BERDICHEVSKY'S CULTURAL CRITIQUE OF JUDAISM

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INTRODUCTION

Micah Yosef Berdichevsky is not a well-known figure outside of the Hebrew-speaking world. With the exception of a few paragraphs in some textbooks and nine or ten pages in an anthology of Zionist thought[1] his works have not been translated into English. A small part of his enormous research into Jewish History was published posthumously in German under the title "Sinai und Gerisim." The rest, comprising enough to fill at least eight volumes, remains in manuscript form, and is only now in the process of being translated from German into Hebrew for publication (by his son) in Israel.

As for publications in Hebrew, the twenty-volume (Stiebel) edition of his collected writings, which he himself supervised and edited shortly before his death, has been re-issued within the last few years in three large volumes.[2]

The first contains two of his collections of Aggadah; the second, essays and works of criticism; and the third, six collections of short stories, his only novel ("Miriam"), and several other stories originally written in German or Yiddish.

For those who live in the world of Hebrew letters, the writings of Berdichevsky comprise a unique and valuable part of the cultural inheritance. It may seem strange that such

a talented and prolific Hebrew writer has remained all but unknown to the "outside" world. One may hazard a few tentative explanations.

In the first place, we are struck by the radical nature of Berdichevsky's critique of Jewish life. He was in a real sense a revolutionary spirit, demanding a basic and fundamental change in the whole fabric of Jewish existence. He was often bitter and sarcastic in his condemnation of the Jewish "Establishment." His pen was sometimes more destructive than a sword, and as a consequence of his intemperate nature he alienated many influential Jewish Intellectuals.[3] Finally, his Hebrew style, which contrasts markedly with the polished prose of, say, Ahad Ha-Am, did not help his cause. It would require more than the ordinary measure of sympathy, knowledge, and skill to translate Berdichevsky's essays into English, and the fact is that most of the scholars equipped to do the job are part of the very "Establishment" he castigated so violently.

For these and other reasons, even the Hebrew literature about Berdichevsky is limited to one full-length book,[4] a few important essays,[5] and chapters in textbooks of Hebrew literature. In English, one may fine an appreciative essay by Spiegel,[6] a few words by Hertzberg,[7] and a chapter here and there in the textbooks. Apart from these few secondary sources, Micah Yosef Berdichevsky is <u>terra incognia</u> for the Jewish world outside of Israel.

This paper will deal with one essay, albeit an extremely important one, "The Transvaluation of Values." In general, we will find in the essay the major aspects of Berdichevsky's position. Where an important element is not fully represented in the essay, we will supplement our presentation with some secondary sources. In quoting from the essay, every effort has been made to translate the Hebrew exactly and literally, even at the risk of sacrificing English style. The paper is divided into two sections. The first is a Biography of Berdichevsky, and the second an analysis of "The Transvaluation of Values." As an appendix, at the end of the paper, a brief biography of the major Hebrew writers mentioned in the text is included.

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Hertzberg (Ed.), The Zionist Idea (New York: Meridian, J.P.S., 1959), pp. 291-302.

2. כתבי ש.י. גרינברג

1. בעונות ובגזרות, תל אביב, עם עובד, 1957
2. מאמרים, תל אביב, דביר, 1960
3. פיוטים, תל אביב, דביר, 1960

3. The best example is Professor Klausner, whom he ridiculed unmercifully.

4. Yashurun Keshet, ש.י. גרינברג, חיים ופעלו (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1958). This book is the source of most of the biographical information contained in the first section.

5. Especially those of Lachover, Voyeslavsky, and Tchernowitz(רב צ.י.), v. Bibliography.

6. Spiegel, Hebrew Reborn (New York: MacMillan, 1930), pp. 333-374.

7. Hertzberg, loc. cit.

PART I

THE LIFE OF MICAH YOSEF BERDICHEVSKY

CHAPTER I

LIFE IN EAST EUROPE

There are some thinkers whose biography is irrelevant to their work. They who have expressed their thoughts objectively and dispassionately are easier to write about than Berdichevsky. For him every important issue, no matter how abstract it might seem to others, became a matter of intense personal concern. Whether criticizing the Jewish community or describing the new life of freedom and the return to nature which he sought to effect within that community, Berdichevsky was talking about himself. Until his eighteenth year, he lived in the heart of the tradition, as it were, establishing at a young age his reputation as a great scholar. Afterwards he left Russia and lived in Germany, but never succeeded in disentangling himself emotionally from the world he had supposedly forsaken. Criticism of Judaism was, for Berdichevsky, criticism of himself. As we examine his life, we will see the proof of such a generalization.

Berdichevsky characterized the Jewish people as being torn to shreds (פרוסים) -- one group dwelling fearfully in the dark recesses of the old world, one group forsaking that world and moving to the cities of the "West" to assimilate, and a third group trying to make a synthesis between the

two worlds but succeeding only in making themselves religious schizophrenics. This fragmentation was the source of great suffering for Berdichevsky, because he himself loved both the "old world" and the culture of the "West." He himself was torn asunder, because each world claimed his total allegiance. These "kera'im" (ס"ע"ר) -- rents -- were not abstract socio-economic-cultural considerations, subject to abstract analyses and solutions, but very real and personal facts of life. With all his heart he detested neat formulations and well-constructed sets of answers, not so much because he was convinced philosophically that there was no one, unified Truth, but because his own life, and the lives of many of the people of his generation, were so full of self-contradictions as to make "Truth" seem an idle and irrelevant word.

Micah Yosef Berdichevsky[1] was born on August 19, 1865 in the Ukranian town of Miedzibosh. His father, Rabbi Moses Aaron, was the Rabbi of the community (a position of prestige and honor, which bore with it only a small financial remuneration). Miedzibozh had been the home of the Baal Shem Tov and was considered to be the cradle of the Hasidic movement. Micah Yosef represented the sixteenth generation of a Rabbinical family, among whose illustrious scions were Rabbi Isaac HaLevi ben Moshe Ish Horowitz (d. 1517), and Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsberg (d. 1778), a disciple of the Baal Shem.

About 1870, the family moved to Dubova, where Rabbi Moses Aaron had been offered a living with better prospects. There Micah Yosef spent his childhood, which lasted for another two years. "When I grew up and attained the age of seven, the gates of the Talmud were opened to me."[2] If he had not spoken of his childhood so often, not only his stories (most of which are about life in the small East-European towns, and contain much autobiographical material) but also in his essays and works of criticisms, we might forget what such an East-European Jewish "childhood" was really like. Berdichevsky was taught that the things of the world "outside," the forests and meadows, trees, birds and flowers, were evil things and the snares of Satan. Only "inside," in the Bet Midrash and in the books of the Talmud, was the good to be discovered. The important thing was not to be seduced, not to turn one's attention away from one's studies to look at the world outside. The Mishnah (Avot, 3:7) was quite clear on that matter: "Whoever is walking along the road, studying, and interrupts his train of thought to exclaim 'that tree is very lovely' . . . the Scripture regards this person as jeopardizing his soul."

For a time, it seemed as if the boy would follow the traditional family calling. He was an extraordinary student and, by his eighteenth year, an acknowledged master of Bible, Midrash, Talmud and Kabbala. But he was also a sensitive child, aloof and introspective by nature. A combination of

of circumstances served to make him different from his contemporaries. His mother, whom Berdichevsky loved dearly, died when he was eleven, and only a few months later his father took another wife, who had two children by a previous marriage, and bore ten more to Rabbi Moses Aaron. She seems to have been a good person at heart, but a stern disciplinarian who favored her own offspring over her stepchildren. The Rabbi's household, though a center of life in Dubova, was dreadfully poor, and material want left its imprint on Berdichevsky's youth. He was not physically healthy, and the privation he suffered in childhood aggravated an inherent frailty.

What distinguished his early life most clearly was the range of his imagination. He preferred the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (though from a functional viewpoint these were almost outside the canon for an Orthodox Jew) to the Pentateuch. He wrote later of how he would picture the life in the Holy Land when there were mighty men and strong kings ruling the people. The Yiddish story books, especially the medieval "Josippon," and the other tales of the heroes of Israel, which were written especially for women, engaged his imagination far more than the laws of the Talmud.

His gift for vivid self-projection was reinforced by an extraordinary memory for sights, sounds and feelings, and by a perceptive curiosity. Those faculties were later to serve him well, for his stories of the world of his

childhood, even those written forty years later, are masterpieces of re-creation and description.

At the age of ten, he was betrothed to the daughter of a wealthy merchant, but the years before his actual marriage witnessed an ever-increasing alienation from the world in which he lived. A sensitive and poetic soul, he discovered the beauties of nature, only to be forced to suppress his inclinations and return to his study. He often wrote of his feelings during these early years of his life. "The Transvaluation of Values" begins with an autobiographical account of his life as a youngster, and the rents (ס״ערן) which were even then taking place in his soul:

Two men are walking among the trees of the forest, one a teacher and the other the student. They are discussing a difficult legal point; whether a knife can impart impurity to the food it cuts and if so whether one ought to recite a blessing over the food involved, and to what quantity of food the rule would apply. As the various opinions of the commentators are discussed, the boy notices that they are passing by a particularly lovely place, and says so, only to be immediately reprimanded by his teacher, for the Mishnah specifically prohibits interrupting one's study to look at nature. He writes of that experience,

> My God, My God! On an amount of food less than the size of an olive, even if its purity has been spoiled by the knife, the commentators are of the opinion that we must say the blessing, but on the whole of nature, on the light of life that is sown in the world, on the beauty and the

> exaltation, the height and transcendence; anyone who blesses these jeopardized his soul! I was young in these days and my head was full of the dew of youth, my heart full of feelings of freedom, and I was standing between two worlds . . . and I saw the chasm lying between the world of Israel the Grandfather, doubled over his books and his commandments, and the great wide world beyond. I saw, and my heart went out.[3]

By the time of his marriage, at the age of sixteen, Berdichevsky was already in a state of perplexity. He retained his love for the tradition he had come to know so well, and yet his love of life and his curiosity -- especially for the "heretical" writings of the Enlightenment, the Haskalah -- tended to alienate him from his surroundings. The decisive factor seems to have been his reading of Krochmal's "The Guide for the Perplexed of the Time." He confessed that he did not understand it all, but given the choice between Enlightenment and Orthodoxy, he knew he would have to choose the former. He loved his wife and during the years immediately following the marriage, he lived happily and securely with her in her father's house in the village of Teplik. He continued to excel at his studies, but he was restless. After a time, his sympathies for the Haskalah movement became known in the town and he was watched by the local Zealots. One day he was discovered by his father-in-law in the act of reading a book by Nahum Sokolov. For this heretical behavior, he was expelled from the household and his marriage was annulled.

He was then nineteen years old, with neither a clear idea of what was to become of him nor any visible means of

support. To return to his father's house was impossible, for though he cared for his father, he could not abide his stepmother, the many small children, and the poverty which pervaded the place.

He decided then to attend the Yeshiva at Voloshin, in Lithuania, where at least one might study without needing too much money to stay alive. He also hoped to be able to study openly more of the Haskalah literature, discussing it with like-minded friends, rather than being constrained, as he had been, to satisfy his curiosity at night in the privacy of his room. To an extent, his expectations were fulfilled. As he was on his own for the first time in his life, he gained self-confidence and more of a sense of purpose. He learned a great deal at the Yeshiva. He met students with whom he could reach such "modern thinkers" as Zunz and Graetz. Occasionally, one of the group could afford to buy the "scientific" journals of the day. He was more than ever a "maskil," a follower of the Enlightenment, and more than ever determined to study history, politics and philosophy. Still he kept at his rabbinical studies. In Voloshin he published his first essays, which were explanations and clarifications of various Talmudic problems. In 1886 he published a history of the Yeshivah ("Toldot Yeshivat Ayts HaHayyam"[4]) in the journal "HaAsif" of Nahum Sokolov.

After a year and a half in Voloshin, he was convinced that it would do him no further good to remain there. It

was true that his studies had been of a more intellectual and critical kind, and that he had enjoyed more freedom there than in Dubova or in Teplik, but the Yeshiva was still not the "real" world for which he longed.

Another factor compelled him to leave. Apparently, his father -- who disapproved of the Yeshiva in any case, and had sent Berdichevsky no money to live on while he was there -- was not happy at having a twenty-year-old son living so long without a wife, and put pressure on him to marry again. Berdichevsky, who wrote a great deal about his first wife, and about the basic warmth and security of his years in Teplik, gave no hint in his writings of the second marriage. We are not told of his meeting with his second wife, of his relations with her and her family, or even how long the union endured.

For about two years the couple lived in Barshad, in Poldeya, where the wife managed a large General Store while her husband continued his studies and writings. During this period he wrote his first short story, "He Looked and Became Demented" (ראה ונעשה), which was published by Y. L. Gordon in his journal, "HaMelitz." He contributed essays and studies in Jewish history to other periodicals, and in some of them his criticism of Jewish life is already to be seen.

Although we have no knowledge of his personal life during his stay at Barshad, it is clear that it was a very

important period in Berdichevsky's intellectual development. While in Barshad he made the acquaintance of Y. L. Gordon with whom he had corresponded while still at Voloshin, and he even went to Petrograd to visit his friend. The friendship was a warm one in the early stages but cooled after a time. In Gordon's letters we see first his dismay and then his dislike of Berdichevsky's spontaneous, tumultuous, disorganized thinking and writing. "You will be a very good influence on Hebrew literature, if ever you can settle down."[5] Such was the gist of one of Gordon's letters. Interestingly enough, Gordon advised Berdichevsky to go to Vienna to continue his secular and scientific studies, and offered to give him letters of introduction to Solomon Buber and others, but later he withdrew this offer.[6]

The years at Barshad were important to Berdichevsky. At Voloshin the sensitive and intuitive young man had been exposed to rigorous and disciplined study. In Barshad the intellectuality and critical acumen acquired in Voloshin became a permanent part of his personality. His sadness and sense of loneliness are also first discernable in this period. One may suppose that two primary factors were responsible for this development. It is likely that an increasing intellectualism served to alienate him even more from the world of his childhood. One must bear in mind the traumatic effect of two unsuccessful marriages (the second marriage had ended apparently under the same circum-

stances as the first; the pious father-in-law, "forbidden" books, etc.) before he was twenty-three years old;

Berdichevsky's restless intellectualism had another important effect on his career. At Berashad he developed an abiding distaste for the polished and refined style of writing. In his writings during this period, he criticized violently many of the writers of his day who, he felt, covered up basic difficulties and conflicts by elegant language. His search was for truth, and style became secondary. Not realizing that stylistic infelicities could constitute a barrier between the thought of the writer and the perception of the reader, he never achieved that lucidity and clarity characteristic of many of his contemporaries. However, complex the reasons for Berdichevsky's attitude towards the craft of writing, the fact remains that he never became a polished craftsman.

At the age of twenty-three, Berdichevsky left Berashad and began a period of aimless wandering. It was obviously a difficult time for him. Apart from identifying the names of a few town in Russia and Poland where he stayed a while, we do not know exactly where he went or by what route he eventually came to Odessa. Although he undoubtedly "learned life" in his travels, and gathered much material for both his stories and criticism, it was a bad time in his life. In one of his stories written about this period, he intimates that he was even considering suicide. Apparently he supported himself by teaching, tutoring children and writing.

In 1889, at the age of twenty-four, he arrived in Odessa. That city was then a center of Jewish life and scholarship. Among others, Mendele, Ahad Ha-Am and Lilienblum were living in Odessa at the time, and Berdichevsky met them there. In Odessa, the Jewish community was vigorous and flourishing, and there, too, the Hibbat Zion movement had its center. He was drawn to the vital Jewish communal life and to many of the young writers active in various literary circles. He was determined to matriculate at a good university and, since Tsarist policy excluded Jews from higher Russian academic institutions, he decided to prepare in Odessa for a university career in Germany.

He stayed in Odessa until the spring of 1890. During that year he learned a little Russian, but did not achieve facility in the language. He did not get on well with many of the literati of the city. Odessa was a center of sophistication, and he was ill at ease in a worldly-wise environment. His violent emotions, the contradiction between his feelings for the traditional Jewish world and the lure of the secular, modern world, his dislike of polished and stylized expression achieved at the expense of the painful search for truth, his own uncertainty of purpose and inelegance of expression -- all these prevented him from showing up at his best; indeed, he made for himself more opponents than friends. In comparison with the cultivated writers of Odessa, he was still immature.

CHAPTER II

TO THE WEST

Berdichevsky left Russia in the spring of 1890. Despite his eagerness to enter a university, he considered the day of his departure from his native land as one of the darkest in his life. His immediate destination was Frankfort-Am-Main, where there was a large and wealthy Jewish community. He thought that there he might best support himself, especially as some relatives of his father lived in that city. To his dismay, he found that there was no university in Frankfort! He left immediately for Breslau, which was also a large Jewish center.

Breslau attracted him for another reason. David Frishman, who, although Berdichevsky's senior by only five years, was already a well-known and respected figure in Hebrew literature, had also come to that city to study at the university. The two became friends. Berdichevsky worked hard at learning German, but the language difficulty kept him from attending lectures until the next year. It is worth noting that before actually beginning to attend lectures at the University, he studied at the Royal Academy of Arts. He had been an amateur painter, and considered taking up an artistic career. That idea came to naught, and by 1891 he was working seriously in the faculties of Philosophy and

Mathematics. To keep himself alive he worked at a book bindery, but he never had enough money to afford more than one meal a day. His health was bad, and made worse by fatigue and a lack of warm clothing, but most of all he suffered emotionally from a lack of purpose in life. His emotional connection with the world of his ancestors was stronger than ever, now that he had left that world, and Berdichevsky suffered here too from a sense of loneliness and isolation.

In his later years, Berdichevsky saw more clearly how his own personal situation was a reflection of the life of the Jewish people as a whole. By calling to witness his whole life, Berdichevsky could attest to the reality of the alienation of the Jews from the world, the forces which rent them into tatters and shreds, and the impossibility of exerting a positive influence in the world so long as they were torn apart from within. In Breslau he felt the truth of this perception for the first time. It became clear to him that his vocation would have to be that of a Jewish publicist, at one and the same time an uncompromising critic of the conditions which caused the Jewish people to be so out of place in the world and a prophet calling them to a new life; although he did not yet know what the conditions of this new life would be.

