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DAVID A. LYON

OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY AS REFLECTED
IN THE LIFE OF ZEVI SCHARFSTEIN

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The Culture of American Hebraist Educators of the
Early 20th Century as Reflected in the Life of Zevi Scharfstein
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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of Religion

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIGEST.....	ii
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Chapter

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW MOVEMENT.....	4
II. THE LIFE AND WORK OF ZEVI SCHARFSTEIN.....	22
Life and Times.....	22
Work and Contributions.....	30
Textbook Writing.....	45
III. PERSPECTIVES ON THE HEBRAISTS' WORLD.....	51
Scharfstein and His Larger World.....	51
Understanding the World of the Hebraists.....	55
Scharfstein's Legacy.....	63
APPENDIX: Translation, <u>Forty Years in America</u>	
Chapter 16, "The First Announcement of the Histadrut Ivrit".....	71
Chapter 17, "The Maskilim in America".....	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	96

Dedicated
to Lisa and Jeremy,
my loving family

Digest

This thesis explores the culture of American Hebraist educators of the early part of this century. An analysis of the life and work of Zevi Scharfstein, a respected teacher and innovator in the Hebrew movement, reveals much about the movement's goals, its participants and their self-perception.

Chapter One, an introduction to the Hebrew movement, traces the movement's roots to the Haskalah in Eastern Europe, and to renewed Zionist aspirations. During this early period, changes in world visions brought to the fore the distinction between Hellenism and Hebraism. For Jews, Hebraism meant "a spirit of Judaism which pervaded all Jews and their lives." It was hoped that Hebrew language and literature would unify and enlighten world Jewry. The Hebraists, led by men such as Dr. Samson Benderly, cultivated and nurtured growing interest in Hebrew and the Hebrew lifestyle in America, bringing men like Zevi Scharfstein into the fold.

Chapter Two, a focused look at Scharfstein's life and work, considers his life in Dinivitz, his avid interest in the Hebrew movement as reflected in his dedication to Hebrew education, and to the unique attention and skill he brought to textbook writing. An analysis of his textbooks illustrates how he tried to influence American Jewish communities to adopt the Hebrew lifestyle.

Chapter Three, a look at the world of the Hebraists, focuses on the environment in which Scharfstein lived and created for himself, the world of the Hebraists from a socio-linguistic perspective, and Scharfstein's legacy. Joshua Fishman, a noted socio-linguist, takes issue with groups like the Hebraists, who claim an interest in Hebrew

language alone, and suggests that they are more interested in philosophic and altruistic endeavors. "Scharfstein's legacy" highlights the significant and lasting influences he had on Hebrew education, plus his successes and failures. Lastly, Scharfstein takes an introspective look at his own career .

The appendix is a translation of Chapters 16 and 17, from Forty Years in America, Scharfstein's memoirs. In Chapter 16, Scharfstein discusses the complex meetings and issues which preceded the establishment of the Histadrut Ivrit. In Chapter 17, he discusses the Maskilim's arrival in America, where they faced enormous changes in status, and formidable challenges economically, socially, and politically.

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW MOVEMENT AND HEBRAISTS IN AMERICA

The Enlightenment of the 19th century provided opportunities for Jews to flee the shtetls and cities of Europe and Eastern Europe. Some fled to Palestine; many more to the United States. There they found the freedom to either live religiously as Jews or lead secular lives. Millions of Jews found their way to the United States between 1881, and the early decades of this century. For them the United States was the Goldene Medine, the golden land of freedom and opportunity. Some Jews chose to forsake Judaism in their pursuit of monetary riches. Others shared in the pursuit of riches, but maintained a strong spiritual link with Jews around the world, particularly in Palestine. For them, the cultural diversity of Jews living in different lands posed new challenges to Jewish survival in the age of emancipation. This cultural diversity could be overcome, they thought, by a common language --- Hebrew, the language shared by Jews for centuries wherever they lived.

The Hebrew language dates back thousands of years. The oldest portions of the Bible may have been composed as early as 1300 B.C.E. Hebrew was used in written and oral communication as well as literary works. It was also the language of prayer and study. Referred to as Lashon ha-Kodesh, or the Holy Tongue, it is still strictly reserved, by some, for the purposes of prayer. Over the centuries Jews living in different lands have added vocabulary and expressions to Hebrew, a reflection of personal and national experiences. Philosophical, medical and agricultural terms have been added to Hebrew,

making it a versatile and powerful language. Historically, Hebrew has linked Jews across the centuries and across the globe.

The revival of Hebrew was an exciting endeavor, promising to be the foundation on which the future of Jewish survival would be built. The Hebrew revival required much planning, perseverance, and vision from its leaders, among whom were such men as Samson Benderly, Izchak Ben-Zvi, and David Ben-Gurion. These and other leaders of the Hebrew revival recognized that if the revival was going to be successful, it had to attack first its most formidable task --- to teach Hebrew to thousands of Jews in America, in concert with teachers in Palestine who shared a similar task. The Hebraist's vision, energy, and spirit were driven not simply by their own vision of Jews' destiny, but by a perceived need to shape the future of the Jewish people, something Jewish communities had been unable to do for centuries. Emancipation permitted the Hebraists to pursue the lifestyle of Hebraism.

Hebraism and Hellenism offered inherently different visions of the world. As defined by Matthew Arnold, Hellenism was the guiding philosophy for centuries prior to the Enlightenment. It followed the Greek ideal: to see things as they really are, or as Horace Kallen pointed out, as they ought to be. Its aim was perfection; its governing ideas was "spontaneity of consciousness."² Thus, a Hellenist's view of reality was static and structural: what was observed was real and one's conception of reality depended on what currently existed. Change that was the product of human endeavors was unreal and evil. Hebraism, by contrast, concerned itself with conduct and obedience. The aim of

² Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (New York: MacMillan & Co., 19883, reprint 1941), p.113.

Hebraism was righteousness, its governing idea was "strictness of conscience."³ A Hebraist's view of reality was dynamic and functional. The very essence of reality was change. Through righteous deeds and strictness of conscience, a person was able to effect change towards a better end.

The differences between Hebraism and Hellenism were vast, but the final aim of both of them was the same: man's perfection or salvation. In history, Hellenism dominated the scene, but not to the total exclusion of Hebraism. "Neither [Hellenism nor Hebraism]," wrote Arnold, "is the law of human development as their admirers are prone to make them; they are each of them contributors to human development..."⁴ Arnold warned intellectuals that there was no unum necessarium, or one thing needful. That is, there was no one thing "which [could] free human nature from the obligation of trying to come to its best at [many points.]" There was a message for Hebraism within Arnold's discussion. The idea that Hebraism was a lifestyle with goals and objectives for its people was clear, but Arnold cautioned that it could become mechanical and its goals blurry. Hebraism spoke of lifestyle, but it also spoke of national unity of all Jews, and more precisely, a spirit of Judaism which pervaded all Jews and their lives. According to Hebraists, Zionism, the joy of Hebrew language and literature were all part of the goal, but also part of the Hebrew lifestyle to which all Jews ought to align themselves. This pervading spirit and all encompassing lifestyle was exactly that part of Hellenism which the Hebraists were acting upon in their movement. As Arnold suggested, "Hellenism may thus actually serve to further the designs of Hebraism."⁵

³ *ibid.*, p.113.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.120.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.145.

The Hebraists were probably not conscious of the philosophical distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism. In truth, it was difficult for those who lived in a society whose social milieu was changing to recognize the subtle changes occurring in its guiding philosophy, i.e. the prevailing philosophies of Hellenism or Hebraism. Rather, Hebraists recognized opportunities, made possible by societal changes, to lead their lives according to the tradition that had guided them and their ancestors in the past. Emancipation permitted the Jews to re-adopt the Hebraic lifestyle, a philosophy that had always been part of them even during the years in which it laid dormant. The Hebrew revivalists redefined Hebraism as an integral part of their lives as Jews free to live and practice in the general society. They saw Hebraism as the backbone of the Hebrew revival through which Jews would make changes in their lives according to their needs as a people.

The Hebraist's goals were well-defined, and their desire to achieve them was unwavering. Among their goals was the unification of the Jewish people. The Hebraists recognized that while Palestine was a physically unifying force for the Jews, a common language was "indispensable to transform a linguistically heterogeneous people into a cultural unity."⁶ As Zionists, the Hebraists were bent on the development of Palestine educationally and physically. They were also lovers of Hebrew which they saw as the unifying force among Jews with varied cultures and languages. A common language, which embodied culture and lifestyle, as well as a common land would, they thought, be the essential ingredient for the revival and continued strength of the Jewish people. The Hebraists may not have been aware of the Hebraic philosophy, per se, but they were acutely aware that a Jew's lifestyle and purpose were not independent of language. "Disassociate [the Jewish] historical experience from the Hebrew language," wrote

⁶ Halkin, p. 13.

William Chomsky, "and the result is a pale anemic reflection, a dilution and sometimes even an adulteration of the original experience."⁷ Chomsky's statement described well the Hebraist's sentiment for the Hebrew language. Hebrew, they felt, was distinctive to the Jews and the sole property of the Jews, because it described their personal history and place in the world. Yiddish could not play the role of Hebrew, even though most Jews from Europe and Eastern Europe were already familiar with it. Yiddish was too new, too close to German, and too limited geographically.

Hebrew's role changed from the early days of the Haskalah to the days of the Hebraists in America. The fathers of the Haskalah saw its role as a means to an end, "an implement that, when it had served the purpose, could be thrown away."⁸ Hebrew was the means by which Jews could be educated in other languages and studies, preparing them for absorption into the general community. The aim was not to destroy Judaism with assimilation and absorption, but rather to bring Jews into the general community as equal members. The fathers of the Haskalah used Hebrew to "decoy the Jews into the foreign world and the foreign languages."⁹ Once the task was accomplished, Hebrew would return to its original purpose, namely religious services. The ultimate goal of the early Haskalah period was to elevate Jews to the level of complete participation in the communities in which they lived and worked. They sought complete involvement in political and academic circles.

The role that Hebrew played in the lives of the Hebraists was quite different from the early Haskalah days. The Russian pogroms checked the enthusiasm for linguistic

⁷ William Chomsky, The Eternal Language, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), p. 10.

⁸ Shalom Spiegel, Hebrew Reborn, (New York: The Macmillan CO., 1930), p.21.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.20.

assimilation. Instead of viewing Hebrew as a means of securing emancipation, Hebraists lined up behind the concept of auto-emancipation as expounded by Ahad Haam and Theodore Herzl. The new Jewish national movement, Zionism, became "the god-father of modern Hebraism in which the Hebrew language and literature became ends in themselves." ¹⁰

Ahad Haam saw Hebrew as the source of life for world Jewry. He called for the complete Hebraization of Palestine, as a prelude to the spread of Hebrew to all corners of the earth. Hebrew would be a link between the Diaspora and Palestine. The speed and confidence with which Palestine was growing Hebraically focused the strength of the Hebrew movement on Palestine, not on America. It was in Palestine where Hebrew and Judaism would survive; whether they would survive in America, seemed to them uncertain at best. Writing in 1952, Jacob Bosniak asserted, "If Diaspora Jewry is to survive and derive its spiritual sustenance from our Torah, from our rich heritage and from the center of Jewish life and culture in Israel, we must revive the Hebrew spoken word among us, and thus create a permanent bridge between Israel and the Diaspora."¹¹ Fear ran high among rabbis and Jewish leaders who saw Palestine and the Diaspora moving apart as the numbers of American Hebrew speakers declined. As Zionists, the connection between Israel and America was crucial to the survival of American Jewry. American Jews saw opportunities to help build Israel, and Israel saw opportunities to provide American Jews with a spiritual and cultural center. The ways in which these two separate communities came together to serve each other increased dramatically. Hebrew became the goal of the national movement, rather than the means to it. Hebrew

¹⁰ Samson Benderly, "Hebraism in America", The Jewish Education News Vol. I, 4 (January 1926): p.1.

¹¹ Jacob Bosniak, "The Revival of Hebrew: A Sermon for Hebrew Month", March, 1952, p.2.

would be the unifying force, the national cry of Zion, and the purpose for the work of the Hebraists.

The Hebrew language defined the Hebraists' ideology, and, therefore, their movement. Typically, language as ideology was a difficult means of support for the goals of a movement. However, Hebrew was unique, because it embodied many aspects of the Jewish peoples: distinctiveness, history, spiritual fulfillment, and unity. The Hebraists believed that Hebrew held unique qualities for the Jewish people. Anticipating contemporary sociologists, they argued that the link between language and group identity is a reasonable claim to make, and that the "possession of a given language is well-nigh essential to the maintenance of group identity."¹² The Hebraist's major goal was, indeed, the maintenance of group identity through language.

Hebrew satisfied many needs. It continued to serve religious purposes as it always had, but the religious forum was not the place in which the strength of Hebrew to unify the Jewish people would be tested. That is not to say that the Hebraists did not feel in themselves the spirit of Judaism through Hebrew. Indeed, the Hebraists felt the enormous rush of peoplehood and religious duty through Hebrew. Joshua A. Fishman, a socio-linguist writes:

Hebrew thought is an early source for the recurring message that sanctified ethnicity is ennobling, strengthening, healing, satisfying. Its thought proclaims the message of the joy, the wholeness, the holiness of embodying and expressing language and ethnicity in accord with the commandments of the Master of the Universe 'for

¹² John Edwards, Language, Society and Identity. (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1985), p. 3.

they are our life and the length of our days.' Whosoever lives in the midst of his own kind, speaking his own language and enacting his own most divinely regulated traditions in accord with these imperatives, has all that one could hope for out of life.¹³

The Hebraists would have agreed with Fishman, but they measured their success by their ability to teach Hebrew to Jews who would use it in non-religious, secular, settings. Their reasons for teaching Hebrew to Jews, were two-fold: first, for the purpose of communication between Jewish communities in different lands that spoke different languages; and second, to cultivate in them the sense of joy and spirit of Jewish living which they believed was possible only through the Hebrew language. Both encouraged the unification process of Jews in the world.

Socio-linguists say that the revival of Hebrew succeeded because of its unique communicative need. However, John Edwards has pointed out that Hebrew's success was not unique, except that in this case there also existed an old language with a "psychological claim on the population."¹⁴ Be this as it may, the fact remains that, by virtue of Hebrew's psychological claim on its population, its revival succeeded where others failed.

The revival of Hebrew showed itself not in the ancient Hebrew of the prayerbooks, but in literary circles and in the scientific fields. "Were I asked to name books which testify to the resurrection of Hebrew," Shalom Spiegel wrote, "I would refer the inquirer not to belles-lettres, but to a few other booklets similarly concrete in

¹³ Joshua A. Fishman et.al., The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival, (Berlin; New York; Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1985), p. 8.

¹⁴ Edwards, p.87.

topic... 'Diseases of the Eggplant,' [and] 'Sterility in Cows.'" "These," wrote Spiegel, "are the new Seder Zera'im in the Mishnah of our renewed life."¹⁵

The Hebrew language was being employed to express new subjects and fields of interest which only languages with a long culture could express. Such growth required creativity, careful planning, and less scrutiny than grammarians were willing to give. According to Spiegel, "Grammarians who desire to refine a language to grammatical purity and logical regularity, emasculate and cripple it with the monotony of correctness."¹⁶ Like any new organism (the metaphor is Spiegel's), Hebrew required time and freedom to develop, to make mistakes and stumble as it grew and matured. The dramatic changes and speed with which Hebrew developed permitted the auto-emancipation of Ahad Haam and Herzl to continue. The national movement was alive with the spirit of Hebrew and Hebraism. Referring to the enthusiasm, Spiegel wrote, "The revival of Hebrew and its transformation into a colloquial tongue with all the defects and virtues of a living language; the revival of Hebrew literature and its development within the last decades to a high intellectual and emotional level, and such progress in vocabulary as would have filled any civilized people with pride --- these things have proven beyond a doubt the physiological genuineness of our rejuvenation as a people... the rebirth of the Hebrew language and literature is a miracle."¹⁷ Spiegel was not alone in expressing unrestrained excitement for the Hebrew revival. Such excitement reflected his anticipation and hopes for the movement. In truth, success was an imprecise quantity that was difficult to measure. The Hebrew movement's successes, or perhaps advancements, did not come quickly, nor did they come without setbacks.

¹⁵ Spiegel, p.11.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.19.

