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Standing on the Summit?:  
Wolf Schur's Life and Contribution to Early American Zionism

Charles K. Briskin

Wolf Schur was one of the leading figures in Early American Zionism. Shortly after immigrating to the United States, he established *Hapisgah*, an influential weekly Hebrew newspaper, read by leading Zionists, Hebraists, and maskilim of the time.

*Hapisgah* was in circulation from 1888 to 1892, then again from 1897 to 1901. From 1892 to 1896 Schur completed *Netzah Yisrael*, an exposition designed to demonstrate the superiority of traditional Jewish practice, and haskalah ideology, over all other religious practices, specifically Christianity, and non-traditional Judaism, including Reform Judaism.

This thesis is designed to revive the memory of Schur by shedding light on his literary contributions. It is divided into three chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. The chapters include: 1) an exploration of the life and work of Wolf Schur through a biographical portrait. 2) His attitudes toward Reform Judaism in America, with special focus on a chapter of *Netzah Yisrael*. 3) His evolving Zionist ideology, from a spiritual focus to a political one, with special attention to a few unsuccessful movements toward greater colonization of Palestine in the early 1890s.

Selections from *Hapisgah* and *Netzah Yisrael* serve as the primary-source material. Secondary-source material is limited. It includes Hebrew biographical sketches, several books, and articles drawing attention to Schur's involvement with early American Zionism. Most of the pertinent secondary source material is between 30 and 70 years old, indicating that little has been written about Schur in recent memory.

**STANDING ON THE SUMMIT?:  
WOLF SCHUR'S LIFE AND CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY AMERICAN ZIONISM**

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinic Program  
New York, New York**

**March 1, 2001  
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## Preface

My journey through the process of writing this thesis resembled, in some ways, my subject, Wolf Schur's. I began my study last May in Eastern Europe as I prepared to explore the Zionist ideology of leading Eastern European Orthodox rabbis. But, in hopes of finding richer treasure elsewhere, I decided to immigrate to America. Once I arrived, I encountered difficulty establishing a foothold in this topic because finding Hebrew source material on American Zionism was not easy. Several months passed until serendipity led me to Dr. Jacob Kabakoff—one of America's leading Hebraists—who in turn directed me to Schur and his weekly newspaper, *Hapigah*. Once I discovered *Hapigah* in the collection of the HUC-JIR libraries in New York and Cincinnati, I was ready to begin my work.

Wolf Schur and *Hapigah* did not leave a deep impression on the landscape of early American Zionist history—the area for which he is most known. Neither his newspaper, nor his book *Netzah Yisrael* reached a large number of people. He left no personal archives, nor kept a journal. The only direct link to Schur is through his published material and a limited number of correspondence. Furthermore, since there is only a scant amount of extant biographical source material, little is known about his life outside of his writings.

It is the sincere hope of the author to introduce Schur and his literary endeavors to a wider audience in an effort to honor his memory and create a legacy for his small, yet vital contributions to the history of early American Zionism.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of several people. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Carole Balin for her constant support, encouragement, and counsel. She kept me focused on my research—especially in times of frustration and discontent, provided thoughtful comments to early drafts, and issued careful and concise editorial commentary. Second, I would like thank my Hebrew tutor, Henry Resnick. He helped turn my garbled translations into recognizable prose. Furthermore, his insight into the mindset of the Orthodox maskil illuminated the material in ways I did not anticipate. I am very grateful for the many hours we spent learning this material together and am confident that his guidance strengthened this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank my incredibly patient wife, Karen. She shared my travails and triumphs throughout this entire process, and tolerated with grace and aplomb mood swings, unreasonable demands, and a very cluttered dining room table. For her support and encouragement from beginning to end, I am forever grateful.

## Introduction

The prominent Hebrew author, Micah Joseph Berdichevsky perhaps summed it up best when, with a sense of nostalgia remarked, "Who remembers Wolf Schur?"<sup>1</sup> A staunch supporter of Zionism, a passionate advocate for the revival of the Hebrew language for use in modern society, a harsh critic of Reform Judaism, an anti-assimilationist *maskil*—that is, an adherent of the Jewish enlightenment movement. These are just a few of the labels worn proudly by Ze'ev Wolf Schur (1840-1910). Schur earned a good reputation due to his talents as a writer and editor. He worked with zealous determination, tirelessly promoting his ideas and the ideas of other *maskilim* in the pages of his weekly Hebrew newspaper, *Hapigah*,<sup>2</sup> published in the United States between 1888 and 1899. Schur was one of the earliest proponents of Zionism in the United States. He maintained his affiliation with the *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) movement even after immigrating to the United States. He was captivated by the holy tongue of the Jewish people, and actively promoted the acquisition of the Hebrew language among the new Jewish immigrants to America.

Indeed, Schur was a passionate and zealous iconoclast. From his *maskilic* perch, Schur launched attacks against, what he viewed as, the assimilationist and anti-Zionist Reform rabbis, who sought to "dig up the roots of Judaism."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Schur also attacked Orthodox rabbis who buried their heads in tradition without examining the scientific and natural world around them. At the same time, his newspaper became the voice for the early Zionist movements in America. He attracted the attention of Theodor

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<sup>1</sup> The Berdichevsky quote is part of the biographical overview to a collection of Schur's letters in A.R. Malachi, *Iggrot Sofrim* (New York, 193) p. 83. The original source of Berdichevsky's quote is unknown.

Herzl and Max Nordau, the financial support of some of the leading businessmen in New York and Chicago, and his newspaper attracted articles, editorials, and poetry from some of the leading intellectuals of his time. (Schur was the first to publish a literary piece from the then-unknown aspiring writer named Saul Tchernichowsky).

Schur spent most of his life journeying from one place to another. Financial insecurities plagued him throughout his entire career. While respected as a writer and editor, he never held a leadership role for any length of time in any of his organizational enterprises, from *Hovevei Zion* to Shave Zion, to the Federation of American Zionists. Yet all the while, he did fancy himself a modern day Moses, leading his reluctant people around the twin deserts of total assimilation and total separation from the modern world. He named his newspaper *Hapigah*, as if, like Moses he meant to lead his people to the summit upon which they would gaze out into the promised land. Did Schur ultimately reach *Hapigah*? Has Schur been remembered as a modern day Moses in America? No.

This thesis is designed to shed light on the literary contributions of Wolf Schur. Today, Schur and *Hapigah* have been relegated to the footnotes of American Zionist history. However, Schur's continual efforts to promote early American Zionist efforts in *Hapigah*, and his unwavering belief in the idea of Jewish nationhood helped pave the way for later, prominent American Zionists to preach their ideology to America and the world. Indeed, no other American journalist at the time did more to publicize Zionism than Schur. Of course, Schur did not limit his writing to the Zionist cause. He was also a critic of Jewish life in America, especially the non-traditional practices of Reform,

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<sup>2</sup> *Hapigah* was published from 1888-1899. Its name was changed to *Hatehyiah* in 1899 and ran for 59 consecutive issues. All of the references in this thesis, unless otherwise noted will be to the original paper, *Hapigah*.

<sup>3</sup> Wolf Schur; *Netzah Yisrael* (Chicago 1896) p. 241.



assimilated, and Socialist Jews. This thesis will explore the life of Wolf Schur, his religious and cultural clashes with late nineteenth century Reform Judaism, and his unrecognized contributions to the Zionist movement in America. The contents of this thesis should reassure Berdicehvsy. Wolf Schur will be remembered, by future generations, as he ought to be.

## Chapter I

### A Portrait of Wolf Schur

#### Biography

Ze'ev Wolf Schur was born in Outian, near Kovno, Lithuania in 1840. His father, Tuvia—a well respected scholar in Outian— influenced Schur's life's passions for Torah, Zion and Am Yisrael. Tuvia's prodigious intellect enabled Wolf to receive a Jewish and secular education simultaneously. Schur had considered entering a rabbinical seminary in Vilna but an unspecified illness grounded him in Outian.

Schur found his way to Abraham Mapu, the first Hebrew novelist, during his early adult years. One can only imagine the conversations between the two that helped to give form to Schur's thoughts and ideas. Mapu encouraged Schur to complete his studies abroad, so in 1868 he enrolled at the *Beit Midrash L'moda'ai Ha'Yahadut* in Berlin,<sup>4</sup> where he remained until 1870. Yet despite his intellectual gifts he was unable to settle into a productive career as an intellect or writer at this stage of his life. Rather, Schur became the consummate itinerant intellectual, traveling from city to city, studying with some of the brightest minds in Europe, yet never able to secure a professional or personal niche for himself for any length of time. His lack of professional and financial security, and his evident wanderlust enabled him, or perhaps drove him, to spend thirteen years traveling throughout the world, exploring unusual and far-flung communities.

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<sup>4</sup> This institute was not likely the *Hochschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (College for Jewish Studies) in Berlin. Although the Hebrew name is a translation of the German and English, and the city is the same, the *Hoscschule* did not open its doors until 1870. Schur left Berlin in 1870. Furthermore it is unlikely that Schur would have studied in a Reform seminary.

Schur turned his attention eastward, and from 1870 to 1883 journeyed to Turkey, Greece, Africa, India, East Asia, and Egypt and Palestine. The only source of information regarding Schur's travels are found in a travelogue he wrote entitled "*Mahazot ha'Hayyim*" [Scenes of Life], which emerged from a series of articles that were first published in the European Hebrew newspaper, *Hashahar*. Of course, since the articles that formed the book were written after his return, the reader is privy only to a retrospective report. Diaries, letters, and correspondence from the trip do not exist. It is up to the reader to imagine what Schur's travels must have been like.

Upon his return to Europe in 1883, Schur settled in Vienna and was soon immersed in the Jewish intellectual life of the city. It is not clear what he did to support himself while living in Vienna, though he did receive minimal payments for his articles, and he was earning some royalties from his book. We do know that he devoted much of his time writing about Jewish settlement in Palestine. Also at this time, he became associated with *Hovevei Zion* [Lovers of Zion], and developed a passion for the land of Israel that influenced his writings and activities for the remainder of his life.

With Schur's newly-budding Zionist tendencies, some of which might have been formed during his earlier visit to Palestine, one might imagine that he would take advantage of any opportunity to settle there. Yet when offered a position as the secretary to Kalman Zev Wissotsky in Palestine, he declined the offer for unknown reasons. After spending five years struggling to make a living as a writer in Vienna, Schur decided to take his chances on the Jewish intellectual community then developing in New York. In 1888, Schur immigrated to the United States.

## ***Hapisgah***

It appears that Schur had one objective upon arriving to these shores: to become an independent publisher of his own newspaper. Schur had spent many years contributing articles to many of the leading European Hebrew newspapers of the time, including *Hashachar*, *Hayom*, and *Hamelitz*, earning a good reputation among the Jewish intellectual elite in Vienna for his keen mind and his solid writing.<sup>5</sup> Schur decided that the dissemination of articles, editorials, and general opinions on behalf of the important Jewish causes he thought were relevant to the survival of the Jewish people in the new land should be under his complete control. From the moment he set foot in America, Schur began drawing up plans for the future publishing and distribution of a Hebrew weekly newspaper, of which he would be the editor and primary contributor.

At first glance, Schur's desire to publish a weekly Hebrew newspaper in late nineteenth-century America seems misguided. Who would form its core readership? After all, how many Jews in America in the 1880s possessed proficiency in Hebrew and might benefit from his articles? Financial and security concerns, rather than ideology, primarily motivated hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews to immigrate to America in the late nineteenth-century. The staunchest Hebraist and Zionist ideologues made *aliyah*. Most others came to America to find security and hopefully achieve a measure of financial success. America was not regarded as the spiritual center of the Jewish people, of a new Zion, but rather a refuge for poor persecuted Jews. Few *maskilim* numbered among the early flow of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Certainly Schur would find only a small intellectual community with whom he would affiliate in America.

Schur's early activities indicate an aspiration to transfer his European way of life from Vienna to New York. His newspaper, *Hapigah*, was modeled after other European Hebrew newspapers. He continued his affiliation with *Hovevei Zion*, a Zionist organization whose roots and ideas were distinctively Eastern and Central European. He cultivated relationships with other members of the European Jewish intellectual elite who too had immigrated recently to the United States. Schur came to America to take advantage of the financial opportunities the new land, but retained the intellectual and cultural environment he had grown accustomed to in Vienna. Initially, he did not desire to become fully integrated into the culture of his new land.

Despite Schur's dreams of a lucrative and influential career, most of his life in America was fraught with financial insecurity while he struggled for his voice to be heard. *Hapigah* (then *Hatehiyah*) was published intermittently between 1888 and 1901. Indeed, there were many gaps in its distribution, including one that lasted close to four years (between 1893 and 1897). Though *Hapigah* was distributed from several cities, including New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago, he always hoped to garner solid financial support in each of these cities and others, as well.

Schur had competitors like Ephraim Dinurd and Levi Rodkinson, both of whom tried to establish their own Hebrew weeklies, *Haleumi* and *Hakol* respectively.<sup>6</sup> However, Schur proved far more successful in his efforts. His relative success is attributed to the superior literary quality of *Hapigah* and the editorial talents of Schur.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, *Hapigah* was recognized as the semi-official news organ of the *Hovevei Zion*. Thus,

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Kabakoff; *Halutzei Hasifrut Haivrit Ba'america* (Yavneh Press, Tel Aviv, 1966) p.133.

<sup>6</sup> These journals failed due to a lack of financial support and an inability to reach a large audience. The market for Hebrew newspapers was limited, therefore competition was fierce.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 136, fn.7.

Schur already had a small, yet guaranteed, readership base. Despite these limited advantages, *Hapisgah* never established solid financial footing, and it never had a large circulation.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to *Hapisgah*, Schur's other notable literary achievement was his book *Netzah Yisrael*, written during the longest hiatus of *Hapisgah*--between 1893 and 1896. In both of these venues, Schur sought to establish and promote his vision for the Jewish community in America and the world. Schur's first editorial in *Hapisgah* adumbrates his hopes for this new land. Using religiously inspired language and imagery, Schur explained to his readership the title of his newspaper:

We will stand on top of 'The Summit' to see and to protect in order that they not deviate from the path of Zion. We will try in all that we find to attract and unify those who are far away and separated from us. We will lift up our eyes in all directions like a scout from top of a tower to warn and to look out upon all those within the border of *Am Yisrael* to warn them not to go astray.<sup>9</sup>

By calling his paper *Hapisgah*, Schur fancied himself a modern day Moses, leading his people away from the Egypt found in America--embodied specifically within the assimilationist attitude of new immigrants--and leading them to a righteous and pure Judaism, one that blended modern thinking with traditional Jewish practice.

In the first editorial of *Hapisgah*<sup>10</sup>, Schur laid out his vision for the Jewish community in the new land. He adopted the attitude established by other early Zionists, especially Ahad Ha'am, envisioning *Eretz Yisrael* as the spiritual center of the Jewish

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<sup>8</sup> There were never more than 1000 subscriptions to *Hapisgah* at any point. Many of subscribers failed to pay their dues, thereby maintaining the ongoing financial insecurity of the newspaper.