In 1892, Berdichevsky gave vent to his frustration and unhappiness in a long and turbulent essay, "The Authority of the Individual in Relation to the Group" (רשות היחיד בצבור).

It was an uneven and highly subjective work, bitter and sarcastic in tone, with brilliant insights vitiated by confused logic and emotional excesses. He castigated the Jewish world, the Zionist movement, the settlements in Palestine, Hebrew literature, and many important men. The essay aroused a great controversy and provoked ironical and sarcastic replies from many quarters.

Regardless of the psychological roots of this essay, the net result of its publication was detrimental to Berdichevsky. Now he was more than ever alienated, not only from the world of Breslau and the University, which had always been foreign to him, but from much of the modern Jewish world as well. Berdichevsky wrote of these times in many of his stories. We have been left the picture he himself painted, that of a strange, silent, lonely student, oppressed by a sense of failure, by hunger and poverty, unable to return to the world he had forsaken when he "went West," and likewise unable to find meaning in his life in the new world. Under such conditions, men become revolutionaries. It was in Breslau, at a time of absolute failure and despair that Berdichevsky determined to effect the revolution in Jewish life which would remove the cause of his personal suffering, and the suffering of the Jewish people which he saw illustrated in his own life.

"The Authority of the Individual in Relation to the Group" was in many ways an angry and immature work, yet it marked the end of Berdichevsky's intellectual childhood.

After this crisis in his life, he was no longer a pathetic (if brilliant) student of Jewish affairs, but an active critic and spokesman for a new kind of Judaism.

By now his estrangement from traditional Judaism was complete. He refused to teach Hebrew to the children of the local Jews, and to have anything more to do with the world which had caused him such misery. Instead Berdichevsky consciously turned to Western literature and the values of Western European life. He thought of marrying a non-Jewish woman. Indeed, if his story "Mahanayim" (מחנים) is to be considered autobiographical, it was as a result of an unhappy love affair with a half-Jewish girl ("Hedwig") that he left Breslau for Berlin. As his fluency in German increased, he was able to read more than ever the works of non-Jewish writers and thinkers.

Basically, what happened during that period of Birdichevsky's sojourn in Breslau was simply the concretization of a tendency which had begun at Volozhin: The problem of the Jew as the modern world became for him no longer only a conflict of feelings, but a conflict of ideas. The process of intellectualization fixed the dichotomy in his soul; he no longer <u>felt</u> the difference between the two worlds, he <u>knew</u> it to be a fact. This was in a sense a destructive step in Berdichevsky's development; the rents and chasms (סדקים), were now no longer transient emotions, dependent on mood or temper, but a permanent part of his life, and the anguish they caused was likewise permanent.

But in a larger sense, his intellectualization of the problem was crucial to his development as a thinker and critic. Only when the "rents" were seen to transcend his own personal feelings could there be productive discussion of them, scientific and literary criticism about them, historical and sociological research to determine their origins and a demand for a transvaluation of values to remove them. This was the fruit of Berdichevsky's sojourn at Breslau.

At the age of twenty-seven (at the end of 1892 or beginning of 1893) Berdichevsky left Breslau for Berlin. Perhaps he left because of an unhappy love affair, or perhaps because, after two semesters in the philosophy faculty of Breslau, he was convinced that he could learn more at Berlin. In any case, it was a decisive move in his development as a man and as a thinker. By choosing to go to Berlin, the center of secular, western, scientific and philosophical studies, Berdichevsky had cast his lot, once and for all, with the western world. Of course he remained in his heart very much a Jew. There was no diminution of his concern for the plight of his people. Indeed, as the matter became intellectualized, his concern for his people increased, and he spent the remainder of his life writing about Jewish matters. But he was from that moment a Western Jew. That he chose Berlin rather than Vienna (as Gordon had suggested), which was closer in spirit to the world of Russia and Poland, closer to the Jewishness of his childhood, is indicative of

his resolve to identify with the West rather than return to the East. With the move to Berlin, Berdichevsky, the Jew of the nineteenth century, gave way to Berdichevsky, the modern, mature, twentieth-century, Jewish thinker.

One of the immediate causes for the move to Berlin seems to have been the offer of some financial support from the Academy of Jewish Science, the Reform Jewish seminary founded by Abraham Geiger. He attended lectures at the Academy, and promptly registered at the University. He continued to publish his writings in various Journals, and to carry on an extensive correspondence with other Jewish writers, especially Y. L. Peretz and Frishman. Frishman remained in Breslau but they corresponded often. Berdichevsky respected and admired his friend, but his affection was not always reciprocated, as Frishman had a confirmed disposition to sarcasm, and was impatient with the still awkward, bashful, lonely and impulsive Berdichevsky.

He progressed with his studies, reading voraciously in many fields at once. His range of interests and overwhelming curiosity made him an undisciplined student, however, and after three semesters at Berlin University, he found himself again dissatisfied with his academic progress. In addition to bearing the burden of poverty, he was terribly lonely in Berlin, suffering especially from a lack of female companionship. Women were not permitted to study at the University, and Berdichevsky, who had been twice married

and divorced, still did not know how to court women, what to say to them, or even how to meet them and make friends! When an elderly spinster, a relative of Leopold Zunz (the head of the Academy of Jewish Science), who had heard of Berdichevsky from Zunz but had never met him, gave Berdichevsky a small sum of money, he seized the opportunity to leave Berlin and go to Switzerland. There in the fall of 1894 he registered at the University of Bern.

Life at Bern was in many ways more pleasant for him. There were more Jewish students, especially from Russia, and women were allowed to study at the University. The scenery was more beautiful, and this was important to Berdichevsky, who had continued to sketch and paint whenever he could find time. Student life was less constrained and more interesting. With large numbers of Russian Jewish students, there were continuous debates with the Socialist, Zionist and the Marxist elements all represented.

Berdichevsky did not come out of his shell overnight. He remained indigent, bashful, awkward in his social relationships, and for the most part alone. He lived by himself, outside of the student quarter, reading books in the solitude of his room while life went on around him. But in Bern, Berdichevsky discovered again the wonders of Nature. His doctrine of radical individualism, which played an important role in his formulation of the "Transvaluation of Values," was reinforced and complemented by the sense of a transcendent Nature -- joining all individuals into a

common bond of humanity. Berdichevsky had felt close to Nature even as a small child, and now this feeling came back to him, and was metamorphosed into part of his intellectual frame of reference. We will see how this theme will be of central importance in Berdichevsky's philosophy. The natural beauty of Switzerland overwhelmed him. He walked, alone, for days upon end among the mountains and villages surrounding Bern.

In contrast to the powerful emotions which filled his heart at the sight of the gradeur and beauty of Nature, Berdichevsky's inability to find meaningful human relationships (with a few exceptions), both with men and women, became a cause of the most acute personal suffering for him. The autobiographical story which he wrote about his stay in Bern, "A Raven Flew By" (עורב עבר), shows signs of a growing misanthropy, a personal loneliness becoming hardened into a positive hatred of one's fellow man. Berdichevsky was by now thirty years old, and a productive writer and critic. He had made a name for himself in the world of Hebrew letters, had written more than 150 essays, stories, and works of criticism, was progressing in his studies, but with all that, he remained an emotionally immature person. Though he had gone a long way in his intellectual development (parts of his major essay, "The Transvaluation of Values" had already been published), his personal life was a shambles.

Early in 1896, Berdichevsky received his doctoral degree from Bern and his formal academic career was completed. His

thesis was on "The Relationship Between Aesthetics and Ethics." When he wrote of his success to Frishman, the latter congratulated him, and with the characteristically barbed sarcasm with which he treated his young admirer, added a final line to his letter, "Just as you've become a Doctor, so may you become a man."[6] The thrust hurt Berdichevsky deeply. Indeed the relationship between the two was so one-sided as to hardly be called a "friendship," but despite everything, it lasted for many years. Desperately poor, Berdichevsky tried to borrow enough money from Frishman for train fare back to Berlin. He had originally considered going to Lodz, where Frishman lived at the time, in the hope that the latter would find him some kind of remunerative work, but that idea came to naught. Frishman could not help him at all, except that he promised to intercede on Berdichevsky's behalf with several publishers, for, despite his growing fame, Berdichevsky still had great difficulty in finding publishers for his work.

At length Berdichevsky visited Ahad Ha-Am in Zurich, for he had heard of a new journal which the latter was about to establish in Berlin. With hopes and expectations, though without any definite offer or plan for his life, Berdichevsky returned to Berlin. He had finished his schooling, was master of both the Jewish and secular philosophical disciplines, was ready for activity and work, but had nothing concrete to work on! He was hampered in his search for one

fixed direction in life -- now that he stood at a crossroad -- by a propensity which had become even ten years before, in Bershad, characteristic of him. Interested in many subjects at one and the same time, plagued by personal and intellectual doubts, fanatically devoted to the search for absolute truth, compelled to see truth in all sides of every argument, he was constitutionally incapable of making any final and irrevocable decision. He stood precariously with one foot in the camp of the Jewish world and one foot in the camp of the West, so to speak. Paradoxically, it was just because he found compelling truth in both camps that he could find no rest in his soul.

In any event, he had by now accumulated a pile of manuscripts in search of a publisher, and he pinned his hopes for regular and gainful employment on the projected journal to be edited by Ahad Ha-Am. His expectations were fulfilled and when it finally appeared, in the fall of 1896, under the name of "Ha-Shiloach" (השלח), Berdichevsky was listed as a regular contributor. Here began one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of modern Hebrew literature, for Ahad Ha-Am and Berdichevsky were so opposed to each other in outlook and temperament as to render incredible the very idea of their collaboration.

CHAPTER III

BERDICHEVSKY AND AHAD HA-AM

In the second issue of "Ha-Shiloach," Berdichevsky wrote "An Open Letter to Ahad Ha-Am," demanding more space in the journal and more consideration for the needs of the younger generation, the radicals like himself. Ahad Ha-Am replied in the third issue (January 1897), and all through that year the controversy raged. Indeed, Berdichevsky's place in "Ha-Shiloach" was soon lost to him. Because of financial and operational difficulties -- Ahad Ha-Am edited from Odessa, the publishing firm ([illegible]) was in Warsaw, and the place of publication Berlin (Russian censorship compelled this arrangement) -- the journal suspended publication with its twelfth edition in the middle of 1897. After Ahad Ha-Am returned from the First Zionist Congress, and "Ha-Shiloach" appeared again, he would not give Berdichevsky a steady position. It was too clear to him, he wrote, that they would never agree nor understand each other, and there was no point in continuing to collaborate.[7] Nevertheless, Ahad Ha-Am (with the help of Frishman) succeeded in persuading the publishers to make Berdichevsky their agent in Berlin.

Berdichevsky complained bitterly about Ahad Ha-Am's decision not to allow him to work on the journal. He bombarded him with temperamental letters of protest, alternately

bemoaning his fate and boasting that he did not need the work anyhow. Ahad Ha-Am remained firm and yet sympathetic. He even agreed to publish a turbulent and childish "Letter of Resignation" in Ha-Shiloach. He remained convinced that Berdichevsky had great native talent and sensitivity, but that his inconsistency of thought and impossible Hebrew style, along with his personal irritability and confusion, not only prevented him from communicating his "message" to the world, but stood as an obstacle to his own development. Ahad Ha-Am wrote all these things to Berdichevsky in his letters,[6] plainly and firmly, but with the fair-mindedness and compassion which were characteristic of him. Berdichevsky responded emotionally and temperamentally.

In the world of Jewish thought, Berdichevsky soon became known as the מתנגד, the opponent, of Ahad Ha-Am. We have seen how Berdichevsky had maintained an extensive correspondence with many other Jewish thinkers of his day; with Gordon, Peretz, and Frishman, among others. But in Ahad Ha-Am he found an opponent <u>par excellence</u>. Here was a man with whom he could disagree with all his heart, yet who was enough of a "gentleman" to take him seriously, appreciate the value of his position (even though he disagreed violently with it), put up with his eccentric behavior and propensity to emotionalism, answer his criticisms fairly and judiciously, and remain a friend even when the two had reached a point where amicable discussion was no longer possible. Their relationship was, therefore, unlike that of Berdichevsky with

Frishman, for Ahad Ha-Am was too sensitive a man to engage in the sarcasm and mockery which Frishman used in response to Berdichevsky's emotional outpourings. Because Ahad Ha-Am and Berdichevsky respected each other, even in disagreement, their controversy was in a real sense mutually beneficial.

It is true that Ahad Ha-Am was the older of the two (by nine years), and influenced Berdichevsky more than he was influenced by him. Still it may be said that neither can be fully understood without reference to the other. Their relation was one of total and absolute opposition on the vast majority of issueswith which they both dealt, and the material to document this generalization offers an embarrassment of riches.

At each and every turn, the two stood at opposite poles, both in matters of temperament and concerning their view of the nature of Jewish history and Jewish existence. Yet each was in some measure a reflection of the other. More than anything else it was in reaction to Ahad Ha-Am that Berdichevsky pressed his claim for a transvaluation of values, and because of Berdichevsky, Ahad Ha-Am wrote some of his finest essays.[9]

Lachover has given one of the best expressions of the relationship by comparing Berdichevsky to Ahad Ha-Am

"as a later teacher who disputes with an earlier teacher."[10] Ahad Ha-Am was the older, more established figure, and Berdichevsky was one of those who wrote for him. Ahad Ha-Am received countless

letters and manuscripts from Berdichevsky. He studied, criticized, re-wrote, accepted or rejected the things Berdichevsky sent him. Their early correspondence, beginning in the spring of 1896, is almost all about the matter of the journal, and the reasons for accepting or rejecting various manuscripts. Ahad Ha-Am was solicitous in behalf of Berdichevsky's fortunes as, indeed, of the fortunes of many other young Hebrew writers. He con-gratulated the young man for ventures well done and scolded him for his failings. When Berdichevsky, for example, sent him two short essays (one was "מראה הבזק") in May, 1897, the latter explained the reasons for not publishing them. In one essay he found that there were too few facts and too many generalizations. Secondly, it was too controversial, and "Ha-Shiloach" was not so financially stable as to be able to risk a storm of criticism which the essay might engender.

> As for your second essay, it is difficult for me to make a clear judgment . . . since I couldn't read your hieroglyphics. . . . It may be possible for me to publish it if you'll give it to me written clearly, with a space between the lines, as is customary among us . . ."[11]

Such was the tenor of much of their correspondence, the bulk of which dates from 1897-1902. Berdichevsky bombarded Ahad Ha-Am with letters and manuscripts (many of Ahad Ha-Am's replies begin with the phrase, "I received your letters . . .") and Ahad Ha-Am, in a fatherly way, tried to tone down the shrillness, make sense of the content of his essays, and correct his syntax.

We will have occasion to see some aspects of their controversy over the nature of Jewish history and Jewish existence. But more than any speculative disagreement which separated them was the difference in temperament. Ahad Ha-Am was above all things a calm, systematic, deliberate, careful, precise, logical and consistent person. Berdichevsky was a storm incarnate, full of rents and clefts, flashing, intuitive, often self-contradictory, bubbling, fiery, and rebellious. Ahad Ha-Am was a sage and Berdichevsky a poet; Ahad Ha-Am like a built-up, orderly city, and Berdichevsky an open field, with random paths criss-crossing among the boulders. Ahad Ha-Am was a man of knowledge, Berdichevsky a man of thoughts; the former answered questions, the latter asked questions. Ahad Ha-Am was certain he had found one truth for all generations; Berdichevsky was certain that there was no absolute truth, but only doubts and questions and more doubts. For Ahad Ha-Am the amount of Knowledge one had within him was crucial, for Berdichevsky the Existence inside one mattered most. Ahad Ha-Am raised all problems to a level of impersonal abstraction, Berdichevsky personalized abstractions and made them part of his struggling soul. Ahad Ha-Am venerated Knowledge and Intellect above all else; Berdichevsky was moved by Feeling and Will. One spoke of Judaism, the other of Jews; one looked for Truth and the other for Life; one venerated the spirit, the other the body; one wrote lucid, economical, elegant Hebrew, which said exactly what he meant;

the other expressed himself in a torrent of words which somehow meant more than it said.

There is no end to this kind of comparison. Despite the fact that "there are many things in it [i.e., in one of the essays Berdichevsky submitted for publication in "Ha-Shiloach"] which you love and I hate,"[12] Ahad Ha-Am was certainly sensitive to the genius of Berdichevsky, and made every effort to be fair to him. From Ahad Ha-Am's letters, it is apparent that Berdichevsky often complained that the editor would either not publish his essays at all because he disagreed with them, or would insist on "correcting" them to such an extent as to make them unrecognizable. Ahad Ha-Am vehemently denied the accusation. Despite his own personal disagreement, he claimed that he would publish anything worth reading, unless it were of such a violently controversial nature as to seriously damage the academic and financial reputation of the paper. There were only two conditions on which he would insist; first, that whatever he published be written in a clear and intelligible Hebrew, with no useless Talmudic metaphors, and, second, that its author write like a wise man, humbly and without arrogance.[13]

> You write as if commanded by an "angel" who is beating you and telling you: "Write!!" As for me, I can't disobey my "angel" who tells me "These things please me, but those things don't please me."[14]

On the other hand, Berdichevsky genuinely admired and respected Ahad Ha-Am. That he sent him several letters for every one he received in reply; that he submitted his work to

Ahad Ha-Am to be judged and criticized, and, with all his grumblings and complaints, accepted the criticisms, and the editing and suggestions as best he could; that he valued Ahad Ha-Am's friendship and guidance even though he was constitutionally incapable of changing either himself or his Hebrew style to suit the other; these things are apparent even in reading only Ahad Ha-Am's replies to his letters, and bespeak an abiding attachment which lasted for many more years than one would have thought possible.

