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**THE IMPACT OF AHAD-HA'AM'S IDEOLOGY
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIVIL RELIGION
IN THE EARLY STATE OF ISRAEL:
1948 - 1963**

by

Miriam R. Algom

**A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**College of Humanities — Religion
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario**

December 2001

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Acceptance of the thesis**

**The Impact of AHAD-HA'AM's Ideology on the Development
of the Civil Religion in the Early State of Israel: 1948-1963**

**Submitted by Miriam Algom
In partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Arts**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eugene Rothman', written over a horizontal line.

Eugene Rothman, Thesis Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Wilson', written over a horizontal line.

S. Wilson, Director, College of Humanities

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September, 2001**

ABSTRACT

The impact of Ahad-Ha'am on the developing culture of the State of Israel between 1948 and 1968, is the focus of this thesis. Ahad-Ha'am's position in the early Zionist movement is established and his philosophy is described. This thesis discloses his attempt to reform Judaism through a secular-nationalistic approach to the Bible, secularization of the Hebrew language, modernization of Jewish education and the establishment of a Jewish home in the Land of Israel. The thesis then examines the opposition and hostility to his proposal, from the Orthodox camp. Then, the main features of Israel's civil religion, under David Ben-Gurion who shaped the country's image, are defined and examined. This becomes the "new" Judaism. Examples of speeches by both leaders demonstrate the similarity in their ideology. The possibility is raised that the first Prime-Minister, a pragmatist, had to neglect Ahad-Ha'am's significant contribution to the state due to the Jewish Orthodox religious position, and to do so for the sake of political unity.

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INTRODUCTION

Zionism, modern Jewish nationalism, was a revolutionary ideology for suffering European Jews that appeared by the end of the 19th century. It was not, however, a response merely to anti-Semitism. It was also a response to the challenges of liberalism and nationalism of the 18th and 19th centuries, and for this reason it could not have occurred at any other previous period. Zionism was the most fundamental revolution in Jewish life. It substituted a broader notion of self-identity of the Jews as a nation rather than the narrower traditional and Orthodox self-identity in religious terms. It changed a passive and pious hope of the Return to Zion into an effective social force, moving millions of people to Israel. It transformed a language relegated to mere religious usage into a modern, secular mode of intercourse of a nation-state.¹

After almost 2,000 years of dispersion and persecution, Jews went back to their ancient homeland to build and restore the land and the nation. Within a few decades, the Zionist movement succeeded in achieving political independence and on May 14, 1948 the State of Israel was established. In a short time, Jews became soldiers, economists, farmers, scientists, artists etc. in their own independent country and a vibrant modern, unique culture was developed. The Israeli culture and identity in the new state was a product of both the efforts of Zionism, especially the early intellectual Asher Ginsberg, known as Ahad-Ha'am and the founding fathers, among them the first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.

¹ Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981), p. 13.

Ahad-Ha'am, the voice of ideology and principle, as well as consistency and clarity in Jewish nationalism,² was the father of liberal-cultural Zionism. A profound thinker, he sought the modernization of Judaism. He called for the secularization of the holy Hebrew Bible along with the sacred ancient Hebrew language and traditional Jewish education. Ahad-Ha'am urged the Jewish settlement of the Land of Israel, promoting good relations with the local Arabs. He believed that a Zionist enterprise in Palestine as a model center of modern Judaism was a necessary step prior to founding national political independence.

David Ben-Gurion's leadership shaped the new state at home and abroad with unusual authority.³ From 1948 until his resignation in 1963 he was engaged in the process of state and nation building. Applying pragmatism to the principles he espoused, Ben-Gurion understood the need to affirm the continuity between the ancient past and the new reality, the secularization of the Bible, modernizing Jewish education and reviving Hebrew as Israel's official language. Thus, the Jewish society in the new state was marked by the role that civil religion⁴ has played in its culture and politics. Surprisingly, Ahad-Ha'am, the founding father of Israeli civil religion⁵, was never recognized for this vital contribution.

In this work, there will be an attempt to illustrate the unacknowledged Ahad-Ha'am's significant contribution to the culture and identity of the new state. First, chapter one describes the main themes in the Zionist movement and Ahad-Ha'am as an early intellectual pioneer in the

² Steven J. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet - Ahad-Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley, L.A.: University of California Press, 1993), p. XVII.

³ Avraham Avi-hai, *Ben-Gurion, State Builder, Principles and Pragmatism 1948-1963* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974), pp. 1, 2.

⁴ Civil religion is that which is most holy and sacred in the political culture. See Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Berkeley, L.A., California: University of California Press, 1983), p. IX.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

Zionism movement and his impact on the early state of Israel. Chapter two discusses Ahad-Ha'am's ideology and chapter three examines the political culture of the early state and its civil religion. The link between Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy and the early state's civil religion is illustrated. Finally, the question of acknowledgement is raised. A comparison is drawn between the poor recognition of Ahad-Ha'am by the early state, in contrast to the idolization of other great Zionists, such as Theodor Herzl. Some assumptions and conclusions are presented. A separate investigation is recommended, however, for a thorough grasp of Ahad-Ha'am's neglect.

CHAPTER ONE: FOUNDATIONS

I. THEMES OF EARLY ZIONISM

The seeds of the Zionist movement were actually sown when the first grieving captives departed from Jerusalem for Babylon in 580 B.C.E. The Psalmist's cry "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning" was echoed down the ages. The prophetic expectation of the "ingathering" of all the exiles of Israel was also a form of Zionism expressed in terms of the supernatural and the religious. Jewish religious messianic expectations were reinforced by the sense of community that was a product of the self-contained Ghetto. Once the Jews left the Ghetto, the sense of communal identity was transformed by nineteenth century European nationalism.

This nineteenth century secularist spirit sought social solutions in practical terms and encouraged the rise of the modern Zionist movement. The doctrine of the Rights of Man, proclaimed by the French Revolution to the whole world, also gave the Jews a sense of their own group worth and dignity within a modern context.

The Zionist movement was, from its founding, a strategic alliance formed by a multitude of parties and factions whose sole common idea was the promotion of Jewish settlement in the biblical Land of Israel.¹ The major themes of early Zionism were: messianism, democratic socialism, general Zionism, nationalist-Zionism and spiritual-cultural Zionism.

The first theme, messianism or religious Zionism was promoted by a few Orthodox Jewish leaders. The most prominent among them were Rabbi Zvi Hirsch

¹ Michael Jansen, *Dissonance in Zion* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987), p. 4.

Kalischer (1795-1870)², Rabbi Samuel Mohilever (1824-1898)³, Rabbi Yizhak Ya'akov Reines (1839-1915)⁴ and Rabbi Avraham Yizhak Kook (1864-1935)⁵. Although traditional Orthodox Judaism rejected large-scale immigration to the Land of Israel until the time chosen by God, these leaders urged settling the land in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. They believed that the establishment of a Jewish state in Zion was necessary for Jewish redemption and the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the advent of the Messiah. Rabbi Kook settled in Jaffa in 1904 and created a role for the Orthodox in the pre-state period, urging tolerance among all builders of the modern state, secularists and heretics included.⁶ Under the British Mandatory Government he served officially as the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine.

The second ideology was democratic socialism as represented today by Labor Zionism. It emerged alongside revolutionary communism, socialism and anarchism in Europe during the last half of the nineteenth century. Jewish socialists sought to liberate the Jewish masses, particularly those in Eastern Europe and Russia, from both capitalist exploitation and anti-Semitic persecution. They were, at first, liberal and internationalist in their outlook, believing that Jewish labor should be integrated with the organized labor movement in Europe. But the 1881-82 Russian "pogroms" made them into Labor Zionists, as they turned to Palestine as a solution for the Jewish masses.

² Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1972), p. 55.

³ David Vital, *Zionism: the Formative Years* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), p. 214, 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-217.

⁵ Jansen, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

These ideas corresponded with those of Dr. Theodor Herzl, who led the First Zionist Congress at Basle in 1897.⁷

The founding Zionist Congress adopted Herzl's plan of action to secure a home in Palestine 'by public law',⁸ and diplomacy. But its momentum propelled and transformed the organization's leadership from liberal middle-class into a militant-leftist populist movement. When the Second Congress met in 1898, the Organization went ahead and established the "Jewish Colonial Trust" to arrange for colonization and to assist Jewish migration to Palestine, without waiting for diplomatic developments. Representatives of different workers' movements, who attended the Zionist Congresses in increasing numbers, secured places on important committees and promoted projects for the creation of socialist pioneering settlements (*Kibbutzim*), military groups (*Hashomer* and *Hagannah*) and a general trade union (the *Histadrut*). Although Labor Zionism was not a unified camp, but was fractured into several competing Marxist and socialist parties, it had a common objective of creating normal social and political conditions for the Jewish worker in Palestine, while nurturing Hebrew culture.

The liberal middle class were represented by the General Zionists. This movement adopted its name only in 1907 although it existed before as freelance federations whose members, main-stream Zionists, had not been bound to party discipline.⁹ General Zionism was not a movement of extremes. It consisted of many views.

⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

⁹ Laqueur, p. 478.

This was its strength as well as its weakness. At the twelfth congress at Karlsbad in 1921, they came in strong numbers and represented 73 percent of the total. Afterward, as the Right and the Left became stronger, they suffered a decline. In 1923-5 their share was 50-60 percent and in 1931 they were reduced to 36 percent.

General Zionism was plagued by internal dissension. During the first parliamentary elections in the State of Israel the party split into seven lists. Eventually many of the General Zionists joined the Progressive Party, whereas others united with the revisionists (Herut). Outside Israel, the American leader Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver (1893-1963)¹⁰ was prominent in General Zionism, as long as it existed.

The fourth theme, the nationalist Revisionist Party attracted a different following. Its supporters were the artisan and lower middle class, especially in the Polish provinces of tsarist Russia. The founder of this ideology Vladimir (Zeév) Jabotinsky (1880-1940) was a journalist and an orator who, in 1918, persuaded the Zionist leaders and the British War Office to allow him to organize the Jewish Legion. About three thousand Jewish volunteers, mostly from London, the U.S.A. and Canada, took part in the final phase of WWI as the Jewish Legion of the Royal Fusiliers.¹¹ His movement emerged as a result of a 1922 dispute over the mild reaction of the Zionist Executive (dominated by Hayim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion) to British decisions that constituted setbacks to Zionist activity and Jewish immigration. Jabotinsky insisted on the right of Jews to settle in all of the territory of the mandate, 'the two banks of the

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 481.

¹¹ Shmuel Ettinger, "The Modern Period", in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 990.

Jordan river', after, to the Zionists' disappointment, Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, divided the Palestine Mandate in July 1922. This took place when Churchill visited Palestine in March 1921. Already then he reached an agreement with Emir Abdullah to place Transjordan under his rule. As a result, the east bank of the Jordan River, Transjordan, which was considered part of Palestine, was broken away and became a separate entity. The west bank of the river remained the Palestine Mandate.¹²

In opposition to official Zionist policy, which he attacked as being too cooperative with the British and too conciliatory to the Arabs, Jabotinsky founded his separatist "New Zionist Organization" in Vienna in 1935.¹³ He also started forming that same year the para-military National Military Organization (*Irgun Zvai Leumi*) that would fight for Jewish defence and the establishment of a Jewish state. Jabotinsky and his followers began alternate initiatives and institutions.¹⁴ These included the illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine (*Aliya Beit*) and the activist defence force, that later became part of the Israel Defence Forces (I.D.F.)¹⁵

The militant supporters of Jabotinsky called for a 'revision' of the program adopted by the Congresses. Their demands gave them the name "Revisionists".¹⁶ Their activities in Palestine ended with the eruption of the Second World War. Then they joined the war effort and created the Jewish Brigade.

¹² Ibid., pp. 998, 999.

¹³ Ibid., p. 1009.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 1008-1010.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 1060.

¹⁶ Jansen, p. 9.

In spring 1944, the Revisionists, led by Menachem Begin, resumed activities in Palestine. Their objective was the creation of a state and opposition to Britain by force of arms. They continued to oppose cooperation with the Arabs, increased acts of terrorism against the British and emphasized illegal Jewish immigration.

The fifth major theme of early Zionism, was a liberal-cultural one. Unlike the previous ideologies, this one was not concerned with anti-Semitism and the physical safety of the Jews, but with the internal problem of assimilation and the weakening of the Jewish creative power. The founder of this ideology, Asher Ginsberg (1856-1927), known by his pen-name as Ahad-Ha'am ("One of the People" in Hebrew) emphasized his concern to be with "the problem of Judaism" and not "with the problem of the Jews".¹⁷ He claimed that the older national form of Judaism is no longer adequate to modern life and cannot develop itself as long as it remains in exile. The solution, therefore, is to be found in the return to Palestine, where a modern Jewish national culture would emerge, and Judaism would revive its creative powers.

The adherents of cultural-Zionism, both religious and secular, gave precedence to the Book, the Bible, revitalized the Hebrew language, emphasized Jewish history, modern education, and set out to establish a Jewish home in Palestine. The settlers, farmers, artisans, scholars and scientists were to build a Jewish cultural centre, which would serve as a spiritual bond for the rest of the world Jewry.

Cultural-Zionism displayed tolerance. They tried to heal the split between the secularists and the traditionalists, to bridge between the Jews of the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, and to promote cooperation and understanding between the Jewish settlers

¹⁷ Ahad-Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg), "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem", in *Ten Essays on Zionism and Judaism*, ed. & trans. Leon Simon (New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 42-45.

and the local Arabs. This ideology attracted secular Zionists as well as traditionalists, and became identified as an antithesis to Herzl's political Zionism.¹⁸ But, as it turned out, it was this group that mostly challenged the traditionalists and the Orthodox Jewish leaders.

II. AHAD-HA'AM AS AN EARLY INTELLECTUAL PIONEER

Youngsters growing up in the new State of Israel during the 1950s knew very little of Asher Ginsberg, the man, or of his work as the writer, Ahad-Ha'am. True, there is a small street in Tel-Aviv carrying his name. A number of high schools taught and to the very day continue to teach only one or two of his essays. His work was and is virtually unknown to the average Israeli. Except in Zionist circles in the West, he is almost totally unknown.

Of his four volumes of Hebrew essays, over one hundred in total, only forty-two were translated into English. Many of his letters (a six volume collection was published in Hebrew in the 1920s) are first rate essays, but only a few pages appear in English. The only scholarly conference about him and his work took place in 1980 at the University of Toronto. On the other hand, Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, has been the subject of numerous publications and major biographies.¹⁹ Although he passed away at the young age of forty-four after a short political career, Herzl managed to arouse strong enthusiasm among Zionists all over Europe. When the

¹⁸ Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981), p. 112.

¹⁹ Arthur Hertzberg, *Jewish Polemics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 93.

State of Israel was established he continued to be a popular national figure in the state's pantheon, a figure of mythic dimensions.

Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) was educated in Vienna. He was a secular Jew and a liberal journalist. It was the anti-Semitic sentiment of the Dreyfus Affair in France (1894-95) which affected him and moved him towards Jewish nationalism. In 1895-96 he wrote his famous political pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) and soon after, 1897, he called the First Zionist Congress at Basle. A leader of outstanding presence and ability, he also believed that the Jews were one nation. He felt that there could be no solution to the Jewish problem, except by the establishment of a Jewish state. This could be done if "we are granted sovereignty over some area of land on this earth to fulfil the justified needs of our people; all the rest we ourselves will provide".²⁰ This argument earned him immediate fame and prominence. Herzl and his passionate views of national destiny overshadowed Ahad-Ha'am, who was the leading theorist of the Russian Zionist movement between 1889-1897.

Ahad-Ha'am's approach to Zionism was the result of his philosophy of Judaism. Concerned with the crisis within Judaism, assimilation and conversion, he based his philosophy on the argument that the Jewish people are a nation. Furthermore, he maintained that all national identities are sustained by a natural-biological will-to-live and survive. A will that strives to preserve its native genius. The Jewish genius, he claimed, is a combination of the material and the spiritual. It stems from the Torah and the Laws of Moses, a continuation of the work of the Patriarchs. Then came the prophets. They followed Moses' ideology and taught that the perfect society is rooted in

²⁰ Ettinger, p. 898.

truth and justice, which will eventually bring peace. This idea was kept alive by the Pharisee Yohanan Ben-Zakkai and his adherents in Yavneh. Now, claimed Ahad-Ha'am, it is the mission of Zionism to provide a home for the prophetic spiritual experiment.²¹

He opposed Herzl's political approach to the Jewish problem arguing for a national spiritual revival. It is not a state that the Jews require, but an a-political cultural centre that will serve as a focal point for all Jewry, a centre in the historical Jewish home. The most urgent issue, before any political effort, must be the renewal of the ancient Hebrew heritage.²²

While many nationalists, Herzl among them, maintained that a Jewish home does not necessarily have to be in Palestine, Ahad-Ha'am insisted that the biblical Land of Israel was and always will be the Jewish home. He refused to place much confidence in the activities of Herzl, whose Zionism was "born out of anti-Semitism" and depended on it for its existence. The problem, he insisted is not with the Jews, as Herzl claims, but with the crisis in Judaism.²³

For a decade Herzl's point of view prevailed over the whole Zionist world. Ahad-Ha'am, deserted by his friends and supporters, battled alone with amazing courage and persistence. At the First Zionist Congress in 1897, in the midst of the general festivity he described himself as a "mourner among bridegrooms".²⁴

²¹ Ahad-Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg), "Flesh and Spirit", in *Selected Essays of Ahad-Ha'am*, ed. & trans. Leon Simon (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 146-158.