<sup>9</sup> *Hapisgah*; vol. I, no.1, (14 September 1888), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

people, never expecting that all of Diaspora Jewry would be settle there at any point soon. Thus, he argued, within America there needed to be some unifying traits that would help disparate Jewish communities come together under several common goals.

For Schur, the primary objective of his newspaper was for it to be a vehicle of the Hebrew language that would be just such a means of unification. The holy tongue, which was just then entering a modern day renaissance, was the singular channel for bringing Jews of different lands and of different ideological persuasions together.

Throughout *Hapisgah*'s first year, in editorial after editorial, Schur stressed the importance of establishing Hebrew language societies and colleges for teaching the ancient tongue. Through his writings, Schur pleaded with his readers to spread Hebrew, especially among the younger generations. Schur issued a warning indicating his opinion that,

[I]f the desire to promote and use the Hebrew language is not aroused, and if there is little understanding of the relevance of the holy written language of the Jewish people, then the Jewish national ideal and the Jewish people will fall, ceasing the continuation of its growth.<sup>11</sup>

For Schur, Hebrew was the crucial link joining past generations to the current one, and forging a link between his generation and ours. Although learning Hebrew was viewed as largely irrelevant and impractical to scores of new immigrants, Schur always maintained a strong desire to make Hebrew come alive again, thus serving as a unifying force for the Jewish people.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., vol. II, no. 1. (11 April 1890), p. 1.

A second major theme emerging from the first edition of *Hapisgah* is an urgent call to, "awaken the love for our Holy Land in the hearts of all humankind."<sup>12</sup> Schur had been writing on the theme of Love of Zion for some time. He was promoting the ideology of *Hovevei Zion* as it had existed in a much larger context in Europe, and in a smaller context in America. In fact, Schur was one of the first to actively promote cultural Zionism in the United States, often in contrast to the majority of Reform rabbis, whose movement was the most dominant force in the American Jewish community in the 1880s.

Schur kept Zionism on the front page of *Hapisgah* for its entire run, even when Zionism barely registered on the radar screen of the rapidly growing and developing American Jewish community. Surely, Schur was able to resume publication of *Hapisgah* in 1897 on account of the successful meeting of the First Zionist Congress in Basle in August 1897. This influential meeting spawned a need to create various venues for discussion of Herzl's political Zionism in Europe and America. Schur's newspaper was a likely candidate for the job in the United States. It had all along been a vehicle of the Zionist agenda. Once *Hapisgah* resumed publication in 1897, an ideological adjustment was noticeable. Some of *Hapisgah's* editorial comments shifted away from cultural Zionism in favor of Herzl's political Zionism, which enabled the newspaper to regain its position as a touchstone for American Zionists.

Nevertheless, Schur struggled continuously to maintain the financial viability of newspaper. He was always working to cultivate new sponsors, both in the business and the religious communities, and was always seeking new literary talent especially from Europe. He received support from St. Louis businessman Moshe Falk Mervis, Chicago

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<sup>12</sup> *Hapisgah*, vol. 1, no. 1. (14 September, 1888), p. 1.



writers and orators Hillel Malachovsky and Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, and from European writers, including Micah Yosef Berdicehvsy, and Joseph Klausner.<sup>13</sup>

Schur also sought to increase his audience. One example of his effort to increase circulation can be seen just in the shifting vision of *Hapisgah*. In the very first issue of *Hapisgah*, written just under the masthead is the following statement of purpose: “*Hapisgah*: The **Only** Hebrew literary **Weekly** in America for the purpose of promoting the knowledge of the Ancient Hebrew Language among the Jews.”<sup>14</sup> By the 49<sup>th</sup> issue of volume II (17 April 1891) the masthead changed to read, “*Hapisgah*: A Literary Weekly devoted to the advancement and development of the Ancient Hebrew language among the American Israelites. It is the organ of the most intelligent class of the Jewish Immigrants and the Jewish Clergy.” By the time *Hapisgah* returned to the scene in 1897, the masthead was changed once again to read, “A Hebrew literary WEEKLY in America for the purpose of promoting a knowledge of the ancient Hebrew language and literature, and to regenerate the spirit of the nation.” (Vol. V, no. 1, 22 October 1897).

Schur’s primary objective remained promoting the Hebrew language. But he targeted his audience in subtle ways over the years. At first *Hapisgah*, according to its masthead, was targeted to Jews, with no qualifiers attached. As time passed the target audience was refined with a focus on those who were part of the intellectual immigrant and clergy community. In its later issues, Schur did not include a specific target audience, rather a call to “regenerate the spirit of a nation.” One thing never changed over the entire run of *Hapisgah*: It was always intended for the Hebrew speaking Jewish intelligentsia, most of whom were Eastern European immigrants and maskilim. Schur’s

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<sup>13</sup> Kabakoff, p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> *Hapisgah*, (14 September 1888) p. 1. Emphases are Schur’s.

blend of traditional religious practice and enlightenment ideals was attractive to the Eastern European immigrant maskilim. Therefore, Schur took steps to attract these new immigrants and provide an intellectual and cultural forum for them to participate in some of the ideals that he was promoting, specifically Hebrasim and Zionism.

Schur spent the bulk of his career trying to be a successful editor. When lack of funding forced him to cease publication of *Hapigah* in the spring of 1893, Schur might have ceased sharing his observations of Jewish intellectual life in America on a weekly basis. Yet he continued to write and advocate for his causes. During the early years of *Hapigah*, Schur had written a regular column under the title, *Netzah Yisrael*--Eternal Israel. When *Hapigah*, ceased publication in 1893, Schur returned to *Netzah Yisrael*, collecting his earlier essays, expanding them then publishing them into a book by the same title in 1896.

### ***Netzah Yisrael***

In Schur's words, *Netzah Yisrael*,<sup>15</sup> was meant to demonstrate that:

The people of Israel are eternal, because of their Torah, which is eternal, because its source is a source of divinity, a source of understanding, happiness, laws, and justice."<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, this collection of short essays extols the virtues of traditional Judaism, rooted in Torah and Rabbinic law, and its superiority over Christianity. He offered sharp warnings against assimilating into the predominant Christian culture through direct associations with Christians, or through other groups that promote assimilation such as socialists,

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<sup>15</sup> The name is derived from a citation in I Samuel, 15:29, 'The Eternal One of Israel does not lie and does not relent.'

anarchists, and especially Reform rabbis, to whom he devotes an entire chapter that will be examined closely later in this paper. He proclaims:

Thus, it is our duty now, for the time and place require it, to willingly debate and demonstrate the naked truth . . . of the will of our people and present the truth to them . . . because in our day enemies of Judaism have multiplied, both inside and outside the house. Each one of them is dangerous for us—two camps of enemies in the new land.<sup>17</sup>

His language is unambiguous; the dual fronts of Christianity and assimilation have the potential to destroy Judaism. Schur, religiously traditional as he may have been, was also the consummate enlightened Jew, which explains the attacks levied against the,

Eastern European rabbis who try to erect fence after fence, rule after rule [around Torah]. They don't understand Jewish enlightenment and cannot function properly in these days with a world view based in Medieval times."<sup>18</sup>

Schur desired a community of Jews committed to *haskalah* and tradition, with eyes looking eastward toward Zion. This tripartite identity was not easy to find in the New World.

Schur's ideology was similar in some respects to Ahad Ha'am's—who was known as the 'agnostic rabbi.' Though the two do not always agree, some points of intersection are found within the pages of *Netzah Yisrael*.<sup>19</sup> Even before the First Zionist Congress, both agreed that Palestine should serve as the spiritual homeland for the Jewish people, "a place where the Jewish cultural heritage would find free expression, receptive

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<sup>16</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*; title page.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246f.

to the best currents of enlightened modernity yet faithful to its own individuality."<sup>20</sup> Of course Ahad Ha'am's ideas would receive far greater attention than anything Schur ever promoted.

Schur hoped that *Netzah Yisrael* would provide an answer to Christians inviting Jews to join their faith, as well as Jewish non-believers. He attempted to show that Judaism was based not only on faith, but on understanding and knowledge, righteousness and justice.<sup>21</sup>

Schur tried to prove that traditional Judaism is superior to all other forms of religious expression<sup>22</sup>, and *haskalah* is the most rational approach for addressing issues of modernity, science, culture, and politics. Schur shared his views on the mission of Israel through the lenses of the *haskalah* and traditional Judaism. He truly believed that anti-Semitism would always be a barrier prohibiting Jews from resting secure in a 'foreign' country. Thus he wrote passionately:

We can find rest only in a country of which we could justly demand that it open its gates to us. And only Zion shall be redeemed with justice, for it is the inheritance of our fathers."<sup>23</sup>

### Zionist Activities

Schur's Zionist affiliations were primarily with the *Hovevei Zion* movement. Yet he reacted favorably in the pages of *Netzah Yisrael* to the ideas presented by Herzl in *The*

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<sup>19</sup> Schur contributed an analysis of the differences between religious development and religious reform (*tikkunim* and *hitpachot*), based on Ahad Ha'am's essay entitled, '*Al Parashat Derachim*.' See *Netzah Yisrael*, pp. 254-256.

<sup>20</sup> Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology*, Brandeis University Press, Hanover, MA. 1995, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> Schur would include Reform Judaism as a different form of religious expression.

<sup>23</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 265.

*Jewish State* (1896). Schur was able to recognize the advances that political Zionism could make even over cultural Zionism. While Schur did accept most of Herzl's ideas, he found Herzl's failure to list the Hebrew language as a unifying factor for world Jewry to be a major flaw in his thinking.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, he disagreed with Herzl on the exact nature of the future Jewish state. Herzl was a proponent of Western European enlightenment and sought to root future settlements in Palestine in this ideology. While Schur supported this facet of Herzl's plan, he believed wholeheartedly that a traditional base of Judaism had to be established as well. Herzl was an assimilated Jew who could not envision a religious identity in the future Jewish state. Schur reacted sharply to Herzl's omission, advocating for a state in which Jews trained in the sciences, humanities, and halakhah would live according to the highest scientific and religious values of the day.

In addition to his writing activities, Schur was highly involved in a number of Zionist organizations. He began his association with *Hovevei Zion* in Vienna in the mid-1880s, and he continued this association in the United States. When he arrived in America, Zionism was a very minor movement. Although *Hovevei Zion* organizations had been established in a few cities throughout the United States, there was by and large an attitude of apathy or even antipathy towards Zionism at that time. A subtext of dual loyalty seemed to pervade much of thinking of the active opposition to Zionism, especially among the Reform community, and Zionism was not a major concern to the majority of newly-arrived Eastern European immigrants.

Despite the limited support for Zionism, Schur maintained his passionate advocacy for the Jewish national idea. He joined a group who purchased land in

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<sup>24</sup> Kabakoff, p. 149.

Palestine in 1890 in order to establish a settlement, and he employed the pages of *Hapisgah* to encourage individuals or Zionist organizations to do the same. He spoke to various organizations about the need to learn and use Hebrew, as this would be the language of the future Jewish state.<sup>25</sup> Schur looked toward Palestine as the center for world Jewry, at least in the spiritual ideal if not the physical reality, and he wrote about the need to make Zion a religious center.

Because of Schur's tireless activism, and his continual advocacy of Zionism in *Hapisgah* and other Hebrew journals, the European Zionist community recognized Schur's journal as the organ and address of the movement in America.<sup>26</sup> Although *Hapisgah* was not in circulation at the time of the Zionist Congress, Herzl still looked to Schur as the person whom he thought could most successfully promote the First Zionist Congress to the small and fledgling American Zionist community. Although *Hapisgah* was not being published, Schur was still spreading his ideas through public speaking engagements and articles to various newspapers, including *Haivri*. His primary aim prior to the First Zionist Congress was to encourage American Zionists to participate in it as official delegates. Despite Schur's best attempts, only one official American delegate participated in the First Zionist Congress in Basle, in 1897.<sup>27</sup>

After the First Zionist Congress, a new wave of enthusiasm for Zionism came to American shores. There was an increase of activity, more people were participating in the cause, and more groups were being formed. Riding this wave of popularity, Schur

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<sup>25</sup> Schur's belief that Hebrew should be the national language contrasts with Herzl's belief that each Jew would continue to speak his or her own mother tongue. Hebrew language acquisition was not part of Herzl's agenda.

<sup>26</sup> Kabakoff, p. 154.

<sup>27</sup> The delegate was Adam Rosenberg, a leader in the Hovevei Zion in New York, and a founder of Shave Zion.

was able to revive *Hapisgah*, and it quickly became recognized once again as the semi-official organ of the various Zionist societies.<sup>28</sup>

*Hapisgah* was now being published in Chicago, where Schur had resettled a few years earlier. In Chicago, Schur became instrumental in helping to form Zionist organizations devoted to political Zionism, rather than cultural Zionism. In the new spirit of political Zionism that Schur was now advocating, he was able to fuse policies of Herzl's plan with some of the ideals found within *Hovevei Zion*, despite the strong opposition to this fusion by many of the established leadership of *Hovevei Zion*. Schur felt that Zionism should be a means not only of political but spiritual redemption.<sup>29</sup>

In 1898, a call went out among certain Zionist leaders to centralize all of the disparate Zionist organizations throughout the country and place them under one heading. Thus was born the Federation of American Zionists. Although the established leadership of the *Hovevei Zion* movements were reluctant to join forces with the FAZ, Schur advocated cooperation, and he used his paper to publicize their events and programs. This policy of cooperation led some of *Hovevei Zion*'s leaders to protest against *Hapisgah*.

Although it is not clear what the objections were, one could surmise that in an era of small and disparate organizations vying for power, coupled with the ego driven nature of many of the leaders, any attempt to wrest power and control away from *Hovevei Zion* might be perceived as a threat to its leaders. Furthermore, for the first time established Central and Western European Jews such as Gustav Gottheil, rabbi of Temple Emanuel of New York, his son Richard Gottheil, a professor at Columbia University, Rabbi Benjamin Szold and a young Rabbi Stephen S. Wise were taking visible roles in the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

resurgent Zionist movement. Thus, general ideological, cultural, and religious differences among the newly recognized leadership, along with individual styles and personalities of the existing leadership, contributed to the division between the two groups.

Nonetheless, Schur maintained his support of the FAZ, and in turn the FAZ continued to recognize *Hapigah* as its official Zionist newspaper. Schur was initially given honorary membership in the FAZ, perhaps as a favor his continuing support of the FAZ editorially in *Hapigah*. He later became a delegate to its conferences, speaking openly about his concern that the Federation was failing to emphasize the Hebrew language and culture in its program.

