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INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IN ELIEZER SCHWEID'S THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Eliezer Schweid is a very prolific and authentic Israeli-born intellectual creating in various areas from Jewish/Israeli perspectives. He was strongly influenced by prominent Jewish philosophers, ideologists and literati such as Ahad Ha'am, Bialik, Gordon, Buber, and Rosenzweig. Schweid has been living and working in the age of the existential alienation of modern man, the loss of tradition for post-emancipation Jews and national revival in Israel.

After a brief introduction, chapter two describes the social, historical and political backdrop for Schweid's work, while chapter three is devoted to his life circumstances. Selected texts of his are the focus of chapters four and five in an attempt to understand how he views the collective, the individual and their interrelationship.

Schweid's early publications reflect the centrality of collective concerns in his thought. Later essays, especially *Judaism and the Solitary Jew,* indicate a stronger emphasis on the individual. However, this "individual" is generic, defined with collectivistic parameters. The individual, according to Schweid, can have a meaningful existence only as part of a collective. Another way he treats the individual is by using his own biography as a laboratory from which to extrapolate.

To Schweid, the ultimate collective is the Jewish people, and within it, the State of Israel. Schweid has been involved in pioneering educational and political initiatives, especially attempting to appease the polarized secular/religious tensions in Israel. Schweid has devoted his life to building a sovereign and socially just Jewish society.

After the 1948 Independence War many Israelis shifted their focus from the collective to their individual needs, and gradually this became the norm. Schweid feels Israel today has become a cynical, unjust, aggressive and selfish society. The collective has failed to promote a sense of identity and an ethos with clear and positive moral values to be shared and defended by the vast majority of the Israeli society.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Eliezer Schweid has been among the most prolific writers on the Israeli academic and intellectual scene. The 1997 annual conference of the departments of Jewish thought in Israeli universities was dedicated to his lifetime of scholarship. The bibliography prepared for the occasion was partial. A complete listing of Schweid's works would have contained about seventy pages. Schweid writes in Hebrew. Few of his books, and even fewer articles, have been translated into English. Also, very little has been written about him and his work outside Israel. This is a striking fact, considering his central role in the Israeli academic, literary and philosophical communities and his prominence in Israeli public affairs. Schweid is one of the most authentic—albeit not necessarily representative—Israeli-born intellectuals. Both his life and his work constitute documents of Israeli intellectual, cultural and political history and ideological maturation.

Schweid's writings provide a philosophical analysis and Jewish perspective on practically every aspect of life in Israel, and cover the period prior to its establishment as a sovereign state until the present day. Schweid is a spiritual follower of a number of great Jewish philosophers, ideologists and literati. He defines himself completely within a Jewish context, and in his case, this automatically means an Israeli context as well. Schweid is also a person who not only "talks the talk" but also "walks the walk." Throughout his life he has applied his ideas in his personal, family and political life, and absorbed the (sometimes negative) ramifications of those choices.

In terms of style, Schweid's writings represent a rich and unique use of the Hebrew language. In terms of thematic content, he returns over and over again to an examination of the relationship between the individual and the collective. This relationship is reflected in the wide range of subjects covered by his writings, including personal faith, revelation, national educational policies and national revival. My impression as a reader was that the frequency of words denoting the collective—such as *hatzibur* (the public), *hayeshuv* (the Jewish population of pre-state Palestine), or *ha'am* (the Jewish people)—far outnumbers those that denote the individual—such as *hayehudi* (the Jew), *adam* (a person), or *haprat* (the individual). Even when Schweid makes extensive use of individual terminology, he often uses it, as we shall see later, generically and to denote a collective.

Only a small number of the titles in his 1997 bibliography focus on the individual. Indeed, Schweid's early publications reflect the centrality of collective concerns in his thought. These publications include articles and essays on Zionist ideology,[1] Hebrew literature,[2] and Jewish religion,[3] as well as essays on medieval and modern Jewish thought, transcripts of participation in panels and educational essays.

Only two books mention the individual in their title, and one of them was devoted to one of Schweid's spiritual mentors, Aharon David Gordon.[4] The other was Schweid's original treatise *Judaism and the Solitary Jew* (1974), which will be analyzed below in

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[1] Such as: "Bein avot levanim" (Between Fathers and Sons), in *Divrei siyah bet: Hanoar beyisrael* (Spoken Words II: The Youth in Israel), ed. Z. Goldberg and Y. Erez, (Tel-Aviv: Mapai, 1951), 121-137; "Moreshet ha'aliyah hashniyah" (The Legacy of the Second Aliyah), *Sdemot*, no. 32 (1955); "Tziyonut bemivhan" (Zionism under Scrutiny), *Min Hayessod* (1962).

[2] Essays and reviews on Pinhas Sadeh, Nathan Alterman's poetry, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, et.al.

[3] Such as: "Mahzor le Rosh Hashanah" (*Mahzor* for Rosh Hashanah), *Nivim*, no. 10 (1952) and "Mashma'ut hapessah beyameinu" (The Meaning of Passover in Our Time), *Mevo'ot* 2, no. 10, (1954).

order to explore the notion of the individual in his thought. Of Schweid's articles and essays, the first that mentions the individual focuses on another thinker's work, Bahyei Ibn Paquda and his *Sefer Hovot Halevavot*.[5] The scarcity and marginality of the individual in Schweid's early writings reflected his deep and passionate involvement in matters of the collective. Schweid was conscious of this particular focus, and in autobiographical texts he testified that the collective was at the top of his priorities, both as a young person and later in life.

Schweid's particular philosophy and ideology emerged against two primary backdrops. One is the existential angst expressed by many Jews as a consequence of emancipation and the decline of the Jewish community in the modern world. Similar developments were observed in the European society and led to theories of social history, including the distinction drawn by Tönnies between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft,* which help explain the alienation of the individual in the modern urban society. Chapter Two will explore how Schweid describes this existential trajectory evolved in the Jewish world and within the general, non-Jewish context.

The other backdrop against which Schweid's thought crystallizes was his personal experience of the Jewish national revival before and during the establishment of the State of Israel. His autobiographical writing vividly describes the place that the individual in relationship to the collective occupied in his mind even during his earliest years of childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Chapter Three will indicate how this is so and will paint Schweid's portrait as it emerges from two main sources: his own

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[4] *Hayahid, Olamo Shel A. D. Gordon* (The One: The World of A. D. Gordon) (Tel Aviv: 1970).

[5] "Derech hateshuvah shel hayahid hamitaher: Pirkei mehkar betorat hamussar shel *Hovot Halevavot*" (The path of return of the individual who purifies himself: Research notes in the moral teaching of *Hovot Halevavot*) *Da'at*, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 17-42.

descriptions of his life from early childhood to fatherhood, and secondary sources describing him. This will not be a complete biography, nor will it claim to cover all aspects of his life. Rather, it will focus on those elements relevant to our study.

Under girding this thesis is the assumption that the two concepts upon which this study focuses—the collective and the individual—were set forth as major foci in Schweid's thought in the earlier part of his career. He was raised on collective values in his parents' home, in the youth movement and in school. They were first and foremost in his mind for much of his early years. This is best documented in his early publications, and Chapter Four will focus on the collective and the role that the individual plays in it, on the basis of essays published in his first collection, *Ad Mashber*. Obviously, the prominence of collectivist thinking in Schweid's early writing has to do with the fact that he was then an active participant in the culture of a nation that, during that early period of its existence, was fighting for its survival. One could argue that reflecting upon the individual was a luxury that had to wait for a later and safer time.

The first attempt Schweid made to confront issues pertaining to the individual in a systematic conceptual way was the publication of *Judaism and the Solitary Jew* in 1974. By that time, Israel had survived four wars. It was in its twenty-sixth year, its democracy was functioning, and its economy was doing quite well. Israel's politics moved from the battlefield to the diplomatic arena, and generations of younger Israelis now took national independence for granted. In many ways, this could be seen as the normalization of which the early Zionists had dreamed. Had the time come for Israelis to deserve the "luxury" of meeting individual needs? By that time, did Eliezer Schweid recognize these needs and advocate their satisfaction? This will be the focus of Chapter Five.

Besides these texts, later publications by Schweid, including one published less than one year ago, have been consulted and used when appropriate. Also, Eliezer Schweid kindly granted me an interview towards the end of the research for this study, which enabled me to verify and gain insight into his current perspective.

This study does not come close to doing justice to Eliezer Schweid's vast body of publications, nor to the pivotal role he has played in the intellectual and political life of Israel throughout its contemporary history. Many of his ideas and analyses, especially concerning the relations between Orthodox and secular Israelis, have been truly prophetic, and many of the solutions he has been advocating for decades are now being tried, often by people and organizations who do not know their origin. Schweid has been an activist in, and an observer of, Israel from before its inception to the present time. This study is a tribute to his contribution to the realization of the Zionist dream.

Last but not least, Schweid gives an eloquent rationale for the stance that obeying commandments is meaningless without the acceptance of a divine commander. Although this stance is not new, Schweid's particular "path of return" and his analysis of the role of religion in Jewish identity are quite compelling. I believe that his ideas pose a serious challenge not only to the Israeli secularism, but also to the Reform and Conservative Jewish theology. Although this study does not focus on Schweid's attitude to liberal Judaism, I hope that it would allow others to gain insight into Schweid's worldview on two important elements central to contemporary Jewish identity and of vital import to liberal Judaism—the collective and the individual.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Modern Transformation and Individual Alienation

In 1887, the renowned sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies first described Western society as having shifted from what he called "the pre-modern *Gemeinschaft*" (community), characterized by direct personal relationships, to "the modern *Gesellschaft*" (society), characterized by an impersonal structure, order and bureaucracy.[1] This distinction, in the original German, soon became part of socio-historical vocabulary worldwide. Tönnies had ancient and immediate intellectual predecessors.[2] However, Tönnies' uniqueness lies in the fact that he published his work at the height of the vigor of the Gesellschaft society, at a time when few other thinkers could see, despite its many virtues, its inherent weaknesses. In time, Tönnies' theories and conclusions were largely confirmed, and his immense contribution to social thought was recognized.[3]

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[1] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis, with an introduction by P. A. Sorokin, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1957), translated from *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Leipzig 1935; original edition, 1887.

[2] In his foreword to the English translation of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Pitrim A. Sorokin points out that similar descriptions of two contrasting modes of mentality and types of society preceded Tönnies'. Sorokin cites Confucius (who promoted a Gemeinschaft-type society, "Great Similarity," over a Gesellschaft-type, "Small Tranquility"), Plato (whose ideal republic resembles Gemeinschaft and the oligarchic or capitalistic society resembles Gesellschaft), Aristotle, Cicero, the Church fathers (St. Augustine's "City of God" as a Gemeinschaft-type model, contrasted with "Society of Man"), as well as medieval thinkers (like Joachim de Fiore, Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Nicolaus Cusanus) and even Ibn Khaldun, as Tönnies precursors. Immediately before Tönnies, similar analyses were made by other German thinkers such as Gierke, Savigni, Puchta and Hegel ("Family-Society" vs. "Civic-Society"), and following him by Durkheim and others. Pitrim A. Sorokin, Introduction to *Community and Society* by Ferdinand Tönnies (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1957), ix-x.

[3] John C. McKinney, "The Application of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft As Related to Other Typologies," in Tönnies, 12-29.

Here, in Tönnies' own words, are a few characteristics of the two social entities:

> Family life is the general basis of life in the Gemeinschaft. It subsists in village and town life. The village community and the town themselves can be considered as large families, the various clans and houses representing the elementary organisms of its body; guilds, corporations, and offices, the tissues and organs of the town. Here original kinship and inherited status remain an essential, or at least the most important, condition of participating fully in common property and other rights. Strangers may be accepted and protected as serving-members or guests either temporarily or permanently. Thus, they can belong to the Gemeinschaft as objects, but not easily as agents and representatives of the Gemeinschaft. . . . In the city as well as in the capital, and especially in the metropolis [all typical of Gesellschaft], family life is decaying. The more and the longer their influence prevails, the more the residuals of family life acquire a purely accidental character. For there are only few who will confine their energies within such a narrow circle; all are attracted outside by business, interests, pleasures, and thus separated from one another. . . . For Gesellschaft . . . convention takes to a large degree the folkways, mores and religion. It forbids much as detrimental to the common interest, which the folkways, mores, and religion had condemned as evil in and of itself.[4]

As Tönnies published his works at the height of the shift from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, he foresaw the need for many political and economic changes: "The state, as the reason of Gesellschaft, should decide to destroy Gesellschaft or at least to reform or renew it."[5] However, even he did not predict the extent of existential alienation[6] and loss of identity that ensued as a result of the transition.

Tönnies' younger contemporary Max Weber, upon whom he exerted a great deal of influence, picked up the themes enunciated initially in Tönnies' work and, in his own

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[4] Tönnies, 228-230.

[5] Ibid., 230.

[6] "'Existentialism'," says Maurice Friedman, "is not a philosophy but a mood embracing a number of disparate philosophies; the differences among them are more basic than the temper which unites them. This temper can best be described as a reaction against the static, the abstract, the purely rational, the merely irrational, in favor of the dynamic and the concrete, personal involvement and 'engagement,' action, choice, and commitment, the distinction between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' existence, and the actual situation of the existential subject as the starting point of thought." Maurice Friedman, ed. *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader* (New York: Random House), 1964, 3-4.

publications, spoke of the "Iron cage," the sense of alienation and differentiation that trapped modern individuals. Peter Berger, recent heir to the tradition of Tönnies and Weber, built upon the theoretical foundation these scholars had established and contributed additional insights to their understanding of the nature of modern society. Distinguishing between *public and private spheres*, he wrote:

> Through most of human history, individuals lived in life-worlds[7] that were more or less unified. This is not to deny that through the division of labor and other processes of institutional segmentation there have always been important differences in the life-worlds of different groups within the same society. Nevertheless, compared with modern societies, most earlier ones evinced the high degree of integration. Whatever the differences between various sectors of social life, these would 'hang together' in an order of integrating meaning that included them all. This integrating order was typically religious. For the individual this meant quite simply that the *same* integrative symbols permeated the various sectors of his everyday life. Whether with his familiar at work or engaged in political processes or participating in festivity and ceremonial, the individual was always in the same "world." Unless he physically left his own society, he rarely, if ever, would have the feeling that a particular social situation took him out of this common life-world. The typical situation of individuals in a modern society is very different. Different sectors of their everyday life relate them to vastly different and often severely discrepant worlds of meaning and experience. Modern life is typically segmented to a very high degree, and it is important to understand this segmentation (or, as we prefer to call it, Pluralization) is not only manifest on the level of observable social conduct but also has important manifestations on the level of consciousness. A fundamental aspect of this pluralization is the dichotomy of *private and public spheres.*[8]

Religion was one aspect of life that lost its prominence in the public sphere, and was relegated to the private sphere, giving people the option to make or not to make it

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[7] "The *consciousness of everyday life* is a web of meanings that allows the individual to navigate his way through the ordinary events and encounters of his life with others. The totality of these meanings, which he shares with others, makes up a particular *social life-world.*" Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973), 64-65.

[8] Ibid. Berger gives credit for this aspect of his thought to recent German sociology, and especially to Arnold Gehlen. Italics mine.

part of their lives and the choice of how to do so. In Berger's language, structures that previously sustained a societal relation have shifted from society as a whole, to much smaller groups of confirmatory individuals:

> The pluralization of social life-worlds has a very important effect in the area of religion.[9] Through most of empirically available human history, religion has played a vital role in providing the overarching canopy of symbols for the meaningful integration of society. The various meanings, values and beliefs operating in a society were ultimately 'held together' in a comprehensive interpretation of reality that related human life to the cosmos as a whole. Indeed, from a sociological and social-psychological point of view, religion can be defined as a cognitive and normative structure that makes it possible for man to feel "at home" in the universe. . . . Institutionally, the most visible consequence of this has been the *privatization of religion*. The dichotomization of social life into public and private spheres has offered a 'solution' to the religious problem of modern society. While religion has had to 'evacuate' one area after another in the public sphere, it has successfully maintained itself as an expression of private meaning. Separation of church and state, autonomization of the economy as against the old religious norms, secularization of the law and of public education, loss of the church as a focus of community life – all these have been powerful trends in the modernization of society. At the same time, however, religious symbols and even (to different degrees in different countries) religious institutions have continued to have an important place in private life.[10]

The relegation of religion into the private realm deprived it of its role as the primary instrument of coping with fears of the irrationality and precariousness of human life for many. While the social and political role of religion was compartmentalized, it lost much of its comforting value for people, albeit that the reasons for their anxieties have not been eliminated. The need for a safe haven, which was taken for granted in the traditional society, could not be satisfied:

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[9] Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), and Thomas Luckmann, The Invisible Religion; The Problem of Religion in Modern Society (New York: Macmillan 1967); quoted in Berger, The Homeless Mind, 240.

[10] Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 79-81.

> The secularization effect of pluralization has gone hand in hand with other secularizing forces in modern society. The final consequence of all this can be put very simply (though the simplicity is deceptive): *modern man has suffered from a deepening condition of "homelessness."* The correlate of the migratory character of his experience of society and of self has been what might be called a metaphysical loss of "home." It goes without saying that this condition is psychologically hard to bear. It has therefore engendered its own nostalgias – nostalgias, that is, for a condition of "being at home" in society, with oneself and, ultimately, in the universe.[11]

The inevitable outcome of these processes was a sense of alienation in modern society in general and in religious life in particular:

> Modernity is understood by some as *liberating*, and by others as that *from which* liberation is sought . . . both liberation quests are valid. . . . The liberation of modernity has been, above all, that of the individual. Modern social structures have provided the context for the socialization of highly individuated persons. Concomitantly, modern society has given birth to ideologies and an ethical system of intense individuals. . . . The experience of "alienation" is the symmetrical correlate of the same individuation, . . . [it] is the price of individuation. . . .[12]

In the modern era, with the rise of nineteenth century Romanticism, and especially after the disillusionment of modernity following the first and second world wars, the alienation of the individual became a focus of many thinkers and deepened the existentialist stream in philosophy.[13]

The process of privatization of religion also had an impact on Judaism. David Ellenson has written:

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[11] Ibid., 82.

[12] Ibid., 195-196.

[13] In Maurice Friedman's words: "Insofar as one can define existentialism, it is a movement from the abstract and general to the particular and the concrete. The understanding of a particular existentialist thinker in his particularity would be more important, therefore, than any amount of general definition... Existentialism is a direction of movement towards particulars, but it is not and can never be an espousal of the particulars at the expense of all generality and abstraction. Therefore, existentialism is actually a relative thing—a tendency rather than a platform." Friedman, *The Worlds of Existentialism,* 4-5.

> With the advent of the modern political setting, the traditional ***kehillah*** (community) and its institutions are altered and in significant ways often dismantled as the Jewish community passed from the corporate political structure provided by the world of medieval European feudalism into the congregational pattern of association that marked religious life in the modern West. [14]

The collapse of the traditional Jewish community as well as the alienation individual Jews felt as the result of living in a changing society, led a variety of Jewish thinkers to an appreciation of existentialism and the relevance of its emphasis upon alienation and loneliness as marks of the modern condition. In Franz Rosenzweig's words: "There is no one today who is not alienated."[15] Thinkers as disparate as the best-known dialogist existentialist, Martin Buber, and the father of Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, addressed the themes in a number of works.[16] In the second half of the twentieth century, Eliezer Schweid developed his own version of a Jewish existentialist philosophy, which is unique in its Zionist orientation and expression. The existential angst facing the individual in his philosophy, however, springs from the overarching socio-historical trends we have described.

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[14] David Ellenson, "Gemeimndeorthodoxie in Weimar Germany: the Approaches of Anton Nobel and Isak Unna," in *In Search of Jewish community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria 1918-1933,* ed. Michael Brenner and Derek J. Penslar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 37. Ellenson uses Berger's analysis to shed light on the specifics of the German Orthodox during the Weimar period

[15] From the draft of the opening address of the Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus in Frankfurt, in *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought,* ed. N. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1961), 229; quoted in Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1982), 98.

[16] Regarding the themes by Soloveitchik and Buber, see Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide,* 2nd ed. (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1995), 159-160, 236-238.

2. Transformation in Jewish Life in the Wake of Modernity

The process of transformation[17] that marked Jewish society in its passage from the Middle Ages to modernity was the object of extensive debate among historians. Michael Meyer showed that the demarcation of this passage by different scholars was greatly influenced by their time, place and ideological penchant.[18] Notwithstanding specific agendas of some scholars' periodization and choice of symbolic turning point, there is general agreement on the social and cultural phenomena of the modernization process. While many scholars wrote about this process, here we shall rely mostly on Jacob Katz's lifetime study of it. Jacob Katz laid the foundation for the social approach to Jewish history in the mid-1950s.[19] One of the earliest applications of this methodology was in his

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[17] David Ellenson refers to "transformation" to describe how even the apparently monolithic Jewish Orthodoxy was influenced, in all its factions, by internal and external processes that catapulted the whole Jewish existence into a new world of promise and threat. See David Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy,* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990, xi.

[18] For instance, in the 1820s, the Jewish German historian Isaac Marcus Jost attributed the awakening of modernity in Jewish society externally, to the ascent of Frederick the Great to the Prussian throne in 1740; Heinrich Graetz was more skeptical of external forces and assigned the birth of Jewish modernity to Moses Mendelssohn, also in the eighteenth century; the politically conscious historian Simon Dubnov, in the early twentieth century, linked Jewish modernity to political causes, particularly the French Revolution and the first granting of citizenship to Jews; Zionist historian Ben Zion Dinur chose the immigration to Palestine of Rabbi Judah the Pious in 1700 as a rebellion against Jewish life in exile and a symbol of the coming of modernity; Jewish mysticism scholar Greshom Scholem focused on the seventeenth century Sabbatian pseudo-messianic movement which, he claimed, irreversibly shattered traditional Judaism and gave birth to neo-mystical and anti-mystical reactions. Israeli historians Shmuel Ettinger, focusing on political history, and Jacob Katz, focusing on social history, reached similar conclusions regarding the deterioration of the communal social and political power structure following the emergence of the centralized absolutist state and its intolerance of separate corporate entities. Katz's theories will be discussed later. Cf. Michael Meyer, "Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?" *Judaism,* (1975), 329-338.

[19] Jacob Katz, "The Concept of Social History and its Possible Use in Jewish Historical Research," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* III (1955): 292-312.

Tradition and Crisis,[20] a study that focused on the passages that characterized Jewish society in Europe as it evolved from the late Middle Ages to modern times. Most of his book is devoted to a detailed study of traditional Jewish societal institutions before their transformation. However, at the end of the book, Katz expands his analysis to include changes taking place in the larger world that led to the rise of what he calls "the neutral society."[21] Katz's analysis can be summarized as follows.

By the end of the Middle Ages in Europe, Jews were a distinct entity within a larger society. Jews were easily identified by their geography (e.g., ghettos), appearance and language, over and above the religious and life-style differences that also marked them. In keeping with Tönnies' general observation regarding the alienation outsiders experienced in Gemeinschaften, the Jews' rights were limited and dependent upon the whims and interests of the rulers in whose midst they dwelt. As a Gemeinschaft in and of itself, the Jewish society defined itself to a large extent according to Talmudic tradition, and gladly differentiated itself from the gentile society that surrounded it, even though economic interdependence muted this attitude at times.

Jewish society constituted "a society within a society" with limited contact points between Jews and the larger society. The community had absolute authority over the individual, more so in the deep Middle Ages than later. The contact with the non-Jewish world was delegated to the leadership, even in private matters, and non-Jewish majority

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[20] Jacob Katz, *Massoret umashber: Hahevrah hayehudit bemotzaei yemei habeinayim* (Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958) [Hebrew]; English translation by B. D. Cooperman, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993). Citations below follow the Hebrew edition, unless otherwise stated.

[21] Ibid., 284-297.

leadership supported the authority of the Jewish leadership. Besides regular enforcement measures such as expropriations, fines, corporal punishment and, in exceptional cases, capital punishment, two unique measures of social control were excommunication and handing over of Jews to the gentile authorities. The latter were used sparingly.[22]

From the late fifteenth century to the mid-eighteenth century, European Jewry experienced major events that contributed to irreversible changes in its structure and functioning. Gershom Scholem's suggestion that Sabbatianism and Frankism were the forces that catapulted European Jewry into modernity[23] has not been substantiated.[24] However, they certainly had a share in the process of weakening the communal structure and authority in the wake of modernity. As Michael Meyer puts it:

> As [Gershom] Scholem[25] points out, Sabbatianism divided the Jewish world for generations. . . . A community so divided was less able to oppose new ideas in its midst or to project the image of unified authority that might have suppressed emergent centrifugal forces . . . [Sabbatianism and followers of Jacob Frank (1726-1791)] brought . . . antinomian tendency into certain central as well as east European communities . . . [and] Jewish law was no longer unchallenged as the bond uniting all Jews.[26]

In Eastern Europe, one of the strongest reactions to the changes was the rise of the *hasidic* movement. In Western Europe it was the *haskalah*. Katz tried to find parallelism

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[22] More about excommunication: Ibid., 124-127.

[23] Scholem, Gershom G., *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken 1971), 125-126, 140-141; quoted in Meyer, "Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?" *Judaism,* (1975), 333.

[24] Jacob Katz, "On the Question of the Relation of Sabbatianism to Haskalah and Reform," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe, Hebrew Section (University of Alabama 1979), 83-100; quoted in Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 398, n. 2.

[25] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: 1954), 304; *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: 1971), 84, 90, 140, 170; quoted in Meyer, *Response to Modernity,* 398, n. 1.

[26] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 11.

between the two movements and attributed the birth of modernity to both: "*Hasidism* and *haskalah* exemplify the two methods of renunciation by which the traditional society could be affected: one that was based on charismatic religious factors and one that resulted from rationalist critique."[27] As Meyer notes, Katz eventually admitted that while *haskalah* actually shattered traditional Jewish society, *hasidism* had a distorting effect on its framework before *hasidism* itself turned against Jewish enlightenment.[28] For the majority of Jews in Eastern Europe, *hasidism*, as well as the ultra-Orthodox non-*hasidic* society in Eastern Europe, represented one of the only two possible reactions to the prospect of secularization on the way to total assimilation.[29] In the words of Eliezer Schweid:

> [The two options were:] A. Rejecting emancipation while "freezing" the traditional religious model, and thereby also freezing the process of acculturation on the levels of popular culture as well as high culture. This ensues from the fact that in the reality of modernity, any conscious adjustment to the environment was conceived as a serious threat to religious Jewish identity. . . . B. Adjusting the Jewish religion to the larger culture through a new, secularized, conception of religion, intended to introduce it as one of the components of modern culture, or through an adaptation of central parts of the modern larger culture to the Jewish religion. . . .[30]

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[27] Katz, *Massoret umashber*, 270.

[28] Shmuel Ettinger, review of *Massoret umashber*, by Jacob Katz, *Kiryat Sefer* XXXV (1959-60): 12-18; quoted in M. Meyer, "Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?" 336.

[29] The full picture, however, was much more complex. David Ellenson showed that, in nineteenth century Central Europe, Jewish Orthodoxy was not a monolithic entity, in the image of the founder of Neo-Orthodoxy, S. R. Hirsch. A pluralistic modern Orthodox Judaism, represented by Esriel Hildesheimer, also existed there at the same time. Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer,* xi.

[30] Eliezer Schweid, *Likrat Tarbut Yehudit Modernit* (The Idea of Judaism as a Culture) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1995), 31.

Eliezer Schweid's philosophical work lies clearly in the latter option: adaptation. He often uses the former, resistant option merely as a benchmark for comparison.[31] Therefore, the following overview focuses on the trends of Jewish thought that followed the adjustment option, whether in the form of religious reforms or alternative expressions to Jewish identity, such as secular Zionism.

