

The Sermons of Isaac Nissenbaum  
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The Jewish sermon, just as every other branch of modern Hebrew literature reflects the problems, thoughts, and ideals of contemporary Jewish life. The sermons of Issac Nissenbaum represent a cross-section of the thoughts and strivings of contemporary Judaism. They bring into bold relief every segment in the body of historical Judaism. They present a philosophy of Jewish life and a program of action directed toward the preservation of the Jew and his culture. But before we can get a true picture of this man and his thinking we must first understand the history of the period.

The advent of the 19th century marked the beginning of a new era in Jewish life. It witnessed a transformation of Jewish values. The Haskalah, opening wide the gates of Jewish exclusiveness bringing the Jew into closer contact with European culture stimulated every aspect of Jewish life, the religious, political, and literary. It was in Russia that the Haskalah led to a rich cultural revival, to the rebirth of the Hebrew language and literature, with a continuous Hebrew literary outpouring in poetry, history, fiction, and criticism. Quite naturally, this movement began to arouse national feelings among our people, and Zionism came into being. It was born out of the anguish of many centuries, out of the weariness of endless wanderings, out of the inveterate will of a people to live, removed from the mystical spheres of messianic speculation, and transformed into a political and spiritual reality. It effected deeply the totality of Jewish life in modern times. It also penetrated into the synagogue effecting

profoundly the form and content of preaching with the result that a new type of preacher came into being, known as the "matif leumi"-the national preacher. This preacher made Zionism the central motif of his preaching. He was well-grounded in Jewish lore, knew modern Hebrew literature, was also deeply affected by secular education, and used the "derashah" as a means of improving Jewish life. Unlike the Maggidim who devoted themselves mainly to the exposition of religious and ethical precepts, the Mattifim, while they inculcated in the hearts of their people a love for Torah, study and ethical duties, were primarily motivated by feelings of intense Jewish nationalism instilling in the hearts of our people a love for the ethnic elements of our national culture, our history, our language, our literature and the messianic ideal of the restoration to Zion. These preachers represent a fine combination of traditional Judaism and modernity. The most representative preacher of this modern trend is Isaac Nissenbaum. He was born on the 25th of Tishri 1869 in Babroysk, White Russia. When he was only four years old the daughter of one of the neighbors came from Palestine to visit her parents. One day she came to visit the Nissenbaum family. In his autobiography the preacher telling of her visit says, " I remember, I sat on a small stool at the feet of my mother and listened to the stories of this woman, about the Wailing Wall, the grave of Rachel, and the other holy places. And who knows, if it was not this woman who planted the first Zionist seeds upon the

furrows of my tender heart. The words of our prophets and sages afterwards moistened and watered these seeds until I became a Zionist."<sup>1</sup> He grew up in an intensely Jewish home where a deep love for Torah and religious practices was implanted in his soul. Even as a child he acquired proficiency in the knowledge of the Bible and many tractates of the Talmud. He studied in the Yeshiva in his own town, in the famous Yeshiva of Vohlozin, and in Vilna and became well acquainted with the entire Rabbinic literature. He had an insatiable desire for study, a quick comprehension, and a diligent disposition. When this promising boy reached the tender age of thirteen years his father died, and, remaining free from Orthodox parental supervision, began to read with great avidity the new Hebrew literature including Mapu, Shulman, Smolenskin, Lillienblum and the others. This literature inspired him to further study of the Bible, but also dampened his love for Chassidism which impressed *him* deeply because of the great piety and religious devotion of many of its adherents. But that Chassidic influence never left him, as he himself said: "It seems that in some corner of my heart there still remains hidden, Chassidic sparks that found their way into it in my childhood days and have not yet been extinguished." In two volumes of his sermons "Kinyona Kedem" he makes extensive use of the Zohar showing a fine knowledge of the mystical trend in Judaism. He studied the works of all the masters in the field of historic Judaism including Mendelsohn, Krochmal, Rappaport,



Luzzato, Levinsohn, Weiss and others, thereby deepening his knowledge of the entire field of Judaism. Realizing that general culture in<sup>m</sup> way conflicts with orthodox belief, he began the study of German and Russian gaining familiarity with the literatures of both languages.

Zionism was then in its incipient stages. It began to make its appearance as a subject for extensive polemics<sup>c</sup> which have not ceased even in our day. In about 1888 the columns of the "Hamelitz", a Hebrew periodical became the battle-ground for a long disputation between many Rabbis and writers over the question of Shemita in Palestine. Following with keen interest the pros and cons of this controversy which touched also on the value of promoting the agricultural development of Palestine, the youthful Nissenbaum became interested in the Hovevi Zion movement.

As a child he enjoyed listening to the Maggidim who came to his town, and whom he loved to imitate. It was these Maggidim who shaped the destiny of this man. After he married he established himself in Minsk. It was there that his career as a preacher began. He was invited by his uncle who was a Rabbi to preach in his synagogue. Having no knowledge of Midrash and being unfamiliar with homiletical literature his sermon was made up of disconnected thoughts without any central thesis. His uncle who was an experienced preacher advised him to make a study of homiletical literature. He found much material in the sermons of the maggid of Dubno, Eleazar Ashkenazi, and Isaac Rabinowitz. In the "Here<sup>6</sup>" of Samson Raphael Hirsch, a book which left a profound impress-

ion upon him, he found a great source of preaching material. The Pentateuch with the commentary of the Malbim fell into his hands, which included the Tannaitic midrashim of the Mechilta, Sifra, and Sifre. This Aggadic material, its ideas and its literary style, affected him greatly. Gradually he learned how to combine the midrashic material with his own thinking with one central idea running through the entire sermon. For his style of preaching he is indebted to the great German preacher, Dr. Yellenik, whose sermons he read with care. As he himself says: "These books I read a few times and it was they that determined the style of my sermons."<sup>3</sup>

It was in the service of Zionism and Hebrew culture that he acquired his reputation as a great preacher. In his community he became one of the leading figures among the "Hovevei Zion" who admired him for his idealism and eloquence. He was one of the founders and leaders of the movement for the revival of the Hebrew language and the dissemination of Hebrew culture among the people of his community. His reputation reached the ears of the great Rabbi Samuel Mohliver who invited him to come to Byalistok to be the secretary of the "Merckaz Ruchani" an orthodox Zionist group which he himself headed. It was in that capacity that he got an intimate understanding of all the problems connected with a nascent ideology beset by many obstacles that had to be surmounted, and it was also in that capacity that he grew more acquainted with the inner problems of Jewish life in general. In the meantime, he had been preaching all along but only within his own community. But with the coming of the

first Zionist Congress the Zionist movement was launched and in it Nissenbaum found unlimited opportunity to launch his own brilliant career as a preacher. He was invited to preach in some of the largest Jewish communities of Poland. Great masses of people came to hear him including the learned, the rich, as well as the Maskilim. After the death of Mohliver he accepted the invitation from Synagogue Ohel Moshe (named after Moses <sup>Montefiore</sup>) of Warsaw to be its preacher, with the understanding that he would be allowed to travel about four months during the year visiting communities as spokesman of the Palestine Committee in Odessa, in behalf of the Zionist cause. Though he could have very easily chosen a Rabbinical career having received his "Semicha", he rejected it. As he himself says: "During the years that I served Rabbi Samuel Mohliver I became acquainted with many Rabbis from small and large cities <sup>who came</sup> to pour out to him (Mohliver) the complaint of their hearts, their troubles and sufferings that they endured at the hands of the mighty ones of their congregations. I considered the state of the Rabbinate as it was, and realized that I saw a false vision, that in being a Rabbi I would be able to increase my activities for the good of my people and land...I began to observe better the activities of Mohliver himself in his city and realized that he too was limited in his influence both by the mighty leaders of the community who held the reins of power in their strong hands and the many God-fearing zealots who maintained their grasp on the glorious throne of religion

and in its name closed the doors of the institutions in their possession in the face of a man whose ideas were not like their own. So I came to this conclusion: If it is so in the case of a great Rabbi, famous throughout the <sup>Exile</sup>, how <sup>much the</sup> more will it be true in the case of a young Rabbi who has no fame among his people. I therefore decided to dissuade myself from becoming a Rabbi in Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Though he gave up the Rabbinate, he did not give up its discipline of study. He says: "And thus I left the Rabbinic world and entered the world of literature and preaching. But even this new world, in whose vestibule I had not made myself fit, was completely rooted in my old world, into whose reception room I had already entered and immersed thirty years of life. My old house of study I did not leave, my sedulousness over the Talmud I did not cease."<sup>5</sup> But though he considered the old Talmudic studies as indispensable, he tried to bring about reforms in the old Yeshivas in response to the new demands of the times. He felt that these schools should also acquaint their pupils with the field of "Chochmat Yisroel" as well as secular knowledge, in addition to the Rabbinic studies. He was, therefore, very happy when he received an invitation from Rabbi Chayim Tchernowitz, who founded a modern Yeshiva in Odessa, to assist him in finding "a number of pupils great in Torah, religiously observant, and desirous of <sup>H</sup>askalah." The curriculum of this school included not only the study of Rabbinics taught scientifically, but also Bible, Hebrew, Jewish history and also secular knowledge.