From the time the FAZ was established in May of 1898 until October of 1899, Schur's relationship with *Hovevei Zion* deteriorated. Some of the older leadership had publicly protested against Schur's support for FAZ, and many of the ideological and personality differences between Schur, *Hovevei Zion*, and the FAZ continued to go unresolved. In December 1899, Schur formally left *Hovevei Zion* to form a new group called *L'maan Zion*—For the Sake of Zion. The goals of this new organization were unclear and there is little indication of this new organization's was success.

Despite Schur's growing recognition within the American Zionist movement from the First Zionist Congress in 1897 it appears that Schur was never truly part of the inner circle of the Zionist organizations with which he was affiliated. While the FAZ first made him an honorary member and later its Hebrew secretary, the FAZ's limited vision regarding the use of Hebrew makes the latter position seem trivial. Schur's role as Hebrew secretary seems to be a token position rather than one of authority or leadership.



So, too, though Schur had been associated with *Hovevei Zion* since his days in Europe, he never held a position of leadership. Considering all of the various Zionist organizations he helped form, or in which he participated, it is telling that very few histories regard him as a pivotal leader within these groups. Schur's leadership remained limited to his roles, albeit in a very public way, of editor and publisher of *Hapisgah*.

Wolf Schur continued publishing *Hapisgah* (then *Hatehiyah*) until 1901, when a debilitating illness suddenly paralyzed half of his body ending his career as a writer and publisher. He lived another nine years, lonely and poor, virtually forgotten in Chicago. Isaac Suwalsky, a Hebrew writer and editor of the British Hebrew weekly journal, *Ha-Yehudi* found Schur, in this lonely and decrepit state in 1908. In a eulogy that Suwalsky wrote for Schur in *Ha-Yehudi*, he recalled this visit with sadness and bitterness. He titled his eulogy, "An Eternal Remembrance: The Hebrew and Zionist Legacy for the Unfortunate Scribe," a play on the title of Schur's work, "Eternal Israel." Suwalsky wrote,<sup>30</sup>

Jews of Chicago, whom in their midst lives and works Mr. Schur. When he was healthy he published, his Hebrew weekly, *Hapisgah*, then *Hatehyiah*. And afterwards when half his body became paralyzed he was suffering with great afflictions. All throughout [his life in Chicago, the Chicago Jews] alienated him. Schur was like a stranger during the days of his life and was alienated during the days of his illness. It is a disgrace to say, that because in Chicago even the maskilim didn't know, "where does Schur live?"

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<sup>30</sup> The following quote is excerpted from Malachi, p. 86.

## Conclusion

The fact that Schur lived his last years in physical isolation, suffering from debilitating illness, reflects in some ways his professional life. Ultimately, Schur's prominence at any point in his life was tied to *Hapigah*. During its heyday, Schur played a prominent role on the Zionist stage. Throughout its hiatus, Schur was largely in the wings. When *Hapigah* reemerged serving as the semi-official journal for the FAZ, Schur was once again in the spotlight.

Schur was determined to use *Hapigah* as the central platform from which to share his ideas, and those of his colleagues. He was a tireless fundraiser for his newspaper; at times successful, other times, not. He spent every ounce of energy trying to ensure the uninterrupted distribution of *Hapigah*. He believed he was responsible for disseminating, first and foremost Zionism to America, in addition to opinions related to Jewish culture, and the revival of Hebrew for the Jewish community. In some ways, he viewed himself as the one true leader, and the most honest representative, of Zionism in America.

Unfortunately most of the recognized leadership did not view Schur this way. His strong and sometimes controversial opinions made him an enemy of some leaders. His stubbornness irked others in the movement. *Hapigah* was the only venue in which Schur exercised total authority and control. While Zionist leaders might have preferred to ignore Schur, they could not. They needed him, and more specifically his newspaper, to provide information, to spread ideas, and to keep the Zionist dream alive in the consciousness of the American Zionist community. Schur's newspaper was the only one

able to maintain its circulation, and thus its readers, many of whom were leaders in the Zionist movement found it imperative to maintain its solvency.

Once Schur became ill and ceased publication of his newspaper, he virtually disappeared from the Zionist scene. It is as if he was appreciated only when he provided a forum for others to share their ideas and plans for perpetuating Zionism in America and Palestine. Suwalsky and Berdichevsky's observations are thus poignant. In his illness, then in his death, few people took notice of Wolf Schur, and his legacy barely endures.

## **Chapter II**

### **Schur's Attitudes toward Reform Judaism in America**

#### **Introduction**

Wolf Schur was a product of the *haskalah*. He was also a traditional Jew. His writings often reflect the tension between these two ideologies. He addressed evolution and science in one paragraph while extolling the virtues of traditional interpretation of text in the next. He linked the inviolable order of creation with the prevailing scientific trends of his era. It is hard to determine if Wolf Schur's identified himself primary as a *maskil* or a traditional Jew.

Schur was also committed to the notion of Jewish nationhood. He lived looking toward Zion. In America he did everything within his power to elevate the idea of Jewish nationhood, Jewish community, and their by-product Jewish isolationism. Schur was not interested in American national identity. Rather, he strove to protect his Viennese acquired Eastern European *maskilic* identity. He protested frequently against Reform rabbinic appeals for assimilation. He was appalled by the move in a limited number of Reform congregations to offer services on Sunday. He was shocked to discover that prayers for Zion and Jerusalem were removed from Reform liturgy. He was mystified at the ease with which Reform rabbis eliminated *halakhah*—rabbinically mandated ritual and ethical practice— as a binding force. In Schur's mind, the Reform emphasis on assimilation, including abnegation of Zionism in all forms, was one of the single largest threats to the Jews in America.

Frequent articles and editorials in *Hapigah* denigrate the Reform movement. However, the most coherent argument against Reform Judaism is found in Schur's manifesto, *Netzah Yisrael*. This work on a whole is not specifically an anti-Reform diatribe. However, his strong statements favoring Judaism over Christianity, his emphasis on Jewish national identity, his attacks on non-traditional Jews and non-enlightened Jews all serve to prove his thesis that the best form of Judaism blends modern enlightened and progressive thought with a solid foundation of traditional Judaism. Progress and forward movement is good, provided it happens within an unequivocal Jewish context.

Schur was an idealist who never found a solid and consistent ideological foothold. Schur was a traditional Jew living in the world of the *haskalah*. He was never accepted within the ranks of the lay leadership of traditional Jewish communities, and he spoke out continually against the Reform rabbis and their brand of Jewish practice. Some of Schur's statements make him look like a strictly observant Jew, while other statements reflect some of the reforming attitudes of his time. For example, Schur writes:

We have already demonstrated that religion was created for man, and not man for religion. Our Torah is a Torah of life. It was given to us only in order that we may live as a family according to [accepted] social and ethical mores. The first great principle of Torah is, 'Live by it so that you will not die by it.' But in contrast to this principle is the idea that one cannot deviate from its source even by one hair's breadth. Torah's second great principle is; It is impossible to remove anything from Torah, because our Torah is eternal, and the Torah of God is not mortal . . . for without this great rule, we will not have Torah.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 240.

Schur's first words, "religion was created for man, and not man for religion" are radical for a traditional Jew. He places humankind before religion, rather than religion before humankind. Suggesting that religion is our servant places humanity at the center of the religious world, rather than placing God at its center. This statement complements a *haskalah* ideology that humankind, through its initiative, can achieve progress and dominate nature, and that this progress elevates the human and social stature of the Jew.<sup>32</sup> Schur is naturalistic and scientific in his sentiment, yet he challenges his own words stating that "one cannot deviate from [Torah's] source, and that it is impossible to remove anything from Torah." Schur has planted each foot firmly in two camps: the traditionalist and the maskilic.

Schur was not the only person making comments like this. However, *Hapisgah* did not attract hordes of rabbinic and laic contributions who advocated such a balance. In fact, most of the rabbis who contributed articles to *Hapisgah*, by and large, wrote articles addressing Zionism rather than Jewish religious practice in the new land.

Schur's religious affiliation is a mystery. His enlightenment ideas might have been too radical for the more observant Jewish community. Yet he was appalled by the "half baked [American] rabbis [for whom] Torah is like a soul and a spirit without a body, without thoughts of Mitzvot."<sup>33</sup> Perhaps Schur was attracted by the enlightened traditional conformist practice of Sabato Morais, Frederick de Sola Mendes, Benjamin Szold, and other pillars of early Conservative Judaism.<sup>34</sup> Yet except for some communication between Schur and Szold relating to Zionist issues, there was no known

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<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 'Haskalah' [from the CD-Rom]

<sup>33</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*: p. 247.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Meyer; *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford University Press, 1988, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1988) p. 270.

contact between Schur and the early developers of American Conservative Judaism, and there is no evidence that Schur had any leadership roles or association with established non-Zionist focused Orthodox communities of the era.

Although *Hapisgah* was primarily devoted to promoting Zionism, Hebraism and *haskalah* in America, Schur devoted much column space to the negative influence of Reform Judaism on American Jewry. Additionally, Schur attacked non-traditional Jews— Reform Jews, Socialists and Anarchists— who were the primary targets of *Netzah Yisrael*. What threat did Schur perceive Reform Judaism posed? Was his antagonism based more on Reform Judaism's religious practice, or on its disassociation with the Zionist enterprise? Did he see Reform Judaism or Reform rabbis as the primary threat? Schur shed light on these issues throughout the pages of *Hapisgah* and especially *Netzah Yisrael*. The following chapter will explore Schur's chapter of *Netzah Yisrael*, '*Hanotzi Yashan Mipnei Hadash*' [Shall We Through Out the Old In Favor of the New?] in which Schur provides his most complete critique of Reform Judaism in America.

### **The Evolution of Judaism?**

Schur believed that society was always evolving. In the opening words of *Hapisgah* he stressed humankind's duty to, "not rest for even a moment in our directed activities of the soul and spirit, to move forward, always." (Vol. 1, no. 1). This statement reflects an enlightened, naturalistic world-view. If Schur thought ideas rooted science evolved, one would think that Schur believed in religion's ability to evolve as well. For if, according to Schur's words, "the forces of humankind, in whose nature it is to always be active, reaches a state of rest and cessation, then it too [like the universe] will be a step

backwards." (Vol. 1, no.1) Based on this enlightened outlook, ought not religion evolve too?

Although Schur believed in reforming and developing religion, he is vehemently opposed to the methods applied by the leaders of Reform Judaism. He views Reform rabbis as men who "pretend to be wise, who destroy and ruin [Judaism] from the other side, they who are without law."<sup>35</sup> He devoted an entire chapter of *Netzah Yisrael* to the negative influence of Reform rabbis on the religious identity of Jews.

Schur attacked the reformers on three fronts. First, he charged that Reform rabbis' emendations to Jewish law were not based on a deeply rooted understanding and practice of traditional Judaism. He questioned, "how Judaism is able to accept reform and change when it is done only from the branches of Judaism and not its roots?"<sup>36</sup> Second, Schur charged that Reform rabbis desired to elevate the status of Christianity within the Jewish community. Efforts to reject nationhood in favor of denominationalism was one way in which Reform Judaism tried to be 'more Christian.' Schur claimed that Reform rabbis, "see Christianity as the mistress and Judaism as the servant...[saying that Jesus] stands on a higher ethical level, one that is higher than Moses, our lawgiver, and all of the prophets."<sup>37</sup> Schur believed that Reform Jews preferred Christian religious practices such as the Sunday service, using choir and organ, and emphasizing the sermon. Furthermore, he charged that the Reform rabbinic leadership advocated this ritual behavior. Indeed, he maintained that Reform rabbis encouraged their congregants to be more accepting of Christianity, stopping just short of adopting its tenets of belief. Third, Schur charged that Reform Jews' failure to support then-current efforts for national restoration placed them

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<sup>35</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.



outside of the mainstream Jewish community. Schur specifically attacked the Reform custom of removing liturgy that made specific reference to a Zion or Jerusalem from Reform prayer books, and in context, the anti-nationalist position taken in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885.<sup>38</sup> How then, in light of these changes did Schur manage to advocate on behalf of a developing and evolving religion? After all, were not Reform Jews a group of modern and enlightened Jews making an honest and concerted effort to reform Judaism for their time?

The crux of Schur's argument in his chapter entitled, '*Hanotzi Yashan Mipnei Hadash?*' [Shall We Replace the Old in Favor of the New] is based on his belief in the inviolability of the Bible, the enduring authority of the Rabbinic tradition, and the lack of any other recognized authority that could be in a position to overturn any established laws.

Schur's argument is very clever. Throughout the chapter he leads his reader to believe that some of the emendations that the Reform rabbis have enacted are legitimate. He asks early on,

If in the course of time, changing circumstances confront our people, and if one finds that one or several laws of the Torah are not according to his needs, and do not fit the conditions [of the time], is it permitted to change or fix these laws?"<sup>39</sup>

Schur acknowledged and endorsed the reforms of earlier Rabbinic sages. He pointed to the changing conditions of society that led to changes in the law were made.

Specifically, Schur lists four examples of change and reform to Biblical law: the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> The fifth principle of the Pittsburgh Platform reads in part, "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state." Meyer, p. 388.

*Prozbol* of Hillel that overturned the commandment to cancel outstanding debts in the sabbatical year; *shtar iskar*, which removed the prohibition against a Jew collecting interest on a loan; the establishment of an *eruv*, which enlarged the boundary of one's domicile from his home to the entire community; and *halachot ishot*, laws that addressed marriage, such as the right of a women to demand a *get* [religious bill of divorce].

In each case, circumstances warranted a change in the traditional application of the law. For Schur, "laws are changed only for the good of the people, not for the bad."<sup>40</sup> Schur recognized the need for a community to address its changing relationship with Biblical, then Rabbinic law. If a law designed to protect an ancient Israelite was no longer applicable for a contemporary community, then changes could be made. The key for Schur, with respect to Tannaitic and Amoraic emendations of Biblical law, was ensuring that adaptations of Biblical law were made to better serve a contemporary community rooted in Torah. Furthermore, only recognized and wise leaders of Israel, whose understanding of Jewish law and own adherence to it was beyond reproach, were qualified to enact religious reform. Legitimate authorities were thus the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin, the schools of Hillel and Shammai and the great yeshivot of Sura and Pumbeditha.

Schur, therefore, found fault with two legitimate matters in his own day. First, he charged that the Reform rabbis did not have the requisite knowledge to enact reform.

American [Reform] rabbis have a larger worldview, they are enlightened, but their Judaism is superficial. They do not know Judaism from its source because Hebrew is a strange language and the Talmud is like a book sealed with seven

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<sup>39</sup> *Netah Yisrael*, p. 241.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

seals. . .Torah is for them a soul and a spirit without a body, without thoughts of mitzvot.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Schur contended that universally-accepted reforms could only transpire with the consent of a universally-recognized Rabbinic authority. While in the Rabbinic age, the authority of the rabbis was immutable, in his day such authority does not exist. Schur asks:

Who will enact urgent rulings on our behalf? We do not have rabbis in our day who are recognized by all of the people, whose words are honored and upheld by the entire community of Israel.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, in the absence of a Sanhedrin, or any other universally-recognized Rabbinic authority, reforms to Judaism could not be enacted.