²² _____ "The Spiritual Revival", *ibid.*, p. 295.

²³ _____ "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem", in *Ten Essays on Zionism and Judaism*, ed. & trans. Leon Simon (New York: Arno Press, 1973), p. 42.

²⁴ _____ "The First Zionist Congress", in *ibid.*, p. 30.

In his sharp critical comments on Herzl's last book *Altneuland* which he described the future Jewish state, Ahad-Ha'am posed a question, that no one else among the Zionist leaders of the day had asked: "Where is the Jewishness of this cosmopolitan society of Herzl's imaginings?" There are theaters in *Altneuland*, where plays can be staged in several European languages. Also present are an opera house and an academy modeled on those of France. There are newspapers in several languages, museums, concert halls, and all the other signs of a highly civilized life. But there is very little of the Hebrew language. Except for the synagogue service and a song of welcome sung by schoolchildren to admiring visitors, there is no sign of the Hebrew language. Furthermore, there is no trace of Hebrew literature and culture, Hebrew pattern of life or thought. In fact, Ahad-Ha'am concluded, Herzl's utopia, with its repeated insistence on the absence of the Hebrew heritage, is an obvious example of the assimilationist mentality.²⁵

Rejecting Herzl's idea of mass immigration and the transferring of a great number of Jews to Palestine, Ahad-Ha'am insisted on gradualism, preparation and education. Since the Hebrew Bible was the core of his nationalism, he emphasized the study of the Bible and its language - Hebrew. Tirelessly he argued with his many opponents, the traditionalists on one hand and the Yiddishists on the other, that there is only one national language which is Hebrew, and it must be revived. The Orthodox traditionalists have insisted that Hebrew was a sacred language only to be used in rituals and on the Sabbath. The Yiddishists, on the other hand, believed that the medieval

²⁵ Leon Simon, *Ahad-Ha'am, Asher Ginsberg, A Biography* (New York: Herzl Press, 1960), p. 184. Also in Nissim Rejwan, *Israel in Search Of Identity* (University Press of Florida, 1999), p.61.

German Jewish language should be the national tongue of the European Jews.²⁶ Indeed, Ahad-Ha'am wrote all his work, essays, letters, memoirs, solely in Hebrew, although he mastered several European languages. Thus, he is considered the first modern Hebraic essayist.

Although the revival of the creative power of Judaism and the pride in the Hebrew heritage was vital for Ahad-Ha'am, he also advocated Western education. In the first Hebrew secondary school in Jaffa, "Gymnasia", of which he was one of its founders, a modern curriculum was taught in Hebrew and included science, mathematics, Western literature and history. The school emphasized Jewish culture not religion.²⁷

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE: ASSESSMENT OF AHAD-HA'AM

Ahad-Ha'am's position in the Zionist movement was unique. His ideology of gradualism not only rejected the revolutionary style of Herzl, Labor Zionism and Greater-Israel, but also could not accept religious nationalism. In 1910, when consulted by Dr. J.L. Magnes, the New York Reform rabbi, about his project of founding a society "to propagate national religion and religious nationalism", Ahad-Ha'am took exception to this formulation. He fully agreed, he wrote Magnes, that Judaism was a national religion, but he could not accept "religious nationalism". He explained:

In my view our religion is national, that is to say, it is a product of our national spirit, but the converse is not true. If it is impossible to be a Jew in the religious sense without acknowledging our nationality, it is possible

²⁶ Ettinger, pp. 828, 910-913.

²⁷ Steven J. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet - Ahad-Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 83.

to be a Jew in the national sense without accepting many things in which religion requires belief.²⁸

For religion, as he understood it,

is only one particular form of culture. Although, in the past the Jewish national creative power was mainly religious, we cannot foretell in what form our culture will express itself in the future.²⁹

Ahad-Ha'am's views were particularly acceptable to Reform Jewish leaders, who adhered to a vision of Jewish culture rather than Orthodox law and ritual.

Ahad-Ha'am and his school in Jaffa were targets of fervent attacks by the traditionalists. Although he made great efforts to avoid conflicts, he was personally denounced as was the school. They were considered a provocation on orthodox Judaism and the educational life of Jewish Palestine, since his ideology of cultural renewal was seen as undercutting traditional Judaism.³⁰

Ahad-Ha'am's critics accused him of reducing Judaism to a "Godless religion", as Barukh Kurzweil expressed it in harsh words:³¹

The Judaism of Ahad-Ha'am, is a Judaism without the authority of the Torah, and Judaism without God.... Ahad-Ha'am is completely indifferent to the element of irrational faith at the basis of prophecy and to the postulate of dialogic relationship between a God, who reveals, and man, the object of revelation.... The essence of Judaism was reduced to its ethical element.... Ahad-Ha'am weighs the political and spiritual manifestations of his time in the scale of a legitimate secularism. The latter, for him, is the very soul of the traditional religion.... His faith in the power of a spiritual centre, lacking both religious and political force.... The "masked atheism" is one of the silent axioms in education,

²⁸ Ahad-Ha'am, *Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, ed. & trans. Leon Simon (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1946), pp.268, 269. Also in Rejwan, p. 64.

²⁹ *Essays, Letters...*, p. 270.

³⁰ Shmuel Tchernowitz, *Bnei-Moshe U-Tekufatam* (Hebrew) (Warsaw: 1914), pp. 120-121.

³¹ Baruch Kurzweil, "Judaism - The Group Will To Survive? A Critique of Ahad-Ha'amism", *Judaism* 4:3 (Summer 1955): 209-224.

particularly in the teaching of Bible.... This essay is written from the point of view of Judaism as an absolute religious value. It has sought to prove that the attempt to see in Ahad-Ha'am's theory of Jewish continuity a true educational goal is founded in error.³²

Ahad-Ha'am was also the object of furious criticism in radical Hebrew literary circles, where many found his notions of Judaism to be not only conservative, but also arbitrary.³³ But a critique from a different point of view was written by Ahad-Ha'am's famous disciple, the one who translated and edited most of his work, Sir Leon Simon.

In 1952, twenty five years after Ahad-Ha'am's death, with some degree of detachment and objectivity, he wrote about the limitation of his revered teacher's philosophy: In light of the Holocaust, "we may say, that Herzl's diagnosis of the Jewish problem over fifty years ago, was correct, and that the paramount need of the Jewish people was for an independent home of refuge in which the victims of anti-Semitism could live as free men". Sir Simon continued: Ahad-Ha'am did not realize, as well as Herzl, the danger of the resurgent anti-Semitism in Germany and Europe. Nor was he accurate in evaluating the social forces that would bring great numbers of Jews from around the globe to uproot themselves and take part in the settlement of the biblical Land of Israel. The Holocaust, and the re-establishment of a Jewish State, which are the two most significant events in Jewish life, proved Ahad-Ha'am wrong.³⁴

But Ahad-Ha'am's contribution to Jewish thought has, despite its limitations, lasting value, added Simon, "it is still timely to recall the words with which

³² Ibid., p. 210.

³³ Zipperstein, p. XIX. A more detailed account is found in the "Brenner Affairs", pp. 235-244.

³⁴ Leon Simon, "Ahad-Ha'am After Twenty Five Years", *Zion* II: 10, 11 (January-February, 1952): 59.

he ended his note on the first Zionist Congress: 'The salvation of Israel will be brought about by Prophets, not by diplomats'.³⁵

Professor Nathan Rotenstreich, from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, expressed respect for the wise philosopher:

It would be unfair, however, to confront Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy with the position of the Jewish people today, in terms of the disaster which overwhelmed them in Europe, on the one hand, and the emergence of the State of Israel on the other. Nevertheless, the major problem which Ahad-Ha'am raised is still a vital one: the inner relation between the solution of the social and the political question of the Jewish people and the revival of the Jewish spirit.³⁶

In 1955 the philosopher Dr. Mordecai Kaplan, the founder and leader of the Jewish Reconstruction Movement, which has advanced the concept of Judaism as a civilization, also wrote: "Asher Ginsberg whose pen-name was Ahad-Ha'am is probably the one person in Jewish history who, next to Maimonides, deserves the title of "Guide for the Perplexed". During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, many thinking Jews began to realize two disturbing facts: first, that neither assimilation nor isolation was either desirable or feasible; and secondly, that the tradition which had united our people in the past could neither be accepted nor rejected unequivocally. Ahad-Ha'am, who served as a spiritual guide and source of inspiration to Bialik, Weizmann, Ussishkin, Schmarya Levin, Buber, Schechter... to name only a few great leaders and builders of modern Israel, whose intellectual integrity, moral passion and profound

³⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁶ Nathan Rotenstreich, "Ahad-Ha'am After Twenty Five Years", *Middle Eastern Affairs* IV: 5 (May 1953): 171.

spirituality have helped to bring about the modern Jewish renaissance, well deserves to live in the consciousness of the Jewish people.³⁷

Ahad-Ha'am managed to master the two conflicting cultures: the Jewish tradition and the Western culture, wrote Eugene Kohn, in 1956. "The Jewish heritage was one of religious faith and law...; Western civilization rested largely on skepticism, empirical science and rationalist philosophy"... Following his spirit, "we shall both be contributing to the culture of the nations among whom we live and to the perpetuation and revival of Judaism."³⁸

In his evaluation, Isaac Goss expressed a deep appreciation to Ahad-Ha'am, the writer and the philosopher: "A pioneer... he taught his generation to write Hebrew clearly... while avoiding... artificial phraseology". Furthermore, his contribution to Jewish thought "has a lasting value, as well. The concept of the 'spiritual centre' is still the only concept which provides scope for bridging the gap between Israel and the Diaspora", as he predicted. While Israel is the only place where Jewish culture can be primary and not secondary, the Diaspora maintains its significance. Furthermore, Ahad-Ha'am's warning that the greatest danger to Jewish survival is in disintegration, is true today as it was in 1893 when he wrote the essay "Imitation and Assimilation".³⁹

More recent assessments, although small in number, also express respect for the philosopher's wisdom and insight. "Ahad-Ha'am was not a political leader or organizer, as Herzl was", wrote Jacques Kornberg, a History Professor at the University

³⁷ Mordecai Kaplan, "Anti-Maimunism in Modern Dress" in *Judaism*, 4:4 (Fall 1955): 303.

³⁸ Eugene Kohn, "The Wisdom of Ahad-Ha'am", *The Reconstructionist* XXI (January 27, 1956): 16.

³⁹ Isaac Goss, "Ahad-Ha'am - A Reappraisal" *Jewish Spectator* XXI: 9 (November 1956): 19-22.

of Toronto, in 1983. The main figure in the Jewish nationalist movement from the late 1880s until 1897, Ahad-Ha'am was a thinker, an intellectual with a vision... His authority "in the Zionist movement rested both on his stylistic achievement in the revival of modern Hebrew prose and on the ideological coherence and clarity he bestowed on Zionism".⁴⁰

Professor Shlomo Avineri, a leading political scientist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, defined him as "a political philosopher", who "confronted practical problems with a moral and theoretical dimension. It is this vision, concluded Avineri, "that made Ahad-Ha'am's description of the problems facing Israel today so accurate."⁴¹

Steven J. Zipperstein, the historian and Director of the Program in Jewish Studies at Stanford University, wrote in his brilliant biography *Elusive Prophet*: "the way in which Ahad-Ha'am combined the roles of ideological mentor and critic with a fierceness and consistency that spanned some four decades..., was unique in modern Judaism... he managed to interject into the Jewish nationalist enterprise a heightened sense of its fundamental ambiguity: it could only achieve its extraordinarily ambitious goals if it moderated its appetite... if it faced up to its own limitations and the limits placed upon it by the larger world."⁴²

⁴⁰ Jacques Kornberg, "At the Crossroads: An Introductory Essay", in *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad-Ha'am*, ed. J. Kornberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. XV.

⁴¹ Avineri, pp. 112, 124.

⁴² Zipperstein, pp. 324, 325.

There is one final assessment that should be considered. Professor Eliezer Don-Yehiya of Bar-Ilan University pointed out the impact of Ahad-Ha'am on the modern nationalist movement and the strong opposition from the traditionalists. He wrote:⁴³

Ahad-Ha'am's arrival on the scene signaled a turning point in the relations between Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism. In his writing he left no doubt about Zionism's ideological stance, a stance that the various religious streams perceived as a grave threat to the sacrosanct traditional Jewish values and way of life. Zionism, as mediated through the prism of Ahad-Ha'am, became for the first time an ideology of modern nationalism in which unifying elements such as land, language and historic culture were introduced as the foundation for national existence and as sacred values to be fostered and set at the centre of educational and cultural activity. The religious circles grasped the grave danger that Zionism of the Ahad-Ha'am variety posed to traditional Judaism... and it was hugely resented by all streams of religious public.

He, nevertheless, became the "unacknowledged father of Israeli civil religion."⁴⁴

IV. AHAD-HA'AM AND THE EARLY STATE OF ISRAEL

When Israel was established in May 1948, its founders conceived it as a moral state with biblical values. No leader was more explicit or insistent than the first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in arguing that Israel was created with a purpose beyond the satisfaction of its citizens' needs. It was this ideal that attracted Jews from all over the world into Zionist activity, not the school of thought that sought the normalization of Jewish existence.⁴⁵ But, when the new state selected its national heroes,

⁴³ Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Religion, Modernization and Zionism", *Studies in Zionism* 12:2 (1991): 191.

⁴⁴ Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), p. 232.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 216.

it was Theodor Herzl who was crowned as "the prophet of Israel's freedom",⁴⁶ and Ahad-Ha'am, on the other hand, became an anachronistic figure.⁴⁷

David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), the first and the most charismatic leader of Israel, understood the need for a new identity and a unifying symbol system to the pluralistic society of the new state. Between 1948 and 1956, Israeli civil religion in general and statism in particular was developed under his leadership.⁴⁸ According to C.S. Liebman and E. Don-Yehiya, traditional religion is "a system of symbols, which provides ultimate meaning through reference to a transcendent power".⁴⁹ In contrast, civil religion, although structurally compromised of characteristics of traditional religion, at its core stands a corporate entity rather than a transcendent power.⁵⁰ The ultimate authority is transferred from God to society and nationalism. It is within this context that Ben-Gurion's vision and the state's early directions must be examined.

The objective of civil religion is the sanctification of the society in which it functions. It aims to:

1. Unite the society by involving its members in a set of common ceremonies and myths that express a common past, a common condition and a common destiny. Civil religion consists of beliefs, myths, rituals, symbols and heroes as traditional religion does.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 121. The notion of civil-religion was modernized and popularized by Robert Bellah in his classic essay "Civil Religion in America" in *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967) pp. 1-21.

⁴⁹ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

2. Apply legitimization by transmitting the sense of inherent justness or rightness in the nature of the social order and in the goals pursued by the society.
3. Mobilize and stimulate the efforts and energies of society's members on behalf of socially approved tasks.

The importance of this construct for the direction of the new state is clear:

1. Judaism created a symbol system and a world view for the individual who is a member of a powerless minority, not a modern state. Reliance on God as savior and redeemer, therefore, stands in conflict with modern values of national self-redemption.
2. Traditional Judaism's perception is that God is the ultimate source of authority, not the state nor Jewish collectivity, unless Israel is to become a theocracy.
3. Traditional Judaism's symbol system does not command obedience from the majority of Jews. The vast majority of Israeli Jews do not observe many of the traditional laws. Hence, traditional Judaism alone cannot serve to integrate, legitimate and mobilize contemporary Israeli society.⁵¹

As already indicated, it was Ahad-Ha'am who passionately argued for the need to restore nationalism and Judaism, so it would meet the needs of modern Jewry. He was aware of the resistance of traditional religious leaders to his suggestions but he

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

insisted on changes within Judaism and emphasized unifying national values such as: biblical ethics, the biblical language, land and modern education.

Ahad-Ha'am called for the building of a centre in the historical Land of Israel for educational and cultural activity for the renewal of Hebraism. Hence, in 1948 when Israel was established, the leaders of the new state stressed the need for both safety and identity, security and culture, and education; a strong defending army, economy and a versatile school system. The government of the new country emphasized the land, biblical values, Hebrew as a national modern language, Jewish tradition and secular studies. But Ahad-Ha'am disappeared. The founder of cultural Zionism who had a profound influence on the early State of Israel (1948-63), seemed to be half forgotten.