3. External Developments and Their Influence on Jewish Life

Parallel to the internal developments, particularly in Western Europe, external factors put another level of pressure upon the traditional Jewish community. The decline of the pre-modern corporate structure in the age of absolutism led to a parallel decline in the ability of the community to define the identity of the individual, the concord between the life of the individual and that of the community, and the role the community could play in the life of the individual.[32]

In the Middle Ages, the state fixed the formal political and social boundaries of Jewish existence. As long as the state was structured along corporate lines, the Jews had a place of their own in the structure, albeit different from others, since their very presence in the society was dependent on the rulers. With the rise of absolutism, the earlier independent status of each corporation gradually gave way to more dependency on the centralized state. The new relationship was still based on the old structure, but directed

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[31] For example, the appendix to *Judaism and the Solitary Jew* is entitled "Facing the Modern Era–three attitudes." While Schweid analyses Spinoza's and Mendelssohn's views on Judaism as a whole, regarding Rabbi A. Y. H. Kook he focuses only on his "Secularism from a Religious Viewpoint." See *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut* (Judaism and the Solitary Jew) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1974), 113-192.

[32] David Ellenson, "'Who Is a Jew?': Issues of Jewish Status and Identity and Their Relationship to the Nature of Judaism in the Modern World," in *Berit mila in the Reform context,* ed. Lewis M. Barth [United States]: Berit Mila Board of Reform Judaism, 1990, 71; and Katz, *Massoret umashber*, 287-297.

from the top down, with the state becoming a central value. The rulers' courts became more sophisticated and required able administrators, and this allowed a small number of Jews to partake in non-Jewish court life. Some Jews found a similar opportunity in the permission to study medicine in Germany from the eighteenth century onward. These steps could be seen as early manifestations of the *privatization of religion*, in the sense that the needs of the ruler outweighed the tradition of regarding Jews only as part of a corporation. They allowed both the court and the Jew and his family to experience the new relationship as separate from the Jew's religion or his relationship with the Jewish community.

Coercive legal authority began to be taken away from the Jewish community. Indeed, the advent of modernity meant that the corporate political structure of a feudal medieval Europe would collapse, and Jews, like everyone else, would be treated as individuals. This marked the demise of the Jewish community as a political entity, and ushered in the notion of a voluntaristic community. It also marked the transformation of the notion of Jewishness from a question of status (defined by the community) to one of identity (defined by the individual).[33] Initially, however, this process was not reflected in a change of social behavior, and most Jews remained confined to the Jewish society and tradition (although some court-Jews converted to Christianity).[34]

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[33] Ellenson, "'Who Is a Jew'," 70-72.

[34] Michael Meyer describes early assimilation in the lowest (such as beggars and vagrants) and highest (such as court Jews) echelons of society as the precursors of the gradual penetration of European cultural elements into the Jewish society through intensified social contacts. See, for the lower strata, Rudolf Glanz, *Geschichte des niederen jüdischen Volkes in Deutschland: Eine Studie über historisches Gaunertum, Bettelwesen und Vagantentum* (New York: 1968), and for the court Jews, Selma Stern, *The Court Jew*, Philadelphia, 1950, 227-246; quoted in Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 398, n. 3,4.

Towards the mid-eighteenth century the state became more successful in emptying the traditional social corporations of their political clout, and inadvertently decreased the control of their social structures as well. The crucial new phenomenon was the emergence of individual citizenship, independent of a local ruler. This process represented a change in moral and ethical worldview that relied on rationalism and utilitarianism, which legitimized the pursuit of individual goals. Initially these changes did not apply specifically to Jews, but towards the end of the eighteenth century, especially in Germany, the Jew could be included in the futuristic view of society as an equal person independently of his or her national or religious identity.[35] Katz points out that the emphasis here should be on the word "futuristic," for this attitude of a select few in the European, mainly German elites, did not translate into changes that marked the social reality of the majority of contemporaneous Jews. The seeds of the *privatization of religion* were sewn, but only once the enlightenment began to manifest itself broadly towards the end of the eighteenth century were Jews welcome into the social dynamics of the larger world. Even then, the number who took advantage of the opportunity was minimal. In the eyes of most people on either side, living simultaneously in both worlds was acceptable only for utilitarian purposes, and otherwise one needed to choose. Two notable examples of this phenomenon were Spinoza and Mendelssohn.

Baruch (Benedict) de Spinoza (1632–1677) was a Dutch philosopher, born into a Spanish-Portuguese Jewish family in Amsterdam. Spinoza questioned the authority and

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[35] This inclusion was first expressed by Lessing in *Nathan der Weise* (1778) and Christian Wilhelm Dohm in *Über die bürgerlische Verbesserung der Juden* (1781-83). Mendelssohn mentioned Lessing and Dohm as the first intellectuals who included Jews in their notion of tolerance within society. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Moses Mendelssohns gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig: Ed. G. B. Mendelssohn, 1843-33), III, 180; quoted in Jacob Katz, *Massoret umashber*, 291. n.13.

divine origin of the Torah and later developed an ethical philosophy that did not derive its authority from divine sources in their traditional Jewish understanding. In a sense, he took an unprecedented and precautious initiative of "privatizing" his religion and relating to it outside the theological tradition and the authority of his immediate society. His attitude outraged the Jewish community in Amsterdam, but he refused to "back down" and chose to live his life completely in accord with his own philosophy. While at least one member of the group of friends with whom he questioned basic tenets of the Jewish faith, Juan de Pardo (1614–1672?), asked to be readmitted after being excommunicated and was forced to apologize for his views, Spinoza persisted and, on July 27, 1656, was excommunicated.[36] Spinoza preferred to be loyal to his convictions outside the Jewish community as well, and he turned down prestigious positions (such as one at Heidelberg University) and considerable income (from the French royal court), fearing that acceptance would have compromised his integrity. However, the unique feature in his relationship with the Jewish community and with his Jewish identity lies in the fact that he chose to act as an individual without regard to his communal origin and without a need to replace it with another (that is, convert to Christianity). Ultimately, his choice became more of a problem for the Jewish community, which sought, in vain, to convince him to repent and be readmitted.[37] What would seem self-evident to us three and a half centuries later, was an original and courageous choice not shared by many of his contemporaries.[38] Spinoza

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[36] Writs of excommunication of Pardo and Spinoza in Paul Mendes-Flohr and J. Reinharz, ed., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New-York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 50-51.

[37] Rudolf Smend, "Spinoza," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD ed.

[38] Slightly earlier, Uriel da Costa had twice been expelled from the community for similar charges, though he recanted each time and ultimately committed suicide.

did not engage an immediate following in the Jewish community and he did not establish a trend. He is regarded, nonetheless, as the precursor of a new kind of a Jew who would emerge with the advent of modernity: the Jew who does not simply inherit his identity without question, but who must make choices in order to clarify for himself his identity as a Jew in a society that allows such choices. The free choice that Spinoza expressed and experienced as a liberation from the constraints imposed by the medieval situation, would later become the very source of alienation in a modern society with too many choices and too few guidelines on how to choose:

> The most fundamental function of institutions is probably to protect the individuals from having to make too many choices; the private sphere has arisen as an interstitial area left over by the large institutions of modern society. As such, it has become an area of unparalleled liberty and anxiety for the individual.[39]

The reality in which Spinoza lived as a unique individual was soon to be altered; yet he was a precursor. It would be another generation before his position would reflect a social trend and not be confined to an individual phenomenon.

Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was born fifty-two years after Spinoza's death. In the short time between the two, non-Jewish society, especially in Germany, became both more accessible and more attractive to larger numbers of rank-and-file urban Jews. What began in the early eighteenth century with allowing non-Jewish subjects to be taught to children, culminated towards the end of the century with concerns that Jewish education would altogether disappear. The *privatization of religion* was in full swing, alongside the devaluation of the community's authority. The reactions to the crumbling

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[39] Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 186.

walls of the spiritual ghetto were confused and varied. Unlike Spinoza's time and place, now the community could not impose its legislation on individuals (in Prussia, a decree from 1792 formally forbade it).[40] Also, unlike Spinoza, Mendelssohn remained religiously within the mainstream of Jewish belief and practices. His contribution was in creating bridges for Jews to integrate into the non-Jewish society without necessarily surrendering their Judaism. He also permitted his non-Jewish peers to have a better understanding of what Judaism meant. With Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725-1805), he encouraged opening Jewish education to non-Jewish subjects. He did not see any contradiction between integration and Judaism, nor did he encourage any changes in the theology and practices of the Jewish religion. Mendelssohn was perhaps the first to demonstrate, in theory as well as in practice, that one could be simultaneously both Jewish without compromise and a full participant in modernity.

Assimilation in the upper economic strata took social forms—such as the literary salons held by notable ladies, especially in Berlin and Vienna—and intellectual forms—such as Mendelssohn's participation in public philosophical and theological debates. However, a "neutral society" had not yet emerged, and those interested in social or intellectual assimilation were implicitly expected to choose between a Jewish and non-Jewish identity. Pressures on prominent personalities took a more public form, such as the pressures on Moses Mendelssohn to choose between the Jewish and Christian worlds, which led to his initially hesitant public defense of Judaism. According to Jacob Katz, the expectation was anachronistic, since the social innovation of that era was the creation of a

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[40] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 26-27.

neutral sphere of society that allowed Jews to participate in it *without* leaving their original society, or to leave it without having to join another religion. Few people were able to maintain this duality, for the genuinely neutral society had not yet emerged. For many, participation was only a step on the way to total assimilation and conversion. Although many converted to Christianity as a response to social pressure and for convenience, more people left the traditional Jewish society without converting.

Despite the growing phenomenon of departure from Judaism in both forms, the traditional society prevailed. Only people from the upper echelons of the Jewish society had a chance to be educated for, and accepted by, the neutral society. They were an elite in their own society and conversed with an elite in the surrounding society. Most other Jews, however, remained part of the traditional Jewish society. In Jacob Katz's words:

> Thus we have a stratum of *maskilim* defined by identification with its society of origin, but feeling strong reservations about that society's traditional system of values. If the members of this group did not actually join the neutral associations, they did identify with them. In sociological terms, the natural associations had become the reference group of the *maskilim*. . . . The *maskilim* pictured the future of Jewish society in accordance with the model and the values of the neutral society. . . . From the 1780s onward, the *maskilim* emerged as a group with a clear-cut social-ideological character, which laid claim, much like any other social elite, to the leadership of [Jewish] society as a whole. *The rise of this new elite alongside the traditional society constituted the decisive event in the Jewish social history of this period.*[41]

Mendelssohn reacted to the pressures on him to choose by confirming his Jewish commitments. He assumed the responsibility of rebutting the criticism of Judaism by non-

[41] Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (English edition), 224-225. My italics.

Jewish personalities, such as Lavater in 1770, thereby outlining a new and modern way of affirming the Jewish identity.[42]

Spinoza and Mendelssohn marked a new era in Jewish thought. They faced the need to confront a new reality, in which the Jew knows from where he comes, but has more choices, sometimes imposed, that his predecessors did not enjoy. While most Jews dealt with the dilemma of choosing their course between tradition and modernity in practical terms, Jewish thinkers felt the need to state how these choices would be made in coherent philosophical or ideological ways. Jewish thought had passed a threshold of no return. Eliezer Schweid, who spent the greater part of his academic career studying and teaching modern Jewish thought,[43] puts it thus:

> Jewish thought in modern times is marked by a cut that it attempts to heal, but the scab remains even after the healing and the tear breaks open time and time again. Spinoza's philosophy was the first and most succinct expression given to this cut in the realm of philosophical contemplation, and as such it was the first philosophic formulation of the problems facing modern Jewish thought.[44]

Schweid analyzes the crisis in Jewish identity that resulted from Jews' encounter with the modern world. He describes Spinoza's response as the "negative option" in this crisis, as opposed to the "positive option" personified by Moses Mendelssohn.[45] Mendelssohn remained loyal to the traditional Jewish religion and did not see the adoption

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[42] Katz, *Massoret umashber*, 294-295.

[43] His *Toldot hahagut hayehudit ba'et hahadashah—Hameah hatesha' 'esreh* (A History of Jewish Thought in Modern Times—The Nineteenth Century) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1977) was a bestseller and has been out of print for years.

[44] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut*, 153. Eugene Borowitz has a similar view, but, for him, "Spinoza has no place in this book" because he was "content to leave Judaism behind." Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought,* 351-353.

[45] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut*, 23-24. See also "Spinoza and Judaism," ibid., 115-153, and "Mendelssohn on Judaism," ibid., 154-177.

of enlightenment culture into the Jewish realm as contradicting the basic tenets of Judaism. His contribution was in providing the philosophical and linguistic tools for his contemporary Jew to "internalize the modern cultural ideal of his non-Jewish environment, to make an original contribution to it, to integrate within it, and still to remain a whole Jew in his religion."[46] While other Jewish enlightenment pioneers wanted to revive a Hebrew-centered culture, Mendelssohn's own vision was more one of a modern Jewish culture in the German vernacular, with Hebrew as the language of the Jewish religion. Naphtali Herz Wessely, Mendelssohn's disciple and his partner in writing the Torah exegesis, had a slightly different position. He distinguished between the "Teaching of God" and the "Teaching of Man." The latter, or humanism, could be shared with other enlightened peoples. According to Schweid, Wessely's message, through his own Hebrew literary works, provided the blue-print for the modern Jewish school, with all the duality in areas of interest, values and language that were typical of the *haskalah*.[47]

The new trend in the relationship between the individual and the community became more pronounced in the following decades and centuries. It signaled a shift in the structure of society and the interrelationships among its members, as well as between the community members and society's institutions. Different modern thinkers tackled the challenges emanating from these changes in different ways, influenced to some extent by the vantage point from which they observed them. Many twentieth century Diaspora thinkers have done it from a reality that has already interiorized the duality of a supposedly

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[46] Schweid, *Likrat tarbut yehudit modernit*, 34.

[47] Ibid., 38. For a detailed description of Wessely's educational philosophy, its background and the Jewish society's reactions to it, see ibid., 40-51.

neutral modernity and the specificity of their Jewishness. It will be interesting to see whether Schweid, born and bred in Zion, where modernity is also specifically Jewish, will tackle the issues in a different way.

As stated earlier, one of the most significant changes brought on by the advent of modernity is the decline of the social institutions of community. In the late medieval Europe, in both Jewish and non-Jewish societies, community provided individuals with an organic frame of reference within which identity was well defined, relations between individuals were personal and membership in the community was total. The passage into modernity downgraded this holistic experience and began a shift from the total, imposed community to which the individual belonged by definition, to a partial, voluntary community to which the individual can choose to belong. But, as we saw earlier in Berger's words, the choice was in some way a "curse" disguised as a "blessing:"

> The private sphere is "underinstitutionalized."[48] . . . [It] has a shortage of institutions that firmly and reliably structure human activity. . . . The most important [existing institution in the private sphere] is the family, which still derives legitimation and legal sanction from the state. There are also religious institutions, in whatever stage of privatization . . . [as well as] voluntary associations. . . . But none of them is in a position to organize the private sphere as a whole. The individual is given enormous latitude in fabricating his own particular private life—a kind of "do-it-yourself" universe. This latitude obviously has its satisfactions, but it also imposes severe burdens. The most obvious is that most individuals *do not know how* to construct a universe and therefore become furiously frustrated when they are faced with a need to do so. [49]

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[48] Term coined by Arnold Gehlen, *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter* (Hamburg: 1957), quoted in Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 186-187.

[49] Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 186-187.

4. Proliferation of Choices after Spinoza and Mendelssohn

The privatization of religion created a wide range of choices, from total assimilation with or without conversion out of Judaism, to total seclusion and rejection of the non-Jewish world. Most people, however, experienced a mixture of Jewish identity and participation in the general, non-Jewish society. When it came to the formal definition of the choices facing the Jewish community as a whole, a number of options were presented as "the best solutions." Schweid presents Spinoza and Mendelssohn as representatives of the first of three stages in the developments that led to the discussion of the crises in the self-identity of the Jew. In the second stage, Schweid describes a succession of some of the leaders and thinkers who faced those dilemmas and offers an analysis of the solutions they offered. Some of these men became the founders or precursors of religious and/or ideological movements. Their common denominator is that all of them were educated in a Jewish community whose authority had already been severed and where Jewish studies already competed with non-Jewish studies. This caused the choice facing singular individuals to become the choice of a whole social stratum of intellectuals.[50] Schweid includes as representatives of this stage Saul Ascher (1767-1822), David Friedländer (1750-1834) and Gabriel Riesser (1806-1863), each of whom reacted differently to the situation they confronted. Ascher's choice was a gradual shift to Kantian humanism; Riesser lived apart from Jewish tradition, though he did not convert, while Friedländer became one of the precursors of Reform Judaism. Also included in Schweid's representative list are Samuel Hirsch (1815-1889), who offered a non-radical Reform

[50] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut*, 24.

perspective; Zecharias Frankel (1801-1875) – the founder of "Historical Positive Judaism," the precursor of Conservative Judaism – who objected to unilateral changes by individuals as in Reform Judaism, but accepted the need for changes to respond to changing historical conditions; and Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), the founder of Neo-Orthodoxy, who vehemently objected to Reform but supported emancipation and equal rights for Jews, an attitude that inevitably also implied some adaptation of the traditional *halakhic* life to the new conditions.[51] According to Schweid, S. R. Hirsch represented the third stage in Schweid's analysis. In his book *Igrot Tsafun,*[52] S. R. Hirsch defends acculturation (*shiluv*), which conserves the Jewish heritage, and objects to assimilation (*hitbolelut*), which dilutes it. His literary form and the fact that he wrote in German are illustrative of the reality of the passage from the second to the third generation of acculturation. Schweid also offers as representatives of the third stage of his analysis Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Moses Hess (1812-1875). He equates Marx's opinions of

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[51] Ibid., 24-26, 195-198, n. 8. While Hirsch fiercely opposed the *Wissenschaft des Judentums,* as well as Zecharias Frankel's Positive-Historical school, Ellenson showed that other neo-Orthodox leaders did not share his attitude, notably Hildesheimer, Wohlgemuth, Nobel and Breuer (Hirsch's grandson). Ellenson's study on their attitude to Kantian (Historical) philosophy concluded that they were "as eager as their Liberal colleagues to articulate a philosophy of Judaism in modern philosophical terms. . . . [Kant's] emphasis upon an 'ethics of duty' gave the Orthodox a culturally respectable warrant to shift away from an evolutionary approach to Judsiam to one that was more philosophically informed. Thus, the challenge of the Historical School to the Orthodox notion of the immutability of Jewish Law and the unitary authorship of the Torah could be circumvented." David Ellenson, *Between Tradition and Culture: The Dialectics of Modern Jewish Religion and Identity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 3-4, 25-26.

[52] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 77-79. See also: Ben Usiel [S. R. Hirsch], *Igrot Tsafon: Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum* (Altona: 1836); quoted in ibid., 412, n. 54. The book consists of an imaginary correspondence between a rabbi from the second generation of emancipation and a student from the third generation, Benjamin. The student, who knew little Jewishness at home, is debating between assimilation and affirmation of his Jewish identity. The book was written in German and aimed at strengthening the piety of traditional Jews who were tempted by the emancipation. Michael Meyer recently quoted a descendent of R. S. R. Hirsch who claimed that the title, *Igrot Tsafon,* i.e., "Letters from the North," should be read *Igrot Tsafun*, i.e., "Letters of the Hidden [One]." Michael Meyer, "History of the Reform Movement," (class taught at the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati on 16 February 2000), private class notes.

Judaism to Spinoza's unequivocal rejection, without the supreme intellectual challenge posed by Spinoza. However, Schweid sees a personal-mental and social-political significance in Marx's position, implying that the Jew is required to choose himself even as a non-Jew, to confirm the negative choice through self hatred and negation of his own Jewishness. While Marx represents the complete breach with Judaism, Moses Hess represents the circumstances of the opposite choice. With his assimilated family background (but traditional upbringing), he felt distanced from Judaism without actually negating it. With his future-oriented socialist vision, he was less concerned with the incomplete assimilation of the Jews. However, once he realized that he could not escape his Jewishness, he needed to "choose himself." While Marx "chose himself" by negating his Jewishness, Hess did the same by embracing it—a choice that required him to redefine his attitude to Judaism as a system of belief and as a complete way of life.

It is curious to note that Schweid builds his "genealogy" of the Jewish dilemma in the twentieth century in a very selective way. While it is true that the problems facing the contemporary Jew can be traced more easily back to Spinoza and Mendelssohn and their followers in Central and Western Europe, it is equally true that the social, economic and cultural changes from the Middle Ages to the modern era had a strong impact also on the traditional Eastern European Jewry. Some of the later personalities on whom Schweid bases his analysis are direct spiritual descendents of this very traditional society of Eastern Europe and Russia, and in order to understand their particular choices and the ideologies they represented it would be necessary to be aware of the soil from which they grew. This is especially important since Eastern European Jewry was the numeric majority, and later their influx into the United States, Western Europe and Palestine would have a strong

impact on the character of Jewish societies there. In the West, many of them would become "westernized" within a generation or two and become the positional heirs of the Western European Jews. In the Zionist reality of Palestine and later Israel, however, those of Western and Central European origin have become marginalized after an initial period of influence as individuals. The Eastern European origin of the majority of Jewish society in Palestine and later Israel left its mark on the cultural identity of the Israeli society for decades to come.

As we saw, in Western Europe the *haskalah* paralleled the emancipation of the Jews. Jewish autonomy declined, as did the role of the community in the lives of individuals. This was an ideal background for a total change of life-style and openness to new ideas. In Eastern Europe, however, *haskalah* occurred in tandem with a stagnation of the status of Jews, a rapid rise in the number of Jews, an economic decline and the spread of flagrant anti-Semitism.[53] The Russian government's modernization drives were not accompanied by more civil rights, but did decrease the authority of the community over the individual. The option of *haskalah* was a minority phenomenon, and could not compete with the massive ultra-Orthodox movements, *hasidism* and the Lithuanian *mitnagdim*. Part of the *maskilim* supported government-imposed educational initiatives, such as Russification,[54] thus fueling the resistance to *haskalah* within the traditional society. Early *haskalah* in the East was focused on the revival of Hebrew language and

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[53] This section is based on Ehud Luz, *Makbilim nifgashim: Dat uleumiut batnu'ah hatziyonit bemizrah eiropa bereshita (1904-1882)* (Parellels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in Early Zionist Movement [1882-1904]) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1985), 23-51.

[54] Russification included rabbinic appointment by the Russian state and the establishment of government-sponsored rabbinic seminaries. Cf. A. Shoaht, *Mosad 'harabanut mita'am' be Russia,* 1971; quoted in Ibid., 24.

literature. Later *haskalah* (during the reigns of Nikolai I, 1820-1855 and Alexander II, 1855-1881) witnessed a wave of Jews who acquired Russian education for the purpose of economic ascent and rapidly distanced themselves from their Jewish roots. Most of them did not return to the Jewish areas, and it was the earlier brand of *maskilim* who continued to aspire for a reform in the life of Jews in general. They expressed their efforts in literary forms, but their choice of Hebrew limited their appeal, as most Jews knew only Yiddish. Until the end of the nineteenth century they remained a small avant-garde group. The majority of the Jewish population continued to receive traditional education. The leadership kept losing power and did not prepare for the impending changes that would result from modernity, as slowly as that was coming. When there was no choice but to recognize the rising impact that took place as a result of contacts with the larger society, the Jewish reaction was largely one of closing in and passivity. As a result, religious-theological thought in Eastern Europe came to a standstill, only two generations after the *hasidic* explosion. One exception was that of Rabbi Nachman Krocmal (*Renak*) (1783-1840), on whom, incidentally, Schweid draws extensively in several places in his writings.[55] The ultra-Orthodox leadership could only see one way to fend off such changes, and they reacted with extreme stringency to all change. Young scholars were steered towards the growing large religious academies (*yeshivot*), where discipline was strict and non-Jewish learning purged. The attempt to modernize them along the lines developed in the West by Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) and Esriel Hildesheimer (1820-1899), which combined strict adherence to *halakhic* Judaism with openness to

[55] E.g., *Likrat tarbut yehudit modernit*, 61-92.

secular studies, was utterly rejected. The only *yeshivah* that allowed some openness (Bible studies, periodicals in the vernacular, social concerns) was the Volozhin *yeshivah* under Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (*Hanatziv*[56]). This was the cradle of later Orthodox rabbis and leaders who supported Zionism, such as Samuel Mohilever[57] (1824-1898), Mordechai Eliasberg (1817-1889), Isaac Jacob Reines[58] (1835-1915) and Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook[59] (1865-1935). Schweid practically "skips over" these developments, though he uses Rabbi Kook as the prototype of the Orthodox Zionist. Another important phenomenon was the foundation of the *musar*[60] movement by Rabbi Israel Salanter[61] (1810-1883), who worked for a spiritual and moral revival rather than the academic style that most *yeshivot* promoted in order to fight *hasidism*. This movement would later have a

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[56] *Hanatziv:* Hebrew acronym for Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (1816-1893), who was at the head of the Volozhin *yeshivah* for thirty years. Against the background of opposition (epitomized in the ruling *hadash asur min hatorah,* "anything new is forbidden by the Torah," by the Hatam Sofer, quoted in *Shivat Zion* [1902],1, 7) and ambivalence among Orthodox leaders regarding the issue of collaboration with "sinners" (the secular Zionists), *Hanatziv* equated the modern return to Zion with the return at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, considered the revival of popular motivation to settle in the land of Israel as a sign of divine will, and became an early member of *Hibat Zion.* Ehud Luz, *Makbilim nifgashim,* 82.

[57] Orthodox Rabbi and one of the founders of *Hibat Zion.* Supported of the "productivization" of the Jews and the inclusion of non-religious studies ("haskala") in religious education ("yirah") and sought to bridge the gap between the *maskilim* and the Orthodox rabbis. Ibid., 37; Arthur Hertzberg, ed. *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 399-405.

[58] Prominent Orthodox leader and early supporter of Zionism, against powerful opposition of great luminaries such as the *Hafetz Hayim* (Rabbi Israel Meir Hacohen of Radin), and later founder of the *Mizrahi* religious-Zionist movement. Ibid., 299-335.

[59] A.k.a. *Haraayah,* his Hebrew acronym, often used to distinguish between him and his son, Rabbi Zvi Yhudah, who provided the spiritual inspiration for the nationalist Israeli movement *Gush Emunim* after the Six Days War. *Haraayah* served as Rabbi in Boisk, Lithuania, until his emigration to Palestine in 1904, where he served as chief rabbi of Jaffa. His support for Zionism, even though it was essentially secular, was based on a view of the Zionist movement as a forerunner of the Messiah as part of his leaning towards mysticism. In 1919 he was appointed chief rabbi of Palestine. Cf. Arthur Hertzberg, ed. *The Zionist Idea,* 417-431.

[60] Hebrew for "ethics" or "morality," the central value transmitted in the *yeshivot* of this movement.

[61] Ehud Luz, *Makbilim nifgashim,* 33-35; see also Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter ureshita shel tnu'at hamusar* (R. Israel Salanter and the Beginning of the Musar Movement) (Jerusalem: 1982); quoted in ibid., 387, n. 20.

strong influence on the *yeshivah* world in Israel. In this way, it helped to define the overall society within which Schweid worked.[62]

5. Zionism as a Response to Modern Jewish Existence

The beginning of a modern Jewish movement marked each of the three stages in Schweid's analysis: The first stage gave birth to the *haskalah* movement. The second stage resulted in the creation of Reform Judaism, with its emphasis on personal autonomy; the Neo-Orthodox reaction to Reform, with its combination of allegiance to strict *halakhah* along with practical acculturation; and Positive Historical Judaism (later Conservative Judaism) with its notion of an evolving *halakhah*. The third stage was the beginning of Zionism.