Berdichevsky likened his relationship with Ahad Ha-Am to that which Nietzsche described himself as feeling for the French philosopher, Paul Rée. It was a perceptive analogy. In the preface to his book "The Genealogy of Morals," Friedrich stated,

> It seems to me that never in my life have I read seriously a book which so compelled me to oppose in my heart each and every section, each and every sentence in it, like the book of my friend Paul Rée, "Concerning the Origin of the Moral Emotions," a sly book which, reading between the lines alone, caused me to turn the whole matter topsy turvy . . .[15] The same thing happened to me when I read "At the Crossroad" (" [illegible] ") by Ahad Ha-Am. Since I began to read I hadn't ever read an intelligent discussion of this sort which, together with feelings of respect which I felt in my heart towards them, aroused in me such a violent opposition to so many of their thoughts, and to sayings and to ideas; that they compelled me to come to different conclusions about the subjects under discussion.[16]

The "different conclusions" will become apparent in the course of our analysis of Berdichevsky's thought, in the next section. It was clear, however, that Berdichevsky's affiliation with "Ha-Shiloach" was not a viable arrangement. In

his naivete, he was hurt and disappointed by the loss of his position as a regular contributor. In reaction to this loss he began to write in German for the first time, thinking to compensate for his failure in Hebrew by a success in German. Five or six stories resulted from this decision, and some of them were indeed published in various journals. It was to prove a temporary inclination, however. After a few years, Berdichevsky abandoned his ambition to become a great writer of German fiction. He lamented the fact that his German stories were not distinguished, and realized that his character, and his vocation in the world of Jewish belles-lettres compelled him to write in the true language of Jewish thought, that is, in Hebrew.

CHAPTER IV

BERDICHEVSKY AS A MATURE WRITER

By the beginning of 1898, he was back where he started; restless and lost, contributing sporadically to various journals, and eking out a precarious existence as a publisher's representative in Berlin. He was still, in his thirty-third year, uncertain of his future. He had made a few good friends, and was thus not as lonely as he had been, but was still confused and restless. The Warsaw publishing house then closed its Berlin office, during the summer of 1898, and Berdichevsky was left with no permanent means of support at all. Despite this, he continued to write in Hebrew, German, and Yiddish. A half dozen of his finest stories, several essays (including "The Transvaluation of Values"), and many smaller works of criticism date from this period.

Berdichevsky moved to Weimar in 1898, hoping to work on a novel in German in the peace and quiet of a smaller town. Weimar had been the city of Goethe, and was then the home of Nietzsche. Berdichevsky did actually visit Nietzsche's sister several times, the German thinker being by then incurably ill. He wrote, in German, a large book of Jewish recollections and images (of which all but one chapter was somehow lost), and several other stories, also in German, about East European Jewish life.

That same year, Berdichevsky moved from Weimar to Bukau. His fortunes improved with the acceptance of some of his German stories by various publishers and (consequently?) with the acceptance of several of his Hebrew essays by other journals. He was slowly beginning to gather around him a group of writers whose radical views coincided with his, also perhaps his success in writing German had raised his prestige.

Among them, the members of the group scraped together enough money (by setting up a kind of joint stock company) to establish their own publishing house in 1899. The first four pamphlets issued by the "Youth" -- for they called their house "Tse'irim" (צעירים) -- were four of Berdichevsky's essays. Ahad Ha-Am was pleased to learn of the undertaking, but advised him, before publishing his essays, to give them "to someone who knows the grammar of the [Hebrew] language to correct the many mistakes which deform their character."[17] With the establishment of the new publishing house, Berdichevsky, for the first time, had become a "success." His work became widely known and he himself became an important and controversial figure in Hebrew literature.

The "Tse'irim" continued to publish for twelve years, and gained a wide following among the younger generation of European Jews. Keshet observes[18] that the pioneers of the early years of the century, who went up to rebuild the Holy Land, were recruited from among these very students and intellectuals, who responded so eagerly to the call for a

Transvaluation of Values, and whose longings the "Tse'irim" reflected and symbolized. "If that generation took the concept of 'national Judaism' from Ahad Ha-Am, they took the longing for a new kind of personal existence from Berdichevsky."[19]

In many respects, 1899 was the most important year of Berdichevsky's life. Not only did he (in founding and leading the "Tse'irim") finally achieve some measure of success and an intellectual stability which had up until then been potential more than actual, but he met Rachel Ramberg. She had come from Poland to Berlin in 1899 to complete her general education and her training in the profession of dentistry. She was a highly gifted woman and at the same time endowed with great sensitivity and sympathetic understanding. When she met Berdichevsky, he was, despite his talent and fame, a lonely and emotionally confused man. Because of his relationship with her, he found at last some inner security and stability. The positive and constructive aspects of his personality and his capacity to lead a normal, social existence came to the fore when he was with her, replacing the nihilism, bitterness and misanthropy which had hitherto been his most prominent characteristics.

Berdichevsky went to Berlin in 1900, also to receive training as a Dental Technician. After they were married, both he and Rachel worked together. During that same year, 1900, he travelled to Warsaw with his fiancee to meet his

future in-laws, and while there arranged for the publication of nine collections of stories. He even sent a story to Ahad Ha-Am, who published it in Ha-Shiloach. Then the two went on to Dubova, to see his father again for the first time in twelve years. In the spring of the year, they were married by his father in Kazatin, a town half-way between Warsaw and Dubova, where most of the family lived, and then Berdichevsky and his wife returned to Dubova to spend the summer in his father's house.

Having decided that they would not live permanently in Russia, the couple went to Vienna, then to Munich and Prague, trying to decide where to live. In the end, they chose Breslau, and for nine years thereafter Berdichevsky lived in that city. On the surface of things, it was a surprising choice. Vienna had a greater Jewish population, more good libraries and schools, and was closer to his father to whom he had remained attached during the years. Keshet suggests[20] that Berdichevsky's return to the place where he had previously been so profoundly miserable suggests a romantic rather than a pragmatic disposition, a psychological need to triumph over an environment in which he had once been so unhappy. The house they took was in the same poor quarter of town, and indeed on the same street where he had lived as a student ten years earlier.

Breslau was a provincial city, neither the home of a vital Jewish community nor a center of German cultural or intellectual life. Its cultural provincialism was a mixed

blessing for Berdichevsky. On the one hand, he missed the movement and the life of an active intellectual and cultural atmosphere. He was not "at home" in that city, disliking the Jews he met and making but one or two friends among them. He was cut off from his circle in Berlin, and treated by the local population not as a conquering hero (as he had been in Berlin) but a strange Eastern Jew. It was difficult to earn a living; both he and his wife worked at the dental profession; he in the technical side of it (making plates, bridges, etc.) and she as a dentist. After a few years, she gave up her own practice and became an assistant to another dentist.

On the other hand, removed from the busy cultural and political atmosphere of both the German and Jewish worlds, Berdichevsky had peace and quiet in which to work. Interestingly enough, during these first years of the 20th century, he wrote a great deal in Yiddish. Eventually, Berdichevsky's Yiddish stories and folk tales, which form an important, if separate, part of his creative work and are significant within the world of Yiddish literature, filled three volumes.

His inclination to write Yiddish, which had been aroused primarily by his visit to Dubova, may seem strange in one who had been so violent a critic of contemporary Jewish life. Partly it is to be explained by some change in his own personality, now somewhat less troubled and more relaxed than it had been. Partly, also, he discovered, both in his own wife and when he visited his native town, the positive side --

the humanity and occasionally the strength -- of the life of Russian Jewry. This is not to imply that his criticism of Jewish life and Jewish values was beginning to lose its edge. Far from it! He remained for the rest of his life an angry protagonist of a new set of values to revive a moribund community. But now his basic criticism no longer blinded him to those things of value which yet remained in the people, despite the tradition, so to speak. And his recognition of these vital aspects of Jewish life, which found expression both in his stories and his Yiddish writings was surely of value both to his criticism itself and to the contribution it engendered to the realm of Jewish belles-lettres. It is probably that if Berdichevsky had returned directly from Dubova to Berlin to share in the busy life of that city, his sensitivity to this positive aspect of Jewish folk life, born again in Dubova, would have died in its infancy. Although it is true that Berdichevsky's enduring fame rests upon his Hebrew writings, and that his stories in Yiddish and German are only episodes and occasions in his development, his work in these languages is not without importance in Jewish literary history.

While in Breslau, he continued to busy himself with the publications of the "Tse'irim," and two more full-length books, published in Warsaw appeared in 1903. Berdichevsky remained the same kind of critic he had always been. Though his personal life was certainly happier and more stable than ever (despite the fact that his economic situation was still

precarious), the pain in his heart over what he considered the spiritual and physical degradation of his people never left him. Almost against his will, he had set himself up as a critic of the old values and a proponent of the new. His place was of necessity in opposition to the status quo, and, as such, was a lonely and isolated place for him to occupy.

Berdichevsky's alienation from the main stream of the community, exacerbated by his dislike for the particular types of Jews he found around him in Breslau, was further increased by his lack of a clear and systematically-conceived alternative to the Jewish status quo. Had he been, for example, simply a political Zionist, like Hertzl -- committed first and foremost to such a tangible and concrete program as the rebuilding of the Jewish State -- his lot would have been easier. He would have had something simple and direct to fight for. Had he been, like Ben Yehudah, wholeheartedly an advocate of the Hebrew language as the primary means of rebuilding the people; or a protagonist of Yiddish, like Peretz; or a Socialist, like A. D. Gordon; or a Torah-centered Orthodox Jew, like Rav Kook -- had Berdichevsky been any one of these kind of figures, he would have been a happier and more secure person (and perhaps a more immediately effective critic). But it was not in Berdichevsky's character to be any one of these men. Indeed, he shared a part of all their programs and philosophies, but, always a seeker of Absolute Truth, he saw too clearly their many

faults and flaws. Seeing the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the many programs and movements of his day, Berdichevsky wrote honest and direct criticisms of them, thus alienating many of the intellectual leaders of the generation. So he never subscribed wholeheartedly to any program. He never submerged himself in a transcending Cause, or became one of many movers in a greater Movement. Hence his alienation was complete; not only was he cut off from the Jews, but also from the critics of the Jews.

Indeed, Berdichevsky's unique place in the history of Jewish thought was assured by the variety of his interests. Writing prolifically in three languages (each of which showed a different aspect of his personality), he was a philosopher, critic, writer, historian, Talmudist, collector of Aggadah, and more. The same variety of interests, however, tore him to shreds, isolating him from his more one-sided contemporaries, and filling his own personal life with an ever-present sadness. Active and involved in so many areas of inquiry, he found peace and security in none of them. To use Keshet's phrase, Berdichevsky's "sadness was like that of a pagan, springing from a superfluity of gods."[21]

Berdichevsky lived in Breslau for nine and a half years. They were enormously productive years from a literary and critical standpoint, but he felt them to be years of frustration and despair. He never had more than barely enough money to support his wife and child. His pessimism about the condition of the Jews led him to swear off writing in Hebrew,

for he found nothing but disappointment (financially and spiritually) in his relations with most of his editors, fellow writers, and, indeed, most of his readers.

> Days and years have passed by me during which I have neither read nor written Hebrew. For I have been full of despair for our writers and our literature. . . . For whom do we labor? For whose sake? It is almost as if even the few survivors don't know each other. . . . None knows his fellow and none arouses his fellow, but each candle is lit in its own place, [and stays lit] until it goes out.[22]

Yet he could not help writing. It was in his blood, so to speak. Despite himself, he wrote Hebrew when dealing with Jewish problems, and more than forty Hebrew essays and stories date from this period. The language of his day-to-day life was German, and his diary, begun just after the turn of the century, was written in that language. German was also the language of his historical research, which occupied his time more and more. With regard to the contemporary Jewish world, he had thrown up his hands in despair, so to speak. Cut off from most of the life around him, he buried himself in research into the past. On two separate occasions, Bialik -- who had assumed the literary editorship of "Ha-Shiloach" after the retirement of Ahad Ha-Am, and who respected Berdichevsky very much -- invited him to become a co-editor of the journal; Berdichevsky refused. Brenner, Martin Buber, Rav Tsair and other Jewish writers and intellectuals who came to Breslau to visit him, pressed him to take an active part in the literary and intellectual world of contemporary Judaism. Again he demurred. He preferred being alone.

As a grown man, he saw much of his youthful rebellion give way to despair. Plagued with fatigue and ill health, angry and frustrated at the chronic instability of his finances, held back by a shy and sensitive personality, confused by an intellect so strong and honest as to give him no rest from his many doubts, Berdichevsky lived the last twenty years of his life in isolation. He who had criticized "The Book" so violently remained a "matmid," a perpetual student poring over his books.

Yet he was a man who read nearly everything written in the realm of contemporary Jewish thought. His isolation was personal rather than intellectual. From his small flat in the provincial city of Breslau he was always aware of what was going on, and this awareness was reflected in his works of criticism, his diary, and, most of all, in his correspondence. In the range, depth and scope of his letters, Berdichevsky made up for the isolation of his person. It is remarkable to consider how much this shy and sensitive man, with all his anger, frustration and despair, loved to correspond with other writers and critics of his generation. In the course of his lifetime he wrote literally thousands of letters. When one considers that his productive life was really not very long (he began writing at about the age of twenty and died when he was only 56), and that during these thirty-five years he wrote what today would be equivalent to at least fifteen large volumes (most of which has not yet been published), the extent of Berdichevsky's correspondence is almost unbelievable!

At the beginning of October, 1910, Berdichevsky moved for a time to Berlin. His historical research had already compelled him to travel to other cities in search of larger and more complete libraries. Through the intercession of friends (one of whom was Martin Buber), he had at last managed to secure what today would be called a "fellowship" -- a stipend from a group of wealthy Jews in Berlin enabling him to devote all his time to research. His wife and child remained in Breslau. He lived with them much of the time, but for long periods would be working in other places. At last, in August, 1911, the Berdichevskys settled all of their affairs in Breslau, packed and shipped their belongings (including a library of 2,000 volumes), and Micah Yosef, Rachel, and their son Emanuel (then seven years old) moved to Berlin. They found a large and quiet house in Friedenau, the residential, garden suburb of the city (which Berdichevsky always called by the Hebrew translation of its name "Neve Shalom").

CHAPTER V

THE LAST YEARS

Pleased to be rid of Breslau (he compared his leaving that city to the Exodus from Egypt!) Berdichevsky lived in relative peace and quiet -- at least to all external appearances -- for the last ten years of his life. His wife no longer practiced dentistry, but devoted most of her time to being her husband's secretary, translator, and assistant. It was she who translated two volumes of his collections of Aggadah into German, for publication during the War and a collection of his stories into Russian, which appeared in 1922. After his death, she edited one volume of his historical research, "Sinai und Gerisim," for publication in 1925. More of his Hebrew essays were published in the years before the First World War, with three volumes of Yiddish stories and two volumes of Aggadah also appearing in print. Through the continued activity of friends, solicitous in his behalf, his material needs were more or less satisfied (for the first time in his life), his books found publishers and Berdichevsky even found himself with a circle of friends (and critics!), Jewish and Christian alike, with whome he could meet and talk. Although it is true that these "friends" were never intimate (they met at a Berlin cafe rather than in one of their houses), it was still a break in the sheer physical isolation which continued to

characterize Berdichevsky's inner life, and which had marked his outer life as well up to that point.

From time to time, Berdichevsky also received visitors in his home; Ahad Ha-Am came once, and Ben Yehudah, Fichman, Neumark, Iddelson, and a few others, stopped in to visit him. On some he made an extraordinary impression, and he found them to his liking, so they came often again.

Rav Tsair and Lachover have written about days spent talking to Berdichevsky; about his encyclopedic knowledge and his uncanny discrimination of the true character of the people he met and those whose works he had read; about his ability to talk for hours on end, probing ever deeper into the heart of a matter, not giving answers so much as asking questions, driven by a relentless search for truth yet honest and strong enough to doubt and question at every point, and, most of all, full of pain at his inability to reach final freedom from doubt. "There is not in our entire literature a man more full than he of the urge to think and the pain of thinking," wrote Lachover about Berdichevsky,[22a] and Rav Tsair echoed the thought. But the gatherings in a Berlin cafe and the occasional visitors were the exceptions to the rule, and for the most part Berdichevsky remained alone.

With the outbreak of the World War, his financial difficulties returned, and with them a flood of worries and doubts overwhelmed him. A project to publish a Jubilee edition of his complete works was abruptly cancelled because of the War, and Berdichevsky, in bad health and worse spirits,

was compelled to waste a great deal of time on petty jobs to earn his livelihood. As a Russian citizen he was restricted in his movements, and confined to the city of Berlin. Though some of the more onerous requirements of aliens living in Germany were waived in his case -- at the intercession of several influential friends -- his application for German citizenship was rejected (although later it was granted him, at the beginning of 1919). The few Jewish writers whom he knew were either out of the country when the War started, or they had left of their own accord. In failing health, material want, and cut off again from the company of men, Berdichevsky could not even work properly. During these four years of the War he wrote nothing in Hebrew nor anything relating to Jewish history or the Aggadah. Rather, this was the time he turned to a study of Christianity and the New Testament, which Berdichevsky started at the instigation of a German friend, abandoned at the end of the War, and of which nothing has yet been published.

His anxiety over the fate of the Jews in Russia, and of his family in particular, gave Berdichevsky no rest. He felt the pain physically, felt his health deteriorating and his strength ebbing away. As if sensing that his days were numbered, he left off his historical research entirely, to prepare his Hebrew works for final revision. He still cherished the hope that an edition of his collected works would be undertaken by some publisher. With his fortunes at

their lowest ebb, it was as if Berdichevsky was putting his house in order before he died.

In 1919, however, Avraham Stiebel founded a publishing house in Moscow, and Berdichevsky's fortunes changed overnight. Stiebel, an admirer of Berdichevsky for many years, agreed to publish his collected writings. After finally obtaining a release from his Warsaw publisher, who up until then had the rights on much of his work, Berdichevsky went to work with Stiebel, collecting, editing, revising and arranging his work. With the return of some measure of financial stability, and the prospect of seeing, at last, his work published in a definitive edition, his spirits were lifted, though his health, impaired by a lifetime of privation, remained bad. Despite physical weakness, he addressed himself to the enormous task which occupied the last three years of his life. New stories and essays came from his pen during 1919-1920, and major additions to his collections of Aggadah. He set aside his historical research completely, hoping to return to it after this task was done.