America posed many challenges unthinkable to immigrants who envisioned the "new world" as a place where streets were paved with gold. They encountered language barriers, cultural differences such as food, clothing, and domestic concerns, and a lack of connectedness with everything that was once familiar to them. For some, America was too different, and as difficult as the "old world" was, it was better than this terribly foreign land. Seeking avenues back to their roots, back to their people, and back to a sane way of life, was an exhausting and often fruitless endeavor. However, the Hebraists prided themselves on possessing the one thing which all Jews in America, who were seeking their people and their culture, needed --- Hebrew. Although immigrants spoke Yiddish, the Hebraists thought it represented the "old world," the place from which the Jews had come and would not return, literally or figuratively. Yiddish was a blend of languages; Hebrew was pure. Hebrew represented not only the grand history and origins of the Jewish people, but the vehicle which would guide the Jews into the future. Chomsky expressed Hebrew's qualities as follows:

"Hebrew [is] a symbol of Jewish unity, distinctiveness, hope, and renaissance...

Hebrew is the nerve-center which unites and integrates the Jewish people in time and space...

Hebrew is a symbol of regeneration and self-assertion in Jews' life...

Hebrew is a potent medium for revitalizing the Jewish community of America, for rendering it dynamic and creative, and it is a source of spiritual satisfaction and security for the individual American Jew. "18

The Hebraists sought to educate large numbers of American Jews, especially recent immigrants, in Hebrew, and the goals of the Hebrew movement. Samson

¹⁸ Chomsky, p.271-272.

Benderly, a leading Hebraist, said that the, "difficulties in the way cannot weaken the determination of American Jewry to build up an American Judaism whose core at least will be Hebraic."¹⁹ With respect to the immigrant's situation, Benderly meant that the lack of security felt by the immigrants, manifested in an ill-defined Jewish community and poor Jewish education, would be resolved by the Hebraic way of life, or Hebraism.

Samson Benderly's work focused on educating those (immigrants and natives) who had lost their affection for Jewish life. He was aware of the Americanizing tendencies that made his work so difficult. For Jews in America, maintaining Jewishness had to be a daily effort. Such an effort necessitated an awareness of Jewish philosophy and purpose, which highlighted the very real differences between Judaism and Christianity. Benderly was cognizant of the fact that when Jews led a secular life in America, they were, for all intents and purposes, leading a life based on Christian ethics and philosophy. For Benderly, emphasizing the beauty and unique qualities of Judaism vis-a-vis Hebrew and Hebraism was the means of attacking the popular appeal of secular America (Christian America) for American Jews.

The lure of assimilation was not a new problem for Jewish communities. But, for the first time, Jews did not have to convert to enjoy the secular and Christian aspects of the society in which they lived. To maintain Judaism, Benderly and his followers sought to fashion a meaningful alternative for American Jews, one which permitted them to aspire to their American goals while they still lived by Jewish ethics and standards, and supported Jewish efforts in Palestine.

¹⁹ Halkin, p. 13.

The Hebraists were part of the movement to maintain the identity of Judaism apart from Christianity. While theologians and philosophers muddled through the seemingly close relations between the two religions, the Hebraists proclaimed the special meaning and unique qualities of Judaism. They were not interested in learning about Christianity; they were only interested in the dissemination of Judaism and Jewish living. "Judaism," asserted Bernard Heller, "refuses to accept the kiss of death"²⁰, hence the enthusiasm with which the Hebraists led their movement. By the second decade of the century, there was a vigor among Hebraists and among other Jewish leaders who sought to renew the Judaism of old through the Hebrew language. The spirit in Israel and the maturity of the Hebrew movement in America presented two strong groups which together had a dramatic effect on world Jewry. Sermons and speeches reflected the renewed vigor with which the Hebrew and Zionist movements were moving forward.

In 1910, the New York Bureau of Education was founded under the leadership of Dr. Samson Benderly. The Bureau pointed out that education was not the "private business of a few 'landlords' ... but the public domain that belongs to the large community..." The word "business" was appropriate, because the Bureau was seeking the community's attention to the importance of Hebrew education, but it was also seeking money. One of the achievements of the Bureau was improving the teachers' status and worthiness. The Bureau was intent on bringing Jewish education up to modern educational standards.

Founded in 1916, in New York City, the Histadrut Ivrit, or Hebrew Federation, was the central agency for the dissemination of Hebrew Culture in America. Among its founders were Samson Benderly, Shmarya Levin, and Eliezer ben Yehuda. In their own

²⁰ Mark Silk, Spiritual Politics, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p.51.

eyes, they saw the Histadrut Ivrit as the single organization in America that would sustain world-Jewry by its formidable and far-reaching institutions and programs, unifying all American Jews by means of the Hebrew language. For more than twenty-five years it has served as the national organization for fostering the Hebrew language. Its primary goal was to spread the message of the Hebraic revival among the Jews of America, to revive Hebrew as a unifying force for world Jewry, not simply as a language for communication and literature, but as "the unique and distinctive past of the Jew acting as a formative influence in his present and future." Hebrew, according to the Histadrut, meant the Jew's "real self, his personality. It meant a rejection of the cosmopolitanism... the protective mimicry forced upon him in a hostile world."²¹ The leaders of the Histadrut Ivrit believed that the Jews lived in a hostile world in need of redemption; Hebrew was the means by which their Jewish souls would be redeemed.

With Samson Benderly at its helm, the Histadrut Ivrit concerned itself, primarily, with Jewish education. Benderly was an educator, concerned with the effective, professional, and endearing quality of teaching taking place in Jewish classrooms. To that end, he laid out objectives for the Histadrut Ivrit, while bearing in mind the overriding goals of the Hebraists, which were to build a permanent bridge between [those] in Israel and those who must necessarily remain in the U.S., and to preserve Jewry and Judaism in the Diaspora from dilution and assimilation and extinction.²² Benderly made clear that the effort must be concentrated on the young generations in the school. He defined the tasks that lay ahead for the Hebrew movement: 1) To increase the number of better trained Hebrew teachers; 2) To put more organized and purposeful content into the Hebrew instruction; 3) To establish a Hebrew library;

²¹ Halkin, p.8.

²² Bosniak, p. 2.

4) To extend weekday instruction based upon a schedule of hours and sessions per week compatible with the life of the American Jewish child; and 5) To inculcate, if not a knowledge of, at least a love and a proper attitude toward the Hebrew language and literature in [the present] system of non-Hebrew. ²³

Teacher training was a crucial part of Jewish education for Benderly. Principals and teachers were of a mixed bag. Some of the principals and teachers came from Russia and Eastern Europe, and had a Haskalah background. They came with Hebraic knowledge and an awareness of curriculum and methodology. However, these teachers were too few in number. There was no Jewish education if the teacher could not teach and the children did not enjoy their lessons. Benderly endeavored to train teachers, and to provide incentives and rewards for quality teaching. He sought high standards for his teachers, setting requirements and certifications that would promise only the best teachers a place in the classroom. Better pay and respect were also his goals. He sought to counteract the stereotype of the heder and the melamed, and to raise teachers' status and pay. Utilizing patience and perseverance, skill and diplomacy he endeavored to bring about a new understanding of the role of Jewish education and the importance of the Jewish educator.

The next step in Benderly's plans involved curriculum reform. His aim was transparent, evidenced in the use of such words as Zionism, Hebraism, Hebrew, Judaism and Jewishness throughout his texts. Hayim Greenberg, writing for The Jewish Frontier, expressed the goal succinctly: "Zionism should be the natural product of an organic education to Jewishness, the culmination, not the point of departure."²⁴ Hebrew

²³ Benderly, p.3 column 2.

²⁴ Hayim Greenberg, "Education in America", Jewish Frontier Anthology, 1967, p.22.

educators believed that Hebrew language and literature would prepare students for Zionism and the love of Zion, because they would possess the language, the communicative link, to the people and their culture.

Jews in America became familiar, on a limited basis, with the Histadrut Ivrit through its many publications and textbooks. It published textbooks, periodicals and various pamphlets. Hadoar, founded in 1921 was first published as a Hebrew daily newspaper. It failed after only eight months. In 1922, Hadoar was converted to a weekly and succeeded. Hadoar was devoted to belles-lettres, education, social and political problems. Hadoar Lanoar, a children's bi-weekly was founded in 1934, and edited by Daniel Persky. Hadoar Lanoar was illustrated and printed with vowels. In addition to the weekly publications, Histadrut Ivrit published Sefer ha-Shanah, a Hebrew yearbook that published longer essays. Histadrut Ivrit also published several pamphlets and books. New periodicals were published, too, including Hatoren, and Miklat. Histadrut Ivrit also founded a publishing house, Ogen, devoted to the publication of the works of Hebrew writers in the United States. Histadrut Ivrit clearly had a double function. It issued Hebrew material for the public, but it also encouraged American Jews to write and publish their work.

In addition, the Histadrut Ivrit prided itself on its innovative and "modern" textbooks for children, which included large print and pictures. The quality and appeal of its publications and textbooks were of relative high quality. Seeking to attract students and interest them in Jewish studies, the Histadrut Ivrit's publications and textbooks shared the style and appearance of modern printings issued to children in public schools. The Histadrut Ivrit tried to give much attention to writing style and aesthetics in their effort to make their books as appealing as possible. The Hebraists

wanted children to enter their classrooms and admire their Hebrew books. The Hebraists wanted no lingering reminders of the heder.

By means of popular educational methods and aesthetics, as well as propaganda, the Histadrut Ivrit reached a wide audience. Adults were bombarded monthly, if not weekly, by events marking an occasion, a celebration, a memorial, or simply an opportunity to listen to a lecture. Famous anniversaries were celebrated as part of the propaganda: Juda Halevi, Saadia Gaon, Rashi. The goal was to keep the Hebrew movement before the public eye. Histadrut Ivrit even had a slogan to popularize the idea of reading the Bible daily, "Read the Bible daily, read it in the original language --- in Hebrew."²⁵

In keeping with the idea that the future of Jewish education rested with the youth, Histadrut Ivrit considered as its most significant achievement the enlistment of youth in a program developed in 1936, called *Histadrut Hanoar Haivri*, the Hebrew Youth Organization.²⁶ In combination, the efforts made by the Histadrut Ivrit, thus, touched all bases, from youth and adult, to publishing and education. Proud of its success, Abraham Halkin boasted that the organization's "psychological effect is so far-reaching that its influence is felt in the entire student body of the schools, notable among the Jewish youths."²⁷ While his comment reflected a measure of self-congratulation, there was certainly a large measure of truth to his words. Histadrut Ivrit was making headway in its efforts to educate America Jews, young and old, in Hebrew and related literature.

²⁵ Halkin, p.16.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.16.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.17.

In reflection, Benderly expressed pride in these beginnings, remarking that "Thousands of devoted young men and women harnessed themselves to the task of Jewish education, not because the profession of the 'melamed' rose in the estimation of the people, but because they desired to carry their message of the Hebrew revival...to the children in the classroom."²⁸ While Benderly's account was rife with excitement and pomp, it was exactly this kind of exuberance that sparked the interest of young people and older people alike. Once they turned their heads to see what the excitement was all about, Benderly turned on his persuasive powers, seeking new converts and dedicated teachers for the Hebraist world he and others were building.

Real and lasting success, Benderly knew, would only come if the Hebraist's efforts and innovations were continued and built upon. Teacher training, curriculum materials and textbooks, and youth programs had to continue and be improved over time. The Hebraists were aware of how important it was to be broadly appealing in their approach to education and materials. Attitudes had to be updated as styles and methods changed. To facilitate this ongoing task, the Histadrut Ivrit employed talented young educators devoted to the goals of the Hebrew movement. The young educators who joined the Histadrut Ivrit were selected carefully. These individuals, most of them carefully selected by Benderly himself, took responsibility for specific tasks, including textbook writing and editing, curriculum development, book publishing, and teacher training.

The chapters that follow focus on the life and career of one of these individuals, Zevi Scharfstein, and show how his work reflects the goals and objectives of the organization as a whole. Scharfstein exemplifies the talented and innovative young people who became involved in the Hebrew movement. He was immersed in its day-to-

²⁸ Benderly, p.1.

day work: teaching, writing, editing, lecturing. Through him we may examine the work of the Histadrut Ivrit from the perspective of a newcomer, an active participant, and a leader, all in one.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ZEVI SCHARFSTEIN

Life and Times

The broad goals of the Histadrut Ivrit were articulated by those, like Zevi Scharfstein, who did so much to promote the objectives of the organization. "It is impossible," wrote a contributor to Sefer ha-Yovel Scharfstein, "to touch [the subject of] Hebrew education without the personality of Scharfstein."²⁹ His contributions to the Hebrew movement represented a unique perspective on Hebrew education. He was a prolific writer who contributed to the development of textbooks, teacher training, and the revival of the Hebrew spirit in American Jewish youth. His independent and daring attitude led him to new insights on Jewish education in America.

Scharfstein was born on March 15, 1884, in Dinivitz, Poland, located in the Ukraine, near the 1917 border dividing Poland from Russia. He died on October 11, 1972, at the age of 88, while visiting his daughter, Mrs. Shulamith Chernoff, in New Haven, Connecticut. Surviving him were his wife, the former Rose Goldfarb, a son, Dr. Ben-Ami Scharfstein, head of the Department of Philosophy at Tel-Aviv University, a brother and seven grandchildren.

²⁹ S.L. Blank, "MiDinivits v'ad Heinah" in Sefer HaYovel Sharfstein, ed. Hillel Bavli (New York: Histadrut Halvrit, et. al., 1955), p.13.

During Scharfstein's youth the Jewish renaissance movement (Haskalah) swept through Dinivitz. The Jews in the city responded enthusiastically to the Haskalah and everything it had to offer. The Haskalah became part of the local environment: it was welcomed and nurtured as a means to heighten Jewish identity and nationalism. The new literature was seized especially by the youth. The young people in Dinivitz were captivated by the Zionist idea and by the revival of the Hebrew tongue. Rarely was a young boy of Torah found who did not read new Hebrew books.³⁰ The Jews of the city were caught in the spirit of the Haskalah; they hired volunteer teachers to teach various subjects. Teachers taught 16-17 boys and 12-13 girls for an hour a day in an apartment they rented.

Scharfstein described his early education proudly. He described his teachers as "morim," careful to write the word in quotes. He also referred to specialists as "mumchim," also careful to write the word in quotes. They were called "morim" and "mumchim" because they played the parts, and his use of quotes conveyed the meager qualifications he believed his teachers actually held. The titles *morim* and *mumchim*, which he later defined so carefully, were used for those who were qualified --- or who passed his teacher training courses. In some respects, his teachers were effective because they facilitated the enthusiasm of the youth, and directed their interests toward the goals of the Haskalah and the popular revival movements.

The Haskalah, which overwhelmed the city, sparked Scharfstein's interest. It led him to overlook weaknesses in the teachers and experts of his day, to gratify his insatiable appetite for more education, and to take advantage of the opportunity to teach others. The whole environment influenced Scharfstein's understanding of education and

³⁰ Aharon Zeitlin, "Ilan Naeh," in Sefer HaYovel Sharfstein, ed. Hillel Bavli (New York: Histadrut Halvrit, et. al., 1955), p.18-19.

its role. In his youth, he was captivated by the Haskalah because it was part of the reality of his environment, not a foreign or temporary fad. This environmental factor later influenced his approach to educating American Jewish youth.

Tragedies befell Poland in 1905. Scharfstein witnessed numerous crimes against Jews that took place in Poland, and in his native town. Despite them, he persevered. By 1914, the outbreak of hostilities forced Scharfstein to move to New York City. He left Poland "without a broken heart,"³¹ for he had already developed a set of ideas and plans to work on upon his arrival in America. On the boat to America, Scharfstein related this personal agenda to Hillel Bavli, who later recounted it in Scharfstein's jubilee volume. According to Bavli, Scharfstein spoke of "writing new textbooks intended and prepared for the young generation in America." He also revealed to Bavli that he intended to publish a "History for Children."³²

Scharfstein's general interest in education and specific goal of writing and preparing materials for children were fed by his own early experiences. He observed that his teachers, his peers and he, himself, thirsted for more books, lessons, and literature on all aspects of the Jewish past, present and future. Scharfstein's originality, later identified as a unique and brilliant quality, originated from his recollection of what interested and excited him when he was a boy learning about a new era in Judaism. His ability to remember his own childhood and to empathize with children allowed him to be always on the forefront of meaningful and effective educational models for children of every generation.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.19.

³² *ibid.*

Scharfstein showed great promise as a teacher, certainly a reflection of his spirited youth and sincere interest in learning and imparting Jewish knowledge. One early experience with two students influenced his decision to be a teacher. His students "yearned for his teaching, and what he saw them accomplish in their lives influenced him, and he knew that he wanted to be a teacher."³³ Moments of satisfaction and reward impressed Scharfstein. But, he was a modest man who knew that his gift for teaching was still unhoneed. At this point, he still had little idea what he would be able to accomplish in the teaching field.