In addition to his preaching, he also tried his hand at writing, contributing articles on religious, literary, and Zionist themes in some of the Hebrew periodicals such as: "Talpiyoth", "Hatzfirah, and "Hamelitz". In 1896 he became a permanent member on the staff of the "Hamelitz", and in 1910 he joined the staff of the "Hatzfirah" edited by Nahum Sokolov and also served as its secretary. He edited the "Mechkerei Hayahadut" and "Kinor Naim" of Samuel David Luzzato; "Toldoth" and "Erech Milim" of Rappaport, and the "Darchai Hamishna" of Zecharia Frankel.

In 1905 he went to visit Palestine. He passed through the entire country, met the leaders of the Yishuv, visited all the historical places, and acquainted himself with all its religious, social, and economic problems. When he returned to Warsaw for the Holy Days he devoted his sermons to a discussion of what he had seen and experienced in Palestine. Evidently his popularity was growing, for the synagogue in which he preached became too small to hold the great masses of people who came to hear him preach. The entire structure was remodeled and enlarged but even then the number his listeners grew to such a proportion that the synagogue itself could not hold them. Every Saturday before his sermon great throngs would crowd his synagogue, leaving no standing room unoccupied, filling all the vestibule and the Beth Hamidrash. On the first Sabbath of every month he preached in Hebrew, and even then great numbers attended. He felt that his preaching had a great influence upon his listeners. He says: "Everything that happened in the midst of Jacob

found an echo within the walls of "Moriah", ( name of the remodeled synagogue ) so that its worshippers became conscious of everything that occurred in Israel, and the influence of the synagogue upon the environment grew from year to year." <sup>6</sup>

Throughout the years he never ceased striving to improve the welfare of his people and to raise the level of Jewish learning. In 1917 when the Germans occupied Poland he met Dr. S. Poznanski and discussed with him the possibility of establishing a modern Rabbinical seminary in Warsaw like the one in Breslaw. They both realized that no matter who would emerge victorious in the War, Poland would go through tremendous changes in its political, economic, and cultural structure that would have a great effect upon the Jewish community, too. They therefore saw the necessity of strengthening Jewish life and culture in that period of tension. Poznanski presented the idea before a convention of the "Mizrachi", the Orthodox Zionist organization with which both he and Nissenbaum were affiliated. The seminary was established in 1920 under the name "Tachkemoni". It was an institution devoted to both religious and secular learning. It was Nissenbaum who influenced greatly the character of this modern institution of learning. It was called "The Rabbinical Seminary", but Nissenbaum always refrained from calling it by that name. He says: "The Rabbinate, according to my point of view, is not a profession that one learns in so many hours and years. The Rabbinate is not acquired only through great knowledge and erudition. It depends greatly upon the inner character of the student, and his innate religious sentiments. Tach-



kemoni has therefore become important to me not as a factory for the production of Rabbis, but as a high educational institution that will rear scholarly, learned, and enlightened young men who love their Father in heaven, their people, its land and its sanctities."

He continued his Zionist, communal, and preaching activity tirelessly until the year 1923 when he became very ill. Despite his failing health, he continued his preaching and literary activity, preparing his late sermons for publication as well as other works on Zionism and Judaism. Last year he published his last book and since then with the Nazi invasion of Poland, his fate remains unknown.

The literary productivity of Issac Nissenbaum represented by the ten volumes that he has published in the last thirty-six years constitutes a distinct contribution to Hebrew literature, and especially to modern homiletics. The books in the order of their publication are:

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1903-a book of sermons                              | ספרים / חמ"ד אברהם                  |
| 1908-a book of sermons on the Sabbaths and Holidays | ספרים אברהם לזמני השנה / חמ"ד אברהם |
| 1911-sermons  | פג"ח אברהם                          |
| 1920-sermons  | פוסקים אברהם / חמ"ד אברהם           |
| 1920-a short history of Zionism                     | ספר / התנועה הציונית                |
| 1926-sermons  | אמרי אברהם                          |
| 1929-an autobiography                               | חיי אברהם                           |
| 1930-life and works of this great Rabbi             | רבי אברהם / חמ"ד אברהם              |
| 1931-sermons on the Pentateuch                      | קנין קרבן                           |
| 1939-studies in Judaism and its tradition, Jewish   |                                     |

nationalism and the future redemption

אלהינו

These books represent the life-work of Isaac Nissenbaum, an earnest leader, a great preacher, and a faithful son of Israel. The thoughts and sentiments expressed by this homilist with prophetic eloquence reveal the presence of a rich Jewish soul throbbing with love for everything Jewish. The modern preacher can find in these sermons an inexhaustible source of Jewish thought, idealism, and inspiration.

II

The lasting inspiration that we find in Nissenbaum has been motivated both by his inherent passion for preaching as well as by his attitude toward preaching as a sacred task closely related to prophecy. Preaching, he avers, is the spiritual heir to the prophecy and the sacred poetry embodied in the Scriptures. The prophets directed their attention primarily to the condition of the people in the present, and to the moral, social, and political situation. They wanted to see their nation, the bearers of the ideals of justice and righteousness, live a life of holiness and sanctity, peace and security in their own land. But seeing that the life of their people was far removed from their inner vision, they pronounced their words of rebuke and admonition in order to open the eyes of the people to their evil deeds and restore them to the right path, the path of the Torah. With this purpose in mind did the prophets always mention to the people their great past. The memory of the past used to engender moral upliftment was a technique employed by almost all the prophets. With this same purpose in mind of elevating the spiritual level of their people to coincide with their own inner vision, did the prophets speak also of the great future of the nation. Their promises for the future were designed not only to forestall the despair that might seize them during the destruction of their land and their exile, but also ~~as~~ <sup>and</sup> especially so, as an incentive to correct their ~~way~~ <sup>way</sup> in the present. As if to say: look at the bright future that awaits you and see the depraved condition you are in

now. You must prepare yourselves for your great future. Thus did the memory of the past and the assurances <sup>of the</sup> future serve as powerful instruments in the hands of our prophets and our poets to stir the heart of our people and lead it <sup>8</sup> in the path of justice and righteousness. These same methods were used also by the preachers through the ages. (Nissenbaum is historically incorrect in saying that the sermon was cast out of the synagogue as part of the worship service and was succeeded by the Piyyut. Preaching never ceased throughout the Middle Ages. <sup>9</sup>) Preaching in the last few hundred years as well as in the previous ages has been one of the driving forces that made for the preservation of Judaism. The preachers who were in many cases men of excellent ability and fine character, had a great influence upon the people. They preached love of Torah, fear of heaven, the observance of the law and proper moral conduct. Their words left a favorable influence upon the spiritual and moral condition not only of the ordinary masses, but also on the well-to-do and the scholars to whom the reproofing preachers would tell the bitter truth. This was their task - to <sup>10</sup> strengthen religion and preserve morality. Thus in content did preaching function as the heir to prophecy.

In style, however, the derashah is quite different from its predecessor, - prophecy. Prophecy is its own authority. It never had to rely upon the authority of Scripture. The derashah, on the otherhand, grew out of Scripture and always had to rely upon Scriptural as well as Mishnaic and Midrashic authority. That is <sup>why</sup> ~~way~~ the words of the prophets flowed forth

as a stream of mighty waters, while the preachers because<sup>7</sup> their reliance upon authority were forced to set bounds to the flight of their imagination. And furthermore, while the words of the prophets have been preserved in writing as they were uttered, the words of the early preachers regarding the conditions of their time were not recorded and were forgotten, and there remained the Midrash - a heap of statements quoted from Scriptural and Rabbinic authority without any unity of thought and inner relationship. As a result, it is impossible to tell what style these early preachers used in preaching, while in the case of the prophets, their style is very self evident. And furthermore, while the practice of the prophet was to speak to the people in the name of God, the manner of the preacher was mixed. At times he spoke to the people in the name of God, like the prophet, and at times he spoke to God in the name of the people. But just as prophecy was not composed by the prophet with the intention of setting down his words into writing and in book form, but was essentially meant to be preached to the masses, so the sermon was not composed by the (early) preacher with the expressed purpose of being put into book form, as is the custom in our days, but was meant only to be preached before the entire people. The derashah like prophecy was a living message that burst forth from the depths of the spirit of the people.