Stiebel remained in Russia and sent Lechover, his Warsaw representative, to Berlin, to assist Berdichevsky in editing his works. The enormous amount of work drained Berdichevsky of what little strength he had left, but the effort bore fruit. From 1922 to 1926, Stiebel published twenty volumes of the "Writing of M. Y. Berdichevsky," nine volumes of essays and works of criticism, seven volumes of stories, short novels and folk tales, and four volumes of Aggadah.

This was only a small part of Berdichevsky's incredible production. Remaining in manuscript form with his son, Emanuel[23] are three or four more volumes of Aggadah, two volumes of ancient history (one of Old Testament, the other of New Testament research), two more volumes of research into the origins of Christianity, two volumes of miscellany and three more volumes of research into the history of ancient Israel (of which "Sinai und Gerisim" was the only one published, in its original German); plus uncounted thousands of letters (one volume of Berdichevsky's correspondence with Brenner has just been published), plus his diary of which his wife translated a few hundred pages into Hebrew. All of these await publication. The extent of Berdichevsky's productivity staggers the imagination!

But his days were numbered. In the summer of 1920, after trying for five years in vain to get word of the fate of his family, Berdichevsky learned of the murder of his father in the Ukrainian pogroms of 1919. Friends had known of it earlier, but had not told him for fear of the shock it would cause. At last, from a letter sent by one relative who had escaped to Palestine and thence to America, the word came. It filled him with a grief which endured until his death. Lachover was with Berdichevsky during those days, and he recounts[24] how, when they were once on a trip and the topic of conversation turned first to the world of East Europe and then to his father, Berdichevsky talked for a while, then all of a sudden, in the middle of a crowded

railway station, he broke down and wept.

The year 1921 was one of personal tragedy for Berdichevsky. Brenner was killed in Tel Aviv in the Arab riots of that year. Other friends, including William Zeitlin, a young scholar who was important in the work of publishing his volumes for Stiebel, died suddenly in 1921. Their deaths, especially that of Brenner with whom Berdichevsky had been very close, affected him enormously. Despite the work of editing and collecting his writings, the culmination of Berdichevsky's life-long ambition, the taste for life had departed. Lachover tells[25] how Berdichevsky was even doubtful whether it was a good thing to publish his criticisms of Jewish life, now that the condition of East European Jewry had taken such a drastic turn for the worse.

Yet during the last two years of his life Berdichevsky wrote his only full-length novel, "Miriam," and worked long hours on the editing of his work. On November 8, 1921, he was stricken with a heart attack. Lachover came to the house on the next day on some matter concerning the publication. Berdichevsky swore him to secrecy -- nobody but his family, the doctor (who had known for two years of Berdichevsky's weak heart), Lachover, and then Stiebel and one or two others knew of his last illness. During the last ten days he kept "working," dictating several paragraphs to all but complete his novel, "Miriam." He gave his manuscript of "Miriam" to Stiebel then expressed regret that he

FOOTNOTES

PART I

CHAPTER I

1. In his later years, Berdichevsky took the name Bin Gorion (בן גריון) after the author of "Jossipon," a popular Yiddish book of "history" and folk tales which the women used to read.

2. Yeshurun Keshet, מ.י.ברדיצבסקי, חייו ופעלו (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1948), p. 15.

3. כתבי מ.י. ברדיצבסקי, מאמרים, תל אביב, דביר, 1960, ד'27

4. Keshet, op. cit., p. 59. Keshet believes this to have been written after Berdichevsky left the Yeshiva. The view expressed above is derived from Ben Or תולדות הספרות העברית החדשה, תל אביב, יזראל, 1951, ספר ב', ד' 181

5. Keshet, op. cit., p. 62.

CHAPTER II

6. Keshet, op. cit., p. 104.

CHAPTER III

7. Letter, 5 Dec. 1897, אגרות אחד העם, ירושלים, יבנה, 1925, ספר ב' ד'146

8. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 178-81.

9. Spiegel, Hebrew Reborn (New York: MacMillan, 1930), p. 336. This is the judgment of Spiegel.

10. Lachover, ראשונים ואחרונים, תל אביב, דביר, ס' ב', ד'31 (1935)

11. Igrot, Vol. I, p. 99. Frishman made the same complaint to Berdichevsky about his handwriting, but, with his usual irony, suggested that the young man might do well to write to him in German! (Berdichevsky had just written that he was very much encouraged by the acceptance of one of his first German short stories in a literary journal. V. Keshet, op. cit., p. 118.)

12. Ibid., p. 120.

13. Ibid., p. 124.

14. Ibid., p. 146.

15. The "quotation" is really more of a paraphrase; cf. The Philosophy of Nietzsche (New York: Modern Library, 1927) pp. 624-625.

16. Arachin, p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

17. Letter, 12 April 1899. Igrot, Vol. II, p. 68.

18. Keshet, op. cit., p. 126.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 129.

21. Ibid., p. 133.

22. Berdichevsky in a letter to Brenner, 3 February 1908, in ש.י.ברדיצבסקי—י.ח.ברנר, חליפת מכתבים, תל אביב, הקיבוץ המאוחד 1962, ר' 37-38

CHAPTER V

22a. Lachover, op. cit., p. 40.

23. According to an interview with Emanuel Bin Gorion, in Ha-Aretz, 27 October 1961, p. 10.

24. Lachover, op. cit., p. 74.

25. Ibid., p. 70.

26. Rav Tsair, שפכה יבריונה (New York: The Jubilee Committee, 1945) p. 229.

PART II

THE TRANSVALUATION OF VALUES

CHAPTER I

THE BOOK

Underlying Berdichevsky's critique of Judaism is the assumption that Judaism is -- in the generally accepted sense of the term -- a Culture. We will define that term presently, but it is important first to understand the whole context of Berdichevsky's approach to the nature of Judaism in relation to other possible approaches.

Most American Jews regard Judaism as a set of universally accepted beliefs; beliefs about the nature of God, Man, Israel, Torah, etc. A Jew in America is united with his fellow Jew in England or France because they share the same world view.

This is obviously an oversimplification, yet it is substantially true that for the average American Liberal or Conservative Jew, Judaism is a Religion (or at least a world view), and Jews are bound to each other by belief, just as members of the disparate Protestant sects are held together by the basic tenets of Reformation Christianity.

Another conception of Judaism is that entertained by contemporary Israelis. Judaism, for the average man in the street, is more apt to be a matter of birth and nationality than of religious commitment. Again, the problem is considerably more complex than such a simplistic formulation would suggest, but at least on one level the problem of

"Jewishness" is more than anything else a racial and ethnic problem. Everyone born of Jewish parents who has not definitely renounced his allegiance to the Jewish tradition is *ipso facto* a Jew.

For Berdichevsky, the Jews were a community of believers, members of an identifiably ethnic group, and much more. That is to say, the theological and racial formulae were hardly exhaustive. He discerned no theological uniformity in the history of Judaism and denied any claim to ethnic identity in people with such a long and checkered history.

When Berdichevsky used the term "Judaism," he referred to the whole commonly shared existence of the Jewish people in all its generations, that is, to a Culture; a living, creative, vital, all-encompassing force; a rich complex of ideas, insights, values, ways of perceiving, interpreting, expressing and evaluating phenomena, passed on from generation to generation as a spiritual, moral, intellectual, artistic and psychological inheritance. Judaism was a Culture in that it was the one factor encompassing all national and individual creativity, giving it its peculiar nature and its unique character. Judaism was, in Berdichevsky's view, everyting which the Jewish people do or experience, which makes them what they are, which joins each man to the community, and each generation to those which preceded it and those which follow it.[1]

There are many things to be said about such a conception

of Cultural Judaism. In the first place, one can see immediately how Berdichevsky derived his definition from his own experience. The Jews in the small communities of East Europe lived in a world of their own making, with few, if any, connections with the gentile universe around them. They enjoyed a large measure of autonomy in the areas of inter-community relations, education, charitable organization, and religious institutions. While it is true that these communities, organized and unified hundreds of years before by the Council of the Four Lands, were economically feeble, periodically ravaged by disease, and vulnerable to the depredations of avaricious princes and to the violence of a hostile peasant population incited by officials of the government and the Church, they nevertheless succeeded in fashioning an authentic Jewish Culture, as we have defined the term. The theological and ethnic elements were only two aspects among others comprising the whole.

It is worth noting that such a conception of Judaism was, by virtue of its breadth, quite difficult to define exactly. When one considers Judaism as a Culture and defines that term as including everything without which the particular people would not be what it is, then one has posited a Judaism whose exact definition is virtually impossible. Even if one could correlate all the social, economic, political, religious and psychological factors governing a particular town at a particular time, the extension of such a correlation to cover all places at all

times under a unified definition is almost a priori out of the question. We shall see that the awareness of this difficulty played an important part in Berdichevsky's critique.

Finally, it should be said at the outset that Berdichevsky's cultural critique of Judaism loses a great deal of its force when Judaism ceases to be a Culture and becomes a Religion -- a fixed world view or a set of theological formulations -- which is precisely what has happened in the Western world of the 20th century. Perhaps this fact explains Berdichevsky's relatively meager influence on Diaspora Jewry and his very great influence in Israel, where Judaism as a Culture is at least a possibility.

In "The Transvaluation of Values," Berdichevsky gave voice to his cultural critique of Judaism. His thesis was quite simple: contemporary Jewish culture was dead. Rather than performing any of the functions of Culture, as we have defined that term above, Jewish culture was, in fact, a bad influence on the Jews because it was no longer a living, creative body but a mummified, ossified, or petrified corpse.

Instead of endowing the people with life and creative power, Jewish culture stifled the vital impulses by rigidly circumscribing the acceptable limits of Jewish creativity. Unless he chose to live within the four walls of the Law and to deny his own power, the Jew was cut off from the past. The function of a normal culture is to conserve and foster individual creativity and to transmit the fruits of such creativity from one generation to the next. Jewish

culture, however, wrought the opposite effect.

By its narrow orthodoxy it forced all life into one pattern. Because it was not alive and dynamic, ready to change and adapt itself to new times and conditions, it could not perform the functions of a living organism; that is, it could not dispose of waste matter. So the world of Judaism became a hoarder, accumulating and treasuring valueless objects until it had grown beyond any bearable size. The support, guidance, and definition of a living culture had become an intolerable burden, suppressing the individual by forcing him to give up his humanity and fulfill, instead, the details of a dead letter.

All around him Berdichevsky saw signs of the death of Jewish culture. Both from what he remembered from the world of his childhood and in his day-to-day experience with the emancipated Jews of Germany, he found no relief from the desolate picture he painted. He did not believe anybody who told him that the Jews were alive and flourishing. His reaction, simply, was

> Why should we lie to ourselves? We have no existing culture, neither externally nor internally. We have neither heaven nor earth.[2]

The symbol of the stifling and stultifying effect of Jewish culture was, for Berdichevsky, "The Book." When he used that word, as he did often in the essay, he understood by it all of the influences which have caused the Jewish people to stop living a natural, healthy life. "The Book" was the symbol of the intellectualism and legalism which

deadened the spontaneous love of life; of the endless study which ruined the young people and the obscurantism which blinded their elders. Jewish culture Berdichevsky argued, was dead because

> . . . the people have ceased to feel that a man may acquire knowledge by investigating himself, and the phenomena which surround him, and the appearances of life and nature. /For the Jewish people/ knowledge comes only from consulting ancient and antiquated books; and the development of knowledge consists, in its eyes, in the making of endless commentaries and clarifications of these books and the piling on of preachments about them. This people has forgotten that knowledge is the light which the Lord has sown in the phenomena of Nature and Life, in the perception of them /the phenomena/ and the exultation of the soul which comes because of them; a knowledge in which rests the secret of the greatness of the peoples of the Western world, with their full and complete life.[3]

This is to say that instead of experiencing life, the Jewish people had become a nation which studies life. Instead of being devoted to growing, creating, and expanding our horizons, it has sunk into a world of non-being, where it lives in "The Book" and fashions only unreal commentaries on "The Book."

> The Jewish people is mummified . . . buried in piles of sand which is choking its spirit and its soul. For an abstract Book, which has swallowed up all the strength of the people, its essence and its life over its long history, has no longer any connection with Life and Nature. It is a Book in and of itself, everything comes from it, everything is in it, and everything exists for its sake. It remains for a few only to turn its pages over and over again, to explain it, to interpret it, to study it, to hearken to its teachings; for it is the essence of his life and the ultimate goal of the human species, which was created only for its sake.[4]

Berdichevsky argued that "The Book" was not only abstracted from life but actively opposed to it. It had kept the People of "The Book" in bondage, and denied them the right to live freely and creatively.

> Indeed we are a species of ants, not people . . . who are dedicated for all generations to a special task and a religious law which doesn't always correspond to Life; all of us, young and old, men and women, large and small, all of us are slaves to the Writings and the Written, only to the Writing.
>
> We are slaves -- and this slavery has become the essence of our essence; our existence, our being, and everything which is in us.
>
> Do not look at the heavens and the earth. Do not look at the world and its fulness. Do not look into your souls and the thoughts of your spirit! Look in that Book which has been given to you, and there it is written what you must do and what you must not do.
>
> All the appearances of the world, all the phenomena of life, all the feelings of the soul and all desires, all the wealth of man and his fulness is forbidden, impure, defiled; for the Jew is obligated to hearken to the voice of the Writing.
>
> Should there come to you this feeling, this desire, this inclination, this lust, take yourself to the Beit Midrash . . . if you long for life, bend your ears to the sages of the Book and hearken to their advice and their words.
>
> We are strangled, we need air; yet we study the Book, study and teach . . ."[5]

Couched in different formulations, the theme of slavery to the Book is repeated throughout the Essay.

> All of the myriads of feelings, the great thoughts, the will and the desire; everything which stirs the heart of man insofar as he is a man and a creature with a living, intelligent, sensitive, and willing soul -- all of life and its multitude, everything, everything has been silenced because of the yoke of the Book.[6]

As a result of its abstraction from life and of its slavery to "The Book," Jewish culture has become ossified

and the soul of the people turned into a collection of dead letters, "shadows on earth, devoid of light."[7] "The Book" has so corrupted the natural, healthy relationship between man and Nature as to make the Jew a cultural freak.

> Our lot, O Children of Israel, is an intellectual crookedness, for which it would be difficult to find a parallel among any of the cultured nations. Among us, people look differently at the world and its fulness, which frightens /them/ by its strangeness and its wildness. A foolish and tasteless attitude towards all of man's life -- its pleasantness and its beauty; a petrified stubbornness which forcibly closes the eye so that one may not see straight -- these are the products of the abstract Book, which has built for itself an pedestal of its own, removed from life, from its hustle and bustle.
>
> All the twisted and complicated sophistry of this abstract Book -- which, were a sane man from the outside to hear of it, he would disbelieve his ears and laugh in derision -- has become an obligation, the essence of life, the beginning and the end of everything; and all this applies to the entire people, great and small among them, none is exempt.[8]

By serving "The Book" the Jewish people have cast their lot with non-being, slavery and death, because "The Book" is not a perfection of reality or a higher reality, but simply non-reality. "The Heavens written in the Book do not declare the glory of God,"[9] and the Jewish people, committed to the service of their dead culture are consequently neglecting the service of God. Sarcastically, Berdichevsky rephrased a famous verse from the Bible:

> מה צרו מה אהליך יעקב, משכנותיך ישראל!
>
> How narrow are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwelling places, O Israel! Thy dwelling places, O Israel, have turned into burial pits, thy tents are closed and locked up, and, outside, Life goes on its way . . .

> The whole world is happy, the world is wide; and the Jewish people, the people whose origins were very great, is satisfied with an inadequate portion. It knows not of change or redemption. The days of summer and winter are equal in its eyes, as if the order of life has not changed at all and the movement in the earth and its fullness ceased to be. Wherever we turn we see signs of death, signs of the howling waste of the wilderness.[10]

It all adds up to a desolate situation. Berdichevsky has nothing but scorn for the pretensions of the Jewish people to possessing a superior culture which could serve as a beneficial influence on the nations of the world. The Messianic dream of the Jewish people was, for him, an impossible conceit.

> As long as there is darkness in our tents and gloom in our lives, we boast in vain of a transcendent moral culture, which in the future be a light to the nations.[11]

Messianic pretensions? Indeed, just the opposite is true.

> On the one hand we are thought of as God's chosen people, and on the other we are a doormat for every trampling foot. Behold us, the slaves of slaves . . . יושבי צלמות ומאירי עולם -- we are the givers of light and the dwellers in the shadow of death.[12]

In the light of such a situation, Berdichevsky was not surprised that, far from benefitting the world, the Jewish people was dying out. He was not suprised at the rate of assimilation or that a petrified culture had no way to keep itself together.

> Is it any wonder that we see so many rents (פרצים) within us? Is it any wonder that we must continually complain about the best of our sons, who are going "to plant other vineyards," and who are dropping away, one by one?[13]

Berdichevsky saw the Jewish community disintegrating before his eyes. There is a tone of urgency and impatience in his critique. He pressed for a quick and radical solution of the problem because he was doubtful whether, failing an immediate change, the people would be able to survive.

> This hour, in which we are involved, is not like yesterday nor like the day before yesterday -- it bears no relation to them. All the foundations and conditions, both internal and external by which we have always existed are crumbling. Those "long nights" have ended, and in their place have come new days and new conditions. . . We have come to a time in which two worlds are in collision: Being and non-Being. To be the last Jews or the first Hebrews. . .[14]

" אנחנו אסירי זכרונותינו -- We are prisoners of our memories,"[15] enslaved, entrapped; victims of a corrupt tradition. The Jewish people has surrendered to a dead tradition and it must get back its life. Its best people are leaving the fold and Jewry cannot survive the loss. There is only one way for the people to save itself, only one remedy for the disease. The nation will perish unless it can effect a basic change in its way of life -- a radical and absolute שינוי ערכין; a transvaluation of values.

> קרועים אנו לגזרה קרועים; we are torn to shreds; on the one hand the radical element is forsaking the house of Israel, and journeying to "the sons of the stranger," sacrificing to them the work of his soul and his spirit, and giving his vigor to strangers; and on the other hand the religious (דתיים) sit in their dark and gloomy doorways, observing and practicing what has been commanded them. The enlightened, who stand in the middle are schizophrenic: half Western -- in their life and their thoughts, and half Jews -- in the synagogues. The vital forces are being dissipated and the nation destroyed.