Mentors and role models gave Scharfstein confidence and encouragement to develop his skills as a teacher, and to begin his writing career in the textbook field. After teaching one day, Yehezkel Manzon, a master teacher, turned to Scharfstein and said, "We listened to your lesson this morning from the corridor, but you didn't know it. You are one of us, and we hope that you will be a blessing to education." Manzon got up from his place and shook Scharfstein's hand. As Scharfstein wrote, this "sealed my fate; to be all the days of my life a teacher in Israel."³⁴ Manzon's declaration that Scharfstein was "one of us," was a powerful message; in effect, it anointed Scharfstein. The anointing, like the anointing of a new officer, brought with it privileges, appointments and stature. However, the compliment paid Scharfstein was practically a non-sequitur. The Hebrew movement was in its infancy in America, headed by only a few men who were significant only in their own eyes. To be called, "one of us," begged the question, "one of whom?"

³³ Yochanan Twerski, ed. et. al., Shevilei haHinuh. Hovrot Tsvi Sharfstein, vol.4 no. 3, (New York: Shevilei haHinuh Committee, June 1944), p.166.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 171.

The Hebraists were a small group of men who saw themselves as uniquely qualified to effect a revival of the Hebrew language and everything pertaining to it. Membership in the group provided legitimacy; without it one's ideas, books, and materials were often dismissed as lacking in the proper "Hebraist" spirit. To be called "one of us," was, therefore, an important achievement needed to complete dreams that many of the early Hebraists carried with them during their entire lives. In Scharfstein's case, as in many others, the aspiration was to "serve the cause of the Jewish renaissance by teaching Jewish children to speak and read the reborn Hebrew language and instill in them the spirit that would transform them into responsible sons and daughters in Israel."³⁵

Scharfstein's education and training, before he came to America, and to the Histadrut Ivrit, were not as extensive as some Hebraists', such as the pioneering Samson Benderly who was educated at a major university.³⁶ Scharfstein, by contrast, was educated by private tutors in Poland. Although he was a self-motivated learner and acquired much knowledge, he did not attend large schools or universities. He held only one academic degree: an honorary Doctor of Hebrew Letters awarded by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. An obituary that appeared in the New York Times, October 12, 1972, cited Scharfstein's education and honorary doctorate, followed by the sentence, "nevertheless, he was highly regarded as a teacher of teachers." Because of his meager formal education, Scharfstein did not attain the stature within the movement that men like Benderly did, with their prestigious educational backgrounds. In books

³⁵ Aaron Soviv, "Zevi Scharfstein," in Jewish Education News, Alvin I. Schiff, ed., vol. 42, no. 8, Winter 72-73 (National Council for Jewish Education), p.8.

³⁶ Benderly studied at the American University in Beirut, and earned a medical degree in ophthalmology in 1899. He served as house physician at the Sinai Hospital in Baltimore.

dedicated to Benderly and his "boys," men like Scharfstein are merely footnoted.³⁷ Still, as different as the backgrounds of these two men were, each should be properly credited for the work he did in the Hebrew movement and the important role he played.

Scharfstein's potential contributions to the teaching field were recognized, and in 1915, he was invited by Mordechai Kaplan to teach Hebrew Literature and Hebrew Language Methodology to students of the Teacher's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). His long tenure at JTS --- he retired in 1957--- attested to his success and the meaningful contributions he made there. Indeed, the impression Scharfstein left on several generations of teachers was formidable. Not only was he a teacher to his students at JTS, but he was also the "acknowledged teacher and mentor to the entire Jewish education profession."³⁸ "The second half of this century has not brought to the fore an educational figure and symbol like him nor does it appear likely to possess the intellectual vigor and creative verve to do so....," Meir Ben-Horin wrote upon Scharfstein's death. "[He] may, in fact, come to be seen as the man who was the free world's foremost practicing Hebrew teacher during the last seven decades."³⁹

In calling Scharfstein a "Hebrew teacher," Ben-Horin both complimented his mentor, and clarified his position within the Hebrew movement. It was a compliment, because Scharfstein, himself, was very specific about his definition of what a Hebrew teacher was.⁴⁰ To be recognized by his peers as the paradigm of the Hebrew teacher was the highest compliment he could have been paid. It was also a clarification of

³⁷ see Alexander M. Dushkin, Living Bridges, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1975), p.9, footnote 9.

³⁸ Soviv, "Zevi Scharfstein," p.8.

³⁹ Meir Ben-Horin, "Zevi Scharfstein: 1884-1972," Jewish Book Annual 41(1983-4), p. 113

⁴⁰ Scharfstein defined a Hebrew teacher as one who was also a Hebrew person.

Scharfstein's position within the movement. He was not a leader or a philosopher; he was a teacher, a Hebrew teacher. Men like Benderly and Dushkin, by contrast, were leaders and philosophers within the Hebrew movement --- which gave them a higher status.

Did Scharfstein envy Benderly's status as a leader and philosopher? Apparently not. He always professed great respect for Benderly and men like him, calling them his teachers and his colleagues-in-arms against the deterioration of the Hebrew spirit of American Jewish youth. But Scharfstein came to America with goals of his own, namely, to write and publish textbooks. He did what he loved, and excelled at it, for he was a "born teacher...[for whom] teaching was much more than personal self-fulfillment, it was dedicated service to his people."⁴¹ Articles written about Scharfstein, in reflection of his life, commented on his ability to bring "a blessing, and also his spirit and his soul" to teaching.⁴² He was, as such, an inspiration to friends, writers and teachers, young and old alike.

Scharfstein's ability to transmit to others his sense of Jewish spirit and soul was a unique gift. Unlike many immigrants to the United States, he was able to maintain the spirit of his native land while exercising his talents as an educator of a new generation of emancipated Jews. Hillel Bavli, a noted Hebrew writer, was intrigued by Scharfstein's ability to absorb the spirit of American life, while carefully dedicating his work to the warmth of Judaism he remembered from his native Poland. Through memories of his childhood, he maintained what the maskilim (adherents of the Haskalah "Enlightenment" movement whose aim was to spread modern European culture among Jews) were all

⁴¹ Soviv, "Zevi Scharfstein," p.8.

⁴² Shlomo Dimasek, "Minhat Todah," in Sefer HaYovel Sharfstein, ed. Hillel Bavli (New York: Histadrut Halvrit, et. al., 1955), p.21.

about. With the model of the maskilim in mind, he was a symbol of the "persevering modernist, the acme of perfection."⁴³ The lessons of the maskilim were even evident in Scharfstein's work habits. He prided himself on continuing to learn and grow throughout his career. He read pedagogic journals to learn new ideas and techniques that he might develop or improve upon. He held meetings with teachers and spoke with parents to learn about succeeded and failed in the classroom. His understanding of the American spirit taught him that America changed quickly, and placed demands on all its people. At the same time, he knew from the maskilim that only an enlightened, up-to-date presentation of Jewish heritage would succeed in reviving the Jewish spirit of America's Jewish youth.

Scharfstein's perseverance, coupled with his sensitivity for the past, earned him praise from a broad spectrum of Jewish leaders. Gershon Churgin, an Israeli poet, novelist and essayist spoke of him as the "Jew and man to whom nothing Jewish and nothing human is foreign." Ben-Horin added, "...accolades Scharfstein earned [were for] his qualities as a man, and as a teacher, and because of his scholarly, popular, and pedagogic writings..."⁴⁴ Aaron Zeitlin wrote, "There is within him optimism from birth... Hot is his head but calm is his soul...Scharfstein's soul is light and his step is firm."⁴⁵ Zeitlin's insight to Scharfstein's personality suggested that he persevered by reacting abruptly and critically to educational inferiority; that he was generally intolerant of others who claimed to profess good pedagogy. Nevertheless, Zeitlin added, the love he expressed for education and the children whom he served was never compromised.

⁴³ Blank, "MiDinivitz v'ad Heinah," p.10.

⁴⁴ Ben-Horin, "Zevi Scharfstein:1884-1974," p.112.

⁴⁵ Zeitlin, "Ilan Na'eh," p.17-19.

Scharfstein embodied the qualities that made for a strong leader in the field, and an endearing teacher in the classroom. He led the field of Jewish education for decades, and taught teachers and students alike with that rare quality that earned him the supreme title of his life: "Hebrew teacher."

Work and Contributions

Zevi Scharfstein brought with him from Poland, experience and a great deal of enthusiasm. But, before he could put them to use, he, as a newcomer to America, had to learn about American Jews firsthand. He studied under men like Benderly, and he learned much from students and families whom he met. He also collected data from which he established his goals for textbooks, educational materials and teacher training programs. Finally, he formulated a theory that guided much of his life's work. He concluded that the education of each generation depends on the influence of three factors: tradition, group life, and outlook on the future.⁴⁶

Jewish tradition, Scharfstein found, was not influencing Jewish youth. He saw that the tradition, for which he had much love, was lost on the current generation of American Jewish youth, replaced by innovations and fads. Young Jews were creative in a whole variety of realms thanks to the freedom that America offered all its citizens, but Jewish history, language and purpose meant nothing to them; they were either dormant, or completely dead. These aspects of Judaism once guided men and women in the choices they made for themselves and their children. Now, those choices were being guided by American values, which Scharfstein felt to be transient at best, and, at worst, totally foreign to Judaism.

⁴⁶ Louis Feldman, "Half Century of Jewish Education in the United States," Term Paper, (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1968), Box 1533.

Group life within America's Jewish communities was no better off. Synagogues were attended by fewer adults and youths. In the home, Jewish families struggled to maintain rituals that represented the barest semblance of Jewish living. Economic and social demands vied for the time and energy of each family member. Men and women often abandoned Shabbat morning worship and observance for work in the factories or shops. They had few personal choices if they wanted to provide for their families; factories and shops demanded work on Saturday. All this was done in the name of the American dream to which Jews, like so many other immigrants, aspired.

To these observations on the American environment, Scharfstein added the human element. He believed that the "nature and development of Jewish education could not be understood without considering the human element that created the[ir] foundation..."⁴⁷ Foremost among these, Scharfstein felt, was the individual's fight for survival. Second, life was very different from eastern Europe. Third, immigrant Jews faced a society where religious leaders and teachers, who had been noted community figures in eastern Europe, were demoted to low social status. In America, wage earners and shop owners were community leaders and mentors to the youth. The pursuit of money had replaced the pursuit of learning.

All of these features affected Jewish education. New questions were being asked of and by the immigrants: Who and what was important to know? What English words were meant for the street and for business, and what words were for other occasions? Where was an acceptable place to work, live, eat, and gather? What was important to Americans? Why did the immigrants appear different? Immigrants did what they could

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

to adapt. Some abandoned everything they knew from eastern Europe, but there were also those who acculturated without totally assimilating.

Crucial to the development of Jewish education was an awareness of the changes in personality that children from immigrant families underwent. Immigrant youths, unlike their parents, entered America at a time in their lives when rebellion and independence were part of their personalities. As eager young Americans, many scoffed at Jewish tradition which, for them, was a millstone dragging them back in the past. Families were torn apart by this rebellion, forcing parents to stand between their children and tradition. In some instances, the youths left home in search of their personal American dreams. Sometimes, the end was tragic; some immigrant youths were recruited into lives of crime or prostitution.

Educators believed that a loss of dependence, a lack of parental influence, led to the "decline of the youths' spiritual world and all the values of their lives."⁴⁸ Together, these youths, some adjusted and others in crisis, were the subject of Scharfstein's and his colleagues' work. Young people brought with them into the classroom their fight for survival, their struggle to adapt, and their acerbic personalities. Scharfstein taught teachers how to respond effectively.

Scharfstein's focus on the surrounding environment and the individual personalities of young people was one of the unique contributions he made to the field of education. He was concerned broadly for the people, and simultaneously attached to the issues at an individual level. In this macro-perspective, the health of k'hilat Yisrael, he believed, was in jeopardy when communities of Jews were in crisis. In this micro-

⁴⁸ Feldman, "Half Century of Jewish Education in the United States."

perspective, the level at which he felt he had more influence, the health of Jewish communities was endangered when their youths felt no connection to their Jewish heritage. "The foundation of the feeling of community, " he wrote, "comes from the life of the family." He called the children "foundlings: spiritual orphans dangling by their heritage and lacking inner support,"⁴⁹ when he observed immigrant youths rebelling against their families. His concerns were respected by his colleagues, and he believed in his ability to affect the student in the classroom, and the environment as a whole.

Scharfstein's efforts to resolve the problems he found in Jewish education drew from two educational models: the Eastern European model of the *heder* and *melamed*, and the new model created by Benderly, based on American educational theories. The Eastern Europe model was a unique system whereby younger boys studied with older boys, and beginning students were led by advanced students. Young students enjoyed every encouragement, including opportunities to study with senior scholars. In the United States, by contrast, Jewish education was pushed aside into leftover time. The love of education for its own sake was lost; the quest for money and riches replaced it. Scharfstein agonized over this development: he lamented that material interests dominated the youth, to the exclusion of their spiritual selves.

In his world, he was a daring pioneer. "He intermingled personal experiences and first-hand observations with selected passages from contemporary memoirs and works of poetry and prose."⁵⁰ In Chaye haY'hudim b'Mizrach Eropah, or Jewish Life in Eastern Europe, he combined educational history and personal experiences. "In this combination [of educational history and personal experiences]," wrote Meir Ben-

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Ben-Horin, "Zevi Scharfstein: 1884-1972," p.117.

Horin," lies the book's authenticity, freshness, and independence of judgement."⁵¹

Scharfstein did not intend to write a scholarly piece of educational history. He wrote with a unique wit and understanding of the Jewish condition. He bridged the old and new worlds for immigrants who were still seeking validation for their feelings of alienation in America.

Scharfstein did not feel subservient to past masters of Jewish education. While they had been his teachers, he considered his education as a means toward new understanding and development. He respected his teachers' interests in transmitting Jewish tradition, but he felt that the future depended on the youth of each generation. He wanted that generation and those that followed to attain a Jewish national character. This, at least, they could transmit to their children, and they to their children. The first step toward this goal, he believed, was to focus textbooks and curricula towards the reality of diaspora Jewry.

In preparation for writing a textbook on any subject, Scharfstein first asked questions about how previous generations had studied that subject. Taking this step backwards, he believed, was the only way to proceed into the future. Understanding what parents and grandparents taught their children and taught in their own homes was, to his mind, integral to the creation of effective and realistic school textbooks.⁵² He learned, for example, what families already knew about Jewish life, what traditions families were upholding and discarding, and how they conceived life in America. From there, he developed textbooks and materials that taught something new about Jewish life, refocused

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² He used the information he collected as the source of his writings which informed and trained teachers and educators for decades.

confused notions about Jewish belief and practice, and explained how a person could be an American and a practicing Jew at the same time.

Scharfstein used his historical perspective to support the sociological steps he was taking in writing textbooks. "It goes without saying," he wrote in the preface to Hebrew Self-Taught, "that Hebrew is the heart of Jewish culture." For Scharfstein, Hebrew represented everything that was Jewish, because Hebrew was at the heart of communication, prayer, ritual activities and other traditions of the Jewish community. He described his task as the rebuilding of a Jewish society defined by the Hebrew lifestyle. His textbooks contained stories, songs, hopes, and, of course, Hebrew vocabulary --- all critical to the creation of a Jewish society based on the Hebrew lifestyle.

Scharfstein's textbooks were said to be the "Torah of education."⁵³ Mordechai Medini chose the word "Torah," appropriately, for Scharfstein's books reflected the "law" of what textbooks should accomplish in presentation and content. His textbooks were the standard by which other Jewish textbooks were measured. Others learned from him what it took to create high quality pedagogic materials. One noticed in his textbooks the careful attention he gave to every sentence and detail. Pictures and illustrations included in his books had to be pleasant to the eye. He made sure that everything in the textbooks had a basis and an idea, for he was a logical person who demanded a reason for everything. He also renewed his textbooks as often as he could, so as to keep them current, and in tune with the outlooks and attitudes of American Jewish youth.

⁵³ Mordecai Medini, "Ledimuto Shel Tsvi Sharfstein," in Sefer HaYovel Sharfstein, ed. Hillel Bavli (New York: Histadrut Halvrit, et. al., 1955), p.13.

Despite all of the praise he received, Scharfstein remained both critical of his own work and of the work of others in the field. He assailed those teachers and educators in Jewish schools who still used books that were written in the old style, without regard for present-day conditions. Many such books came from Russia, and conflicted with Scharfstein's twin goals: to introduce textbooks that reflected the reality of American Jewish life, and to inculcate Jewish ethics and ethical conduct. In evaluating his own work, Scharfstein appeared to be persistently pessimistic. Despite the letters and accolades he received from around the world expressing appreciation for his work in education, he claimed he was a modest man who remained self-critical. Unlike the "hot-headedness" with which he criticized others' work, he was less harsh on himself. True to his educational philosophy, he updated his textbooks, but he did so as he saw fit --- without fanfare or criticism from his colleagues. Only after he published his revised editions did he claim to be self-critical. Scharfstein was always confident that he could do better, if not outdo anybody else in the field.