11

Prophecy needed no appointment of place and time. Whenever the spirit rested upon the prophet he would stand



and prophe<sup>s</sup>y wherever he found people assembled. He was an uncontrollable force that knew no bounds. Not so the derashah. A definite place<sup>12</sup> was fixed for it. It was preached on the Sabbath in the synagogue.

There were two types of preachers in the early days of preaching. There were those who spoke calmly appealing to the mind and the intellect of their listeners basing their words on traditional authority. And there were also preachers who with fiery words appealed to the emotions of their listeners, and kindled a sacred flame in their frozen hearts, but did not rely at all on authoritative tradition. But good preachers in order to keep the attention of their listeners had to combine both qualities. They had to speak with enthusiasm to influence the emotions of their listeners,<sup>13</sup> but also base their words on authority.

Such excellent preachers have been few in number. Even now there are many wise men with creative spirit who have something to say to their people, but have not been endowed with preaching ability, and when they preach the congregation becomes drowsy. But on the other hand, there are preachers who captivate people with their eloquence, but have nothing<sup>14</sup> to say.

It was the sermon that attracted the people to the synagogue, making it the center of Jewish life. The sermon diffused knowledge of the Torah among the people, awakened sentiments of love for the Jewish nation, centered its attention upon the younger generation to unite it with its people and its sanctities, and brought light and hope into depressed



hearts. It tied up the synagogue with everyday home life. The sentiments aroused in the synagogue were transferred to the home. Thus did the synagogue through the sermon<sup>15</sup> live the life of the people.

In our day, however, the sermon though it reminds our people of its great past and future and wields a great influence over them, its Jewish prophetic spirit has escaped from it. Its purpose conflicts with that of the early derashah which was the heir to prophecy. Its purpose is not the survival but the suspension of the nation. It sees a blessing for our people not in the "ingathering of the exiles" but in their dispersion. It aspires not to a pure and sacred life true to our spirit and our Torah, but to a life lived in the spirit and the ways of the other nations. But not only does the modern sermon, as preached in the Reform congregations, differ from the early one; the preachers also differ. In the hearts of our early preachers there burned a holy flame, the flame of faith and love for the nation. They spoke what they thought and fulfilled what they preached. Their preachments and deeds blended in harmony. But our modern preachers though they speak with strong emotion, their hearts are as cold as ice, cold to all the sanctities of the nation. Even in the Orthodox congregations of western Europe the sermon is far removed from the spirit of early preaching. It does not possess that deep love for Israel, neither does it express a sharp protest of dissatisfaction with the life in exile, neither does it encourage faith and

hope in the future of the nation.

The time has come to revive the old Derasha with its old content, but in corrected form. Thus it will again become what it has been - the spiritual heir to prophecy. Like prophecy and the old derasha it must chastise and console, it must parallel the past and the future, and express a deep love for the nation. It must chide the nation for its moral decline making no distinction between groups and classes, showing no favor to either rich or poor. It must penetrate the clouds of the nation's future and find the bright star that will illuminate the road in the darkness of the night. It must uncover before the people the entire body of Jewish lore revealing its light, its love for Israel, its hope of redemption, and its sacred spirit. This must be the character of the sermon in our day. The revival of the sermon, Hebraic in spirit and, as much as possible, Hebrew in language will bring about the revival of the synagogue, of worship, of the Jewish heart itself. And when the Jewish heart is revived, all the visions, and the strivings of the prophets will again come to life and the sermon will be replaced by prophecy. <sup>17</sup>

This the hope of Nissenbaum: to see the modern sermon regain its prophetic character, its zeal and fire, and its love for all the sanctities of our people and for its national attainments. The modern preacher must therefore devote all his efforts to the revival of what he calls *אמיתות אלהים*, national Judaism, the only true historical Judaism as it evolved from the days of Sinai to this day. He expresses the hope that there will arise many men who will agree with

him in his particular philosophy of Judaism, and who will teach its content and meaning and designate its strong connection with the land of our fathers.<sup>18</sup> In order to be able to preach that Judaism, the modern preacher must receive adequate training. In addition to his speaking ability and moral nature, he must know life with all its problems and needs. He must be well equipped with a full knowledge of Hebrew literature both classical and modern, Jewish history and also a general knowledge. He must be vitally concerned with the condition of the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion. He must also grow accustomed to public speaking and gain expertness in it.<sup>19</sup> The preacher possessing these equipments will draw the people to the synagogue to listen to him, for the people of our day are no longer satisfied with "homiletical stunts" of the maggid.<sup>u</sup> They want to understand the relationship between the Scriptures and the problems of modern life. They want to hear a living message that will touch the strings of their wounded heart.<sup>20</sup> In order to be able to give the people that hopeful message the preacher must be motivated by great ideals. Wisdom and clever interpretation though beneficial is not enough. The sermon in which the goal of the preacher is secondary to his ideas, that sermon cannot live. Ideals must be prior to interpretation. The preacher must make his vision and aspiration the permanent possession of his people. And knowing the disposition of his people, the people of the book, that it does not need to listen to the words of a contemporary, the preacher must put his ideas and sentiments

into the mouths of our prophets and sages. Let them speak through his mouth. Let him speak their language. Perhaps it will stimulate the people to listen to him. But if the sermon is to have a great influence upon the people, its Scriptural and Midrashic passages must be interpreted literally and simply.<sup>21</sup> Only thus can it be a living, vital message. Where must that message come from? It must come from our old synagogue "which has not yet spoken its last word". And when it does speak that word aloud, that word will be: "Revival". But this new word coming from the old synagogue will only find response in the hearts of men if the sacred spirit of our prophets and sages will abide in it.<sup>22</sup> Thus having formulated a theory of preaching richly Jewish in content and lofty in purpose, direct and unequivocal in approach, Nissenbaum proceeds to carry it out in practice. He preaches a religious nationalism and a nationalistic religion often subjecting thought and interpretation to poetry and imagination. But even though his sermons are distinguished for their power of idealism, they are equally distinguished for their brilliant interpretation of Scriptural and Rabbinic pronouncements. Though many of his sermons contain brilliant ideas well developed, he stands out more as the deft homiletician than the profound thinker. His sermons possess great force, stirring eloquence, and prophetic inspiration. Though he grew up in an intensely Orthodox environment, he became imbued with the modern spirit and used the sermon as an instrument for affecting the much needed reconciliation between traditional Judaism



and the ideas of the modern world. As a rule he builds his sermons around one Biblical text buttressing it with many Rabbinic dicta from which he deduces his ideas that are colored with illustrative material drawn from the varied history of our people as well as from secular learning. Unlike the Maggidim of his day, he makes no attempt to solve problems and contradictions in Bible and Midrash. He explains his texts simply and literally in accordance with the simple meaning of the passage that he employs, and derives from it ideas not only inspirational but instructive.

He begins one of his sermons with the two verses: "And ye shall keep<sup>e</sup> my commandments and do them: I am the Lord. And ye shall not profane my holy <sup>N</sup>ame: but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the Lord who hallow you." <sup>23</sup>

From these words, he says, did the sages derive two important lessons: the profanation and the sanctification of God's name. These are directed both toward the outer and inner life of the Jew. The "profanation of God's name" served as the reason to make us meticulously strict in all observance and made us deal with the Gentile most equitably in order that the name of God and Israel should not be made profane in His eyes through us. It also put great obligation upon the intellectual leaders of the people who bore those ideals, whose value the people had not yet learned and whose necessity they have not yet acknowledged, causing them to conduct themselves with upright<sup>ness</sup>~~ness~~ and equity in their relations with the people so that the Torah and its ideals might not be profaned through them. ( *Id. ibid.* ) "Kiddush hashem"

however, made our people into martyrs who offered up their lives for their faith. It showed the outside world that the Jew and his spirit could not be destroyed by instruments of destruction. But the real importance of "Kiddush hashem" can be found in our inner life. "I will be hallowed among the children of Israel". Let the younger generation see the martyrdom of their elders and follow in their footsteps.