CHAPTER TWO: AHAD-HA'AM'S PHILOSOPHY

**"Not by might, nor by power,
but by my spirit, said the Lord of Hosts".**

Zekhariah 4:6.

I. AHAD-HA'AM'S LIFE

The object of enormous attention in the Jewish nationalist world in its formative stages, Ahad Ha'am, the intellectual, was a slight, reclusive, somewhat bitter, reserved, untalkative and rather snobbish man.¹ He was born as Asher Ginsberg in Squirra, a small town near Kiev, Russia on August 18, 1856 to a wealthy hasidic family. Hasidism, in general, is a popular mystical movement that fosters a warm and emotional attachment to *Eretz-Yisrael*. Some sects encourage settlement in the Holy Land as a religious duty. So, Ginsberg's father, a hasidic scholar, provided his son with an environment emphasizing the love for the Land of Israel, and the love of learning.² Asher was provided with a traditional Jewish education from the tender age of three. Displaying a passion for learning, he was exceptionally bright, but shy and a loner.

At the age of sixteen, as was customary in those days, Asher was married by his parents in an arranged marriage. He continued to study after he left his parent's home, but now he read Enlightenment (*Haskala*) and secular literature. He was in his twenties when he began his exploration of European secular thought and languages. He studied history, literature, philosophy, psychology, sociology, as well as, Russian, English, German and French.³ In 1885, he moved with his family to Odessa and his rural life came to an end. He stayed in Odessa for twenty years. This is where his career began.

¹ Zipperstein, P., XVIII.

² Simon, *Ahad-Ha'am, Asher Ginsberg, a Biography*, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Besides being a brilliant student of the Bible, Talmud and mediaeval scholars such as Maimonides, Ginsberg was well read in French, Russian and German philosophy and the works of the British moralist and empirical thinkers.⁴

Odessa, at that time, was a centre of Jewish life and Hebrew revival in Russia. Many important Jewish scholars and Zionist activists lived there. Soon after the Ginsbergs' arrival, Asher joined the *Hovevei-Zion* (Lovers of Zion)⁵ committee, which was led by Dr. Leon Pinsker. At the same time, Asher's economic independence came to an end, so he decided to try "writing to eat bread".

Ginsberg's literary career began with his first and famous essay "Lo Ze Ha'derekh" (The Wrong Way), which appeared in 1889. He chose to sign this article, and all the work that followed, with the pseudonym Ahad-Ha'am (One of the People). Years later he wrote:

The idea of this pen-name was to make it clear that I was not a writer, and had no intention of becoming one, but was just incidentally expressing my opinion on the subject about which I wrote as "one of the people" who was interested in his people's affairs.⁶

Significantly, it was as Ahad-Ha'am that Ginsberg was famous and has been known until today.

In his memoirs, we find a description of his transformation once he joined the nationalist committee:

I had never before been privileged to spend hours every week in such enlightened company. Naturally, I was very shy at first, being a mere "rustic", and was all ears for what my colleagues had to say; but gradually I

⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵ This group, the forerunners of the Zionist Organization, was established towards the end of the 19th c. in Poland, Russia, Romania, Germany and England, promoting Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. See Ettinger, pp. 894-8.

⁶ "Reminiscences", in *Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, p. 333.

lost my nervousness and came to realize that even so humble a person as myself might sometimes have a useful contribution to make... Afterwards, I became one of the vocal members, and not always without effects.⁷

And vocal he was. He spoke through his writings. He insisted in writing in Hebrew although he read and wrote easily in several European languages.⁸

With the publication of his first article *Lo Ze Haderekh* his name changed as did his personality. The shy and quiet young man became the centre of controversy and the revered advocate of a new philosophy of Zionism, seeking a Jewish cultural nationalism.⁹ He supported the Zionist movement *Hovevei-Zion* and viewed its members as the torchbearers and followers of the Pharisees, although he criticized their settlement program in Palestine. He called for "preparing hearts" and engaging in both morality and Hebrew culture. As a result, Ginsberg, who became Ahad-Ha'am, found himself in the front ranks of Russian Zionism. He wrote regularly for different Hebrew periodicals and his readership kept growing. In just a few years he revolutionized Hebrew literature and journalism, as well as Zionist and Jewish thought.

In 1889, a short while after the publication of "The Wrong Way" the Society of *Bnei-Moshe* (Sons of Moses) was founded under his leadership. Focusing on "preparing hearts", the members dedicated themselves to the national ideal by their ethical conduct, while reviving the Hebrew language and culture. This semi-clandestine society contributed, during the brief eight years of its existence, many gifted leaders to the Jewish and Zionist life as well as the first modern Hebrew school in Jaffa.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., pp. 331, 332.

⁸ Hertzberg, *Jewish Polemics*, p. 88.

⁹ Simon, *Ahad-Ha'am*..., p. 53.

¹⁰ Ettinger, p. 897.

In 1891 Ahad-Ha'am visited Palestine for the first time.¹¹ In his essay "Truth From the Land of Israel" he expressed a critical appraisal of Zionism's problems in Palestine. Unlike other visitors, he did not hesitate to deplore the widespread speculation in land and called for an immediate end to this practice. Furthermore, with an exceptional historical understanding he warned *Hovevei-Zion* members of an "Arab problem" and of committing injustice towards them.¹² In 1893, he visited Palestine again¹³ and saw the new Hebrew school (for boys and girls separately) that was established that year in Jaffa.

The First Zionist Congress in 1897 brought Theodore Herzl to prominence in the Zionist movement and Ahad-Ha'am was overshadowed for a few years. Although many of his friends left him, he did not stop writing and publishing. With the failure of Herzl's diplomacy and his early death in 1904, Russian Zionists abandoned Herzl's priorities and gradually refashioned Zionist ideology. More than anyone else, it was Ahad-Ha'am who provided the ideological authority for this shift.¹⁴

In 1907 he moved to London as the representative of the Wissotzky Tea Company, which had employed him since 1902. During these years until World War I he contributed regularly to different periodicals. The War, however, devastated him, and his writing ceased. Only in 1922 when he moved to Tel-Aviv, although he was sick, did he regain some measure of peace. He enjoyed the love and reverence of the pre-state Jewish

¹¹ Simon, *Ahad-Ha'am*..., p. 59.

¹² Avineri, pp. 122, 123.

¹³ Simon, *Ahad-Ha'am*..., p. 68.

¹⁴ Kornberg, pp. XV, XXV.

population. With the assistance of some of his friends, he wrote his brief memoirs, and edited and published six volumes of his letters.

In 1925, two years before his death, his wish for a Hebrew university in the Land of Israel, "a single great school of learning",¹⁵ materialized. The Hebrew University in Jerusalem was founded. At the opening ceremony of the Institute for Jewish Studies, the centerpiece of the Hebrew University, he was one of the honorary guests and the keynote speaker. He made explicit his assumptions about the role of the university's Judaic Studies department in Jewish society in both Palestine and the Diaspora.¹⁶ Indeed, Ahad-Ha'am's vision was realized and the Judaic Studies department at the university has served all these years, even today, as a cultural centre for world Jewry.

Ahad-Ha'am passed away after a long illness in January 1927. His disciple, the national Israeli poet Hayim Nahman Bialik paid a moving tribute to him:

Since the day on which thy light descended upon us,
We've beheld in thee a lion of truth, a giant in spirit,
Of true convictions, chaste and pure, in open and secret
Firmly holding his views, not dependent on the judgement of others,
Walking his lonely path, clear sighted and energetic
Keeping his flame alive in his innermost heart, ...¹⁷

II. SOURCES OF AHAD-HA'AM'S THOUGHT

As already indicated, Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy appears to have had a major impact on the ideology of the early State of Israel (1948-1963). First and foremost his

¹⁵ "Zionism and Jewish Culture" (1902), in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 97.

¹⁶ Zipperstein, p. 318.

¹⁷ Fiedlander, Israel. *Past and Present* (New York: The Burning Bush Pres, 1961), p. 281.

philosophy was founded on the nationalist notion that the Jewish people are not a church, or a system of faith alone, but a nation with unique qualities that they retained even after their dispersion around the world for more than two thousand years. In many essays and letters he argued fervently with his many opponents that Judaism is Jewish nationalism or a national religion not "religious nationalism".¹⁸ He supported his arguments by using the Hebrew Bible, which he no longer considered just a sacred book, but an important historical document. The Bible demonstrated that the Jews were actually a nation in ancient times. They lived on their land, spoke their language, they had a political-economic organization and a distinct religion and culture consisting of an elaborate system of values and ideals, myths, symbols and rituals. Thus, in the future, Jewish nationalism and culture must draw from the biblical past.¹⁹

In his two early essays "The People of the Book"²⁰ (1894) and "Ancestor Worship"²¹ (1897), Ahad-Ha'am called for change in the attitude to Judaism. Treating the Orthodox standpoint very carefully he wrote: "Bible, *Talmud* and *Shulhan-Arukh* are simply three different expressions of the genius of our people, each reflecting the circumstances and requirements of a different epoch in its history".²² But now, there is a need for a fundamental change, he continued, and the "People of the Book" should not be enslaved anymore to the Book. Instead, the Book must be a source of inspiration and moral

¹⁸ In a letter to Dr. J. Magnes, 1910. In *Essays, Letters...*, p. 269. In this approach he followed in the footsteps of two great Jewish Hegelian thinkers. One was Rabbi Nahman Krokhmal (1785-1840) and the other the famous historian Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891). See Avineri, pp.14-35.

¹⁹ "The Spiritual Revival", in *Selected Essays...*, pp. 261, 2.

²⁰ *Essays, Letters...*, pp. 58-64.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-70.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

strength.²³ Zionism is Judaism, he claimed, and on this conception "our education and our literature must be based".²⁴ The Zionist position is not only fundamentally historical, but it is also a direct outcome of prophetic teaching, as were the Jewish ideals of morality and justice.

Assuming that nationality is naturally acquired, Ahad-Ha'am drew an analogy between the individual self and the national self, concluding that the latter is anchored in the individual self.²⁵ The national identity and character, which is the national self, is a combination of "past and future ... of memories and impressions with hopes and desires, all closely interwoven and common to all individual members of the nation."²⁶ As for the nation of Israel, the past was the Bible and the future is the hope for renewal, as expressed in the prayer: "Next Year in Jerusalem".

Ahad-Ha'am believed that both the national self and the individual self consist of three stages: childhood, maturity and old age. The individual, however, differs. His life is limited by natural law. The national self, on the other hand, is capable of renewal. With the help of faith, "healthy blood and youth in its veins, the nation ... will become conscious of new desires ... for the future."²⁷

Echoes of Ahad-Ha'am's views are also found throughout history in the writings of other philosophers. Aristotle, the Stoics, Grotius, Spinoza, Herder and others

²³ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁵ "Past and Future", in *Selected...*, p. 80-83.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

declared that there exists a natural social impulse in man.²⁸ In his work *Politics*, Aristotle established the theory that man has a social instinct and a natural desire to have others join in the good communal life. This is the foundation of the state. He wrote:

The family is the association established by nature ... when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village ... When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end... Hence, it is evident that the state is a creation of nature and that man is by nature a political animal.²⁹

The organic conception of society and the analogy between the social organism and the individual organism were current in literature. Similarly, we find in the work of the Jewish Dutch philosopher Benedict Barukh Spinoza (1632-1677) the idea that the state should be compared to the individual organism.³⁰

Spinoza aligned himself with Aristotle by declaring that there exists a natural social impulse in man, and that man has a natural desire for friendship, which is the foundation of a state. In Proposition XXXII-XXXVII, Spinoza drew an analogy between the individual organism and the social organism and added the Aristotelian concept that likeness of kind contributes to social coherence.³¹ Furthermore, Spinoza held that a nation dies and disappears when its national culture and institutions are radically changed. A

²⁸ Harry, A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), ii., p. 245.

²⁹ Aristotle, *The Politics and Constitution of Athens*, ed. Sverson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), Book I, 2, 1252^b #10, pp. 11, 12.

³⁰ Wolfson, ii, pp. 246, 249.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 244, 245.

nation depends on its culture very much like the human body on its oxygen.³² This is, as we know, another major theme in Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy. Thus, it was Spinoza who established the intellectual foundations of the conception of the Jewish people as a "nation", and discussed the separation of religious and national institutions.³³ Spinoza argued that, since the Jewish religion demands from its followers complete submission and, therefore, passivity, the Jews must abandon their ancient faith and customs in order to rebuild the Jewish commonwealth.³⁴ Spinoza's criteria for examining Jewish history are historical and sociological. Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy is based on the same criteria.

Discussing the nature of the national self, Ahad-Ha'am claimed that much like the individual self, it struggles for self preservation and it contains a "will to survive". In his essay "Many Inventions" (1890)³⁵ he discussed this natural powerful force in both humans and nations. The will to survive has distinct qualities: external and internal. The first is the struggle against hostile natural forces, such as sickness to the human body, or wars or military attacks to a nation. The second is internal, spiritual. He wrote:

... the human mind is not guided by reason alone ... But in fact there is another force at work below the surface, a force which ... assumes control of the mind's movements ... This all-powerful force disguises itself in innumerable changes of shape and form ... (it is) the desire (the will) for life and well-being. This desire, which is implanted in us by nature forces every living thing to pursue at all times that which brings life and pleasure ... For every living thing this desire is the motive and the goal of every single action. In the case of human beings, it is the supreme force, which influences, recognized or unrecognized, consciously or unconsciously, not only their actions and their schemes, but also their beliefs and their opinions.

³² Ibid., p. 250.

³³ Dov Schwartz, "Fascination and Rejection...", in *Studies in Zionism*, 14:2 (1993), p. 147.

³⁴ Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 12.

³⁵ "Many Inventions", in *Selected...*, pp. 159, 160, 161, 169.

The concept of self-preservation already occupied many thinkers in antiquity and early-Christianity.³⁶ According to Cicero (106 B.C.E.-43 B.C.E.) the concept of self-preservation was established by the Peripatetic view,³⁷ which reads: "Every natural organism aims at being its own preserver".³⁸ Aristotle discussed the "nutritive soul" which is shared by all living organisms and controls "organic growth, self-preservation and reproduction".³⁹ St. Augustine, one of the greatest leaders of the early Christian Church (354-430), St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a great theologian and philosopher, Duns Scotus (1265-1308), the noted thinker, to name just a few, all supported the Aristotelian notion of self-preservation, or in Duns Scotus' words "desire, appetite".⁴⁰

Spinoza also discussed the notion of self-preservation as sort of a natural impulse, desire or will. He termed self-preservation as "conatus" and argued that it is not an act of free will, but rather determined by nature, a forceful will or desire to live.⁴¹ Spinoza developed his conception of the conatus along the lines of the principle of self-maintenance as explained by Aristotle, and emphasized the concept of the self-preservation of the mind, too. Spinoza maintained: "There is no idea in the mind which excludes the existence of the body".⁴²

³⁶ Wolfson, ii, p. 195.

³⁷ It was established by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 B.C.E.-322 B.C.E.).

³⁸ *De Finibus... Malorum*, IV, 7, #16, Wolfson ii, p. 195.

³⁹ *De Anima* II.4, 416^b 11-17, see Mary Louise Gill, *Aristotle on Substance...* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 226.

⁴⁰ Wolfson, ii. p. 196.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 202.

Years later, Spinoza's concept of the "conatus" or "will" inspired the German philosopher Friedrich W.J. von Schelling (1775-1854). In his earlier periods, Schelling already developed the Spinozaistic principle of the ontological unity of everything in the external substance.⁴³ In his later works on freedom and identity, Spinoza's principle of identity was evident.⁴⁴ In his discussion on identity, Schelling wrote: "Will is primordial Being, and all predicates apply to it alone - groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation".⁴⁵ His ideas inspired many European thinkers.

This brings us back to Ahad-Ha'am and his philosophical approach to nationalism. Spinoza's thought echoes in his words: "that is the national self, in the form given to it by history, that desires to survive: not some other nation, but just this one, with all its essentials, and all its memories, and all its hopes."⁴⁶

Founded on the theory that assimilation will destroy the Jewish people from within, Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy, like Spinoza, did not discuss anti-Semitism, but the continuation of Jewish culture and institutions. Further, both agreed that society is based upon the social instinct of man and the special form of society called "state" ("civitas" by Spinoza) is not natural (as Aristotle argued) but an artificial product, a result of an agreement.⁴⁷ But, while Spinoza maintained that a state is acceptable because it is the only instrument where man is able to live according to his native impulses, Ahad-Ha'am's approach was vague.

⁴³ Paul Tillich, *Perspective On 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology* (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 143.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁵ Friedrich W.J. von Schelling, *Of Human Freedom* (Chicago: Open Court, 1936), p. 24.

⁴⁶ "Past and Future", in *Selected ...*, p. 89.

⁴⁷ Wolfson, ii, p. 247.