Zionism was one of the responses to the challenges of the rapid transformation of the host societies within which Jews lived all over Europe. In Russia and Eastern Europe, it was also a response to the rapid deterioration of the social and economic situation of the largest concentration of Jews in the world. In the minds of its early leaders, Zionism would offer solutions to both the individual "problem of the Jew" and the collective "problem of Judaism." As such, they hoped it would serve as a remedy to the alienation felt by the individual Jew as a result of his exposure to modernity, and, at the same time, that it would solve en-masse the problem of resettling millions of Jews by providing them with a new collective identity and a new existence.

Zionism can be divided into two main streams. On the one hand there was "Spiritual" or "Cultural Zionism," which focused on the welfare and education of

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[62] Ehud Luz, *Makbilim nifgashim*, 35.

Diaspora Jews (*hakhsharat halevavot,* "preparation of the hearts"), with a vision of the return to Zion by part of the Jewish people and the establishment there of a spiritual center (*merkaz ruhani*) for world Jewry. This stream found its ideological spokesman in Ahad Ha'am[63] (1856-1957), one of the leaders of early Zionism (*Hibat Zion*[64]) in Russia. The other stream was political Zionism, which sought to solve the problem of the Jews through settlement in Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish homeland through diplomatic means.[65] This stream became the core of the Zionist movement under the leadership of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904). Schweid makes a slightly different distinction, between "spiritual" Zionism and "pioneer" Zionism. All streams were subsequently influenced by liberalism, socialism and religion.[66]

From a movement of dreamers towards the end of the nineteenth century, Zionism became a partial success after several waves of immigration into Palestine, the British occupation of Palestine and the Balfour Declaration (1917), as well as the growth of an organized Jewish settlement in Palestine. Many of the Zionists leaders there abandoned

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[63] Pseudonym of Asher Hirsch Ginsberg, Hebrew essayist and Zionist leader who opposed political and practical Zionism for practical reasons, which sought to solve "the problem of the Jew," i.e., the economic and political suffering as individuals, and promoted solving "the problem of Judaism," i.e., the prospect of Jewish demise through assimilation, by substituting a secular "spiritual center" in Palestine. Cf. Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, ed., 430-432, n.1;[Ahad Ha'am], *Essays, letters, memoirs: Ahad Ha-am,* trans. and ed. Leon Simon, Philosophia Judaica, ed. Hugo Bergman (Oxford: East West Library, 1946).

[64] Hebrew: "Love of Zion." One of the earliest Zionist groups that initiated the Zionist movement, established in 1882 following the pogroms in south Russia in 1881 and encouraged settlement of Jews in Palestine (practical Zionism). Cf. Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, ed., 432 n. 4.

[65] For the sake of brevity, I consciously refrained from discussing the Uganda Scheme (1903-1905), which opposed religious and secular attitudes in Zionism. For a recent analysis of it, see Ehud Luz, "Pulmus Uganda, 1903-1905" (The Uganda Debate, 1903-1905), in *Makbilim nifgashim,* 336-367; see also Ibid., 437. For a short overview of Zionism, cf. ibid., 418-420; see also Hertzberg, ed. *The Zionist Idea.*

Jewish faith and religious practices, but adhered to Judaism as a national identity. They hoped that Zionism would enable the Jews to become, in their own country, "a people like all peoples." Schweid describes this attitude as "collective assimilation," and identifies Ya'akov Klatzkin (1882-1948) as its main representative. On the other end of the spectrum, Rabbi A. I. H. Kook viewed Zionism, from his unique religious angle, as evidence that the Jewish people is *not* "a people like all peoples" but a chosen people, *am segulah*. Between these two extremes, other Zionist intellectuals proposed solutions to the role of religion in the Zionist vision. For example, Ahad Ha'am, Haim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934) and Yehezkel Kaufman (1899-1963) viewed religion as a cultural phenomenon, whereas Aharon David Gordon[67] (1856-1922) and Martin Buber[68] (1878-1965) proposed a redefinition of religion beyond the dogmatic and normative expression of traditional Judaism.[69]

For a young, non-religious Jewish person born in Palestine during the British mandate, these personalities were considered great luminaries and arch-role models. Young Zionists grew up in ideological environments inspired by some of them, but most of those young people went on with their lives and left their ideologies behind. Others,

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[66] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut*, 27-29. Schweid's original contribution in his analysis is giving a distinct, unconditional Zionist approach to the issue. Borowitz, however, analyzes it as an outsider to Zionism, viewing it as one of several possible solutions and not necessarily as the best or the only viable one. See Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, 83-92.

[67] Gordon is, to this day, the symbol of the "religion of labor," which inspired generations of socialist-Zionists in Israel (including Schweid). He emigrated to Palestine in middle age and dedicated himself to agriculture and preaching his "faith," which was strongly influenced by romantic ideas of the connection of man and nature. See Hertzberg, ed. *The Zionist Idea*, 369-386; Avraham Shapira, "Individual Self and National Self in the Thought of Aaron David Gordon," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1996) 280-299.

[68] Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 211-213, 448-453, 474; Dan Avnon, *Martin Buber: The Hidden Dialogue*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

however, applied what they had learned by joining or establishing a kibbutz, working for an ideological movement or a political party, joining one of the Jewish underground organizations and, later, the Israel Defense Forces, or followed a political career. Few of them actually continued in the spiritual work, following in the footsteps of the previous generation of Jewish thinkers. One of those latter few was Eliezer Schweid. Despite his practically secular, *sabra*[70] background, Schweid experienced existential dilemmas early in his life, and became sensitive to questions of identity as an individual and as part of a collective. He became aware of the fact that similar problems face the individual Jew, whether he is in a rapidly assimilating non-Jewish environment in the Diaspora or in a nominally Jewish environment in Israel. The mixture of national, socialist and Jewish messages that informed his upbringing stirred him to define what role each of these elements played in his identity as a Jewish individual, and what role they occupied in the collective environment of which he was part. This exploration became Schweid's life work. For some of the questions, he offered interesting and unique answers. In other cases, he is still struggling with the questions. In the next chapter, we shall explore Schweid's life as the backdrop for his thought.

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[69] Schweid., *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut* , 29-30.

[70] A term used to denote a Jew born in the land of Israel, before or after the establishment of the State of Israel. The Zionist folklore glorified *sabras* as physically, morally and mentally healthy, and looked down on those born in the Diaspora, or, in Zionist vocabulary, in the *galut*, that is: exile.

CHAPTER THREE

ELIEZER SCHWEID, HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT IN HIS WORKS AND IN THOSE OF OTHERS

Anyone in Israel remotely connected to the area of Jewish education, or who is aware of secular-religious relations or involved in the debates on values and ideology in the Jewish state, is aware of the great impact Eliezer Schweid has had on thousands of students, teachers and simply, people. Unlike some of his Israeli contemporaries such as Yeshayahu Leibowitz,[1] Schweid has not appeared as much in the media, but he has been exerting his influence through diligent and relentless writing, teaching and involvement in planning and implementing innovative educational enterprises. His books have never been bestsellers, but even his early books, dating as early as 1969, still enjoy shelf space in many unspecialized bookstores. It is interesting, therefore, how little is known about Schweid outside of Israel to many people who are interested in the history of Jewish Thought, Zionist ideology or education in Israel. Many ideas circulating today in the sensitive area of secular-orthodox relations and attempts at conciliation are derived from his thought. However, most people do not even know their origin. Schweid himself is the epitome of modesty. Only in 1992, at age 63, did Schweid put his own story on paper, as the first chapter of his *To Be a Member of the Jewish People: A Personal View*.[2] Schweid is aware that such a story can never be told in its fullness, and he recognizes that autobiography can never fully capture the totality of the person.

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[1] David Hartman, "Yeshayahu Leibowitz," in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Washington D.C.: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993), 189-204.

[2] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 5-27.

Therefore, before telling his story, Schweid offers a kind of disclaimer regarding the selectiveness of his presentation:

> There is a private realm that faces the public realm, and there is a private realm behind that private realm. A person withdraws into his courtyard and looks outside. But if asked to expose his courtyard to the outside, he withdraws into a front room in his house and looks out into the courtyard, next to the street, and again, his privacy remains in the shelter that preserves the aloneness to itself.[3]

Yet, this caveat notwithstanding, Schweid still provides the reader with significant insight into his life circumstances as the breeding ground for the development of his thought.

1. Eliezer Schweid Seen from Within

a) Schweid's Family Background

Eliezer Schweid was born in Jerusalem on September 7, 1929, at a time when one of the worst clashes between Jewish and Arab inhabitants of then mandatory Palestine took place. Shortly before his birth, Arab mobs massacred the Jewish population of Hebron, and although not part of his own memories, the family stories of his pregnant mother welcoming the few relatives who survived gave his birth year a special significance for the rest of his life. As a first-grade student he himself witnessed the violent confrontations of 1936 in Jerusalem and the transformation of friendly neighbors into Jewish and Arab enemies.[4] Those were years of extreme tensions between Jews and Arabs in the mixed city under a hostile British military government. Tensions reigned also within the Jewish society, between

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[3] Ibid., 6.

[4] For a literary description of this transformation, see David Shahar, *Yom ha-rozenet* (Day of the Countess) (Tel-Aviv : Sifriyat po`alim [1976]).

the non-religious modern Jews and the ultra-religious remnants of *hayeshuv hayashan*,[5] who led lives akin to those of the poorest persons in Eastern-European Diaspora. In Schweid's memory, these tensions are intertwined with the awareness of a special meaning attached to living in Jerusalem, feeling the presence of Jewish history on every street corner, but also his experience as a personal "exile" within his own homeland:

> I knew that as a "Jerusalemite" I would never feel like a real "sabra." But I was proud to be a member of the generation that was fighting, defending itself and building its homeland. My friends and I regarded ourselves as the actual "last generation of submission and first generation of redemption."[6]

Schweid's youth and young adulthood preceded the State of Israel and were influenced by historical events: violent Jewish-Arab clashes, the rise of Nazi Germany, the British White Paper curbing Jewish immigration into Palestine, World War II, the echo of the Holocaust, illegal immigration and the struggle against the British mandatory authorities for the right of Jews to settle in Palestine. Schweid took an active part in this struggle as a member of the Hagana underground in 1947-1948, and he still regards this period as the major and most difficult part of his initiation into adulthood. However, Schweid feels that only after the establishment of the State of Israel did he assume full responsibility as an adult, "in the social-communal sense, as a kibutz member, in the personal-familial sense and in the public-national sense."[7] In this quote, Schweid explicitly defines the three foci that were to capture his attention as a thinker – the individual, the communal and the national. He explains:

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[5] Hebrew: "The Old Settlement," denoting the traditional Jews who have lived for generations in Palestine (Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias and Safed), subsidized by Diaspora Jews.

[6] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 7

[7] Ibid., 8.

> From the early years of my youth, I was expected to be aware of, and have a sense of duty to, the public reality around me and to its historical processes. I willfully and enthusiastically responded to this expectation, and I always found the frameworks within which I could make my contribution. This directly influenced the range of subjects with which I chose to contend—the shaping of my opinions, my feelings, decisions that largely traced my life, and naturally—my personality.[8]

Eliezer Schweid's personality and the areas he later chose as the center of his life work actually have their roots in his home environment. He grew up in a non-religious home, one marked by a mixture of non-observant Jewish literacy, national pride and socialist convictions. Schweid uses the term *hofshi* (literally, "free") to describe his home, a term used at the time as the antonym of *dati* (religious), much as today the term *hiloni* (secular) is employed. The choice of this term, according to Schweid, reflected a proud self-awareness of being non-observant without forgoing the Jewish foundation of one's identity and the freedom to partake in Jewish experiences. It reflected the freedom to choose Judaism without its secularist rejection.

Schweid describes the national message he received at home as "a strong, unequivocal emotional message of *ahavat yisrael*,[9] denoting loyalty, pride in the spiritual and moral uniqueness of the Jewish people, the pain of the exile and the yearning for redemption." He remembers what he describes as "an explicit religious atmosphere" in his childhood home, expressed through stories, songs, and the use of Yiddish, all of which created "a double, bi-lingual connection to the Jewish past on the one hand, and to the present of Land of Israel on the other," with no contradiction, but rather "a continuity of generations and an historical direction."[10] Obviously, his use of the term "religious" here

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Literally: "love of Israel," denoting loyalty of a Jew to other Jews and to Jewish values.

[10] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 9

does not denote the primarily *halakhic* sense of the term *dati*,[11] but rather a cultural-spiritual one.

This lack of contradiction allowed Schweid to obtain a strong sense of identity and a feeling of being part of something greater than himself, to which he felt committed and of which he was proud. Although his parents did not transmit either a faith in God or a legacy of *halakhic* life to their children, they did inspire in them "an appreciation for the people whose faith in God and loyalty to his commandments was the spirit that revived it and traced its way." This gave him a strong emotional connection to tradition, and to faith as part of tradition: "Actually, in my youth and young adulthood, I never thought of myself as a believer in the religious sense. But in reality I did believe—with faith as a spiritual-moral strength. This is how I identified with it. In due time I understood that the belief in the value of faith is its hidden root."[12] The family kept kosher and followed the Jewish holidays as a tribute to a national-cultural heritage. For example, they viewed attendance at the opening and closing services of Yom Kippur (*kol nidrei* and *neilah*) as a response to a national rallying call, which, if ignored, was equivalent to self-excommunication. Schweid says that his home enriched his Jewish identity by expecting from him, and providing him with the means for, proficiency in the Hebrew Bible, literature and poetry. Schweid acquired a deep emotional identification with Haim Nahman Bialik, in spite of the extreme differences in their lives and times. This led him in time to other writers and thinkers of similar background, such as Ahad Ha'am and Aharon David Gordon.[13]

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[11] The word *dati* comes from *dat* or "law;" literally: a person who adheres to the Law, the Torah.

[12] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 9

[13] Ibid., 10.

Another aspect of Schweid's formative years was his exposure to a special type of socialism in his parents' home. His mother's socialism was emotional; she objected to the dogmatism of the Marxist party[14] she had joined, and felt attached to her Jewish identity. His father had a more structured notion of socialism, influenced by Gustav Landauer,[15] whom he had known as a young man. His father's influence introduced him to Gordon's writings, where he found "the same combination of non-class-oriented, non-Marxist social-popular-morality and a deep identification with Judaism through the unique reality of the Jewish people" he had imbibed in his parents' home.[16]

Schweid's identity was also formed through out-of-home experiences, namely school and youth movement. He went to both primary and secondary schools affiliated with the Labor movement,[17] and he was active in youth movements with a similar ideology.[18] His parents supported his activism and his resolution to become a kibutz member,[19] and he testifies to a strong correlation between the ideological messages received at home and those received in his out-of-home environment. However, he was also strongly impacted by the contrast between the poverty in his parents' home and the better-off homes of his peers, and

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[14] Poalei tzion smol

[15] Gustav Landauer (1870-1919) was a Jewish-German intellectual who was active in the extreme left wing of German politics (became minister of the Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919 and was murdered soon after). His Jewish awareness was influence by Buber and reflected a mixture of estrangement from organized and ritual religion, dissatisfaction with merely ethnic religion, and search for Jewish spiritual sensibility. Cf. P. Mendes-Flohr and J. Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 240-241.

[16] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 11.

[17] In Hebrew the term is *zerem ha'ovdim*, literally "the workers' stream," denoting the part of the Jewish population in Palestine that identified with socialistic ideologies intertwined with civic religion and main-stream nationalism, as opposed to hard-core nationalists on the secular side ("revisionists") and ultra-Orthodox non-Zionists or anti-Zionists on the religious side. A small group of religious Zionists generally collaborated with the socialist-Zionist majority.

[18] *Mahanot ha'olim* and later *Hatnu'ah hameuhedet*.

the humiliation he felt by always having to ask for special considerations when it came to activities that required monetary participation. Due to his talents and devotion, this did not stand in his way in becoming part of the leadership. On the level of personal relations, however, he felt an invisible wall between himself and others, although he did not feel they discriminated against him.

c) Early Ideological Development

Schweid regards his childhood poverty as a prolonged trauma that had a strong influence on his worldview. He testifies to the existence of a "Marxist motif that I internalized on the background of my personal experience and which is, to this day, part of my worldview, although I regard myself as a disciple of A. D. Gordon and I am far from [Marxist]'materialism.'" Precisely because of his lack of financial resources he felt the need to justify his status among his peers through his cultural contribution to the group.[20] About its impact on his ideology, he says:

> Ideologically, this feeling caused me to identify with the group and its ideological values, with what the group ought to be by its own definition. But at the same time, [it created in me] a judgmental-independence and an acute critical attitude, especially inwards, towards the society with which I identified. It was as if I was at the same time within it and beyond it, and my criticism focused on the gaps that showed between the principles and values that were hailed at school and in the youth movement—with which I identified and through which I belonged—and the level of their actualization in practice (through which I was estranged).[21]

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[19] The ideal of youth movement members at the time was *kibutz*, or *hagshamah*, ("realization" [of the pioneering Zionism's ideals]). This meant participating in the creation of new cooperative agricultural settlements, kibutzim, usually after a period of *hakhsharah*, or "preparation", in a veteran kibutz, and *mahlakah* ("platoon"), the time devoted to military training and combat duties.

[20] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 12.

[21] Ibid., 12-13.

The great divide between the young Eliezer Schweid and his social environment, school and youth movement was neither principally financial nor ideological. Rather, it was his attitude to Jewish identity that distinguished him.

> The message of school, and more so of the youth movement, included a different understanding than my parents' of the Jewish people and also of socialism. The socialist attitude of *mahanot ha'olim* . . . tended to Marxism . . . but the tension focused on the affinity to the Jewish people and its heritage. From that aspect, the school's and (especially) youth movement's message had a strong element of *shlilat hagolah*[22] ["Diaspora Rejection"] in the Berdichevsky-Brenner style. In their depiction of the Jewish people they [school and youth movement] underscored the picture emerging from the stories of Mendele Mocher Sfarim, Y. H. Brenner, Berdichevsky, [the] Bialik of "In the City of Death" and [the] Tchernichovsky of "My Sword, Where is my Sword!" This was a Diaspora Rejection that went well beyond the understanding that the exile is the disaster and distress of the Jewish people. [It went] well beyond the feeling of empathy and compassion with the suffering people, aspiring to be redeemed of its exile. Diaspora Rejection of the kind I was taught at school and in the youth movement put the blame for being exiled and remaining in exile on the Jewish people itself. It marked the whole creation of the exilic period with the stamp of degenerated exilism.[23] It put on the [Jewish] people the blame for its disaster and depicted the reality that was supposed to come about in the Land of Israel as an absolute antonym to the "exilic existence." The new Jewish existence would draw exclusively on the ancient [Jewish] heritage: the heritage of the time during which the [Jewish] people lived in its own country. That is to say, the heritage of the Biblical and Hasmonean periods. All the other parts of the Jewish heritage, maybe with the exception of the active "messianic movements," were shown in a negative light. It goes without saying that the late religious-Jewish tradition was rejected with the totality of its contents as clearly "exilic." What they tried to reconstruct as a Hebrew culture, was an "earthy" synthesis (agricultural and pertaining to the Land of Israel) of the most ancient and the most modern.
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> My Jewish and Zionist worldview crystallized out of an acute conflict. . . . The Brenner-style Diaspora Rejection, with its great existential power and speaking in the name of "authenticity" and the radicalism of youth, attracted me. . . . But these were not compatible with the love of the Jewish people and its heritage that I internalized at my

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[22] *Shlilat hagola* literally means "negation of the exile," but actually denotes the prevalent attitude of rejecting the diasporic option of Jewish integration in other countries, claiming that the only place for Jews is in the Land of Israel, the Zionist political and cultural option. Henceforth I'll use "Diaspora Rejection."

[23] Hebrew, *galutiut*, a word made up from *galut*, exile, and the suffix *–iut*, equivalent to "*–ism*."

> parents' home. Nor were they compatible with the need I felt in hindsight, to find in the Jewish heritage within which I was educated, the contents that would feed my worldview and my lifestyle. I felt that there was something distorted from the outset, also from a moral standpoint, in the Brennerian Diaspora Rejection that some of the [youth movement] instructors tried to impart to us with a zeal that reflected a political narrow-mindedness. I, however, already had the sufficiently alert critical senses to feel it. I rebelled and objected.[24]

This conflict of conscience was partially resolved after the merger of Schweid's youth movement, *mahanot ha'olim*— which was affiliated with the Socialist-Zionist and anti-Diasporic *hakibutz hameuhad* settlement movement—with the anti-Marxist *gordonia* youth movement, inspired by Gordon, who objected to Diaspora Rejection. He was able now to better defend his views on Judaism and Socialism and reach leadership positions in the movement, and he began to express his opinions in educational programs. He continued doing so throughout the next three stages of his life: *hakhsharah*, *mahlakah* and *hagshamah*.[25] According to his description, his commitment to "culture" in a climate that glorified the hardy and mocked the refined was at the most tolerated by his peers. This is how he describes the background of the next transition that would mark his life:

> I cannot say that [they] agreed with my opinions, but they understood that these are opinions that are suitable for a *tarbutnik*.[26] A person must identify with his job, and those opinions seemed to be a legitimate element of [my] commitment to the job. Since everybody agreed that *hakhsharah*, *mahlakah* and *kibutz* need cultural activities (a bit of learning, a bit of extra-curricular activities, a bit of holidays and theme parties), and everybody realized that for all this one needs a "fanatic for one thing,"[27] nothing was easier than charging him who requires culture to carry out the mission in his own way: He would "do culture" as he pleases; the

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[24] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 13-14.

[25] Cf. supra, note 19.

[26] Term created by adding the Russian suffix *–nik* (as in *Refusenik*), creating an adjective from a noun, to the Hebrew word *tarbut*, culture; hence: "the culture officer" in charge of providing the soldiers with entertainment and political education.

[27] *Meshuga' ledavar [ehad]*, terms denoting a person who is devoted to a particular cause and who promotes it in every way and everywhere he or she can; usually used in a positive connotation.

> members would benefit by having someone to bail them out, even if his opinions differ from theirs. Thus they let me do my thing (without much participation). Naturally, the result was mutual frustration, because the group lacked both the knowledge and the ideological and emotional motivation to participate in the message I wanted to convey in my activity, and I lacked the positive feedback. It seems that this frustration is what ultimately put me on the track of Jewish studies at the [Hebrew] University, and led me, eventually, to leave the kibutz.[28]

c) From Pioneer to Intellectual

In the fall of 1952, Eliezer Schweid began his undergraduate studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. For a kibutz member to go to school required formal permission from the kibutz general assembly, and assumed the member's intention to come back, an intention Schweid testifies that he had. However, life had other plans. He went back to his native Jerusalem and his studies became the central element of his life, his Jewish identity and his vocation, while the contacts with the kibutz—barely twenty miles away—weakened. In spite of strong internal and external pressures (at that time, leaving a kibutz amounted to treason in the eyes of the other members and like-minded people in the city), he understood within two to three years that there were other ways to do things. In Eliezer Schweid's case, the focus shifted from the kibutz and the social-communal ideology of the kibutz movement, to Jewish identity, culture and education:

> The social issue remained important to me. What I received from A. D. Gordon's teachings regarding the question of the relationship between nation and society—both regarding commitment to social justice as the foundation of the existence of the nation, and regarding the organic infrastructure of the community as the foundation of Jewish lifestyle—was included as a significant element in my understanding of Judaism. Furthermore, the social standpoint continued to be my principal angle of examination in the analysis of processes of culture and spirit, including

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[28] Schweid *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 15.

> faith and religion. But the general context was not any more that of the "socialist Zionism" but that of "Judaism and Zionism."[29]

Schweid identifies this as the beginning of the formative stage of his worldview. He describes this process as resting on two parallel and complementary foundations: his academic pursuit and intellectual contribution on the one hand, and his experience as a parent on the other. One central element in his development derived from his life-long involvement with education, starting as a schoolteacher in his student years. Later he was centrally involved in teacher education, including the Kerem institute in Jerusalem, where Schweid was a founding member.

d) Schweid's Early Writings

Eliezer Schweid arrived at the Hebrew University as a published essayist and literary critic.[30] His writings had already traced the issues that troubled him, and especially the growing alienation of Israeli youth from their Jewish roots. He predicted early on that in the long run, the question of the Jewish identity of the Israeli society and culture would be the most difficult challenge that would decide the future of the state.[31] These anxieties were fully expressed in the article "Between Fathers and Sons,"[32] published in 1951 and followed in 1953 by a programmatic article on Jewish education in public schools[33] and Schweid's involvement in founding a new intellectual publication, *Mevo 'ot*, with an educational-cultural

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[29] Ibid., 17.

[30] Published principally in the movement's periodical *Shdemot*, the movement's educational department publications, the kibutz movement's periodicals *Nivim* and *Niv hakvutzah* as well as essays and literary criticism in the national literary magazine *Molad* and the political publication *Hapo 'el hatza 'ir*.

[31] His prediction seems to have been accurate, in light of current affairs in Israel.

[32] Schweid, "Bein avot levanim" (Between Fathers and Sons). In *Divrei siyah bet: Hano 'ar beyisrael* (Spoken Words II: The Youth in Israel), ed. Z. Goldberg and Y. Erez., 121-137. Tel-Aviv: Mapai, 1951.

[33] Eliezer Schweid, "Limudei yahadut bevatei hasefer" (Jewish Studies in [Public] Schools), *Hapo 'el hatza 'ir* 24, no. 33-34, (17 May, 1953).

agenda focused on Jewish and Israeli issues. Schweid continued and even increased his publication activity during his studies. When it came to choosing his major, he did not make the natural choice for him, as a published literary critic, to specialize in Hebrew literature. Rather, he recognized a deficiency in his Jewish literacy and chose to deepen his understanding of Judaism by studying its traditional sources, and he elected to do so in an academic setting. His main areas of study were Jewish history, Talmud and Jewish philosophy. With hindsight, Schweid says, his uninterrupted involvement in literary criticism had an influence on his learning style, and also led him to discover that contemporary literature was directly linked to the continuum of Jewish creation throughout history. In his words:

> This decision further led me to enhance my writing literary criticism to the level and scope of professional writing. I saw in it a complement, rather than a contradiction, to my interest in Jewish thought, whether past or present. I saw in literature a direct and profound existential expression of contemporary Israeli Jewish thought (and I believe it is so now, too). Therefore I felt that through the ongoing literary criticism, I was feeling the pulse of intellectual life and experience in my environment and in my time. Thus, I was directly fashioning my worldview in my literary articles as well as in my essays on society, culture and education.[34]

e) Schweid's Academic Background

Schweid began his academic career with the study of ancient and medieval Jewish thought. His interests leaned more towards modern Jewish thought, but at the time, the Hebrew University's curriculum in this area did not extend beyond Spinoza. Later, Schweid became its first professor of modern Jewish thought. During his student time, he remembers,

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[34] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 19.

Hebrew University professed a *wissenschaftlich*[35] ethos—it aspired to embody objective approaches and textual analysis and denigrated "subjective interpretations." Schweid says that as a student he already had a strong sense of the value of the particularistic (hence, subjective) aspects of the Jewish sources, and he did not agree with the ideology that rejected them. Nonetheless, he consciously chose not to opt for the traditional form of studying the sources in yeshivot, but entered the alienating academic arena with a sense of mission:

> [The ideology of the Hebrew University] represented the fundamental conception of the secular culture within which I lived and created, and to which I had to continue my contribution. Therefore, despite my difficulty [with a purely] academic [approach to Jewish] learning, I had to confront it, no matter how or where, while [realizing that it was] a serious internal problem in the secular culture [and not in me]. This was my challenge . . . and the challenge was hard and embarrassing. I was only able to cope with it with a [combination of] criticism and a change of course, and this (fertile) tension did, and still does, follow me in my path.[36]

Schweid regards Yitzhak Baer, Gershom Scholem and Shlomo Pines as his formative teachers, and the latter as his mentor. Although Pines was the most identified with the objective-scientific-critical approach, he encouraged Schweid to seek his own way of learning, researching and understanding. Schweid says that his struggle with Pines' approach yielded a number of publications,[37] and taught him how to view his own, as well as others' positions, both from within and from without. His experience with Baer and Scholem,

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[35] From the term *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the critical approach adopted by modernistic scholars to the study of traditional Jewish texts. cf. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 75-77.