The issue of adapting and reforming Jewish law was not the only matter Schur addressed. He was concerned as well about the laws Reform rabbis were attempting to change. If he read the Pittsburgh Platform, he would surely have perceived Reform's "acceptance as binding only the moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization,"<sup>43</sup> as a threat to established and enduring Rabbinic law. Yet, Schur was likely attracted to the Reformers enlightened ideas of, "the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of a kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men."<sup>44</sup> But he was appalled by their rejection of the Jewish people as a

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 245f.

<sup>43</sup> 'Pittsburgh Platform' (1885) Excerpted from Meyer, p. 388.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

nation. So while he could respect certain elements of their enlightened approach, he was likely horrified to discover how far their ideas drifted from traditional Judaism.

### **The Sunday Service**

Schur's most vitriolic attacks in this chapter are levied against the prominence of the Sunday worship service, and against Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise for his rejection of the divine authority of Jewish law. One of the most stunning and controversial discussions in the history of Reform Judaism centers on the relevance of observing the Sabbath on its Biblically appointed day of the week, Saturday. The issue was first addressed at the Breslau Rabbinical Conference in 1846. One of its most radical participants was Rabbi Samuel Holdheim of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. According to the historian Michael Meyer,

[Holdheim] developed a philosophical concept of the Sabbath according to which it was one of the essentials of Judaism, but its meaning had changed in the course of time. While in the Biblical period rest made up its substance, expressing symbolically God's existence beyond time, there later arose the additional notion of the Sabbath as sanctification in a religious and moral sense. It was the in the latter understanding that he found its true contemporary significance. But a worthy sanctification of the Sabbath was no longer possible on the seventh day as Jews lived within a Gentile society. He therefore made the radical suggestion that in order to preserve the Sabbath for those who could not celebrate it properly on its historical day it would have to be moved to Sunday.<sup>45</sup>

Although Holdheim's colleagues generally did not react favorably to his conclusion, the idea was born that Sabbath observance was malleable, though sanctification was not.

Perhaps with Holdheim in mind, Schur charged that Reform rabbis sought to switch the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. It is not known how Schur determined that the Sunday service was a widespread practice and a perceived threat to the foundation of Judaism.<sup>46</sup> Even in the limited number of Reform congregations that offered a Sunday service—replete with organ, choir, hymns, and a lengthy sermon—in all but three synagogues this service was never intended to replace the traditional Saturday Shabbat. Furthermore, the rationale for the Sunday service was never intended to align Jewish Sabbath observance with Christian. Rather it was intended to serve Jews, who, due to economic necessity were forced to work on Saturday. Very few congregations had experimented with the Sunday service when Schur formulated his attack.

However, Sinai Congregation of Chicago—where Schur was living at the time he published *Netzah Yisrael*—under the leadership of Rabbi Emil Hirsch, had actually abandoned the Saturday service in favor of the Sunday service. If anyone had proposed to ‘switch the Sabbath to Sunday,’ it was Hirsch.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps Schur believed that Congregation Sinai’s Sunday service was the norm rather than the exception in the Reform movement. The Sunday service was most often viewed as a supplement to, rather than a replacement of, the traditional Shabbat service. The service’s liturgy was limited

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<sup>45</sup> Meyer, p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Meyer provides an account of the generally unpopular trend to hold Sunday services. He emphasizes several points. First, no congregation, including Chicago’s Sinai Congregation used Sabbath liturgy, or conducted a Torah service on Sunday. Second, the presence of non-Jews reduced the denominational features of the service. Third, the success or failure of the service depended on the oratorical skill of the rabbi. Hirsch’s service in Chicago was therefore very popular due to his renown as a gifted preacher. While three dozen or so Reform congregations experimented at one time with the Sunday service between 1874 and after World War I, the practice never became widespread. The perception that the Sunday service was typical was the result in part of several large prominent congregations that adopted this practice. The more popular solution to the empty sanctuary problem was the introduction of a later evening Friday night service, at a fixed time, which endures to this day. See *Response to Modernity*, pp. 289-292.

so as to highlight rich choral music and a lengthy sermon. The mood was more akin to a concerto or an academic lecture. These services were not designed to be sacral. Yet, these services were quite popular— with Jews and non-Jews alike— and attracted many more people than Shabbat services. Perhaps Sunday services created a perception that Sunday was the day when Jews went to Temple.

Schur took to task the rabbis who promoted this ideal. He began his attack in a rather benign manner. He asks:

Why not make the day of rest on Sunday rather than Shabbat? After all the intent of Torah is only, 'L'maan yanuah (for the sake of rest)'[Exodus 23:12] to provide one complete day of rest.<sup>48</sup>

While here Schur seemed to provide a text-based rationale in support of the Sunday service, he quickly changed his tack.

But that is not the only intent of the Torah, because the Torah states, 'Observe my Sabbaths and keep them, for it is a law between me and you for all generations, to make you know that I am God, who makes you holy' (Exodus 31:13).<sup>49</sup>

The weight of the command, the relationship established between God and all of humankind through covenant and sign, and its eternality nature provide a weightier defense of Shabbat observance on its appointed day. Furthermore, the language of Exodus 23:12 does not use the term Shabbat in its formal way. It reads in full, 'Six days shall you do your activities, and on the seventh day you shall stop [tish'bot] in order that your ox and donkey may rest. . .' Exodus 31:13 refers to Shabbat in a proper noun form.

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<sup>47</sup> According to Meyer, Hirsch claimed to have transferred nothing, saying: 'I am ready today, tomorrow, as I always have been, to preach on Saturday, but not to vacant pews, and not as a vicarious Scapegoat in the wilderness of empty space.' *Response to Modernity*, p. 290.

<sup>48</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 244.

"You must observe my Sabbaths. . ." 3,000 years of Jewish tradition have designated Shabbat to be observed on the day we modern people refer to as Saturday. The commandment from Exodus 31:13 provides a stronger and more logical argument in favor of Saturday observance.

Schur then defended Shabbat observance on Saturday. He stated that Shabbat is a sign for all generations, that God created the world in seven days, and God rested on the seventh day, and that an order of creation had been established. And it is inviolable.<sup>50</sup> This last point is interesting because Schur here shifts away from a religious argument for Sabbath observance and introduces instead a scientific argument. He supports the notion of a natural order of creation, beginning with a liquid body and slowly developing into mass and form. Indeed, here he promotes the idea of evolution. This is further proof of Schur's ability to blend two worlds—one of traditional religious conviction, and the other of openness to science in a modern context.

Schur believed that Shabbat observance was inviolable, except in the case established by the Rabbis, of saving the life of a human being. Schur acknowledged that traditional Shabbat observance was challenging for many American Jews. The new-world economy expected its laborers to work seven days per week. Middle-class merchants felt an economic need to keep their shops open on Saturday. While working on Shabbat might have been a matter of financial necessity, it was not a matter of life and death. '*Pikuah nefesh doheh et ha-Shabbat*—to save a life, one may postpone Shabbat' did not exempt merchants and laborers from the commandment to 'Observe my Sabbaths and keep them.' With regard to Shabbat observance, the force of Jewish law is

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

immutable, and no Beit Din or other authority can change this law until, perhaps, the time of the Messiah.

Schur's feelings about Shabbat observance were clear. He was frightened of the consequences of moving Shabbat to Sunday. He proclaimed unequivocally:

If Shabbat is delayed until Sunday, we will alter the intent of the Torah by changing the order of creation as stated in Torah. If Shabbat is moved to Sunday then a different religion will be established. If Shabbat disappears, so too will Judaism disappear. . . Therefore, we need to answer the question: May Shabbat be postponed from Shabbat to Sunday? In a voice of strength, might and power, the answer is no! 1,000 times no! Resting on Shabbat is one of the most central principles of Torah. [Shabbat] is one of its deepest roots in the forest of Judaism. Shabbat is our holy day, and if we uproot Shabbat, the entire tree will fall, and its people will cease following Torah, which is our soul and the spirit of our lives.

Our Torah is worth suffering for, and enduring pain for.<sup>51</sup>

Shabbat is the essence of the Jewish people and the very notion of altering Shabbat observance in any way was an affront to Schur.

For Schur, the Shabbat issue was just one example of Reform rabbis' utter disregard for the heritage of the Jewish people. He wrote constantly about the rabbis who 'turned Judaism upside down.' He railed against what he perceived as their fundamental lack of literacy:

With all that has been written about, we can determine that it is impossible to give consent to the emendations of the American rabbis, many of whom know only basic knowledge of Torah, and who do not know Hebrew or Talmud. Their



reforms only serve to uproot Torah, as evidenced by the desire among many of these rabbis to postpone Shabbat until Sunday.<sup>52</sup>

He viewed nearly all of their actions as clear threats to the future of the Jewish people as a race and as a nation.

Schur's primary problem with these rabbis was their large measure of influence on their congregations. In fact, Reform rabbis served large and prestigious congregations. They published Reform ideology and practice in their English language newspapers. Their arguments were convincing. Schur writes:

Had these rabbis not stood at the head of their communities, teaching the pathways of Judaism, rather if they were private then their business would not be ours. Each individual man would go along his path in a manner he found good for him, and if he went astray, so be it. . . But if the man teaches this path to others, he does not go astray alone, rather he leads others to go astray, and he has brought disgrace onto all hear his voice. . . They have no feelings for Judaism and they teach their communities ideas that are opposite the foundation and principles of Judaism.<sup>53</sup>

Schur was less concerned with individual Jews practicing Judaism outside the boundary of traditional Judaism. He was more troubled by rabbis successfully promoting Reform practice, and what he perceived as, a full embrace of a new American style of Judaism that undermined traditional observance. Would these Jews who were lured by the Reform rabbis have remained connected to traditional Judaism? It is difficult to say. Surely Reform Judaism's appeal increased over time, and more and more congregations were

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

being established throughout the latter part of the Nineteenth century. Yet Reform Judaism remained a largely Midwestern and Southern movement, and attracted far more Central and Western European immigrants than was Eastern Europeans, the audience for Schur's newspaper. After all, most Eastern European Jewish immigrants did not flock in large numbers to the Reform congregations. Rather they abandoned traditional Jewish practice altogether.<sup>54</sup>

### Doctrine vs. Law

In the pages of *Hapigah* and *Netzah Yisrael*, Schur even accused particular individuals within Reform's embrace, including Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, with heretical beliefs and practice. In the chapter of *Netzah Yisrael* entitled '*Hanotzi Yashan Mipnei Hadash*,' Schur launched an attack on Wise and his article, "Why the Decalogue was read after the Shema."<sup>55</sup>

Schur used his critique of the article as proof that American rabbis were destroying Judaism from its foundation. In the article, Schur drew on Wise's practice of reading the Ten Commandments after the *Shema*. The recitation of the Ten Commandments served as a statement of faith for Jews, for Wise believed only the laws of the Decalogue were inviolable. The bulk of mitzvot contained within Torah are only

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>54</sup> Eastern European immigrants did, however, maintain close Jewish communities outside of religious life. Educational and cultural centers were established to serve the community. Zionist organizations attracted many non-religious Jews. Assistance groups for Jews from the same Eastern European community, called *Landmanscahfien* were formed. In time, large numbers of Jews joined and led secular organizations, such as the Socialist Party, the Anarchist Party. Jewish communal life remained integral, albeit outside of the traditional framework of ritual observance.

<sup>55</sup> I was unable to find Isaac Mayer Wise's original article. However in an essay entitled, "The Law" presented at the Rabbinical Literary Association at Detroit, MI in July of 1880, Wise outlined his approach to law and doctrine contained within the Pentateuch. The essay is included in *Isaac Mayer Wise: Life and Selected Writings*; David Philipson and Louis Grossman, eds. (Cincinnati, 1900).

important to the individual Jew if the observance thereof is meaningful. Thus, according to Wise, Jews no longer had an obligation to observe *mitzvot* other than the Decalogue. Schur assumed the proof text for Wise's argument was from the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Tamid 32a which states, in part, that only the commandment of the Decalogue need to be taken to heart while there is no obligation to observe the other 603 commandments.

Schur based his argument on a number of Talmudic statements that reject the proposition of reading the Decalogue after or before the Shema. Tamid 32a states, "read the Decalogue, Shema, V'haya Im Shamo'a, etc." The Mishnah rejects Wise's assertion that the Decalogue should be read after the Shema. In Mishnaic times (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Century C.E.) the Decalogue was read before, not after the Shema. However, early Christianity adopted the practice of reading the Decalogue in their worship services. Their practice led the rabbis to remove the reading of the Decalogue from Jewish worship so as not to confuse Jewish worship with Christian worship. 'Rabbi Yehuda said: Even within the borders where it is required to read [the Decalogue] we have already cancelled this practice because doing so many appear that there is mixing with the heretics.' (Berachot 12a) The custom of not reading the Decalogue was upheld for centuries, always in an effort to prevent the common person [*Am Ha'aretz*] from thinking that the Decalogue emerged from a different Torah (meaning the Christian Bible). Schur charged that Wise's reintroduction of the reading of the Decalogue into the synagogue service went far beyond the boundaries of traditional Judaism:

For one thousand years the reading of the Decalogue had been voided [from Jewish liturgy], but now comes one man who decided among the heretics of their

time. These are empty headed and light weight ideas from Rabbi Wise. [ideas that] uproot Torah from its roots... he did not hear what the sages of the Talmud had to say about this matter [regarding the reasons why the Decalogue was removed in the first place].<sup>56</sup>

Surely, Schur regarded Wise as an influential leader in the new American Jewish community. Wise's ideas indeed resonated with a growing segment of the community, yet Schur believed that Wise's ideology stood outside of the boundaries of what Schur considered normative Judaism. Schur's reaction to Wise, and his focused opposition to him reflected a very traditional rather than enlightened approach to contemporary Jewish religious belief and practice.

Schur also claimed that Wise's assertions had no foundation in traditional Judaism. But to the contrary, Wise employed a number of logical and convincing arguments to demonstrate his position. Wise first established a difference between law and doctrine:

Law and doctrine are the two generic terms by which Judaism designates its original apothegms. Law is commanded, doctrine is taught; law is obligatory, doctrine is advisory; law is established, doctrine is accepted. Every law is based upon one or more doctrines which it generalizes, as a law of nature is deduced from phenomena, acknowledged by reason or authority or both. The doctrine is a simple theorem. Therefore, every law suggests a doctrine, but not every doctrine has become a law. . . Those who speak of the letter and the spirit actually mean law and doctrine.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 252f.

<sup>57</sup> Philipson & Grossman, p. 125.