> As for the urge for a spiritual revival, which is beginning to penetrate into the hearts of the few survivors, we feel that this revival must be both internal and external, and that it will be impossible except in the form of a complete upheaval that is to say -- a transvaluation of the values which have up to now determined the course of our life.
>
> Our heart, longing for life, feels that the revival of Israel depends on tipping the scales. Let preference be given to the Jews over Judaism, let the living man take priority over the inheritance of his fathers.
>
> We must stop being Jews, who possess an abstract Judaism, and become basic Jews (ב"ב"בע ב"ר"ן), part of a living and existing people. The usual "I believe" has already ceased to be sufficient for us.[16]

This is the heart of Berdichevsky's position. A radical and complete change is called for. There is no time to simply make adjustments. Reorientation or reform would be inadequate.

> לא מ"קר"ב מ"ר"ב לנו כמ"ר"ן, ש"נ"ים ר"ר"ים לנו
>
> - We don't need repairs in our life, changes are imperative for us, basic changes in our whole way of life, our thoughts and our souls.[17]

Either we rebuild the entire house, or sit and watch its last vestiges rot away. Nor can we expect to revive Jewry by a dose of spiritual plasma from the outside world. The change must be basic and internal if it is to be effective.

> I don't believe those who say that we have a living internal culture nor those who say that it is possible to graft onto our life a culture from without. I don't believe in the possibility of continuing the light which shone previously for the generations in the Diaspora . . . and likewise I don't believe in the possibility of bringing an external light into our internal lives . . .[18]

When Berdichevsky wrote of looking for "a culture from without" to "bring an external light into our internal lives," he was criticising the thought of the Haskalah. In his judgment, most of the writers of the Haskalah period had missed the point. The problem, he argued, is inside ourselves, not in our relation to the outside world. What is worse, when one looks "inside," into the heart of the tradition as it now stands, for guidance and encouragement to help repair the breaches, one finds no help there either. The transvaluator of values has few if any allies among the more obvious heroes of the tradition. The Jewish people have plenty of great men, plenty of thinkers and plenty of philosophers. But their thoughts are as dead as the culture they represented.

> The quantity of our books and the expounding of ideas among us is a thousand times greater than the quality of the thoughts themselves.
>
> Men like Rabbenu Asher, R. Akiva Eiger, and the Vilna Gaon could belong only to us. Only among us is it possible to know so much and teach so much without the trace of a thought or a fruitful idea!
>
> Our talented men are barren (עקרות), barren of thoughts and barren of feeling.
>
> If we were an illiterate nation, and we had no readers of books, then we might hope to advance in a spiritual revival by means of a general process of thought. But now that we are the People of the Book, and most Jews are authors and writers, without any living thought nor possibility of thought, now that the dead letters have killed every trace of a living spirit. . . . All the talents which may be among us are wasted away and benefit none.
>
> In a time of despair, I do not believe that those dry bones can revive.[19]

These are violent words, but as Berdichevsky saw the problem, what was wrong with all previous attempts to revitalize Judaism was that such attempts were academic. They were syntheses of thoughts, combinations of ideas, juggling of concepts, and shiftings of emphases. Nowhere did he find a sense of the necessity to think, or of the reality of the task to be done, but only abstractions: "Judaism," "Spirituality," "Enlightenment," "Revision," "Labor," etc. Berdichevsky believed that nobody was coming to grips with the real problem, namely, that there is a basic contradiction between what "The Book" demands of a Jew and what Life demands of a man, and that one of the two demands had to be sacrificed to the other. In place of an agonizing awareness of the dilemma of the Jew in the modern world, he found in the writings of his contemporaries abstractions about the nature of Judaism. These abstractions he detested.

> The trouble is that we have only "brainy" people (אינטיליגנטן) and only "smart" people (חכמים). And the trouble is that our people seem to express their thoughts "as it were," and deal with thoughts without any internal compulsion or inner necessity to do so.[20]
>
> Our people are accustomed to adopt for themselves a multitude of answers to questions they don't really ask. They deal with thoughts without any existential contact (מגע קיומי) with them, and judge on matters which don't pertain to them.[21]

The calm and uncommitted abstractions of contemporary Jewish thought (especially those of Ahad Ha-Am) infuriated Berdichevsky, for he could never understand how others

managed to write so dispassionately about that which was for him a source of the most excruciating agony. Reading their analyses and judgments, he complained that nowhere was there evidence that these men had been moved by inner compulsion or that their thinking was somehow connected with their lives.

> They lack the creative power of thought and the vital <u>will</u> to think. For them, thoughts are not the products of the effervescence of life . . . since they haven't <u>any life at all</u>.[22]

In the writing of his Jewish contemporaries, Berdichevsky read bookish criticisms of "The Book," abstractions of an Abstraction, and nowhere did he discern an awareness of the uncertain, problematical, and dangerous condition of the Jewish people.

Berdichevsky, therefore, distrusted the whole concept of Enlightenment. For him, as long as Jewish thought remained abstract, uncommitted, and inauthentic, there was nothing to be gained by the myriad syntheses, reconstructions, and attempts at enlightenment and reform. They were all futile, because they were all synthetic and artificial.

> Enlightenment (השכלה) and Knowledge won't help very much, so long as they are not <u>necessary</u> and don't come to us from within by means of the process of our own creativity; all culture is a product, but its beginnings are never external.[23]

In the thinkers of his day, Berdichevsky saw only externally derived and externally motivated attempts at cultural definition. He rejected them all for precisely this reason; the critics of Jewish culture and the

formulators of a new Jewish enlightenment did not really understand the problem <u>from within</u>, that is, as it affected the life and soul of the simple Jew who was trying to live his life as a human being.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW VALUES

What Berdichevsky was looking for was a new kind of Jewish culture, an authentic national and personal existence with a living, vital, creative, and committed relationship to the world. The old, dead, non-Being (אין), incarnate in "The Book," had to be radically changed for a new existence. This new existence Berdichevsky described as a new relationship to Nature and the World, to Life, Youth, Beauty and Poetry -- these terms are almost interchangeable in the essay.

"Teva" (טבע), Nature, is one term he used as an antithesis of "The Book." Get rid of "The Book!

> . . . return to nature! . . . Remember that there is no such thing as an ultimate dualism (שתי רשויות)-the world and man, God and man --, but that everything is one and infinite.[24]

What we need are "natural Jews" -- (Berdichevsky often used the term " עברים," -- Hebrews -- to denote the new kind of natural, life-affirming Jews.

> Even if it weren't written in Scriptures it would be possible to say, -- it would be <u>necessary</u> to say -- that in the beginning God created the world, and that afterwards He made man. . .
> It is the World which tells the glory of God, and Nature which declares his handiwork; Nature is the father of every living thing and it gives life to every living thing; Nature is the beginning of everything, the beginning and the breath of all living things.[25]

What is needed is a living Jewry, and the tragedy of it is that Jews can live if they are willing to do so. The people can change -- it can remove the rust and dissipate the fog of obscurantism. To do so is to effect the transvaluation of values.

So keen was his awareness of the specter of death haunting the camp of Judah, and so overwhelming his desire for the vitality which could banish it, that Berdichevsky sometimes rose to the stature of an ecstatic poet. His words took on the aspect of prayer.

> The life of a man among us is withered away by the traditions, the laws, the rules, and abstract teachings. Many, many are the things in the inheritance of our fathers which will off the soul and deny it freedom. But we have "The Song of Songs," we have the songs of life and of splendor of life; we have the Psalms of the son of Jesse on the pleasures of nature and the glory of its Genius. . . . Our souls can recite a blessing: Thou, O Lord, art very great, Thou are clothed with glory and greatness! In such a God we will trust, we will wait for the God who is clothed in light as in a garment, who spreads out the Heavens like a curtain; we will trust in Almight God who gives man victory and redemption. . . . How great are the works of the Lord, the world is full of His possessions! Praise ye the Lord, praise His handiwork![26]

And then the ecstasy died away, and the analytical, intellect returned.

> All the works of man and his thoughts, all of what he knows and all his calculations, feelings, inclinations; everything which moves him to act and think, to workand to toil, whether physically or spiritually, whether with luxuries or necessities, everything, everything, is the result of his will to live.[27]

Life and the will to live are so basic, that even spirituality (רוחניות) is inconceivable without them.

> Even our spirituality is, in the final analysis, only an instrument of the will, it is only a conscious need of our life on the earth and in the heaven which is upon the earth.[28]

Nor is there a proper intellectualism, much less a poetry, without Life.

> In the realm of thought and poetry one does not create ex nihilo, but rather [the source of creativity] is that which is seen and envisioned and felt as something alive within us, which brings itself to life.[29]

Although in his greater moments man transcends Life and Nature, they nevertheless remain the source of all his creativity.

Nature, God, the World, Life -- these have been lost to the Jewish people, and it must find a way to rediscover them within itself, so too Beauty. An ugly life is scarcely better than no life at all, and so also Poetry. It is worth noting that Berdichevsky was from his earliest days an amateur painter, and although he himself did not write poetry, he venerated it as perhaps the most genuine expression of the life and creativity of a people.[30] Beauty and Poetry were indeed vital parts of the natural world, the world in which the Jews also would have to live if they were to survive as a people. Both were aspects of the heritage of Nature which had been suppressed by "The Book."

The drive for Freedom and Air, for Nature, Life, Beauty and Poetry, sprang from the depths of Berdichevsky's soul.

They were not abstract considerations for him, but inner claims which he could not have suppressed even if he had wanted to. All the more reason, then, for his impatience with Ahad Ha-Am and the others. To analyze the dilemma of the Jew without heat and without passion, when the opposing claims of "The Book" and Life were in fact so basic and irreconcilable in the life of the Jew, was, for Berdichevsky, almost an *a priori* impossibility. The new Jewish existence for which he called was more than a possibility; it was a necessity. The choice wasn't between one formulation of Jewish life as against another, but between Being and non-Being. Under such circumstances, to choose anything short of a complete affirmation of life at all costs amounted to choosing death.

CHAPTER III

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP

There is another aspect of the dilemma of the Jew in the modern world which has not as yet been brought to light in our general summary of Berdichevsky's position. This is the problem of the individual in relation to the group. Not only was Individualism central to Berdichevsky's demand for a transvaluation of values, but to any understanding of his relationship to the Jewish world of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Berdichevsky is known as a spokesman *par excellence* of Jewish Individualism. In any dispute between the claims of the community and the claims of the man he unhesitatingly sided with the latter. Indeed, apart from the subjective factor of personality, it was this position, more than any other, which differentiated Berdichevsky's thought from that of Ahad Ha-Am and the Haskalah, and which characterized his unique view of Zionism.

As we have seen, Berdichevsky contended that "The Book" was responsible for the spiritual death of the Jewish people. But not only was "The Book" destroying the People, it was destroying *the parsa* -- who was the only unit from which the people could be rebuilt. "The Book" has stifled the man, the "I," in its over-zealous concern for the people, the "we." It has so structured the legal, moral and ritual

existence of the Jewish community as to require a creative person to deny himself and to subordinate his own will to the collective needs of the community. The idea of the priority of the community, which for Ahad Ha-Am[31] was the growing achievement of the Jewish moral spirit, and represented the absolute triumph of an impartial, abstract, absolute justice over the egoism or altruism which characterises Christianity, was for Berdishevsky nothing less than a disaster.

> We, the Jews, are an ancient people, and because of such variegated inheritances -- a stream of thoughts, feelings and values transmitted to us from of old -- we can no longer live in accordance with our basic simplicity and our natural being. We don't belong to ourselves (אינו שייך לעצמו), our dreams are not ours, our thoughts are not ours, and our will is not that which is implanted within us. We have been already taught everything, everything has been transmitted to us. Our senses, our whole way of looking at things, our reflection, our imagination, and the emotions of our heart, our motivations and our inclinations, our desires and our longings already have names and concepts, expressions and clarifications, ordinances and commandments, advice and suggestion, prepared and ready from the beginning. Indeed, for every relationship to the world without or the world within us, for all our perplexity and our questions there are already plenty of answers. Everything is definite and marked in its confines and its borders, everything has been weighed and measured in laws and rules, until the human beings among us who want to know themselves are completely at a loss and can't find their own "selves." (אינם מוצאים את "עצמם" עצמם)[32]

The Jew cannot find the "I" in the midst of the mass of inherited values; and, lacking the "I," the "we" is meaningless for him. This is the heart of Berdishevsky's individualism. At a later point, we will examine in detail

how this thesis motivated his enormous historical research. In a word, because he was profoundly individualistic and because he was certain that there were a large number of great individualists within the Jewish tradition, Berdichevsky went looking for them, and sought to discover the way in which the group, for a variety of reasons, suppressed them.

The expression of his concern for the fate of the free, creative individual, in opposition to the limiting and determining group, was surely in large measure autobiographical. When Berdichevsky spoke of the individual being stifled by the group, he spoke of his own emotions. When he wrote in his essays and his stories of the rents and tatters in the soul of the modern Jew, he was reflecting his own experience. Indeed, Voyeslavsky points out[33] that all of Berdichevsky's early stories are about individuals who have cast off the yoke of the Jewish tradition, that is, about people like Berdichevsky himself. The problem of the Jew who left the intellectually crippling and emotionally disabling world of the East European Jewish town, only to find that not only had he freed himself of the disadvantages of that world, but was likewise unable to enjoy its benefits (the benefits of a unified, conventional and secure existence) was exactly Berdichevsky's own personal problem. We see as autobiographical his call to Freedom, Life, and Nature. The rents and tatters in the soul of the Jew were there in his soul. The loneliness of the Jew who had attained his freedom was his loneliness. Berdichevsky's

veneration of the clear and free intellect and the active power of the will as the two faculties in man which make a possible transvaluation of values, stem from his own life and his own experience.

Individualism, however, was something more than a function of Berdichevsky's psychology. It was basic to his entire philosophical position.

> It is not the world which is basic, but only the man. . . . Man is not of secondary importance to the acts of Creation, but the reverse is true.[34]

> There is nothing in reality except individual human beings, and the matter of the people or the group is only a collective and visionary concept. . . . Essentially I labor for myself, and on the altar of my heart there burns a great self love -- though on this same altar there may rise the flame of love for the community, and I may let the community rule over me, subordinating myself to the whole and not seeking my own portion.[35]

We notice the immediate qualification -- Berdichevsky's individualism was not equivalent to anarchy. He did recognize the necessity and desirability of a communal life. It was evident that a man inherits from a transcontent society most of what he knows, the tools which he uses in his striving for self-perfection (language, categories of thought, etc.) and, indeed, the criteria by which to determine his goals and measure his progress in attaining them. Nobody starts from scratch. Every generation begins where the previous generation left off. Every person begins where his fellows have stopped.

Man and the community are closely bound together, yet still separate, mutually exclusive and yet mutually complementary. The individual's function is to live and create; the community's function is to receive the work of each generation of Individuals, give permanence to Individual creativity, and transmit the fruits of a person's labor to the next generation.

The people, the community, is the immortality of the individual. The wealth of the individual is dependent on the community. That which he himself cannot accomplish by his own perfection and his own essential possessions, he can achieve by his relationship to others, who give him what they have and allow him to inherit what they have.[36]

This sharing with others is, as we have said, what one means by "Culture." But the basic unit, the Individual, remains the ultimate reality. It is the Individual, the human being, who is logically and chronologically prior to the community or the group. Though the individual is part of the whole, he is the basic part.

> They say that for this reason man was created alone, in order to know and to make known and to have it known that he is one, single and unique, so as not to give an opportunity to deny the unity of humanity and its perfectability (אחדות האדם והשלמתו). Every man is a part of humanity, only one limb; and all of them, all the unique limbs, are joined together into an absolute unity, which comprises all of creation and all invention to all eternity and to all infinity.[37]

Berdichevsky, writing here in a different context changed the emphasis but did not change the basic idea. We

are bound to the world, but it is we who are bound; human beings with individual and private lives. Humanity is a whole, but parts comprise the whole. When our life is whole and integrated, functioning in unity and harmony like the limbs of the body, then we are healthy and we grow, and the growth of each limb contributes to the growth of the body. But in fact we are torn to shreds, not whole and not integrated. The Jewish body is moribund and diseased, and the individuals who have still kept their own identity are sick of bearing the dead weight.

Here, of course, the metaphor fails; in biology the limbs of necessity die when the body dies. In our present context the reverse is true, the individuals are the means -- the only means -- by which the body can be revitalized and the call is addressed to them. They have the power to change themselves, and by so doing, to help effect the change in the whole of which they are a part. And when they decide to change, the change, if it is to be effective, must be radical.

> There comes a time when the "inner I" is tired of carrying the yoke of these ideas and deeds which are completely foreign to it, and then come the days of revolt, the days of changing the values of the internal and external life; the holy becomes profane and the profane holy, the good turns to evil and the evil to good. And everything changes and takes on both a new content and a new form.[38]

Berdichevsky saw also how each person can effect a transvaluation of values. A human being has two faculties which are his weapons in the struggle -- and these are his

intellect and his will. Thought and volition are potent weapons, Berdichevsky believed, and they occupy together a sovereign place in the world. The power to think freely is of the utmost importance to the individual. It is the best guarantee of preserving his personal integrity, and, as such, the most effective weapon with which to fight off the encroachments of a smothering community.

Because he saw the intellect as uniquely the property of the individual, Berdichevsky considered the ability to think freely more important than what one thought. "The value of thought in general . . . is not worth as much as the freedom of thought."[39] The liberation of Jewish thought from the mold into which it had been cast by "The Book" was the indispensable first step in the transvaluation of values.

His absolute insistence on the freedom of the intellect led Berdichevsky to disclaim emphatically any idea that he was trying to found a new movement or sect within Judaism. For the basis of any new movement must be a uniformity of belief among its adherents, and his task was to free the creative intellect, not confine it into a new pattern of his own making.