He expressed distrust in power. He rejected political Zionism and the idea of a Jewish state.⁴⁸ Instead, contending along Spinoza's lines of cultural continuity, he argued for the need to create a Jewish cultural centre in the Land of Israel.⁴⁹ Although his philosophy is interpreted as a cultural ideology solely, careful reading suggests a further insight:

This centre... will surely be a home of healing for its spirit. And afterwards? In our present state of spiritual disorganization we have no idea of the volume of our national strength, nor of what it will be able to achieve when all its elements are united around a single centre, and quickened by a single strong and healthy spirit. The generations that are to come afterwards will know the measure of their power, and will adjust their actions to it.⁵⁰

Suggesting gradualism⁵¹ he believed in gradual work towards a Jewish state, afterall, as did Spinoza.

Clearly Ahad-Ha'am's thought was inspired by Spinoza, but for some reason he never credited him. Throughout his work, Ahad-Ha'am acknowledged many scholars. Thus, the inevitable question arises: why, then, did he not recognize Spinoza? It seems that it was impossible for Ahad-Ha'am, who tried to attract both the secular and the religious Jewish public to acknowledge Spinoza. The Dutch philosopher was taboo to both Jewish and Christian Orthodoxy, as well as to the Enlightenment.⁵² Later on, unfortunately, a similar fate would await Ahad-Ha'am. Twenty one years after his death, with the

⁴⁸ "Jewish State and Jewish Problem" (1897), in *Ten Essays...*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid. J.G. von Herder and G.W.F. Hegel also maintained that a state is not an end in itself but only a foundation for a national spiritual expression. See Avineri, p. 121.

⁵⁰ "Summa Summarum", in *Ten Essays...*, pp. 160, 161.

⁵¹ Ahad-Ha'am admitted to be a Darwinist. See "Slavery in Freedom", in *Selected...*, p. 194.

⁵² Tillich, p. 73.

establishment of the State of Israel, Ahad-Ha'am disappeared. Although the new state implemented many of his theories, he was not recognized.

III. AHAD-HA'AM'S PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM AND ZIONISM

As the founder of "Cultural Zionism", Ahad-Ha'am was mostly concerned with the solution to the phenomenon of Jewish fragmentation and assimilation. In his view, these were internal problems, therefore the solution must also come from within. The revival of Jewish culture and spirit in the historical Land of Israel was the core of his thought. While his opponents were calling for a political solution to the Jewish problem, he urged for a cultural revival. In 1902 he explained:

I know full well that such is not the usual course of things. In every nation which develops in a healthy and natural way, the development starts from below and proceeds upwards. First of all the economic and the political foundations of the national life are considered; and it is only after creating such external conditions, as are favorable to its survival, that the nation turns to less material things and produces what it is capable of producing in the domain of culture.... But with the Jews it is different. They climbed the lower rungs of the ladder thousands of years ago, and then, after they had attained to a high stage of culture their natural progress was forcibly arrested: the ground was cut away from under their feet, and they were left hanging in mid-air, burdened with a heavy pack of valuable spiritual goods, but robbed of any basis for a healthy existence and a free development... for many generations....⁵³ The Jews as a nation are in an analogous position, child and grown man in one... [They need to] build from below and from above at the same time! Of course, nation building in this style is something abnormal. But then our life altogether is abnormal.... In this matter therefore, we must not look for guidance to the history of other nations: we must do what our peculiar position forces us to do, relying on our nation's strength of will and power of endurance, which have preserved it miraculously to the present day.... But we must recognize that this program of a spiritual "back to the land"... is not one which can be carried out easily.... To lay the foundations of spiritual 'refuge' for our national culture

⁵³ "The Spiritual Revival", in *Selected...*, pp. 290, 291.

demands perhaps preparations no less elaborate, and resources no less extensive than to lay the foundation of a material refuge.⁵⁴

This brings us to the question:

"Does the Jewish people as a whole stand in need of improvement from the point of view of culture?...⁵⁵ If we estimate the cultural position of the Jewish people... we shall have to admit that it is very unsatisfactory, and much worse than that of other nations. Every other nation is free to climb as high on the ladder of culture as its strength allows.... But we Jews are hemmed in by obstacles of all kinds.... Beyond doubt, therefore, there is an urgent need for the improvement of our position from the point of view of culture....⁵⁶ Modern life, of its own accord, forces Jews to pursue enlightenment.... Zionism is bound to supply this work of enlightenment with the nationalist basis, which it lacks at present....⁵⁷ Yet it is obvious and undeniable, however extraordinary, that most orthodox Jews... are unable to understand the ideal of the regeneration of Israel as a people. The masses stand aloof, and regard the new movement with complete indifference; and their leaders are mostly opposed to it and try, by every means that jealousy and hatred can suggest, to put obstacles in its path."⁵⁸

Discussing cultural nationalism, Ahad-Ha'am wrote in the spirit of Spinoza, August Comte, Herbert Spencer as well as Charles Darwin.⁵⁹ For him, Jewish culture was built up layer by layer. The nation is like an organism, whose unity depends on the relationship between the generations and their spirit. The history of a nation, therefore, is the history of its spirit, expressing itself in certain ways of life, beliefs and thought. Jewish spirit and culture, which expressed itself in religion, ethics, language, literature and folklore was an independent and driving force in Jewish history. The Jewish spiritual character was

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 292, 293.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 298.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 299.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 302.

⁵⁹ Hertzberg, p. 89. Ahad-Ha'am acknowledged the inspiration of these philosophers except for Spinoza. See *Selected...*, pp. 44, 183, 190, 194. *Essays, Letters...*, pp. 134, 245, 318.

dictated by the prophets ("Moses being the greatest of them"),⁶⁰ the Pharisees,⁶¹ and Rabbi Yohanann Ben-Zakkai.⁶² The prophets' writings presented the Hebrew outlook on life, the core of the Hebrew national spirit: "the universal dominion of absolute justice".⁶³ Thus, the laws of morality have been the essence of the national character⁶⁴ and the Jewish hero has been the righteous man, a kind of a spiritual superman.⁶⁵

The idea that the Bible was the source of Jewish nationalism, culture and uniqueness was central to Ahad-Ha'am's thought. It is found in many of his essays, among them his brilliant essay "Moses". The prophet, he wrote, was not a god or demi-god, but a human being, who died in his sin, as any other man. Moses' duty was to carry out God's mission as the national law giver and as such "his image was not worked into the very fabric of the religion, as an essential part of it".⁶⁶ As the prophets' role model, "the ideal archetype of Hebrew Prophecy, in its purest and most perfect manifestation",⁶⁷ Moses never

⁶⁰ "Moses", in *Selected Essays*..., pp. 306-329.

⁶¹ By Pharisees, Ahad-Ha'am referred to a Jewish movement, at Second Temple era. He regarded them as "separating" (from the Hebrew verb "Parash") from the concerns of everyday life. *Ibid.*, p. 153(n).

⁶² He obtained permission from the victorious Romans to retire with his disciples to Yavneh, where he founded an academy. He kept alive Jewish study after the fall of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70. Later, Yavneh became synonymous with the spiritual, rather than political content of Judaism. *Ibid.*, p. 156

⁶³ "Priest and Prophet", *ibid.*, pp. 132, 133.

⁶⁴ "The First Zionist Congress", in *Ten Essays*..., p. 25.

⁶⁵ "Judaism and Nietzsche", in *Essays, Letters*..., p. 79.

⁶⁶ "Judaism and the Gospels", in *Ten Essays*..., p. 230. See also Hertzberg, p. 89.

⁶⁷ "Moses", in *Essays, Letters*..., p. 105.

compromised a principle. He had "faith in the power of the ideal".⁶⁸ "He never ceased to fight for justice", not only "for his age alone, but for all time".⁶⁹

Moses was a prophet of an abstract ideal. In the second commandment,⁷⁰ wrote Ahad-Ha'am, he expressed the uniqueness of his prophecy, which inspired Judaism: "Thou shall not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness...." "This is the essence of Judaism", he emphasized.⁷¹ Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism's religious and moral consciousness is independent of any definite human form and is connected to an abstract ideal, which has "no likeness". Hence, Moses was the supreme representation of Jewish virtue and character.

The idealist Moses was also a nationalist. His spiritual and moral kingdom was designated "to be established on earth by his people after he delivers them from bondage"⁷², and molds them to become a nation. Moses' laws, Judaism's religious and moral consciousness, emphasized "the well being of a nation, as a whole, in the land of its inheritance".⁷³

With Moses as a role model, prophetic Judaism continued to evolve, Ahad-Ha'am wrote. It took until the period of the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.) for the prophets to finally achieve their goal, the nation's acceptance of their spiritual monotheism:

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷⁰ *Exodus*, XX: 3, 4, 5.

⁷¹ "Judaism and the Gospels" (1910), in *Ten Essays*..., pp. 229, 230.

⁷² "Moses", in *Essays, Letters*..., p. 109.

⁷³ "Past and Future", in *Selected*..., p. 86.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit,
said the Lord of hosts".

Zekhariah, 4:6.⁷⁴

In other words, the nation's acceptance of prophetic Judaism was a reflection of the nation's need for its spirituality.⁷⁵

The spiritual element, as vital as it has been, was only one half of Israel's identity. In his essay "Flesh and Spirit"⁷⁶ (1904), Ahad-Ha'am presented his fundamental understanding of Jewish history: the necessity of two elements, material and spiritual, "flesh and spirit", or political and idealistic. Historically, at the time of the First Temple the two elements were already interwoven:

We have only to read those passages in which the prophets rejoice in the victories of the State, in the time of Sanncherib, for instance, or bewail its defeats, to see at once how they valued the State, and how essential political freedom was, in their view, to the advancement of the very ideals for which they preached and fought.⁷⁷

It was during the period of the Second Temple that these two elements became differentiated. Ahad-Ha'am saw the historical conflicts between the Sadducees and the Pharisees as focusing around these two aspects of Jewish life. The Sadducees believed in the very existence of the Jewish state as the essence of national life; the Pharisees believed in the spiritual content as the mainstay of Jewish existence and were ready for far-reaching compromises with the Romans, as long as such compromises did not endanger national existence as articulated in the ability to develop the spiritual content of Judaism.

⁷⁴ The prophet Zekhariah Ben-Berakhiah, around 520 B.C.E.

⁷⁵ In a letter that Ahad-Ha'am wrote to Rabbi E. Lolli in 1898, in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 261.

⁷⁶ *Selected ...*, pp. 139-158. See also Avineri, p. 119.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

The Pharisees, according to Ahad-Ha'am, were the true synthesis of the spiritual with the material, and hence their dialectical defense of political power was viewed as a necessary tool but not as an end in itself.⁷⁸ Carrying on the prophetic ideals, the Pharisees took the middle road by interpreting the laws and enabling the continuation of Jewish distinctiveness, unlike the ascetic Essenes and the conservative Sadducees. He wrote:

For this reason the Pharisees were always fighting a twofold battle: on the one hand they opposed the political materialists from within, for whom the state was only a body without an essential spirit, and on the other side, they fought together with these opponents against the enemy without, in order to save the state from destruction.⁷⁹

The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans proved the Pharisees' view. Judaism continued to exist even without the material infrastructure of a body politic. Had the Sadducean-cum-Zealot view prevailed, then the Jewish people would have ultimately disappeared as all other nations conquered by Rome.⁸⁰

The Pharisees led by Rabbi Yohanan Ben-Zakkai, "took the scroll of Law" and moved to Yavneh (Jamnia), at the time of the war, in 66. The new centre for Jewish learning became a new, quasi-political focus for Jewish existence, despite the lack of political independence. Although it was intended for a short time, since they "firmly believed that today or tomorrow Messiah would come",⁸¹ it lasted for two thousand years. As a result the Hebrew national spirit lived its own distinctive life in the Diaspora.

Ahad-Ha'am believed that the organization of the Ghetto was a unique creation. All the communities were built in a similar pattern, living a similar type of life,

⁷⁸ Avineri, p. 119.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 156.

⁸¹ *Selected....*, p. 157.

despite geography, hoping for a complete reunion in the future. "Its root conception is that the purpose of life is spiritual perfection".⁸² This framework enabled the Hebrew national spirit to live its own distinctive life for centuries. Unfortunately, with time, cracks and decay started to appear in the rabbinical structure. The hope for the renewal in the future, "that enabled our ancestors to live on despite their weakness",⁸³ was dwindling. He declared:

The artificial building stood too long. It was erected only to serve for a short time... but at last its foundations decayed, and its walls cracked... even more and more... Israel, they said is a spirit without a body.⁸⁴

Once the structure started to crack, Jewish spirit and creativity became fossilized and enclosed in Talmudic literalism, continued Ahad-Ha'am. True, *Talmud* and *Shulhan-Arukh* have been the expressions of Jewish genius, each reflecting the circumstances of a different era in history.⁸⁵ "But time has changed and there is no need to regard all the minutiae of our inherited tradition."⁸⁶ Requirements are different today:

It is perfectly obvious that there is no longer any wide-spread demand for an iron code. Even those among us who meticulously observe every precept of the *Shulhan Arukh* do so only out of subservience to the past.⁸⁷

He continued:

It is not only Jews who have come out of the Ghetto; Judaism has come out too... (and) it is in danger of being split up into as many kinds of Judaism... as there are countries of Jewish dispersion. And now Judaism finds it can no

⁸² "Judaism and Asceticism", in *Essays, Letters...*, pp. 125, 126.

⁸³ "Past and Future", in *Selected...*, p. 85.

⁸⁴ "Flesh and Spirit", *ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸⁵ "Ancestor Workshop" (1897), in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

longer tolerate the "galut" (Diaspora) form which it had to take on, in obedience to its will to live, when it was exiled from its own country.... So it seeks to return to its historic centre, in order to live there a life of natural development.... For this purpose Judaism needs at present but little.⁸⁸

The endurance of the Jewish people cannot be credited to the observance of rabbinical rituals.⁸⁹ Rather the preservation of the national spirit was mainly the result of the Mosaic Law, as the "Law of Moses had one object: the well being of the nation, as a whole, in the land of its inheritance".⁹⁰ It enabled our ancestors to live on with hope of a reunion in the Land of Israel. It is necessary, therefore, to return to the Biblical ideals.

Thus, in his approach, Ahad-Ha'am revolutionized the definition of Judaism. He detached nationalism from religion. It was clear to him and his disciples that the custodians of Jewish tradition included Jewish scholars and Hebrew writers and not only rabbis.⁹¹

At the same time, he supported the notion of the "chosen people". He rooted the doctrine in the mystery of Jewish history, interpreting it to be a heavy load, not a privilege:

It is a unique feature of Judaism that it distinguishes its own adherents... by imposing on them a heavy load of duties and obligations... in order to spread fraternity and well being among mankind.⁹²

⁸⁸ "Jewish State and Jewish Problem", in *Ten Essays*..., p. 43.

⁸⁹ A letter to Rabbi E. Lolli, in *Essays, Letters*..., p. 261.

⁹⁰ "The Wrong Way", in *Ten Essays*..., p. 8.

⁹¹ The Jews were not unique in this regard. Anthony Smith describes "the new priesthood" as the "secular intellectuals". See Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nation* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], p. 161. See also Charles Liebman, "Religion and Democracy in Israel", in *Israel Democracy Under Stress*, eds. E. Sprinzak and L. Diamond (Boulder and London: Rienner Pub., 1993), pp.278, 291 n.15.

⁹² "Judaism and Nietzsche", in *Essays, Letters*..., p. 81.

On the other hand, his philosophy of cultural Zionism did not accept the radical secularists. When, for example M.J. Berdiczewski proposed a Nietzschean role model of a modern-secular superman to replace the Yeshiva scholar, Ahad-Ha'am answered in a tone of an offended rabbi. The Jewish people, he claimed, do not need new forms. It is inherently the bearer of the prophetic moral teaching and cannot betray its nature.⁹³

Ahad-Ha'am's solution was a cultural centre in Palestine, emphasizing the notion that as the spirit of the individual needs a body,⁹⁴ so does the national spirit require a home.⁹⁵ He wrote (1912):

Our national existence requires most of all at present, a fixed centre for our national spirit and culture, which will be a new spiritual bond between the scattered sections of the people, and... will stimulate them all to a new national life.⁹⁶

Serving as the heart of the Jewish society worldwide, the centre would be the source of rich and diverse national Jewish culture and spirit, that would save Judaism from degeneration:

It needs not an independent state, but only the creation in its native land... a good sized settlement of Jews working... in every branch of culture, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature... This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the centre of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable.⁹⁷

⁹³ Hertzberg, A., pp. 90, 91.

⁹⁴ This is a Spinozic notion. Spinoza argued that the mind is inseparable from the body. *Ethics*, II, Prop.13, Schol., in Wolfson ii, p. 53.

⁹⁵ "Flesh and Spirit", in *Selected...*, p. 153.

⁹⁶ "Summa Summarum", in *Ten Essays...*, p. 132.

⁹⁷ "Jewish State and Jewish Problem", *ibid.*, pp. 43, 44.