For Wise, the fundamental law of Judaism was the Decalogue; everything else was doctrine. Wise intuited that the panoply of mizvot contained in Torah were merely teaching points—doctrine—that supported the law of the Decalogue. Wise believed that the Decalogue was inviolable while all other laws were malleable. Wise pointed to Rabbis who, throughout the ages, had expanded existing doctrine and law through the application of accepted hermeneutic principles such as Kal V'homer, and Gezerah Sheva. He similarly noted the same Rabbis who had compressed the laws of Moses. These Rabbis changed the penal code,<sup>58</sup> exempted women from observing positive time bound mitzvot, and established rulings that laws relating to the land such as shmitah and peah are obligatory in Palestine only.<sup>59</sup> For Wise, the interpretation and application of Jewish law had been debated throughout the centuries and was continuing in his own. To him, the conflict surrounding the practice of “not adding to and not subtracting from the law,” would be solved by the following four principles:

First. The Decalogue is the Torah in letter and in spirit, the eternal law and doctrine, the exclusive source of theology and ethics, the only intelligible categorical imperative. Therefore, it is called in the Pentateuch *Had-dabar*, the word or the substance, the only true logos by which the moral world was called into existence, and which as the Talmud states, existed before the creation of this earth...In its totality it comprises the entire substance of theology and ethics; no

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<sup>58</sup> For example, they changed the punishment for physical damage from the severe “An eye for an eye,” to the more compassionate, “Money for an eye.” Financial compensation for physical injury was a more reasonable and humane punishment. Also, the conditions for which, “A wayward and rebellious son” could be stoned to death were narrowed to the point that it was virtually impossible for any boy to be convicted of the charge. These laws might have been appropriate in their appointed time, but were no longer appropriate in the Rabbinic era.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-130.

new category of law can be added to it and none can be taken away from it without destroying its unity and perfection.

Secondly. The body of law contained within the Pentateuch is called *Torat Moshe*, the 'Law of Moses' which reduces to practice the fundamental concept of the Decalogue, provides the means to enforce it, and expounds and expands its doctrines.

Thirdly. The Law of Moses is constituted of mitzvot, commandments with a direct object; chukkim, ordinances of a ritual character and mishpatim, statutes of a judicial character.<sup>60</sup>

Fourthly. Every law of the Pentateuch, whenever, wherever and by whomsoever written, may justly be termed a law of Moses, as the whole Torah may justly be styled the Law of Moses.<sup>61</sup>

Wise reasoned that the only binding law in Judaism is contained within the Decalogue. This revelation was the only one made directly between God and the people. All other revelations were indirect, using Moses or a prophet. Wise believed that,

The covenant of God with Israel depends on the Decalogue and no other document, commandment, revelation, doctrine, or precept.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, he reasoned that,

Once the people of Israel lost its independence and its country, its temple and its government a second time, the Law of Moses, as in the Babylonian captivity, lost its obligatory force.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Chukkim* and *mishpatim* are temporary applications of *mitzvot*, which are confined to the Decalogue. Therefore, *chukkim* and *mishpatim* are temporary while *mitzvot* are eternal. The Decalogue for Wise is *mitzvot*, while everything else is *chukkim* and *mishpatim*.

<sup>61</sup> Philipson & Grossman, pp. 133-135.

In short, Wise interpreted the Decalogue as the only binding force in Judaism. The Decalogue is law while all else is doctrine. Wise offered a series of proofs from the Torah, Ezra and Nehemiah, Talmud and Codes to support his thesis. Despite Schur's accusation that Wise was ignorant, Wise indeed clearly demonstrated his facility with sacred text

While one may not agree with his thesis, calling Isaac Mayer Wise 'empty headed', and 'filled with light-weight' ideas was absurd. Obviously, Wise posed a threat to Schur through his mix of erudition firmly rooted in Talmudic and scientific interpretations of Rabbinic and Biblical law. In many ways, the two took identical approaches to their interpretation, yet arrived at completely opposite conclusions. Wise approached his theology and religious practice from a fully enlightened perspective that, perhaps, stood outside the boundaries of normative *haskalah*. He applied new methods rejected by most traditionalists, including Schur.

## **Conclusion**

Was Schur more concerned about the threat to the religious life of Jews or to their cultural and social life? It is apparent that Schur had little influence or contact within the religious organizations being formed in America, yet, as far as one could tell, he was an observant Jew. Did he pray three times per day? Did he don phylacteries or wear a skullcap outside his home or synagogue? Did he observe dietary laws strictly, or observed the laws of the Sabbath? We do not have the answers to these questions,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 136f.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

although based on his attitudes toward Reform Judaism and his passionate advocacy for tradition, one could infer that he was an observant Jew.

Schur was deeply attached to the culture and heritage of the Jewish people. This heritage, he asserted, was rooted in almost 2,000 years of Rabbinic tradition. He regarded the proposals of the Reform rabbis as 'half baked' ideas that would uproot Judaism—religious and cultural—from its foundations.<sup>64</sup> He feared that continued reforms would lead the Jewish community down a slippery slope toward complete assimilation into the larger Gentile world in America. If the Reform rabbi or the Reform Jew was active in Jewish communal affairs, such as the emerging Zionist organizations, or was active in settlement and relief efforts for immigrant Jews, or was involved in educational societies, Schur might have been more supportive, at least of their private practice.

Yet it is clear that organizations aiding new immigrants were administered by Eastern European, non-Reform Jews, and served similar communities.<sup>65</sup> The Reform Jew, through different modes of worship and practice had, in Schur's eyes, removed himself from the mainstream Jewish community. The Reform rabbinic leadership was at fault. Schur would do whatever necessary to attack those who led the Jewish people away from the pillars of faith, language, and land. And that was precisely the charge Schur levied against these rabbis.

Schur perceived Reform Judaism as the fastest pathway to assimilation, and accused its rabbis of leading the charge. Assimilation, therefore, provided the greatest threat to Judaism. With the exception of Rabbis Bernard Felsenthal of Chicago, Gustav

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<sup>64</sup> These sentiments are found repeatedly throughout Schur's writing.



Gottheil of New York, and Benjamin Szold of Philadelphia, Schur had no collegial relationships with liberal rabbis.<sup>66</sup> Schur emphasized isolation, while Reform rabbis advocated assimilation. Schur was a new Eastern European immigrant, while most of the Reform rabbis were Western and Central European, and had been in America a generation or more. Schur charged Reform rabbis with neglecting their Eastern European brethren in favor of building bridges with Christian organizations in America. Schur was a zealous Zionist while Reform rabbis were largely anti-Zionist.

Schur believed that he had little in common with Reform rabbis and for the most part he was right: he viewed himself as a *ger*— a stranger— in America. Unlike the Reformers, his heart remained in Eastern Europe and he viewed America as an empty nation, devoid of culture and ethics.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, Reform rabbis wanted the new American Jew to be a full participant in the American society. They wanted their movement to be acknowledged as another religious denomination among the dozens of existing Protestant denominations, rather than as a nation. Externally, their religious services, whether on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday more closely resembled Protestantism than Orthodoxy. Their Temples looked more like cathedrals than *shtiebles* (small, village synagogues).<sup>68</sup> They shaved their beards, removed their skullcaps, worked on Shabbat and ate non-kosher food. Although Reform Jews were not the only Jews assimilating.

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<sup>65</sup> Some settlement and aid organizations received significant funding by Reform Jews, but their services were provided primarily by Eastern European immigrants.

<sup>66</sup> Schur, Felsenthal, Gottheil, and Szold all shared strong Zionist convictions. These liberal rabbis contributed periodically to *Hapigah*, and Schur corresponded with them. The larger extent of their relationship is unknown, however, it is likely that Schur and Felsenthal traveled in similar Zionist circles in Chicago and thus had more direct contact. Beyond Zionism, Schur and Felsenthal share a support in the revival of Hebrew as a living language. See Kabakoff and Malachi for selected letters.

<sup>67</sup> *The Chicago Pinkas* (Hebrew); edited by Simon Radowicz (The College of Jewish Studies, Chicago, 1952) p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> By the turn of the century, however, Orthodox congregations were building large cathedral-like synagogues of their own. The Eldridge Street Synagogue on Manhattan's Lower East Side is a prime example.

Schur believed wholeheartedly that Reform rabbis were the primary instigators of assimilation. He regarded them as pseudo-religious authorities stamping their *heksher* (approval) on this new type of diluted religious practice.

At the same time, of course, Schur was afraid of Reform rabbis. They had power, prestige, and influence. They were products of the Jewish enlightenment just like Schur. They were proponents of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the scientific study of Judaism) just like Schur. However, they refuted the religious and cultural values that so strongly rooted Schur. In Schur's opinion, Reform rabbis veered off on a course so fundamentally opposed to the enduring tenets of Judaism—religious tradition, language and culture, Zion—they stood outside of the pale of normative Judaism. Schur did not have the ability to compete with them. He was enigmatic. His roots were embedded in traditional Jewish practice, but his imagination enabled him to venture intellectually into the modern scientific trends of his time. Perhaps if Schur had lived one or two generations in the future, he might have become a leading Conservative Jew. But this was not his lot. He would be subjected to the competing forces of tradition and enlightenment in America.

## Chapter III

### Schur and his Evolving Zionist Ideology

#### Introduction

In contrast to Wolf Schur's sharp opposition to Reform Judaism, he came to champion Zionism. He disregarded a Jew's religious and political affiliation, if he was a committed Zionist. Thus, Schur disparaged the practice of the Sunday service at the Chicago Sinai Congregation, while embracing its Zionist rabbi, Bernard Felsenthal. His friendship with Felsenthal and Rabbi Gustav Gottheil of New York stood in stark contrast to his relationships with most Reform rabbis. Schur excoriated leading Reform rabbis, including Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler, for their views on religious authority, ritual observance, and Zionism. While Schur viewed Reform religious practice as a threat to Judaism, he regarded Zionism, in part, as a panacea for the lures of the modern, free, and assimilationist culture of New World America. Therefore, Schur excused a Reform rabbi's lack of traditional religious observance if he supported Zionism.

Schur spent the second half of his life as a tireless advocate for Zionism. He was part of the many changes that occurred in the Zionist movement. Schur commenced his activity with the *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) society in Vienna in the mid-1880s. He supported of Zionist endeavors in America including *Shave Zion* and the Blackstone Memorial in the early 1890s. He was one of America's first outspoken supporters of Herzl, and an honorary board member of the Federation of American Zionists at the close

of the nineteenth century. Schur was associated with virtually every aspect of the early Zionist movement in America.

From 1870 to 1883 Schur traveled the world. He toured countries that few Jews had ever visited, encountering many interesting and diverse Jewish communities. He also witnessed the difficult living conditions under which many Jews toiled, and heard tales of persecution. During his travels, Schur visited Palestine as well, touring towns and villages with their meager yet hopeful and growing Jewish populations.<sup>69</sup> The convergence of these impressions—persecuted Jews in foreign lands and the continuing settlement of Jews in Palestine—struck a chord with Schur. He returned to Europe infused with a passion for a newly developing modern ideology called Zionism.

Once back in Vienna, Schur affiliated with a branch of *Hovevei Zion*. He published many letters and articles supporting Zionism in European Jewish newspapers, including *Hashachar*, *Hayom*, and *Hamelitz*. Schur's enduring love of Zion never wavered. His ideology evolved over time from a cultural and spiritual Zionist belief to a political Zionist ideology. Later, in America, Schur welcomed articles by Zionists of all stripes to write for *Hapigah*. He demanded only sincerity and integrity from his contributors.

Schur was a committed and active Zionist from 1883 until his death in 1910, with two particularly intense periods of activity: from 1888 to 1892, and from 1897 to 1901, when paralysis ended his career. Schur spent his early Zionist years promoting the cultural and spiritual ideology of the *Hovevei Zion* movement in the pages of *Hapigah*. This ideology was loosely formulated around twin pillars of establishing a refuge for persecuted Jews in Zion, and developing a spiritual center in Zion to actualize the dream

of nationhood. Schur was also involved with several nascent Zionist organizations, none of which succeeded.<sup>70</sup> From 1897, with the advent of the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Schur shifted his allegiances to the political Zionism championed by the new international leaders of Zionism, Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau. In America, Schur forged partnerships with an emerging group of Zionist leaders, most of whom were new to Zionism and represented a Central and Western European cultural viewpoint in contrast to the Eastern European Orthodox framework of *Hovevei Zion*. Schur supported the Federation of American Zionists and its leadership, including Richard Gottheil, Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, and Marcus Jastrow.<sup>71</sup> His newspaper became a forum for Zionism in America when it reemerged onto the literary and cultural scene in October 1897, after a four-year hiatus.

Schur's writings reveal his shifting attitude toward Zionism. In early material, he supported the idea a cultural and spiritual center in Palestine, as stated in the inaugural issue of *Hapisgah*:

Another honored aim in our organization of this newspaper is to awaken the love of our holy land in the heart of every man, whether he holds on to old ways or goes forward to a spirit of the future day, toward attracting a national feeling which has awakened in the past years in the heart of the people.<sup>72</sup>

When *Hapisgah* first appeared in 1888, any Zionist efforts in America were concentrated within the small and disorganized *Hovevei Zion* societies. So Schur used *Hapisgah* as a means of publicizing *Hovevei Zion*'s efforts to a larger audience. He favored the *Hovevei*

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<sup>69</sup> Tales of Schur's journeys are found in his collection, *Mehazot Hahayim* (Scenes of Life) Vienna 1885.

<sup>70</sup> Failed Zionist organizations include *Shave Zion*, New York, 1891 and *Hevrat Zion*, Baltimore 1894.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Raider; *The Emergence of American Zionism* ( New York University Press, NY, 1998) pp. 13ff.

<sup>72</sup> *Hapisgah*; vol. I, no.1 (14 September 1888) p. 1.

*Zion* program that encouraged gradual yet small-scale settlement in Palestine as a means of removing persecuted Jews from Russia. Settlement, not self-government, was their aim.

Early on, Schur acknowledged that immediate, large-scale settlement to Palestine was impossible. But he did recognize that if land was purchased legally, this acquisition of land—acre by acre—would eventually provide Jews a solid foothold in the land of their ancestors. By the time Schur wrote his last chapter of *Netzah Yisrael* in 1896, he began to adopt a more politically charged form of Zionism. He reasoned:

But what we say is that we will return to Zion. We do not say that we will return in our youth or in our old age. . . If we make an effort to enter the land of our fathers quietly and slowly, and establish settlements for ourselves then we will eventually possess a great portion of the land of our fathers, and then it will become for us a spiritual and material center from which the light of life will go forth. . . In justice Zion will be redeemed. . .and we will be able to eventually take over the administration of the state.<sup>73</sup>

Here, the spiritual and cultural spirit are blended with the nationalistic and political. He reasoned that if settlement was permitted and encouraged, then in the course of several generations a *de facto* Jewish nation would come to exist. Would it, though, be an internationally recognized Jewish state? It is difficult to determine what Schur thought about the future structure of this land filled with Jews, except that he imagined that the land would be administered by the Jews. Given the absence of nation-states in the Fertile Crescent region in the late nineteenth century, it was difficult to foresee the emergence of

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<sup>73</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 266.

such on the political landscape of that area. In 1892, was Schur dreaming of a state for the Jews, or a Jewish state?