In his journal, Shevelei Hachinukh, Scharfstein wrote about his experience writing textbooks in his youth, before he learned the skills required to prepare them properly. Of his first books, he wrote that he was "pleased at first, but not for long."⁵⁴ He recognized areas in which he needed to grow as an educator, so he studied articles on pedagogy which influenced his later textbooks and writings. He also listened to other educators' suggestions. He hoped that Shevelei Hachinukh would be a forum for all teachers and educators interested in developing their skills and learning from each other. He wanted teachers to think of the journal as their own; as a place to contribute stories, successes, novel experiences in the classroom, and observations of the community.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.15.

In 1950, Shevelei Hachinukh celebrated its tenth year of publication.

Scharfstein took this opportunity to evaluate its successes and failures.⁵⁵ At first, he was critical. He blamed himself, the editor, for not making personal contact with teachers about the periodical. But, he also blamed the "apparent indifference" of many teachers to professional literature. He was discouraged, but not defeated, by the lack of teacher interest in professional growth. They, too, were faced with the conflicting goals of tradition and acculturation. Another weakness, he wrote, was the inadequate number of articles on subjects such as retarded students and model lessons for their instruction. A third weakness was the "unavailability of accurate information on current practices in Jewish education." He blamed this on the lack of money necessary for the proper collection and preparation of such material.

Scharfstein's criticism revealed much about the man and the teacher he was. He had a truly undying enthusiasm for Judaism and Jewish education. He was a charismatic teacher, and he relied on it and his intuitive understanding of American Jews to guide him in his work. But, he was exasperated by the teachers who pledged themselves to him and his work, yet failed to live up to his expectations. They were not "undying enthusiasts" like himself. They were simply dedicated Jews doing difficult and often unrewarding work.

Scharfstein was also a leader in seeking Jewish education for retarded children. Unlike the Jewish tradition from which he came that exempted a retarded child from formal education, he considered such education a necessity and a right. He had hoped his journal would invite articles on education for retarded children, but was disappointed by

⁵⁵ Zevi Scharfstein, "Shevilei Hahinuh," Jewish Education, volume 21:2, pages 8-9.

the lack of work in this specialized field. He lamented that no money was available to permit him and his teachers to stay abreast of current education practices. Scharfstein felt alone in a large Jewish community that did not yet jump on his bandwagon which called for deep dedication to such specialized Jewish educational needs.⁵⁶

To the periodical's credit, however, was the publication of articles on Jewish history and trends in educational psychology and philosophy. He hoped that articles on trends in education would address issues such as education of retarded Jewish children. He was also interested in the history of Jewish education. He intimated to Hillel Bavli during his trip to America, that he planned to write a textbook on the history of Jewish education. He was also proud of the articles on educational psychology and philosophy that shared the status of education in Israel and the diaspora.

As much as he was an educator, Scharfstein was also a prolific writer. He produced articles, dictionaries, biographies and essays. His lectures, too, were bound in volumes for teachers to use. His work primarily revolved around four interrelated centers of interest: 1) Hebrew lexicography, biography and the essay; 2) Jewish ethics; 3) Jewish educational history; and 4) Jewish school curricula and methodology.⁵⁷

Scharfstein's lexicons were resources of Hebrew words and expressions that were used in modern Hebrew, but were drawn from the rich Hebrew literature of the past. One of his first lexicons was a thesaurus, Otsar Hamilim Vehanivim, or Lexicon of Hebrew Synonyms and Classical Expressions. He also published the Otsar Hara'ayonot

⁵⁶ Scharfstein founded Shilo Publishing House. The money he could not collect from the community for collection, development and distribution of education materials did not discourage him in his work. Scharfstein published his own books and the books of those who produced quality material worthy of bearing the Shilo seal.

⁵⁷ Ben-Horin, "Zevi Scharfstein: 1884-1972," p.113.

Vehapitgamim Miyemei Hamigra¹ ve^Cad Yomeinu, or Lexicon of Ideas and Epigrams --- Quotations from Classical and Modern Hebrew Literature (1966), in three volumes. These books were meant for libraries, both public and private. The world of Jewish[™] expression through Hebrew was opened up by these books, because they were concise sources, relatively speaking, of major words and expressions, both classical and modern, for the modern Hebrew speaker. He hoped American Jews would use these books to facilitate their reading of Hebrew literature, to compose Hebrew letters or essays, or to pepper their speech.

Scharfstein was also devoted to autobiography. He wrote two autobiographical works. The first was devoted to the years from his childhood to his arrival in the United States, and it was entitled, Chayah Aviv Ba¹arets --- Meqorei Chayay, or It was Spring in the Land. Sources of My Life, (1953). The sequel to this book was entitled, Arba^Cim Shanah beAmeriqah, or Forty Years in America --- Memoirs of a Jewish Educator, (1957).⁵⁸ Scharfstein's autobiographies had a didactic aim. He sought to demonstrate that the decisions he made in his life, to come to America, and to teach, were influenced by a consistent devotion to a Jewish way of life. He portrayed himself as the paradigmatic Hebrew teacher, and the paradigmatic American Jew --- one who accepted the American way of life, while successfully pursuing a Hebrew lifestyle. This was the important message he expressed in his books and lectures, and to the teachers he trained.

Scharfstein's memoirs were also evidence of his lack of modesty, which he ardently claimed he possessed. His memoirs, generally read by adults and aspiring educators, could be seen as a variation of his textbooks. Like his textbooks for children which portrayed American families who satisfied their American dreams while

⁵⁸ See Appendix A, for a translation of portions of this work.

remaining dedicated to Judaism, his memoirs informed adults about his life --- the paradigmatic Jew who attained the best of the American and Jewish worlds. He believed that his life was an example for other American Jews, and that all of his work was meant to aid others in achieving the same for themselves.

At the Teacher's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, he lectured on educational instruction, and on his own teaching style. He believed that the teachers he trained benefited from his unique perspectives. So that all could benefit from his instruction, his lectures were first bound into 169 booklets, entitled, "Hora'at Halashon HaCivrit." Twenty-two years later, in 1940, it appeared as a 410 page volume, Darkhei Limud L'Shoneinu.⁵⁹ Contained in this volume were all the ideological education theories favoring the Natural Method of teaching Hebrew. Scharfstein was a proponent of this method which proposed teaching Hebrew, in Hebrew.

The Natural Method of teaching Hebrew, or Ivrit b'Ivrit, began with the work of Izchak Epstein, around the turn of the century in Safed. Epstein reportedly took his students outdoors for a nature study lesson conducted in Hebrew. It was from these experiences that he developed his Ivrit b'Ivrit ideas. At the same time, Samson Benderly was a young man living in Safed, his place of birth. Benderly was an impressionable young man who may have observed Epstein's language experiments. As a cultural Zionist, he viewed the Natural Method as a "sound approach" to the continued revival of the Hebrew language.⁶⁰ Benderly was not the first to bring the Natural Method to America, but he did succeed in making it "respectable" in America. Through his position at The Bureau of Jewish Education of New York City, he was able to get new Ivrit b'Ivrit

⁵⁹ Soviv, "Zevi Scharfstein," p.8.

⁶⁰ Elazar Goelman, "Some Aspects of Ivrit belvrit in America," in Isidore D. Passow and Samuel T. Lachs, eds., Gratz College Anniversary Volume. (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 79.

textbooks for use by American Hebrew teachers. Ivrit b'Ivrit textbooks imported from Palestine and Europe did not satisfy educational standards here. So, Scharfstein was commissioned by The Bureau of Jewish Education to write more suitable texts. He wrote a two-volume work entitled, Sefer Hatalmid, and published it through his own press. Through it he "made an invaluable contribution toward the dissemination of Ivrit b'Ivrit in the United States."⁶¹

Scharfstein was concerned with the whole spectrum of American Jewish curricula, not simply Hebrew language education. As a Hebraist, he was interested in developing curricula and textbooks on every subject related to the development of the Hebrew person. One of his books focused on methods of teaching the Bible. Scharfstein hoped that his Bible textbooks would teach Jewish ethical conduct, on the side. One such book was entitled, Darkhei Limud HaTanakh. The first publication of this compendium was in 1934; a second revised edition was published in 1951. His textbooks were designed to teach Bible stories, but he also intended them to teach Jewish ethics, as he understood them, from classic Bible vignettes. Bible figures became children's heroes, and their deeds became examples of acceptable behavior.

After retiring from the Teacher's Institute in 1955, Scharfstein wrote a number of books on history and methodology, thereby satisfying his goals of years before. Among them was his five-volume history of Jewish education, Toledot Hachinukh HaYehudi. Another was his book on the role of the heder, Hacheder Bechayei Ameinu. His many other works were included in a forty-page bibliography in Sefer Scharfstein, a volume dedicated to his honor.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 81.

Scharfstein educated teachers at the Teacher's Institute, and in the field, about teaching. But, he also engendered in them the spirit of Jewish history and peoplehood which, for many American-born Jews, was unknown and not part of their spiritual selves. As committed as he was to teaching, he was also bent on the need to transmit from teacher to student the love of Judaism. "Teachers depended on him," wrote Yehuda Goldin in Sefer HaYovel Scharfstein, "for the work he edited, wrote or lectured on, and for his understanding of the new and the old."⁶² Goldin believed that Scharfstein was the source of everything teachers needed to know about teaching and transmitting the love of Judaism to their students.

Scharfstein accomplished what he did for teachers, because he was able to show them that their life and careers had meaning and worth. For many teachers, the predominant question was Judah Leib Gordon's question of years before: "For whom do I toil?"⁶³ Scharfstein understood why teachers asked this question. It reflected the problems of their communities and their work. Their students were often inattentive to lessons, and disinterested in acquiring a language that seemed to distance them from their American peers. Why bother teaching Judaism in this context, teachers wondered? Why were they teaching modern secularists? As a realist, Scharfstein was aware of these conflicts. He built solutions to immediate problems into his philosophy and methodology. He shared with teachers his goals in creating his textbooks. He also shared with them his philosophy of the Jewish spirit, his sense that each student and adult was capable of being Hebraically cultured. Scharfstein admitted to teachers that their work was difficult, but assured them that it was also purposeful. American Jewish youths

⁶² Yehuda Goldin, "Igeret Beracha," in Sefer HaYovel Sharfstein, ed. Hillel Bavli (New York: Histadrut ha-Ivrit, et. al., 1955), p. 20.

⁶³ Shlomo Dmasek, "Minhat Todah," p.21.

were rebellious, but he believed that they were also interested in learning when that learning was made interesting.

Scharfstein kept up teachers' interest and sense of purpose in teaching American Jewish youth even under the most difficult conditions. He did this by transmitting to them his own sense of purpose in Jewish education. His life and experiences influenced him, and were the source of his strength. But, his concept of the role and function of Jewish education also had much to do with the devotion he put into his profession. In Darkhei Limud HaTanakh (page 21), Scharfstein wrote, "Our war is for life and death. Our conflict won't be cured in a few short hours of teaching." He likened the goal of education to war, in which issues and solutions were not meted out in the short run, but were only achieved after painstaking hours of sacrifice, failure, and tribulations. He, thus, compared teaching to a battle for life and death, in which one could not quit in the middle. The teacher had to be totally devoted to the purposes, the goals and the means, of Jewish education, no matter how long it took to realize results.

Scharfstein urged teachers to focus on the larger goals of the Hebrew movement, even while attending to the narrower objectives of classroom teaching. The overwhelming goal was to revive the Hebrew language, as well as the Hebrew spirit⁶⁴, in American Jewish youth. How was this goal played out in the classroom? Scharfstein sought to bring a new "Hasidut" to the students. He yearned for the day when students would study Jewish subjects out of their love for Judaism, and would be happy speaking Hebrew and encountering Judaism everyday of their lives. For Scharfstein, the Hebrew word "Calitsut," (gaiety) came closest to satisfying his need to express joyfulness, to fulfill the mitzvah, "vachai bahem, velo sheyamut bahem." Scharfstein understood this

⁶⁴ see Chapter 3, for the meaning of "spirit" within a socio-linguistic context.

to mean that the Hebrew lifestyle was the means to living life fully, and not the means to a suffocating lifestyle which acted as an obstacle to other, American, aspirations.

Special teachers were able to experience Scharfstein's "Calitsut." They were well-trained and dedicated. In Darkhei Limud L'shoneinu, Scharfstein asked the question, "What is different about a Hebrew teacher?" He answered, "[A Hebrew teacher] is a master of his own treasure...he carries a vision of life in his heart." The perseverance and ultimate dedication required to be a Hebrew teacher was not something that could be transplanted. It had to be a passion. The height to which Scharfstein took his message was reflected in subsequent words, "Only for the Hebrew teachers who believe they can bring their students under the wings of heaven, will their righteousness endure forever in our Book of Life." The commitment to be a Hebrew teacher was, thus, not only a service to the Jewish people, but a service to God.

Scharfstein taught many lessons to his teachers before they entered the classroom, and he charged them with many duties. Chief among these kernels of wisdom were to take account of the environment in which students lived, and the concerns that they brought with them into the classroom. A teacher had to acknowledge that Hebrew was not part of the environment in which students lived. Since, if Hebrew became like a "yoke that weighed heavily on his neck, the student would not find joy in learning," (Darkhei L'shoneinu, page 8) a Hebrew teacher had to reshape the environment in which Hebrew was taught. Like universities that created houses of language, e.g. German House and Italian House, Scharfstein proposed to his teachers that they create a classroom environment in which students would hear Hebrew, see Hebrew words and signs, read Hebrew books and poems, and sing Hebrew songs. It was to be a totally Hebrew environment, a veritable "Little Palestine."

Scharfstein's loudest words of warning concerned the nature of students in the classroom. The most attentive and the most participative student, he reminded teachers, was not necessarily the one who had the most insight, the most feeling, and the most to offer Judaism. Often, there were students who did not answer each question, instead they dreamed. More important than praising correct answers, he insisted, was the teacher's duty to awaken the Jewish spirit in each student. Correct answers were helpful, but they did not prove that the Jewish spirit was alive. He urged that teachers be praised not just for running a good classroom, but for instilling the love of Hebrew in students, and for stimulating expressions of joy by students for their teachers and studies.

Textbook Writing

Scharfstein approached the task of writing a textbook in much the same way he prepared a fine lesson plan. First, he expressed his goals which were definitive statements outlining the proposed task and the method used to accomplish it. Second, he stated his objectives which were the skills he wanted students to be able to perform upon completion of the lesson. Third, he composed the plan which animated his goals and objectives into meaningful learning experiences. Like a teacher who informed his class about the lesson, and what he expected the class to learn to do, Scharfstein wrote his goals and objectives in the preface to his textbooks. The lesson plans Scharfstein carefully crafted were the chapters that followed.

In the prefaces to his textbooks, he did not try to capture his reader's attention with lofty language, unrealistic expectations, or philosophic treatises. He wrote with understanding, patience, and support. In Hebrew Self-Taught, he wrote in the preface, "we, your guides, should like to warn you against being discouraged by any preconceived

ideas or initial difficulties."⁶⁵ Scharfstein's sensitivity is expressed in this statement, because he acknowledged the competition he faced in the memories Jews had of the *cheder* and *melamdim*. "Preconceived ideas" recalled dark rooms, strict teachers with stiff rulers, and rote learning. "Preconceived ideas" also recalled early memories of Hebrew being a difficult language to learn. And, without expanding on the words "initial difficulties," Scharfstein managed to alleviate concerns Jews had about their early failures in Hebrew education, and present obstacles as they learned it again. "Anyone who is willing to put in honest work," he wrote, "can get to speak Hebrew..."⁶⁶

Scharfstein's goals and objectives for his students were clear and succinct. In Shaar le-Sifrut, he wrote in the preface the two aims he had for the book. First, he wanted the reader to "develop [the] ability to read Hebrew fluently and with enjoyment..."⁶⁷ Reading Hebrew fluently was important to Scharfstein's perception of how a Jew interacted with other Jews. A Hebrew reader would be able to read Hebrew newspapers, books and literature which linked all Jews together. And, he wanted Jews to feel joy and pleasure when they participated in Jewish life and language.