[36] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 19-20. The original Hebrew has a mixture of past and present tenses in describing a situation in the past. For the sake of clarity, the translation is in the past tense only. The passage is quite obscure, hence the need for fill-in words in English.

[37] E.g., "Haim kayemet masoret 'atzmait shel filosophia yehudit?" (Is There an Independent Tradition of Jewish Philosophy?], in *Hauniversita* (1967); *Ta'am vehakashah: Pirkei 'iyun besifrut hamahshvah hayehudit bimei habeinayim* (Reason and Deduction: Studies in the Medieval Jewish Thought Literature) (Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1971), Introduction; and "Hashpa'at ha Rambam bahagut hayehudit shel hameah ha'esrim" (Maimonides' Influence on Twentieth Century Jewish Thought), in *Sefer hayovel li Shlomo Pines bimlot lo shmonim shanah* (Jubilee Book for Shlomo Pines on His Eightieth Birthday), Mehkerei Yerushalaim bemahshever yisrael (Jerusalem Research in Jewish Thought) 9, no. 2 (1990), 324-393.

however, was more difficult. Schweid describes them as scholars who purported to advance strict objective scientific approaches to their materials. However, they actually held strong personal (hence, subjective) convictions, which they sought to impose on their students. This, Schweid believes, limited his ability to communicate with them, but not their influence on him. Scholem modeled a relentless attempt to fully understand the *internal* context and logic of the philosophies he taught. Baer, on the other hand, coached him in the presentation of philosophies within their *historical* context.

f) The Role of Parenting in Schweid's Worldview

Schweid tells how he and his wife, Sabina, taught their children Jewish texts from an early age, and how, eventually, the teaching became reciprocal:

> What happened . . . was unexpected and very surprising: my children enabled me to receive the kind of primary faith-message that a person ought to receive from his own parents in his childhood. I experienced the things with them in a way that allowed me to see them as a believer. Now I understood that my parents, who transmitted to me very much, deprived me of something essential: the keys to the inner secret of faith, which is derived from a primal observation, but one that is guided by a teaching and directing environment. Could I transmit to my children keys that I had never received? To my surprise, it turned out that I could. I held on to their childlike ability to receive, and thus received the ability to give. And, lo and behold: what I gave them turned around and was received in me. It seemed as if, in a certain sense, I have re-lived with them, as an adult, my childhood. As an adult, that is, in a reflective observation of them, and of me in their eyes.[38]

This touching description is the most personal and authentic expression of Schweid as an individual focusing on his individual person and needs, rather than his role in the collective, that he provides. As we shall show later, Schweid often empathizes with the "handicap" people who have not received a deep Jewish heritage from their parents often

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[38] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 24-27

feel. His earlier analysis was that they have little hope of overcoming this "handicap," but if they want to do so, their path of return must begin with identifying with the collective before they, hopefully, experience faith.[39] Here, however, eighteen years after *Judaism and the Solitary Jew*, Schweid finally expresses himself as an individual within the smallest unit of the collective, the family. Within it he seems to have learned that there is individual life beyond the collective reality that he lived. His terminology shows, however, that his thought pattern is still strongly linked to the collective as a spiritual construct he names "heritage," which he contrasts with the academic learning:

> One could almost say that through performing with them the commandment of parenting in a way that my parents had never done with me, I also became a father to myself. I re-created my heritage. Thus I discovered something that no academic learning would have revealed to me, and which is maybe one of the secrets of the existence and renewal of the religious[40] heritage in every generation: the ability to create anew not only the current creation that draws on the heritage, but also the heritage on which the current creation draws. In the thought of believers, the separation between past and present is avoided. The entire past heritage becomes again a living truth, a truth that feeds the present while being updated within it. This is the deep secret of *midrash*: it creates its discovery in the depth of the sources and later births it from within them. This secret was developed spontaneously between my children and me. Only after we retrospectively created a *midrash*, I understood the secret of its creation.[41]

Schweid, however, was not only a thinker, but also a doer. Once he realized that his "handicap" originated within his parents' home and that he possessed the opportunity to overcome it within his own family, he soon translated this realization into a plan of action and began to implement it. While being spiritually motivated, Schweid remained realistically grounded. He knew what he wanted, but he knew just as well what he did not want. He did

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[39] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut*, 31-32

[40] Hebrew: *toranit* ("Toraitic"), pertaining to the Torah. Used in Israel as synonym to "religious."

[41] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 24-27

not want to disconnect from his Western values and his social contact with people who did not share his journey:

> While studying with my children it became clear to me, as stated, that I had not received from my parents certain contents without which I would be unable to transmit to my children even what my parents had transmitted to me. These included first of all anything that pertains to the evolvement of faith from the aspects of feeling and awareness, but they continue to the essence: its application in a [Jewish] way of life.[42] I understood that with regard to a [Jewish] way of life, the transmission requires a greater fullness than the one I had received in my parents' home. It behooved me to create a living environment within which it would be possible to demonstrate with sufficient "doing" whatever was being said and learned. The implication was that I had to create anew also the tradition that we were going to apply together: the Sabbaths, the festivals and the holidays, and furthermore, the whole family atmosphere. Here my wife was my support. Not only she agreed with me and helped me, but also she was the one who had the wisdom of translating abstract ideas into deeds and ways of life. Slowly and gradually we created our home tradition that stretched like one of the tributaries of the big and wide river of tradition, albeit in a unique version that suited us. We searched for a "middle way" that would connect us to the renewing ancient tradition of our people but would not estrange us from the broad society of our people, within which there are religious and non-religious, believers and non-believers, nor from their varied culture which is open to the expanse of today's Western civilization. For this purpose we created a number of home customs: customs of the eve of the Sabbath and Kabbalat Shabbat, Passover Seder, the Feast of Shavuot and the Feast of Sukkot, home customs of Purim and Hanukkah, as well as customs of birthdays and other festive and painful family occasions, each in its time. Thus, a personal world crystallized, inspired by a growing worldview which, growing and branching out, became an observation that includes a world and becomes wider and deeper than it.[43]

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[42] Hebrew term: *orah hayim.* Traditionally this term denotes the Jew's religious daily duties from the time one wakes up in the morning until one retires to bed. It is the title of one of the four parts of Joseph Karo's code of Jewish Law *Shulhan Arukh*, published 1555, the 697 chapters of which cover, in addition to daily practices, also the laws of the Sabbath, Jewish festivals and prayers. In Schweid's usage, it can be translated as "way of life" or "lifestyle."

[43] Schweid, *Lihyot ben ha'am hayehudi*, 25.

g) Schweid's View of His Work

Schweid himself attended a symposium in Jerusalem in August 1978, sponsored by the theological periodical *Immanuel* that focused on his thought.[44] This occasion provided Schweid with an opportunity to articulate his ideas in response to the perspectives expressed in his colleagues' understandings.

In response to a discussion on the relationship between his thought and that of his Zionist predecessors, Schweid four times asserted that he was "continuing a certain line" in Jewish and Zionist thought. In reflecting on his own intellectual lineage, he stated:

> The best thinkers were a minority and exerted little influence. I feel that I am continuing this great minority whose thought, for reasons I try to understand, did not shape education in this country. . . . Those people followed a certain distinctive tradition that transmitted many fruitful ideas, although did not turn out to be effective. The political situation, the cultural situation was not ready to accept their ideas.[45]

While his early Zionist predecessors came from the past and looked into the future, Schweid said he already belonged to a generation that had to shape its vision while tackling the problem of existence in the present. In his view, however:

> The immediate Israeli problem is that the future is now, and there is no time to postpone the confrontation with the problem of the meaning of being Jews, of having a Jewish state, of having a Jewish culture, for tomorrow. . . . We have to reorient ourselves both towards the past and towards the future, trying to redress the mistakes of the past, reconnect what our predecessors have severed and dissected, willingly or not willingly. We cannot resurrect the past, yet we have no choice but to find a way to connect ourselves again with the sources which we consider important enough to transmit to the coming generation.[46]

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[44] "The Thought of Eliezer Schweid: A Symposium," *Immanuel* 9 (Winter 1979): 87-102.

[45] Ibid., 93.

[46] Ibid. 94.

2. Eliezer Schweid: His Commentators and Critics

As prolific as Eliezer Schweid himself has been, and still is, it is surprising how little has been written about him. While Jonathan Cohen of the Hebrew University has written a major review essay on his work in the prestigious *Religious Studies Review,*[47] Michael Oppenheim remains the foremost scholar of his work.[48] In his article on Schweid in Steven T. Katz's *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century,*[49] Oppenheim provides an overview of Schweid's thought.

At the outset, Oppenheim points to two aspects that characterize the uniqueness of Schweid. First, Schweid represents the first generation of native Israeli philosophers who responded to the new reality of Israeli independence. Secondly, Schweid sees his vocation both as a philosopher and an educator, and philosophy as inseparable from its application in the real world. Not unlike one of his spiritual predecessors, Ahad Ha'am, Schweid spent more time and energy writing essays on current affairs and articles of public concern than on developing complete philosophical theories. "Schweid seems to be trying to bring together his commitment to the Jewish heritage with the day to day issues of contemporary Israeli society."[50] In that respect, part of his intellectual production can be regarded more as ideological writings than as pure philosophy. He has always been concerned with the

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[47] Jonathan Cohen, "Common Ground for Cultural Renewal: Eliezer Schweid and The Uses of Jewish Thought," Review of *Democracy and Halakhah* and *Wrestling Until Dark,* by Eliezer Schweid. *Religious Studies Review* 23, no. 2 (1997): 127-134.

[48] "Eliezer Schweid: A Philosophy of Return," *Judaism* 137 (Winter 1986), 66-77; "Paths of Return: The Concept of Community in the Thought of F. Rosenzweig and E. Schweid," in *Community and the Individual Jew: Essays in Honor of Lavy M. Becker,* R. S. Aigen and G. D. Hundert, ed. (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, 1986); "The Relevance of Rosenzweig in the Eyes of his Israeli Critics," *Modern Judaism* 7 (May 1987), 193-206; "Eliezer Schweid," in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993), 301-324.

[49] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 301-302.

[50] From the opening remarks by Dr. Pinhas Peli in Symposium, 87.

timeliness of his message. However, there are themes that can be traced in many of his writings and which, viewed together, are the building blocks of his *weltanschauung*.

The wide scope of Schweid's thought can be analyzed in different ways. Shalom Rosenberg, one of Schweid's students and disciples, identifies four motifs in Schweid's work: (1) Culture as the foundation of moral positions, responding to the existential dilemma of modern man; (2) The relationship between [secular] culture and religion;[51] (3) An approach to *halakhah* as universally binding, but dynamic; and (4) Unequivocal Zionism.[52] A different analysis, by Michael Oppenheim, offers a good summary of the principles underlying Schweid's thought. He identifies three clusters of themes recurring in Schweid's work, which are reflected in three sub-headings in his article: (1) The path of return; (2) The life of faith; and (3) Zionism and the Jewish state today.[53] We shall use Oppenheim's structure for the purpose of this chapter.

a) The Path of Return

The idea of the "The Path of Return" resulted from Schweid's analysis of the emergence of a secular Jewish culture following several centuries of passage from the medieval to the modern world, resulting in the alienation of individuals from their identity as Jews.[54] Schweid claims that every individual solution requires a communal foundation and a sense of responsibility by the individual for the whole Jewish people. Further, a complete return is only possible in the State of Israel. This perspective places Schweid, even in his

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[51] Rosenberg said that Schweid equated culture with religion, but Schweid himself objected to the attribution to him of the equation. Schweid explained that he wanted to reestablish the relationship between the concepts of secular culture and religion. Cf. Symposium, 94.

[52] Ibid., 90-92.

[53] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 304, 309, 311.

[54] David H. Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer*, 2-12.

treatment of issues pertaining to the individual, in a strictly Zionistic, that is, communal and particularistic framework. It also differentiates him from some of the thinkers who influenced him, according to his own account, such as Franz Rosenzweig. Like Rosenzweig, Schweid also sought systematically to explore the nature of the alienation from Judaism that many modern individuals experience and to sketch a path of return.[55] While this message is conveyed to Jews as individuals, the path of return begins with accepting oneself as a member of the family and people from which one was born.[56] The return must take place with full understanding of the nature of the general, secular world, which is based on the presumption that humans have the right and the power to decide between truth and falsity. Schweid, however, does not require the rejection of the "pre-return identity" as a condition for the return.[57]

There is much common ground between the non-Zionist German-Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig and the vehemently Zionist Eliezer Schweid.[58] Both were spiritual seekers from a young age, having discovered their connection to their Jewish heritage as adults. Both of them focused much attention on the individual Jew who, like themselves at an earlier stage in their lives, was disconnected from his heritage and community, and both wanted to make a "return." Both linked the need for authentic life with the purpose of achieving a relationship to one's heritage, and both found this heritage in the religious aspect of Judaism. They envisioned a life centered on one's Jewish identity and sought individual and communal religious renewal as their core. Both considered the need of a community as indispensable

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[55] Oppenheim describes Schweid's *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut* as "a 'hygiene of return'–using Franz Rosenzweig's word about his major work." Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 302.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 305-306.

[58] Idem, "The Relevance of Rosenzweig in the Eyes of His Israeli Critics," 193-206.

and a detached return as impossible. However, they had different visions of what this community of return meant. For Rosenzweig, the return was primarily individual and its natural venue was as part of a minority Jewish community in the Diaspora. Schweid's idea of return was inherently linked to the collective and could only be achieved in a Jewish national setting, the Jewish community in Israel.[59] For Schweid, Rosenzweig's individual return amounted to having "removed the Jewish people from the arena of human history."[60]

Schweid is clearly situated within the conceptual world of existentialism, as is reflected in a sampling of the problems he addresses – alienation, meaninglessness, lack of direction, contradictions and paradoxes, and the weight of freedom. However, his approach is unique in his substitution of the question, "Who am I?" with "Where do I come from?"[61] This differentiates him from many existentialists who focus on the *universal* nature of the existential dilemma, while his reinterpretation of the ontological question requires a *particular* answer. For authenticity and meaning, the individual needs a life of commitment to the particular groups of his family, community and people, who are linked to each other through a shared past—in his case, the Jewish tradition. Like the prophets of biblical Israel, Schweid condemns attempts by Jews to become "like all the nations,"[62] in which he sees a restatement of, and not an escape from, modern alienation.

In treating the past, Schweid follows in the footsteps of earlier and contemporary Jewish thinkers such as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Emil Fackenheim. They realized that the present could not be made relevant

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[59] Idem, "Paths of Return: The Concept of Community in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig and Eliezer Schweid," 172.

[60] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 317-318.

[61] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut*, 32.

[62] Heb.: *kekhol hagoyim. Cf.* Deut. 17:14; I Sam. 8:5, 20; Ezek. 25:8; I Kings 14:24; II Chron. 36:14 .

through a dogmatic clinging to rigid concepts of the Torah. Their existentialist response was through a phenomenology of Jewish belief described in terms of a covenant, historical myths and an evolving *halakhah*. Schweid's demarche is similar, with the intention to provide access for Jews without *halakhic* background. Michael Oppenheim puts it thus: "Rosenzweig and Schweid, in particular, have given individuals the confidence that the will to return can be translated into a definite path of action,"[63] by showing that the Jewish experience transcends history and that the *halakhah* provides options for concrete responses to the divine call.

One of the aspects by which Schweid differs from his contemporaries is in stating that twentieth-century Jewish thought is characterized by "the belief in *Torah* as an authority dictating a community way-of-life."[64] This is reminiscent of Eugene Borowitz's idea of a "covenantal community" and his position that "Jewish existence is not merely personal but communal and even public."[65] The predominantly autonomist Borowitz, however, rejects the priority of the *halakhic* authority over the individual—and hence over the collective[66]—which Schweid requires, in principle.[67] Oppenheim concludes:

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[63] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 319.

[64] Eliezer Schweid, *Hamistika bayahadut lefi Gershom Shalom* (Mysticism and Judaism According to Gershom G. Scholem), Mehkerei yerushalayim bemahshevet yisrael (Jerusalem Research Papers in Jewish Thought), app. II (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 84; English edition, *Judaism and Mysticism According to Gershom Scholem: A Critical Analysis and Programmatic Discussion*, trans. David A. Weiner (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 159; quoted in ibid., 320, n. 47.

[65] Eugene Borowitz, "The Autonomous Jewish Self and the Commanding Community," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 44; quoted in ibid., 25.

[66] Once his position of the imperative communal and public dimension of Jewish existence is applied.

[67] As we shall see later, Schweid expects an authentic Jew to accept that the whole *halakhic* tradition applies to him, even if he follows it only partially. See "Partial Fulfillment of the Commandments," in Eliezer Schweid, *Ad Mashber: Yahadut vetziyonut bimdinah yehudit* ([Israel] at the Crossroad: Judaism and Zionism in a Jewish State) (Jerusalem: Zak, 1969), 83-90, and "What is Faith?" and "The Jewish Vision of Zionism," both in Eliezer Schweid, *Emunat am yisrael vetarbuto* (The Faith and Culture of the Jewish People) (Jerusalem: Zak, 1976), 66-67, 190.

> No other Jewish philosopher in the modern period has directed his work into the concrete present life of Jewish communities in the manner of Schweid. Even the masterful educational writings of Rosenzweig do not match the extensive and innovative insights of Schweid, nor have any of these thinkers wrestled as seriously with the issue of helping a community find a consensus concerning fundamental Jewish patterns of life.[68]

Shalom Rosenberg describes his own understanding of the process that led Schweid from the universal existentialist dilemmas to linking culture with religion:

> Isn't it amazing that our generation cannot find a foundation for its moral positions? It is because a foundation for moral positions cannot be found in scientific thought and research. What do we do then? The solution offered by Eli Schweid is that the ideas on which moral positions are founded are in something called culture, culture as an independent source for our thinking and for doing. Now if you accept culture, it will take you out of isolation, by which we mean the impossibility of obtaining answers to your problems. Furthermore, if you accept culture, you must accept with it some kind of transcendental presupposition, because according to Schweid, the only basis for culture—and that is indeed a strange and perhaps faulty affirmation in our age—is [to accept] culture as religion. . . . This, to Schweid, is something that cannot be disputed; we must thus accept religion as an independent source for our thinking and our deeds.[69]

Schweid responded that while human existence is the source of culture, culture must reflect human existence as a whole, and without reflecting religious values it is incomplete, and that religion and secular culture must be seen as complementing units:

> I try to see the religious sources of secularism and the secular sources of religious feelings. I try to find out how a positively secular man can find and re-establish his relations with the religious sources of his culture.[70]

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[68] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 320. Contemporary non-Zionist liberal Jewish thinkers also advocate a return to Torah.

[69] Symposium, 90-91.

[70] Ibid., 94. Eugene Borowitz was challenged by a similar realization in *Renewing the Covenant*, where he analyzes the spiritual crisis that has beset western religion with the understanding of the failure of secularism to provide a ground for values. See David Ellenson, "Eugene B. Borowitz: A Tribute On the Occasion of His 70th Birthday," *Jewish Book Annual* 51 (1993-1994): 132.

In terms of the actual ways by which Schweid urges modern Jews to return to their identity, this means, first of all, adopting a positive attitude towards religion as the expression of the highest values of Jewish culture; and, secondly, a decision to be obligated by at least some elements of the Torah.[71] His own attitude to selectivity in fulfilling commandments is ambivalent, and he also advocates an openness of observant Jews to universal ideas of the secular world. However, as we shall see later, his rationale for the acceptance of *toraitic* authority is rather convoluted, and seems to be a reflection of his personal spiritual search rather than a readily applicable solution for his readers.

b) Life of Faith

Under "Life of Faith," Oppenheim describes Schweid's attempt to bridge the gaps between secular and Jewish approaches, exaggerated by defensive responses to the historical and critical attitudes of modernity, by offering a phenomenology of Jewish belief. Schweid dismisses the secularist claim that faith requires a fundamentalist belief in "Torah from Heaven." In his mind, such an assertion is only an excuse for not facing the issues modernity has posed Judaism. Like Rosenzweig, however, Schweid does expect faith to include trust in God's promises and the knowledge of God through the principles of creation, revelation and redemption. God is manifest through the *mitzvoth*, says Schweid, which he views not as a finite code of rigid law, but as an evolving body of divine commandments that needs to be adapted at every age. Although Schweid requires the universal acceptance of the

[71] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 307-309.

commandments, he does not provide a solution as to their source of authority.[72] In Schweid's view, the fulfillment of the *mitzvoth* is a response to God's presence. Schweid has a dynamic concept of life of *mitzvoth* for the returning Jew and sees such life as being marked by a continuous process of study and action that leads to a whole life of Torah.

Oppenheim points out that Schweid's focus on the *halakhah* as the core of Jewish identity put him in opposition to Gershom Scholem, with whom he also differed on the question of the possibility of Jewish religious revival in our time.[73] While Scholem denied the existence of a central essence to Judaism, and thus endorsed an open attitude to various forms of Jewish creativity, Schweid insisted that in spite of the varieties of Judaism from the Bible to the present, Judaism has a central core: life of *halakhah;* his notion of *halakhah,* however, is one of an evolving *halakhah*. This position is reminiscent of the theology of the founder of positive historical Judaism, Zecharias Frankel.[74] Also, like Frankel,[75] Schweid objected to the idea that mysticism is central to Judaism. Scholem, on the other hand, viewed the medieval Jewish mystical movements as the only authentic response to the challenges of

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[72] Although Schweid explicitly states: "Judaism is Torah. It begins with the giving of the Torah, and every creation that continued it is also Torah," his stance is not as clear as this quote might indicate. He tries to answer the question "What is Torah?" in describing it as the document, testifying that the "meta-history" of the Jewish people began with a series of covenants between God and humankind, and later with the Israelites, culminating with receiving the commandments at Sinai. By using the term "meta-history," however, Schweid circumvents the dilemma of the historicity of the revelation, and places it in the realm of a communal memory recorded in the Jewish sources, from the Torah onward. See Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut,* 91.

[73] Eliezer Schweid, *Mysticism and Judaism*, 323.

[74] For example: "Judaism is a religion which has a direct influence on life's activity. It is a religion of action, demanding the performance of precepts which either directly aim at ennobling man or, by reminding man of the divine, strengthen his feeling of dependence on God." Zecharias Frankel, "Die Symptome der Zeit," *Zeitschrift für jüdische religiöse Interessen* (1845), 1-21; M. Waxman, ed. and trans., *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism* (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1958); both quoted in P. Mendes-Flohr and J. Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 174. Regarding Frankel's views on the revelational source of authority of the Oral Law, cf. Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 414, n. 97.

[75] "Because of this trait neither pure abstract contemplation nor dark mysticism could ever strike root in Judaism." Z. Frankel, "Die Symptome der Zeit," in Mendes Flohr and Reinharz, 174.

intellectual, social and political change. The responses of Jewish philosophy and theology, he claimed, were neither legitimate nor efficacious. According to Schweid, mysticism ignored, rather than responded to, change, whereas Jewish philosophy and theology have been the only connection between old and new. Both thinkers offered responses to the crisis of modernity. Like many contemporary secular Israelis, Scholem, viewing religion from outside, limited his definition of "authentic Judaism" to that form which affirms the miraculous revelation of Torah, while, at the same time, criticizing that belief and the Judaism that flowed from it as fossilized and incapable of revival. Schweid, viewing religion from within, was more open to accepting different stances towards the Torah as authentically Jewish, and individual and communal religious revival is one of the central elements of his thought and ideology.[76]

When asked whether he viewed as normative in *halakhah* not the substantive-normative, but methodological-normative (i.e., commitment to the *way* of the *halakhah* rather than acceptance of substantive *halakhic* answers to specific problems), Schweid responded:

> I don't believe you can continue *halakhah* without an obligatory relation to the substantive. I wouldn't accept Buber's position relating to *halakhah* for example. I do accept substantive parts of *halakhah* itself, not merely [as] an idea or a general way. . . . It is the individual who finds himself in a community, and wants to be in a community. The existence of a community is determining the individual's relation to *halakhah*. . . . It is as if we would put Franz Rosenzweig's thought into a Zionist dimension. It was a tragic mistake to see the individual by himself and not [as] part of the community.[77]

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[76] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 315-317; Schweid, *Hamistika bayahadut lefi Gershom Shalom*, 37, 66, 68 (English translation, 129-130, 132); quoted in Oppenheim, 322, nn. 40-42.

[77] Symposium, 97.

c) Zionism and the Jewish State

"Zionism and the Jewish State Today" analyzes the political aspects of Schweid's philosophy, which is a natural by-product of his linkage between philosophy and personal responsibility to the collective. Unlike non-Zionist (like Rosenzweig) and anti-Zionist (like Steven Schwarzschild) Jewish thinkers, for Schweid, Zionism is at the foundation of his thought. He believes that only through Zionism can individual Jews be responsible to the Jewish people.[78] He sees no hope for long-term Jewish existence outside the State of Israel.[79] Indeed, "choosing life,"[80] for Schweid, means living in Israel, and this is also the most authentic response possible to the Holocaust.[81]

Oppenheim describes Schweid as "heir to the cultural stream within the Zionist movement." Warren Z. Harvey sees two main differences between Schweid and most of the earlier Zionist thinkers. First of all, while their Zionism developed in a European context and anticipated a future reality, Schweid's Zionism developed in the Israeli context of a sovereign state. Secondly, while most of the earlier Zionist thinkers formed their views from a secularist standpoint, Schweid felt such secularism created a spiritual void within himself and his society and he therefore rejected his secularist background. Indeed, it led Schweid to conclude that the national problem for the Jew is really a religious problem. His thought, according to Harvey, "moved from modern secular individualism to modern Jewish

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[78] Eliezer Schweid, "Elements of Zionist Ideology and Practice," in *Zionism in transition*, ed. Moshe Davis (New York: Herzl Press, 1980); 239; quoted in Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 312 n. 23.

[79] Eliezer Schweid, *Miyahadut letziyonut, mitziyonut leyahadut: masot* (Between Judaism and Zionism: Essays) (Jerusalem: Hasifriya Hatziyonit, 1983), 256; quoted in ibid., 312, n. 24.

[80] "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendents may live." Deut. 30:19.

[81] Eliezer Schweid, *Miyahadut letziyonut*, 121-137; idem, *Maavak ad shahar* (Wrestling Until Daybreak) (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1990).

nationalism and finally to a new kind of religious nationalism which poses a challenge for both the Israeli secularist and the Jewish religionist wherever he may be."[82]

Like Ahad Ha'am, Schweid lamented the decline of Jewish communal life, and, as a response, he strove to "explore the conditions necessary to create a new Jewish culture that retains the essence of continuity with the past and finds a proper balance between traditional contents and what is positive in modern secular culture."[83] Nonetheless, although Schweid viewed Ahad Ha'am as one of his sources of inspiration, he did not see himself as Ahad Ha'am's disciple. He neither shared Ahad Ha'am's expectation that the religious foundation of the Jewish community would eventually disappear in the secular environment, nor Ha'am's idea that Jewish life must be built on elements gleaned from the religious past. Schweid objected to this partial and utilitarian attitude to Jewish religion, and required a commitment to the past as a whole as the only possible basis for new creation, a commitment relying on an open encounter with Judaism through Torah and *mitzvoth*.[84]

Shalom Rosenberg explains the difference between Ahad Ha'am and Schweid as follows: "The difference," he writes, " . . . is that for Ahad Ha'am religion has no validity by itself, and [it] is only one of the expressions of Jewish identity, of Jewish nationalism in its historical development, but for Eliezer Schweid religion is a much more serious matter and he is against using religion to serve other mechanisms. It must be studied for its own intrinsic value."[85] Schweid's other spiritual predecessors, H. N. Bialik and A. D. Gordon, are closer to his own philosophy in their holistic attitude to Jewish religious life: Bialik in promoting the

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[82] Symposium, 88-90.