> We want to raise the ability of our thought, to enrich our spirit, and to increase the talent for doing things which is in us; but far be it from us to stamp our thoughts with a special stamp, to command ourselves what to think and what to feel.[40]

The Active Will gives one the power to act, once a person has understood his situation and has seen the alternatives confronting him. The national will is important, the individual will absolute. Under the influence of Schopenhauer, Berdichevsky saw the whole progression of life as a manifestation of the will to live.[41]

> The will is the God of the world (הרצון הוא אלה׳ העולם) the essence which is in-and-of-itself, the absolutely unique, the bearer of all the many phenomena of the various parts of the world and reality.[42]

Withal, he agreed that man is determined by the circumstances of his life, by the things which happen to him willy-nilly. He knew that things are always happening to a person, and they necessarily affect him. But Berdichevsky argued[43] that an event is not simply an objective occurrence, and even if it were, we cannot perceive it objectively. Epistemologically speaking, we know things according to our relationship to them. To use his example of a battle between armies, an objective fact becomes for one side a victory and for the other a defeat. The attitude of victor and vanquished to the same event, i.e., the battle, resolve it into two different experiences.

So the function of the will is to fix one's relationship to the facts of existence. To determine one's relationship to necessity is, her argued, to effectively transcend necessity.

> The will is nothing more than a perfected level of necessity. Blind necessity, when it

> is perfected becomes internal necessity; When it is unconscious, it is called necessity -- when it is conscious it is the will.
>
> The will is a law of the process of nature which is perfected by man; the laws of nature, when they are perfected by the lives of people become creative laws.[44]

The same applies also to the national will to live; it, too, is a conscious manipulation of the laws of nature. Both individuals and nations transcend necessity, but the individual will is prior to the national will, just as, for Berdichevsky, the individual himself is prior to the nation. Here again, Berdichevsky criticized the tradition; it was the excessive emphasis on the national will and the consequent denial of the individual will which was responsible for the death of the tradition. To bring it to life again requires the radical change of the individual will to live, and not merely a revitalizing of the national will, as Ahad Ha-Am suggested. The latter is pointless and impossible without the former.

For, in the first place, the attempt to create "national spirit" without a corresponding and prior internal spirit is the same, old academic, uncommitted, barren intellectualism upon which Berdichevsky heaped scorn, as we have seen; and, in the second place, a "national spirit" by itself would constitute only another ruler over Jewry, -- another force to suppress individual life! So there were sarcasm, irony, and a double-edged criticism involved when Berdichevsky wrote that

> Ahad Ha-Am laments the curse which is on this life of "the past" of ours, a life petrified by the Book, so he brings us good advice: to write another big book which will contain in itself all of our previous book-life![45]

One can fairly feel the author's furious anger! No more books! No more re-evaluations! Berdichevsky's criticism of Jewish Life was not academic. He did not want to teach and instruct, but to accomplish a genuine revolution, a real changing of characters and values. The unlikelihood of success saddened him immensely. But this must be repeated: what he was looking for was not a new Judaism but a new kind of Jew, not another Book, but another Man -- a proud, natural, self-reliant, creative, free individual. The call for a transvaluation of values was a call to action, and for those who proposed another re-evaluation, another discussion, a re-thinking or a reconstruction, Berdichevsky had nothing but scorn and anger.

> You say we need thought in life and literature; but we have too many of the buds of thought. We must now turn to a different world.
>
> Excessive thinking has eaten away all the best parts of our lives, all the strength of our lives; it has made us too much a people of the Book, too knowledgeable people.
>
> Because of it we made our brains work long and hard, labor which has sucked out all the life we have in us, and removed all the living blood from our souls.
>
> Life, the World, all of reality around us and in us -- these are the basis and foundation of everything, and yet they have become secondary in relation to thought and knowledge; Life has become secondary to the laws of life.
>
> God, the World, Life -- everything is straight, everything spread out before man, and the Children of Israel looked for accounts only accounts.

> We have more than enough of thought, give us feeling and Life, the essence of Life, as it really is.
>
> We don't need an intellectual literature -- we have too much of it -- but a literature of beauty, a literature of poetry, and the creation of the inner life.
>
> Give us back the youth, the innocence and the poetry of life.[46]

Such is the anguish of Berdichevsky's cry for the transvaluation of values.

The claim on the individual, and the call to <u>him</u> for action, is the basis of the transvaluation of values. Berdichevsky believed that a man has the power to effect a radical change in himself, whereas an entire people can be changed only slowly and cumulatively, as its individuals change. Of course every individual action affects the group. A man is bound to humanity in general by virtue of his humanity, and to his community in particular insofar as he is a product of that community. But in the particular case of the Jew, his tie to the community subverts his larger connection to humanity. Whether he accepts it or not, the Jew is bound fast and pinned beneath the weight of the Tradition. His life is being stifled and he must free himself before it is too late. Nothing is possible -- neither his own life nor the regeneration of the community -- unless he can first liberate <u>himself</u>. This is the necessary first step, and the implications of such a position vis-a-vis any attempt at a <u>national</u> revival (i.e., Zionism) are obvious.

CHAPTER IV

THE REDEMPTION OF THE PEOPLE

Berdichevsky has been characterized by many as an anti-Zionist, but such a characterization shows the most superficial understanding of his position. He did not join or support the Zionist movements, and the reasons for this will presently be made explicit. But it should be obvious by now that a man who is constantly demanding a return to Nature and Life and a break with the Books and the Thoughts will regard the Diaspora as the least likely environment in which to effect such a change. There the Jews were confined in corners of cities, and constantly at the mercy of alien overlords. In point of fact, Berdichevsky argued that one of the primary causes of the unnatural condition of the Jewish people was the fact that they had been driven from their natural surroundings.

> We lack everyting on which a foundation may be built, the holiness of our Heaven lacks a fixed horizon; we lack a floor beneath our souls; and our breath, our songs and our thoughts lack an inhabited land and we lack the echo of that land.[47]

If Berdichevsky disagreed with many Zionists as to the relative importance of the land factor among the causes for the weakness of the Jewish people, there is no doubt but that it was still a very important consideration. The difference was one of degree, not kind. That it was imperative to regain the land was also a basic tenet of Berdichevsky's

position. And yet, with all that, he had reservations about the Zionist movement, precisely because it was a movement. In essence, he contended that the attempt to re-establish the group without considering the individual was a wasted effort.

He agreed with the Zionists that life in the Galut was artificial. "A Community which draws life from the Synagogue in the city of Vilna, built in the name of the God of Jerusalem, is no longer a complete community . . ."[48] The Jewish people are only sojourners in countries not their own, and whatever they do or don't do, they are always subject to pressure and persecution from the world around them. There didn't seem to be much hope for a national revival in such circumstances, and part of Berdichevsky's criticism of Jewry was that it never really tried to change the circumstances and get back its ancestral land.

> It is easy to say that The Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled us from our land and scattered us among the nations. But we also hurried to go into Exile and chose to be wanderers among the nations . . . rather than to dwell in our ruined land. . .
>
> We know all the historical reasons for our dispersion among the nations; but these reasons do not amount to absolute necessities, and we could have changed them by a strong national will -- if, in truth, a single spark of life had remained within us.[49]

That the people was tied to a dead Book reflected the unnatural situation in which it had been placed by being deprived of a foundation and a land. As we have said, Berdichevsky's call for a return to Nature, Life, Beauty,

and Poetry had definite Zionist implications, for as long as the outside world confined the Jews to ghettos and denied them the right to own and work and live on the land, a transvaluation of values was fruitless. "Without a land, and a place to stand on the land, one can't look to the heavens."[50]

But with all this basic agreement on the need for a place of their own in which the Jews could live natural lives, Berdichevsky never supported the Zionist movement wholeheartedly because it had no conception of the role of the individual. It proposed somehow to redeem the People, ignoring the consideration that such a redemption is neither possible nor desirable unless one can find the individuals who are willing and able to go to Israel and build it up. The matter is as basic as all that; one must persuade A, and B, and C to pack up and go because it is in their own interest to go. If it ignored this approach, the Zionist movement would make no progress.

> The redemption of Israel will not come by means of prophets or diplomats, but only by men working for themselves, and preparing the way for others by their work. A People does not live on sacrifices, and will not be built up by them. The people is composed of private persons, each one of whom lives for himself and stands in his own place, each man to his own house and his own possessions. The Community, and the foundations of communal life, are composed of all the private possessions. . . The General is only a physical and spiritual sum total, which comes into being from the acts of individuals and not at the expense of individuals. We need "egoists," who conquer the land for the sake of their private and public aspirations, and not for the sake of some abstract public good.[51]

To be specific, we need Cecil Rhodes, not Lord Montefiore.

If, with the aid of hindsight, it is arguable that the Zionist movement did in fact succeed where Berdichevsky thought it would fail, it is also arguable that his perception of the nature of the Israeli's relationship to his land is probably more accurate than that of any "official" Zionist publicist, and certainly closer to the truth than was, say, Hertzl, in "Altneuland."

Any national revival -- whether one conceives of it in political terms, like Hertzl, or in cultural terms, like Ahad Ha-Am -- is predicated, therefore, on the presence of a situation in which the individual can live with the support of the group. The transvaluation of values, starting with the individual, must finally be accomplished in society as a whole -- and society must make it possible and permanent. Thus Berdichevsky summarizes his view of the future of his people:

> The existence and the possibility of existence, of our people depends upon the creation of a unified environment in which the individual can live together with the group, /an environment which/ makes possible the joining /of individuals/ to a receptive community, which endures and is kept from today to tomorrow. The existence of our people is possible only in a spiritual and physical atmosphere conducive to creators and builders. Give us the possibility for one man to live; the many will come after him by themselves.[52]

"Give us the possibility for one man to live . . ." -- in one phrase we discover again the key to Berdichevsky's complex relation to the Haskalah, to the thought of Ahad Ha-Am, and to the Zionist movement of his time. For them

the problem was a national problem, calling for the changing of the national situation and the national characteristics. All of them demanded, above all, a relationship to a larger group, a people or a movement. A national revival was needed; of course, this revival was to be basically spiritual; of course, it is not possible unless the material conditions were stable enough to allow it. Berdichevsky was in the Haskalah tradition, and a follower of Ahad Ha-Am, and a Zionist. But whereas the vast majority of Maskilim, disciples of Ahad Ha-Am, and Zionists called for mass movements and general projects, Berdichevsky saw the heart of the problem in each individual Jew -- in each human being. Only if individuals undergo a radical transformation will the nation become a new nation.

Berdichevsky did not invent Individualism; it was an important part of both Jewish and secular thought of that time. Nor was he the first Jewish individualist; throughout his life he sought and discovered others in the annals of Jewish history. But I believe that Ben Or is correct when he observes[53] that Berdichevsky was the first person in Hebrew literature to see the individual Jew as the basic factor in the redemption of the Jewish people.

CHAPTER V

BERDICHEVSKY'S HISTORICAL STUDIES

It remains now to ask a question about that which we have thus far assumed. In what way can Berdichevsky be considered a Jewish thinker? Is it possible to effect the Transvaluation of Values and still remain Jewish -- in some recognizable sense of the word? Perhaps by undergoing such a radical change the Jewish people will be throwing out the baby with the bath. Perhaps the renewed, vital relationship with Nature and Life amounts only to a rejection of Judaism and a return to primitive paganism. Berdichevsky was open to this accusation, as all reformers have been. And on the face of it, the traditionalists (ranging from the most Orthodox to Ahad Ha-Am) had a strong case. It was undeniable that masses of young people (especially) under the influence of radical reformers like Berdichevsky, were leaving the small towns and going to the cities, both in Eastern and Western Europe, there to forsake every trace of the inheritance of their fathers and assimilate as best they could into the new world.

Berdichevsky himself was never considered guilty of their offense by association with them, or because he lived among them. Not even his sharpest critics ever doubted his personal Jewish identification; even they regarded him as

one of the most emphatic spokesmen of Jewish tradition. It could be argued, however, that his demand for a radical change in the culture of the Jewish people may have added a new measure of intellectual justification for assimilation. Not only did he castigate contemporary Jewish culture, he even called into question the intellectual bases and justifications for that culture. He was certainly open to the accusation of justifying the assimilationist tendencies of the time and he was keenly aware of his vulnerability.

On one level the question can be answered by an appeal to the personality of Berdichevsky. His attachment to the world of his childhood, the stories he wrote, his enormous learning, his love for the people, the immense sadness and loneliness which his break with the tradition caused him, his use of the Hebrew language, his total devotion to Jewish history and to the Aggadah -- all these bespeak a profound commitment to the Jewish people and a deep concern for their welfare. This was an undeniably potent argument for his Jewish loyalty and ensured for Berdichevsky a hearing which he otherwise might not have received. Still it is an argument which appeals to the heart rather than to the mind. With all its virtue, such a "plea" for the defense is inadequate. It is not easy to pinpoint or argue about feelings, nor do the feelings themselves prove anything. In any case, among the canons of logical thinking an argument from personality is <u>a priori</u> invalid. Even if it were valid, however, an argument about the nature of his

message deduced from the personality of the author would be singularly unfruitful for anybody else besides the author.

Berdichevsky, as we have said, was an activist, trying to incite to a real rebellion: No more books! No more re-evaluation! Throw it all away! Give us back our youth! If the transvaluation of values was to take root among the young generation of Jews who were unwilling and/or unable (for whatever reason) to drop their Jewish identity, he would have to demonstrate once and for all the place of his "new" Judaism in the thousands of years of our history -- that is, to show that his "new" Judaism was not new at all.

Berdichevsky responded to this challenge in many different parts of his work. One section of the essay under consideration, written -- as was characteristic of him -- spontaneously and with great feeling rather than deliberately and carefully, full of the tentative notions rather than of complete arguments, will serve as a basis for presentation. Berdichevsky is defending himself against Ahad Ha-Am.

> You threaten us, saying: our outlook will never even coincide with Judaism, but this is the real question: what is Judaism? What is this abstract and eternal Judaism? Let <u>us</u> do the asking: is this the teaching of Judaism, that a man should be ashamed of himself for loving his enemies (the words of Joab ben Zeruyah to David) . . . or this from the oral law: that a man must be one of the humiliated but never of the humiliators? Is this the teaching of Judaism, that you teach us saying: "A morsel of bread with salt you should eat," or this which says: "in the future a man will be held accountable for all those things which he saw but <u>failed</u> to enjoy" (Jerusalem Talmud)? They say to us, guard <u>Judaism</u>; and we say, We are Jews and that's that ([illegible]). You've chosen for yourselves a fair

> and pious Judaism, only because of which we exist and only for the sake of which we have the right to exist; but we have no need of such an existence, which gives us the privilege of existence only in order to find a transcendent theory in Torah and Life. The people of Israel is an active event and not a fixed and delimited world calculation. We are a people and we have also thought such-and-such, but not [a people] simply because we thought such-and-such. Abstract Judaism has not been our guide, neither this Judaism nor any other. We are Hebrews, and we will serve our hearts. . . . We are standing at the crossroads, our hands are clean. Whoever is for the establishment of the spirit of the people, let him come with us!54

Berdichevsky challenged the entire conception of Judaism as a history with a message, a people whose existence is to be justified in other terms -- any other terms. He denied the consistency of the "message" or the "ideal" of Judaism which Ahad Ha-Am claimed to see, and denied the universality of the Torah in which lay the support of the Orthodox. He denied the existence of a Judaism in any sense, and affirmed in its place the dynamic, struggling reality of the Jewish people, perpetually exercising its will to live and being thwarted.

> The Jewish people was generally inclined "to do evil," that is to say, to live like the rest of the peoples of the world. And the war between real Life (חיים ממשיים) and spiritual Life (חיים רוחניים) filled . . . all the days of its spiritual and natural culture.55

By characterising Jewish history as a "war" between conflicting cultural tendencies, Berdichevsky made a place for his radical new kind of existence within the tradition. The transvaluation of values, far from being a call to something new, was for him a return to a previous nature which

Jews once possessed as a people, but which had been suppressed by an unnatural tradition, imposed by the rabbis.

Indeed, Berdichevsky's demand for a return to Nature and Life was as much a call to "go back" as to "go forward." Since the immediate past was the time when rabbinical and bookish influence reigned supreme, he set his sights on the more distant past, and proposed to over-leap the generations of decline and return to the earliest days of the nation's history when Jews lived in their own land with their own king.

> There is no hope at all for a renaissance without a giant step, without a return to the days of old.[36]

Berdichevsky proposed, therefore, a revolutionary approach to the problem of Jewish existence and the understanding of Jewish history. He proposed to overturn completely the accepted view of the Jewish past. In place of the Hegelian view that each generation somehow completes and improves the work of its predecessors, he contended that from its earliest times the Jewish people have been engaged in a struggle between two conflicting views of its own destiny. One view was that of "The Book," and the other that of Life and Nature.

To support this thesis, Berdichevsky devoted a substantial portion of his mature life to historical study, that is to proving by the most painstaking examination of Jewish history and its sources - Bible, New Testament, Talmud, the Aggadah, the Kabbalah, etc. -- the validity of his

conception. Indeed, all of his vast historical research might be said to have been written to serve a polemic purpose: the justification of the transvaluation of values.

He believed he had proven that the new Jew he sought to fashion was well within Jewish tradition -- indeed, at the heart of Jewish tradition -- that the "normal" Judaism of his day was in point of fact abnormal, (he used the word "sin" in this context) and that the facts of Jewish history supported his view as against the accepted one.

The bulk of Berdichevsky's historical research is as yet in manuscript form, in German, and only the outline of his position is to be found in "The Transvaluation of Values." From the outline, however, one may see the whole picture, many of whose aspects have already been brought to light.

As we have said, the basic premise with which Berdichevsky approaches history is that people are prior to their ideas -- that the Jews are prior to Judaism.

> The wisdom of Israel, and the religion of Israel are only different parts [of the tradition] transmitted to each and every man according to his will and his inclinations; but the people of Israel is prior to them all.
> - Israel is prior to the Law.[57]

Therefore, it is Judaism which is wrong in not meeting the needs and desires of the Jews, and not the Jews who err in wanting what the tradition is not able to give them. In point of fact " נדחו היהודים מפני היהדות "--"Jews have been pushed aside in favor of Judaism."[58]

This is the exact opposite of the traditional formulation: "Because of our sins . . ."

Berdichevsky was not opposed to the Jewish past per se -- this point is worth emphasizing although it has been said before -- but to the past insofar as it presents us with preconceived answers and embracing generalities, and suppresses our own sense of living, questioning, and feeling by telling us in advance what to believe and what to do. Berdichevsky was opposed to the past insofar as it was a "Book," systematizing life without leaving the Jew room in which to live and breathe.