But, he continues, in Judaism there have been not only martyrs who died, but there were also righteous men who were saved, such as, Abraham, Hanania, Michael and Azariah and others, which seems to contradict the value of "Kiddush hashem". If God has saved the righteous men, what about those who were not saved? This question was asked by Marinus the Roman, of Pappus and Julianus and received a very sharp answer: Nebuchadnezzar was worthy that a miracle should take place through him. ( מלך כד ) , but from Antiochus, to the Crusades, Torquemada, Chmelnicki, to our own days there has not been one man worthy of having a miracle performed through him. Such an answer is sufficiently severe to close the mouths of our enemies who make fun of us saying: where is your God? Let him come and save you. But for ourselves we need a more profound answer: the afflicted ones have to be worthy of miracles and not deserve the penalty of death, but those who do deserve that penalty, God provides them with a murderous tyrant and heaven is sanctified through him. ( מלך כד ) The afflicted one must accept his punishment with love, for he is deserving of the death penalty. He through whom God chose to be sanctified is a



holy man, and the afflicted one lives on, for with his death he brought life to his people.

Then he continues to develop the idea of "Kiddush hashem" bringing verses from the same Parasha and weaving ideas around the main text. The entire idea of "Kiddush hashem", he says, begins with the verse: "When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat...be accepted for an offering made by fire to the Lord".<sup>24</sup> The Rabbis deduced from this verse the idea of "Kiddush hashem". They said: "God seeks the pursued. Abel was pursued by Cain and God turned to Abel...Abraham was pursued by Nimrod and God chose Abraham...Israel is pursued by the nations and God selected Israel as His chosen people...So in the case of these animals who are pursued by the lion and the tiger, God has chosen the pursued animals to be brought as sacrifice to Him. He spreads his protecting wings over the weak in order to save them from the hands of their pursuers. Just as in the case of these weak animals it was ~~there~~<sup>in</sup> isolation for sacrificial purposes which protected them from destruction and preserved their kind, so in the case of Israel, by virtue of "Kiddush hashem", and a long martyrdom for the sake of the nation he has achieved eternal life. But the importance of "Kiddush hashem" is not to die for the people's sanctities, it is to live by them, and to preserve them. It is the duty of the woman to dedicate her home to God and Torah. It is the duty of Israel to make its synagogue a "holy of holies", so as to endow all our people with a spirit of holiness. Our unwillingness to return to Zion is a profan-

ation of God's name. Our highest duty to the ideal of "Kiddush hashem" is to work for the return to Zion and become again the people of God. If we fulfill the ideal of "Kiddush hashem" by living it, we will not have to sanctify God's name through death only. Let us live in sanctity and be a holy people and the name "holy one" will not have to be engraved upon our tombs.<sup>25</sup>

Nissenbaum emphasizes with poetic fervor the Jewish concept of life in contradistinction to that of the other nations. Very cleverly he interprets the verse contained in the last blessing of Moses before his death: "And Israel dwelleth<sup>in</sup> safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of corn and wine; yea, His heavens drop down dew."<sup>26</sup> This he says contains a great blessing if it is given the proper interpretation.<sup>t</sup> The word "alone" must not be interpreted to mean that the isolation of Israel in his land is the result of the hatred of the other nations who isolate Israel by force. Not at all! Israel lives in his own land enjoying a life of peace. But he lives alone because he has the <sup>אין</sup> the eye of Jacob. (He makes "ain" mean eye instead of fountain) He has a different concept of life and the world. In that sense he is alone. That concept combines the love of simple living and high moral idealism. His desire is "in a land of corn and wine", to work on his soil and live in peace, but his eyes are raised heavenward, "His heavens drop down dew". In his first desire he is like all other peoples but it is the second that distinguishes <sup>him</sup> from all others. His moral and spiritual concepts are entirely

different. He has his own skies. The evil, folly and wickedness of other peoples are not his, but, "drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open that they may bring forth salvation, and let her cause righteousness to spring up together."<sup>27</sup> This is the dew that the skies of Israel pour down making us a distinct people. It is the high concepts of our Torah by which we lived in Exile, through which we will be redeemed<sup>28</sup> and restored to Zion.

Let us notice how simple and direct he is in his exegesis. Commenting on the Rabbinic verse: "Good was the wisdom of Moses that he caused the Torah to be inherited by Israel."<sup>29</sup> His wisdom was good in that he left the Torah as a heritage to Israel, bringing a great good to all the world. All our wise men should learn from him not to isolate themselves in their own homes and relish in their own learning to win prizes and titles. Jacob too must awaken "from his sleep", recognize his place and time and call out: "Surely God is in this place and I knew it not."<sup>30</sup> They must use the wisdom that they acquired for the good of the people, to open its eyes, to develop its mind, to strengthen its spirit, to broaden its scope of vision. Our people want to learn and develop. Their spirit has not congealed because of the coldness of the Exile. Our soil is well prepared. Good and healthy seeds have been planted in it, and if the blessed rain will be poured over it, it will bring forth good fruit.<sup>31</sup> This is the national duty of our leaders.

He sometimes offers humorous interpretations. He assures the Orthodox elements in Jewry, who are oppsed to Zionism because the youth of Palestine are irreligious, that the young radicals will not destroy Palestine, but rest assured says he:

לפיך לא יחיהו בני האדם . They will not remain in the  
land. The land always spews out those who defile it. <sup>32</sup>

In 1903 when his first book *על דרך חז"ל* appeared, Nissenbaum was attacked in the "Hashiloah" by Isaac Greenbaum the well-kown Zionist leader criticizing him severely for his extensive use of Biblical and Talmudic passages in his discussion of modern problems, which have no bearing upon modern life. <sup>33</sup> He was probably criticized on the same score by the young Zionists of that day for in his introduction to his book *אנשים ודברים* he pleads with the modern generation not to underestimate the importance of the wisdom of the past. He asks them to read his sermons and when they come across the words of the prophets and sages they should not be startled, but they should study their words deeply and they will find in them lofty and "modern" ideals, much more so than what they find in the words of the modern "prophets" whose idle talk even is considered by our young people as a system of thought. He hopes that his sermons will open the eyes of the younger generation, especially the Zionists and nationalists among them to see "the new words" which they are accustomed to hear and read in their own day, coming out of the mouths of the prophets and sages that lived a few thousand years ago. Thus will our nationalist youth realize that the national Judaism which they advocate is really and truly

our historical Judaism. And the religious youth will realize that the historical Judaism which they advocate is nothing else but our national Judaism which has always been the eternal  
34  
Judaism of our people.



III

What is national Judaism? While the term itself is new in our literature, it is an old concept both in Jewish literature and in Jewish life.<sup>35</sup> Historical Judaism is composed of two elements: religion and nationalism, God and the nation.<sup>36</sup> They are so strongly attached to each other that it is impossible to find the line that divides them. There are some things that appear to us to be of a religious character only, that their purpose is only the fine relationship between man and God, but upon closer scrutiny we detect their national essence, directed toward the strengthening of the ties between the individual man and his nation. The Torah looks upon the deeds of every individual through the eyes of the nation since the deeds of every individual leave a good or bad effect upon the entire nation.<sup>37</sup> The Jewish religion as it expresses itself in our written and oral tradition is national in its essence. In its center stands the Jewish nation with its social, moral, and political needs. The well-being of the nation is its noblest aspiration.<sup>38</sup> When religion is separated from nationalism, it loses its interest in the needs of the people and fulfills its duties to heaven only. This paves the way for assimilation. Religion does not emphasize the Hebrew language, and culture, and even tolerates intermarriage, thereby endangering the existence of the nation and paves the way for its own destruction. In Jewish history this is particular-



ly true of the time preceeding the building of the second Temple and during the Greek period. It was Ezra and Nehemiah in their day and the Hasmoneans in their day who by restoring the national foundation of Judaism, helped the religion regain its strength, restored the religious - national balance<sup>39</sup> of Jewish life, and assured the unity of the nation.