[83] Eliezer Schweid, *Hayahadut vehatarbut hahilonit: pirkei 'iyun bahagut hayehudit shel hameah he'esrim* (Judaism and Secular Culture: Studies in Twentieth Century Jewish Thought) (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1981), 22; trans. in Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 312.

[84] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 313.

revival of Jewish relevance through aggadah, and Gordon in attempting "to establish a contemporary *halakhah*, that is, a way to enable the community to take shape in Israel."[86]

Schweid made a distinction between the thought of Bialik, with whose Zionism he felt a close affinity, and that of Ahad Ha'am:

> Bialik was very different from Ahad Ha'am if not in the formulation of his ideas, certainly in his intuitions as a poet. There is a big difference in their approach to education and to the way of recreating Jewish culture in Eretz Yisrael. The whole idea [of the] juxtaposition of aggadah and *halakhah* is a response to contemporary religious attitudes. Bialik, one may say, remained religious even when he rebelled against it; this is impossible to say about Ahad Ha'am. He in a way had completely lost his religious feeling. He felt that behind religion there is something that he could identify with, but it was completely secular. Bialik however felt the depth of the religion, even when he rebelled against it... therefore I think that his thinking was much more fertile than Ahad Ha'am's. Bialik, the secular Zionist, sensed the tragedy of the impasse where he found himself. Nowhere to go, no future to look to. Bialik tried to find the way out of the dilemma.[87]

In surveying Zionist thinkers within the Orthodox camp, Schweid focused on two major figures: Rabbi A.Y. H. Kook[88] and Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn.[89] Schweid rejected the view that Kook, by tolerating the secularist-Zionist pioneers, represented a possible bridge over the national secularist/Orthodox schism. Schweid believed that Kook's kabalistic stance caused him to view the revival of Jewish settlement in the land of Israel by secular Zionism as a temporary phenomenon, an instrument, a stage in a long-term divine plan for the

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[85] Symposium, 91.

[86] Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 314.

[87] Symposium, 95-96.

[88] Eliezer Schweid, *Bein ortodoxia lehumanizm dati: hamegamot ha'ikariyot bahagut hayehudit hadatit shel hameah h'esrim* (Between Orthodoxy and Religious Humanism: Major Trends in Twentieth Century Religious Jewish Thought) (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 1977), 31-33; idem, *Demokratia vehalkhah: pirkei 'iyun bemishnato shel harav Hayim Hirschensohn* (Democracy and Halakhah: Studies in the Thought of Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), 159-170; idem, *Hayahadut vehatarbut hahilonit*, 110-142; all quoted in Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 314 n. 31.

[89] *Bein ortodoksia lehumanizm dati*, 43-46; *Demokratia vehalkhah*, 159-170; quoted in Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid," 314 n. 32.

redemption of the people of Israel. Such a vision does not provide the mutual communication required for such a bridge. Schweid contrasted him with Rabbi Hirschensohn who, on the other hand, tried to understand secular Zionism historically and philosophically, a journey that caused his own understanding of Judaism to change. He came to view the Torah as a dynamic basis for the life of the nation, and he believed the *halakhah* was capable of being in harmony with the modern world. Democracy and Torah, in his view, were not mutually exclusive, and he considered the differences between the religious and the secularist Jews in Palestine as a "battle of peace."[90]

Schweid spent much time and energy developing a philosophy as well as practical suggestions for creating bridges between the religious and the secular. Michael Oppenheim notes that while in the 1960s and 1970s he focused on secularist ideologies, in the 1980s he shifted to religious ideologies. He documented the polarization between them, and drew principles for a "battle of peace" that he deemed necessary due to the mutual interdependence of the two parties. The religious must share responsibilities as citizens and recognize that the secularists also have values that merit respect. The secularists need a relationship to Judaism as a religion, to Hebrew, and to unifying symbols. They must help legitimate the right to the land of Israel. He envisioned the renewal of Jewish communal life through a variety of small voluntary communities, like the ones that existed before the State of Israel was established. Each community would be encouraged to interpret its own way within Judaism.[91]

Oppenheim thinks that Schweid could provide insight for non-Jewish thinkers in a number of areas. For example, his study of individual identity, his focus on the dynamics of religious belief and his emphasis on the relationship between religion and secular culture and

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[90] Ibid., 314-315, nn. 33-38.

the role of the calendar in community life are all such areas. He further questions whether Schweid has fully understood the price of having a Jewish state. Communal polarization and politicization, bureaucratization and industrialization—all go against Schweid's hopes for clusters of small communal settlements with a variety of educational choices. Events that occurred since Oppenheim's article was published in early 1993 indicate that his observation was well founded. The rift between the sides has widened and its manifestations have become more extreme and violent.

Between what Eliezer Schweid has to tell about himself and what scholars, colleagues and students of his have to say about him, we discover a very interesting personality, one who embodies a unique combination of elements rarely found in the same person. His use of the various elements of his life, from his Judeo-socialist nationalism at home, through the grinding stone of school and the youth movement, his involvement in the pre-state and the early State of Israel, his thirst for Jewish knowledge and belonging, his ideological fervor, his commitment and his ability to combine high intellectual tools with deep emotional connection—all these create a fascinating basis for his exceptional contribution to Jewish thought.

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[91] Ibid., 318-319; Schweid, *Hayahadut vehatarbut hahilonit*, 246-247; quoted in ibid., 319 n. 46.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE COLLECTIVE YEARS

1. Overview

This chapter will examine Schweid's first volume of essays, *Ad Mashber*,[1] published in 1969. These essays reflect what Schweid viewed as the most representative and relevant of his writings at that time.

The title of this chapter characterizes this period in Schweid's thought as primarily collectivistic. This is not to assert that there was a sharp shift of focus from the collective to the individual at a later moment. While a gradual shift of emphasis can be perceived in his later years, Schweid's concern with the collective has always remained central.

Ad Mashber is a collection of essays published two years after the Six Days War of June 1967. It includes seven essays originally published between 1962 and 1969, an introduction and a response to critics of one of the essays. They cover a wide array of subjects of national importance – the identity crisis of Israelis before and after the Six Days War, Jewish identity in Israel, relations between observant and non-observant Jewish Israelis, Zionist ideology and Israel-Diaspora relations.

In the introduction to the book, Schweid describes it as a response to a number of issues that have been at the heart of Jewish existence since the emergence of modernity and Zionism, but were neglected during the first nineteen years of the State of Israel, until they reached a point of *mashber*. He explains his use of the Hebrew word *mashber* both in

[1] Eliezer Schweid, *Ad mashber: Yahadut vetziyonut bimdinah yehudit* ([Israel] at the Crossroad: Judaism and Zionism in a Jewish State) (Jerusalem: Zak, 1969).

the modern sense of "crisis" and in the biblical sense of "a threshold of hope." The existential danger felt in Israel before the Six Days War, the unexpected victory and its far-reaching repercussions, led to heated debates in Israel and within world Jewry. These debates brought to the surface three main issues: Israel-Diaspora relations, Orthodox-secular relations in Israel, and the different attitudes each group adopted towards Jewish spiritual heritage. Schweid views these three issues as aspects of a more general question, that of Judaism's essence and destiny, which he approaches from the perspective of an *individual Jew who lives in the State of Israel*. This is our first encounter with Schweid's intertwined treatment of collective and individual issues. Schweid touches on issues that concern the Jewish and/or Israeli nation as a whole in light of the Jewish individual:

> The Six Days War unveiled again, and dramatically, a series of issues that beset the public in Israel ever since the creation of the state: tense relations between Israel and the Arabs and between Israel and other countries that are involved, directly or indirectly, in this conflict; tense relations between Israel and the Diaspora; tense relations between religious and secular within the state; and at the basis of all this [lies] the problem that seems to me the most important and the most fundamental: *the tenseness of the life of the soul of any contemplating individual, whether religious or "secular," who finds himself [torn] between poles regarding his national and cultural identity as a Jew.*[2]

Schweid identifies the crisis as the point at which decisions must be made, as a paradigm shift in Israeli and Jewish life. Prior to the Six Days War, the dominant feelings in Israel were of an interminable Arab-Israeli conflict, a doomed and fast assimilating Diaspora, an imminent explosion between secular and religious camps in Israel, a loss of national identity among religious Israelis, and a loss of Jewish heritage among secular Israelis. After the war, says Schweid, feelings changed radically. Peace finally seemed to

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[2] Ibid., 5. Italics mine.

be within reach. Diaspora Jews also seemed to have rediscovered their identity as Jews and they began to display an affinity to Israel. The walls seemed to be crumbling between religious and secular Israelis, and both seemed to have rediscovered their place in Jewish history and heritage. Schweid claims that while both religious and secular perceptions were based on "real facts," neither was completely accurate, as "we are in the midst of an ambivalent process" that could lead to extremes as well as to the middle way, and which contain opportunities as well as dangers. The *opportunities*, Schweid says, could derive from the Jewish presence in Israel and the higher level of physical security; the revival of Zionist realization (*hagshamah*) through immigration and settlement; and reconnection of Israelis with Diaspora Jews on the basis of Zionist ideals and a shared Jewish heritage.[3] On the other hand, the *dangers* might arise from the potentially endless conflict with the Arabs and with other countries; the risk of moral and cultural decline through cruel conqueror-nationalism; and estrangement between Israel and the Diaspora and between "the thinking Jew and his heritage."

While this presentation seems fully focused on the collective (referring to "Israel," "Israelis," "Diaspora," "the religious," "the seculars," etc.), Schweid tries to express it also in terms of the individual. For instance, he writes:

> Being Jewish is a fate that a person must accept through a conscious choice. A [Jewish] person is born with his Judaism, but as long as he does not choose it as a way of life and a worldview, it is not complete within him and he lives in it halfheartedly.[4]

Schweid regards the wish for "normalization" on the part of the Jewish people in modern times, whether through assimilation in the Diaspora or through the Jewish state

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[3] Note the recurrent theme from the earlier chapter.

without a clear Jewish identity, as "a choice not to make a choice." This book calls the Israeli public to attend to the crisis after the Six Days War by abandoning "the atrophy of the will" [sic] that followed the Independence War, and urges Israeli Jews to choose the threshold of hope – hence, the theme of the title.

Ad Mashber is not arranged chronologically. The first and longest essay, "Days of Return: On the 'Religious Dimension' of the Experience of Victory and Independence," was originally published on the eve of Rosh Hashanah of 5728 (1968), slightly over a year after the Six Days War. The essay compares the aftermath of the Six Days War with that of the Independence War and develops the thesis concerning risks and challenges presented in the introduction.[5] The other articles in this collection, originally published between 1962-1968, reflect specifics of his thought in more detail. Four essays focus on Jewish religious identity in Israel: "What Does It Mean To Be Jewish? The Question of Jewish Identity in the State of Israel;" "Between Keepers of the Tradition and Those Who Do Not Keep It;" "Secondary Affinity to Tradition: Reflection on One Topical Aspect of Ahad Ha'am's Teaching;" and "Partial Fulfillment of Torah Commandments." At least three of the four titles could lead us to expect more attention to the individual perspective. However, even when writing on faith and personal conduct, Schweid remains extremely attached to his collective perspective. The last two essays focus on clearly collective themes: "Zionism Under Scrutiny" and "Between Israel and Diaspora Jews."

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[4] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 6.

[5] This essay, which focuses on the spiritual poverty that followed the Zionist realization with the establishment of the State of Israel and the opportunities for spiritual revival after the Six Days War, elicited harsh criticism on other levels. Amos Oz, for example, accused Schweid of disregarding the fate of the Arabs and Pinhas Rosenblit faulted him for depicting war as a liberating experience. Schweid used his editor's privilege and penned responses to his critics. However, he did not include the critics' articles.

Schweid regards the Six Days War as a major turning point in Israel's history, not only historically and politically, but also from the religious, spiritual and cultural standpoints. Three of the essays date from before the Six Days War. "Zionism Under Scrutiny" documents the stagnancy that marked post-Independence War Zionism and contrasts it, in "Days of Return," with the post-Six Days War Zionist revival. The other two early essays, "Secondary Affinity to Tradition" and "Between Keepers of the Tradition and Those Who Do Not Keep It," are essential articles that express Schweid's thinking on Jewish identity in Israel. He began to develop these thoughts before the Six Days War, and they became more relevant and pronounced in his thought as a result of it.

2. Days of Return

The first essay, "Days of Return,"[6] constitutes the raison d'être of the book and contains its principal message. It analyzes the transformation of the Israeli collective and individual in the aftermath of the Six Days War, and concludes that the Independence War was the end of an era that was followed by a decline in spirit. However, the Six Days War was the beginning of an era of Zionist renewal.[7] This decline and renewal were manifest in three areas – pioneering motivation, Israel-Diaspora relations, and the individual sense of collective identity.

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[6] Eliezer Schweid, "Yemei shiva: Al 'hameimad hadati' shel havayat hanitzahon vehashihrur" (Days of Return: On the 'Religious Dimension' of the Experience of Victory and Independence)," *Ptahim* 1 (Tishri [fall] 1967); reprinted in *Ad Masheber*, 9-34.

[7] Ibid., 12-15, 17.

a) Decline and revival of the pioneering motivation

The Independence War was a war of survival that followed the Holocaust. It demanded total commitment, especially from the young men who, as a result, were depleted of the energies and commitment needed for the grueling task of building the new state. In Schweid's view, once the Jewish state existed, they expected the state to assume full responsibility for their lives. It was now up to the collective – the state – to recognize the wartime contribution of the individuals and to leave them alone to rebuild their lives. Conversely, the Six Days War was preceded by a nerve-wracking expectation of doom and gloom, but ended with a spectacular victory, which led many Israelis, as individuals, to shift from indifference to involvement in collective matters.

b) Decline and revival of Israel-Diaspora relations

The leadership of the *yishuv*[8] enjoyed some recognition as having a voice in matters of the Jewish Diaspora.[9] Once the State of Israel was established, its separate agenda became more manifest, and most Diaspora Jews lost interest in it. The Six Days War caused Diaspora Jews to realize the importance of the existence of the State of Israel. It also led to a renewed appreciation for the critical role Israel played in Diaspora Jewish life. Similarly, Israel recharged itself with the challenge of becoming a cultural center and an inspiration for the Jews in Diaspora.[10]

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[8] Term used for the Jewish population in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel.

[9] For example: its involvement with rescuing Jews during and after the Holocaust.

[10] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 16-17.

c) Decline and revival of the individual sense of collective identity

> The majority of the generation that reached its early adulthood during the Independence War was educated on the values of the Zionist Labor movement. This education gave them[11] the knowledge and mental conviction of the rightness of these values as well as a general sense of belonging to the Jewish people and the Jewish civilization. However, mental conviction and a general national consciousness were not sufficient for [their] complete integration, emotional and intellectual, either in the Zionist movement or in the Jewish civilization. The direct personal experience that created such integration [in their parents] was far removed from them. They hadn't experienced the reality of exile, within which the Zionist movement had its roots. They hadn't lived the life of poverty within which the Socialist experience had its roots. Nor were they part of the Jewish tradition, where the experiential identification with the Jewish people and its civilization had its roots. What was their experience, then? It was the immediate danger that threatened the Jewish population [in Palestine] from the Arabs and the British mandate authorities. This was the experience that made their participation in the war unquestioned. There was no room for arguments about it. But this, however, was the essence of their experience as part of the [Jewish] people.[12]

Curiously, here the use of the third person plural (or singular, if we refer to the Hebrew use of "generation"), which explicitly refers to the collective, implicitly reflects a deep individual experience, that of Eliezer Schweid himself. As we saw in his account of his adolescent years, there was a gap between the ideologies preached at home, at school and in the youth movement, and the sense of identity that Schweid ultimately carved out for himself. His need for a new identity, his awareness of it and his ability to reach it were unique, and this is what makes him a pioneer in his line of thinking. But the absence of experiential roots for the parents' generation ideologies created a similar alienation in the

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[11] The Hebrew text refers to the "generation" and speaks in third person singular, which is "he, him" in Hebrew and would be "it" in English; the most natural rendition I could find for the original meaning was by substituting it for the third person plural, "they, them."

[12] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 17.

second generation as a whole. No wonder, therefore, that the new generation had other values and priorities than their parents:

> Identification with the general national goals was not a natural product of this experience. On the contrary, the very personal experience of the war showed the young Israeli-born person how different he was from his parents in his attitude towards Zionism, the Jewish people and the Jewish civilization. He couldn't see in the realization of the Zionist goals also the realization of his personal wishes. His wishes were different, and although he could not always formulate them well . . . it was clear that they were included in the realm of the personal wholeness of individual life in the present, rather than [in the realm of] the expectations of the national future. . . . The majority of the young generation did not find its place in areas still requiring pioneering activism. . . . The desire for personal accomplishments, no matter how strong, came with feelings of disappointment, emptiness and guilt. . . . They knew that the State of Israel needed not only people who would be willing to die for it, but also people who would be willing to live in it and for it. Many of the parents, but only few of the children, were prepared for this. And anyone who is aware of his duty, but knows that he cannot fulfill it without forcing himself to follow a course of life that is foreign to him, will continue the course of his life burdened by feelings of guilt, emptiness and failure.[13]

While the earlier Schweid seemed to be sensitive to the concerns of the individual, here he could not refrain from making a statement of his priorities: a life focused on individual concerns without assuming one's duty to the collective is bound to yield "feelings of guilt, emptiness and failure." The ideological confusion in the Zionist movement that Schweid pinpointed as early as 1962, in his "Zionism Under Scrutiny,"[14] is not a neutral one in his mind. Rather, it clearly had a negative connotation of a decline. His comparison in "Days of Return" between the effects of the Independence War and that of the Six Days War, indicates that the former brought about an ideological, moral and

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[13] Ibid., 17-18.

[14] Eliezer Schweid, "Tziyonut bemivhan" (Zionism under Scrutiny), in *Min hayessod* (1962); reprinted in Ibid., 95-116.

spiritual decline, whereas the latter created the potential for an ideological, moral and spiritual revival, which Schweid describes in quasi-mystical terms:

> When we say that enlisting for a war for one's very existence is a case of 'return to the point of departure,' [we mean] not only that through the war we gained awareness of the basic situation of the Jewish settlement in the Land [of Israel] and the Jewish world as a whole, but also that through the war every individual among us gained awareness of his basic situation as a person. He lived the full meaning of his fate as a member within his people, and this is what created the wonderful partnership that we experienced in those days. The individual will to live merged with the collective's source of existence, and they were transformed into a colossal inner force.[15]

At this point, Schweid's notion of the individual through the perspective of the collective reaches new heights. He seems to be fascinated with an image of the organic symbiosis between the individual and the collective, where the individual practically loses his identity as such, and acquires the identity of the collective. This romantic vision continues with an attempt to comprehend human conduct in the face of mortal danger:

> The first reaction of a person in the face of the threat of destruction is fear, and this reaction remains valid as long as the danger does not materialize. Under such conditions the person withdraws and seeks a way to escape . . . [such as moral decline]. . . . But fear is only a first reaction to a danger that is not imminent; when such danger persists, an opposite reaction could replace it. If the person has no other choice than the battle, in which he must defend his very existence, and if he believes in his ability to win, albeit at a high price—all his forces are being charged. At such times, fear is pushed aside by courage, and the humiliation of the avoidance of duty is replaced by the awareness of completeness, emanating from the absolute affirmation that whoever does as he is commanded gives himself. This is the nature of a person, who, facing mortal danger from which one cannot be saved by fleeing, feels himself existing with all his might; and his going out to struggle is an act of realization of the freedom to choose life. It is a time of terror and courage in which his whole life focuses on one point of the present, a time in which a person may feel a paradoxical feeling of terrible happiness.[16]

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[15] Ibid., 20.

[16] Ibid., 20-21.

This presentation, which is reminiscent of other, Jewish and non-Jewish, existential thinkers who reflect on the effects the fear of death has upon the individual, comes as a seemingly universalistic aside in a clearly particularistic narrative. Since such occurrences are rare in Schweid's writing, we must consider the possibility that it is not really a generalized theory, but a generalized presentation of a particular situation. It is a particularistic expression of a more general situation confronted by many.

Reflecting on the spiritual effects of the Six Days War on secular Israelis, Schweid describes the process that led to the revival of their sense of Jewish identity. In the first nineteen years of Israel, their alienation from the traditional Jewish heritage increased and they viewed Judaism merely as an ossified object of study focused on the past. This, says Schweid, prevented them from creating a meaningful life in the present. Official and grass root initiatives, intended to improve Jewish identity in public schools and discussion groups, only underscored the gap between secular and religious. In some cases, however, it prepared some secular Israelis for the emotional, quasi-religious experience of the 1967 victory, and decreased their feeling that the notion of "chosen people" contradicted their aspiration to be a "normal people."[17] People realized that:

> . . . Zionism, with regard to its affinity to the Jewish heritage, did not result in normalization in the simple sense of aligning [the fate of the Jewish people] with the fate of other peoples, but in the more complex and problematic sense of aligning [it] to an inner principle, which singles out the history of the Jewish people from that of other peoples . . .[18]

Thus, the original idea of normalization, a central goal of classical Zionism, was undercut by the realities unleashed by the Six Days War.

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[17] Ibid., 25-27.

[18] Ibid., 24.

Similarly, the waiting period before the Six Days War dispelled the illusion that, after the Holocaust, there could be no danger of Jewish annihilation. The danger of being Jewish became manifest again, this time in what was expected to be the Jewish "safe haven." This realization did not escape the Jewish Diaspora.

> The Six Days War clarified to us the historical fate of the Jewish people for generations, through the prism of Holocaust memory . . . including in the hearts of those who had not experienced it in person. This brought the awareness of the crisis to near apocalyptic depth and height... The Holocaust—even the faithful could not invest it with a religious meaning, let alone justify the verdict. The victory—even the unfaithful may find in it a meaning that goes beyond the direct political meaning, and accept it even if it goes contrary to his previous habits of thinking.[19]

Schweid believes that the newfound respect that emerged for the idea of being a "chosen people," as well as what was perceived as a quasi-miraculous victory, revived the potential of faith. Reverting to writing in terms of the generic individual, *ha'adam*, Schweid analyzes the spiritual reaction to the experience of facing mortal danger in war, in a thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure: embracing faith, rejecting faith, and avoiding faith:

> Going into a survival war is standing on the threshold of faith. The overt danger of death denudes a person from the illusion that follows him in the train of "normal" life, that his existence is assured of itself, and enduring of itself, and that he has the natural right, which is attached to his very consciousness, to choose what he likes and reject the foreign and the painful. Suddenly, existence seems like a thin and transparent shell, spread in a vacuum. Any blow could shake it up and any sudden blow could shatter it. Where did it come from? From the mysteries about which we have no knowledge and over which we have no control. And what guarantees its continuity? Nothing! Suddenly, he realizes that he was placed in the world. He was placed there in the sense that he is there despite himself, through an unknown will; and through an unknown will, or through blind coincidence, he may be taken away from his world at any time. At any [kind of] present. Suddenly he realizes that he never chose what constitutes the foundation for all his actions, nor is it up to him to choose; that he was given freedom only after he had been forced [to exist].

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[19] Ibid., 24-25.

> And nonetheless, he exists at such a time of danger, with all his might, and[20] his awareness is focused on this "now," within which his existence is an absolute fact; and nonetheless, he wants and chooses[21] with all his might, for by standing up to defend his existence he is saying "yes" to the very will that placed him in his life. In this very choice he discovers his original freedom, which is the foundation of any choice he makes. Thus, encountering mortal danger . . . in full awareness is a primary encounter with the absolute that precedes individual existence, and which is its condition. If a person chooses life in full consciousness, he is cognizant that the existence that was imposed on him includes an element of command, which is manifest in the very fact that he was placed in life and in the flow of his life. As he preserves his existence, he would be cognizant of the happiness [which is] in complete surrender, which is the happiness of doing what is absolutely correct at that moment.
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> But we were careful to state that going into a survival war is standing on the threshold of faith. This is so because the awakening of awareness and the submission of will are not self-evident either. They reflect a hidden pre-awareness and a hidden pre-will.[22] In the face of danger, it is also possible to detest life and reject it. This would be a terrible moment of loss of faith in an act of revolt against meaningless suffering. But this is also as rare a possibility as its opposite, because it assumes faith at its foundation.
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> Normally, when people face danger, they are engulfed by a sweeping wave from without and from within. They assume their lives, as if yielding to a biological urge, with their eyes shut and a rejection coming from a primary fear of confronting their situation with full awareness. They do not want to want, and choose not to choose. Only after the fact, like a refugee hesitantly crawling out of his shelter, still afraid for his life, their awareness revives and assumes the fact that they stayed alive—whether relieved and grateful, with trembling and humiliation, or—as frequently happens—with a tormenting mixture of relief and humiliation.[23]

Before offering his reader a solution to the problem—how did spiritual revival actually happen—Schweid describes the preconditions necessary for the acquisition of faith. The source of transformation is beyond the individual will, and only those who

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[20] Originally: "that." I changed it in the translation for the sake of clarity.

[21] Without an object, as in the original.

[22] Hebrew: *terem-ratzon*.

[23] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 27-28

"prepare the heart"[24] (a similar term as Ahad Ha'am's, who uses it in a totally different context[25]) can be receptive to the "something above consciousness and above will:"

> Thus, the decision to assume life as it is commanded to us, which is the decision to believe, harbors a great secret. Such an event is caused by something above awareness and will, which forces them to confront and to want, and gives them [= awareness and will] the strength to pass this test. Man cannot create such a power out of himself. He can only prepare the heart for it, and the preparation of the heart also needs a preparation by prior education, which would channel the intellect and the emotion towards faith. Thus, it is highly unlikely that someone who has not been educated like that, would win it [= faith] at a moment of existential fear. It is equally unlikely that he would be able to identify the threshold over which he steps and to name it. The shock would hit such a person with a terrible painful strike where potential happiness shines, without attribute or name. Through it, his decision will be made as if from underneath the threshold of conscious life.[26]

Again, the presentation of the issues as pertaining to "the individual" may be misleading. There is no identifiable individual who would match the description. Therefore, it might be that Schweid is describing his individual experiences and generalizes them in terms of an abstract "individual." At the same time, he might be imagining a generic individual. In either case, the model is supposed to represent a large number of similar individuals, that is, the collective, or, in sociological terms, an "ideal type."

Now Schweid comes to an explanation of the post-Six Days War spiritual revival in Israel, which is perfectly in line with his assertion earlier in the essay, that the individual exists as a function of the collective of which he is part:

> But this time [after the Six Days War] it seems as if a door opened for the many to realize, albeit vaguely, the worth of the moment. But why? Because every individual faced the danger as part of his people, because of

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[24] Hebrew: *la'aroch et halev* (v.) or *'arichat halev* (n.)

[25] Ahad Ha'am's term is *hakhsharat halevavot*. Schweid analyzes and rejects Ahad Ha'am's utilitarian attitude to religion in another essay in this volume.

[26] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 28.