Another goal was to present a "cross section of Jewish life, thought and activities, by means of interesting readings..."⁶⁸ Incorporated into his book were the writings of Bialik, Peretz, Sholom Asch, Berdichevsky, Hillel Bavli and others. Writers such as these presented a rich variety of experiences and moods, dashing any preconceived notions about Jews being all alike and of one demeanor. Scharfstein did emphasize that Jews were one people, but with a diverse and colorful past, present and future. "[Shaar

⁶⁵ Zevi Scharfstein, et.al, Hebrew Self-Taught (New York: Zionist Organization of America, 1946), p. vii.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Zevi Scharfstein, Shaar leSifrut (Shilo Publishing House, 1947), preface.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

le-Sifrut]," he wrote," provides a blended picture of a fascinating people, its longings, its strivings, its struggles and its venturesome spirit."⁶⁹

Scharfstein's books were attractive to young Jewish boys and girls, because they depicted Jews as exciting and fascinating. In a way, he managed to equate the Jewish "venturesome spirit" with the American pioneer spirit. He showed young children that Jews were not just from the old world, oppressed and persecuted. Eminent Jewish writers' works illustrated that Jews were dynamic, contemporary, yearning for a proud future uninhibited in pursuit of their dreams. These were the new heroes, the role models, that Scharfstein provided Jewish boy and girls.

Each lesson in ShaCar le-Sifrut, was a story written by a famous Jewish author. Writings were divided into five distinct sections: *Dalut Hachomer*, *Ga'agu'im LeErets Yisrael*, *BeErets Yisra'el*, *BaAmeriqah*, *Ameriqah BaShira Halvrit*. Preceding each story, written in English, was a brief summary, a biography of the author, and references to related readings. Following the story was a list of vocabulary words printed in English and Hebrew. These stories related to young readers the richness of Hebrew literature, and a Jewish, sometimes mystical, world otherwise unknown to them.

In Meirei'shit, a Hebrew book for younger grades, Scharfstein employed contemporary designs and methods to make an appealing presentation. Black and white photographs and sketches in orange and brown adorned the pages. The Hebrew letters were written in bold black letters. The stories in Meirei'shit, were written in a rhythmic manner, similar to fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Scharfstein adapted his

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

methods to current ones, so his use of rhyme schemes in his stories was not unusual. It was also influenced by the tradition of Oral Torah, which was written to be memorized. He wanted to see students singing and reciting their favorite songs and stories from his books.

The subjects of the songs and stories were familiar sights and events in the lives of American Jews. A visit to the doctor, a parade, making friends, heroes, a tailor's shop, and Shabbat and holiday celebrations were all subjects of the stories contained in Meirei'shit.

Scharfstein also wrote textbooks for adult learners, applying similar goals and objectives. In Hebrew Self-Taught, he employed a running theme. The reader was introduced to the Levy family, and accompanied them in all that they did in and around the house, and on a trip to Palestine. In Lesson 4, the Levy's house was described: each room was named, and the furnishings were labeled. The story highlighted the picture of Herzl on the wall, and the *kufsah*, or coin-box, on the table for collecting money for Palestine. In Lesson 5, Mr. Levy's job as an attorney was the subject of the lesson. The story told how Mr. Levy worked five days of the week. Then, the story told how Mr. Levy "rested" on Saturday, and "also stayed home" on Sunday.

In five lessons, Scharfstein managed to accomplish a great deal. First, he introduced the reader to an appealing family that lived in a beautiful American home, filled with Jewish interests and objects. The Levy's home epitomized the aspirations of many Jews who were still fighting their way out of their immigrant status and old-world ways. Second, Scharfstein showed that a Jew was able to be a professional, and still maintain his faith. Mr. Levy was a lawyer, a top job in America, especially for a Jew. But, more than that, Mr. Levy kept the Sabbath. Scharfstein masterfully chose the

word "rested" to describe Mr. Levy's Saturday activities, and the words "also stayed home" to describe his Sunday activities. Scharfstein could have used the word "rested" to describe Sunday's activities, too, but Sunday was the Christian Sabbath. Jews rested on Sunday, but it was better that they merely "also stayed home." Lessons 6-7 addressed Sabbath observance, and included two songs about work and rest.

In Lessons 9 and 10, matters outside the home and office were addressed. Lesson 9 specifically mentioned social responsibility as part of a Jew's obligation. After work, Mr. Levy went to hear a Zionist speaker, and Mrs. Levy went to a Hadassah meeting. In Lesson 10, the Zionism meeting was concluded with the singing of HaTikvah. Nothing more was said about Mrs. Levy's Hadassah meeting.

Subsequent lessons addressed subjects that reflected Scharfstein's idea of what made a concerned and responsible American Jew. The responsibility of the parent to teach his children, or have them taught, Hebrew, followed in Lesson 14. Mr. Levy visited his son's "model Hebrew school where he was a model scholar." Lesson 16 described the gala banquet held in Mr. Levy's honor for his dedicated service to the Zionist movement. And, Lesson 17 described a curious neighbor who wanted to know more about Mr. Levy's after-work activities. Following Lesson 17, there were 18 lessons dedicated to the Levy's trip to Palestine. These lessons contained the experiences they had travelling there, touring the country, shopping, eating, sightseeing, and using their Hebrew with passers-by. In Lesson 29, an orchard grower the Levys were visiting ended his conversation with the following sentiment, "*Kol Yehudi tsarikh livnot et artseinu*," loosely translated, "Every Jew must build up our land." Lesson 40 concluded the book with the Levy's promise to return to Palestine very soon.

To the contemporary reader, Scharfstein's stories were not subtle. They sent obvious messages and promoted conventional Hebraist values. Lacking from his stories, however, were the complications and obstacles standing in the way of Jewish participation in activities such as Zionism and Hadassah; about these he had nothing to say. Educational and professional obstacles were just two of the impediments still standing in the way of even the best intentioned American Jew who wanted to be just like the Levys. But while easy to criticize, the book, like so many of Scharfstein's books, did achieve its goal. It provided role models and espoused values that all American Jews could aspire to emulate.

CHAPTER III

PERSPECTIVES ON THE HEBRAISTS' WORLD

Scharfstein and His Larger World

Zevi Scharfstein was a team player, but he was also an individualist. Even before he reached American soil, while still on the boat, he expressed to Hillel Bavli his interest in working in the Hebrew movement. He wanted to write definitive textbooks for youths to replace older books that he felt were inferior. He learned the skills needed to write textbooks by working as an editor under the direction of Samson Benderly. He also learned about the goals of the Hebrew movement and the Hebraists in America. Against this backdrop of the Hebrew movement and its goals, he pursued individual methods and tasks. Scharfstein preferred to identify himself as a free-agent who worked with other Hebraists.

In his own larger world, he recorded personal successes, advised teachers, established teachers groups, and founded and led his own publishing company, the Shilo Publishing House. Scharfstein achieved two kinds of personal success. First, as an editor and writer he succeeded in breaking new ground in the field of textbook writing. He criticized openly the current works of authors who produced material that held little regard for the circumstances of the students who used their books. At the same time, he recognized his own contributions to the available materials for classroom use. In effect, he assigned a failing grade to most of the work that preceded his own. He failed such work on the basis that it either had little to do with the goals of the Hebrew movement, as

he understood its goals, or it was totally irrelevant to what really mattered in the lives of young American Jews.

Second, Scharfstein managed to carve out a specialized and protected niche within the Hebrew movement without alienating his colleagues and associates. His position within the Hebrew movement was specialized, because it was a function of the larger movement defined by Benderly. Other specialized functions within the movement were publishing, youth work and camping, to name but a few. It became a protected niche when he was able to secure his reputation as an educational leader in the eyes of his colleagues without alienating them. In his determined manner, Scharfstein successfully established new standards and expectations despite his predecessors' achievements. However, he was not critical without being confident. When he threw out old books and standards, he was able to replace them with solid evidence of what it took to produce new books that would make a difference to students in Jewish schools. He backed up his new definition of "quality" with his own talent and foresight. He was often consulted on educational matters, and commissioned by the Bureau of Education of New York City to prepare and write textbooks. He earned the respect of his colleagues as a "pioneer" and as one who did what he set out to do. His lectures, essays, and curricula were recognized and sought after for use on various levels of educational preparation: teacher training, classroom programs, and textbook and curriculum evaluation.

The teachers with whom Scharfstein worked and whom he advised were more than budding educators --- they were his disciples. Only in the scheme of master-disciple could the relationship between him and his teachers be understood. They were his disciples, because they spoke Scharfstein's language, echoed his opinions, shared his concerns, acted like him in the classroom, and were dedicated to his purposes. He saw himself as the master teacher from whom students would learn to understand and

appreciate the goals of the Hebrew movement, as well as his own unique and specialized teaching style. He defined and expressed the goals of the Hebrew movement in his textbooks. He chose the stories, lessons, vocabulary, and pictures that he believed represented the goals of the movement. In his lectures and essays, he shared with his teachers how he went about making his selections and editing his books. But, as a master educator, Scharfstein knew that books and pictures were only one dimension of the whole teaching process.

The teacher had to bring alive the stories and pictures that lay lifeless on the pages of his textbooks. He taught teachers his own teaching style which, in his opinion, was masterful. Unlike modern teacher training which encourages teachers to blend the craft of teaching with their own personality (the art), Scharfstein taught teachers to blend craft with his own personal style. He believed that only his approach could successfully convey the message inherent in his textbooks. He spoon-fed his teachers the art and craft of teaching, leaving little room for originality.

Scharfstein portrayed himself as the kind of educator to which every other teacher aspired; independent teachers were rarely allowed to side-step him. He was able to stand above, yet among, other teachers and master educators. He seemed to occupy the highest standing in the education field, yet made himself available to teachers and educators at the classroom level where he believed the genius of his own work was borne out. This status which he possessed and earned for himself was due in part to his ability to portray himself as the important teacher he believed he was.

When Scharfstein's position was challenged by new educators, or by those who did not see eye to eye with his aims, he remained resolute, and searched for ways to achieve his own ends. He continued to dedicate himself to the original goals of the Hebrew

movement, even as the movement itself, was changing with the times. Many had begun to question the close link between Hebraism and Jewish education, but not Scharfstein. When there was not enough money to publish every essay, book, idea and lecture that he considered vital to the future of Jewish education, if not to American Jewish life as a whole, and when his essays, lectures and books were rejected, he formed his own publishing company with the assistance of his brother, Asher, called *Shilo Publishing House*.⁷⁰

Shilo gave Scharfstein the freedom to publish everything he produced. By owning his own press he could flood the market with his own work and ideas. Textbooks were still the mainstay of his work, and through *Shilo*, he was able to revise his books, as he liked to do, without concern for whether or not he would receive financial permission from "higher-ups" in the movement. As much as he respected his fellow Jewish educators, he refused to be bound by them and insisted on complete freedom of action.

Scharfstein, who was an important educational leader, may have reached the limit of his influence and importance in the eyes of other figures in the movement. As stated earlier, Scharfstein was not on the same par as Benderly and his boys. As long as he remained in the educator's rightful position within the movement there was no tension, but Scharfstein was an aggressive person whose perception of himself and his field outgrew the boundaries drawn for him by the movement's philosophical leaders.

⁷⁰ see Charles A. Madison, Jewish Publishing in America. The Impact of Jewish Writing on American Culture, (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1976), pp. 86-89, for a brief description of Zevi Scharfstein's work and purpose for opening his publishing company, and a more extensive description of Ktav Publishing House, his brother Asher's company which has become an important source of Jewish books and pedagogic materials.

How could this personality have tolerated any demotion in influence, privilege and finances within the movement?

By forming *Shilo*, Scharfstein made a lateral move away from the confines of the Hebrew movement, while not sacrificing the original goals to which he was dedicated. He saved himself from the petty squabbles that suffused the Hebraist movement, and retreated from those who did not share his goals --- or his high opinion of himself. *Shilo* gave him independent power and authority.

Scharfstein remained a purist within the Hebrew movement. He was a language ideologue who was totally devoted to "the cause." In time, this drove a wedge between him and other leaders in the movement who sought to compromise their goals for the sake of Jewish education. Scharfstein, meanwhile, insisted that it was only through his brand of Hebrew language education that all the Hebraists' goals would be fulfilled. Such determinism, absolutism, and "hot-headedness," as the noted socio-linguist Joshua Fishman observed, is characteristic of "language ideologists," those who believe that language, and language education is the cornerstone of a people and its future. Fishman's analysis helps explain what Scharfstein and his Hebraist contemporaries were all about.

Understanding the World of the Hebraists

In analyzing language ideologists, Fishman poses two questions that shed light on their larger goals: 1) Beyond language, itself, what were they interested in achieving?; and 2) Why did they choose language as the means to their goal? Both questions can be applied to the Hebrew movement.

The Hebraists were interested in achieving at least four interrelated goals beyond language. First, and most broadly, they were interested in Zion, and extending their enthusiasm to fellow Jews in America, who they hoped would join their efforts to rebuild Palestine. Second, they were interested in establishing their authority over Jewish communities. By such authority they would define the ways and means to achieve their first goal. Third, and more narrowly, their goal was to build institutions through which they would produce and implement their programs. And fourth, the bottom line, so to speak, was to promote Hebrew language education as a means through which the Jewish people, if not physically, would be linked spiritually and culturally.

The Hebraists were engendered with enthusiasm for Zion before they arrived in America. Some were already adults when they arrived here, and were educated and trained in the Haskalah movement. Originally, this was only an interest of theirs, but it became their skill and trade. Like businessmen who must develop markets to perpetuate their business, the Hebraists worked the Jewish communities into believing in their cause, thus, building markets of interest in Zion.

Where there was no authority, the Hebraists believed, there was no community. Authority was a goal of the Hebraists, who saw themselves as guides and mentors to Jewish communities. Like Scharfstein who did not like what he saw in Jewish education, the Hebraists, as a whole, did not like the direction that the American Jewish community was taking; they feared assimilation and ultimate disappearance. Through their authority, they convinced Jews that Zion was important, as was a Jewish lifestyle vis-a-vis the Hebrew language. They also convinced Jews that when they adopted the Hebrew lifestyle, as the Hebraists defined it, they would gain a sense of community, a renewed sense of what it meant to be a Jew. They could, thus, achieve their American dreams as well as remain true to Judaism. In effect, then, the Hebraists portrayed themselves as

ideological pioneers: Jews who were paving the way for a vibrant 20th century American Judaism.

The institutions the Hebraists built were signs of their increased authority and quest for permanence in Jewish communities. The Histadrut Ivrit, its bureaus and respective offices, provided the Hebraists a place to call home, a place from which they produced their work, and a formal organization which gave them credibility and status. The Histadrut Ivrit was responsible for publishing textbooks, lectures, educational material, and other periodicals which promoted their cause. These publications, which they hoped would become rooted in Jewish life, were important because they could perpetuate the purposes of the Hebrew movement long after pioneers like Benderly were gone.

Finally, the Hebrew language was the thread that ran through all of the Hebraist's work. Hebrew defined who they were, what they were trying to achieve, and the means by which all their work would be done. In effect, they commandeered Jewish life by redefining Hebrew's role. Suddenly, Hebrew was thrust upon American Jews as the key to all that they desired, i.e. the panacea Jews heard that America was. The Hebraists were unrelenting in their efforts to make Hebrew alive, relevant, and purposeful in all Jewish homes and communities.

Fishman points out that other factors were also involved in movements like Hebraism. He argues that language ideologues tend to be, "altruistic, humanistic, and philosophically encumbered."⁷¹ This explains why a man like Benderly, a devoted Hebraist, could, in Fishman's words, be "led astray into philosophy, politics [and]

⁷¹ Joshua A. Fishman, Ideology, Society & Language: The Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum, (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, Inc., 1987) p.5.

culture planning more generally."⁷² Fishman believed that language leaders strayed in this direction, because language never really was the "be all and end all" of their movement. "For most of them," he wrote, "language is usually no more than a symbol, an index and a part of a far greater and more fundamental *something else*, often something more tangibly instrumental than language alone."⁷³

To the Hebraists, the *something else* was continuity and self-determination reflected in Zion. The Hebraists never lost sight of this goal, but, because they were members of the Hebrew movement they began their work in the field of Hebrew education. When the movement grew and Hebrew education was on firmer ground, and in the hands of men like Scharfstein, leaders of the movement focused on new ways and means to spread the love and purpose of Zion. As the movement became more complex, Hebrew education was relegated to one of the many levels that now existed within the larger movement.

If Zion, and not the Hebrew language, was the ultimate goal of the Hebraists, why did they focus on language at all? What was inherent in Hebrew that precluded anything else from playing the role Hebrew did? Certainly, American Jews knew English better than they did Hebrew, and for many in the early part of the century, Yiddish was a second language. Why, then, did not English or Yiddish serve the purposes that Hebrew did?

As products of the Haskalah movement, American Hebraists were influenced (as Nathan Birnbaum was in Europe⁷⁴) by Johann Gottfried von Herder, a philosopher and

⁷² ibid., p.125.

⁷³ ibid.