Just as the Jewish religion stands out as unique among among all the religions of the world, so is Jewish nationalism distinguished from all others. It is a type of nationalism whose strength lies not in the sword, but in the culture and the pedigree of the nation. It lies in our innate characteristics that distinguish us from all other nations. That basic difference can be detected in our culture from its early beginnings to this very day. We <sup>are</sup> ~~see~~ different from all other peoples in our concept of life, God, the world, humanity, and also in our speech and in our way of life. We have inherited all those from our early ancestors. It is these innate qualities racial in character that have become a part of our life and blood, that have preserved the Jewish nation from the deteriorating influences of foreign environments.<sup>40</sup> It is our race, it is our "Zechut Abot" (merit of our fathers), our fine pedigree, and all the innate characteristics that we have inherited from our ancestors that have made us an eternal people. It is these moral<sup>41</sup> characteristics that made us fit to receive the Torah. The Torah not only fitted in with the instinctive spiritual qualities of our people but also contributed to the further development of these qualities. Providence also provided

Israel with a land that not only harmonized with the character of the people but in turn also provided the opportunity for that character to develop in accordance with its own nature. Thus we see that Israel stands in the center of our world and the Torah and Palestine are the two pillars upon which the existence and development of Israel depends.<sup>42</sup>

In our day this innate character of Israel that can be traced back to the Patriarchs has not perished, but since the beginning of the Exile, we have fallen under the influence of strange environments that both hindered the normal growth of the Jewish spirit and also enervated the character of the people. As a result of this spiritual weakening Israel has begun to complain of the yoke of the Torah, for the character of Israel can no longer measure up to its high principles. And the longer the Exile, the more is Israel estranged from the spirit of the Torah, the more does it deviate from the normal course of its natural development. Israel feels that the Exile has driven a wedge into its soul, and if the Exile will continue, the Jewish nation will perish. The only way to save Israel is to bring again back to life these instinctive creative qualities of the Jewish people and to regain the opportunity for normal Jewish development. Having accomplished this, the breach between Israel and Torah will be mended, and we will again find in the Torah the rules of life that will harmonize with our character, and in turn the Torah will stimulate our natural development until we reach the very zenith of growth that it has marked out for us, and in which direction its laws and commandments are

leading us, and that is, prophecy.

This solution to the problem demands that our people should leave its foreign environment and settle in the land of its forefathers - a land well adapted to the inherent character and the normal development of Israel. Palestine must again become the land of Israel, for only there can the Jewish people live and develop in consonance with its inherent nature.<sup>43</sup>

This is historical Jewish nationalism. It is the innate feeling implanted in our hearts that we belong to a nation, great in spirit and rich in culture. The object of the laws of the Torah, like the purpose of every Jew, is the welfare, development and survival<sup>44</sup> of the nation. Nationalism is therefore Judaism in all its ramifications. It includes the study of Torah and the observance of its religious commandments, the study of the Hebrew language and Jewish culture, the restoration to Zion, and the building of institutions for the promotion of the spiritual and material needs of the people. But it is the spirit of the nation that must hover over all these tasks. They must all be dominated by one ideal and that is, the spiritual, material, intellectual and moral development<sup>45</sup> of the nation and its survival.

The Torah is the heart of Israel. Without the Torah,<sup>46</sup> Israel cannot survive. It unites all the children of Israel together into one nation. The strength of the Torah lies in its constant development. It never remained static. It underwent dynamic, constant change, yet its essential character has remained. It is comparable to a plant that grows

out of its roots. Every age gave its own interpretation to the principles of the Torah. It was this freedom of interpretative thought making for spiritual growth that preserved the soul of our people from becoming dry and barren.<sup>47</sup>

The Torah of Israel is a Torah of life. It does not demand of its bearers the subjugation of the body for the purpose of the upliftment of the soul, neither does it provide for the development of the body at the expense of the soul. It established an equilibrium between the material and the spiritual allowing each one to develop in its own fashion. Both the material and the spiritual desires of man demand satisfaction. The Torah, therefore, makes fair provision for both.<sup>48</sup> (cuzari)

The purpose of the Torah is the survival of the Jewish nation that sustains the moral law of God and fulfills it by its deeds. All the incidents and the commandments of the Torah are directed toward that purpose and in them is reflected the image of the "Shekinah", the soul of the Jewish nation. The Torah, God and Israel are thus united into one.<sup>49</sup> It is this unity which made Israel eternal.

The Torah is the mirror in which we find the reflection of God. Every man looking into that mirror sees only that which he is qualified to see. Every generation sees God, hears his voice echoing through the Torah in accordance with <sup>his</sup> ~~its~~ own inner vision and intelligence.<sup>50</sup> Israel's faith in God is not based on a deductive philosophical reasoning, but on its own historical tradition which points to the presence



of a higher being who has everything in his possession, and who watches over all men, but especially so does he watch over His people Israel. The detailed knowledge of this tradition will give us the wisdom to comprehend the ways in which God guides His world, and how he actualizes His will in the midst of Israel. God performs His will through His messengers. His will is performed through the deeds of men even though they are endowed with free will. He reveals Himself not in the disruption of the laws of nature, but through the natural order of things and through man's management of the world. Everything is done by God. Every deed performed for the good of Israel, even if it does not accomplish the desired result immediately, is done through God's providence. 51 Faith in God and the acceptance of Torah were originally based on fear because they were forced upon the people. Hundreds of years passed in which the prophets gradually implanted the true understanding of God in the hearts of the people - an understanding of God based on love not on fear. The people now saw God not in "thunder and lightening" but in the "still small voice". Thus did the Torah strike root in the hearts of the people and also won over the hearts of many nations. 52

Man must humble himself before God. While he has harnessed the forces of nature for his own use, he stands in helpless bewilderment in the presence of the life-mysterious, unknown, baffling his intelligence. In the presence of this mystery, man must need break his pride and haughtiness



and acknowledge the existence of a great power that dominates over him and his life. On the other hand, man must not cease being because of the superior power of God. God created the world imperfectly so that man might correct the flaws of creation, and feel himself as co-creator, <sup>הוא יתן לו חלק</sup>

know his worth, and guard "the image of God" in him.

It is the duty of man to correct the defects in creation and to lead the world forward to perfect development. But in improving the world, man must begin by improving himself first, before he begins to improve others. Let him correct himself, his children, let his home become the symbol of all the reforms that he demands of others. Having accomplished that, he can begin to work for the reform of the entire community. He must study the nature of the world, study its moral imperfections and try to improve them as much as he possibly can. <sup>53</sup> But before he can do that, he must possess the essential moral seed which few men have. Man must appreciate the value of man, the image of God in him. He must value highly the life of man. But even more than that he must be ready to give up his life for the ideals which must become dearer to him than his own life, for the improvement <sup>54</sup> of the world. This is the moral duty of man.

Morality is the essence of Torah. It propounds the strengthening of the spiritual life in the present, and high ideals for the distant future, for the end of days. This is not "the morality of the Exile" which says that Judaism despises the joys of the world because we cannot attain them. The earthly foundation from under our feet has been removed,

that is why we look heavenward. This is not true. Our  
morals flow from our knowledge of life as it is in reality.  
Our Torah, a Torah of life knows the "way of life" to be  
"instructive admonition" (אור חיים אלה צדק ושלום אלה צדק (ויקרא)  
And in order to alleviate man's pain comes our Torah with  
its spiritual message and stirs in the hearts of our people  
visions and aspirations which lighten their burdens, relieve  
their pain, and endear their life. Throughout our exile  
these ideals have been a life giving element <sup>for</sup> of our people.  
This "joy of the future" lifted our people out of the mire  
55  
of the exile and encouraged him to live.

The Torah also contains moral laws whose purpose it is to build our social life on the basis of justice and equality ( *שְׁוֵה - פָּנִים* ). The earth, it avers, belongs to God. All men rich or poor, strangers or citizens are equal. One law for all men. There can therefore be no masters and slaves, no dominance and subjection, no pride and humiliation. All men are equal in rights of citizenship, in individual freedom and freedom of conscience.