> his membership in his people and out of identity with his people, and because the symbols of his national culture, of a religion whose power made it unique, became his.[27]

Schweid concludes the essay with a theological exposé, which again is written as a generalized self-reflection possessed of a larger, universal meaning. Although it is clear that such reflections originate in individual, personal experiences, their context and the conclusion towards which they lead testify to Schweid's main concern – the collective. Thus, the individual "return," which Schweid understands in terms of faith and acceptance of a divine commandment, is organically related to the national (i.e., collective) return. Experiences such as the Holocaust and the Six Days War assume national-revelational import. For Eliezer Schweid, these were more than abstract conclusions. He himself actually assumed the consequences of his stance, both as an individual by following the path of return to religion, and as a member of the collective by following new political convictions following the "miracle" of the victory in the Six Days War.[28]

3. Essays on Jewish Identity

a) "What Does It Mean To Be Jewish?"[29]

In this essay, Schweid analyzes the question expressed in its title for the largely non-*halakhic* contemporary Jew. Zionism viewed the State of Israel as the one and only solution both to the "problem of the Jews" and to "the problem of Judaism." Yet, says

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[27] Ibid., 29. In the symbols, he means Jerusalem, the Wailing Wall etc.

[28] Schweid participated in the establishment of the nationalist political party *Hat'haiya* under the leadership of Prof. Yuval Ne'eman.

[29] "Mahu lihiyot yehudi? Sheelat hazehut hayehudit bimdinat yisrael" (What Does It Mean To Be Jewish? The Question of Jewish Identity in the State of Israel), *Molad* 65 (Spring 1968); reprinted in *Ad Mashber,* 40-58.

Schweid, the question of Jewish identity remains unresolved, and Schweid sees its manifestation in three areas:

(1) Israel-Diaspora Alienation

Israel represents an attempt to forge a complete Jewish identity in social and political terms. The Diaspora, in contrast, represents a partial, predominantly traditional, religious and/or cultural Jewish identity. Expectations that each side has concerning the other are unrealistic, leading to disappointments and doubts as to Jewish identity.

(2) Orthodox/non-Orthodox Polarization

Both sides, says Schweid, abandoned "the heritage that did not recognize a separation between Judaism as nation and culture, and Judaism as faith and *halakha*."[30] Instead of seeking "normalization," existential fears and personal sacrifice may lead Israelis to reconsider the Jewish heritage to satisfy their spiritual needs after political Zionism rejected what it regarded as the "exilic" tradition.[31]

(3) Individual Jewish identity:

Schweid repeats the last question with a slight difference: Can the Jewish heritage respond to the needs of the *individual*, or does the national identity of the secular Jew not touch upon his life as a civilized person?[32]

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[30] Ibid., 44.

[31] Obviously, such an intense high polarization is not inevitable. It assumes these proportions in the context of a country with a population that ignores the options offered by liberal Judaism.

[32] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 45-46.

Here again, while Schweid uses the words "the individual," they actually reflect a generic unit of the collective. His individual lacks individuality. His individual is such only by virtue of being referred to in the third person singular. The following passage, for example, could be stated in the plural without losing its original meaning:

> The polarization in the relations between the State of Israel and the Diaspora and among different parts of the public in our country manifests itself as an internal rupture in the heart of every individual. . . . Normally, each individual seeks some kind of a synthesis and practices it in a like-minded ideological movement or social group. . . . But it is not possible any more to ignore the acute internal rupture and the dangers of spiritual disappointment and experiential and intellectual impoverishment that are associated with it. Naturally, the questions arise here neither in their national nor in their social and political formulation, but rather in the deep and severe personal one which precedes them: what is the content that would totally sustain and shape the ways of life and the creativity of the modern Jew? What can realize his aspiration for an independent spiritual creation and for a full and meaningful personal life? What does it mean, therefore, to be a Jew?[33]

The answer is, obviously, to be part of the Jewish collective. Schweid describes his own experience in terms of that "generic individual" who is really a unit of the collective. He must have internalized the collective spirit of his childhood to such a degree that he could take for granted that his experiences and his feelings were universally shared.

The rest of the article focuses entirely on the collective. It analyzes the question of Jewish identity and identifies three directions in modern Jewish thought: Religious, National and Cultural. Schweid describes the range of *religious* definitions, between the ultra-Orthodox and Reform, with their different attitudes to the role of *halakhah* in Jewish

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[33] Ibid., 46.

identity and their common focus on revelation and tradition.[34] He then turns to Klatzkin's *national-political* school, which regards identity—seen as a function of ancestry and choice – as separate from faith and tradition, and denies long-term Jewish existence outside of a Jewish state.[35] Finally, he expands on the *cultural* definitions of Ahad Ha'am,[36] Gordon,[37] and Kaufman,[38] focusing on the need for national heritage and original creativity without which neither the religious nor the political solutions could last. The

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[34] Ibid., 47-48. Schweid says that the Orthodox position, requiring adherence to *halakhah,* recognition of Orthodox rabbis only and belief that the interpretation of their own spiritual leader is the only acceptable one, attempts to answer the question "*What* is a Jew," and not "*Who* is a Jew." In keeping with his respect for *halakhah,* Schweid prefers Rabbi A. S. Hartom's attempt to answer the question "Who is a Jew:" "A Jew is whoever, according to Jewish law, ought to keep the Torah"—i.e., even if he does not do so. This automatically excludes those recognized by the liberal Jewish movements, such as liberal converts and (in contemporary Reform Judaism) patrilineal Jews. Schweid gives summary descriptions of the Reform position, "Even those who don't live according to Reform principle are Jews, and must be tolerated, as well as apostates," and the ultra-Orthodox one, "Whoever doesn't follow their *halakhah*, is a criminal, but Jewish, including the apostate." Their common thread, he says, is the belief in God's revelation and in a commanded tradition, without which a Jew *de jure* is not a Jew *de facto*.

[35] Ibid., 49-50. Schweid quotes Jacob Klatzkin: "The national definition of a nation boils down to an awareness of unity on the background of a common origin and a common destiny." Therefore, "A Jew is whoever recognizes himself as such and takes part in the Jewish life in the national-political sense" as described earlier, and *halakhic* duty and/or its acceptance are irrelevant in this case. Schweid writes: "A specific faith, lifestyle or culture, is not part of the definition, but only birthright and a sense of partnership in, and loyalty to, a collective united by an awareness of shared destiny." Religion played a role in the formation of the nation and still prevents full assimilation, but it has been superseded by a universal secular culture, as a national-political principle replaces the religious component of Jewish identity. Eventually, Jewish nationhood would exist only within the Jewish state.

[36] Ibid., 50. Schweid writes that for Ahad Ha'am, "Judaism is primarily a national framework based on a biological sense of affiliation. The Jew, as any other national, is born into Judaism and does not choose it. His very will to live incorporates the national will to live." Thus, "the whole personality enters the framework of the national life, to the point of preferring the existence of the collective to that of the individual who is part of it." Ahad Ha'am views the national heritage as a condition for the national *hefetz hakiyum* (The Will to Exist), and religion as part of this heritage even for the non-religious, who needs to create a synthesis between his Western state of mind, and his Jewish cultural heritage.

[37] Ibid., 51. Schweid says that Aharon David Gordon, who underscored the need for a national partnership, downplayed the need for the transmission of cultural heritage. He focused on the content rather than the framework of the national identity, and believed in a cosmic, ever-regenerating creativity of the people, which assures it continuity with the past.

[38] Ibid., Schweid says that Yehezkel Kaufman was closer to Klatzkin than to Ahad Ha'am or Gordon in his notion of nationhood. "He not only viewed the Jewish religion as the principal element, if not the only one, for the evolvement and preservation of nationhood in the past, but claimed that it should continue to be based both upon a political structure and upon a Hebrew culture, which would be open to the full range of the past Jewish creation."

attitude of the cultural Zionists to religion ranged from instrumental and temporary (Ahad Ha'am) to integral and indispensable (Kaufman).

Schweid sees in the cultural direction a middle ground between the other two, since neither religion nor nationhood can exist purely as such and without a cultural heritage. This approach assumes that the political structure is not important per se, but requires a content with which Jews would identify, and out of which they would continue to create. However, their commitment to it would be less than the *halakhic* Jew's commitment to *halakhah*. According to Schweid, the problem with Judaism as a culture is that it is wrong to separate it from its religious foundations.[39]

Schweid's conclusion is that the second generation could not accept either one of the two "pure" approaches: the secular-national or the religious. Each of them grew out of realities known by their founders, but which the second generation did not know. Therefore, says Schweid, only a third solution, based on Jewish cultural heritage, can bridge the two. On this point he agrees with Ahad Ha'am. On the role of religion in Jewish heritage, however, they disagree. Whereas Ahad Ha'am considered Jewish religion as instrumental and ultimately dispensable, Schweid sees it as essential and indispensable.

Schweid regards the existence of a Jewish state, where a Jewish collective lives a full and independent life within its own framework, as a precondition to the renewal of Jewish life. In this he follows the basic premise of classic Zionism, except for the expectation that renewal would be a natural growth. Schweid believes that renewal can only be achieved through conscious and directed education. [40]

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[39] Ibid., 51-53.

[40] Ibid., 54-58.

b) "Between Keepers of the Tradition and Those Who Do Not Keep It"[41]

While the previous section dealt with Schweid's views on Jewish identity in the fall of 1968, his interest in the subject stems from much earlier. This section takes us back to December 1963. In this essay, Schweid notes that the term *hiloni* ("secular") is often defined in opposition to *dati* ("religious"). Using individual language to describe two collectives, Schweid depicts the religious Jew[42] as someone who feels divinely commanded to observe the tradition strictly, and he sees the secular Jew as wavering between indifference to, and longing for, tradition. Schweid switches into collective and normative language as he speaks disapprovingly of those who seek a "path of return" without making a concomitant commitment to a sense of being divinely commanded. "No part of the secular public is free from an internal or external dependence on the *halakhic* tradition, which defines his national affiliation whether he wants it or not."[43]

Schweid recalls that the primary condition for Jewish identity is a *religious one.* Individually, to be Jewish, one cannot be part of a non-Jewish religion. Furthermore, other marks and symbols of Jewish identity (circumcision, dietary laws, sexual taboos, the Sabbath and holidays), which most Jews keep at least partially, define and inform that identity. Thus, the Jewish identity of the secular Jew is intertwined with and dependent upon religious tradition. Collectively, the religious public, as carrier of the religious tradition, identifies the secular public as Jewish. On the other hand, the secular public has

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[41] Eliezer Schweid, "Bein shomrei masoret lesheeinam shomreiha" (Between Those Who Keep the Tradition and Those Who Do Not Keep It), in *Min Hayessod.* 40 (1963); reprinted in Ibid., 59-73.

[42] The term "religious" is used here in its common Israeli usage, which equates religious with Orthodox. Liberal Jews and traditional Israelis are obviously "religious," but they are not considered as part of the Israeli *dati* category.

[43] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 61.

defined and established the political structures for all Jews, including religious ones, for the past two centuries. As Schweid observes,

> The religious and the secular [sectors] are points of reference for each other. Each defines itself from within and the other from without, and only the overlaps of the two circles expand and contract alternately. . . .The [members of] one are holy vessels for weekdays, and [the members of] the other are secular vessels for holy days![44]

Schweid opposes the political compromises between religious and secular parties, claiming that they promote division instead of urging dialogue. Dialogue will only begin when both sides replace their stereotypes of the other and allow the dynamics between them to work:

> The secular Jew must recognize—and the religious Jew must admit to him—that tradition is his [the secular Jew's] business no less than it is that of the religious public, and the religious Jew must recognize that the secular reality relates to him and he shares its values no less than the secular Jew.[45]

From this point onward the article is completely focused on collective and normative issues: He recognizes the exclusive right of the religious to create within tradition; he condemns arrogance on either side; he poses the question whether democratic and *halakhic* values threaten one another; he urges secular Jews to admit that *halakhah* is relevant to them even if they choose not to follow it; he objects to religious coercion; and finally, he proposes to replace *tolerance*—which maintains alienation between the sides—with *partnership* and efforts to gain knowledge of each other's world. He admits that this task will be more difficult for the religious Jews, and warns:

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[44] Ibid., 62.

[45] Ibid., 63.

> But woe to them and woe to all of us if the external invitation would not awaken the ability to make it happen, and instead of the spiritual work will come the routine of politicians and the wrath of the zealots.[46]

With this quasi-prophetic statement, Schweid ends this early attempt to bridge the polarization that divides religious and secular Jews in Israel.

c) "Secondary Affinity to Tradition"[47]

In this essay Schweid expresses his ideological disagreement with Ahad Ha'am concerning the role of religion in cultural Zionism. Schweid analyzes Ahad Ha'am's position as it appears in three of his essays, and criticizes their premises. Ahad Ha'am's focus on the nation as an organic entity with a will of its own, and his implicit subordination to the collective of the individual—whom he uses as a metaphor for the nation—could be seen as a source of Schweid's similar attitude. Schweid believes that Ahad Ha'am's personal roots in tradition give his understanding of "secondary affinity to tradition" a meaning that is inaccessible to a person born into a secular home.

Schweid accepts the use of the term "secondary affinity" to describe the secular attitude to religion. He understands this term is "an intermediary, functional affinity with indifference to its actual contents." This indifference is not emotional, since emotionally many secular Jews may feel nostalgia for tradition (which in itself is a secondary affinity). Ahad Ha'am posited that a nation, like an individual, has a will to exist, by which one can explain its entire history. He maintained that the expressions of national culture are

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[46] Ibid., 70-73.

[47] Eliezer Schweid, "Zika mishnit lamasoret: 'Iyun betzad aktuali ehad shel mishnat Ahad Ha'am" (Secondary Affinity to Tradition: Study of One Topical Aspect of Ahad Ha'am's Teaching), *Min Hayessod* 32 (1963); reprinted in ibid., 74-82.

connected to the "national self," which has a will to perpetuate itself, and that these expressions must be constantly evaluated as to whether they effectively serve the national will to live. Schweid criticizes Ahad Ha'am for relating to Judaism as an abstract whole, while adopting a utilitarian attitude towards its [religious] contents.[48]

(1) Past and Future

In this essay Ahad Ha'am defines the "private self" as a combination of past/memory and future/hope: "The self endures as long as the one who remembers is the one who hopes. Forgetting cuts off the continuity of self-consciousness, and in this sense it is the end of the self; and the loss of hope indicates the weakening of the will to exist, and it means death. The same applies to the nation."[49] Schweid refers to the collective aspect of Ahad Ha'am's description, saying Ahad Ha'am's metaphor illustrates the polarization between Jews who are in danger of losing their past/memory (heritage, history, national continuity) and assimilating, and those who reject future/hope (modernity) by clinging to a fossilized heritage that leads to national decline. Ahad Ha'am's revolutionary ideal is to preserve the national heritage and at the same time adapt to modernity, that is: memory *and* hope.

Schweid believes that Ahad Ha'am's attitude could only emerge from a generation that received traditional education. While the members of that generation rejected tradition, they retained it as part of their personal biography and it informed their being:

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[48] Ibid., 74-75.

[49] Ibid., 76-77.

> This is a shadow that follows him wherever he goes, a shadow from which it is impossible to cut loose without losing the body that casts it, but still—only a shadow.[50]

Schweid criticizes this attitude for substituting memory for core traditions. For this leads one to support Jewish education for the wrong reasons, as a reference to the past.

> What I was [before] does not define what I am now other than indirectly, circumstantially. It [can] explain and interpret me, but it does not define my present situation.[51]

(2) Early and Late

In this essay, Ahad Ha'am differentiates between two kinds of laws: *early laws* for which the time has not come, and which must be held in abeyance until their time is ripe, and *late laws*, whose time is past, and which may be "resurrected" when similar conditions arise. Schweid objects to this analysis, in which the "national will to live" is the only justification for keeping Jewish laws and traditions. Whereas Schweid would like to see tradition as an expression of ongoing commitment, for Ahad Ha'am tradition is the creative product of past generations, from which future generations may pick and choose whatever they want. Schweid objects to obscuring the notion of acceptance of authority, thereby emptying the specific content of "tradition" into the general one of "culture."[52]

(3) Words of Peace

Discussing continuity and change in religion, Ahad Ha'am wrote that while the *karaites* substituted one part of traditional Judaism with another, Reform Judaism accepted it but modified it, thereby rejecting its source of authority. He makes a further

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[50] Ibid., 78.

[51] Ibid.

distinction between the act of making a *reform*[53] as conscious change, and *development* as unconscious change with an illusion of continuity. He attributes the latter to rabbinic Judaism. Schweid criticized Ahad Ha'am for inconsistency – while declaring that religion must be based on unquestioned authority, he himself rejected such authority and, says Schweid, supported the continuity of Jewish religion for instrumental reasons. Schweid sees another contradiction between Ahad Ha'am's declared support of rabbinic Judaism, which he expected to be transmitted while evolving unreflectively, and his need to explain the same process to the very people who are supposed to transmit that tradition unknowingly. Schweid sees this as another illustration of problems resulting from the blurring of boundaries between culture and tradition:

> The unconscious [selective] suckling [from tradition] and the unconscious development [of religion] are cultural phenomena which one receives according to one's inclination or ability, without making an effort to understand why one accepted, changed or neglected.[54]

Ahad Ha'am's notion of "secondary affinity to tradition" is a recurrent theme in non-Orthodox thought. Mordechai Kaplan interpreted religious values as cultural contents, although he would not describe his thought as non-religious. Likewise, in the State of Israel, many non-observant Jews sought to adopt traditional values such as the Sabbath and festivals as cultural customs, not religious commandments. All of them reflect an implicit assumption, voiced by Ahad Ha'am in "Divrei Shalom," where he wrote,

> One can connect with traditional values by applying to them a cultural conception, allowing one free choice with regard to them, that is: a conception that allows one to skip, "spontaneously" and "unconsciously"

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[52] Ibid., 79-80.

[53] The reference here to "reform," is not to be confused with Reform Judaism. Schweid discusses his attitude to alternative forms of Judaism in the next essay, on partial fulfillment of *mitzvoth*.

[54] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 81.

> (i.e., without awareness and without a sense of duty), over the original meaning of the traditional value, so as to relate to them with a secondary, functional attitude.[55]

Schweid questions the legitimacy of this attitude. He distinguishes between Ahad Ha'am, who grew up with the notion of acceptance of religious authority, and the secularist Jew who did not know a home with tradition, and whose personal memory lacks the contents of such tradition, and who is, therefore, unable to relate to them even culturally. For the latter, a secondary affinity to religion would be equal to no affinity.[56]

d. "Partial Fulfillment of Torah Commandments"[57]

The subject of this 1968 essay is the meaning of religious commandments for the non-religious individual who wants to maintain his affinity to tradition. Schweid wrote it as an account of an individual, a fictional non-religious Jew, of whom he says:

> Certain experiences, and a spiritual development that ensued from them, brought him to a renewed confrontation with tradition, and he is looking for a way to return to it, to be commanded by it, and to live by it.[58]

Schweid immediately puts this "personal" account in its collective context, stating that this experience is representative of a whole generation. From this point on, the narrative, while speaking of an individual, does it by viewing that individual as the embodiment of a generation. A Jew who wants to "return," he says, possesses an

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[55] Ibid., 81-82.

[56] Cf. Franz Kafka's letter to his father: "You really had brought some traces of Judaism with you from the ghetto-like village community. It was not much and it dwindled more in the city and during your military service; but still, the impressions and memories of your youth did just about suffice for some sort of Jewish life. . . . Even in this there was still Judasim enough, but it was too little to be handed on to the child; it dribbled away while you were passing it on." Quoted in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi,. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 79.

[57] Eliezer Schweid, "Kiyum helki shel mitzvoth hatorah" (Partial Fulfillment of Torah Commandments), *Ptahim* 4 (Iyar [May] 1968); reprinted in ibid., 83-90.

[58] Ibid., 83. Schweid indicates a similar treatment by Mordechai Bar-On in *Ptahim*, no. 2.

ambivalent attitude towards tradition. As soon as he tries to act upon his wish, he experiences the gap between himself and the tradition, as well as the unfamiliar nature of traditional lifestyle and thinking. If he feels unable to accept it as a whole, he has two options: to pull back, or to select parts of the whole. Schweid questions the legitimacy of selectivity, because the essence of religious commandments[59] is the recognition that they originate from a divinely commanded source.

> Faith in [Torah from Heaven] and in its logical consequence, that all of the commandments in the written and the oral Torah are *"Mitzvoth Hashem"* and that they are binding, is in my opinion a condition for a true return to tradition. This is so because denying this principle obliterates the very notion of tradition and even if one fulfills part of its directives, he does not do so by their virtue as commandments.[60]

This apparently rigid Orthodox position is mitigated by Schweid's assertion that there is no consensus on the meaning of "Torah from Heaven," and that *each person may trace his own way with regard to it.*[61] His flexibility is apparent also in balancing his insistence that a Jew should accept the divine authority of the totality of the commandments with an understanding that the applicability of each commandment depends on its interpretation. This requires an ongoing process of selection according to the changing circumstances of the Jewish collective and the individual who lives within it. This position is similar to the Orthodox one, with circumstantial differences when the two disagree on specific commandments and their interpretation. The ideas Schweid promotes

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[59] Ibid. Schweid defines a commandment as a directive to behave in a certain way, based on the acceptance of the commanding authority. It is devoid of coercion and dependent on free will. The reward or punishment associated with it is in doing or not doing what it prescribes.

[60] Ibid., 84.

[61] Although Schweid does not mention it, this statement is reminiscent of Rosenzweig's notion of keeping commandments as a function of "being able" rather than "being obligated." Franz Rosenzweig, "Habonim" (The Builders), in *Naharayim: mivhar ktavim,* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1977), 88-89.

here seem curiously similar to Ahad Ha'am's ideas in "Divrei Shalom" concerning the development (as opposed to reform) of commandments, which Schweid criticized in another essay.[62] It is also reminiscent of Zecharias Frankel's position in 1845,[63] whose heritage is being carried on by Conservative Judaism. However, whereas Ahad Ha'am sees such change as pertaining to the collective subconscious, and Frankel requires a broad consensus among the Jewish people, Schweid allows personal circumstances to be taken into account for deciding on the applicability of commandments. He names this "internal selection," as opposed to "external selection," which includes social, political and cultural circumstances. This acceptance by Schweid is surprisingly similar to notions of personal autonomy prevalent in Reform Judaism.

Schweid uses the notion of *zimun* [summoning] as the condition for the applicability of a commandment: one must consider oneself summoned to fulfill a commandment. If one fulfills a commandment without being summoned, its value as commandment is questionable. Thus, it is possible that "either the person has not reached the commandment because the appropriate conditions for it were not ripe in him, or the commandment has not reached the person—that is, it has not been interpreted or applied to his reality." This idea is reminiscent of liberal thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig with

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[62] Supra, 47.

[63] "The third party . . .affirms both the divine value and historical basis of Judaism and, therefore, believes that by introducing some changes it may achieve some agreement with the concepts and conditions of the time." From: "Die Symptome der Zeit," *Zeitschrift für jüdische religiöse Interessen,* 2 (1845). 1-21. In P. Mendes-Flohr and J. Reinharz, ed., *The Jew and the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 175.

his notion of *noch nicht,*[64] which likely influenced Schweid, and Reform thinkers such as Eugene Borowitz, whose notion of being commanded is unlikely to have been explored by Schweid.[65] While Schweid accepts non-performance of commandments when one does not feel internally summoned, he rejects the idea of reforming or abolishing commandments altogether. For example, sacrificial laws were valid in different historical, cultural or intellectual circumstances other than those experienced by Schweid. Yet, he would not abolish them, nor would he fulfill them even if they were applicable today, for "they would achieve the opposite of their original intention as stated in the Torah."[66] He says that many Orthodox Jews hold a similar attitude, even though they do not state it. A modern Orthodox expression of accepting such commandments could be studying rather than practicing them even if such practice could become a live option.

Schweid points out that most of the commandments that are not practiced by secular Jews do not conflict with other values, as in the above example. It is simply difficult for them to do things to which they are not habituated and in which they do not find meaning. The feeling of meaninglessness, Schweid warns, does not dissipate quickly even for one who reaches an awareness of being commanded. It is a gradual process. Schweid urges those who are not ready, to refrain from following commandments for which they are not ready, until they draw closer so as not to feel that they are rejecting

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[64] "Not yet," Franz Rosenzweig's famous answer to the question whether he lays *tefilin*. Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe,* ed. Edith Rosenzweig and Ernst Simon, (Berlin: Schocken Veralg, 1935), 428; quoted in S. H. Bergman, Introduction to *Naharayim: mivhar ktavim* by Franz Rosenzweig, trans. Yehoshua Amir (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1977), xxii.

[65] This idea of Borowitz is mitigated by his recognition of the limits of individuality: "Responding to the Divine presence cannot only be a matter of what is commanded to me personally at the moment, as one whose individuality is not to be separated from . . . being one of the historic Jewish people." Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought,* 2nd ed. (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1995), 286.

them: "On the contrary, it is the only way for a person who was not educated within tradition to accept the commandment and relate to it with respect and a sense of obligation. This applies, of course, only if his intention is to continue being commanded by the commandments of the Torah."[67]

Thus, fulfilling religious commandments selectively is common to all who are commanded, whether Orthodox or not. Here, however, Schweid makes a powerful distinction. The Orthodox selection is done on the basis of the assumptions inherent in a full *halakhic* life, and thus can become a *halakhic* decision, a creation within tradition. The returning Jew, however, can only use what tradition offers him, but not create new traditions or make decisions that would apply to others. Not only has he distanced himself from *halakhah*, says Schweid, but *halakhah* never reached him. He can only embrace Jewish tradition if he meets, on his path of return, those who carry the *halakhah*, ready to make it available to his contemporary social and cultural reality. This can happen only if the "*halakhah* carriers," who study and create *halakhah,* and the "receivers" live in the same environment. In complementary remarks, Schweid adds the following concerns:

(1) Commandments and Civil Law

One can only genuinely fulfill a commandment through an act of free will. However, this can only happen to one who has a mature faith, and who knows that the religious way of life is not arbitrary, but sees it as stemming from an external authority. In Israel, religious legislation (*halakhah*) continues to develop independently of most people's religious observance, but is not generally enforceable. Non-religious legislation,

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[66] Schweid, *Ad Mashber*, 86.

on the other hand, is enforceable. In the absence of separation of church and state in Israel, many religious laws were legislated also as non-religious laws so that they could be enforced. Obeying such laws, says Schweid, fulfills a religious commandment only if it is done out of free will.

(2) The Divine Origin of the Commandments

Schweid posits that commandments, in their religious sense, are based on the assumption that revelation reflects an objective reality. Hence, revelation entails the relevance of divine authority for us. Replacing it by a human or social source of authority (conscience, morality, national awareness) rules out the religious aspect, unless we accept them as vehicles for the divine authority. This is why Schweid thinks one should object both to an Orthodox view that grants humans the authority to enforce religious commandments upon those who are not committed to them and to a Reform view that grants to humans the right to decide what is or is not a divine commandment. Using sanctions for religious commandments is politicization, which represents a primitive understanding of religion. More maturity is needed in order to understand the religious sense of commandment.[68]

(3) When is religious coercion legitimate?

Individuals keep commandments as part of a congregation (*eda*) and within it. Schweid recognizes that there can be situations in which the congregation's unity and

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[67] Ibid., 87.

[68] This position reflects the Kantian notion that religious law that is imposed on the individual is not moral or ethical because "it restricts the individual's attempts to actualize his freedom and his moral autonomy through a system of self-legislated ethic." Cf. David Ellenson, "Emil Fackenheim and the Revealed Morality of Judaism," *Judaism* 25 no. 4 (Fall 1976), 403.

continuity would be threatened without enforcing religious principles through human authority. The protection of *religious interests*, Schweid warns, needs to be differentiated from the *political interests* such interests produce. The legitimacy of coercion is dependent on the recognition by the coerced individual of the right of the authority to use it against him.[69] Personal or political interests that could be served by commandments may not be upheld by the authority of the commandment, but only by the personal or political authority. These conditions mean that legitimate religious coercion could have been applicable in a pre-modern traditional community, but not in a modern democratic society, where it would require a majority through the democratic process.