⁷⁴ Nathan Birnbaum (born May 16, 1864) was the father of the idea of convening the Tshernovits Conference of 1908, a conference of the First World Congress for the Yiddish Language. He was a language ideologist; a convert to Yiddishism, and a Ba'al Teshuvah.

poet of the 18th century. He believed that the "authentic language of any ethnocultural community was the catalyst that provided its 'volksgeist' (ethnic spirit/soul) with the creative power to enrich the life of its own people..."⁷⁵ There was no question that Hebrew was the "authentic" language of the Jewish people. The Hebraists counted on its historical qualities to be the "catalyst" that would enrich the life of the Jews, especially here, but abroad as well.

The Hebraists believed that the "volksgeist," or ethnic spirit/soul, was dormant in American Jews. And, once Hebrew led Jews out of their ethnic hibernation, so to speak, they would, by virtue of Hebrew's mystic ability, acquire a sense of peoplehood. Concomitantly, they would be dedicated to leading Jewish, if not Hebrew, lives. Therefore, Zionism would not have to recruit support from Jews, but rather Jews would respond naturally to Zionism as an extension of their being Jews. Zionism, as a natural extension of living Hebrew lives, became the pedagogic model for the Hebraists.

No other language or aspect of Judaism, itself, could accomplish all that the Hebraists demanded. English was a new language for Jews who arrived from Eastern Europe; it reflected nothing of Jewish history or peoplehood. Yiddish was spoken by many Jews, but was also relatively new. In addition, Yiddish was a blend. The Hebraists were purists who believed that Hebrew was the only language which captured all that was inherently Jewish.

⁷⁵ ibid., p259-260.

Success & Failure

The Hebraists were eager and confident in their plans for the Hebrew movement. In retrospect, however, we can see that they succeeded in some areas, and even in ways they did not know, but they failed in many others, sometimes without conceding failure, and sometimes in ways they could not have predicted.

The Hebraist's successes can be recorded on three levels: personally, organizationally, and as a movement. Their personal successes ranked among the most important. First, they upgraded the image of Hebrew teachers in America. In an "upside-down" world, in which teachers ranked lowest and store owners and the rich were ranked highest, the Hebraists spawned a counter-revolution. They achieved this task by acknowledging the environment in which they now lived (Scharfstein's own contribution). They made their teaching model work in a system which chose to relegate it to its lowest rank. Standards and expectations were established for teachers, along with commensurate wages. Teachers slowly entered the ranks of other professionals in the Jewish community who earned money and respect.

Organizationally, the Hebraist's institutions were forums in which leading thinkers in the Hebrew world exchanged ideas and learned from one another. The Histadrut Ivrit of America, was responsible for establishing programs of study, camping experiences, lectures, periodicals, and publishing opportunities, to list just a few of their services. Through these means, the Hebraists spread their message and attained larger audiences. There was no limit, creatively, to what they were able to do to accomplish their goals. America promised them freedom from governmental censure and freedom of religious expression --- something they never knew before anywhere else.

Each new program was a new step in reaching what had been unimaginable goals only decades before.

As a group, the Hebraists were responsible for transplanting the Haskalah from Europe to America. They brought with them their enthusiasm for renewing Hebrew not just as a prayer language, but as a modern language for use in the home and the field. They also influenced Jewish communities who believed Judaism was not relevant to their lives in the new world. Hebrew, they emphasized, was the key to enabling America and Judaism to coexist.

Equally important, were the consequences of their work. Hebrew teachers, for the first time began to earn meaningful wages and were perceived as actually making a difference in the lives of young Jews. And, new forms of classroom materials and methods were encouraged for use in Jewish schools. Journals and other forums provided by the Hebrew movement inspired growth and cultivated new ideas for Jewish education and American Jewish life as a whole.

An important consequence of the Hebraist's Zionism was the impact it had on men like Emanuel Gamoran, who was the Educational Director of the Commission on Jewish Education of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1923-1958. Gamoran was a Zionist, a minority view in the Reform movement during his tenure at the Union. But, Gamoran was trained under Benderly, and his own goals reflected the Hebraists': "He wanted to teach Jewish children to survive positively as Jews while helping them create a viable Jewish community in America."⁷⁶ Gamoran faced obstacles in the Union that men like Scharfstein did not face. He encountered resistance from rabbis who did not

⁷⁶ Rabbi Hillel Gamoran, interview held at Beth Tikvah Congregation, Hoffman Estates, Illinois, August 1989.

appreciate his thinly veiled disdain for them, and he faced the difficulty associated with being a "man ahead of his time" in a movement unwilling to embrace Zionism. "He Judaized American Reform education," wrote Robert Joseph Wechman, "at a crucial juncture in its history by giving it a Jewish aspect, and as far as possible, a Zionist point of view."⁷⁷

Just as the Hebrew movement's greatest success occurred at a personal level, so, too, did its greatest failure. The Hebraists were arrogant men who lay exclusive claim to the Hebrew lifestyle and Zionism. They occupied positions of authority from which they attempted to direct, teach, and shape Jewish communities throughout the United States. They scorned those who dissented from their wisdom, and placed obstacles in their path. They also tried to define the only ways in which a Jew could express his interest in Jewish life. Thus, a second failure of the movement was its unwillingness to recognize alternative ways, other than Hebrew, to live committed Jewish lives. Hebraists did not acknowledge Jews who succeeded in America, supported their congregations, and identified as Jews, but did not embrace Hebrew for themselves and in their homes.

The first two failures led to an inevitable failure which, because of their self-inflicted myopia, they could not have predicted. They did not consider the possibility that their own avid enthusiasm for Hebrew and Zionism would fail to triumph, leaving Jews who dissented with nothing at all to hold onto. By refusing to tolerate alternative modes of identity, they left a sizable minority of Jewish children "outside the pale." In time, they became a minority like so many others within the American Jewish community --- but a minority that still acted as if it had achieved hegemony. In time, a

⁷⁷ Robert Joseph Wechman, "Emanuel Gamorn: Pioneer in Jewish Religious Education," (Syracuse University, Ph.D. thesis, 1970), from "Dissertation Abstracts International," Vol. 31, no. 11, 1971.

new generation of Jewish educators, dissatisfied with the failure rate among the Hebraists-trained students, looked to new approaches to Jewish education, created new Jewish educational organizations, and left the Hebraists behind.

The Hebraists travelled in a small circle against the larger background of American Jewish movements and interests. Their self-perception was tremendous, and for a time, especially within their own group and immediate communities, they were successful. But, their self-perception stood in the way of their ability to see themselves as a mere cog in a Jewish world that was moving quickly around them. In time, they lost touch with reality, and lost control of Jewish education. But some of their ideas endure.

Scharfstein's Legacy

Scharfstein's true legacy reflected his deeper self --- his Hebrew personality. The numerous books, lectures, curriculum and essays he prepared were merely products of this man who was deeply entrenched in the survival of the Jewish soul vis-a-vis Hebrew language and literature. He believed that these tangible objects were only as permanent as they were resilient to wear over time. The more lasting legacy Scharfstein wanted to leave, and to some extent he did leave, was the methodology and psychology he implemented in his work which reflected his devotion to the Hebrew lifestyle. He wanted his teachers to know for themselves, and to implement in their work, the same devotion he had for the Hebrew lifestyle. Likewise, he wanted American Jewish youth to experience and become devoted to the Hebrew lifestyle through the books and materials he prepared for classroom use. This great legacy Scharfstein wanted to leave can be observed in his books, teaching style, and the work he did on behalf of Jewish professionals.

One of the important skills he brought to the development of educational materials, textbooks writing, and curriculum development was his ability to analyze. The education field was rife with newcomers, leaders and innovators, as well as various and conflicting methods of teaching. He had a keen ability to read about new approaches, and to extract from them innovations he believed were appropriate for his ideas, and for his teachers who were prepared to implement them. Despite what other educators were doing or espousing, the "buck stopped" on his desk when it came to matters of textbooks and classroom teaching. Consequently, he earned an enviable status as an educator who stood at the helm of his field. But, Scharfstein was not interested in just status and power; he set an example and taught his teachers that they, like himself, did not have to accept teaching methods simply because they were new or popular. He insisted that his teachers discriminate and select only the most appropriate methods and materials, or parts thereof, for classroom use. His ability to analyze, therefore, was his way of introducing "quality control" into a flooded education field.

Scharfstein's textbooks were lessons in his discriminating use of stories, pictures and format. He was adamant about not isolating Jewish youths behind Jewish walls while he worked to bring them into the Hebrew lifestyle. He did not deny American Jews, American ways and pleasures. The stories he chose exemplified Jewish life against the American background. His stories were about American Jewish children enjoying American ways, but from a Jewish perspective and with Jewish values. Likewise, the biographies of Jewish heroes he used in his Hebrew books were not meant to focus Jewish youths' interests just on Jewish figures, but to show that Jewish figures could also be American figures.

Similarly, Scharfstein chose pictures for his books which illustrated modern Jewish life in America. They showed happy children playing in modern playgrounds, and

modest American homes in which successful Jews lived who participated in both American and Jewish activities. He used color in his newer and revised books. The pictures were meant to be part of the lesson and not simply a decoration. The colored pictures were integrally related to the content of the story or lesson in each chapter. Presumably, a student was able to look at the picture and tell a story using the vocabulary and grammar taught in the lesson. Not every teacher was aware of this expanded use of pictures, but Scharfstein's teachers learned from him the valuable lesson of choosing each part of a book or lesson so that it worked as a unit, and not as many disparate parts that even a student found confusing.

Somewhat less significant, but important, nonetheless, was Scharfstein's detail for the binding of his books. Unlike paperback books or pamphlets which were part of the *cheder* world, and were often torn or mutilated after a brief period, his books were durable. They were hardback books with formal title pages, prefaces, table of contents, chapters, page numbers, glossaries, and sometimes indices. He believed that students were more eager to study when their books looked and felt like books they found in the public library --- books they took seriously. He also intended for his books to be retained by students. He hoped that students would collect the textbooks they completed in their own small libraries --- a legacy of their studies and the love they had for Hebrew, if not for Scharfstein's books alone.

Scharfstein's decisions about what was appropriate for his textbooks and for the classroom were based on his pioneering educational philosophy, described as "educational eclecticism." According to Theodore Bramell, this was "an educational pattern which inserts elements of progressivist methodology and educational psychology into courses of study based on 'essentials,' found in the classics of religion, science and

literature."⁷⁸ Essentialism was observed in Scharfstein's educational philosophy in the distinction he drew between the Hebrew teacher and the Hebrew person. In the introduction to Darkhei Limud L'Shoneinu, he defined the difference between the Hebrew teacher and the Hebrew person as follows:

The difference is great. The former is a craftsman who acquires for himself the best possible ways and masters them; the latter carries in his heart the vision of revival. He who forms vision to craft deserves the honorable designation of Hebrew teacher.⁷⁹

The teacher who understood the meaning of Scharfstein's definition of the Hebrew person, gave priority to the issues (essentials) of national survival and revival. The teacher did not succumb either to the pressures of the environment, the convenience of the students' needs, or to methodology. The essentialist was severe in his demands. Scharfstein did give consideration to the students' environment, to the "yoke" of learning that, at times, weighed heavily upon the necks of students, but he never compromised the goals of national survival and the Hebrew revival. He was a living example of what he expected of his teachers and of those who followed him in his work.

Scharfstein's leadership paved the way for the professionalization of Jewish educators which meant upgraded status and higher wages. His efforts to upgrade the image of the Jewish educator and to compensate them properly for their work encouraged

⁷⁸ Ben-Horin, p.114.

⁷⁹ see Elliot Eisner, "The Art and Craft of Teaching," Educational Leadership, January 1983, p.9, for a contemporary debate on teaching: is it an art or a craft?

his teachers to reach and fulfill the high expectations he had for them. And, as Jewish communities viewed Hebrew teachers as professionals and as modern Jews who helped their children attain Jewish and American values, they showed their support by sending their children to Hebrew school and funding its programs. Later, as young Jews matriculated from Hebrew school, some sought positions as Jewish educators. What was once considered a low-level job was now considered by young Jews and their parents as a noble profession.

To Scharfstein, the support of the Jewish community meant that he did not have to compromise his education goals. He was interested in developing the finest materials and the most capable teachers. He created materials that aroused a love for B'nai Yisrael and its Land. He made this clear when he defined two words: *Lilmod* and *L'chanekh*. *Lilmod* means "to teach," and *L'chanekh* means "to educate." The teacher who "educated," Scharfstein believed, aroused the Jewish *n'shamah*, the Jewish soul. The awakened Jewish soul, he believed, was good for America. This was his unique way of explaining the importance of Jewish education. "If one neglects his culture," he wrote, "he impoverishes American culture."⁸⁰ He believed that America benefited by the rich devotion American Jews had for their own people. It was a misunderstanding among educators, he admonished, that people should isolate themselves in order to preserve their way of life. Instead, he advocated arming oneself with the knowledge and love of one's own people. From that position, American Jews had the best opportunity to retain their sense of identity and belonging in a country that encouraged assimilation. Such a position provided American Jews with enduring strength and integrity with which to encounter America.

⁸⁰ Louis Feldman, "Half a Century of Jewish Education in America," Term Paper, (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1968), Box 1533.

Scharfstein was confident of the role Hebraists played in American Jewish lives. "To make the way," he remarked, "we must articulate daring ideas that will shed light on our problems and will find a solution for them..."⁸¹ As times became more challenging and progressive, so did his attempts to free Jews from the encroachment of American fads and trends. "We must," he added, "act out of complete independence of the insipidness of the past, and the dominant secular thought that does not encompass our goals." "Independence" was their claim; independence from American dreams that did not encompass the Hebraist's goals, and independence from other Jewish groups that sought similar goals, but never met the standards of the Hebraists.

Scharfstein was proud of the Hebraists' successes, and particularly proud of his own. He enjoyed his status as the leading pedagogue in the Hebrew movement. He revelled in his textbook success, his teacher training, and the affect he was having on a second generation of Jews who wanted to be teachers. But, as he became more discriminating of current trends, more demanding of his teachers, and more authoritative about his teaching methods, he clamored for more independence than the movement allowed him. By starting his own publishing company he moved away from the grip of the movement. In doing so, he created for himself a smaller Hebraic world, within which he published his own material and modeled his teachers after himself. From his personal perspective he achieved exactly what he set out to do --- write definitive books on teaching, create new materials for the classroom, and train others to accomplish and continue what he could not do as a single human being. Indeed, his legacy influenced future generations of teachers with respect to materials for classroom use, textbook writing and teacher training.

81 *ibid.*

Where, then, did Scharfstein fail? He failed exactly where he believed he succeeded. In establishing for himself a smaller Hebraic world, from which he published his own materials, and prepared teachers in his own image, he managed to isolate himself just as he cautioned others not to do.⁸² When he stepped further away from the Hebrew movement's leadership by opening his own publishing company, he isolated himself in order to preserve his own sense of mission. He failed to remember that his own educational philosophy stated that America benefited from Jewish participation. Analogically, would not the larger Hebrew movement have benefited from his direct affiliation? Indeed, the larger Hebrew movement would have been kinder to Scharfstein in the records of its own history. Instead, Scharfstein was footnoted in many books which recounted the important people and events of the Hebrew movement in America. The Hebrew movement did not deny the legacy of Scharfstein within the movement, but it did deny him the important position he believed he held.

Scharfstein also failed in his goal for the Hebrew language to inspire American Jews to live the Hebrew lifestyle in the long run. His definition of the pure Hebrew lifestyle exists today only as a remnant. In small sections of large cities Hebrew newspapers are read daily. But, for the most part, the goals of the Hebrew language for American Jews changed dramatically. Those who learned Hebrew as a second language do so in preparation for life in Israel, or for work in a Jewish profession that required Hebrew fluency. Others learned a modicum of Hebrew for their Bar Mitzvah, and for their obligations to prayer. What came of the second generation of young Jews who entered his teacher training programs eager to continue his legacy? They also vanished, and were replaced by prevailing methods and trends that defined new generations of American Jews and interests.

⁸² See above, page 18.

If Scharfstein were asked personally, "Where did you fail?" he may have replied that he never "failed", but rather "overlooked" possibilities for solutions to educational problems. He did not see himself as a person who was unable to solve educational problems; he saw himself handicapped by his mortality which prevented him from being aware of every educational problem. In his self-proclaimed modesty, Scharfstein turned aside praise and continued to seek new understanding everyday. He had many answers and convictions, and he never stopped developing his ideas and methods. In Shevilei Hachinukh. Choveret Zevi Scharfstein, Scharfstein considered the question, "Is there a minimum of expectations to pass on to our generation?" To which he replied, "To this question I have not found a solution, and perhaps there isn't one." Despite his years of work and the volumes of materials he published, he recognized that the place he held in the world was a passing one. As a Jew, he believed he was a link in the line of Israel. He added to the knowledge of other Jews, he filled them with the spirit of Israel, and he left his work to younger colleagues, hoping that they might pass it on to future generations. He did not see himself as one who had the answer to for all time, but as one who had a key to unlock doors of learning during his brief sojourn in this world. "Education," he once said, "is like a man and a tree of the field --- give it years and food."