The centre will fulfill the prophets' spirit of morals and ethics, for the "fundamental idea of the Hebrew prophets was the universal dominion of absolute justice."⁹⁸

Echoes of Herder and Hegel are clearly audible in Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy, wrote Shlomo Avineri.⁹⁹ According to these philosophers, the creation of a body politic is the apex of the cultural and spiritual forces of a people. Indeed, Ahad-Ha'am insisted on the creation of a cultural centre in Palestine before any political endeavour. For that reason he supported the Hovevei-Zion, the early Zionist movement, as the heir to the legacy of the Jewish people and the builders of the future cultural-spiritual centre in Zion. They were to solve the Jewish problem by transferring Jews from Russia to Palestine¹⁰⁰

An evolutionist, he insisted on gradualism and resisted Herzl's call for an urgent mass mobilization:

Whereas revolution overthrows the old at a single stroke, and puts the new in its place, evolution destroys and builds in sections.¹⁰¹

Change requires time... we have a long journey to travel.¹⁰²

In another essay he specified, not only gradualism but another controversial thought. He believed that although mobilizing Jewish people to Palestine is important, it does not mean the elimination of dispersion:

This school of thought differs from those who claim to be the "real" Zionists in refusing to believe in the possibility of transferring all the Jews in the world to Palestine, and consequently in refusing to accept the proposition that we cannot survive in the Diaspora. On the contrary, it holds that

⁹⁸ "Priest and Prophet", in *Selected...*, p. 133.

⁹⁹ Avineri, pp. 116, 121.

¹⁰⁰ "The People of the Book", in *Essays, Letters...*, pp. 58, 63.

¹⁰¹ "Judaism and the Gospels", in *Ten Essays...*, p. 226.

¹⁰² "Summa Summarum", in *Ten Essays...*, p. 137.

dispersion must remain a permanent feature of our life, which it is beyond our power to eliminate; and therefore it insists that our national life in the Diaspora must be strengthened. But that object, it holds, can be attained only in the land of its birth.¹⁰³

This was Ahad-Ha'am's response to the Herzlian view which claimed, that under the current conditions Jewish life was possible only in a Jewish state and those who remained outside the state would inevitably be either crushed or assimilated. The political Zionists had a negative attitude towards the Diaspora. Ahad-Ha'am also opposed the Diaspora nationalism, of the famous historian Simon Dubnow (1860-1914). According to Dubnow, the Jewish people had outlived the stage of territorial nationalism and had become a spiritual nation. The Jews should not seek to have a country of their own, but instead they should insist on the right to live their distinctive national life in the countries where they had been settled for generations. Rather than settle in Palestine the Jews should concentrate "on the acquisition of 'national autonomy' for the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, or rather in Eastern Europe, for the theory was entirely based on the conditions of the Jews there."¹⁰⁴

Ahad-Ha'am, in a characteristic fashion, took the middle line. He did not believe that the entire Jewish people would settle in Palestine; nor did he think that the Diaspora Jews would give up the struggle for survival. Thus the Diaspora cannot be condemned. It must be regarded as a permanent feature of Jewish life, though never as a national autonomy. The only way to preserve a distinctively Jewish life, he insisted, is by building a strong national centre in Palestine.¹⁰⁵ In a letter to S. Dubnow in 1907, Ahad-Ha'am wrote:

¹⁰³ "Nationalists and the Diaspora" (1909), in *Essays, Letters...*, pp. 220, 221.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 213.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 220, 221.

In my opinion the possibilities of national life for Jews in the Diaspora are very limited... there is no point and no purpose in Diaspora work, unless at the same time we try to obtain a really free national centre in our historic land. Granted that, Diaspora work will serve a real purpose: that of preserving our scattered national forces and uniting them around the centre.¹⁰⁶

Ahad-Ha'am's theories of gradualism and the Diaspora drew much criticism.

During the 1890s economic and political distress had spurred an impatient activist mood among Russian Jews. Ahad-Ha'am's refusal to acknowledge Herzl's efforts at mass mobilization, was a doctrinal rejection of the political requisites of the Jewish national revival. Although Ahad-Ha'am acknowledged that Palestine could, in the distant future, shelter greater number of Jews from economic and political distress, he stressed the requirement of a gradual change for the revival of the Jewish spirit. For the suffering hungry and distressed masses he could only offer the option of moving to Western Europe or America, where they could enjoy freedom.¹⁰⁷ His concern, as we know, was solely the modernization of Jewish Culture and the development of Jewish identity. The Jewish centre in Palestine, according to him, never meant to solve the material problems of the Jewry, but only to serve as a frame for Jewish culture and Jewish identity. Indeed today, almost a century later, we realize that he was capable of judging what has turned out to be one of Israel's weaknesses: its limited appreciation of the need to strengthen the national Jewish culture and consciousness among Jews.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁰⁷ Kornberg, p. XXVI. Also "The Time Has Come", in *Ten Essays...*, p.107.

¹⁰⁸ Yoran Hazony, *The Jewish State - The Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 127.

Ahad-Ha'am insisted on education.¹⁰⁹ It was regarded by him as the most urgent tool for the gradual altering of Jewish consciousness and the strengthening of nationalism. His notion of spiritual revival meant a shift from faith to ethics and nationalism. A shift to those ideals which have been rooted in the ancient Biblical heritage: Hebrew language, history, literature, the land and the fundamental religious traditions. He explained

A complete national life involves two things: first, full play for the creative faculties of the nation in a specific national culture of its own, and secondly, a system of education whereby the individual members of the nation will be thoroughly imbued with that culture.¹¹⁰

Thus, in March 1889 the secretive society of Bnei-Moshe (The Sons of Moses) was established in Odessa. Although not actually his initiative, but carrying his thought,¹¹¹ it was an attempt to create a new spiritual elite. The group assumed responsibility to guide Zionist activities both in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora in the fields of culture and education. It marked a new direction for both the Zionist movement and the Palestinian Jewish community.¹¹² The group was strictly selective in accepting new members. It required personal commitments of them in order to foster the sense of serving as an example for the masses as moral and ethical guides.

This was the first organization to require of its members comprehension of the Hebrew language and an active involvement in all the affairs of the early Zionist movement, Hovevei-Zion, which was practical and philanthropic. This intense concern with

¹⁰⁹ "The Spiritual Revival" (1902), in *Selected...*, p. 304.

¹¹⁰ "Nationalists and the Diaspora" (1909), in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 217.

¹¹¹ Ehud Luz, *Parallel Meet - Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement (1882-1904)*, trans. L.J Schramm (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 78.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

education and ethics bears witness to the revolutionary bent of the society. It was precisely for this reason that the traditionalists rejected the group, which was detrimental to its short existence.¹¹³

During all this time Ahad-Ha'am realized the complexity of the relationship between nationalism and religion. He correctly foresaw that this would be the rock that would shatter the society's unity. Courageously defending his Zionist ideology he sought a neutral common denominator acceptable to all the members and believed that it could be found in what he called "the spirit of the nation". In the introduction to his proposed bylaws for the society: *Miluim Le'derekh Ha'hayim*, he described the society's role as follows:

To elevate the national spirit in the hearts of all the people and to make it supreme over all the various winds that blow in the folds of Israel, without interfering in any way in the arguments of the warring sects over the Torah and religious observance; with absolute tolerance of personal beliefs and opinions in matters that are between Man and God... to instill in all of them a single faith and a single opinion in matters that are between a man and his fellows...¹¹⁴

Ahad-Ha'am's Zionism highlighted the ancient national language, Hebrew. For a period of twenty years, from 1890 to 1910, both as an editor and a writer, he played an authoritative role in shaping the developing Hebrew language. Insisting on high standards of Hebrew prose and clarity,¹¹⁵ he called:

try to revive the literature... insert living thoughts into it... never change one iota for the sake of belles-letters. The idea is to embellish your thinking, and this in itself will embellish your language.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 78, 79.

¹¹⁴ Ahad-Ha'am, *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha'am* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Dvir and Hotza'a Ivrit, 1959), p. 440. See also Luz, E., p. 79.

¹¹⁵ Tudor Parfitt, "Ahad-Ha'am's Role in the Revival and Development of Hebrew", in *At the Crossroads*, ed. Kornberg, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ "Halashon Ve'sifrootah" (Hebrew), in *Kol Kitvei...*, p. 97.

He, as we know, foresaw the revival of the ancient Hebrew language as the modern Jewish national tongue, which has been a unique phenomenon in human history. He maintained that the biblical language can no longer be possessed by a small elite, as it had been for 19 centuries, but should be restored and re-united with the soil of Israel.¹¹⁷ It should replace the Diaspora Jewish languages. "As circumstances change, one language gives place to another."¹¹⁸ At the time that most European Jewry spoke and was literate in Yiddish, he predicted: "can anybody doubt that Yiddish will be forgotten in two or three generations?"¹¹⁹

The revival of the ancient Hebrew language is an essential part of the national consciousness, declared Ahad-Ha'am. The link between a nation and its national language is like the one between a person and his mother tongue:

Hebrew has been our language ever since we came into existence (through the Bible)... We are, therefore, justified in concluding that Hebrew has been, is, and will always be our national language; that our national literature, throughout all time, is literature written in Hebrew... When language dies, the spirit of the nation dies with it - never to be resurrected.¹²⁰

Ahad-Ha'am was a leader in the revival and development of Hebrew.

Finally, it is important to note the notion of the revival of Jewish labor in Palestine in Ahad-Ha'am's work. He was only thirty three years old, when he launched his famous first essay "The Wrong Way" (1889) presenting his ideology of land and

¹¹⁷ "Rival Tongues", in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 224.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ "The Spiritual Revival", in *Selected...*, pp. 283, 284.

nationhood.¹²¹ Calling for the renewal of Hebrew, labor and farming, he insisted on selfless efforts and ethical conduct in the new agricultural settlements.¹²² He encouraged the pioneers to lay solid foundations to the future centre and be self-sufficient. He guided, criticized and praised them when necessary. His critical appraisal of Zionism's problem in Palestine was never more apparent than in the essay "Truth From the Land of Israel",¹²³ written in 1891 after his initial visit to the new Jewish settlements in Palestine. Ahad-Ha'am's journey was undertaken on behalf of *Hovevei-Zion*, and the essay is imbued with his immediate impressions of the Jewish villages in the country. Unlike other visitors, he did not idealize the complex situation. He deplored the widespread speculation and the finance mismanagement, and called upon *Hovevei-Zion* to stop the phenomenon immediately.¹²⁴ He also pointed at the arrogance of the Jewish pioneers and their disregard for the local Arabs.

What distinguishes Ahad-Ha'am's writing is his awareness of the necessity to confront the Arab problem in Palestine. He had a sense that tragedy would result from the relations between Arabs and Jews. Writing in 1891, at a time when there had hardly risen any manifestation of Arab nationalism in Palestine, his perception of the problem to be faced by Zionism in the future, clearly attest to his exceptional realism:

We tend to believe abroad that all Arabs are desert barbarians, an asinine people who does not see or understand what is going on around them. This is a cardinal mistake. The Arab, like all Semites, has a sharp mind and is full of cunning.... The Arabs, and especially those who are city dwellers, understand very well what we want and what we do in the country; but they

¹²¹ "The Wrong Way", in *Ten Essays*..., p.24.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 14-20.

¹²³ *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha'am*, pp. 23-30.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24. See also Avineri, p. 121.

behave as if they do not notice it because at present they do not see any danger for themselves or their future in what we are doing and are therefore trying to turn to their benefit these new guests.... But when the day will come in which the life of our people in the Land of Israel will develop to such a degree that they will push aside the local population by little or by much, then it will not easily give up its place.¹²⁵

Ahad-Ha'am also warned against the insulting behaviour toward the Arab population. He referred to Jewish settlers who were entangled in quarrels with Arab villagers over field boundaries or water rights and contended that "the only language that the Arabs understand is that of force." Writing this essay one hundred and ten years ago, his foresight in spotting one of the tragic dimensions that was to develop during the emergence of the Zionist movement is most impressive:

One thing we certainly should have learned from our past and present history, and that is not to create anger among the local population against us.... We have to treat the local population with love and respect, justly and rightly.... Our brethren are right when they say that the Arab honours only those who show valor and fortitude; but this is the case only when he feels that the other side has justice on his side. It is very different in a case when (the Arab) thinks that his opponent's actions are iniquitous and unlawful; in that case he may keep his anger to himself for a long time, but it will dwell in his heart and in the long run he will prove himself to be vengeful and full of retribution.¹²⁶

Ahad-Ha'am was, indeed, the first Zionist leader to give weight to this feature of Jewish colonization and to put it on the Zionist agenda.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, he believed in the possibility of peaceful and normal relationships between the two alien people as he wrote:

Once the cultural atmosphere of the land is shaped in the Jewish spirit, it is possible that the Arabs too can be absorbed. For haven't they been here since ancient times, and quite possibly some of them are members of our own people?¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ibid. Also in Avineri, p. 123.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 29. In Avineri, *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Zipperstein, p. 61.

¹²⁸ *Kol Kitvei...*, p. 424, in Zipperstein, p. 247.

To summarize, Ahad-Ha'am's revolutionary philosophy of Judaism regarded the Bible as a national document. Similarly, he viewed the national spirit drawing from biblical prophecy and its teaching that the perfect society is rooted in truth, justice and peace. Although he recognized the important role of faith in Judaism, he considered ethics to be the core of Judaism. Maintaining that the Jewish people is a living organism that is striving to preserve its life and its native genius, as any other nation, he called for the renewal of the spiritual-cultural content of Judaism and the establishment of a Jewish cultural centre in the ancient Land of Israel, in order to heal the crisis in Jewish existence. The centre, he insisted, must be in the ancient land, the biblical homeland and not just any territory as his opponents claimed. The pioneers, the builders of the centre, must be prepared. He emphasized that change of consciousness is needed: the renewal of the biblical language, modernizing Jewish education, biblical ideals of morality and ethical conduct, study of Jewish history and Bible along with farming and developing the land. He warned of many obstacles and argued that those not capable of struggling should not participate in the enterprise.

Ahad-Ha'am faced strong opposition from all over: political Zionists, secularists, socialists as well as the traditionalists. In particular, the traditionalists viewed his work as undercutting traditional Judaism and dangerous. In a lithograph, circulated in Jerusalem in 1891, of a few leaders of *Bnei-Moshe*, Ahad-Ha'am, among them, was shown as a plump, self-possessed bourgeois, which scarcely resembled him. Beneath his name was the following:

Over and above them all, directing them like a choirmaster, is the high priest of the well known society, which is rotten to its core, the Bnei-Moshe. Isn't this man Ahad-Ha'am?¹²⁹

The document claimed these leaders as "responsible for shameful deeds at the expense of the community of Israel". The traditionalist's campaign against Ahad-Ha'am was fierce. In the next chapter we will discuss this issue and show how Ahad-Ha'am handled the conflict and how he tried to reduce the controversy. Although he was not intimidated and did not bend his principles, in his typical way he searched for a compromise. Nevertheless, he could not avoid a conflict.

IV. AHAD-HA'AM'S PHILOSOPHY AND THE ORTHODOX RESPONSE

In his first essay "The Wrong Way", Asher Ginsberg created a stir and became at once famous for his ideas, under his Hebrew pen-name Ahad-Ha'am. The opening paragraph established immediately the two pillars of his ideology, the land and the people. He wrote:

The present generation has seen the birth of a new and far reaching idea, which promises to bring down our faith and hope from heaven, and transform both into living and active forces, making our land the goal of hope, and our people the anchor of faith.¹³⁰

Challenging the Orthodox demands, he argued for a change in attitude to the Bible. It is not only about God and faith, he insisted. It is about the nationhood of the people of Israel and their land: "... are those of our people really right, who say that we

¹²⁹ Zipperstein, pp. 84-86.

¹³⁰ "The Wrong Way", in *Ten Essays...*, p. 1.

have ceased to be a nation and are held together only by the bond of religion"?¹³¹ He continued:

All the laws and ordinances... of the Law of Moses have but one unvarying object: the well-being of the nation as a whole in the land of its inheritance. The happiness of the individual is not regarded. The individual Israelite is treated as standing to the people of Israel in the relation of a single limb to the whole body: the actions of the individual have their reward in the good of the community. One long chain unites all the generations, from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to the end of time; the covenant which God made with the Patriarchs he keeps with their descendants.... For the people is one people throughout all its generations.¹³²

This affirmation presented a challenge to Orthodox Judaism. It went far beyond the *Haskalah's* (Enlightenment's) attempt to reconcile religion by historicizing religious rituals. Ahad-Ha'am's assertion of the revival of the Holy Land as the primary focal point of Jewish aspiration meant that religion's prominence had always been provisional. Now that Judaism had the opportunity to return to its original cultural foundation in Palestine, the dominant role played by religion in exile was nearing its end.¹³³

The Orthodox leadership sensed the danger looming over the traditional society should a new cultural-national identity be created. It absolutely rejected the new ideology, which was independent of religion. They aimed their rigorous opposition against the effort to foster Hebrew culture, Bible study, Jewish history, Hebrew language in daily life and even the settlement in the Land of Israel. In their despair to influence the Zionist movement from within, they agreed to cooperate with secular political Zionism against Ahad-Ha'am.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 3.