His complaint against "The Book" which was brought out earlier in this section, was levelled not only at the Judaism of his own generation but at all generations. From earliest times "The Book" endeavored to rule over and control the people, as a result of which the nation has deteriorated. A once vigorous Jewish culture is now stricken with schizophrenia and xenophobia. The Jews live in sin, for "The Book" has forced them to deny Life, to deny the other nations of the world, and deny their own individuals.

Who, for Berdichevsky, were the "sinners"? Not the evil men and the wicked souls, but the most righteous men and sages of the tradition whom, for all our opposition, we can't help admiring!

> The great sins which we sinned against Life, sins because of which we have withered away, were perpetrated by absolutely righteous men (צדיקים גמורים), by men of great qualities. . . . Even in humility, in the obligation to

> make oneself a doorstep which is tread upon, there is a kind of greatness; even in the subjugation of man before God we see fear and trembling and a kind of might . . .[59]

As Berdichevsky viewed Jewish history,[60] the group always expressed its power to pick and choose, keeping the ideas it wanted and could use and rejecting what it considered dangerous. Perhaps it is in the nature of any group to go in one fixed direction. Berdichevsky didn't deny the power of the group to suppress individuals and ideas when it considered them harmful to its best interests. That power is a fact, the effects of which can been seen in all societies and all generations. Rather, Berdichevsky questioned the moral right of the group to exercise the power. The Pharisees suppressed the Sadducees because of the needs of that particular time. But the suppression of the Sadducees, he believed, was an enormous loss for future generations, and a complete waste of all the previous generations of Sadducees, whose cultural aspirations eventually came to naught! In the opinion of Voyeslavsky, such a sacrifice was tantamount to murder.

> Every person in Israel, in all generations, has stood on Mt. Sinai and heard the voice of Almighty God saying, "Thou shalt not murder!" And many generations in Israel have arisen and murdered thoughts and feelings -- these most precious possessions of man -- and they stood and blessed God for this murder. The murder of a man is forbidden, but the murder of a man's greatest possession, this image of God which is in him, . . . the faculty of thought and speculation -- this kind of murder is permitted? -- one is appalled![61]

The denial of freedom was all the more appalling because Jews are commanded to serve one God -- and God is not limited to the controversy of Pharisees versus the Sadducees or the Rabbinites versus the Zanaites, in a word, to the doctrinal needs of the community. Surely God is infinite, and open to all, to all beliefs and all opinions without limitation. But the tradition has denied this. It has replaced freedom with orthodoxy, and therein lies the cause of Berdichevsky's complaint, as well as the stimulus for his historiography.

Berdichevsky saw not one, abstract, eternal Judaism but a constant struggle of opposing factions within the people. Following Nietzsche's appraisal of the course of Jewish history, he described its outlines thus; in ancient times the Jews lived in a natural, free relationship to Life and Nature -- and their God, although he was the one God of righteousness and justice, was also the God who gave rain and prolonged life, who was responsible for the stars and the changing of the seasons.

> But afterwards, in a period of decline [Berdichevsky is quoting Nietzsche verbatim] this God was not as powerful as he had once been; they didn't forsake him, but only changed their idea of him: they denied his nature and his idea in order to keep him. The Lord, God of Justice, was no longer one with his people, he was no longer the ineffable name or the essential feeling of the people, but instead a God who imposes conditions upon his creatures. . . . His idea became a tool in the hands of the priests, who explained all wealth in terms of the reward for man's hearkening to the voice of God, and all evil by man's not listening to his voice,

> as the punishment which came because of sin.
>
> And after they put reward and punishment in place of the natural necessity of a people's conduct, the whole unnatural way which ruled among them commenced. The God who Wants came in place of the God who Delivers confused mankind, etc. Morality was no longer a product of Life and the conditions of a natural, fundamental inclination of Life and the conditions of the flowering of the people, it only became abstracted from Life and opposed to Life.
>
> They falsified God, falsified morality, and they (the priests) went even further. The whole history of Israel could no longer stand before them, and sought to jettison it! It devolved upon those priests to create a remarkable counterfeit enterprise, of which there is much evidence hidden in many parts of the Holy Scriptures. With an unprecedented light-headedness they gave the anti-moral early life of Israel, its real history, a religious stamp.
>
> At the hands of these priests the great past of Israel was falsified into a period of decline, and the Diaspora came only as a punishment for this great past. By their hands the heroes of Israel and the great characters of its history became fallen and wicked men.[62]

Therefore Berdichevsky looked carefully at this past. Despite the fact that its major documents were, in his view, deliberate forgeries, and falsifications of the truth, he believed it possible to find a tradition different from the accepted one. He believed he had found it, and to document his belief wrote the equivalent of eight or nine volumes of Jewish history.

The heart of his new perception of the Jewish past is that it doesn't exist as we have imagined it, a block of sameness and a piece cut from one cloth. It is rather the sum total of many parts and many people, of great individuals reacting to the group and vice versa. To formulate the matter in Berdichevsky's words:

> "אין היהדות משותפת לכל הדורות" = Judaism is not uniform for all generations. . . If the sages of Israel find the difference between the Prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah, that Ezekiel resembles a villager who saw the king and Isaiah a city-dweller who saw the king, then surely there is even a greater difference between the God who acted at the Red Sea and a God whose head is wearing Tefilin. . .
>
> The God who called and said, "You shall save alive nothing that breathes"[63] is not a gracious and merciful God. The God of the Torah is not the same as that of the Prophets, and He of the Prophets is not He of the Writings. The God of Isaiah is not the God of Ecclesiastes, the God of Shammai is not the God of Hillel, and He of Hillel is not the God of Saadia.
>
> Is there any need to say that the God of The Songs of Songs is not the God of Ben Sira, and the God of Deborah is not the God of Beruryah?[64]

Where then is the abstract, eternal Judaism in which everybody is supposed to believe? For Berdichevsky it simply doesn't exist, and the attempt to create one is spurious.

> Judaism is only an abstract term. There is no fundamental Judaism; there are only Jewish individuals who think and act in different times and different periods.[65]

There is no "mainstream." If Jewish history has any consistency at all, it is at best the consistency with which two diametrically opposite tendencies alternate in their influence. Berdichevsky called one short section of the essay "Dichotomy" (דו-פרצופים), and described the two tendencies variously as the Sword/the Book; the natural and corporeal/the moral and spiritual; Shammai/Hillel; the strong, mighty lust for Life/the soft, impoverished humility. He even argued that each side has its own value. Different

times and conditions made different demands on a Culture, but the two are certainly not one and the same thing.

> Even today I am astonished that the sages of Israel inscribed the saying: "The Sword and the Book came down bound together," since each contradicts the other and each destroys the other. There are different times and seasons for them, each has its own special time; and when the first comes, the second goes. . .[66]

In another place, Berdichevsky used a different image.

> Our history is many generations old, generations with different ideas and different qualities.
>
> Basically, however, it only has two parts. I can divide all of our long history into two groups, we have but two limbs.
>
> One generation is the Generation of Shammai, a generation of might and Life, and the second generation is the Generation of Hillel, a generation of softness and poverty, a generation of subjugation beneath the yoke of Life, a generation in which too much spiritualism has squashed the essence of Life.
>
> What is Good in the eyes of the one is absolute Evil to the second, and vice versa.
>
> A man should always be as strong as a cedar; A man should always be as frail as a reed . . .
>
> Behold the generation of Hillel changes and passes on, and the generation of Shammai comes . . .[67]

There is no doubt but that the prophets and priests, the generation of Hillel and the men of the Book are most consistently represented in Jewish writings. They have, after all, been the ones who (for a variety of reasons) wielded the sceptre throughout the ages and, like all who have won the struggle for power, they have written the history books to suit their taste. He who would find the other half -- the generation of the Sword, the Heroes, the Men of Shammai - must therefore dig deep beneath the floor of normative Judaism. He must search diligently the dark

recesses and neglected corners of the Past, ferreting out a clue here, a hint there, a story which somehow "got through" in this book, a memory only half-repressed in that document.

Such was the historiography of Berdichevsky, and in the recesses and corners of the past he studied for most of his life. When studying a non-normative stream in history, one has more difficulty proving theses and validating generalisations, but the rewards of diligent study are very great. There are greater treasures to be found in this aspect of our past than one would imagine, and no writer in Jewish history has brought more of them to the light of day than Berdichevsky.

When he looked carefully, Berdichevsky found that in innumerable generations the very kind of Jew which he was now trying to re-create, the Jew with a vital, living relationship to the World and Nature, to Beauty and Poetry, did actually live and breathe and make his mark on the Jewish world. Such men became dear to his heart and mind -- for in them he saw the kind of men he wished he could find in his own day.

Beginning with Israel's earliest days, Berdichevsky found these men in the generations which lived before the giving of "The Book," that is, before the prophetic and priestly groups took power. He recalled the giants in the desert, the twelve spies, and the conquerors of Canaan.

> We know of the beginning of Israel and its early times only from books of laws and ideas which conquered it and which fought against it

> and against its ways, and these [books] have taught us to say that the deeds [of Israel in those days] were evil; but we must picture to ourselves the life of the "rebellious" children of Israel in its purity, in its strength and in the natural feelings which it had.
>
> This life, before the Giving of the Book, how fair, how exalted it was, how lovely and how strong; how goodly are thy tents, O Jacob. . .
>
> The purity and the simplicity -- before the giving of "Good and Evil," before the giving of knowledge and the laws of life, before moral disgust triumphed over the healthy relationship of to life. These gave to the Children of Israel a kind of immeasurable natural beauty.
>
> The direct relationship, which then ruled between man and the world, the natural connection in all the ways of life and the stirring to life; now it all splinters our souls and the emotions of our life.
>
> A great longing fills us for those days and the life of those days; then, when a man in Israel could sit in the space of the world and life, and live like a human being who knows his function.
>
> All the "Everlasting Life" of ours, our spiritual inheritance, is as nothing compared to the tranquil life of those days.[68]

Such was the Jewish nature which Berdichevsky found beyond "The Book," and these were the people he venerated. How different he found it from the old head "wearing Tefillin"; It was a Judaism a person could love and be proud of, could live in and willingly die for.

> Then sang Israel the song of the world and of nature, the song of the heavens and the earth and all their hosts, the song of the sea and its fullness, the song of the mountains and the high places, the song of the terebinths and the meadows, the song of the seas and the rivers. Then sat the man of Israel under his vine and his fig tree, the fig tree put forth its figs and
>
> Those days were days of expansiveness and beauty.[69]

After a time the situation changed. "All the rabbis and the scribes forgot that Nature in its fulness and

Life were also part of the eternal will."[70] Then it was that

> After all these things, behold the Day of the Lord of Hosts is upon all the cedars of Lebanon . . . and there arose among us many generations of people who despised Nature, who thought the marvels of the Lord entirely superfluous . . . and we became a non-people, a non-nation, a non-human being.[71]

Berdichevsky, of course, denied what is commonly accepted: that this was a change for the better. The opposite is true, for then we were a great nation, and now we are a mummified relic. "Everything teaches us that they turned the mountain upside down upon us -- that is to say, they compelled us to pervert our nature.[72]

The change was assuredly for the worse. Berdichevsky venerated not the Judaism of his day but the Judaism of "those days," that is, the life of the Jewish people whenever it bubbled up from the depths of the national soul and the national will to live. He admired Joshua, the Kings of Israel, the Prophets of Baal, and the false Prophets of Israel, the Hellenists, the Maccabees, Alexander Yannai, the Saducees, the Zealots, Bar Kochbah, Elisha ben Abuyah, the Karaites, Uriel D'Acosta and Spinoza -- all of whom the tradition detested. These were people who found "The Book" too narrow and confining, who could not live within the constricting walls which the rabbis and moralists sought to build around them. The tradition should have been big enough for them -- especially for D'Acosta and Spinoza -- but it wasn't. Berdichevsky held the heroes in higher

esteem than the rabbis; the Zealots who died in the siege in Jerusalem were dearer to him than the Pharisees who lived through it. As he wrote about the war of 70 A.D., about Nikadaimon Ben Gurion, Ben Kalba Shavua, and Ben Taitsit Ha Keset, and then about Yohanan Ben Zaccai, the Scribes and the Pharisees, his words grew more bitter and sarcastic than ever.

> The best of the people knew the value of a land for a people and fought for it with extraordinary valor, in <u>them</u> there was a living and sensitive spirit. But the leaders of the people perverted the natural inclination of the people by means of their spurious spiritualism and taught them to prefer Yavneh over the Fortress of Jerusalem, that is to say -- over the fortress of the people and its existence.
>
> We should confront Ezra, Nehemiah and their group, who put their people into captivity with tears and fasts, with the great generation which fell by its sword, with "these outlaws"(הניהו בריוני) -- and see which of them are the giants and which the dwarfs.
>
> These outlaws were greater by far than the masters of the "Eighteen Benedictions." The Sword was more potent than the Book; those who fell on their swords surpassed those who escaped from between the walls and hid themselves in coffins. . .[73]

Was the change wrought by the Pharisees indeed a change for the better? By no means! Yavneh was a catastrophe.

> . . . To the extent that Judaism prevailed, and found for itself a nest in the heart of the Jews -- to that extent the features of its bearers [i.e., the Jews] diminished. What use have we for words, exalted in themselves, when the stature of the people is lowered because of them.
>
> Even those who believe in the absolute value of Judaism do not deny that the mighty Age of Israel and the basis of the people of Israel as a nation came mostly in those very days when they committed, apparently, the greatest evil in the eyes of God.

> Nonetheless, in Yavneh the spirit of Judaism won out; then the remnant of Israel became a nation watching over faith; but what value have those who are as careful in a small commandment as in a large one in contrast with the heroes of Israel who conquered the land and fought for it.[74]

Because he was so attracted by the vital, dynamic moments in Jewish history, Berdichevsky venerated Hasidism. It was not only that he himself was born into its world, but rather that he found the same quality of rebellion and greatness of soul in the Tsadik of earlier days. Hasidism also took the Jew out of his narrow, dead, Book-world of the "shtetl." It brought him into the fields and the woods, renewed the contact with nature and life; it taught him to sing and to exult in his humanity.

Likewise, one sees the reasons for his attachment to the Kabbala, to Spinoza, Anan ben David, and Elisha Ben Abuya. In all of the rebels and outcasts, the dissident and minority voices Berdichevsky found friends and allies.

But it is worth noting, as Veyeslavsky points out,[75] that it is not primarily because Berdichevsky himself agreed with any of their teachings, although in some cases this is partially true. Agreement or disagreement in doctrinal matters was for him totally irrelevant. It was rather because these men and movements were at least living and vital expressions of the will to live, the work of people who tried to be Jews and still be free to create anew a natural, fresh relationship to the World.

Berdichevsky's conception of Jewish history, although

born of the need to justify historically the transvaluation of values, was no fanciful self-projection of the author onto the past. His research was arduous and exhaustive, his command of the sources absolute. The conclusions he reached were sustained and supported by a complicated critical apparatus. For all that, his thesis was revolutionary in its conception and implications, it was by no means capricious. His research had compelled him to reach certain conclusions, and he claimed for these conclusions the stature of objective, historical fact.

Withal, the personality of the man should not be overlooked. His perception of Jewish history had served to alienate Berdichevsky all the more from his surroundings and his generation. The Jew of his day, as sometimes presented in contemporary Hebrew and Yiddish literature, who had distinct foibles resulting from a ghettoized life, was a perpetual failure, an eternal stranger in a world foreign to him. This was not the Jew of whom Berdichevsky could be proud -- of whom any natural man could be proud. For him there were nobler aspects of Jewish history than the crooked nose, the bent back and all-but-extinguished life. Jews were once a people of giants and heroes, a supremely vigorous nation. There had lived in Israel Jews far greater than the people he knew and saw. As we have said, Berdichevsky found such Jews "between the lines," or, in an unguarded moment, openly revealed in the pages of the Bible and the Oral Law. But his most precious source was the Aggadah.

CHAPTER VI

BERDICHEVSKY AND THE AGGADAH

To those who saw in Berdichevsky a destroyer of Judaism, it may have seemed odd that in the last years of his life he dedicated himself even more than before to the study of the Aggadah. Some doubtless saw this as proof that he was a "Baal Teshuvah," a repentent sinner. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was precisely his philosophical and religious position -- leading him to demand a transvaluation of values, and his historical research -- showing him that the tradition, by suppressing life, had also suppressed countless generations of great men who embodied the values he sought to re-create for his days, which lead Berdichevsky inescapably to the Aggadah. There he found the place in which the great rebellious giants of the past still lived on. The Sacred Scriptures and the Halacha had been carefully written and controlled by the Priests, the Pharisees and the Rabbis. The Aggadah remained free and untouched. The voices stilled by the spiritual tyranny of the Book and suppressed by the confining spiritualism of the tradition found echo in the Aggadah. Berdichevsky, feeling the need felt, took it upon himself to champion their cause. Because he made his voice for their voices, he devoted a substantial part of his later life to making

them heard again.

Voyeslavsky described Berdichevsky's relation to the Aggadah in these words:

> The Jewish Aggadah -- not the official kind which goes in the proper path of Jewish creativity and which serves as a kind of buttress to strengthen its progress, but that which goes unobtrusively, which was banished from the place of honor of Jewish perception, and found a resting place only in the deepest recesses of the soul -- this kind of Aggadah captured his heart. He saw in it a conduit through which flowed feelings and thoughts, evidence and testimony of the existence of men who were whole before their God, whole within themselves, who trembled with ache for life which surrounded them, and greater than this, from the primordial fear within themselves. The stifled Jewish imagination built for itself a special world of its own, and into this world it brought in again all the strength, the wills, the desires, the longings and the yearnings, the astonishment and the wonder, which were stifled by the straight moral path of Israel's view of the world. Berdichevsky was, indeed, not only the defender of people, classes, and individuals of value, which the organism had cast out, but also of thoughts, hints, feelings and existences which up to now have not received their due.[76]

The individualism of both people and the ideas lived in the Aggadah, and because Berdichevsky's whole philosophical "mission" lay in bringing forth once again this aspect of Jewish life, his collection of Aggadah is, as Voyeslavsky also points out, entirely different in character and tone from all of the many collections made during the same period by other men.[77] All of the latter illuminated, re-inforced, and gave color to the tradition -- Berdichevsky's collection[78] denied it.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

To summarize any presentation of Berdichevsky's critique of Judaism and his demand for a new set of values, one can do no better than call upon the author himself. Berdichevsky was his own best summarizer. In innumerable instances a few short paragraphs contain the heart of his thought. In the examples now to be offered nearly all of the elements of his critique are present; the unnatural, moribund, Book-life of the Jewish Community, the call for a return to the living, natural, vital relationship to the world and nature, the glorification of the might and strength of the earlier generations of Israel, and the expression of the lust for life which the tradition has suppressed.