APPENDIX

Chapters from Forty Years in America

Chapter 16

The First Announcement of the Histadrut Ivrit

When I came to settle permanently in New York, in 1915, there already existed there several associations for meeting those who knew Hebrew, and for discussions and lectures in their spiritual living language. Groups like these were also formed in other large towns in the United States. The late Kalman Whiteman, for whom public service was a vital necessity, sensed that that it would be a good idea to unify all the associations for joint work. He called the representatives of the New York associations together, and about twenty members met and established a local committee. After some time a committee was called in Philadelphia, and more than a hundred delegates responded: representatives of Hebrew associations and delegates of Zionist groups, national institutions and schools. The Histadrut Ivrit was established by this committee.

These were great and awesome days all at the same time --- the days of world war. Zionist leaders from Europe and Israel came to America at that time. The Central Zionist Organization, whose base was then in Germany, was not able in wartime to fulfill its mission. Its directors were mostly foreigners, citizens of other nations, and were not permitted to remain in Germany. In Palestine, the Jews were pursued by the Turkish Sultan, and the Zionist heads faced the danger of imprisonment or expulsion --- accordingly they turned to the United States. Shmarya Levin, Benzion Mossinson, Menachem Sheinkin, Izchak Ben-Zvi, today president of Israel, and David Ben-Gurion all came. Every one of those mentioned became an influential force in [Jewish] national

life in America. Shmarya Levin influenced Jewish leaders to participate in helping to settle Israel and to establish a strong Zionist organization, and was very valuable in drawing Louis D. Brandeis into the Zionist movement. Sheinkin went from city to city, arousing hearts and spreading certificates of different kinds, for the purchase of mountains and hills; Ben-Zion Mossinson lit up hearts with the explosive power of his words, and the beauty of his Herzl-like beard. Izchak Ben-Zvi and David Ben-Gurion worked in the organization, "Poale Zion." All of them, except for Ben-Gurion, were also on the administrative board of the Histadrut Ivrit.

In 1917, the committee of the Histadrut was called to New York. A public appeal was then published in newspapers entitled, "To the American Hebrews." The content of the proclamation will not be intelligible without calling attention to the great nationalist excitement that broke out as a result of the war among every political party of our people. In Russia, great things were done in Jewish education at the time. Echoes of the excitement also reached America, and accordingly it was said in the public appeal: "One of the most pleasant discoveries of the nationalist excitement, now being felt among American Jews, is the idea that Hebrew should be introduced into our spiritual and national lives." The signatories then call on, "for all the Hebraists to unify." "All the (Hebraist) organizations and institutions, no matter how great their commitment to the Hebraist idea, will not bring about the desired end so long as they are alone and separated without a central organization, which will pave their way, organize and unify them into a working partnership." On the proclamation were signed names like Rueben Brennan, Shmarya Levin, Nahman Sirkin, Menachem Sheinkin and others.

The first committee was called in the month of Tevet 1917, in the auditorium of the Gan Yeladim, (Kindergarten) on Montgomery Road in the lower part of New York City. This was the first time that Hebrew activity was given the shape of a real

movement, rather than a utopian organization of friends who loved the language and its literature. Many delegates came, 120 in number, not only of the few Hebrew groups and of the educational institutions, but also representatives of the Federation of Zionists, of "Poale Zion," the "Mizrachi," "Hadassah," "Young Judea," and an order of the national workers.

In the committee there was a feeling of exaltation. The spiritual tempest raging in Eastern Europe --- some breeze from it crossed the ocean and touched the hearts of American Jews. Shmarya Levin dispersed the clouds of despair and raised before his audience news of Hebraist-nationalist activities in Russia. He told about the many schools that were opened in Russia in the days of distress and the destruction. Even in Germany, he said the yearning for Torah from Sinai had awakened, and school systems had been established, evening classes for Hebrew language and literature were being held, and German Jews, great and small alike, were reviving their souls with ancient Hebrew words. He called on American Jews to raise the banner of Hebraist thought. Hearing all these exalted words the listeners forgot their surroundings and conditions, and their terrible spiritual loneliness in the land that demands uniformity of language, speech and thought. Their imaginations soared ahead of them and they were overwhelmed, clapping their hands and believing that a miracle could happen.

At another meeting chaired by Mr. A[braham] Spicehandler, Y.Z. Frishberg lectured on education. He was a person with experience, who had served as a principal in several schools and in different cities, and he knew the stumbling-blocks on the road of education. The chief stumbling blocks were --- according to him --- the leaders, the presidents and treasurers of the schools, whose aspirations in education were limited and pragmatic. They did not believe that they will succeed in raising children to Torah, and had no such yearnings. It is enough for them that their children know how to read

the prayers in a mechanical way, not in order to pray, but to be able to participate in public prayers and to say "Kaddish" when the time comes. In contrast to these wretched "aspirations," the Hebrew educator demanded "greatness" --- knowledge of the Bible and the Hebrew language and Jewish history. Frishberg called, therefore, to split off the management of the education institutions from the "small souls" and to put it into the reliable hands of the Histadrut Ivrit, whose objective it should be to establish good Hebrew schools.

Unintentionally, the lecture resulted in a stormy debate that turned in another direction. Among the delegates were, as has been pointed out, representatives of the "Labor-Zionist" party, and the "Mizrachi". The Labor Zionists had begun educational activities and established their own schools, on a Yiddishist basis with supplementary Hebrew, and on the basis of secular nationalism. In those days, days of excitement earthshaking events, they believed that the day was near when they would spread their net over America's cities, and educate thousands of children in their way. The Mizrachi was not yet much involved in education, but it, too, hoped for good days in this sphere. Delegates of these two parties, therefore, opposed with great force Frishberg's suggestions. Education --- they said--- is a party issue, while the Hebraist effort is for all of Israel. The Histadrut Ivrit should limit itself to the areas of language and literature and not reach out to the youths being taught in the schools. As is known, Ben Gurion was the active force behind the abolition of party schools in Israel, but no comparisons may be drawn from one period to the next. Times change and experience adds wisdom and pain.

Amidst the noisy wranglings, Dr. Yehuda Kaufman (today known as Even Shmuel) introduced a new proposal: that the Hebraists not violate the boundaries of others in education, but try to bring in the Hebrew language as a required subject for Jewish

children in the public schools, and the public high schools in the larger cities in the United States, where many Jews resided. Two leaders of great influence supported him: Isaac ben Zevi and David Ben-Gurion. Ben Gurion proved especially vocal in showing through logic, example, and, in strong words, that every Hebrew school now or in the future could not succeed in solving the problem of Hebrew education, for it was not obligatory, and voluntary education is disregarded by most people. As long as teaching the Hebrew language will not be an obligation upon our children, most of them will remain ignoramuses.

It is difficult to describe the great ferment that this suggestion aroused. The delegates jumped from their places moving excitedly, everyone demanding permission of the speaker immediately, without waiting a moment, as if any delay was likely to return our world to void and chaos. I saw before me flaming faces, hands flying high, mouths wide open, and I heard voices and shouts that joined the ear-splitting tumult.

Why were the Hebraists so excited?

The suggestion was not, truly, based on knowledge of America and its spirit, and the opponents to it did not manage to clarify for themselves the reason for their rising against it, but they had a sense that the suggestion would undermine a certain citadel. The proposers transferred to America ideas that were foreign to it in those days. In Europe, agitation over minority rights was proceeding and Jews demanded their national rights, their special schools and the right to their language in every institution of the government. These demands were suited for countries with many different nationalities. The United States was as distant from the spirit of these states as the distance of the east from the west. All of its newcomers willingly melt into one pot. The nationalists who came marched off to the cultural slaughter singing songs of praise and thanks, and

combining all of them into one, brave new nationality. But, state and religion were separated here, and all learning steeped in the spirit of religion, for example the teaching of Tanach, was barred. Those opposed to the proposal of the Labor Zionists felt its distance from reality, it even seemed to them that were it to be realized, all the Hebrew schools would be closed, and the parents would say: The public schools will teach our children Hebrew. In short: The need was, "To Save" education.

Amidst the magnitude of the confusion, the running of the meeting was given over to me; perhaps I could calm the tempers. Ben Gurion stood on the platform to defend the proposal, and his words sank and were lost in the tumult. His face hardened from rage, the protrusion of his chin stuck out towards his listeners, his hair flew about, and his eyes fired sparks of rage toward the trouble makers. I pounded my gavel on the table, I begged the delegates to calm down, but even my hoarse voice was a cry lost in the wilderness of shouts. After, Ben Gurion made another few attempts to speak, without success, he flung at his audience the word of contempt: Melamdim!

Blood rushed to my face. Was he, Ben Gurion, also among those who scorned the teachers? Even he was confused for a minute, as if he regretted his own words. Then he said: "A slip of the tongue!"

* * * * *

In the evening, a large "popular" assembly gathered. The speakers were men of note: L. Motzkin, Eliezar Ben-Yehuda, Henrietta Szold, Shmarya Levin, and the "national preacher" Zevi Hirsch Masliansky. The last mentioned reminisced about when he came to Odessa in 1891, and participated in the gathering of "Safah Berurah," [clear speech] whose members tried to speak Hebrew, yet despite the nice name they chose for

themselves theirs was an unclear language. They tried but did not succeed. "And now go and see --- he added with pathos that gushed from his heart, because the Hebrew language was his life's ideal --- just 25 years passed since then and our language has risen to life. Incline your ears and listen to the words of the young children, whose Hebrew conversations flow as from streams of living water, as if they were of ancient days, when we dwelled on our land. Were Isaiah to arise from his grave, he would ask again his gladdening question: "Who bore these for me? By whom, then, were these reared?" And again he would call out his great soul-sustaining cry: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people!"

Shmarya Levine was the "Maftir." He gave one of his great speeches, arousing thoughts and elevating the soul. He spoke about the paralysis of the creative spirit of the people of Israel. The assimilators --- and this word he spoke with contempt --- come always to the people with the proposal "We will create with you." They never realize that the work of creation is never done in partnership. It sparkles alone, from out of solitude, and arising like a blaze which fires and lights up the world. In an orchestra of all peoples, there needs to be heard also the voice of the solo violin, all alone, expressing the feelings of the individual. And our violin will sound the music of Isaiah, our prophet and the prophet of the nations...

Shmarya, tall and gaunt, whose jaws protruded, and eyes burned with the fire of holy fury, spoke like an ancient reprover, and the sharpness of his language, the bitterness of his heart and the strength of his emotions heightened the power of his words. The spellbound listeners felt the sins of those leading them astray, and it seemed apparent to them that because of them we would lose our portion in the world. And, in their hearts, too, a spark of fury was kindled...

One study meeting was particularly new and pure. Regular meetings were filled with propaganda and tactical propaganda: Speaking in similes, screaming and arguing, and trying hard to win over the opposition; generating battles, entering heart and soul into the frenzy and participating in it: enjoying the blows back and forth.

And here there was a meeting devoted to Torah and pure bliss. I called upon Eliezar ben Yehuda to lecture on "Hebrew Pronunciation." Ben Yehuda then dwelt in New York, with his family, working on his dictionary. Chemda, his wife, worked at chasing down the rich for contributions to the publication of the dictionary, and he, Eliezer, engaged in chasing down words and examples. In the main public library they set aside for him a special room, and there he sat surrounded by books and scraps of paper. There he listed on his thousands of pieces of paper the examples and the explanatory quotations that he needed.

The audience looked to him with reverence. In him they recognized a hero, a courageous warrior. In truth, he was a thin person, small of stature, with fallen cheeks. The black strap that fell from his glasses pinching his nose gave great prominence to the paleness of his face. And, yet it was precisely his weakness, his leanness, the delicateness and the weakness of his voice that gave him the impress of a spirit, of a secluded scholar, who sacrificed the material life for the spiritual. Silence and expectations pervaded the lull, and he was listened to with baited breath.

Ben Yehuda spoke like a man of science and not like a fanatic. He did not prove that the Sephardic pronunciation that he sought to have followed was the true one. "Difficult to decide," he said, "which of the different pronunciations, the Ashkenazi, the

Sephardi, the Yemenite or the Persian or any other pronunciation, is the real one. Differences of pronunciation exist in every language, and from the sociologist's perspective there is not a correct pronunciation or an incorrect one. The pronunciation depends on the climate of the land, on the adjustment of the tools of pronunciation to local conditions, and on other conditions. The principle in which we are interested in knowing is which of the pronunciations is more similar to the pronunciation that was used among our forefathers in the Land of Israel. No voices of people from those days remain, yet we have evidence in writing, and according to it, we believe that the Sephardic pronunciation is closer to that of the ancient Hebrew pronunciation."

Then he began to bring evidence from the Targumim: From the Septuagint, and from the Greek Targum of Aquila Hager, the Targum that was found in the Cairo Geniza, and additional material from the Church Fathers. According to the way they wrote Hebrew names we see that the *Kametz* is pronounced like an 'a' with a *Patach*.

Ben Yehuda's opinion was not news to specialists, but the wider community was not accustomed to words of study at meetings, and their spirits were raised. When he concluded, the hall resounded with applause.

* * * * *

Years have passed since the time of the great debate in that committee --- almost 37 years. Since then changes have come about both in the fate of the people and in the fate of the speakers. Two of the proposers then, who were in those days leaders of a small party, small in membership, were a short time later, about half a lifetime, official representatives of our people. One of them became president, and the second prime minister in our renewed land. What does their proposal mean to us today?

In the big cities of the United States, Hebrew is taught in the public high schools. At present, about 4,000 of our children are studying language as part of their general education. And if there are not multitudes of them taking advantage of this right at taxpayers' --- Jews and non-Jews alike --- expense, it is not America's fault. Indifferent parents are to blame.

Even in the public schools, which from the day they were established at public expense, did not teach foreign languages, even in them was opened a small opening --- at present no larger than the point of a pin --- with the teaching in a few of them of French and Spanish. In 150 cities, in 34 states in the United States, foreign languages are now taught to students at a young age. Los Angeles and San Diego, California, Washington the capitol city, El Paso, Texas, Richmond, Virginia, St. Louis, Missouri, and of the cities close to New York --- Jamestown in our state, and Summerville in New Jersey, are especially prominent in this regard.

For what reasons do we teach a foreign language to students at a young age in elementary schools? --- For a few reasons.

In places which house new settlers, Cubans, Puerto-Ricans, and Mexicans and a split appears between fathers and sons --- the young lose feelings of honor for their parents, the "Greenhorns", over their little knowledge of the language of the land --- teaching the language of father and mother helps to heal this wound and also helps to improve the relations of the American children to Spanish immigrants. And above all, educators believe that knowledge of an additional language and culture helps to withdraw the American from his provincialism and his separateness, and to provide him with a broader sense of world culture.

Our two leaders were not false prophets. Their proposals began to be effected, albeit not for their original reasons. It is not their fault if the strength of the diaspora exceeds the (Jewish) cultural desire to live on and continue! On this, their warning holds true even today.

Chapter 17

"The Maskilim In America"

Part I

The stream of immigration brought with it to the coasts of the United States, thousands of simple Jews --- craftsmen, wholesalers, small shopkeepers, and those lacking a profession and support --- and, besides them, there were also a number of Maskilim. In the pamphlet, Jews and Judaism in New York, published in 1887, the author wrote, "Many people here read the Hebrew language, periodicals that are published in Europe, and all the new and old books produced by our people of talent, are read with love, desire, and great enthusiasm in many Jewish homes."⁸³

The Maskilim were of all types --- they differed in personal characteristics, and according to when they arrived. Among the first few to come, in the 80's and 90's of the 19th century, were the old Maskilim, educated by the books of Mapu, Smolenskin and Ada"m Hacoheh. They were romantic men, admirers of the "pure" Hebrew language: the Biblical style had an euphoric effect on them, settling them in the heavenly academy, with prophets, seers and noblemen. They were the great zealots for the purity of the language, whose ears burned from any sound that was not Biblical.

At the end of the 19th century, Maskilim came from the era of Hibat Tziyon (Among the earlier group were also Hovevei Tziyon, but the ones who came after them were more openly self-conscious.) Sorrowful words played upon their souls:

Upon a luxuriant tree
 I sat calmly
 and suddenly I fell
 while still young I was plucked.
 If from the place of my birth,
 I was wandering,
 Why do I need life?

And upon seeing the setting sun these words occurred to them:

Where are you, where are you, oh Holy Land,
 my spirit longs for you...

Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, came the new Maskilim, students of Ahad Haam, whose logic overcame their sentimentalism, and who approached the realization of Zionism from a more realistic perspective. Not many years later, Zionist maskilim arrived whose ideology was composed of nationalistic and sociolistic aspirations.