¹³² Ibid., p. 8.

¹³³ Zipperstein, p. 81.

¹³⁴ Luz, p. 289.

In March 1902 the national-religious Mizrahi Movement was established. It was a united front of both the secular-political Zionist movement, under the leadership of Herzl, and the religious Zionists under the leadership of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines, against Ahad-Ha'am's cultural Zionism. Under Reines' leadership, Herzl's supporters from within Russian religious Zionists were rapidly organized. Yet, Ahad-Ha'am's authority among the Eastern European Zionists could not be so easily overwhelmed.¹³⁵

Ahad-Ha'am put great efforts into avoiding a rift with the Orthodox camp. He believed that it was possible to attract Jewish nationalists from all sectors of the community, including the traditionalist sector, to Bnei-Moshe. Although many of the traditions were certain to be replaced by more relevant forms, he called for religion to be treated with respect.¹³⁶

Under his leadership, *Hovevei-Zion* and *Bnei-Moshe* worked on the settlement of the Jews in Palestine while reviving the language and the culture. He demanded a balance between them. Although the pioneers' resources were limited and the difficulties were so enormous that many left, Ahad-Ha'am insisted:

... I maintain that work for the national revival cannot be confined to the material settlement alone. We must take hold of both ends of the stick. On the one side, we must work for the creation of an extensive and well-ordered settlement in our ancestral land; but on the other side we are not at liberty to neglect the effort to create there, at the same time, a fixed and independent centre for our national culture, for learning art and literature.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Hazony, pp. 140, 141.

¹³⁶ Zipperstein, p. 81.

¹³⁷ "The Spiritual Revival" (1902), in *Selected ...*, p. 289.

As he specified already in 1897: "For this purpose Judaism needs... : a good sized settlement of Jews working without hindrance in every branch of culture from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature."¹³⁸

Four years earlier, in 1893, a group of young teachers, from the movements Hovevei-Zion and Bnei-Moshe of Russia, established the first Hebrew secondary school in Jaffa.¹³⁹ What started "as something of an accident, without specific goals", a school for Jaffa's Jewish poor, in Ahad-Ha'am's words,¹⁴⁰ later grew and became popular. Only six years after its inception, the school moved to Tel-Aviv and in a short time it became the well known secondary school *Gymnasia Herzliya* (Herzliya High School). It carried (oddly) Herzl's name, although it mirrored Ahad-Ha'am's cultural priorities.¹⁴¹ The school still exists and is popular in Tel-Aviv.

In 1914 about one-third of Tel-Aviv's population of two thousand was made up of students. The town was still officially the Hebrew speaking suburb of Jaffa and an example of the secular character of Ahad-Ha'am's vision for the Jewish future. Designed, by and large, by the men of his Odessa entourage, most importantly its future mayor Meir Dizengoff, no provisions were made in its original plans for the location of a synagogue. Instead, at its centre was a large gymnasium. It was entered by way of a long, impressive outdoor corridor designed to be reminiscent of the path leading to the Temple in Jerusalem. Ahad-Ha'am, and others called it *habbayit shelannu* (our home) - echoing classical

¹³⁸ "Jewish State and Jewish Problem", in *Ten Essays...*, p. 44.

¹³⁹ When the school started, boys and girls studied separately. See Zipperstein, p. 83.

¹⁴⁰ *Kol Kitvei...*, p. 112. Also, Zipperstein, pp. 158-159.

¹⁴¹ Zipperstein, p. 317.

Judaism's designation for the Temple. The gymnasium would be a beacon for the new city.¹⁴²

The school offered a modern curriculum, which the like of it was never seen before. According to Ahad-Ha'am's directives, preference was given to culture rather than religion, to ensure that the students develop a national awareness. There was emphasis on Hebrew literature and language as well as Bible studies. He stressed the importance of the Hebrew language as a link between the individual and the group. The Bible studies, he argued, would create a connection between the child and his ancestral culture and history, thus instill in him pride and love of his past, as well as, a strong aspiration for its renewal.¹⁴³ At the same time, secular subjects such as mathematics, biology, geography, French and Arabic, were also highlighted in order that the student will get a modern European education.¹⁴⁴

This was a revolutionary curriculum and attracted fierce opposition from the Orthodox. For a long time, Ahad-Ha'am tried conciliation. On one hand, he declared: "I am Hebrew and my language is Hebrew",¹⁴⁵ and wrote all his extensive work solely in the restored biblical language. On the other hand, he was reluctant to speak it for many years. Although he claimed that those who were not brought up to speak a language naturally, should not do it,¹⁴⁶ it is more likely to be his gesture to the Orthodox camp. Hebrew was not

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 316, 317.

¹⁴³ "Ha'gimnasia Ha'ivrit" (The Hebrew High School), in *Kol Kitvei...*, p. 418.

¹⁴⁴ "Ha'kchinukh Ha'leumi" (The National Education), in *Kol Kitvei...*, p. 410. Also in "The Schools in Jaffa", *ibid.*, pp. 187-210.

¹⁴⁵ Parfitt, p. 22.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-24.

in use for almost two thousand years. The usage of the language for every-day matters was forbidden (and still is by extreme-Orthodoxy) by orthodox Judaism. At this time, most European Jews were literate in Yiddish and only a small number of intellectuals had a command of the ancient tongue.¹⁴⁷ Although Ahad-Ha'am was fluent in Hebrew, he refrained from speaking it for many years, using Russian instead.

Until he moved to London in 1907. During all this time, Ahad-Ha'am spoke Hebrew only once in public. During his visit to Palestine in 1900, he was invited by a Hebrew teacher at Mikveh Israel Agricultural School to address his Hebrew pupils. Initially, Ahad-Ha'am refused. But, after he was begged "not to undo all my work and efforts here", Ahad-Ha'am agreed and demonstrated an ability to speak fluently, in the Sephardic accent, as was the established practice in Palestine.¹⁴⁸ Only in London his attitude to spoken Hebrew changed. From then on he joined the Hebrew speaking circles.¹⁴⁹ It seems, he no longer believed a reconciliation could be reached with the traditionalists.

In the arena of education, Ahad-Ha'am also made great efforts in order to compromise with the Orthodoxy.¹⁵⁰ In general, he called for respect to the religious education system. More specifically, he argued for the need to divide the secularist and religious educational programs, hence, creating two educational systems:

We must remember that, side by side with the 'improved' education of today, we have also the old traditional system, which is no doubt losing ground every year, but is still strong... and will undoubtedly play an important part in our national life for many years to come, influencing by its method and its

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ See Ahad-Ha'am's letter to S. Ben-Zion (Jaffa) in January 1908, in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 310.

¹⁵⁰ As he wrote in a letter to M. Shenkin (Jaffa, 1908), in *Essays, Letters...*, p. 267: "If the high school cannot continue to exist unless caps are worn... this should not be made a principle".

spirit the education and upbuilding of tens of thousands of Jewish children.... Yet it is obvious and undeniable... that most orthodox Jews... are unable to understand the ideal of the regeneration of Israel as a people... and their leaders are mostly opposed to it, and try... to put obstacles in its path".¹⁵¹ "... we have no need and no right to demand of any section that it shall entrust the education of its children to another section, which is fundamentally opposed to its views on human life. Just as the 'modernists' cannot sacrifice the education that they want in order to satisfy the Orthodoxy, so the orthodox educators cannot give way a single inch in a matter so vital to the existence of the ancient stronghold, for which they would give their lives."¹⁵²

Indeed, years later, these ideas were adopted by the Ministry of Education of the new State. Two educational systems were created. The public system has been concerned with a modern approach; the religious system has been emphasizing faith and religion.

The campaign against Ahad-Ha'am and his philosophy continued. He was depicted both as anti-religious and dangerous. His work challenged the traditionalists in the way they celebrated their festivals, educated their children and charted their destiny.¹⁵³ So, since its opening, the school of Jaffa, Bnei Moshe and in particular Ahad-Ha'am were met with the fury of many Palestinian traditionalists. They were condemned for infecting students and eventually the entire Holy Land with heresy. None of Bnei-Moshe's other projects had ever encountered a comparable reaction.¹⁵⁴

Ahad-Ha'am and other leaders were accused of terrible transgressions: missionary activity, eating ritually forbidden foods, being Parisian sinners (Bnei-Moshe's hope to relocate its centre to Paris, may have been the background for this particular

¹⁵¹ "Spiritual Revival", in *Selected...*, pp. 301, 302.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁵³ Zipperstein, p. 84.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

accusation), and capable of the most heinous crimes, including disloyalty to the Turkish government.¹⁵⁵

It was announced, for instance, in the traditionalist newspaper *Havazelet* that Bnei-Moshe's "goal is to teach the sons of Judah the ways of war and to introduce them gradually to all sorts of secrets and cunning actions until such time that their hearts are filled with rebellion and treachery toward God and King that they will rise up and attack the entire religious tradition like the followers of Robespierre in their time."¹⁵⁶

This was the first time the religious educational system was successfully challenged.¹⁵⁷ The educational enterprise of Ahad-Ha'am and Bnei-Moshe took place also in Russia. In 1895 a reformed Jewish school was established by Bnei-Moshe in Pinsk, which served as a model for many more such schools in Russia. All these schools emphasized Hebrew as a daily spoken language, Jewish history, Bible study and secular courses as well.

While Ahad-Ha'am successfully reformed Jewish education, the Orthodoxy continued to oppose him. In 1912 an ultra-Orthodox movement was established in Poland. This anti-Zionist movement *Agudat-Israel* (The Association of Israel) as well as other Hasidic movements condemned and fought Zionism and modern secular Jewish culture. They began to engage in extensive political activity, build *yeshivot* (religious academics) and called people to live by the Torah.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 85. In Shmuel Tchernowitz, *Bnei-Moshe* (Hebrew), (Warsaw: 1914), pp. 120-121.

¹⁵⁷ Luz, p. 129. There were attempts prior to 1880s, by the Enlightenment Movement, to reform Jewish education, but they all failed.

¹⁵⁸ *Carta's Universal Encyclopedia* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Carta Pub., 1990), p. 12.

The constant conflict and struggle devastated Ahad-Ha'am. He became sick. Only in 1922, when he moved to Tel-Aviv did he enjoy a little peace. The love and admiration of the Jewish population of pre-state Israel compensated for his long battles with the Orthodoxy. On the second of January, 1927 Ahad-Ha'am was gone. As was the practice at the time in Palestine, when one of the grand figures of the community died, thousands of Jews from all parts of the land joined the funeral procession. He was buried in Tel-Aviv.¹⁵⁹

When the State of Israel was established, many of Ahad-Ha'am ideals were incorporated in the new state's policies. Under the leadership of both David Ben Gurion, the first Prime-Minister and the country's spokesperson, and Hayim Weizmann, the first President and Ahad-Ha'am's adherent, the emphasis was on political, cultural issues. In the next chapter we will discuss how the new State underlined the urgency of the revival of the Hebrew language, literature and culture, the study of the Bible and Jewish history, building a just society "a light unto the nations" as well as modernizing education as Ahad-Ha'am argued. Furthermore, in the new Israeli society, culture and tradition played the key role not religion. Thus, the new state incorporated the philosophy of both Theodor Herzl and Ahad-Ha'am. But, while Herzl was acknowledged by the State as a founding figure, Ahad-Ha'am was "hidden away" and half forgotten. Although his legacy stayed on, his name disappeared.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, it is not surprising that recently Ahad-Ha'am's words were echoed in a speech by the current head of the Israeli *Mossad*, E. Halevy. In an address on national security he stressed that a strong Jewish state provides security to the Diaspora. He said "Whether we like it or not, the security of Israel impacts and influences the fate of Jews

¹⁵⁹ Zipperstein, p. 323.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. XVII, 328 n.1. See also Hertzberg, p. 86.

abroad... what happens in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv and Haifa, has an impact on the plight of the Jews in New York, London and Moscow."¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ In the daily *Yediot Aharonot* (Hebrew), Tel-Aviv, December 22, 2000.

CHAPTER THREE:
AHAD-HA'AM'S IDEOLOGY AND CIVIL
RELIGION IN ISRAEL, 1948-1963

I THE CONTEXT FOR THE CULTURE IN THE NEW STATE

One of the greatest achievements of Zionism is, according to some scholars, the creation of an Israeli culture and identity.¹ The dream of a national renewal has been realized. Israeli² culture expresses the Israeli experience through language, music, literature, poetry and art and is the outcome of Zionism and Ahad-Ha'am's ideology. By rejecting the stereotypical image of Diaspora's passivity and Talmudic legalism, established by the Zionist movement, adopting the renewal of Hebrew as a national tongue, recreating the biblical past, and emphasizing culture over religion and faith, the Israelis defined Jewishness as a nationality. Israeli identity and culture are the product of Zionist history, Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy and the efforts of the early governments of the State of Israel to create a new Jewish identity.

Four ideological streams came to a working agreement, towards the establishment of the State of Israel. These are: left-wing Democratic-Socialism, right-wing Revisionism, Orthodoxy (both the Zionist Mizrahi and the anti-Zionist Agudat-Yisrael) and the middle-class General-Zionists. These parties formed the basis of Israel's political system.³ By Now Ahad-Ha'am's Cultural-Zionism disappeared and under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, national unity was emphasized.⁴

¹ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *Original Sins, Reflections on the History of Zionism and Israel* (London and Concord, Mass.: Pluto Press, 1992), pp. 114,115.

² When I use the term *Israeli* in this work, I refer to the group of citizens of Israel who are Jewish, excluding the more Orthodox Jews, who do not wish to be part of the new Zionist society, and continue to follow Orthodox Judaism as it was practiced in Europe in the past.

³ Jansen, p. 10.

⁴ Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. XII, XIII.

Less than a year before the creation of the state, a UN Committee was established to study the future of Palestine after the expiration of the British Mandate in May 1948. At that time, the ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist Agudat-Israel was ready to declare its opposition to a Jewish state. The Zionist executive, headed by Ben-Gurion, acquired the support of the Agudat-Yisrael party thus preventing its resistance to the founding of the state. The price was the 'Status Quo Agreement', which was set forth in a letter to the Chief Rabbi of the Orthodox party dated 19 June 1947. It promised that the Jewish state, once established, would keep the Sabbath, ensure the observance of dietary laws in state institutions, maintain Orthodox control over laws concerning personal status (marriage and divorce) and continue to operate educational streams, including one Orthodox and one Ultra-orthodox.⁵

A short time later, a dispute arose over the wording of the new state's declaration of independence. The secularist majority objected to the use of the word 'God' in the document. So, the expression 'Rock of Israel' (*Tzur Israel*) was used instead.⁶ The phrase was ambiguous. The Orthodox groups understood it as a reference to the Divine while the secular could interpret it in its poetic sense, suggesting the eternity of Israel.⁷ After the signatures were affixed, the representative of the Mizrahi Party chanted the traditional blessing thanking God for this accomplishment while David Ben-Gurion and the other secularists listened bare-headed. At the very moment of Israel's inception, David Ben-Gurion and his circle instituted all kinds of concessions, compromises and creative ambiguities for the sake of unity, which is referred to as "consociationalism" by Asher

⁵ Jansen, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ Cohen and Susser, p. XI.

Cohen and Bernard Susser.⁸ Interestingly, given how problematic the relations between secular and religious had been since Ahad-Ha'am presented his program of cultural Zionism⁹, the cooperation between the Orthodoxy's leadership and the secular David Ben-Gurion continued.

In the past,¹⁰ both *Mizrahi* and Herzl's political Zionism shared a similar view. They both reacted to the hatred, suffering and humiliation endured by the Jews. *Mizrahi* supported Herzl's political and diplomatic activity aimed at securing recognition of the Jews' right to a land and a state of their own.¹¹ *Mizrahi's* leadership agreed with Herzl that a Jewish state could be established anywhere (e.g. Uganda, Africa), not necessarily in Palestine and opposed Ahad-Ha'am's efforts in settling Jews in the Land of Israel, as well as his entire ideology.¹²

It was the fact that both religious and cultural (Ahad-Ha'am's) Zionists stressed Judaism's cultural-historical distinctiveness but offered a different definition of Jewish uniqueness, that rendered the cooperation between them so complex. Political Zionism, on the other hand, was less concerned with defining Jewish identity, education and culture. They viewed Judaism as representing a dispersed and subjugated people in need of territory and political independence. For this reason the religious Zionists headed by Rabbi

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. XII.