Most Jews did not envision a political reality accompanying nationalistic dreams until the publication of Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*). According to Herzl, Jews could dream of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine that would be recognized by international law. Two months after the enthusiastic response to Herzl's call at the First Zionist Congress in 1897, Schur resumed publication of *Hapigah*. Schur's leading article in the October 22, 1897 issue spoke favorably of the new life and energy that was being infused into the Zionist movement especially in America, and he praised Herzl effusively. Schur recognized in Herzl's words a further boost to the Zionist mission—the hope of creating a homeland for the Jews, controlled by Jews.

The road from nascent *Hovevei Zion* programs in America to the enthusiasm generated by the First Zionist Congress was not always paved. Schur encountered many potholes and roadblocks in the way. He had, for instance, strong opinions about the religious and cultural identity of the new settlers that were often ignored. He also had many vociferous opponents, who made it difficult for Schur to establish himself as a leader within Zionist organizational life. Promising Zionist organizations collapsed frequently. But within the confines of the newspaper he controlled, Schur's voice was heard loudly and clearly. While many did not agree with his viewpoints and ideas, he earned respect. When *Hapigah* was in circulation, it was the best source for news and information about Zionist activity in America. Zionist readers and writers used *Hapigah* to disseminate their ideology throughout the United States. In large measure, one can trace the development of Schur's Zionist ideology in the pages of *Hapigah*. While

Schur's overarching goal was to share the most viable ideas being discussed in individual organizations and societies with his committed readership, he concentrated, over time, on three issues in particular: The *Hovevei Zion* program, the Blackstone Memorial, and political Zionism.

### ***Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion)***

When Schur came to America in 1887, he was already a member the *Hovevei Zion* movement in Europe. Thus he immediately joined the small but committed group of Jews in New York who called themselves *Hovevei Zion*. At that time, Zionist activity barely registered as a blip on the radar screen of the American Jewish community. The majority of American Jews were of Western and Central European descent Jews, and had been in this country for a generation or more. They were ambivalent at best, hostile at worst to Zionism. At the same time, the Eastern European Jews who had fled pogroms in search of economic security in the '*goldene medina*' were not likely to hop on the Zionist bandwagon in this country. Their pursuit of social and economic stability precluded an interest in Zionism.

Yet for immigrants who had been active Zionists in Europe, the fledgling *Hovevei Zion* movement in America provided a refuge of familiarity in a new-world that seemed utterly foreign. As the historian Ben Halpern and others observed:

Zionism performed certain specific functions in the adjustment of new immigrants, functions that were not relevant in the Old Country. They provided the comfort of a familiar, Old Country milieu for small groups of strangers in the



New World. Zionist societies often took the form of lodges and fraternal orders or of *landsmanshaften* composed of fellow-townsmen from abroad."<sup>74</sup>

For Schur and others, *Hovevei Zion* provided not only an ideological, but a social context as well. Although *Hovevei Zion* has been recognized as one of the earliest American Zionist societies, a more accurate picture would encompass Eastern European immigrants attempting to find a common cultural bond.

Despite the feeling of security they provided, the *Hovevei Zion* societies in America were generally weak in membership, finances, clear-cut goals, and leadership. Their existence was haphazard, requiring constant stimulation and motivation from a few zealous leaders, including Dr. Joseph Bluestone and Rabbi Philip Klein, both Orthodox maskilim.<sup>75</sup> The goal of *Hovevei Zion* societies in America was identical to their European counterparts: to establish colonies in Palestine for the persecuted Jews of Russia. In actuality, *Hovevei Zion* in America was a sentimental rather than an activist organization.<sup>76</sup>

The American *Hovevei Zion* societies were comprised of traditional and secular maskilim.<sup>77</sup> Its members had been part of the intellectual classes in Europe, could read and write in Hebrew, and were closely monitoring Zionist activities as reported in the Hebrew press. Two general sentiments regarding settlement in Palestine pervaded the early *Hovevei Zion* societies in America. Most traditional maskilim viewed settlement as

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<sup>74</sup> Ben Halpern, "The Americanization of Zionism, 1880-1930," in *American Zionism: Mission and Politics*; Jeffrey S. Gurock, ed. (Routledge Press, New York, 1997) p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> Marnin Feinstein; *American Zionism 1884-1904*; (Herzl Press, New York, 1965), p. 14 and Hyman Grinstein; "Orthodox Judaism and Early Zionism in America" in *Early History of Zionism in America*, Isadore Meyer, ed. (New York, 1958) p.219.

<sup>76</sup> Feinstein, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> This was also the case in Europe. See Ehud Luz, "The Limits of Toleration: The Challenge of Cooperation between the Observant and the Nonobservant during the Hibbat Zion Period, 1882-1895" in Almog, Reinhartz, and Shapira, *Zionism and Religion* (Brandeis University Press, 1998).

a vital aid to persecuted Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe, while most secular maskilim hoped that Palestine could provide them with a national identity and a central focal point.<sup>78</sup> Despite divergent worldviews, these groups cooperated and formed a common front against Central Europeans, who were mainly Reform Jews.<sup>79</sup> In reality, while each faction skillfully promoted its message, aside from the efforts of a small number of enterprising individuals, the societies as a whole were generally unsuccessful in their efforts to encourage settlement in Palestine.

Schur was recognized as a leader within *Hovevei Zion*'s ranks primarily because of *Hapigah*. In fact, his journal became the unofficial, publication of the Zionist movement in America. Schur had an excellent reputation as a writer and editor. Furthermore, he was wholeheartedly devoted to maintaining the publication and distribution of his newspaper. While many other Yiddish and Hebrew journals failed, including *Shulamith*, *Haleumi* and *Haivri*, Schur navigated *Hapigah* through rough waters, sending forth his Zionist vision longer than any of his competitors.

From 1888 until 1892, Schur devoted a large portion of the editorials and articles in *Hapigah* to the Zionist cause. In addition to his own editorials, he generously published viewpoints he did not share. In so doing, Schur fulfilled the mandate set forth in the first edition of the newspaper to be open to those, "who will come to the matter with good intent and knowledge and gentle words for matters of concern to the nation and community."<sup>80</sup> Schur regularly published the activities of the various *Hovevei Zion*

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<sup>78</sup> The extent of Schur's leadership within *Hovevei Zion* is unclear. There is no record of him holding a high level position, however, the societies were poorly organized and administered. Therefore, it is quite possible his leadership outside of *Hapigah* was exercised in a less formal way. He was certainly a known figure in the movement, in large part because of the influence of his journal.

<sup>79</sup> Yosef Salmon; "The Mizrahi Movement in America: A Belated but Sturdy Offshoot" *American Jewish Archives* 1996 (source taken from the internet, <<http://www.huc.edu/aja/fw96-2.htm>>).

<sup>80</sup> *Hapigah*; vol. I, no. 1 (14 September 1888) p. 1.

societies and their offshoots. He also publicized efforts to unify the disparate societies under the common goal of resettlement in Palestine, and he allowed his newspaper to be used to flesh out disputes and debates over the future of the Zionist movement.

In other words, Schur was always open to ideas that helped further the Zionist cause. Although *Hovevei Zion* collectively was ineffective at making practical advances, a few of its enterprising members proposed plans for economic and land development in Palestine.

### **Shave Zion**

Schur believed in, and used the pages of his newspaper, to support one particular idea for land development in Palestine. In February 1891, Adam Rosenberg, a leader of the New York *Hovevei Zion* society, created an offshoot fraternal organization called *Shave Zion*, whose purpose was to collect money to buy land in Palestine for future settlement of Jews living in America.<sup>81</sup> Rosenberg was dissatisfied with the *Hovevei Zion* societies. He was convinced that their focus—promoting the idea of settlement for oppressed Russian Jews and providing minimal economic support for Jews already living in Palestine—was short-sighted. He strongly believed that if a viable settlement option existed, then Jews in America would choose to move to Palestine. Although Rosenberg was a leader within the *Hovevei Zion*, he issued this proposal unilaterally. And *Shave Zion* became a semi-independent organization, with its own charter, not subject to the same procedural regulations as *Hovevei Zion*.

After recognizing the benefits of Rosenberg's plan, the *Hovevei Zion* society in Boston decided to establish its own *Shave Zion* group. Critics warned that this

approach—each group acting on its own—would present a fractured front, that would only serve to discredit American Zionism's efforts. Schur dedicated many pages of *Hapigah* to this dispute, advocating on behalf of Rosenberg's efforts, while appealing to the heads of the various *Hovevei Zion* societies to unite around this issue. Eventually, Rosenberg issued a compromise that called for the creation of a central executive committee for *Shave Zion* that would deal with all matters concerning land purchase and settlement in Palestine. However, the Boston group, decided not to join the New York group in this project.

It is not entirely clear why there was so much opposition to Rosenberg's plan. Perhaps it was related to personality more than ideology. As stated above, the success and the failure of *Hovevei Zion* in America was due in large part both to its strong-willed, independent and zealous leaders. This combined with an unfocused and disunited vision, led ultimately to the failure of *Shave Zion*.

One wonders what this entire episode would have looked like without Schur's reporting in *Hapigah*. As the only newspaper dedicated to supporting and publicizing the endeavors of *Hovevei Zion*, Schur provided a forum for discussion and debate. While the dispute affected primarily the *Hovevei Zion* chapters of New York and Boston, reverberations were felt throughout the entire organization. The continual and diligent reporting kept all *Hovevei Zion* members informed of the issues. Thus, Schur provided a forum to debate contentious issues, as well as a means for disseminating the results of these debates. Schur attempted to keep all of the interests of all parties in mind. He supported Rosenberg, the larger *Hovevei Zion* movement, and all those dedicated to promoting Zionism in America.

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<sup>81</sup> Feinstein, pp. 80-85.

## Economic Initiatives

Schur supported other efforts that provided economic support for Jews in Palestine. In 1891, in response to anti-Semitic attacks in Greece, a proposal was issued to import *etrogim* for the festival of Sukkot from Palestine rather than the Greek island of Korfu.<sup>82</sup> This action was to serve two purposes: first as a boycott against Greece for its anti-Semitic demonstrations, and second, as an expression of economic support for the Jewish farmer in Palestine. The importation of *etrogim* resulted in controversy in America and Israel. Ultra-Orthodox Jews—who were bitterly opposed to the resettlement of Palestine—opposed this plan because they charged that the farmers—who by and large were non-observant—had violated the prohibition of harvesting during a sabbatical year. *Hovevei Zion* societies throughout the world rejected the ultra-Orthodox opposition and supported the plan to import Palestinian *etrogim*.

Schur addressed the *etrog* controversy in *Hapigah* through his own editorials and letters received from Palestine and the United States. In fact, he provided advertising space to merchants selling Palestinian *etrogim*, attacked the use of Greek *etrogim*, and stressed the need to support Palestinian farmers. While the success of the nationwide boycott is not clear, reports from the Boston *Hovevei Zion* society show that they enlisted seven synagogues to boycott Greek *etrogim* and purchase *etrogim* grown in Palestine.<sup>83</sup>

Schur supported as well the *Hovevei Zion* societies' plan to import Palestinian carved olive wood trinkets to be sold at the Chicago World's Fair in 1892. He even suggested that various societies sponsor Jewish artisans from Palestine to come to the

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<sup>82</sup> For a detailed account of the *etrog* controversy, see Feinstein, pp. 42-45.

<sup>83</sup> Feinstein, p. 44.

World's Fair to demonstrate their talents and hard work. Schur believed this plan would provide economic support for Jewish artisans and inspire greater activity from members among *Hovevei Zion*.<sup>84</sup> Despite Schur's good intentions, petty rivalries emerged among many leaders of the individual societies. While many took credit for the idea, none put forth the necessary funding to bring the artisans and the products to the World's Fair. What should have been a successful venture ultimately failed.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the failure, Schur proved once again his expertise in communicating the broad ideas of Zionism and in promoting the practical means for supporting those who were already living in Palestine.

### **The Blackstone Memorial**

In early spring, 1891, William Blackstone, a Chicago businessman and Methodist Episcopal lay leader, presented a petition to President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James Blaine that addressed the question of a Jewish State in Palestine. This petition was known as The Blackstone Memorial. After a visit to Palestine in 1888, Blackstone was moved by the possibility of a large-scale Jewish resettlement to their ancestral homeland. Initially his motives appeared entirely selfless and humanitarian. He had seen the large numbers of immigrants escaping persecution from Tzarist Russia, and had witnessed first-hand the possibility of a Jewish colony in Palestine. His arguments were rooted in politics, diplomacy, and economics and the document resembled a foreign policy proposal. He presented a rational, enlightened argument that recognized the national character of the Jewish people. Blackstone wrote:

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<sup>84</sup> *Hapigah*; vol. II, no. 46 (27 March 1891) p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Feinstein, p. 42.

Why not give Palestine back to [the Jews] again? According to God's distribution of nations, it is their home, and inalienable possession, from which they were expelled by force. . . Why shall not the powers which under the treaty of Berlin, in 1878, gave Bulgaria to the Bulgarians and Serbia to the Serbians now give Palestine back to the Jews?<sup>86</sup>

Blackstone reasoned that the plan was good for the Jews, good for the Russians, good for the Americans, and ultimately good for the world.

Prior to issuing the petition, Blackstone sought to garner widespread support in the Christian and Jewish community. In the fall of 1890 he organized 'The Conference on the Past, Present, and Future of Israel' which was possibly the first large-scale meeting between Christians and Jews in America. Jewish participants included noted Reform rabbis Emil Hirsch and Bernard Felsenthal. Blackstone and other Christian participants were shocked to discover the icy reaction on the part of the Jewish delegation. Hirsch's opposition was indeed consistent with the prevailing Reform opinion of the era:

We, the modern Jews do not wish to be restored to Palestine. We have given up the hope in the coming of a political, personal Messiah. We say, "The country wherein we live is our Palestine, and the city wherein we dwell is our Jerusalem.

We will not go back. . . to form again a nationality of our own."<sup>87</sup>

Not every Jewish leader was as adamantly opposed as Hirsch, but some did have reservations about the language of the proposal. Bernard Felsenthal, one of the founders of pre-Herzl Zionism in Chicago rejected the notion that Jews,

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<sup>86</sup> Excerpts from The Blackstone Memorial are excerpted from Hilton Obenzinger, *In the Shadow of 'God's Sun-Dial': The Construction of American Christian Zionism and the Blackstone Memorial*. (<<http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/obenzinger.html>>)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

[h]ave not become agriculturalists elsewhere because they believed they were sojourners in the various nations, and were yet to return to Palestine and till their own land.<sup>88</sup>

This language caused anxiety among many of the Jewish participants because it insinuated that Jews were sojourners in the United States. In an effort to appease the Jewish concerns, Blackstone inserted an addendum to the petition stating,

Several petitioners wish it stated that the Jews have not become agriculturalists because for centuries they were almost universally prohibited from owning or tilling land in the countries of their dispersion.