These types also had different divisions: activists who were capable of mixing with the people and influencing them; and introverts, gentle folk who separated themselves from the public, isolating themselves with their books and associating with people like themselves, the "best" people, who formed the "elite" of the society.

When the first Maskilim came to America, they were very confused and feared falling, "From a high roof to a deep well." For the Maskil was elevated in his hometown above the common people. To be sure, the jealous ones despised him, and sometimes hurt him, but the general public honored him. The Maskil read newspapers, and knew the ways of the world; he worried about K'lal Yisrael, he demanded changes in the public

institutions, and he protected the deprived. When the Maskil came to America, he saw an "upside-down world." Workers, ignoramuses, the poorest of the poor overseas, whose opinions were ignored in their hometowns --- and if one dared to open his mouth he was rebuked by the parnas or cut down by a householder with a "Quiet, tailor!" or: "Shut your mouth, simpleton!" --- here, in the land of equality, they seized power for themselves and made themselves leaders. They established organizations and stood at their heads, even if they were small organizations and of little means; they became *gaba'im* in synagogues and Talmud Torahs --- even if they were small and poor. The new "leaders" who had previously been objects of and insulted, demanded damages for their days of poverty and shame. They wanted to take their revenge on the "beautiful Jews" who had taken advantage of them. Every intelligent phrase and every noble movement angered them, as if they only came about to remind them of their inferiority. The psychology of "*eved ki yimloch*."⁸⁴ was prominent in them. They became masters and providers, chose rabbis, cantors, teachers, and articulated their fates. They mocked every intelligent person. Anyone who felt superior to them in thoughts, in knowledge, and in behavior, was considered a "loafer", and a "dreamer of dreams", and they called him disgraceful names. The masses were intoxicated with their newfound power, their self-confidence soared, and the wisdom of the Maskil was contemptible in their eyes.

Moshe Weinberger, author of the pamphlet, "Jews and Judaism in New York," described the rise of the crowd: "I must first introduce you to several of the differences between synagogues here and in our native lands, and they are: In all other lands congregants are unequal and treated accordingly, each man attaining honors commensurate with his status and worth. In America, all are equal and treated alike.

⁸⁴ When a slave is given the opportunity to become king. Psychologically, the slave is unable to perform a king's role.

There is a dear and wonderful expression for this among the congregations here: "Equal hats make men equal;"

The results born out of these powerful changes are considerable and numerous, but here we will only consider those that pertain to our issues, and they are: 1) many of those who were not privileged, when they were in their native lands, to come into the company of other people, could find here friends to mingle with, and they became people more refined;

2) The inferior among the people who never had their own opinions and were always forced, before they left their places, to answer, "amen," to everything on which others spoke their own minds, here are privileged not only to make their opinions known publicly --- they no longer need councils and others' opinions --- but if fortune smiles upon them, in another year or two they may be leading movers and shakers; hundreds of people desiring their advice and rejoicing over everything they say.

3) Brazen outlaws, people who in their homeland were excluded from society, forced always to stand at the side of the road asking every passerby what was happening behind the closed doors of the town hall,⁸⁵ hold their heads high in this country. They are like a cancer of thorns and thistles spreading amidst people of wisdom and ideas --- never lacking, thank God, in any congregation --- preventing them from boosting the community's honor, and, consequently, that of Torah and Judaism.

The educated were embittered about the new ways of the world. If it was difficult for simple Jews to make the adjustments and they would complain about the land of

⁸⁵ lit. within the enclosure. Reference to "within the Temple enclosure."

Columbus --- it was even more difficult for the Maskil. His public status plummeted, while that of the simple people soared to greatness. He was not used to physical work. There, in his hometown, he had time to read a book, to discuss issues that stood over and above the world. Here, there were only two paths open to him, the way of the merchant and the way of the worker, mostly tailor's work, and neither of them was wrapped in roses. The merchant was bound up in spiritual misery --- humiliated from knocking on doors and the rudeness of the people who refused to pay their obligations. The work --- the hours were very long and the manager, known as the foreman, was the taskmaster and the oppressor, and their bodies were broken and crushed, and the heart was not open any more to spiritual issues. So, the Maskilim's world was dark for them in their first years.

Part II

As pointed out, the Maskilim were divided into theorists and pragmatists. The former were isolated from the crowd and congregated in the big and medium-sized cities, into "Shochrei Sefat (Ever," and for "Chovevei Sefat (Ever, and "Achi(ever," as well as other societies of this kind, and they would gather from time to time to listen to a lecture on literary issues, and to enjoy a nice conversation, and to support literary publication. But if the Maskil wandered to a small American town, far from Jews, he ended up, during his days, far from his spiritual world, and he was swallowed up into the work of the natives and their way of life.

The pragmatists entered Jewish society and influenced wherever they could. They were founders of the Zionist groups and establishers of Talmud Torahs. For much of what remains of the remnant of Jewish life here we have the Maskilim to thank.

The total number --- if not the percentage --- of Maskilim was not at all small, Tens of thousands without a doubt. They included the students of the big yeshivas from Lithuania and Poland, for when they went out into the world they looked and "were affected." If someone tried to publish a Hebrew newspaper here --- they would assist him. Moreover, the Yiddish newspapers would give, among their many articles, a little material that was appropriate for the "Maskil." Wherever there was some conflict or dispute over the meaning of the Bible, or some matter from the history of Israel, or a Talmudic problem, they would rain down letters on the editor. And to this day, we are amazed to read in Jewish newspapers "voices from the people" --- letters composed logically, with knowledge of the world, and sometimes with knowledge of the Talmud and Haskalah literature.

In America, I have met Maskilim of every style and shade, from the naive and the ones that were mocked to tragically bitter souls, from the ones hidden away in their rooms to the blessed public figures. I will mention a few of these meetings.

* * *

When I lived on the shore, near Brighton Beach, I had a close neighbor, one "Rav", a religious Hebrew Maskil who would go around from city to city to peddle a few of the books that he wrote. One of them was the Hebrew translation of the Aramaic chapters in Daniel and Ezra. The translation was in pure Biblical Hebrew. Apparently, he would collect subscriptions, during his travels, was receiving, in his travels, on a daily Orthodox newspaper that was published in New York, because from time to time he would publish letters from provincial towns, and would praise their congregational leaders. He was a lover of the "pure." Once, we met in a certain train station, and waiting for the subway that went to New York. I asked him:

"Did you read the last issue of 'HaDoar?'"

"I don't read 'HaDoar!'", he answered angrily.

"Why?"

"You ask why?" he raised his voice and his eyes were fueled with anger. "Because the writers of 'HaDoar' are destroying and dissecting our holy language."

"Destroying?"

"Don't you read? They are mixing Aramaic and Ashdodic words with the Hebrew. They are sowing a newspaper of two different seeds... if Mapu rose from his grave...to read a style like this his blood would boil...I would not like my eyes to see such profanation of the holy..."

"Do you know what I do?" He added in a whisper and drew his mouth close to my ear. "I commanded my wife when she was blessing the candles on Erev Shabbat not to continue saying, 'To kindle the light of Shabbat,' rather, 'to bring up the light of Shabbat.' 'In your bringing up the lights,' is what is written [in Scripture]; this is pure Hebrew."

* * *

One winter night, I came to the Boro Park neighborhood to lecture in Hebrew on literature or education. In the room were gathered about fifty people. In the first row sat a man on a chair who was listening to my words with much concentration. His face and his eyes testified to that. This was a man with wide dimensions, broad shouldered and broad hips. When he entered the room everybody noticed him: He was wearing a furcoat with an ungainly collar and great amounts of hair that was extraordinary in America --

- as if it was brought from Siberia. Even his hat, a Karakol hat, was a kind that wasn't found here. He contained an abundance of luxury, stature, honor, power and strength.

When I finished he came up to me and shook my hand with a handshake that was real, and he thanked me and blessed me aloud, and told me his name.

I was silent.

"You don't remember my name?" he asked with astonishment.

"No!" I stuttered with a little embarrassment.

"I am surprised. I read the 'Shachrut' frequently, (a pointed newspaper for children that I edited then and it appeared for five years) and I solved all the riddles. In almost every issue my name was listed as the puzzle solver."

Solving Hebrew puzzles --- these were the naive Maskilims' toys, and the "Tagablat" would publish, periodically, Hebrew puzzles, their solution being a verse from the Bible or a name of a hero in the history of Israel, and hundreds of people submitted their solutions, and their names were published in a special column.

* * *

In "Camp Tabor," the name of a summer resort, I sailed in a boat alone. I saw a man standing on the edge of the pool and following me with his eyes. He had a noble face, framed by a small, trimmed, salt and pepper beard and a protruding belly. I invited him to sit in the boat, and he accepted.

The matter was at nightfall. The shadows of the Mulberry trees reflected in the calm waters. A calm wind was covering the landscape.

My guest sat quiet and deep in his thoughts, and I did not interrupt him. The boat parted the water, and we heard only the rowing of the oars. After fifteen minutes, when the last redness was fading and disappeared, I heard from my guest a quiet melody:

A spring sun inclined eastward
to the edges of the sky,
the glory of the reddishness was made strong there
appealing to the eyes...
and he continued M'ana's song "Misa'at Nafshi," until its end.

Many many years had passed since I left Russia. Here, I put my neck to the millstone making a living, and I didn't turn to a book anymore. My youthful desire and my youthful songs were forgotten. Now, in this magical serenity, the sounds of my past have been awakened, and the things that I used to talk about and my inner thoughts came back to mind. In the beginning it was difficult for me to seize the thread that had escaped from me, but slowly I caught it. I sang the song to the end.

During the next two days that he was in the resort, he had a distant look in his eyes, he didn't socialize with the guests, and he was quiet like a person taking moral stock of his soul.

* * *

More than once I found one who had been a Maskil, but fell away during the course of his life. I was walking with my friend on Fifth Avenue in New York, and we both spoke Hebrew, perhaps not in a whisper. I saw an old man wearing a panama hat and dressed elegantly walking behind us. After a few minutes, he caught up with us and asked:

"Which language are you speaking?"

"Hebrew."

"Yes, I heard and recognized it," he answered in fancy English, "In my youthful days I was fluent in it. But it's forty years that I have been in a completely different environment. This is the first time since the day I came that I have heard it spoken and I still caught the contents..."

He then quickly distanced himself, like one who was afraid to continue the conversation.

Part III

"Relative to the large Jewish populations here," writes Mr. Weinberger in his pamphlet, "the number of Hebrew authors, poets, and intellectuals is very small, and their lot is like that of most authors since the beginning of time. Some act as teachers at the primary or secondary level, some are assistants in business, some are workers and artisans, some are peddlers, some are merchants, and most are just plain poor. At times they may work four shifts in a row, until they themselves no longer know who they are, what they are doing, and what their mission is.

Hebrew authors here cannot make much use of their knowledge or skills, and only occasionally is something of theirs seen in a book or a journal. Why then are they called authors? Because while still in their homelands they embittered their lowly lives with literary activities. But since they came to America, their eyes have been opened. They have seen that intellectual endeavors are futile. Futile too is the endeavor to preserve the outposts of knowledge, for no one will every in this way be able to produce enough food for his body to maintain himself. So they have turned their backs and chosen to address other subjects. Instead of soaring high on the wings of poetry and song, or

burrowing deeply into the world of culture, investigating and enriching scholarship, language, and literature, they delve relentlessly into the practical world, the world of the present. They concern themselves with affairs of the stomach: with livelihood and similar subjects relevant to the nitty-gritty of existence. They sink up to their necks in a torrent of present-day banalities and material possessions, just like all the rest of their Jewish brethren in this city and land."⁸⁶

The Maskilim that participated in Hebrew literature in Russia and Poland, whether they felt compelled to write or were asked to --- were very depressed and embittered. The Hebrew newspapers that bloomed and faded weren't able to pay a writer's salary. That is why they were forced to turn to the Yiddish newspapers, and the obligation to fit their writing to the public spirit deepened the wounds of their hearts. They felt that they prostituted themselves: to make tasty things for women and for the simpletons, in order to attract their heart. And what attracted their heart? --- any plots that stimulated crass emotions, any complications and miracles, robberies, murders and rape, everything that stirs the blood and excites the heart. In the daily newspapers were published delightful romantic stories serials with many continuations, and the writer's job was to finish the daily chapter with an exciting event, like when the hero is about to do some great or wonderful deed, or someone is in danger, and the reader's heart aches from the desire to know if he prevails and attains his passion, or is left in shame, or if one in trouble is saved from rape or from death. --- at this place the chapter finishes with the note, "More to come." Those who know or make up things tell stories of readers who gambled with each other, what would be the end of the romantic hero, would shoot him with a bullet from a pistol? The writer stopped and nobody knew if he was fatally wounded or if he got up on his feet and lived. The victorious one said: He

fell wounded. They came to the writer and bribed him with verbal bribes and with bribes that had greater value than the verbal ones --- in order that he would revive him in the next chapter, and so the writer did. The first one went... the story about the two who competed was long, once this one was defeated and the other won, and later the opposite. The reader can imagine its outcome.

Menachem Mendel Dolitzky, a poet who expressed the yearnings of the generation for Zion in his poems, held an important position in Russia, and was the greatest of the poets in his era, Judah Leib Gordon, wrote to him:

Here you have my pen, go up and take my place!

When he came to America he was forced to write romantics in a Jewish newspaper, fun romances, that embittered his spirit. In one of his songs, "My Heart's Logic," he expressed the bitterness of his heart. "The Virgin of Israel," depended on the violin on evenings.

Behold a different violin in your hand, you unfortunate one,
 The violin of the Levite to cry for your pain,
 In the language of David your king, in the tongue of your
 prophets,
 Where a word is a volcano, an utterance --- a sea of tears
 its voice makes mountains and hills crumble...
 But woe because you switched, virgin daughter of Judah,

From your prophet's language to the language of the Babylonian plunderer.⁸⁷

A few Hebrew writers with talents were forced to be permanent workers in Yiddish newspapers. There were those who made peace with their fate, and there were those who suffered in misery, and their work was "*avodah zarah*," "the work of foreign gods" to their final days.

Part IV

I also met the pragmatists among the Maskilim, and I heard about their activities in different cities.

When I came to Stamford, Connecticut, I found two who built up the community: David Cohen, and Jacob Berger. The latter barely made a living, because given the choice between business and communal work, communal work came first for him. He worked every day for the sake of strengthening the Zionist union, for the sake of improving the Zionist school --- "Zionist," was his formal title --- and for the sake of the Jewish Center. In the committee meetings his advice was not decisive, because he was not a man of means, and on the committee were wealthy people whose words were law, and whose advice was final. Berger was at the school from the crack of dawn until late evening and visited parents' homes, making sure that no one among would withhold a Hebrew education from his children. Almost all the city's (Jewish) children attended the school.

⁸⁷ Poem of Menachem Mendel Dolitzky, New York 1860, p.96.

There were Maskilim in different cities who left their mark on their cities. Dr. Jacob Gordon, who had been a student of Tilz Yeshivah and who studied medicine in the United States, organized Hebrew education in Minneapolis, and founded a central Talmud Torah that excelled in its organization and its studies, and educated a generation that knows Hebrew. Recently, they built a wonderful building for the Talmud Torah and named it after him. Sometimes, Hebrew Maskilim were appointed principals of educational institutions to which they brought their ideals, and imposed their own systems, and it was wonderful. Native-born Jews who are dedicated to the idea of reviving Hebrew were the students of those Maskilim. I included in this group also those who arrived in the United States, in the years of the world war, and engaged in organizing the people on a Zionist basis, and a Social Zionist basis in Europe, and their activity was seen here, too.

If an investigator sought to follow the development of Jewish spiritual life in America, he would distort history were he not to describe the activity of national activists who dedicated their time and money to promoting the continuing of Jewish education and national life in the new land. Hundreds and thousands of activists worked, each man in his city and in his congregation, never recognized by name or honored except within their limited areas. And, there were those who did not get any recognition at all, even where they lived, because all the good work was named for the rich. Our Maskilim worked out of spiritual dedication without any expectations of additional recompense besides the personal satisfaction which was theirs. These were our spiritual people, every soulful person could brag about them and say: If only my portion were with them.

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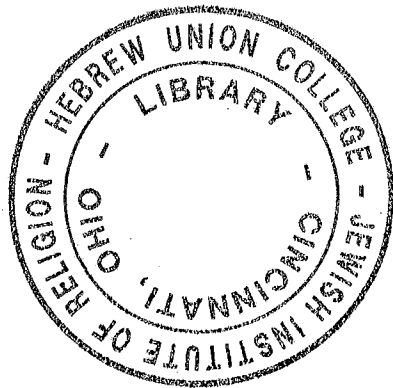
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