⁹ Luz, p. 81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

I.Y. Reines and later by Rabbi A.I. Kook, preferred Herzl's political Zionism over Ahad-Ha'am's cultural Zionism,¹³ and later cooperated with the secularist David Ben-Gurion.¹⁴

Seffi Rachlevsky, in his book *Messiah's Donkey* (Hebrew), published in 1998, describes the study of the celebrated Orthodox-Zionist leader, Rabbi Z.Y. Kook (1891-1981). There, the portrait of the secular Herzl hung next to the portrait of a distinguished rabbi. When asked the reason for this curious combination, Rabbi Kook explained that Herzl was a messenger of God, and therefore a holy man.¹⁵ The secular leader David Ben-Gurion was also considered a messenger of God by the Zionist and anti-Zionist Orthodoxy.¹⁶

Born in Plonsk, Poland, in 1886, Ben-Gurion received both a Jewish and a secular education. He was a socialist in his youth and as such immigrated to Palestine in 1906.¹⁷ From the time the Israel Worker's Party (Mappai) was established in 1930, he was one of its chief leaders. From 1935 onwards, he headed the Jewish Agency executive until the establishment of the state in 1948.

Upon the establishment of Israel in May 1948, Ben-Gurion, also known as "B.G.", became Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and was a glorified military leader, a social economic thinker and a self-taught student of philosophy.¹⁸ An agnostic, who frequently quoted the Bible, he understood that political achievement cannot be sufficient

¹³ Don-Yehiya, Vol. 12, No.2, (1991), p. 193.

¹⁴ Jansen, p. 100.

¹⁵ Seffi Rachlevsky, *Hamoro Shel Mashiah* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifrei-Hemed, 1998), p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31, 145.

¹⁷ Ettinger, p. 912.

¹⁸ Avineri, pp. 198, 9.

without social, cultural and spiritual changes.¹⁹ He understood the need for a modern Jewish identity for the Jewish citizens of the new state, mostly secular. He also adopted the Herzlian notion of rapid action in order to save distressed European Jewry. He realized that cultural-Zionism was a necessary complement to political Zionism. In 1963 David Ben-Gurion retired and resided in Kibbutz Sde-Boker in the southern Negev until his death in December 1973. He was buried in Sde-Boker.

II. MAIN FEATURES OF ISRAEL'S CULTURE

Jewish society in pre-state Israel was strongly influenced by the cultures, customs, institutions, ideologies which the early Jewish Zionist settlers brought from their land of origin. There was, of course, a strong element of Jewish traditionalism. But secular concepts such as socialism, democracy, secular nationalism and institutions like the co-operative farm, labor unions, political parties, theater, painting, school systems and more had little or no connection with traditional Jewish culture.²⁰ With the establishment of the state and its increased population (tripled in three years), David Ben-Gurion understood the necessity for an integrated system of symbols for a nation that had been dispersed for over eighteen centuries.²¹ This recognition of the need for a unifying symbol system led him to the application of the civil religion theory.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 216.

²⁰ Dan Segré, *A Crisis of Identity - Israel and Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 38.

²¹ Liebman, and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, p. 22.

The civil religion thesis assumes that religion provides the basis for the cultural integration of society. Robert N. Bellah, who popularized the term civil religion,²² reminds us of Ahad-Ha'am's writing:

By civil religion, I refer to that religious dimension, found I think in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality.²³

In so doing, Bellah lent specificity to the contentions of two contemporary thinkers, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, that there is an organic institutional alternative to church religion in American thought and life. The alternative is a living, functional civil religion that has been articulated in American consciousness since the founding of the nation.²⁴

Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya argue that there are two ideal types of societies; one is found in the moral or visionary state, the other in a welfare or service state. The former requires a civil religion, the latter does not. Israel stands closer to the moral model, therefore one expects to find civil religion there.²⁵ Civil religion, they claim, embodies characteristics of traditional religion - it projects a meaning system, expressed with symbols - but at its core stands a corporate entity rather than a transcendent power.²⁶

Civil religion was developed in Israel from its inception, emphasizing the Jewish nation and the new state. Liebman and Don-Yehiya refer to Israeli civil religion,

²² This notion was used before by the French philosopher-Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).

²³ Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 3.

²⁴ Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 186.

²⁵ *Civil Religion in Israel*, pp. 216, 217.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

which evolved over a decade, as statism.²⁷ The aim was to unite the new immigrants, the sub-communities and the institutions around the state and Zionism.²⁸ Functioning as a quasi-religion, a substitute for traditional religion, statism gives rise to values and symbols that point to the state, legitimate it and mobilize the population to serve its goals. In other words, statism cultivates an attitude of sanctity towards the state, affirming it as an ultimate value.²⁹

Indeed, the establishment of the Jewish state evoked an outburst of enthusiasm from Jews and Christians in both Israel and the Diaspora.³⁰ This enthusiasm served as a source of loyalty, identification and even reverence towards the state and its institutions. David Ben-Gurion, the major architect of statism, aimed for the representation of the state as the expression of the national Jewish spirit, the realization of many centuries of yearnings for freedom and sovereignty, and as the guarantor of national unity, as Ahad-Ha'am did.

Like traditional religion, the Israeli civil religion of statism also sought to recapture the spontaneous experience of the initial moment of revelation, through symbol, cult and ritual.³¹ But contrary to religion, statism was not prepared to use authoritarian measures to achieve its goals. In fact, statism combined elements of both mobilization and reconciliation systems, a tendency to democratic-liberalism as the means of achieving their

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 222, 223.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁰ The founding of the state only a few years after the Holocaust added to this excitement. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³¹ Liebman, and Don-Yehiya, p. 85.

goals.³² Furthermore, statism accepted secularism as a positive value and viewed religion with tolerance.³³

The central myth of Israeli statism was the establishment of Israel.³⁴ According to David Ben-Gurion, the four critical events in Jewish history were: the exodus from Egypt, the assembly at Mt. Sinai and the receiving of the Torah, the conquest of the Land of Israel by Joshua and the establishment of the State of Israel.³⁵ But, he added:

Our history does not commence with the foundation of the State of Israel, the first Zionist Congress, the preparation of *Shulhan Arukh*, the compilation of the *Mishnah*, or the final redaction of the Bible canon; nor with the return from Babylon, the establishment of the Monarchy or the conquests of Joshua Bin Nun. It does not commence even with the reception of the Torah on Sinai or the Exodus from Egypt. These are all important milestones on our long road, but they were preceded by deeds and events, tests and trials from the time of the Patriarchs and their sons after them. Behind us lie four thousand years of struggle and achievement, which have set their stamp upon the history of humanity and have shaped our spirit, fate and purpose.³⁶

The heroes of statism were therefore biblical heroes. David Ben-Gurion perceived them as the ideal role models to young Israelis and preferred them over the heroes of later periods, the Maccabees or Bar-Kokhba.³⁷ Ben-Gurion, as Ahad-Ha'am before him, viewed the biblical times as "the period of Jewish glory and independence", and spiritual creativity which formed the nation and accounted for its continued survival.³⁸ Hence,

³² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98. See also David Ben-Gurion, *Vision and Way* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Labour Party Press, 1951-1957), Vol. 4, p. 18.

³⁶ David Ben-Gurion, *Like Stars and Dust* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1997), p. 149

³⁷ Liebman, and Don-Yehiya, p. 94.

³⁸ *Divrei Haknesset*, 1956, p. 1792. This is the Knesset protocol, the official record of the Knesset debates and resolutions. Cf. *Selected Essays of Ahad-Ha'am*, pp. 261, 2.

statism elevated the contemporary builders of Israel to almost equal status with the biblical heroes, while David Ben-Gurion, who played the central role in the creation of the state and in the Israeli Defense Forces, served as first Prime-Minister and Minister of Defence.³⁹

One Zionist hero, Theodore Herzl (1860-1904), founder of the World Zionist Organization became a mythic hero in the statist period. Herzl's remains were transferred to Israel in 1949 in an elaborate state ceremony and reinterred on a mountain in Jerusalem named after him. This was all done in accordance with a special law adopted by the *Knesset*⁴⁰ Mount Herzl became a sacred site and the date of his death, the twentieth of *Tamuz*, was declared State Day or IDF Day during the first years of statehood.

Speaker of the Knesset, Joseph Sprinzak, speaking as acting president of the state, called Herzl "the prophet of Israel's freedom", who must be numbered among "the holy and the great builders of the eternity of Israel."⁴¹ Incredible spiritual and physical qualities were attributed to Herzl, all contributing to his transformation into a mythic hero of almost superhuman proportions. It was then that Herzl reached the peak of his authority.

Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya ask, why Herzl? Why was Herzl chosen as a national hero? The answer according to them is (1) Herzl had been admired by all the subcommunities of early state society; (2) the great Zionist came from an assimilationist background. Thus, Herzl was suited to the image of the new Jew in contrast to the traditional, exilic Jew.⁴² This is true, but not sufficient. As was pointed out in the

³⁹ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, p. 94. The authors argue that Ben-Gurion was especially attracted to the biblical Joshua.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95. Also in *Divrei Haknesset*, 1949, pp. 1314, 1315, 1324, 1330, 1331.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96. See also *ibid.*, p. 1359.

⁴² *Ibid.*

previous chapter, unity preserving, consociationalist David Ben-Gurion, for one reason or another, chose to include the religious parties in his governments' coalitions. Herzl, as we know, was admired by the traditionalists, since the days of the inception of the National Religious Party (*Mizrachi*) in 1902, which was a united effort of Herzl and Rabbi I.J. Reines against Ahad-Ha'am. Herzl, charismatic as he was, was involved with Zionism for only nine years, from 1895 until his early death in 1904 when he was only forty-four years old. David Ben-Gurion could have selected many other important veteran Zionists as national heroes. There was, however, only one secular Zionist leader, who was popular among the Orthodox and this was Herzl. Indeed, as indicated above, David Ben-Gurion himself was popular among the traditional elements of society. He was considered an ideal hero-leader with talents and capacities equivalent to those of the first great leaders of the Jewish nation. He was called both modern-day Joshua and Moses. In some extreme instances, adulation of Ben-Gurion took on the overtones of Messianic ceremony kissing the soles of his feet, touching his clothing, bringing sick children forward so that he might heal them with his touch and calling him the Messiah.⁴³

Religion, both traditional and civil, consists also of a system of values and symbols which provide ultimate meaning.⁴⁴ Both systems promote the internalization of its sacred values through a process of socialization. The system of values and behaviour is legitimated and internalized by symbols and ceremonies.⁴⁵ Symbols include ceremonials, focal symbols such as the cross in Christianity and the *menorah* in Judaism, audio symbols

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

such as language, music and prayer, conceptual verbal symbols such as myth and doctrine, public symbols such as a flag.⁴⁶ Ceremonies include pilgrimage, travel for religious renewal to a special place that is itself a sacred symbol, such as Rome or Jerusalem, festivals and special days.⁴⁷

In 1948, with the establishment of the State of Israel, Ahad-Ha'am's vision materialized and Hebrew became its official language, and was internationally recognized as the modern Jewish tongue. It took both secularization and sacralization processes to change the language which for almost two thousand years was used for religious purposes only. The use of words, idioms and phrases derived from religious sources were detached from their original meaning to serve secular purposes.⁴⁸ Many biblical phrases and aphorisms were adopted to express identification with the Bible and the biblical period. David Ben-Gurion, an admirer of the Bible, argued that the Bible was the authoritative source for rules governing syntax and usage. He insisted that senior army and government officials Hebraize their names and sought to influence members of government and Knesset as well as the general society to do likewise. He preferred biblical names, and argued that medals awarded to IDF soldiers should bear only names of biblical heroes. Similarly, he insisted that streets surrounding the compound of government offices have names of biblical origin.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Introducing Religion From Inside and Outside* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983), pp. 100-118.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴⁸ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, p. 38.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 94.

Israeli civil religion,⁵⁰ at that time, embraced symbols that pointed to victory, achievement and to acceptance into the family of nations. The Holocaust, symbolizing exile, deprivation, enslavement and humiliation was discussed very little. It took until 1959 to pass the law establishing the forms of public observance of the Holocaust Day. The following year, 1960, with the famous kidnapping and trial of the Nazi war criminal A. Eichmann, finally marked the change in the Israeli attitude towards the Holocaust.⁵¹

The sacred symbols of Israeli civil religion of statism have included the national flag and the state's symbol. The blue and white flag (the colors of the Jewish prayer shawl) with the Star of David at its centre, was preferred by the traditionalists. In spite of the secularists' objection, with Ben-Gurion's support, their suggestion was accepted.⁵²

The state's symbol the *menorah*, a seven-branched candelabrum, was accepted by both the religious and the secular. The menorah as a symbol lent itself to multiple interpretations. According to the Bible it was constructed in accordance with God's instructions and placed in the Tabernacle in the desert. Titus' Arch in Rome has displayed the *menorah* as one of the items the Romans plundered from the second temple. Hence, the *menorah* signals the restoration of Jewish sovereignty.⁵³

Independence Day, on the fifth of the month of Iyar (Hebrew calendar), commemorating Israel's declaration of statehood, was the chief holiday of statism. The major theme of the celebration was the inauguration of a new period in Jewish and world

⁵⁰ Liebman and Don-Yehiya call it "the civil religion of statism".

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-107.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

history alongside continuity and succession, discounting the intervening two thousand years.⁵⁴ The military victory in the War of Independence that followed the establishment of the state, led to the perception that the prophetic vision of the ingathering of the exiles and the victory of the few over the many (David and Goliath) was being realized. Hence, it is not surprising that the joy and enthusiasm evoked by the creation of Israel had both a biblical overtone and Messianic sentiments. Many believed the state to be the fulfillment of the traditional prophetic vision of redemption.⁵⁵

Independence Day was incorporated in the Jewish calendar along with Passover and Hanukkah, the two traditional holidays of freedom. New rituals were introduced for the celebration of Independence Day, unlike any other religious holiday: dancing both on the streets or in dance festivals, national flags flying from every home, a military parade, the conferring of the Prize of Israel upon twelve outstanding writers, scholars, scientists and entertainers (the number twelve was chosen as a reminder of the twelve tribes of biblical Israel), watchfires, ceremonial tree planting alluding to the biblical commandment of planting trees, and the World Bible Contest, an international quiz emphasizing the link between the State of Israel and the Bible.⁵⁶

The Jewish religious holidays were secularized, and festivals of secondary importance in traditional Judaism such as *Hanukkah*, *Tu-Bishvat*, or *Lag-Ba'omer* assumed greater importance stressing national themes. The religious references to God were substituted with the terms People of Israel and Nation.⁵⁷ The three pilgrim festivals,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122. Cf. Ahad-Ha'am "Ancestor Worship" in *Selected...*, p. 212.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-118.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 121.

Passover, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Booths (Deuteronomy, 16:16-17) were transformed and transvaluated.

Passover, originally marking the spring and physical freedom (exodus) was celebrated in a variety of ways, considerably different from the traditional one, especially in the rural *kibbutzim*. There, the emphasis was on reviving the biblical agricultural notion and love of the land.⁵⁸ The Festival of Weeks the biblical wheat harvest festival was traditionally a holiday of prayers emphasizing the time of God giving the Torah, the Law, to the nation in the desert, at Mount Sinai. Under civil religion the biblical notion of agriculture was revived and the new rituals also expressed the nationalist motif. The focus of the celebrations was the donation of the first fruits of the agricultural produce to the Jewish National Fund, which purchased and prepared land for settlements and planted trees. The celebrations, in song, dance and recitation from both traditional and modern Hebrew sources, alluded to the biblical notion of bringing the first fruit of the harvest to the Temple⁵⁹ (Exodus 23:16, Numbers 28:26, Deuteronomy 16:9-11).

The Festival of Booths, the autumn festival of *Sukkot*, is described in the Bible as the feast of ingathering at the end of the agricultural year (Exodus 23:16), emphasizing the land, its produce, and thanksgiving for food. The unique feature of the festival is the observance of the commandment to dwell in booths for seven days (Lev. 23:39-42). This is the historical-religious meaning, which marks the forty-year journey and

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 49, 50.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 50, 51.

survival in the wilderness with God's help. The third of the pilgrim festivals was the most joyous out of the three, as was emphasized in the Bible.⁶⁰

In the early state, the Festival of Booths was also celebrated as an agricultural holiday with national elements in the kibbutzim and villages. The emphasis was again on the revival of ancient, biblical Judaism. The booth was interpreted as a symbol of the wandering of the Jews in the deserts of the world. Thanksgiving gifts were brought by children, but instead of donating them to God, the gifts were donated to the Jewish National Fund for the purpose of purchasing land and planting forests.⁶¹ The pilgrimage custom was never revived.

The festival was part of the secularized traditional paradigm and expressed nationalism: Exodus-physical freedom and sovereignty, Torah-Law, Thanksgiving and Booths-food and land. Again, God was omitted from these holidays as from the entire symbol system and was replaced by values such as, Nation, Land, Humanity, Security and working class.⁶²

All agreed that the Sabbath should be the weekly day of rest. The majority of the population, however, being secular, did not follow the traditional customs including attending synagogue. Like the festivals, the Sabbath too was secularized. This has proven to be a major problem for Israeli society. True, all shops, industry, business, entertainment and public transportation have not been operating on the Sabbath as a result of the 1947 agreement between David Ben-Gurion and Mizrahi (later NRP) and the non-Zionist ultra-

⁶⁰ Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Be A Jew* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1972), pp. 250-252.