With this addendum, over thirty Jews in attendance at the Chicago conference signed the petition.

Other important signatories included: Melvin W. Fuller, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; Thomas Reed, Speaker of the House of Representatives; future President, then Congressman William McKinley; businessmen John D. Rockefeller and J. Pierpoint Morgan, and over 400 other government, business, and religious leaders in the United States.<sup>89</sup> This far-reaching document was remarkable for its vision, its widespread support, and its innovation. Even leading Zionists of the time were not advocating for anything as comprehensive. It is likely that some leading politicians and businessmen supported the proposal because they interpreted it as a means of immigration control by providing an alternative destination for Eastern European Jews. Whatever the case may be, no single document of early American Zionism had such widespread or controversial affects on the Jewish community.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 2.



Jewish response to the Blackstone Memorial was divided. American Zionists generally supported the plan, while many in the Reform community opposed it. The American Zionists were enthusiastic about this high profile attempt, by gentiles no less, to support colonization in Palestine. Their efforts were being validated. The Reform rabbis, however, were concerned about the negative impact this petition would have on their community. Many felt that their patriotism would be questioned and that they would be perceived as a separate, foreign nation within America, rather than one of many religious denominations. Rabbi Solomon Schinder of Boston feared,

No sooner could a Jewish Commonwealth be established in Palestine than those very people will raise the cry, "the Jew must go." He now has a land of his own.<sup>90</sup>

Schur, as one might imagine, was enthusiastic about the Blackstone Memorial and endorsed it in editorials over the next several weeks.<sup>91</sup> After all, Schur was an avowed supporter of colonization in Palestine. Initially he believed that Blackstone's motives were benevolent, based on a desire to ease Jewish suffering in Russia and establish a permanent home for the Jews in Palestine. However, Leon Zlotkoff, editor of the *Yiddish Courier* in Chicago revealed Blackstone's primary motive, which was reprinted in *Hapisgah*. Blackstone had told Zlotkoff that he believed that once Jews returned to Palestine they would accept Jesus as the messiah.<sup>92</sup> Blackstone's motives, it seems, were primarily religious, though the document was not. Schur reacted diplomatically, continuing to support the plan, while quelling the fears of the doubters:

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<sup>90</sup> *Hapisgah*; vol. II, no. 49 (17 April 1891) Schindler's letter was reprinted from an article in the *Boston Herald*, (16 March 1891) p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Schur covered the Blackstone Memorial from April 17 through May 29, 1891.

<sup>92</sup> *Hapisgah*; vol. III, no 1 (8 May 1891) pp. 1-2.

They do not intend to bring us under the wings of Christianity in our time. . .but rather in the days to come when peace returns and each of us sits under his fig tree and vine, and after the days of Gog and Magog. Let the Christians do what they can to help us settle in Palestine. To the question of our faith, let that rest until Elijah returns and then we shall see whether or not their dream happens.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, Schur's Zionism had always been rooted in nationalism, not religion. While his cultural and spiritual emphasis shifted toward the political after Herzl, his primary goal remained the creation of a center of national identity for the Jewish people worldwide. Thus, Schur saw colonization as the first and foremost goal for [American] Zionists. With Blackstone's Memorial under consideration by President Harrison, Schur believed that the dream could come true.

The Blackstone Memorial was received favorably in a large portion of the American press, both Jewish and secular.<sup>94</sup> *Hapigah*, *The American Hebrew*, *The Menorah*, and *The New York Times* all endorsed the Blackstone Memorial. Jewish newspapers showed little concern about the Christian messianic ideal that underlay the Memorial. However, many newspapers opposed the plan, most notably the *Sun*—a New York daily, and the *Jewish Messenger*.

Of course, the most vocal critics of the Blackstone Memorial were Reform rabbis. They used their positions of influence to lambaste the plan in the Jewish and secular press and before their congregations. While their accusations about Blackstone's motives were particularly virulent, they ultimately were upholding the established anti-Zionist principles established in the Reform movement's Conferences of 1869 in Philadelphia

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> See Feinstein, pp. 60-70 for a detailed account of press reaction to the Blackstone Memorial.

and of 1885 in Pittsburgh.<sup>95</sup> Rabbi Solomon Schindler of Boston's Congregation Adath Israel issued the most public denunciation of the Blackstone Memorial in a lecture that was reported in the *Boston Herald*. Schur reprinted the *Boston Herald* article and issued vitriolic reactions in several editions of *Hapisgah* in April and May, 1891.

Schindler found fault with the Blackstone Memorial on several grounds. First, he argued that it undermined Jewish American's determination to become full citizens. It might, he feared create the impression that Jews in America had divided loyalties. He wrote:

Here in America, where all opportunities that we could desire are granted to us, we ought not to neglect becoming full citizens, not citizens by letter alone, but in spirit. All this has nothing to do with religion. . . Not unless we cease to be aliens; not unless we cease to form a community in a community, a kind of indigestible morsel in the national stomach, will we escape the danger of being looked upon as strangers, even if our great grandparents should have happened to lived upon this soil.<sup>96</sup>

For Schindler, Jewish support of colonization in Palestine was tantamount to being regarded as a traitor. This sentiment obviously reflected his insecurity over the place of the Jew in American society.

Schindler also addressed the concerns of Jews living under the rule of the Turkish Empire and among a large and settled Arab population:

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<sup>95</sup> The rabbis in attendance at the Philadelphia Conference established that 'the messianic goal of Israel was not restoration but the union of all humanity.' In Pittsburgh the CCAR asserted that, 'We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.' See Michael Meyer, p. 256 and p. 388.

<sup>96</sup> *Hapisgah*; vol. II, no. 49 (17 April 1891) p. 1.

If Palestine is to be settled by Jewish emigrants from Russia. . . it is self evident that the land must be cut out entirely from the Turkish Empire and given over to them, otherwise they would be jumping from the frying pan into the fire But what is to become of the Turkish subjects of the Mohammedan population that are at present living in Palestine?<sup>97</sup>

This statement reflects the difficult diplomatic position that the United States and other European countries would be put in on account of this particular Jewish matter. The Turkish empire, while weak, still controlled Palestine.

At the same time, Schindler spoke of the unlikelihood of settling two million Jews into an undeveloped and relatively infertile land. He reasoned that if the Jews were determined to become farmers, then they would be better off doing so in fertile areas of Russia:

The facts are, that for agricultural purposes, there is better land to be found in Russia, and that if the Jewish residents of Russia only wished, or possessed the ability for agricultural pursuits, the Russian government would be more than pleased to settle them as farmers in their vast fertile steppes.<sup>98</sup>

It seems that Schindler failed to acknowledge the oppressive circumstances under which Russian Jews were living. Finally, Schindler urged his congregation to oppose the Blackstone Memorial and expressed strong disapproval of colonization efforts in Palestine:

You ought to spread the declaration that you do not desire to return to Palestine, do not wish to compel any one to go there, do not believe in the restoration of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Israel as a nation, do not expect a fulfillment of biblical predictions, do not believe in them, and that, not only do you reject the presumption that you are different in any respect, save in some religious views, from your neighbors, but that you are one with them in spirit and ready to prove it by helping them to bear their burdens whenever you are called upon to do so.<sup>99</sup>

Schindler did not believe that the Blackstone Memorial would be actualized. He was not concerned about the Christian signers of the plan. But he was worried about the reaction from the Christian community. Schindler wanted Jews to assimilate fully into American culture and society. Support of Jewish colonization in Palestine would jeopardize this progress.

In response to Schindler, Schur addressed some of his general reservations to the plan, including its Christian missionary undertones. He remained cautiously optimistic about its success and called Schindler a disgrace to the five million Jews worldwide. He explained that the article from the *Boston Herald* was being reprinted in *Hapigah* so that all will know what Schindler speaks:

It is our right to call out our voices and to yell about this great injustice, because his words are poisonous, a poison that appears to be strengthened, a great poison that is brought to all of the Russian Jews who have settled in villages on the land.<sup>100</sup>

Moreover, Schur suspected that Schindler held Russian Jews in contempt. He questioned Schindler's motivations for failing to champion colonization. Schur pleaded on behalf of Russian Jews who were fleeing for reasons including famine, hunger, and anti-Semitism.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Schur was concerned about the welfare of his brethren and took Schindler to task for his sentiments that:

These Jews will be burdensome onto the land, and they pose a great danger to it, and thus it is our imposed duty to restrain them by any necessary means.<sup>101</sup>

Schur called upon American rabbis to denounce Schindler, and he promised to give them the necessary space to rebuke him. Schur's friend and ally, Bernard Felsenthal, was the only rabbi to respond to the offer.<sup>102</sup>

The Blackstone Memorial illustrates the great divide between pro- and anti-Zionists, most often fractured between Jews of Eastern and Western European descent. Their differences were cultural, religious, and socio-economic. On the one hand, the Eastern European Zionists, like Schur yearned for the way of life in the Old World. They perceived cultural and religious assimilation as the greatest threat to the Jewish community in America. Zionist activity was one solution to this problem. It mattered little that the Blackstone Memorial was proposed and supported by Christians. Schur and others felt that if Blackstone's efforts were sincere, his plan ought to be supported. On the other hand, the Blackstone Memorial frightened the well-established Western European Jews. Many shared Schindler's fears that the Memorial would further shake the unstable platform upon which the Jewish community stood. Two generations of American national identity strengthened their resolve to fight against any suspicion of dual national identity.

Editorial pieces flourished in the Jewish, Christian and secular press for several weeks following the presentation of the Blackstone Memorial in March, 1891. No

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Feinstein, p. 71.

uniform consensus ever emerged. On December 9, 1891, President Harrison delivered his State of the Union address to Congress. In it he mentioned, briefly, the effects that continuing persecution would have on Russian Jews, and the problems that would be created by mass emigration to Western lands, including the United States. He did not mention the Blackstone Memorial in his address and ultimately nothing ever came of it. While the Blackstone Memorial today is barely a footnote in American Jewish history, it stands as the first major political effort to address the ongoing efforts to create Jewish settlements in Palestine in the late-nineteenth century. And Schur managed to keep the debate and discussion flowing in the pages of his *Hapigah*.

In the end, the fate of *Hapigah* seems inextricably linked to that of *Hovevei Zion* in the United States. With each passing year, *Hovevei Zion* seemed to wither more and more. The Blackstone Memorial remained the most newsworthy event for American Zionists between 1884 and 1892. Except for the minor efforts to procure land through *Shave Zion*, and the attempt to market Palestine at the 1892 Chicago World' Fair, *Hovevei Zion* and American Zionism were ineffectual participants in a small but developing American Jewish organizational infrastructure. Additionally, each *Hovevei Zion* society was beset with differences of opinion, petty rivalries, jealousy between leaders, and inept management. Beyond local difficulties, the Turkish government was placing restrictions on immigration and land purchases, and was prohibiting outright the establishment of colonies.<sup>103</sup> *Hovevei Zion's* practical work became increasingly difficult to mount. In 1892, as *Hovevei Zion* had virtually withered into an inconsequential organization, financial hardships forced Schur to suspend publication of *Hapigah*. With *Hapigah's* demise, no Hebrew newspapers promoted Zionism to an American audience.

Until the publication of Herzl's, *The Jewish State* in 1896, *Hovevei Zion* and *Hapisgah* were virtually dead.

### **Wolf Schur—The Political Zionist**

Once Wolf Schur suspended *Hapisgah* in 1892, he put most of his literary energy into *Netzah Yisrael*. What began as a revisit to articles from his newspaper blossomed into a comprehensive work addressing issues relevant to the Jewish community in America. Zionism emerges later in the book after Schur's discussions of Judaism's superiority over Christianity, in general, and traditional Judaism's superiority over Reform Judaism, and secular Jewish political movements in particular. Schur was just concluding the writing of *Netzah Yisrael* when *The Jewish State* appeared. It seems that Schur wrote the last chapter of his book as an addendum, after poring over Herzl's essay. Schur was excited about the fresh perspective offered by Herzl. For Schur, Herzl's plan was the required antidote to bring the American Zionist movement back to life.

Before reading Herzl, Schur had been planted firmly in the cultural and spiritual Zionist camp. His writings consistently supported gradual Jewish settlement in Palestine, recognition of Palestine as the spiritual center for Jews worldwide. He advocated slow and gradual settlement without an attached overt political agenda. As he wrote in *Netzah Yisrael*, he envisioned a modern, enlightened center rooted in the enduring Biblical and Rabbinic tradition:

We should establish a physical and spiritual center [in Palestine] and establish a Beit Midrash (rabbinical seminary) for Torah and wisdom together. [If this happens] the rabbis who emerge from it will not be 'half-baked.' Rather they will

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<sup>103</sup> Feinstein, p. 55.



be well-versed in Bible, rabbinic literature, and all of the sciences. They will become leaders of Torah who stand on the summit of the enlightenment of our time. Their reforms will be rooted in Torah but will reflect the spirit of the time...and it will be a living Torah.<sup>104</sup>

In the end, Schur's lofty goals and vision for a future Jewish settlement did not match Herzl's. Schur enthusiastically supported Herzl, but he also criticized aspects of Herzl's plan. First, Herzl had not proposed a single national language for the Jewish State. Rather he envisioned each person coming to the Jewish homeland speaking his or her native tongue. This was an affront to Schur the Hebraist. He warned that if the land was established in this manner it would resemble the 'generation of the dispersion.'

We must endeavor to use one language and united words for us all, and the language must necessarily be our ancient language, for in it is written our Torah and the words of our prophets.<sup>105</sup>

A nation of polyglots would create a Tower of Babel and serve only to weaken the national identity of its people.

Secondly, Schur criticized Herzl's economic vision for the Jewish state. He had been a consistent supporter of the settlers' agricultural efforts. In effect, planting psychological and physical roots deep into the land was a major point of the *Hovevei Zion* Zionist ideology. In contrast, Herzl envisioned a modern state with an economy built on industrialization and commerce, reflecting of course the economies of Western Europe. At first, he did not recognize the value and importance of agricultural development. Meanwhile, Schur supported industry and commerce, but saw agriculture

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<sup>104</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 248.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

as the primary form of economic development in Palestine. If the Jewish settlers were to be entirely self-sufficient, they needed to know how to till and tend the land.

Finally, Schur urged that the Jewish state should be infused with religious values. Herzl ignored religion in *The Jewish State* leading Schur to reaffirm the position he had asserted previously:

We need a great Sanhedrin of rabbis and wise men who know Torah, religion and law. They will guard our Torah, our language, our rights and freedoms. Dr.