4. How collective are the collective years?

The four essays discussed in this section have focused on religious issues and have touched upon their relevance in both public and private realms. Although some issues discussed in them, such as the limits of religious coercion, protect the individual and restrict the collective, Schweid's collectivistic penchant is clear throughout. The focus is often on the individual when it comes to issues such as the individual's obligation towards the Jewish people and the divine authority of the Torah. However, when he writes about matters of great interest to the individual, such as personal autonomy or partial fulfillment of commandments, his concern for the *kelal* (the collective) seems to overshadow his concern for the *perat* (the individual).

The first and main essay in this volume, "Days of Return," is set in a fundamentally communal context, evoking key words such as nation, crisis, war, survival and victory. It

[69] For example, a member of a *haredi* community typically recognizes the right of the leadership to enforce its principles even at such times as he tries to transgress them.

does, though, have a strong individual component in Schweid's vivid and moving descriptions of facing mortal danger and the emotional and spiritual impacts such danger has on the person experiencing it. However, as indicated earlier, Schweid's individual is often depicted in generic terms and/or seems to reflect Schweid's own unique and non-transferable experiences and reactions.

The last two essays in this volume are by definition collective. The first, "Zionism Under Scrutiny,"[70] was originally published in 1962, fourteen years after the establishment of the State of Israel, and five years before the Six Days War. It sets out to evaluate how well Zionism did in achieving the goals it had set for itself. The second, "Between Israel and the Diaspora Jews,"[71] was published two and a half years after the Six Days War, shortly before its re-publication in *Ad Mashber*. Neither of those two articles, whose main ideas have already been discussed in regard to the essay, "Days of Return," sheds new light on the interplay between the collective and the individual in Schweid's thought.

The collective years, hence, seem to live up to their reputation. Schweid's focus seems to be on the communal experience and on individuals as parts of the collective, with occasional glimpses into the individual's perspective. In the next chapter we shall try to find out whether Schweid's treatment of individual issues is different in his *Judaism and the Solitary Jew*.

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[70] Eliezer Schweid. "Tziyonut bemivhan" (Zionism under Scrutiny), *Min hayessod* (1962); reprinted in *Ad Mashber*, 95-116.

[71] Eliezer Schweid. "Bein yisrael lihudei hatfutzot" (Between Israel and the Diaspora Jews), *Davar*, 20 September 1968; reprinted in *Ad Mashber*, 117-126.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW INDIVIDUAL IS THE INDIVIDUAL?

In 1974, Schweid published one of his most widely cited works, *Hayehudi haboded ve hayahadut*.[1] At the back of the title page of the Hebrew book, an English translation of the title appears: *Judaism and the Solitary Jew*. There is a clear difference of nuance between the two titles. While the Hebrew title begins with the individual, the translated title begins with Judaism. Also, the Hebrew word *yahadut* can be rendered in English in more than one way. When speaking of an individual, it would be more appropriate to use it in the sense of the person's "Jewishness," relating to his particular way of living his Jewish identity, rather than "Judaism," with its collective and impersonal resonance. If Schweid wanted to further emphasize the primacy of the individual, he could have used *ve yahaduto* rather than *ve hayahadut.* These choices, I believe, are not accidental. They reflect the author's collectivistic orientation, a tendency that remains pronounced even when he deals with the individual.

This point is reinforced when one looks at the table of contents. The book has two parts, the second being a trilogy of biographical essays on Spinoza, Mendelssohn and Rabbi Kook, as representatives of three distinct approaches to the encounter that must be mediated between Judaism and modernity. These are descriptive and analytical reviews of the three thinkers' general philosophies as they applied to Judaism and modernity, with no particular emphasis upon the individual experience.

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[1] Eliezer Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded vehayahadut* (Judaism and the Solitary Jew) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1974).

The first and main part of the book has seven chapters:

1. *On the Solitude of a Jew in Our Times*: From aloneness to solitude; how the individual Jew became a solitary individual; the anxiety of solitude as existential anxiety.
2. *On the Attitude to the Family*: The beginning of biography; the essence of the family; the Jewish family; choosing the self in the family.
3. *On the Attitude to the People*: Biography, family and people; the essence of the people; the Jewish people; choosing the self in the people.
4. *On the Attitude to History*: People, culture and history; the essence of history; history in Judaism; choosing the self in history.
5. *On the Attitude to the Source*: The source as the beginning of history; the uniqueness of a source as a cultural creation; sources of Judaism; a creative attitude to the sources.
6. *On Faith*: Faith as the foundation to the attitude to Torah; the question of faith as a question of identity; the possibility of "returning" to faith.
7. *On the Uniqueness of the Jewish Uniqueness*: Particularism and universalism; the paradox of the "chosen people;" relative vs. absolute uniqueness.

The chapter descriptions already provide us with a clue as to Schweid's attitude to the individual. Even when Schweid dedicates the title of a whole book to the individual, the individual existence has a meaning only as part of a collective – a family, a people, a culture, a history, or a religion.[2]

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[2] Schweid's notion of the individual is reminiscent of Buber's idea of the "social self," as explained by Ellenson: "Individuals are 'human' precisely because they are capable of entering into dialogic relationship with other persons as well as with God. Human life is a social construction.... At the same time, our individualism is formed by and leads us to be for others.... In this vision, neither the solitary individual nor the social aggregate is the essential fact of human existence. The fundamental reality that marks us as persons is that we are formed by God as social creatures." David Ellenson, "Autonomy and Norms in Reform Judaism," *CCAR Journal* (Spring 1999), 25.

Earlier, as we saw, Schweid describes the plight of the solitary Jew with the advent of modernity. Now, he defines the anxiety of solitude experienced by the Jew as an existential anxiety.[3] He writes:

> The anxiety of the solitary Jew is an existential anxiety. The individual apparently defines himself from within himself. He is an "I" who is understood by himself, in and of himself, and as long as he is thus understood by himself, the question "Who am I?" has no meaning for him. Another person might ask about him, but it is doubtful whether he can be answered. He, in any event, does not ask, because the answer is given even before he does: "I." And what meaning does this answer have beyond the immediate awareness of the individual to himself? But the solitary [individual] knows that "I" has no existence without an attitude towards what lies beyond it, and the existence of the "I" has no meaning without such an attitude. For him, therefore, the question "Who am I?" has a meaning. It screams itself out of the anxiety of his solitude as long as he does not know an answer, and the answer for a question that is asked like that is not ready in and of itself. The fact that the "I" has no existence without an attitude towards what lies beyond it has two aspects. On the one hand, the "I" is not there of himself. He finds himself already there, but when he can say "I," he had already begun somewhere; he had already surfaced from strange depths. From this aspect, the question "Who am I?" is the question "Where did I come from?" and it directs him to the past, and again directs him to the past, because at any time, a person is what he has already been. His past is within his present. On the other hand, the "I" is not complete within himself, and he is never there as a completed [entity]. He is open to have an affinity with man, society, the environment, and when he can say "I" he is still not complete, but he stands before himself as a destiny. From this aspect, the question "Who am I?" is the question "Where am I going? What do I want to be?" and it directs him to the future, because at any time, a person is what he is about to be. His future is within his present. Thus, the question of identity is the question of attitude to the past and the future. A person chooses himself with an affinity to his past. When he does so, he creates a biography that is connected to history, and a family that is connected to a people, and he continues in the heritage of the culture, which is the creation of a people's life and the reality of a history. Through them he could also reach faith. But he cannot begin the journey at the end. When he is asked about his attitude to the Jewish faith, the Jewish heritage, Jewish history, and even the Jewish people, he says, as an individual, that they are "irrelevant" to him. And as a solitary [individual] he can react only in confusion and pain. If Judaism is faith—he has no faith; if Judaism is a heritage of a culture

[3] The Hebrew term is *metzukat zehut*, literally: distress of identity.

> that was created out of faith, he has no share in it; if Judaism is a connection to a people—the people is not one, and its life as a whole does not affect him directly, unless there is a fateful threat from outside. In his eye, as we said, nothing is assumed from the outset as a given, and therefore the solitary [individual] ought to begin his journey from the beginning that precedes all these, from the private point at which he touches directly that which lies beyond himself.[4]

This passage encapsulates many aspects of Schweid's thought, including the analysis of an apparently universal problem, at the end of which we realize that in the back of his mind he always has the Jewish particular frame of reference. This shall be dealt with further on. For now, it should be noted that Schweid, while treating the very issue of "the individual," claims that the individual must be defined in relation to a collective in order for his life to have a meaning. In so doing, Schweid actually suggests that the individual use the right to define his identity, granted him through the transition from pre-modern to modern times, to maintain the pre-modern identification of the individual with the collective even after the collective has lost its power to enforce its will on the individual.[5] He compares the *unaware* individual, who has no existential anxiety because he is satisfied with the simple definition of the "I" as "I," with the *solitary* individual, who is suffering from existential anxiety because he realizes that this definition is insufficient.[6] By putting the solitary individual on a temporal axis, he redefines the question, "Who am I?" as "From whence do I come and to where do I go?"

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[4] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 31-32.

[5] Ellenson, "'Who Is a Jew?'," 70-72.

[6] Schweid's thought is in interesting contrast to Kirkegaard, who posits the completely solitary "I." In *Fear and Trembling,* he writes: "The one knight of faith can render no aid to the other. Either the individual becomes a knight of faith by assuming the burden of the paradox, or he never becomes one. In these regions partnership is unthinkable. . . . Hence even if a man were cowardly enough to wish to become a knight of faith on the responsibility of an outsider, he will never become one; for only the individual becomes a knight of faith as the particular individual." Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* and *Sickness unto Death,* trans. with intro. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954), 80-82; quoted in Maurice Friedman, *The Worlds of Existentialism,* 286.

Thus, the identity of the individual is defined by his past and future, and, for the solitary Jew, his alienation from the past (faith, heritage, affinity to the Jewish people) engenders an existential anxiety. Schweid believes that the individual can overcome this alienation and even achieve faith, but to do this he must begin a journey and embark upon the "path of return."

The weakness of this well-structured argument lies in its implicit assumption that that Jews who are not alienated from religion, tradition and heritage are immune from existential anxieties. Yet, these assumptions are not necessarily fatal flaws in Schweid's argument, if we understand them as directed to a limited audience–secular Jews in general, and those who, like Schweid, have experienced existential anxieties concerning their Jewish identity. Schweid seems to direct his thought to this group and offers his path of return as a possible remedy for their malady. The journey he proposes begins with the individual who realizes his solitude and undertakes to eliminate it from his life through reconnection with the elements that make up his past and future: the family, the people, the culture, and "the sources."

With regard to the family, Schweid asserts that the individual realizes his identity as a function of the past. That identity, expressed in personal memory, is based on two main elements – his relationships with other people and his genetic uniqueness. This identity is experienced initially within the family, which, although a function of a biological process, is primarily a social institution, based on a consciousness of affinity and transmitted through parenting and education.[7] Jewish tradition, from its biblical origins, is family-centered, and many of the commandments are family oriented, and

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[7] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded*, 35-37.

relate to family purity (as distinct from idolatry), respect for parents and the obligation to educate children. Even the relationship between God and the Jewish people is often depicted as an ideal family relationship. All this points to the primacy accorded family values in Judaism. These values find a constant expression in the cycle of the Jewish year, with its Sabbaths and holidays, where the family plays a primary role.[8] He observes:

> The strongest connection of the Jew to Judaism, with regard to his national attitude as well as his attitude to the heritage, is the family connection. Whether a person decides to keep his link to Judaism or to disconnect from it, he first of all decides on his attitude to the Jewish family within which he was born, and thereby also to *the content within which he lived its unity*.[9]

This conclusion leads Schweid from an analytic-descriptive narrative to a normative one. Having linked individual identity to the past through genetics and heritage, he links the next step in answering the identity question to the future, through the individual's volitional choice. He can choose not to start a family or not to transmit the heritage in his new family, thereby making a negative choice as to his given identity. Schweid remarks that such a choice is one of "effacement and destruction."[10] Therefore, he posits, "the *correct* decision with regard to the self of the individual is the *positive* decision to start a family and continue as a father what he received as a son. . . . A Jewish person who becomes a father and raises a Jewish family in his own way, chooses himself

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[8] Ibid., 39-43. Schweid further developed the theme of the holidays in his *Sefer mahzor hazmanim: mashma'utam shel hagei yisrael* (The Cycle of Appointed Times: The Meaning of Jewish Holidays) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1984).

[9] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 43-44. Italics mine. Despite their ideological differences, Schweid's position is akin to that of Michael Meyer, who criticizes the Reform emphasis on personal autonomy in Jewish education, which reduces such education to providing resources for individual decision. He promotes education "as drawing into the circle, " i.e., "The task of the parent or teacher [ought to be] to expound and analyze the [cultural and religious traditions of Judaism] from within the circle of their own commitment. The goal is to draw the child into the circle, not so much to educate (in the sense of 'drawing out') as to 'instill' a sense of what it is like to live within the circle." Michael Meyer, "Reflections on the 'Educated Jew' from the Perspective of Reform Judaism," *CCAR Journal* (Spring 1999), 13.

[10] Hebrew: *bitul vaharisa.* Cf. Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 44.

as a Jew."[11] It is noteworthy that Schweid uses "father" and "son," as if women had no share in the transmission of heritage, reflecting a lack of gender consciousness. This is among the factors that have led me to conclude, as we shall see later, that one of the ways in which Schweid conceives the individual is with himself as the prototype. This also comes out of his frequent focus on non-religious modern Jews. In most cases, he says, their parents have already made the negative decision and maintain only a partial affinity to Judaism (such as opposing mixed marriages) with no link to a living and creative tradition. Their children can continue their parents' influence in one of two ways, effacement and emptiness on the one hand, or renewal and replenishment with a barely familiar or cherished content on the other. Schweid reiterates his normative stance (this time with "parents" instead of "father"!) and adds: "The proper choice for a person who is born and educated as a Jew is to choose his Judaism and perpetuate it."[12]

Having established the link between the individual and the family, Schweid moves to the next level of affinity: the people. In his analysis, the family is linked to the people in a way that is akin to how the individual is linked to the family. When the individual identifies himself as his parents' son (*ben lehorav*), he identifies himself as a member of his people (*ben le'amo*).[13] Consequently:

> The person who asks about his identity must, therefore, explore: How and to what extent his personality was shaped in connection to his people? What did he receive directly from the people? And then he will have to choose himself on the background of his national past: Will he want to continue this relationship in his family and his people, and how?[14]

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[11] Ibid., 45. Italics mine.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 47.

[14] Ibid., 48.

Schweid explicitly states that his description of the individual's biography is based on an assumption that the individual received an education from which he can draw. Thus, he excludes anyone who had no Jewish exposure in the family, who lives in an assimilated environment, who grew up without a family, as well as people who have one or more parents who is not Jewish, or who converted to Judaism. These exclusions reflect the limitation of scope his characterization bears in regard to children of two Jewish parents whose affinity to Judaism is partial, and who transmitted their mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish values and their unanswered questions to their offspring.

Schweid's definition of a people is "a family of families."[15] Its formation and cohesion rely on the heritage of ancestry and the continuity of generations, and, with time, also on the creation of a common history, language, and cultural and spiritual traditions. He warns against interpreting ancestral affinity in terms of race or blood, since national identity is primarily the product of nurture, not nature. In the people, as in the family, extraction is a necessary but insufficient element for creating a sense of belonging: "the people is a conscious union of families. The awareness of unity based on common extraction is what unifies it."[16] As in the family, such awareness exists when the members regard each other not as individuals, but as parts of a unity, and everyone must choose himself in his people.[17] "This is a theoretical question for most people. For [specific] individuals, including many Jews, this is a real and fateful question."[18]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 52.

[17] See Sartre's application of his notion of *authenticity* to the situation of the Jew: "Authenticity for him is to live to the full his condition as Jew; inauthenticity is to deny it or to attempt to escape from it." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. G. J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1948), 91

[18] Ibid., 53

Schweid traces the traditional origins of the Jewish people and shows that it conforms to his definitions. He notes the erratic course of its crystallization as a people in the biblical narrative, and concludes, again, with his normative stance:

> At every turning point in history, Israel's essence as a people was put to the test, and every individual in his family, tribe or community was required to choose. This is a living fact to this day. It is imprinted in the special fate of this people and the quality of the accentuated conscious-volitional attitude of every individual within it. More than the member of any other people, the Jew is required to recognize his belonging to his people, to choose it, and to continually express his choice in his behavior.[19]

Schweid stops short of explaining the epistemological grounds for the individual to make such choice, and limits his rationale to the traditional source material. The Bible puts a high value on the existence of the Jewish people, but not a supreme value, as the Jewish people has an existence only in the Torah. In the biblical worldview, without loyalty to the Torah, the Jews have no existence as a people. It is through such loyalty that they become a people. In this view, Schweid says, all the principles according to which the Jew must live are defined from within the people, including relations with other peoples. Schweid quotes biblical and rabbinic sources[20] to show that people feel responsible for each other because they come from one father, and he adds: "In the people, such intimacy is tangible as life partnership, and therefore only the people is a whole society within which the individual can find full expression."[21] Schweid adopts the

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[19] Ibid., 55.

[20] "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" Malachi 2:10; and Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5: "The Holy, blessed be He, created all humans in the mold of Adam, the first [human], and none of them is like the other; therefore, every single one of them must say: 'The world was created for my sake.'"

[21] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 57.

traditional Jewish value, "All Jews are responsible for each other,"[22] and uses it to make two points: one, the shift from the universal principle of mutual responsibility to the particular principle of Jewish solidarity, and the other, the affirmation of his belief that the Jewish individual can find full expression for himself only within the Jewish people. The Torah, he says, is universal, but it defines a particular role for the Jewish people. The Jewish people is a chosen people, an *'am segulah*, neither because of a mission to other peoples, nor because God needs to be worshipped. Rather, it is because the Jewish people comes into being through its dedication to God, and its dedication to God takes place through its life as a people. Thus, the first condition established for the Jewish individual that allows for meaningful self-expression—*affinity to the people*—is followed by a second condition, *commitment to Torah*. Schweid views a transition from an instinct-based definition of the individual's existence as a function of his affinity to the family and the people, to a faith-based definition of the Jewish people, as an organic one, a view not necessarily shared by all his readers.

Time and time again in its long history, Schweid claims, the Jewish people made the same choice that he expects now from the individual. "There is no period in Jewish history that is not, in effect, a new beginning,"[23] and the great Jewish literary creations—the Bible, the Mishna, the Talmud, and medieval commentaries—are "reflections of life in the making." However, says Schweid, the Jewish people is still "not completed. In our times, as in the past," he writes, "it must begin anew. It must be a people, that is, it must decide on its attitude to the covenant and interpret it in its life."[24]

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[22] Babylonian Talmud, *Shvu'ot*, 39a.

[23] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 58.

[24] Ibid., 59.

The Jewish people's relations with other peoples further enhance this need. Since its inception, the Jewish people have wavered between what it shared with other peoples and what separated it from them. Seeking to be accepted, they tried to become like other peoples. Yet, they also knew that this trajectory, if taken too far, would cause them to cease as a people. Consequently, they reverted to their separateness and solitude. Similarly, the modern Jew is faced with a choice between three goals: to cease to be a people, to be like other peoples, or to return to its uniqueness.[25] This is not only true for Diaspora Jews, but for Israeli ones as well, for a Jew can also assimilate among other Jews. Schweid believes that unlike members of other peoples, whose identity is not diminished when they are unaware of it, the Jew can maintain his unique identity only by wanting it. National pride has been shunned by Western intellectuals due to the recent totalitarian experiences in Europe and the globalization of the world economy. However, Schweid notes, whereas even the opponents of nationalism in most countries do not reject their national identity, the solitary Jew seeks to identify with his environment by opposing national identity in general and his Jewish national identity as a Jew. This is a manifestation of the fact that, unlike other nationals, the Jew's national identity is not granted: it needs to be chosen. Furthermore, this choice entails coming to terms with the historical fate of the Jewish people and with its heritage. Assuming responsibility for Jewish historical fate means, for Schweid, taking a stand in favor of its survival by being a Zionist. To assume the Jewish heritage means running against the grain of those

[25] Ibid.

accepted Western values that have led to an atomization of the social fabric. Therefore, in order to realize his Jewish essence, a Jew must reject those Western values.[26]

Turning to the notion of history, Schweid points out that history is a characteristic of humans, as opposed to animals. Persons live with an awareness of time as a continuum from the past to the future, which is reflected in their memories and values.[27] People create culture. While every people has a historical awareness, the Jewish people's identity is singular.[28] It is founded on a historical beginning, a belief in a historical redemption, and the notion of a purpose in history. Naturally, its awareness is very central:

> [The Jewish people] needs to know at any time that it continues a history and is being judged in a history, and that only in [history] its existence as a people is real. If it does not remember to remember itself as a people, oblivion will be its verdict.[29]

Schweid's notion of Jewish singularity harbors an assumption that the Jews have a collective sense of separate identity that, he further assumes, other peoples do not possess. However, Schweid did not find it necessary to substantiate this assumption.

Schweid offers prooftexts from the biblical narrative for sources pointing to the development of Jewish historical awareness. The myth of creation, he says, defines a "beginning" of the universe, of history and of the dimension of the *past*, which is typical of pagan myths. Abraham, however, gains consciousness of his destiny to become a people, and introduces the dimension of the *future*, which marks the departure from

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[26] Ibid., 60-63.

[27] Ibid., 64-73.

[28] Leo Baeck's wrote: "Every people can be chosen for a history, for a share in the history of humanity. Each is a question which God has asked, and each people must answer. But more history has been assigned to this people than any other people." Leo Baeck, *This People Israel: The Meaning of Jewish Existence*, trans. Albert H. Friedlander (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 402.

[29] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded*, 74.

paganism.[30] The pagans expect the future to be a repetition of the past, and this expectation represents cyclical thinking. The biblical narrative, however, substitutes it with a notion of the future as a trend, or a continuous projection of the past, which represents linear thinking.

The story of the Exodus is an expression of the collective memory of a past, which the Jewish collective undertook to remember as a symbol of its experiences in every generation, and as the basis for its year-cycle. Just as the Jews adopted existing pagan mythologies in writing their own myth of creation, and yet, invested that myth with new meanings, so too did they do so in establishing the festivals. Nature-related pagan festivals were "converted" and infused with historical consciousness. They were given new meanings, ones that symbolized the victory of history over myth. All Jewish holidays are commemorative holidays.[31]

The biblical historical narrative is founded on the basis of faith in a God who created the universe and man and who commands him to follow God's will. Both biblical and post-biblical Jewish history is a succession of acceptances and rejections of God's authority, followed by sovereign times when God "shows his face" (*gilui panim*), and exile, when God "hides his face" (*hester panim*). During exilic times, says Schweid, the only expression of *gilui panim* was rabbinic literature. Otherwise, the meaning of exile *was* the lack of history.[32]

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[30] This is not a suggestion that Judaism transcends the mythological meaning, as can be seen from the next sentence. Schweid explains collective memory as the ex-post documentation of the past in what then becomes a "source" that acquires commitment by the collective, which makes it into its sacred source (like the Torah). Thus, he can admit the mythical nature of the Torah without risking that it would be discredited on the basis of critical arguments. Ibid., 86.

[31] Cf. Schwied, *Sefer mahzor hazmanim*, 11-27.

[32] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded*, 75-79. This statement reflects Schweid's clearly Zionist stance, which leads him to adopt a monolithic view of Jewish history between periods of Jewish sovereignty.

> The modern transformation of historical awareness, says Schweid, led to viewing history as a scientific discipline, complemented by the social sciences, focused on the past and concerned with objective facts. Prioritizing the past-oriented, scientific dimension of history compromised its role as a relevant dimension of the present. For the Jews, it meant a *relativization of the past*, questioning their heretofore accepted traditional sacred history. Natural modes of historical explanation, such as economics and politics, were introduced. The naïve acceptance of tradition was no longer possible for the individual who wanted to be part of the modern world. Thus the modern Jew realized that he was the product of history.[33]

However, our attitude to history is not only what we *remember*, but even more so what we *choose* to remember and transmit.[34] It is not enough for the historian to know what was, claims Schweid. He ought also to resolve what he wants to make of it. Schweid points to a special transformation in Jewish history: the traditional non-history of the Jews in exile was replaced by the modern understanding of their history as part of, and influenced by, the peoples in whose midst they resided. Some modern historians, Zionists in particular, sought to skip the exilic period and connect the biblical and Second Temple eras directly to modern Jewish history. Early Reform Jewish leaders, such as Abraham Geiger,[35] saw biblical prophecy as original Judaism, adapted by early rabbinic leaders to the needs of their times, and then frozen until the advent of modernity. National thinkers, such as Michah Yosef Berdichevsky and Jacob Steinberg, defined

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[33] This analysis is akin to Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's analysis of the emergence of Jewish historiography: "The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it had never been before—the faith of fallen Jews. For the first time history, not a sacred text, becomes the arbiter of Judaism. Virtually all nineteenth-century Jewish ideologies, from Reform to Zionism, would feel a need to appeal to history for validation. Predictably, 'history' yielded the most varied conclusions to the appellants." Yerushalmi,. *Zakhor*, 86.

[34] In Franz Rosenzweig's inaugural address at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus he suggested that learning could constitute a "kind of remembrance, an inner remembering, a turning from externals to that which is within, a turning that, believe me, will and must become for you a turning home. . . . Turn into yourself, return home to your innermost self and to your innermost life." Franz Rosenzweig, "On Jewish Learning," in Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig,* 234; quoted in Ellenson, "'Who Is a Jew'," 27-28.

[35] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 95-96.

Judaism as a political phenomenon and viewed life in Diaspora as an exile, as an aberration that must be corrected by reverting to the original, independent state of the Jewish people. Neo-Orthodox thinkers, such as S. R. Hirsch, believed that between the destruction of the Temple and the coming of the messiah, Jewish existence was beyond history. Schweid rejects those three attitudes as a-historical, leading to a lack of continuity in Jewish historical awareness,[36] and he concludes:

> Thus, choosing oneself in Jewish history requires a new understanding of the uniqueness of Jewish history and the perpetuation of that history in a way of life. This is the choice that leads to the next step in confronting the question of Jewish identity: the knowledge and experience of Jewish history in its uniqueness requires a confrontation with its sources.[37]

Schweid describes the succession of sources in a people's history as the important factor in the people's identity, rather than the events they depict. He equates "the sources" with history, and states that a historical attitude implies commitment to the sources as a norm for national identity.[38] The use of the definite article before "sources" implies "all the sources," but Schweid does not specify what is included in his notion of the sources. From other parts of his narrative one can deduce that this notion might be restrictive. While he extends it beyond the realm of traditional works and regards even contemporary Israeli literature as part of it, it is doubtful that he would define liberal Diaspora Jewish literary creation as "sources." A liberal view might agree with his notion of "sources," but it would require commitment to the totality of Jewish expression.

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[36] Yerushalmi, conversely, showed that the historical approach to Judaism is a departure from basic Jewish premises, such as divine providence and the uniqueness of Jewish history, bringing them down to the same level of any other history. This implies a new awareness that precludes an *a priori* definition of Judaism. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor,* 89.

[37] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 84.

[38] Ibid., 85-86.