⁶¹ Liebman & Don-Yehiya, pp. 53, 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

orthodox Agudat-Yisrael. But, the entire Israeli society has been inextricably divided over this issue. From the early years until today, the secular population has demanded a change in the Sabbath Law so all services are available on the Sabbath and holidays.

The Sabbath law was not the only concession granted to the minority traditionalists in the pre-state, 1947, agreement, as was noted in the previous chapter. An extremist Orthodox religious ideology was established in opposition to the democratic Zionist, civil religion vision, embodied in Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948.⁶³ The Orthodox approach enabled the establishment of the two headed Chief Rabbinate, *Sephardi* and *Ashkenazi*, ethnically divided. The system of religious courts was preserved and developed in opposition to the secular system of courts by virtue of the Jurisdiction of the Rabbinical Court Act of 1953,⁶⁴ safeguarding the rabbinical Orthodox monopoly in family courts.⁶⁵ The public-religious educational system, which inculcates Orthodox religious ideology, was established opposite the secular system by the Public Education Act of 1953.⁶⁶ This autonomy in religious education was given to Mizrahi already back in 1920 by the secular World Zionist Organization,⁶⁷ as Ahad-Ha'am suggested in 1902 in his article "Spiritual Revival" as part of his conciliatory efforts.⁶⁸

⁶³ Uri Huppert, *Back to the Ghetto - Zionism in Retreat* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp. 17, 18.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁸ In *Selected...*, p. 304.

Indeed, as was noted, in 1953, the Minister of Education the historian Ben-Zion Dinur (1894-1973), presented to the Knesset the Law of Public Education.⁶⁹ Authored primarily by David Ben-Gurion,⁷⁰ the act recognized the need for two independent educational systems, for the two main leanings. Emphasizing the importance of education in shaping the fragmented society and its national culture, David Ben-Gurion and the authors of the law hoped it would serve the renaissance of Jewish statehood,⁷¹ and be an important step in the direction of unity. Clause 2 of the Law states:

The object of State education is to base elementary education on the values of Jewish culture and the achievements of science, on the love of the homeland the loyalty to the State and the Jewish people, on practice in agriculture and manual work, on pioneer training, and on striving for a society built on freedom, equality, tolerance, mutual assistance and love of mankind.⁷²

This ideal aim in education expressed Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy as he wrote:

... the country will be a national spiritual centre of Judaism... which will bind all Jews together; a centre of study and learning, of language and literature of bodily work and spiritual purification...⁷³

From 1948 on, his notion of the role of both the Bible and the revival of the Hebrew language in Jewish nationalism was introduced in the new state. These concepts were emphasized in both society at large and the public educational system. The Bible captured a prominent place in elementary schools, secondary schools and the community in general. As a national document, and with its universal message it highlighted the themes

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁰ Huppert, p. 100.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Joseph Solomon Bentwich, *Education in Israel* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965), p. 42..

⁷³ "Summa Summarrum", in *Ten Essays...*, pp. 154, 155.

of return to the sources and national rebirth and revival. The Bible has been taught in all grades from kindergarten to grade XII and for the first two decades was a popular subject. Children have become familiar with Bible stories, many of which have come alive by association with historical sites which they have actually visited. The students have studied and can easily quote many biblical verses.⁷⁴

The annual Bible quiz received a great deal of publicity and attention in general. Bible study circles were instituted throughout the country. The community's interest in archaeology, which validated the Bible and strengthened the attachment to the land, was encouraged.⁷⁵ Indeed, the early state projected the modern settlement of the land as the successor to the biblical period of Jewish national independence, discounting the intervening two thousand years.⁷⁶ This approach reminds us of Ahad-Ha'am's words:

Now it is quite obvious that this need for a detailed code of religious observances is not widely felt in our own time. Even those Jews who still carry out every detail of the *Shulhan-Arukh*⁷⁷ do so only because they are slaves of the past. If the *Shulhan-Arukh* had not been there already, our generation would certainly not have produced it....⁷⁸ This book... was the book that best suited the spirit of our people, their condition and their needs... in the Middle Ages, just as the Talmud is our Law in the form which it took in the last days of the ancient world, and just as the Bible is our Law in the form which it took while the Jews still lived as a nation on their land. The three books are but three milestones on the road of a single development, that of the spirit of the Jewish nation. Each corresponds to the nation's conditions and needs in a different period.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Bentwich, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁵ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, p. 110.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ The *Shulhan Arukh* is a code of Jewish law, which is the final authority for Orthodox Jews.

⁷⁸ "Ancestor Worship", in *Selected Essays...*, p. 215.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

The Hebrew language, which was once considered dead, was revived after decades of struggle. Hebrew became the official language of the state and therefore the formal language of instruction. This was particularly important in view of the large number of Yiddish speaking immigrants from post-Holocaust Europe, Arabic speaking immigrants from the Middle-East and Africa and Laddino speaking immigrants from the Balkans and Turkey. Hebrew, the second language for these groups, unified them in a common linguistic culture. It was also fortified by the study of the Bible. In fact, good writing or speaking of the language was impossible without using biblical phrases. In the schools, the study of Hebrew language and literature was as prominent as the Bible.⁸⁰

The curriculum of the State Schools did not emphasize History and Geography as much, though these subjects were very popular. History included both the secular study of world history as well as Jewish History from the period of the Bible up to the present day,⁸¹ strengthening Jewish identity. The study of Geography was also divided into world geography (General Geography) and the geography of Israel.⁸²

The study of Jewish religion meant the study of Orthodox Judaism, according to the State Educational Law.⁸³ In the Religious State Schools more time was assigned to Talmud and religion. Unlike the secular system, in the religious schools teachers and children were expected to keep all the outward observances. The school day began with prayers. Boys were required to wear 'fringes', to keep their caps on, to say grace

⁸⁰ Bentwich, pp. 61-62.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁸² Ibid., p. 154

⁸³ Ibid., p. 71.

after meals, etc. The syllabus was distinguished from that of the secular schools also by the spirit in which religion, Bible and Talmud were taught:

1. To implant in the children a belief in God as the creator and Law-Giver, who revealed his word to His people in His Book.
2. To educate them to carry out the "Mitzvot" (duties, observances) to God and their fellow man.⁸⁴

Although the Sabbath and the Festivals are celebrated at home, the preparation for them was an integral part of the curriculum. While the interpretation of these topics in the secular system emphasized (still does) the historical aspect of the tradition, the religious system devoted more time to it and highlighted faith.

Mathematics, Science and English as a second language were also prominent in the curriculum. The system also offered enriched courses in these subjects.⁸⁵ Art and Music were allocated two hours weekly and were compulsory. So was Manual Training, which included Woodwork or Metalwork for boys, Domestic Science for girls and Agriculture for boys and girls.

As we see, Ahad Ha'am's vision became a reality. Although not acknowledged, his ideals of the need to reform Judaism by reviving Hebrew, implementing the Bible as the source of modern Jewish nationalism, and modernizing Jewish education while cultivating the Land of Israel, have penetrated deeply into the consciousness of modern Israel.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ In some schools French was introduced as well or instead of English. Ibid., p. 62.

III. LINKS BETWEEN AHAD-HA'AM'S PHILOSOPHY AND DAVID BEN-GURION'S APPROACH

David Ben-Gurion, the charismatic nationalist played, as we already know, a critical role in defining Israel's image and policy between 1948-1963.⁸⁶ He combined Herzl's political ideology of the urgent need to create a Jewish state with Ahad-Ha'am's philosophy. David Ben-Gurion held that since the Jewish problem had been twofold, physical and cultural, the solution should be accordingly. The physical desperation of the Jews deserved a political treatment and the identity crisis needed a cultural and educational reform.

The Ben-Gurion era in Israel was characterized by an extensive debate over the meaning of the establishment of the state.⁸⁷ In the "First World Ideological Conference", held in Jerusalem in 1951, Ben-Gurion was very explicit about his political philosophy. He began his speech by dismissing the centrality of religion as an integrating force in modern Jewish nationalism, claiming that Jewish nationalism had always been nourished by nonreligious sources. This trend of secularization did not have a significant effect in the weakening of the three major components of Jewish nationalism: the people's link to the homeland, the Hebrew language and the messianic vision of redemption. Ben-Gurion conceived all three components in secular terms and claimed that they were always present in the life of the nation, whether or not Jews lived in their own homeland.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Avraham Avi-Hai, *Ben-Gurion, State Builder, Principles and Pragmatism 1948-1963* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974), p. 37.

⁸⁷ Michael Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals: Power, Knowledge and Charisma* (De Kalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983), p. 64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Pondering the question of Jewish survival Ben-Gurion wrote: "The Jewish people has been struggling for its survival, unity and independence ever since it came into being, until our own days. This is the daring and tragic struggle, unique in human history, of a small nation, alone, dispersed..."⁸⁹ The secret for that heroism, he continued is "in the message of the prophets of Israel, the prophets of pure truth and absolute justice... which has preserved Israel throughout the ages".⁹⁰

A self taught student of the Bible, history and philosophy, David Ben-Gurion viewed the Jewish nation: Although "the supreme destiny of Israel was in the kingdom of the spirit they did not disparage the body or its needs, for no soul is without a body, nor any human universal mission without sovereign national existence",⁹¹ he declared.

Reading Ben-Gurion's lines, one cannot ignore the parallel found in Ahad-Ha'am's writing, a few decades earlier. He discussed the same notion when he wrote about the Pharisees, who "upheld the Jewish view which was handed down from the Prophets: that is the combination of flesh and spirit... They knew full well that spirit without flesh is but an unsubstantial shade, and that the spirit of Judaism could not develop and attain its end without a political body, in which it could find concrete expression".⁹²

Ben-Gurion, too, conceived the spirit of Judaism as the spirit of the Prophets. "The vision of the Prophets came from their moral consciousness, their understanding of the

⁸⁹ David Ben-Gurion, "Jewish Survival" in *Like Stars and Dust*, p. 124.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁹¹ "Mission and Dedication", *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹² "Flesh and Spirit" in *Selected ...*, pp. 154, 155.

overmastering needs of their people and of mankind... Micah condensed the entire doctrine of Hebrew prophecy in one majestic verse:

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God? (6:8)⁹³

In fact, in the Proclamation of Independence it was laid down that "the State of Israel will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex". It was also laid down that the State "will be based on the principles of liberty, justice and peace as conceived by the Prophets of Israel".⁹⁴

The charismatic leader of Israel viewed the reestablishment of Jewish independence in Palestine as a leap over two thousand years of Jewish history, and Jewish society as the heirs of the ancient Jewish people. The revival of Israel, he maintained, must be founded on biblical ancient Israel, emphasizing the uniqueness and mission of the people of Israel as preached by the Prophets. "A people with great spirit... that gave the world everlasting moral truths and tenets".⁹⁵ He repeatedly insisted: "The human, Jewish and national values, which we believe in, and which alone gave our Movement its moral conquering force, were formulated and enacted by Israel's prophets with more fire and vigor, with a more profound and convincing faith, than anyone has done ever since".⁹⁶ Or, as he wrote in a letter to Nathan Rotenstreich, the political philosopher dated January 9, 1957: "You are mistaken in your belief that there are no sudden leaps in history; indeed there are.

⁹³ "Achievements and Tasks", in *Like Stars and Dust*, pp. 407-408.

⁹⁴ "Israel and the Diaspora", *ibid.*, p. 212.

⁹⁵ David Ben-Gurion, "The Imperatives of the Jewish Revolution", in *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p.133.

⁹⁶ David Ben-Gurion, "Worlds and Values", in *Jewish Frontier*, 24, (December 1957), p. 15.

In the establishment of the Jewish State there was a leap over a gap of centuries; in the War of Independence we drew close to the days of Joshua Bin-Nun, and the story of Joshua became closer and more comprehensible to the youth than all of the speeches at the Zionist Congresses."⁹⁷

Education was very important to David Ben-Gurion. As his central goal was the building of a nation and a state, he formulated the following objective: "We are bringing home a unique people, dispersed to the ends of the earth, speaking in many languages, brought up in foreign cultures and divided into communities and tribes. The whole of this vast and variegated influx we shall have to melt down anew and recast in the mould of a nascent nation. We must break down the geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers between the sections, and endow them with a single language, a single culture, a single citizenship... We must give them spirit, culture, literature, science and art... imbue them with an attachment to our past and a vision for the future... We must revolutionize the land and the nation, our entire way of life".⁹⁸ The Prime Minister wanted to modernize Judaism by implementing Ahad-Ha'am's ideals as building blocks.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Achievements and Tasks of Our Generation", in *Like Stars and Dust*, p. 351.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the State of Israel created an Israeli culture and a new Jewish identity. The form the modern state took was, beyond all other individual contributions, due in a large part to the leadership of one man, David Ben-Gurion. The state's first fifteen years were under his sole authority. From 1948, Ben-Gurion was engaged in a process of state and nation-building, creating a new reality.¹ Clearly, Ben-Gurion played the critical role in defining Israel's policy and image.²

By defining Jewishness as a nationality, the Bible played a major role in Ben-Gurion's worldview. The Bible was no longer interpreted as a guide to strict religious observance, but became a source of inspiration. It was the document of Jewish nationalism and uniqueness and provided the historical frame of reference and the source of moral values. It lent itself to social and historic interpretation applicable to the situations in which Ben-Gurion was leading himself and his people.³ The Bible appeared consistently at the centre of Ben-Gurion's public pronouncements, emphasizing the great leap back, of over 1,900 years of history, to the biblical period of heroism, independence and freedom.⁴ Thus, Ben-Gurion was using the Bible to create a national identity in a new state.

The charismatic Prime Minister believed that Israel must be a model state and a source of moral and societal light for others.⁵ The theme of "light unto the

¹ Avi-Hai, pp. 1, 2.

² Ibid., p. 37.

³ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

nations", taken from Isaiah 42:6, the theme of creating social justice in Israel, was central in his thought. It was an ultimate justification for Israel's existence and an ultimate goal for its future development.⁶

Ben-Gurion believed in the power of the spirit, the will, the desire to survive and to achieve. In his view the superiority of the spirit typified the Jews in history and in the rebirth of Israel. Despite his pragmatic understanding of the need for power and economic achievements, there was room in Ben-Gurion's philosophy for idealism: the will and the idea are no less important than the material.⁷

The state's choice of Hebrew as the national language signalled the end of the Yiddish language. Until the creation of the state, Hebrew was the language of a minority. In rabbinical Judaism Hebrew was not the language of real life, but the "holy language" of prayer and religious ritual. Hence, the return to Hebrew was an expression of total secularization. The revival of Hebrew as a spoken and written language, used by a whole nation, seemed like an impossibility less than one hundred years ago,⁸ but was already an integral part of Ahad-Ha'am's dream.

The link between Ahad-Ha'am's ideology and the culture of the early state is clear. His worldview, as we know, consisted of similar concepts: Jewish nationalism, the national will to survive, the Bible as the source of Jewish nationalism, the Jewish spirit, the language and the urgent need to modernize education. Both Ahad-Ha'am and

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 53.

⁸ Beit-Hallahmi, p. 122.

David Ben-Gurion were courageous, idealistic and pragmatic leaders, who believed in the power of a compromise in order to reform Judaism.

Clearly, Ahad-Ha'am should have been considered one of the founding fathers of the State of Israel. Instead, he disappeared. Until the 1990s there was only a handful of publications examining his work. Even in the 1981 publication of the Israeli *Carta's Universal Encyclopedia* there are only a dozen lines about him,⁹ which is one third of the length of the article about Theodore Herzl.¹⁰ Ahad-Ha'am is described there as an early Zionist intellectual, but there is no mention of his enormous contribution to contemporary modern Judaism and the development of Israeli culture.

The question, therefore, why Ahad-Ha'am was left unrecognized emerges time and again. The answer, however, is beyond the boundary of this thesis. It requires further investigation in order to clarify the following assumptions. It seems, that although David Ben-Gurion had an articulate set of principles, the one principle, which always prevailed, was pragmatism. As national unity was most important for the Prime Minister, he was always ready to compromise his principles. As an example, when he realized that it would be impossible to get the Orthodox and the secular to form one educational system, he opted for a settlement.¹¹ Instead of creating one depoliticized education system, he allowed two systems, one, national-secular and the other one, Orthodox. Thus, as was already discussed, Ben-Gurion managed to establish good working relations with the Orthodoxy and was popular among them.

⁹ *Carta's Universal Encyclopedia* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Carta Publishing, 1990), pp. 57, 58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

¹¹ Avi-Hai, pp. 275-277.

Ahad-Ha'am, on the other hand, was taboo for the Orthodox. His ideology, as we know, was attacked by them to be a "Godless philosophy". Ben-Gurion, in this typical pragmatic approach, chose not to acknowledge the great banned philosopher, although he was inspired by him. Thus, he neglected to credit the significant contribution of Ahad-Ha'am to Israel's culture and identity for the sake of national unity.

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