Having been accepted by all mankind, we thought that the Torah and its noble moral ideals would capture the hearts of all men, but now we see that the advancement of these ideals have been checked. While <sup>the</sup> sciences have been making great strides forward, expanding everywhere, morality stands in its tracks. And when it does advance its progress is so imperceptible that its existence may be questioned. The reason for it may be found in the fact that <sup>the</sup> people that has always been the advocate of moral idealism has itself ceased

to live by its own ideals. It has forgotten the words of its prophets. Neither does it have the courage and strength to go forward, carrying its Torah and its ethics into the outside world and become again "alight unto the nations",<sup>57</sup> thereby enriching the moral convictions of mankind. Moral progress will come through the efforts of men who will make that cause their deepest devotion, who will first implant the moral seed in their own heart, and then into the hearts of all men. But since moral development is dependent upon the efforts of men, who are often subject to error and who are frequently hindered in their work, it makes small, often<sup>58</sup> imperceptible strides, but gradually it does advance.

There is much truth in the idea that morality in itself has not developed into higher forms. There still exists that original line dividing love and hate, but because of the constant social readjustments of society that line has been shifted. Humanity is still divided into we-groups and they-groups. Everyone that belongs to us is to be loved and maintained, every stranger must be hated. In the beginning, when civilization was at its lowest, mankind was divided into family units. Anyone who did not belong to the family was an enemy to be fought. Afterwards<sup>74</sup> new adjustments took place and new social regulative organizations evolved, first the tribe and now the nation. Anyone who belongs to a different nation is hated as a foreigner. So we see that the line which divides love from hate has been extended outward to include wider spheres and groups of men. In modern times, along side national and racial conflict there is also

class-conflict, with the antagonism between capital and labor growing day by day. And we who are "foreigners" among all peoples, are very much aware of their deep hatred toward us, even though we as a people can hardly be divided into distinct classes as other peoples can. The number of our laboring class is extremely small, and the capitalists among us are very few in number. But even though the class struggle plays no role in the inner life of our people these two powerful classes arouse hatred in the hearts of their followers against our people. The poor workingman who is aroused by the proletariat to fight "capital", wages war also on us, because he looks upon us as those who disturb the normal order of things. This, unfortunately, is the kind of moral progress we are making in our day. But, nevertheless, morality is advancing. And while its development cannot be characterized as creative of new moral values, nevertheless, it does make headway, and is spreading throughout the world, thanks to the teachings of our Torah and prophets that are penetrating everywhere and influencing even greater numbers of men.

The "Mitzvot" represent the practical expression of the moral law. Their purpose is to preserve the unity of Israel from disruption. They are to be observed in equal fashion by all Jews. Theoretically Jews have been allowed to disagree with traditional authority, but in the matter of practice the laws of Judaism are equally binding upon all Jews. The unity of the nation is sacred. A transgression might endanger that unity. The "Mitzvot" are the spark of one soul,



the soul of the Torah, the unity of the nation. When one spark is extinguished the entire soul is impaired. <sup>60</sup>

There are those who say that the observance of the "Mitzvot" alone is sufficient in a program for Jewish survival, and there is no need to try any other means. Our preservation depends on the practice of the commandments that emphasize our religious uniqueness. There are also those who believe that the unity of Israel can be preserved without religious means. Their solution is nationalism. The former are the religious assimilationists, the latter are the nationalistic assimilationists. There is a third type, and that is the assimilationist who remains completely passive to any program of Jewish survival. It is this type of assimilation that is far more dangerous than the others. It has robbed us of our spiritual strength and destroyed our national dignity.

The basis of opposition to Torah or nationalism may be found in the craving of the rich to pursue a hedonistic philosophy of life. The Torah they claim stands as an obstacle in their way. They therefore make of it a butt for derision and throw off its yoke. There are also those who are opposed to Torah on the ground that it makes for Jewish isolation. They say that the great ideas and ideals of Judaism have already been accepted by all mankind and therefore there is no longer any need to preserve Judaism. The answer to all these forms and philosophies of Judaism is that Judaism has a history thousands of years old which supplies us with an answer to all these problems. These ideas have



already been tried out in history. Historically speaking, these forms of opposition arise during a period <sup>in which Judaism</sup> sheds old forms and takes on new ones, or more correctly when these new forms become more and more prominent. In most cases assimilation begins with the growing indifference to the Torah and the nation and ends with the complete absorption in the culture of the land by those who advocate it. Those who forsook the Torah (followers of Messianic movements) also left their people and were absorbed by their neighbors, but those who held on to the Torah remained <sup>within</sup> in the nation. Their opposition brought new life into Judaism and the nation, and enriched our spiritual heritage. Our history teaches us another lesson. Those who remained attached to their nation even though they were opposed to many principles in the Torah remained within their group, such as the Sadducees and other sects. But those who left the nation, like the Karaites have been completely lost to Jewish life. The survival of the Jewish nation depends upon the preservation of the Torah, our Mitzvot, and all our spiritual possessions. He who wants to live a wholesome life must return to his people and his Torah and must work for the revival of the Jewish nation. 61

The synagogue has always been the center of Torah. It fulfilled the function of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was the spiritual center of the Jew for prayer, study of Torah, and communal and national needs. It was a fountain that poured forth sacred sentiments - both religious and national, and high moral ideals. In that sanctuary did the Jew pour out his deep gratitude to God on happy occasions,

from it he drew divine consolation on a day of adversity. The synagogue united within itself all the members of the congregation into one nation with one common fate in the present and one hope for the future. Its influence was not felt only within its four walls but penetrated into every Jewish home. The sentiments aroused in the synagogue found their way into every individual home, and endowed it with its holy spirit. The strength of the synagogue consisted first of all in its prayer. The prayers were recited in public in the Hebrew language with enthusiasm, everyone knowing that these prayers were recited by all members of the nation in all times and places. All this lifted the Jewish soul, brought it out of its isolation and tied it up with the historical soul of the nation. The synagogue also influenced our people with the reading of the Torah and the sermon. The sermon especially spread the knowledge of the Torah among the people. It aroused feelings of love and honor for the nation and paid particular attention to the younger generation to unite it with the nation and its sanctities. And thirdly, the synagogue was the national center of the people. In it the people gathered to pour out their complaints in words of prayer to God in a day of evil, and also to devise methods of defense. The synagogue was the fortification that defended and preserved Israel throughout the Exile.

When the synagogue was under the influence of the Torah it flourished, now when the Torah has lost its hold upon the people, the synagogue has lost its former strength and influence. The people no longer come to pray, and those who

do, pray without feeling. Orthodoxy has eliminated the sermon as a sign of Reform, and the sermons in the Reform temples do more harm than good. The synagogue is no longer the rallying point of all Jews in times of trial and suffering. Our liberal Jews wanting to restore to the Synagogue its power to attract the people, built beautiful temples. But that didn't improve the condition, for the spirit of God has left "the tents of Jacob" and the hearts of men. And now we remain without a spiritual center around which to concentrate all the forces of Jewish life. We must therefore revive the old synagogue and thereby preserve the national spirit of our people. It is the Hebrew language of the prayers that develops a feeling of kinship between all Jews the world over. We must therefore remove all foreign languages from the synagogue and make Hebrew its dominant language, so that any Jew going to another country will find in the synagogue a Hebrew atmosphere. It will make him feel at home with his own people. It will make him feel that he belongs to one nation though scattered all over the world, yet one in spirit and culture. Especially can this be accomplished if our preachers will preach in Hebrew as frequently as possible. It will make our people feel that Hebrew is our national language and must therefore be the language of the synagogue, and that the language of the land is for us only local and temporary. The Hebrew sermon will impel our people to study the Hebrew language, so that in the future the Hebrew sermon will become permanent in the synagogue and all our people will understand it. We must also insti-

tute rules of proper deportment in the synagogue, look after its cleanliness and beautification, so that it will also make a nice impression externally. We must also select a worthy Cantor who with his Hebrew melodies and pleasant enunciation will bestow a spirit of holiness upon our prayers and worshippers. The reading from the Torah and the sermon will spread the knowledge of the Torah among our people. Thus the synagogue will become again the spiritual center of our people. Such a living functioning synagogue, will make us again a living functioning nation.<sup>62</sup>

The language of the Torah is Hebrew. Israel appeared on the stage of history with the Hebrew tongue on its mouth. Throughout our history the Hebrew language and Torah became strongly attached to one another. They both became inseparable. After the first exile Aramaic began to replace Hebrew. The Scribes realizing that the neglect of the Hebrew language constituted a danger to the unity of the nation, fixed<sup>th</sup> eighteen benedictions to be recited by all in public. Their greatest hope however lay in the diffusion of the knowledge of the Torah written in Hebrew. The study of the Torah was made obligatory. They did not allow its translation into another language, because they feared it would push aside the original Hebrew and the Hebrew tongue would therefore be forgotten. The victory of the Hasmoneans brought into Palestine a great stream of immigrants from Assyria and Babylonia who spoke only Aramaic, which again began to dominate the life of the people. The Pharisees were busy with religious matters only. It mattered not to them in what language the people



studied their religion as long as they knew it and observed its commandments. With the beginning of Christianity the leaders began to realize the great danger that awaited the survival of the nation and its Torah, because of the omission of the Hebrew language. They made the study of Hebrew obligatory upon the children.