Schweid rejects the description of pre-documented time as pre-history, a term that he understands not as early history, but as its total absence. He proposes to describe it as meta-history, "the metaphysical assumption, or the definite belief, by those who already have a history, regarding a super-historical event, in which a force beyond history is involved, and from which begin existence and order. . . . Creation myths of all nations reflect the beginning of human civilization at the meeting point of historical memory and its meta-historical assumption."[39] This encounter is a religious experience, and the sources are religious scriptures. Without their religious dimension they become questionable historical documents. The secular attachment to the Bible as a historical source without the later Jewish sources "increased its prominence, but deprived it of its meta-historical dimension, thereby obliterating its validity as a source and its meaning in history."[40] Schweid is aware that Jewish sources reflect a multitude of different understandings. While no single definition can be found for Judaism, there is a unity that comes out of the succession of sources, relying on each other: biblical, rabbinic, *talmudic*, *halakhic*, philosophic, *kabalistic*, and even modern Hebrew literature, to the extent that it relies on its antecedents. This is the broad definition of Torah, and its unity is founded on the total commitment to the toraitic covenant and the way of life that it commands, and on its openness to continuity. The attachment to the Bible as a purely literary or historical document and the rejection of Jewish oral tradition—*torah shebe 'al*

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[39] Ibid., 87-88.

[40] Ibid., 89. Compare with Yerushalmi's analysis of the relation between Jewish historiography and Jewish memory, in which he wrote: "The collective memories of the Jewish people were a function of the shared faith, cohesiveness, and will of the group itself, transmitting and recreating its past through an entire complex of interlocking social and religious institutions that functioned organically to achieve this. The decline of Jewish collective memory in modern times is only a symptom of the unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis through whose mechanisms . . . the past was once made present." Yerushalmi, *Zakhor,* 94.

peh—as its complement, says Schweid, voids it of its legacy as the edifying document of the Jewish people. According to Schweid, even secular Jews are attached to the Bible not purely as an objective document, but also as a symbol of their identity. Therefore they need to become more "Jewishly literate" to know who they are. Schweid believes that the modern Jew is capable of accepting the sources of Judaism as his Torah and of renewing the certainty of the covenant in his heart. This, he says, can only be reached in the learning negotiation, after the interested individual approaches the Torah as a Torah.[41]

But how can this happen without faith? The lack of faith is the root of the existential angst of the solitary Jew. A Jew who grew up in a secular family may have an affinity to the family, the people, the culture, the history and even the sources, but he feels that faith is not a choice. Schweid claims that even faith is a function of extraction, and even those who grew up without it have a share in it. He describes faith in general as a sense of certainty that everyone has in relying on parents, friends, bodily functions, knowledge or ideals. Such faith requires an assumption that wishes can be realized. Faith results from daring to wish and experiencing the realization of the wish. The leap[42] to faith in God follows from wondering about the ultimate source of faith.

> God is a term for the primary, the absolute source of all that is, and therefore the faith in God is the beginning of all faith as a vital attitude, which *precedes* consciousness [as an] attitude that is expressed in action, and which *follows* it as the ultimate answer that the thought can give to the question of the beginning and meaning of life.[43]

The very thought of God as the ultimate source of being is the result of taking the question, "Who am I?" to its utmost limit, and receiving the answer to the question,

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[41] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded*, 90-95.

[42] My choice of the expression, not Schweid's. Cf. infra.

[43] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded*, 97. Italics mine.

"from whence do I come?" beyond the family, the people and history. According to Schweid, the only answer for the question of the ultimate source of the personal, individual identity is God, which is the reality that precedes the awareness of the "I."

> Whoever reaches the discovery of the idea of faith in God by wondering about the riddle of the beginning of the "I," will not think of God as the "reason of reasons" or as an abstract beginning that is beyond his life. The faith in God that emerges from the person's life is faith in a personal God, in whoever created that singular person—that singular "I"—and addressed him in the act of creation and in the life that emanates from it. Only thus does faith in God answer the question of the beginning of the "I."[44]

But faith is never totally private nor is it totally public. It is the experience of an individual who is part of a collective and it is experienced, according to Schweid, in terms of a particular religious culture. Religion, therefore, is at the same time both the most spontaneous and intimate of personal experiences, as well as the most crystallized and general social experience. Religion gives the individual a structure, within and beyond which he can express himself privately. This dual dimension represents a potential for expressing the grain of faith that is in everybody. But most secular people are not aware of this as a possibility, even if at times they have recourse to religious patterns. While the individual's identity with reference to the *family*, the *people*, the *culture*, *history* and the *sources* results from his own self-choice, the individual's identity with reference to *faith* is the product of his education and social affinity to religion. Whether he defines himself as having or not having faith, as being religious or non-religious, he makes a conscious choice to perpetuate the way he has always been, or to "choose himself" differently. Schweid says that any Jew can renew his Jewish faith, but

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[44] Ibid., 98-99.

not through "a leap of faith."[45] According to Schweid, the very notion of "a leap of faith" presupposes a receiving party on the other side. Jewish renewal of faith, he says, goes through changing one's attitude to the Jewish people, Jewish culture, and Jewish history, as well as through studying the sources. In this study, all questions are permitted, including those concerning the authority of the Torah, provided the individual asks them sincerely and on the condition that he is ready to receive any answer.

> A person does not decide to believe in order to study the Torah, nor does he decide to study the Torah in order to believe. A person decides to study the Torah for the sake of studying the Torah, for the very life he wants to live by it. The faith that presents itself to him as he goes about his learning is the certainty that accompanies him when he asks and is being answered, and it is never granted to him, but at any time it is found anew in the study that leads to action, and in the action that leads to study.[46]

Schweid's description resonates with personal experience. He says that faith "just happens" as part of the path of learning. But when he mentions that learning should be done for the sake of studying the Torah *and for the very life he wants to live by it,* he actually tells us about a choice made before undertaking the study, a religious choice, a choice that seems to be akin to "a leap of faith." This choice also is reflected in the stipulation that all questions may be asked, *provided one is ready to receive any answer.* What if the "answer" is that he does not want to be Jewish, or that Schweid's rationale does convince him, and he wants to remain a secular, liberal or cultural Jew? Had

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[45] The term "leap of faith," now a household term, originated with the thought of Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish intellectual who left an important mark on Western thought. He is known as the "father of existentialism," and his most famous concept is "leap of faith," which should actually be read, "leap *into* faith." This concept is based on his original interpretation of Christian theology, regarding faith as the means through which God bestows on the individual a chance to be a true self and by which God judges him for eternity. Faith needs to be reenacted continually. However, faith cannot be achieved by virtue of reason. Reason must be superseded by the absurd in order to achieve faith in something loftier. Kierkegaard uses the story of the binding of Isaac as an illustration of the inability to bridge the gap between reason and faith, thus requiring a "leap into faith," an act which is in the realm of the absurd. The notion of the absurd as part of the human condition was one of Kierkegaard's primary contributions to modern thought.

Schweid given the reader an answer to the question of *why* one ought to feel an obligation to renew one's Jewish identity and go on the path of return, his claim that what he regards as a Jewish renewal of faith is not "a leap of faith" would have been more convincing.

This is where Schweid ends the journey he began in this book with his initial analysis of the crisis of modernity and its impact on the Jewish individual. It was a journey that described the individual in the context of his family, his people, his culture, his history and the sources of his heritage. While Schweid often refers to the situation of "the individual," the description is generally one of a generic individual who represents a collective or a generation. Thus, the "individual" is reduced to a prototype or stereotype, without the whole gestalt of a single specific individual. This might be another manifestation of the secondary role of personal autonomy in his concern, especially when compared to liberal, non-Zionist Jewish thinkers such as Eugene Borowitz.

Schweid's analysis in *Judaism and the Solitary Jew* begins with the transition of society into modernity and its impact on Jewish life, especially "the exodus from the Ghetto," to paraphrase Jacob Katz.[47] This impact was felt on a communal scope by a whole society, but it could only have happened through individuals, in innumerable different ways. Today, with hindsight, we can group all the individuals, define what makes them distinctive as a group, classify their reactions, and qualify and quantify their range of responses on a continuum. In so doing, we de-emphasize their individuality and see them as discrete parts of a general historical trend that transformed Jewish existence

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[46] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 104.

[47] Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

in Europe and America. This is surely true for historians, philosophers and ideologists, who see the world in abstract terms of processes, ideas and trends.

Schweid—a Zionist ideologist, philosopher and historian of philosophy—seems to fail (or refuses) to see the individual Jew independently of the Jewish social, cultural, national or religious context. Or rather, in his own words,[48] he cannot conceive of a *meaningful* existence for a Jewish individual without the collective Jewish context. In that, he may be expressing an implicit nostalgia for a pre-modern era, in which Jews could not be Jews without an affinity to Judaism and to a Jewish community.

Schweid also seems to abstain from expanding his ideas to the realm of the universal. His analyses of social institutions (family, people, etc.) begin as generally applicable, but eventually the reader realizes that his frame of reference is Jewish. For instance, Schweid comes close to treating the notion of faith as an individual concern.[49] However, even when the text could refer to *any* form of faith, it soon becomes clear that Schweid refers basically to the faith of a Jew and understands the concept in Jewish terms.[50] Similarly, when he describes the existential alienation of modern man after the disintegration of pre-modern society, he begins immediately by focusing upon the existential angst that marked the Jew,[51] and makes no reference to the existential angst that marked Western European civilization as a whole,[52] and that found extensive

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[48] Eliezer Schweid, interview by author, Jerusalem, Israel, 4 January 2000.

[49] E.g., *Schweid, Hayehudi haboded,* 96-104; idem, "Mahi emunah?" (What is Faith?), in *Emunat am yisrael vetarbuto,* 11-67.

[50] The only reference to a non-Jewish context is a rejection of the notion of "leap of faith," without citing its origin or discussing it any further. See Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 102.

[51] See beginning with the phrase, "The Jew who is open to what is happening in the world in our times finds himself isolated." Ibid., 15ff.

[52] Cf. supra, 9-14.

expression in existentialist philosophy.[53] Obviously, Schweid is aware of the universal existential dilemma and of existentialism, and undoubtedly their absence from his writings is a deliberate choice.

The notion of universalism finds a particular expression in Schweid's vocabulary when he refers to a "particularistic universalism" as an alternative to the opposition of universalism and particularism. After discussing his view of Jewish uniqueness with regard to the family, the people, culture and history, Schweid seeks to show "the uniqueness of Jewish uniqueness . . . which exacerbates . . . the problem of Jewish identity, and at the same time gives this particular problem a universal meaning, which affects the Jew not only as a Jew, but also as a human being and an individual."[54] Schweid notes that most Jews cannot escape the fact of their being different, and they perpetually struggle with their identity. Sometimes they love being unique, "chosen," and, at other times, they hate their own inability to escape their difference through assimilation. In his eyes, the only response of integrity for a Jew is to affirm his identity as a Jew, which, he says, entails the acceptance of the covenant with God with its attendant assumption of the commandments. But this response can only come after a

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[53] For one of many examples: "The talk asks you, then, *whether you live in such a way that you are conscious of being an 'individual.'* . . . For in the outside world, the crowd is busy making a noise. The one makes a noise because he heads the crowd, the many because they are members of the crowd. But the all-knowing One, who in spite of anyone is able to observe it all, does not desire the crowd. He desires the individual; He will deal only with the individual, quite unconcerned as to whether the individual be of high or low station, whether he be distinguished or wretched." Søren Kirkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing. Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession*, trans. Douglas V. Steere (New York: 1956), 193; quoted in Maurice Friedman, ed., *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader* (New York: Random House, 1964) 113.

[54] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 105.

genuine struggle between rejection and acceptance, albeit that most people assume a non-committal position, a posture that does not, in his view, resolve the problem.[55]

Schweid ends his *Judaism and the Solitary Jew* by suggesting that the way to save "the Jew" from his solitude—which now can be understood more as a collective identity crisis than an individual existential dilemma—is by "studying the sources from the focus of Jewish life in the present . . . [which] needs a method and framework of its own."[56] However, taking one step back, we may finally be able to identify that "individual," about whom Schweid wrote his book. By contending that the choice be one of integrity, by assuming the covenant with God, and by arguing that assimilation is an emotionally and intellectually alien choice for the Jew, Schweid basically defines himself. In doing so, Schweid actually depicts his life as paradigmatic to the lives of modern Jews in general. As Isa Aron and David Ellenson note, many contemporary Jewish thinkers—including Rosenzweig, Kaplan, Soloveitchick and Hartman—have indeed responded to the challenges of modernity from a personal perspective and their proposed solutions have met the needs of some contemporary Jews.[57]

In his own description of his childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, Schweid unveils the roots of his own duality. As a boy raised in a secular home in pre-State Palestine, he was nurtured with a strong sense of collective identity as a cultural

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[55] Compare with Paul Tillich's notion of *ultimate concern* when he discusses the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness: "Everyone who lives creatively in meanings affirms himself as a participant in these meanings. . . . This is what one can call 'spiritual self-affirmation.' . . . Such an experience presupposes that the spiritual life is taken seriously, that it is a matter of ultimate concern. . . . A spiritual life in which this is not experienced is threatened by nonbeing in the two forms in which it attacks spiritual self-affirmation: emptiness and meaninglessness." Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 46-47.

[56] Schweid, *Hayehudi haboded,* 112.

Jew, a Zionist and a Socialist. At the same time, he was constantly aware of the distance he felt, as an individual, from his social and cultural environment. Tradition was not in vogue, but he clung to the *yidishkeit* he received at home. Diaspora rejection was in style, but he, although convinced of Zionism as the only solution for the problem of Judaism and the problem of the Jew, refused to adopt it. He was also aware of his solitude as a poor child among those more well off and he found a spiritual sanctuary in the often-ridiculed leadership position of cultural officer. He followed the *hagshamah* ethos and began his adult life as a member of a kibutz, the most intolerant environment for individualists and non-conformists. He was on a spiritual quest even when he was not yet aware of it, and found the starting point of his own "path of return" when he went to study Jewish thought at the Hebrew University and when he became a father. This was the struggling individual, who set the bar of integrity high, maybe too high for many other individuals to respond to his frequent appeals for action, commitment and "being commanded." However, what he demanded of others, he required of himself. He was the first to take the leap, which he would call *a nahshonian leap*,[58] but which really can be viewed as "a leap of faith." When Schweid speaks of "the individual," he often seems to try and "personalize" his diagnosis of the collective in the hope that others will follow in his footsteps and join his journey. Until such times, "the individual," in third person singular, often reads like an attempt to generalize the experience of Schweid himself.

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[57] "However," they write, "due to the compartmentalized and individuated nature of the modern world, these solutions work only for individuals and cohesive groups." Isa Aron and David Ellenson, "The Dilemma of Jewish Education: To Learn and To Do," *Judaism* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1984), 216.

[58] After the biblical chieftain Nahshon ben Aminadav in the story of Exodus who, according to the Midrash, was the first of the Israelites fleeing the Egyptians who had the courage to leap into the parted Sea of Reed, thereby sanctifying the name of the Almighty. (Exodus 14:21-30 and *Pirqe derabi Eliezer*, 41).

Schweid clearly immersed himself in the return to Jewish tradition, the adherence to God's covenant with the Jewish people and the acceptance of the commandments as the expression of the covenant. He made the choice of affirming his personal assumption of the fate of the Jewish people in general, and the Zionist realization in particular, as an original thinker, a teacher and teacher of teachers, a political activist and a communicator. In the Jewish tradition, there is a category of people who could be described in a similar fashion. In biblical times they were the prophets.

Last year, Schweid published a book under the title *Prophets for Their People and Humanity: Prophecy and Prophets in 20th Century Jewish Thought,*[59] in which he describes a series of Jewish thinkers[60] of the second and third generation after the emancipation who demanded of the Jewish people that it return to itself and to its God. This is how he characterizes them:

> These were a handful of conscious and sensitive intellectuals[61] who experienced very intensely and with deep identification the spiritual crisis that overcame their people, and who were affected by it in "spinning around their own axis,"[62] returning to the essence that was embodied in the [Jewish] sources. The truth they discovered in the depth of their souls was relevant not only to them, but to the entirety of their persecuted and suffering people. The return that they demanded was in and of itself a mission. It could only be realized as a mission to the people, whose spirit was embodied in them. They uncovered the road, and now it was up to them to open the eyes of their people to see it and walk on it.[63]

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[59] Eliezer Schweid, *Neviim le'amam velaenoshut: Nevua unviim bahagut hayehudit shel hamea ha'esrim*, (Prophets for Their People and Humanity: Prophecy and Prophets in 20th Century Jewish Thought) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999).

[60] Herman Cohen, Ahad Ha'am, M.Y. Berdichevsky, H.N. Bialik, Franz Rosenzweig, A.D. Gordon, Martin Buber, Rabbi A.Y.H. Kook, Leo Baeck and A.J. Heschel.

[61] Hebrew: *anshei ruah*, "men of spirit."

[62] Expression borrowed from Martin Buber, quoted by Schweid: "We mean return (*hazara*) only in the sense of repentance (*tshuvah*), which spins us around our own axis; not only until we return to where we passed before in our journey, but until we reach the way in which one hears the voice..." Martin Buber, "Ben dorenu vehamikra" (Our Contemporaries and the Bible), in *Te'udah veyi'ud* (Jerusalem: Hasifriyah Hazionit, 1960), vol. 1, 153; quoted in Schweid, *Neviim le'amam velaenoshut*, 14.

[63] Schweid, *Neviim le'amam velaenoshut*, 14.

Those driven intellectuals came back to lead their people after having drifted away and they returned out of a sense of an impending spiritual disaster, just like Moses who became the leader and deliverer of his people only after finding God and returning from exile. Schweid equates the inner voice that gave them a sense of authority with that which directed the Biblical prophets, and compares their belief in the Jewish people's ability and obligation to redeem itself from its physical and spiritual distress with the prophets' call for a real-life, historical deliverance.

> The major problem on the agenda was the biographical and historical credibility of the hope for redemption: is there still any chance in the face of the destruction on hand? Apparently, only the growing spiritual heroism in individuals, expressed in their faith and dedication to fulfillment[64] in spite of their aggravation and from within it, could provide an appropriate religious response for their time.[65]

This attitude cuts across forms of faith and practice and ideologies, and achieves a crystal clear expression in the person and the words of A.D. Gordon: The realization of the idea of pioneering "realization," *hagshamah*, through every individual "by himself," and thereby the self-realization "of" each and every individual "himself,"[66] that is: the realization of his destiny *as a person and as a member of the Jewish people*.

Schweid ends his introduction by stating:

> [This book was written] under the assumption that this phenomenon, the renewal of prophecy as a personal mission, is the key to understanding the essential concepts, and recognition of the qualities, of twentieth century Jewish philosophy and religious thought.[67]

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[64] Hebrew: *hagshamah.*

[65] Schweid, *Neviim le'amam velaenoshut*, 17.

[66] Hebrew: *be'atzmo* and *et 'atzmo.*

[67] Schweid, *Neviim le'amam velaenoshut*, 19.

In this introduction, Schweid seems to give us enough indications to ask the obvious question: does he see himself as a present-day prophet? A positive answer would shed a new light on his biography, purpose, career and intellectual production. His uniqueness and almost obsessive integrity at various stages of his life, his unrelenting commitment to the causes he espoused, his frequent alienation from his reference group and his adoption of stances contrary to theirs, as well as the complete subordination of the individual to the collective cause – all those can be better understood in light of the prophetic vocation. This can also better explain the "path of return" that led Schweid from scientific, skeptical and human-centered socialist Zionism to the mystical and God-centered religious nationalism. The symbiosis between the individual and the collective, especially if we accept the hypothesis that in many cases the individual is Schweid, would receive a new meaning if we apply Schweid's criteria for determining modern day prophets to his own life and realize how many of them apply to him.

Whether a modern day prophet or not, Schweid clearly does not focus on the individual as the departure point or the frame of reference of his thought pattern. From the many examples we saw so far, it is clear that he views the collective, and especially the Jewish national collective, as both the *departure point* and the *frame of reference* of his ideas. The collective is the *departure point* for the relations between it (the Jewish people, Judaism) and whatever is *outside* it (other peoples, other religions). The collective is also the *frame of reference* for whatever is *within* it (individuals, families, culture, religion). This analysis places a clear division between Jews and Israelis on the one hand, and "the others" on the other. Schweid does not display ethnic, religious or national arrogance or claim of superiority over others. On the contrary, even when he

elaborates on the notion of chosen people, he emphasizes the fact that in Jewish terms it means something only within Jewish existence, and he does not make a statement concerning others. Because the Jews are chosen to serve God in a particular way, the rest of humanity is not un-chosen, and other peoples can occupy an equally important, though different, role in the divine plan.

Ironically, the modern day prophet in Schweid might follow the example of biblical predecessors who were not listened to, mocked, rejected and in one case even murdered. According to his analysis, before Israel became independent, individuals knew what their role was in the collective's struggle for sovereignty—which, in his view, was a positive attitude. After independence, the attention of people turned to themselves, and each individual wanted to nurture his individuality and have a life—from the viewpoint of the collective, a negative attitude. The Six Days War caused many individuals to renew their commitment to the collective cause, as they understood it, and Schweid saw in this a revival of national identity. The maturing of Israel brought the "us vs. them" attitude to new heights. While Schweid himself promoted a mild version of this attitude, this division is not what he actually envisioned. The us/them attitude infected more and more segments of the Jewish state, fueling polarization across religious, political, social, economic, ethnic and cultural divides within the Israeli society.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

In this study, we followed the life and thought of Eliezer Schweid, an active participant in the Zionist enterprise from the Hebron massacre in 1929, just before he was born, to my interview with him in early January 2000, with special emphasis on the 1960s and 1970s. We learned about the home environment into which he was born, the Jewish and universal values he acquired at home and in society, and the interactions he had with his peers, as well as other experiences that shaped his worldview. The portrait that emerged from this was one of a unique individual, quite different from his peers, and yet, at the same time, one with them in their common pursuit of their ideals and in their eagerness to put the cause of the collective above their personal interests.

Thus Eliezer Schweid harbored within himself the tension between the two notions that are the focus of this study: the individual and the collective. His uniqueness set him apart, in some way, from all the reference groups that shaped and defined him, and one might have expected this to lead to a more individualistic orientation. However, it seems that the collectivistic nature of his environment was stronger than his individual urges, and he remained, to a large degree, a collectivist throughout his life. We saw the dominant collectivistic penchant in his essays from the 1960s. While there are references to the individual in these texts, they actually point back to the collective.

Later essays, especially *Judaism and the Solitary Jew,* seemed to indicate that Schweid had entered a new phase, one with stronger emphasis on the individual. Reading it demonstrated that Schweid may well have developed more interest in, and sensitivity

to, the world of the individual at this time. However, his "individual" was still generic, and his stance still remained largely collectivistic. This text, in concert with his *To Be a Member of the Jewish People*, indicated that besides its generic role, the individual had another role in Schweid's writings—the generalization of his own experiences.

Finally, in light of the recent publication of his *Prophets for Their People and Humanity*, which depicts a series of twentieth century Jewish thinkers as modern day prophets, we wonder whether Schweid also sees himself as a modern day prophet. An affirmation of this hypothesis would shed new light on Schweid's attitude to the relationship between the individual and the collective, as well as on the high frequency of normative statements throughout his work. Clearly, the attribution of prophecy to people living among us can only be a metaphor. But, even if taken as a metaphor, Schweid's role as a "prophet" is not limited to his teaching, warning, protesting and chastising in his essays and in his actions. Like so many of the Bible prophets, he lived to see his people refuse to follow his advice, and to witness the consequences.

Eliezer Schweid, who, in his youth, promoted socialist Zionism, then Jewish literacy for those deprived of it by the generation that rebelled against tradition, and then post-Six-Days-War messianic nationalism, finds himself witnessing the disintegration of his dream. In a recent private conversation, he describes the sovereign Jewish state as being torn apart and away from the integrated, harmonious, organic entity that he envisioned.[1] His vision and that of his predecessors, that the Jewish national and cultural revival would bring Jews back to their Judaism and solidify their moral values so that they really could be "a light unto the nations," seems to be fading away. After half a century of efforts to bring secular Israelis back to their spiritual roots without feeling

coerced, and to help the Orthodox Israelis integrate universal values without feeling Jewishly threatened, his vision seems further away than it was fifty years ago. The "seculars," who believe that universal values must take precedence over Jewish values in Israel, largely reject traditional Jewish life. They have been the driving force that created the State of Israel and dominated its society for most of its history. Schweid's assessment of this creation to date is that of a cynical, materialistic, shortsighted secular society, unaware of its Jewish identity and devoid of a valid claim for its long-term survival. Conversely, the "religious," who believe that *halakhah* must take precedence over any other values, increasingly reject universal values, sometimes even when Judaism prescribes them, and their radicals promote segregation or even open conflict. Similar chasms are widening between different segments of the Israeli society—Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazi and Sepharadi, and most dramatically, between the rich and the poor. Schweid sums up his analysis by saying that Israel has become an increasingly aggressive and selfish society, unaware of its identity, indifferent to moral values, a society dancing to the tune of a handful of "haves" at the expense of an increasing multitude of "have-nots." How reminiscent is this description of Biblical prophetic discourse![2]

In terms of the individual and the collective, it seems as if what Schweid described as happening after the War of Independence, is even more apparent today. The collective has sapped the individual's vital juices too far and for too long without letting him regenerate. The collective has failed to actively promote a sense of identity and an

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[1] Eliezer Schweid, interviewed by author, 4 January 2000.

[2] "Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying: 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the *ephah* small and the *shekel* great, and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for a silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?'" Amos 8:4-6

ethos with clear and positive moral values to be shared and defended by the vast majority, if not the totality, of society. Identification with Jewish tradition was appropriated by the Orthodox, with the consent of the seculars, obviously as a result of their ignorance about, and alienation from, their Jewish heritage. Polls and studies reported in the Israeli media indicate that Israelis' feeling of identification with, and pride in, Israel as a sovereign state, are on the decline. Commentators suggest that corrupt, cynical and hypocritical politicians practicing short-term power politics might be accelerating this trend.

The individual, according to Schweid, can have a meaningful existence only as part of a collective. In the mind of Schweid and probably many others in his generation, there is no doubt that the supreme collective must be the State of Israel. For an individual who lived according to such collectivistic ideals—and in the early days of the State of Israel many did—the moral decline and the loss of identity must be a terrible disillusionment. Such an individual must feel that the State of Israel can serve as the foundation of his identity, and for this person, there are two alternatives.

One alternative is to withdraw into selfish, cynical egotism. In the aftermath of the Independence War, as Schweid described in "Yemei Shiva," people shifted the emphasis of their efforts from the collective to their individual needs. This was a natural change following a war of survival. Between that time and the present, prioritizing individual needs became increasingly acceptable. The question remains how far this trend can go. What Schweid describes now is a society in which cynicism, egotism and selfishness have became the norm, not the exception, and these "vices" manifest themselves, as current media reports indicate, in all socio-economic echelons of Israeli society, from avoiding military service and tax payment to corruption of cabinet ministers, rabbis, and senior military officers.

Another alternative for the disillusioned idealist is to shift the center of his identity, and thus his primary loyalty, from the State of Israel as a whole to one of its polarized sub-units. He can identify with the religious, the anti-religious, a political affiliation, an ethnic group, or any other *Gemeinschaft* that would protect him from the fears of the alienating *Gesellschaft.* This can give him a new "us" with which to identify and a new "them" against whom to fight. If none of those "cities of refuge" satisfy him, he can further shrink the protective bubble down to his immediate family, friends, spouse and self. The smaller these sub-units are, the more mobile they are and, without a strong sense of identity with the larger collective, little can prevent him from leaving—geographically (emigrating) or spiritually (seeking spirituality in other cultures).

Eliezer Schweid devoted his life to preventing the individual from abandoning his affinity to the Jewish national, religious and cultural collective identity, and to building a sovereign and socially just Jewish society. If the decline of identity and morality in present-day Israel is as steep and rapid as he describes, all his work will have been in vain, and the dreams of millions of Jews, in Israel and in Diaspora, that Israel would become *athalta de ge'ula*, the beginning of salvation, will have been shattered. Only the unfolding of history will reveal whether this will be the case. In the meantime, there remains the cautious hope that Schweid's efforts will not have been in vain, but will yet, in some form, be realized.

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