Herzl did not speak of these matters in the new state. It is our responsibility to see with open eyes the genesis of this great activity so that our religion will not become like an orphan against whom all who want strike against her essence disgracefully.<sup>106</sup>

Despite his criticism of Herzl, Schur was clearly enthused about his proposals. In fact, he wrote Herzl four letters of support and pledged to publicize his ideas in America. Once again, Schur took the lead in strengthening Zionist activity in America, and awakening *Hovevei Zion* from its dormancy.<sup>107</sup>

Prior to Basle, Schur had no literary platform of his own. So, in an effort to disseminate Herzl's message, he wrote letters to other newspapers. For instance, in an April, 1897 article to *Haivri* entitled, "The Progress of the Zionist Program in Europe," Schur urged American *Hovevei Zion* societies to send delegates to the First Zionist Congress, claiming it would be a disgrace if no American delegates were present.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Kabakoff, pp.155f.

Despite Schur's appeals, only one American delegate attended the First Zionist Congress.<sup>108</sup>

Although the American presence in Basle was minimal, the First Zionist Congress rejuvenated American Zionism. *Hovevei Zion* had new purpose, meaning and direction. For Schur, this new energy enabled him to revive *Hapisgah* and make it, once again, a leading newspaper for American Zionism. On October 22, 1897 *Hapisgah* burst back onto the scene with its typical literary flourish:

*Hapisgah* had taken the pulse of the Jewish community in America. If a man desired to know if there was a living pulse in the heart of this community of Israel, let him look to *Hapisgah*. When the life spirit fell, it came to the freezing point. Everyone knew because the freeze came too, to the hearts of Jews in America. *Hapisgah's* return to life is a good sign for our nation in our land. It is a sign that [*Hapisgah*] too has returned to life, to national rebirth. With the great awakening caused by the return to the [idea of] national rebirth, which has occurred in recent days [throughout the world], so too has *Hapisgah* been restored to life.<sup>109</sup>

Here, Schur was equating the health of the Jewish people with the health of his newspaper. When *Hapisgah* was in circulation, the spiritual health of the Jewish community was good as well. Indeed, *Hapisgah's* financial difficulties reflected the mood of Zionist organizations in America. As activity decreased, so too did payments for subscriptions. As American Zionism entered a renaissance, *Hapisgah* was restored, becoming a greater influence than ever before.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp.156f.

*Hapigah* was now recognized as the semi-official Zionist organ in America.

Schur became responsible for publicizing the activities of Zionist organizations in America and throughout the world. He even earned the respect of Herzl and Max Nordau, who periodically sent letters to *Hapigah*.<sup>110</sup>

In the first issue of the revived *Hapigah*, Schur wrote a lengthy essay addressing the newly-energized Zionist attitude. A strong internationally recognized leader was in place, political conditions were improving, and the movement was beginning to gain the support of established Western and Central European Jews. Schur claimed:

[There are those who] think it is foolish and impudent [for Jews] to demand their own land. But behold, a writer [Herzl] arises who writes in a foreign language, lives in a land where the yoke is not too oppressive. . . and is not afraid to write what is in his heart. . . The nations in whose midst we live did not laugh at the Jewish state which Herzl sought. This writer is also a man of great action, courageous, large of spirit, who is not afraid of anyone trying to undermine or bother him. He succeeded in bringing to action a great project, which had not been done since the time we were exiled from our land [and] it united the best of our people. . . to walk arm in arm, and to work with one heart and mind for the redemption of our people. And besides the mending of the tears of the garments . . . it opened the eyes of the nations to see we are not just a polite people, but a

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<sup>109</sup> *Hapigah*; vol. v, no. 1 (22 October 1897) p. 1. N.b. This first editorial, in typical fashion, contained a plea for continued financial support through prompt payment of subscriptions.

<sup>110</sup> See *Hapigah* vol. v, no. 6 (26 November 1897) for a letter of encouragement to American Zionist by Nordau (p. 1), and *Hapigah* vol. VI, no. 23 (24 March 1899) for a letter by Herzl (p. 1) urging support of the Colonial Bank. Both of these letters were written in German, printed in the original language and translated into Hebrew by Schur.

nation with manners who knows its fitting place among the nations who have agreed to honor it.<sup>111</sup>

The prevailing attitude was that many countries were giving their tacit support to the Zionist agenda. In an era of crumbling empires and developing nation-states, it seemed, on the surface that Zionists would benefit as well. A combination of external and internal support could lead to the dream of a Zion redeemed.

In the same article, Schur quoted extensively from two articles that appeared in the Turkish newspaper, *Correspondance de l'Est*. Schur related Turkish sentiments and the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church:

Two essays had been written in the journal to support this idea. One discusses the Pope's overtures to Turkey regarding the Zionist state from the center of world Catholic opinion, whether or not the Zionist intention should be acted upon. The article reads: 'The people of Israel are spread over the entire earth. We see an amazing movement, a movement which seeks to join, to unite from afar and gather those who are exiled, to form a general center for these people, and if possible to create a national body. Like all great human events, we see the finger of God amidst this collection. . . And the Christian nation should pay attention to them.' The article goes on to say. . . 'The Catholic church looks with a favorable eye [toward restoration of Zion] and all feel that it would be good if Zionists go to talk to the Holy See in Rome, [that with his support] he can add strength for them to add a Jewish settlement in Palestine, and it could help to raise Turkey, to strengthen it in the present and the future.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Hapigah*; vol. v, no. 1 (22 October 1897) pp. 1-2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*

Schur related the general support of the Turkish government by excerpting from a second essay that appeared in the same journal, *Correspondance de l'Est*.

As its promoters have said and as the gathering in Basle showed, [the Zionist plan] is only to renew the unity of the Jewish people, into one national body, in the land of their fathers, under the government of Turkey, through farmers working the land and through those with practical abilities. The Jews are a people of superior intelligence, and a working people, and they have the strength to move forward and to turn the land into a garden of Eden. This is the written plan and program of the Zionist, and nothing different.

‘Will this disrupt Turkey and cause her to oppose [this plan]? On the contrary. [This plan] presents a great opportunity for Turkey to receive in its land settlers who love peace, who love work and who are diligent, who will not retreat from events that require courage. . . There is more. They are close in race to the Turks. If these people come in place of those coming from Western lands, it will increase the strength of the people who have settled that land, without bringing danger to the state. . . If such new foundations will come, to help the government, to fix order, to help balance trade through imports and exports, [to take advantage of] the great skill and trust they have with commerce. . . [they will ultimately help themselves and the government of Turkey—which will still control the land.]’<sup>113</sup>

The prevailing sentiment according to Schur and which was proclaimed in a large headline, stated unequivocally, “The Turk Wanted to Marry the Virgin of Israel!!!” (*Hapisgah*, vol. V, no.1).

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Schur knew that tension between Zionists and anti-Zionists was bound to intensify with these new developments. Prior to Herzl, *Hovevei Zion* existed quietly and without opposition. After the First Zionist Congress, however, *Hovevei Zion* and other Zionist organizations came under attack by assimilated Western European Jews, Reform rabbis, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and the radical intellectual Eastern European Jews, many of whom were Socialists and Anarchists.<sup>114</sup> The Reform rabbis particularly believed that the Jews should be dispersed throughout the world and remain a light unto the nations. Schur criticized them saying:

If there is a mission for Israel it is to endeavor to return to the land of our fathers...and to establish it on the foundation of the Torah of Moses and to extend his laws according to the conditions of life today.<sup>115</sup>

Schur constantly promoted Zionism to a national and international audience, sharing the positive response world-wide, while reacting to challenges from the American Jewish community.

In addition to his Zionist activities evidenced within the pages of *Hapigshah*, Schur supported efforts to unify American Zionist organizations into one central body. When the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ) was established in 1898, Schur found himself at odds with some of the leadership of *Hovevei Zion*. For the first time, Central and Western European Jews joined Zionist forces. In the eyes of many *Hovevei Zion* leaders, these Jews were assimilated, non-practicing Jews who had little regard for the Rabbinic tradition or for Jewish practice. In other words, the Orthodox leadership of *Hovevei Zion* wanted nothing to do with these Reform Jews. In contrast, Schur welcomed them and

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<sup>114</sup> *Netzah Yisrael*, p. 271.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

believed that their presence would help increase the visibility and efficacy of the Zionist cause in America. Schur's attitude was consistent with his belief that sincere supporters of Zionism, regardless of religious and cultural differences, were always welcome.

The FAZ recognized *Hapigah* as the leading Zionist newspaper and, in exchange, Schur continued to support the efforts of FAZ. The disputes between *Hovevei Zion* and FAZ went unresolved, and eventually *Hovevei Zion* withdrew from FAZ. Schur, too, became disillusioned with *Hovevei Zion* and resigned from the organization, supporting FAZ and the budding Zionist organizations in Chicago, where he resided.

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From 1897 until 1901 Schur maintained a relatively high profile, among Hebrew writers and Zionists. Notably, of course, neither group— even taken together— amounted to more than a very small minority among American Jews.

Schur remained steadfast in his desire to create a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. His ideology evolved from a cultural and spiritual yearning for a center for Jews worldwide into a full-blown political ideology with the help of Herzl. Schur was less concerned with the route to Zion and more concerned with the final destination. He dreamed of Jewish settlement on the land of his ancestors. If gradual settlement was the way, so be it. If a Christian Zionist could help lead the way, so be it. If an assimilated Western European Jew raised the clarion call and proposed a Jewish nation-state, so be it. Schur was open to exploring all avenues of settlement of Palestine.

Schur was a talented writer with an ability to argue ideas effectively in the pages of *Hapigah*. He was attracted to innovative ideas, such as Adam Rosenberg's plan to purchase land in Palestine and the importing Palestinian *etrogim*. He was one of the few



journalists to support the Blackstone Memorial, from its inception to its demise. His support of Herzl, in *Netzah Yisrael* and *Hapigah*, earned him the respect of Zionists worldwide, who looked to *Hapigah* as the American literary organ for the dissemination of their ideas. Schur was willing to open his newspaper to disparate Zionist viewpoints. His only condition was that the contributor be a sincere and dedicated Zionist, even if ideological or religious differences existed.

From 1888 until 1892, then again from 1897 until 1901, Schur was a major figure in the American Zionist movement. His influence did not come from a position within any Zionist organization, rather it came from his determination to promote and publicize Zionism to a literate group of Hebrew-speaking Americans each week in *Hapigah*. He had a mission: to stand on top of the summit, looking out onto Zion, and dream of the day when all Jews would look eastward to their spiritual and national homeland.

## Conclusion

The year 2001 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> year of Wolf Schur's disappearance from the national stage. In 1899 he changed the name of *Hapisgah* to *Hatehiyah* in an effort to pass his newspaper off to Russian censors who had banned *Hapisgah*. Schur's new incarnation ran for 59 consecutive issues until he was stricken with paralysis. In 1901, Schur was forced to cease circulation of *Hatehiyah*, and shortly thereafter Schur, too, stopped circulating his ideas in any forum. Schur was a writer so once he lost his physical ability to express himself on the page his ideas remained locked, in essence hidden from the world. The Chicago maskilim had no interest in helping Schur continue his contributions to the literary scene. If someone had been willing to help Schur transcribe his thoughts onto paper, he might have continued contributing to the Zionist cause. But this was not the case.

Schur was a poor immigrant who earned a meager living publishing *Hapisgah*. Like most of the Hebrew writers of his era, Schur struggled to survive. In fact, in one editorial he declared that, "the fate of the writer in America is worse than that of the woodchopper and the water drawer in Russia."<sup>116</sup> Once forced to cease publication of *Hapisgah*, Schur lost his only source of income. It is unclear how he managed financially for the next nine years. Perhaps, a friend or two assisted him. But we know that Schur had nominal contact with Chicago maskilim and leaders of Zionism once his newspaper became defunct. For years, Schur had advocated for a Jewish community

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<sup>116</sup> Kabakoff, p. 177.

isolated from the lure of assimilation in America. In his final years, he became isolated from everyone.

When Schur died in 1910, few newspapers took notice. He died in virtual anonymity, and has remained so until today. Yet during his period of abundant activity and productivity, Schur became a known and respected member of the maskilic community in America. He was a tireless advocate for many issues, including Zionism, Hebraism, and anti-assimilationism. These issues we know competed with the priorities of most Eastern European Jewish immigrants to America. These men and women, by and large, did not dream of a Jewish nation in Palestine. They desired to find refuge and economic security in the New-World. If they were to learn a new language, it would be English not Hebrew. They longed to become Americans, even if it meant abandoning old ways and habits in favor of the new. Schur fought against such potent forces. Indeed, his allies were always limited in number.

How then do we measure Schur's influence and enduring legacy? His newspaper never had a large circulation. Yet, it was regarded as regular reading material for many of the country's leading Jewish intellectuals. Schur never held an important leadership position in Jewish organizational life. Yet he had access to the inner circles of many organizations. Schur rarely acted in a self-aggrandizing way; he put the needs of an organization or an ideology first. When *Hapigah* was first launched in 1888, Schur's goal was to disseminate the work of the *Hovevei Zion* throughout America. When it was reborn in 1897, Schur responded to Herzl's call to be America's emissary for political Zionism. Schur responded to the spirit of the times, but not in a self-fulfilling way. He wanted merely to maintain *Hapigah's* presence on the national scene. If it was wealth

he sought, he likely would have published a Yiddish or English language newspaper, instead of the Hebrew newspaper that reached only one to two thousand people.

During two periods of intense early American Zionist activity (1888-1892 and 1897-1901), Schur's *Hapigah* remained the only constant fixture on the Zionist scene. Schur was prescient enough to recognize the shift in prevailing early Zionist attitudes from a spiritual to political one, acknowledge the benefits of the latter, and reflect the change in *Hapigah*. Schur proved amenable to following the most reasonable path to Zion. Indeed, *Hapigah* was the only Hebrew newspaper in circulation during the height of *Hovevei Zion*, in America (in the 1890s) and of the Federation of American Zionists (following the First Zionist Congress of 1897). It became the most reliable source of information for each organization. Without Schur's efforts, the achievements of early American Zionism might have been compromised.

Wolf Schur is the unknown-soldier of the history of American Zionism. In some measure, he helped pave the way for later, more famous American Zionists, like Louis Brandeis. One generation after the First Zionist Congress, most leaders of American Zionism were either native-born or Western European. Prior to the Congress, the overwhelming majority of American Zionists were Eastern European. Religious and cultural differences notwithstanding, Schur bridged the gap between these two communities in the pages of *Hapigah* by embracing the Western and Central European leadership of the FAZ.

Today, Wolf Schur is a footnote in history. Yet every home, factory, and farm in Israel today owes a small measure of gratitude to one of American Zionism's most vociferous advocates, Wolf Schur. In 1910 Berdichevsky wondered, "Who remembers

Wolf Schur?" The answer then and until today, sadly, is hardly anyone. Let us hope, however, that this exploration into the life and work of Schur has honored and revived Schur's memory, and his contributions to the development of early American Zionism, enabling us to answer Berdichevsky's question; "We do."

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