בשעתם מנחם אברהם אביהם מלמד תורה ומצוות ואלו אשר לא ידעו לשון קודש  
תורה ואשר לא ידעו לשון קודש כאלו לא ידעו לשון קודש (ספר דברים)

After the destruction of the Temple, and with the beginning of the dispersion, the leaders again felt that that the lack of the knowledge of Hebrew endangered the unity of the nation. They therefore made the synagogue as the sanctuary of the Hebrew nation. They felt instinctively that the life of the nation was interwoven with its national language. From then on the synagogue became the sole refuge for the Hebrew language. The people prayed in it, studied in it. The Hebrew language became the language of scholarship throughout the Diaspora throughout the centuries. It dominated all our spiritual treasures. It united all the Jews of all ages and lands into one people.

During the few hundreds year before the French Revolution the numerous expulsions and oppressions crushed the spiritual life of our people. The language was again forgotten. In the modern day there arose the movement of the Science of Judaism whose purpose it was to revive the past of our nation. If it would have used the Hebrew language it would have again revived the fibres of our spiritual unity. But it used foreign languages in its studies thereby dividing more than ever before the dispersed sections of our people. In



place of one Hebraic Judaism it brought us many Judaisms: a German, French, English, etc. They paid no attention to that Judaism that lived in the past, to that unifying Hebraic Judaism that is destined to arise again only in its original language and form. This neglect of the Hebrew language has again broken up the spiritual unity of the nation. Jews of different lands no longer know each other because they cannot understand one another. The entire nation is scattered physically, divided spiritually, without any tie to keep it together. But again we have found a rescue. The rebirth of the nation in Palestine has brought with it the revival of the Hebrew language. The national restoration becomes meaningless without the revival of the language.

The purpose of the rebirth of the language is to create again one Hebraic Judaism, one language for all the thinkers and creators of the nation, one great spiritual bond for all the scattered sons of Israel. To accomplish that purpose we must learn to study and talk in Hebrew. It must become the language of our schools. But to study it only as a language, as one studies other foreign languages is not enough. We must study it as the language of our nation. We must link it up with our Torah, Without the knowledge of the prophets in the original, the Hebrew language will not be revived. <sup>63</sup>

The Torah is inextricably interwoven with Palestine. The Torah in order to be imbibed by the people, in order for it to become a guide for the people, needed a land that would be fitted to the spirit of the Torah. Thus God chose Palestine. In it were formed the original characteristics of the patriarchs.

In it these characteristics continued to develop and flourish giving rise to prophets and sages who disseminated the knowledge of the Torah among the people. In it developed those prophetic qualities that shaped Israel's destiny as the chosen people. In it Hebrew prophecy was born. Even after the destruction of the Temple for over a few hundred years Palestine continued to be the center of the Torah, the great religious center of the nation. Throughout the Exile the bond between Israel and Zion was never broken, <sup>64</sup> but the suffering and the pain of Exile crushed our <sup>spiritual</sup> ~~prophetic~~ growth, our national dignity, and our faith in national redemption. <sup>65</sup> There are some who believe that the modern Zionist movement was born as a result of persecution and thrives only because of persecution, and as soon as Jewish suffering will end, Zionism will end with it. But oppression is nothing new in Jewish history. Why is it that Zionism has not come to life until now? Zionism is not the result of persecution. Quite the contrary, - it is the result of Jewish emancipation. It was during the few short years of freedom that Zionism was born. It came into being in a period when nationalism and the ideals of freedom spread in the world, and aroused in the hearts of our people a desire for freedom and self-determination and thus did the Zionist movement come into being. The more our people will benefit from the rights and privileges of equal citizenship granted to them by all the countries in which they dwell, remaining at the same time true to their own people and Torah, the more will they realize the necessity for the rehabilitation of their land and

66  
their people.

Palestine is to the Jewish people what a home is to an individual. The individual who possesses his own home is free to pursue his own inclinations. He does everything in his home as he sees fit. The same is true of the nation that lives in its own land in accordance with its own spirit. Israel living as a stranger in foreign lands does not have the freedom and opportunity to live according to its own will and nature. In palestine the Jewish people will be able to live, as it did before the destruction of its state, in that spirit which is true to its nature and ability. It is there that the Jewish people will again be able to live a wholesome well-rounded out life in both its material and spiritual aspects. 67 In the rebuilding of Palestine, the solution to the economic, cultural, spiritual and political problem of the Jew, 68 will have to be found.

Every people that lives in its land determines and devises its own economic structure. Every citizen in quest of a livelihood pursues his own particular task whether it be as a farmer or laborer, a professional or business man, or government employee. If overpopulation results in the narrowing of opportunity the citizens go to other lands to seek their fortunes there, and their own state defends their rights no matter where they may live. This was the nature of our life before the destruction of our state. In the Exile, however, our economic make-up has become completely dislocated. We have become a preponderantly artisan and middle-class people. But now due to the swift technological development the artisans among us find it more and more difficult to eke

out a livelihood. The small business man is also being pushed out by "big business" that controls the wealth of the nation. The result of all these manifestations will be that our people will soon face the danger of economic strangulation.

The only way to escape such a fate is to leave the Exile and reestablish our own land which has all the qualities and facilities necessary for the establishment of the Jewish state.<sup>69</sup> First of all we must redeem the soil of Palestine from foreign owners as well as foreign laborers. This step is fundamental to the building of nationhood. We must purchase the soil from the hands of its owners. For that we will need vast amounts of money. But money alone is not enough. We must also insist that the labor on that soil should be done only by Jews. Jewish money alone will not attract our people to Palestine, but Jewish labor will attract the Jewish laboring class to come to Palestine, and every village and city that they will build, will tend to increase the Jewish immigration into the land. We will possess that soil only by laboring upon it, by building upon it.<sup>70</sup> We must make all of that land, its trade and commerce and everything on it our own, thereby making a safe physical and spiritual refuge for Israel. But if our aim is the true revival of the Jewish spirit, we must not think only in terms of material needs, but we must continue to stress the spiritual essence of the movement. Our material interests and well-being are very important, but we must emphasize the spiritual and moral needs of our revival. Only thus shall we give birth to truly free men who will pursue noble



and lofty ideals in the rebuilding of the center of the Jewish spirit.<sup>71</sup> Moral idealism must therefore permeate our program of rebuilding. Our life there must be put on the basis of complete moral equality and wherever possible, also on economic equality. Whether or not Zionism will be able to bring about economic equality in our land, ~~is~~ something <sup>which</sup> depends on the international economic situation, and we do not know. We are certain, however, that that spirit of freedom and equality which permeates our Torah will prevail in Palestine.<sup>72</sup> And if our life in Palestine will be built upon such noble foundations, it will also have its influence upon the other nations, for Palestine has been destined to be the center of moral progress for all mankind.<sup>73</sup> Since our exile from Palestine has delayed the development of moral idealism we must aspire to fulfill these noble ideals in Palestine<sup>74</sup> thereby encouraging the moral advancement of all mankind.

If Palestine is to become the spiritual center of Jewry, we must establish the institutions of study and learning making Palestine the center of Torah and culture. Hebrew must be the language of our culture. But we must not cultivate the knowledge of Hebrew as such without connecting it up with the study of Torah. It will lead to ignorance and will constitute a danger to our cultural growth. The study of Hebrew must be made indivisible from Torah and Jewish culture. But if Hebrew is to become the national language of Palestine, the Jews in exile must also learn to know that language. If they do not, then all the labors on the behalf of Hebrew in Palestine will go to waste. Quite suddenly



a new stream of immigrants speaking foreign tongues might stream into Palestine and all efforts for the revival of Hebrew will again be destroyed. Hebrew will therefore will not be permanently revived in Palestine unless it is also revived in the exile.<sup>75</sup> This unity of Torah and religion, language and culture, will make Palestine the seat of Jewish learning. There, all the latent talents of Israel will come to life again. And because of its great influence, many of our famous sons who have thus far hidden their identity will reveal themselves again, and acknowledge their identity with Israel. And if our great men, who have won fame in all the branches of science and learning, art, economics, and statesmanship, will do their work as Jews thereby magnifying the fame of Israel, our people will become the most famous and creative in the world. Thus will <sup>Palestine</sup> Israel become the spiritual refuge<sup>75</sup> of our people.

We know very well that only a part of our people will live in Palestine, and probably only a small part, and the majority of our people will remain scattered the world over. But since the majority of our people will remain tied up spiritually with Palestine, and since the basic qualities and characteristics of our people will find there complete freedom of development, the influence of Palestine upon the Jews in the Diaspora will be so great that it will counteract the influence of the foreign environment and preserve Jewish life from assimilation. Palestine will constitute the norm of Jewish living, in terms of which the Diaspora will measure itself correcting all deviations from that norm.<sup>76</sup> So great

will be the influence of the Jewish state that the value of our people will become great in the eyes of all the nations and they will change their opinion of us and grant us safety and security in their own lands. In this way will the Jewish state solve the Jewish problem in Exile.<sup>77</sup>

There are many Jews among us who blame us for showing a greater love for Palestine than we do for the Jewish people. We are doing all in our power they say, to acquire Palestine, even though it is a very difficult task, and make no attempt to find another land that would be easier to acquire as a safe refuge for our people. But even though it is true that it is possible to acquire another land more safe for our people than Palestine, which in our opinion is not feasible, even then we boast of our stubbornness to remain Jews no matter what happens, and choose only Zion because our inner understanding tells us that only in the land of our forefathers shall we be able to live and develop as Jews. It is there that all the unique qualities of our people developed, in it our great culture was created, and only in that land shall we become again a wise and cultured people. That is our Zionist aspiration. What constitutes the strength of a nation? There are many nations in the world who have become famous because of the vast lands and populations that they rule over and because of their great physical strength and resourcefulness. There are other nations, however, whose lands and populations are very small, their physical powers are insignificant, and yet they have acquired fame because they produced men of great talent and genius. What does our strength consist of? We have

not become famous because of the possession of vast lands, great populations and powerful armies. The strength of Israel has always consisted of the spiritual, moral, and prophetic. Not only single individuals among us have been endowed with these qualities but our entire people. Every man in Israel though he is not a prophet, is the son of a prophet, and possesses the spark of prophecy. The strength of Israel is entirely in the moral, in the prophetic.<sup>78</sup>

It is with this prophetic Renaissance that Zionism is concerned. The purpose of the Zionist movement is the revival of prophecy, the revival and the realization of the ideals and aspirations of the prophets in Palestine.<sup>79</sup>

This is national Judaism. This is Jewish moral nationalism. It is not chauvinism. Quite the contrary, it believes that human progress ~~that human progress~~ will be brought about through cultural diversity. Every people must be allowed to live in accordance with its own spirit and its own national character, but at the same time it can utilize the knowledge and learning that other peoples possess, and let the other peoples enjoy the fruit of its own knowledge. Every people has its own language in which its spirit reveals itself, nevertheless it also knows other languages and other peoples know its language. Every people lives in its land, nevertheless, many of its own citizens live in other lands and citizens of other lands live in its land. In this way every people has complete freedom to develop according to its own nature, inclinations and talents, and at the same time influences other peoples and in turn is influenced by them. Thus humanity

developes. This is the universalistic Jewish nationalism toward which we are striving today. It aims to recreate a synthesis between Torah, Hebrew and Palestine, directed toward one purpose - the moral and prophetic regeneration of Israel that will also result in the moral progress of humanity. <sup>80</sup>

All this can be brought about through an effective program of Jewish education that will provide the older generation with a knowledge of rational Judaism, and will impart to our youth a knowledge and understanding of historical Judaism. The cause for the neglect of the Torah, the lack of its knowledge can be found to a great extent among our Orthodox Jews who teach the Torah to their children as they themselves learned it, making no attempt to interpret its teachings scientifically and rationally. The children begin to doubt the truth and the validity of the Torah because they can find no rational explanation for its principles. They therefore come to believe that there exists a conflict between religion and modern thought, with the result that the Torah stands discredited in their eyes, and they reject it as an old, outworn philosophy of life. Our children are therefore lost to Jewish life. This dangerous situation can be solved by an adequate program of Jewish education that will give our children a rational interpretation of Torah and Judaism, reinterpret our old tradition and adapt it to modern life. It must create a harmony between our old faith and the currents <sup>81</sup> of modern thought. Of course we must also teach our children secular studies and general culture because we cannot separate our children from the secular world in which they



live <sup>82</sup>, But the important part of their education must be the Jewish studies. We must teach them to know their Jewish Culture, their religion, and all the spiritual possessions of their people. <sup>83</sup> We must teach them to know the character and meaning of Jewish life, the Jewish psychology and to understand the circumstances in which their people finds itself. We must also instill in their hearts a deep love for their people and its tribulations, and a strong faith in its future, so that all the adversities that they will have to face as Jews will not cause them to lose faith in God and in the future of their people, and will not lead them to disappointment and despair which ends with an escape from Jewish life. <sup>84</sup>

This type of Jewish education makes Jewish nationalism its basic foundation. In previous days when religion was the basis of education all parents strove to see their sons a Rabbi in Israel, but with nationalism as its central idea <sup>85</sup> we must strive to raise redeemers for the Jewish people. This ideal must penetrate into all our educational institutions and make our Orthodox people aware of the need of the physical well being of their sons. When the ideal figure in Jewish life was the "abbi, it was taken for granted that his physical well being was unimportant and was therefore undermined, with the result that our Rabbis and teachers are weak physically and mentally not fitting to play the role of teachers and forceful spiritual leaders. Jewish nationalism will produce the ideal leader who will be a man of physical strength, moral stamina, and spiritual courage. This spiritual leader must be a man of far vision and deep insight. He must



penetrate the depths of the Jewish past and reveal to the people its great future. Whether his visions and ideals will be concretized or not, he will visualize them clearly and hand them down to those who will follow in his footsteps. We no longer have a Moses who was able to ascend the high mountain on one side of which he saw a past of suffering and slavery, and on the other side a <sup>future of</sup> freedom and glory for the people in its own land. Such a leader no longer exists. We do expect, however, that spiritual leaders of our day too should be men of vision. These leaders must be greater than the people, but they must not dominate over them, nor speak to them condescendingly. They must be devoted to their people so that the people will love them. They must always keep in mind the great ideal and purpose that they set out to accomplish, the revival of the nation and its culture, thus they will always put the needs of the people prior to their own needs. They must always remember that they are priests in the Temple of Israel. They must make the national sanctities beloved by all our people, arousing in their hearts a love for Israel and strengthen the weak bonds that tie our people one to another. <sup>86</sup> But they must remember that the people cannot be fed with spiritual things only. The economic situation of their people, its support and maintenance is equally important. The leaders must therefore include within their scope all the material, spiritual, and national needs <sup>87</sup> of the nation.

All these efforts embracing a program of culture and action directed toward the survival of Israel and its redemption

cannot be accomplished in one generation. It is a national program which flows out of the heart of the nation, fulfills the needs of all generations, and continues through all the ages. If fortune does not smile upon it, it does not cease. The seeds that have been sown are bound to bear fruit. Our national leaders know this, so that when they meet obstacles in their way they do not retreat. They know that their labors are for the future, even though that future may be very distant. This future of redemption is bound to come. It was the hope of future redemption that preserved us during our long life in "xile. And now too in our efforts for Jewish revival this hope must give us courage and strength to continue.

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Let us work and redemption will come.

IV

Isaac Nissenbaum occupies an important place in the history of modern preaching. His sermons left a great impression not only upon his generation, but even now in our day their content and spirit has influenced many, and also left their effect upon many of our preachers who found in Nissenbaum a great source of instruction and inspiration. His sermons do not reveal a new interpretation of Judaism. They reveal the essence and meaning of historical Judaism as expressed in our old classical literature and which finds its most expressive formulation in Yehudah Halevi, Luzatto and others, who saw a close spiritual affinity between Torah, Israel and Palestine. Nissenbaum in his sermons adopted this formulation of classical Judaism and preached for its revival in modern life, with poetic fervor and prophetic eloquence and at the same time showing his skill in homiletical interpretation that is direct, penetrating, and refreshingly brilliant.

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