> I remember the Mishnah [teaching]: He who goes along the road and interrupts his studies and says "How fair that tree is," "How lovely is that meadow"-- such a person jeopardizes his soul! And one thought comes to my heart: that Judah and Israel will be redeemed only when a new Mishnah will be given to us, which says: He who goes along the road and sees a lovely tree, a fair meadow, a beautiful sky, and stops himself [from admiring them] to think of something else -- behold, <u>such</u> a person is as one who jeopardizes his soul. Give us back the lovely trees and the fair meadows! Give us back the world.[7]

> For two thousand years we have been studying the Book. Our diligence has been unnatural; . . . For two thousand years we haven't had any present existence at all. A long past encompasses us, a past without a present and without a future. . . . And if the people won't hearken to the voice

> of the present and will continue, as it has thus far been accustomed to do, to live in the past and to serve it exclusively, then we shall not live, even if we don't die.[60]
>
> Behold, I'll give you our thoughts, our ideas, our teachings and ordinances, the laws of life and laws of the heart; and you give me the body, the body of ancient Israel, its nature and its far-reaching life. Bring us back the days of our youth.[61]

To bring back "the days of our youth" was Berdichevsky's purpose in demanding the Transvaluation of Values. It remains now to ask a very important question which has been raised before, but has not been answered satisfactorily. In what sense are Berdichevsky's new values Jewish? All that has been proven by Berdichevsky's historical analysis is that other Jews in former generations felt as he did. One could argue that all Berdichevsky has established is a long history of "non-Jewishness" in Jewish history!

No sooner is the question formulated than it is clear that there is no possible way to answer it. Earlier in this section the question was touched upon and Berdichevsky was quoted as saying, "We're Jews, and that's that!" It has also been shown that Berdichevsky himself was inextricably involved in the Jewish tradition -- that his personal loyalty and affection to it were so strong as not to be doubted by anyone who lived in his generation, not even by his most violent critics. But neither his spontaneous, emotional affirmation in the essay, nor the personal qualities of his own life will serve for a reasonable and rational demonstration of the Jewishness of Berdichevsky's philosophy. One is

justified in seeking a more cogent and demonstrable proof.

The trouble is that in order to prove that Berdichevsky was a Jewish (rather than a pagan or an atheist) thinker, we should have to assume a basic frame of reference, a main stream by which the word "Jewish" is to be defined -- which is the very thing whose existence Berdichevsky denied so vehemently! When he wrote that "Judaism is not uniform throughout the Ages," he himself effectively pulled the rug from beneath any consideration of the "Jewishness" of his position.

There is a more serious obstacle in the way of determining the "Jewishness" of Berdichevsky's position -- or that of <u>any</u> unusual person, for that matter. Quite apart from Berdichevsky's own denial of the cohesive unity of Judaism, there is no universally-accepted, all-inclusive definition from any other source or sources, neither from our own generation of thinkers nor from any past generation. So in order to set up a measuring-rod by which Berdichevsky's position may be judged, one should have to do not only what Berdichevsky considered impossible, but that which nobody else in our history has managed to do -- define once and for all the word "Jewish"!!

Perhaps there is one round-about way of reaching a tentative judgment on this matter. Perhaps it can be demonstrated that his position was not at variance with Jewish thought. Such a demonstration would be far from a positive affirmation, but, in view of the difficulties

involved in the latter, at least a step in the right direction.

To spell the matter out in its most basic details, if Berdichevsky was not a thinker in the Diaspora Jewish tradition, then the only other possibility is that he thought along pagan lines. To reduce such a large area to a more responsible and manageable size, the only other real possibility, and the one most consistently advanced by students of Hebrew Literature, is that Berdichevsky was a Nietzschean at heart, committed to a rejection of all religious concepts, which to his mind, were detrimental to the free development of the individual -- he was as specifically anti-Jewish as Nietzsche was anti-Christian -- determined to replace all existing religious traditions with entirely new and antithetical values.

As a matter of procedure, then, our next task is to examine (briefly, and as thoroughly as our competence allows) the relationship between Berdichevsky and Nietzsche. If we can demonstrate that, despite some very important points of agreement, Berdichevsky and Nietzsche are not in basic agreement on fundamental matters, then we shall have at least eliminated the major alternative to considering him a Jewish thinker, and shall perhaps have begun to suggest some positive elements of Berdichevsky's place in the tradition.

CHAPTER VIII

BERDICHEVSKY AND NIETZSCHE

One enters with trepidation into an arena of giants. Important men in the history of modern Hebrew literature have recorded opinions on the question of Berdichevsky's relation to Nietzsche, some affirming it and some denying it. Part of a doctoral thesis has been written on the subject,[82] collecting and classifying examples of the dependence of Berdichevsky on Nietzsche. It, too, is a formidable document.

Ahad Ha-Am, Klausner, Feretz, and A. D. Gordon have answered the question affirmatively. In citations which Dr. Klausner-Eshkol adduces,[83] and with which she agrees wholeheartedly, these men see Berdichevsky only or primarily as a reflection of Nietzsche.

On the other hand, Brenner, Rav Tsair, Lachover, Shalom Spiegel, and Voyeslavsky emphatically deny the connection. For them Berdichevsky, the original Jewish thinker, is of paramount importance.

The truth is probably to be found somewhere between Ahad Ha-Am's blanket inclusion of Berdichevsky and his friends among the Nietzscheans, ("I'm now reading in this connection some of the books of your 'New Testament,' that is to say, some of the books of Nietzsche." -- Ahad Ha-Am

to Berdichevsky in a letter.[84]) and Veyeslavsky's equally blanket inclusion of Berdichevsky among the most basic, original Jews ("With all the comparisons and analogies which he draws between Israel . . . and the other nations . . . behold Berdichevsky is totally a Jew -- not like us, who have mostly borrowed from the outside world and have very little originality -- but total in the absolute meaning of the term."[85])

There is no denying the enormous influence which Nietzsche exerted upon European thought during the last quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century. That such an influence extended over the entire Western European World,[86] religious and secular, Jewish and Christian, is likewise undeniable. In Hebrew literature, Tschernichovsky, Schneur, Hermann Cohen, Hillel Zeitlin, A. D. Gordon, Klatzkin, and even Ahad Ha-Am all show, in varying degrees, the influence of the German philosopher. That Berdichevsky was especially attached to Nietzschean thought is likewise undeniable, but in what ways and to what extent was the attachment manifest?

Berdichevsky wrote about Spinoza, whom he admired enormously, that, though some see him as only a student of the rabbis, and others as a giant belonging to the whole world, it was his opinion that

> Spinoza wasn't a student of our Rabbis, even though he drank of their waters . . . and all these paragraphs which Spinoza took here and there [from the

> Jewish tradition] don't comprise even a part of a percent of his real greatness . . . all these stones don't yet build the complete building.[87]

So, too, with Berdichevsky and Nietzsche; the former was influenced by the latter, and built his structure with the latter's materials. But bricks do not make a building, and even if the bricks are in some order and show some signs of becoming a complete structure, they do not comprise the whole of it.

Still, the evident of learning, borrowing and quoting from Nietzsche in the essay under consideration is considerable, indeed. In her analysis of the exact nature and extent of this dependence, Klausner-Eshkol has compiled and documented an impressive list of specific themes which Berdichevsky found waiting for him in the writings of Nietzsche, and which, she argues, he took because they were useful to him in his attempt to effect a radical change in Jewish existence.[88] These are the themes:

1. The title of the work itself, and the use of a saying of Nietzsche's as the motto for one of its important sections.[89]

2. The idea that the priests and prophets deliberately falsified Jewish history. Here Berdichevsky quoted Nietzsche verbatim.[90]

3. The conception of the past as strangling and destroying life, and the non-life of the Jews who are bound to a dead past.

4. The past as, nevertheless, the source of values for a people, giving it shape and form; that is, the definition of "culture."

5. The rents within the heart of the Jew and the rift between the Jew and the modern world (for Nietzsche it was the cleft between Christianity and the world).

6. The basic scepticism; eternal truths or eternal values do not exist, morality is only a part of a given place and time of the people who profess it.

7. Life and Nature as the greatest good and the source of all True Morality (as distinguised from Priestly Morality).

8. Individualism as taking precedence over altruism in True Morality.

9. The will to power as the motivating force of men and nations, and the glorification of physical force.

10. The veneration of the great men and mighty peoples of the past who personified the transvaluation of values (for Nietzsche, pre-Socratic Greece, for Berdichevsky, pre-Prophetic Judaism).

11. The conception of history as cyclical, positive ages giving way to negative ages, and vice versa.

12. The approval of polytheism as more genuine and more fruitful than monotheism.

It remains a matter of dispute whether all these propositions are unequivocally true or not, or whether they came to Berdichevsky independently or as a result of reading Nietzsche. The fact was that he found himself in roughly the same personal situation vis-à-vis Judaism and the modern world as Nietzsche was in vis-à-vis Christianity. In such a situation it is not unreasonable to expect two men of similar temperaments to come to similar conclusions. Again, it is clear that Berdichevsky read carefully a great deal of Nietzsche's work, yet more than once he told Lachover, "I never managed to read Zarathustra all the way to the end."[91] Whatever one's personal judgment, the whole matter is not so

clear as the thesis would have it be.

Be all this as it may, the list, though open to doubts and questions, still remains impressive and compelling. But assuming for the sake of argument that Berdichevsky did learn all these things from reading Nietzsche, it is by no means certain that this makes him ipso facto a Nietzschean. For these ideas are not, in fact, the heart and center of Nietzsche's thought. They are not the unique perceptions by which Nietzsche's philosophy is recognized and differentiated from all others.

The crucial ideas which mark "Thus Spake Zarathustra," "The Genealogy of Morals," "Beyond Good and Evil," etc. -- three or four in number are quite of a different order: 1.) God is dead; 2.) The higher man is beyond good and evil; 3.) The world is governed by a doctrine of Eternal Recurrence. These are conceptions without which Nietzsche's philosophy is inconceivable, and they are not to be found in Berdichevsky's "Transvaluation of Values." Berdichevsky's God is by no means dead. He does not seek a Higher Man, a bond beast who lives freely at the expense of the many, but a higher Jew, -- and this only as a means of getting a nobler Jewish People. The new Jew and the new Jewish people are not beyond good and evil but all the more committed to serving the one God of Justice because they can serve Him freely, as strong, natural men serve Him, rather than obeying Him timidly, out of fear and "resentiment." Though there have been cycles in Jewish history, the Sword and the Book

alternating, there is no trace in the essay of the metaphysical necessity of Eternal Recurrence. On these fundamental issues Berdichevsky and Nietzsche part company, and since even Nietzsche is not Nietzschean without them, it is difficult to see how Berdichevsky can be Nietzschean.

That being the case, it is possible to appraise the relationship between the two more clearly. Berdichevsky learned a great deal from Nietzsche. Many aspects of the Nietzschean system were useful to him, and he too them as part of his c anon. But on fundamental issues he remained apart, and that which divided them were those themes which however one defines our tradition, no Jew could possibly accept; the death of God, the existence of the few Higher Men beyond good and evil, the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, etc.

Inasmuch as Berdichevsky found himself confronting the same problem as Nietzsche, as the bearer of a tradition which cut off the possibility of living fully and naturally, he proposed the same general solution; that the first thing to do is to become a free, alive, original, creative individual, to throw off the yoke. This was the theme of European Individualism -- of Nietzsche, Ibsen and Schopenhauer. Berdichevsky undoubtedly was within this stream of thought, but there is no evidence that, in sharing the same general world view, he went beyond the limits which a Jew could go, or that he accepted doctrines fundamentally at variance with

those of Jewish history. As Voyeslavsky points out, the similarities between the two thinkers were not doctrinal but temperamental.

> If one is to inquire and find dependencies between Berdichevsky and Nietzsche, they are not in the seeking of a transvaluation of values, nor in the criticism of Jewish culture or Jewish thought; -- these things lie on the uppermost surface, and there is not enough in them to find a relationship in depth. In my judgment, it is proper and necessary to look for [any relationship] in the veneration of Vitality, the strength of Life, the strength of Flesh and Blood. The Intellectualist within each must give way for a time to the Vitalist.[71a]

In what sense, then, is Berdichevsky to be considered a Jewish thinker? Perhaps in the same way that the average Israeli is a Jew. For the Orthodox, Judaism is primarily a matter of legal observances; for the Liberal, commitment to certain basic theological ideas -- Monotheism, Covenant, Justice, etc. If one might hazard a generalization, neither the Law nor Theology is particulary important for the Israeli. What is important is rather a sense of belonging to a people, to a history, to a land, and to a common spiritual and physical inheritance.

To define "Jewishness" in almost ethnic, tribal, and, (as we have understood that word) in Cultural terms -- allowing of course for the possibility (especially over several thousand years of dispersion) of losing many people and gaining others -- may not be acceptable to all Jews everywhere. But it is as good a definition as any, and the only one which will encompass eighty percent of the Jewish

population of the world. It is also a definition which includes Berdichevsky, and with which he agreed wholeheartedly.

We have offered many examples of Berdichevsky's involvement in and attachment to Jewish tradition. Voyeslavsky cites one more of special interest.[92] Berdichevsky, he argues, was the first Jew in our history to take upon himself the task of providing a specifically Jewish answer to the Protestant higher criticism of the Bible, approaching the basic study of the Bible from within. To a degree unparalleled up to our own day he sought to interpret the Bible not on the basis of moder (i.e., Christian) scholarship, but from the depths of a Jewish vision and understanding of it. Even if the result was "apikorsut," it was a Jewish "apikorsut from beginning to end!

Considering all things together, Spiegel's analysis is probably as close to the truth as any.

> He [Berdichevsky] himself, in clear-eyed moments of introspection, recognized with fear how bound up he was with his ancestral heritage; 'All my thoughts and meditations are nothing but hereditary burdens, echoes of my ancestors' thoughts. Even now, while I loosen the chains, I am merely a son of the generations I would overleap.' He realized that his conflict with traditional Judaism drew sustenance from the best forces of that Judaism, that his pious fathers lived on in his very blasphemies. . . Possibly he divined that his life work would be subject to the law of all revolution: that it only helps the best in the enduring order it fights against to further endurance. So, too, his radical transvaluation became a fountain of youth for what is permanent in Judaism. And, like many a bringer of offensively new and unheard-of things, it was he who safeguarded and reintroduced the long-established and the long-known.[93]

FOOTNOTES

PART II

CHAPTER I

1. See "לשאלת התרבות", ערכין, pp. 40-41, of which the foregoing definition of "culture" was a summary.
2. Ibid., p. 41.
3. Ibid., p. 27.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., pp. 46-47
6. Ibid., p. 34.
7. Ibid., p. 31.
8. Ibid., p. 30.
9. Quoted by Ben Or, תולדות הספרות העברית החדשה, תל אביב, ישראל, 1951, חלק ג', ע' 189
10. כתבי ח.נ.ביאליק, מאמרים, תל אביב, דביר, 1960, "שיטוי ערכין", ע' 28
11. Ibid., p. 40.
12. Ibid., p. 44.
13. Ibid., p. 41.
14. Ibid., p. 29.
15. Ibid., p. 36.
16. Ibid., p. 30.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 40.
19. Ibid., p. 55
20. Lachover רשונים ואחרונים, תל אביב, דביר, חלק ב' 1935, ע' 55
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Arachim, op. cit., p. 40.

CHAPTER II

24. Ben Or, op. cit., p. 184

25. Arachin, op. cit., p. 45.

26. Ibid., p. 42.

27. Ibid., p. 39.

28. Lachover, op. cit., p. 37.

29. Ibid.

30. Berdichevsky argued this point at length in his "Open Letter to Ahad Ha-Am," in the same volume of essays, pp. 155-156.

CHAPTER III

31. See especially his essay,

32. Arachin, op. cit., p. 35.

33. Z. Voyeslavsky ספר מקום, ירושלים, מרכז הרשות המדינית, 1956, ע' 82

34. Arachin, op. cit., p. 45.

35. Ben Or., op. cit., p. 87.

36. Arachin, op. cit., p. 39.

37. Ibid., p. 28.

38. Ibid., p. 35.

39. Voyeslavsky, op. cit., p. 32.

40. Arachin, op. cit., p. 30.

41. Refer to Footnotes 27 and 28 above.

42. Lachover, op. cit., p. 31.

43. "מרד בצל", Arachin, op. cit., p. 39.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., p. 35. Berdichevsky is referring specifically to a project suggested by Ahad Ha-Am (and actually initiated by him) to publish an encyclopedia containing an accumulation of all the Jewish knowledge of the ages.

46. Ibid., p. 47.

CHAPTER IV

47. Lachover, op. cit., p. 37.

48. Arachin, op. cit., p. 52.

49. Ibid., p. 47.

50. Ben Or, op. cit., p. 189.

51. Ibid.

52. Arachin, op. cit., p. 41.

53. Ben Or, op. cit., p. 189.

CHAPTER V

54. Arachin, op. cit., p. 38.

55. Ibid., p. 34.

56. Ibid., p. 33.

57. Ibid., p. 30.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

60. The following paragraphs are the formulation of Voyeslavsky, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

61. Ibid., p. 27.

62. Ibid., p. 48.

63. Deut. 20:16

64. Arachin, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

65. Ibid., p. 51.

66. Ibid., p. 45.

67. Ibid., p. 46.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., p. 45.

70. Ibid., p. 27.

71. Ibid., p. 45.

72. Ibid., p. 46.

73. Ibid., p. 47

74. Ibid., p. 51.

75. Voyeslavsky, op. cit., p. 26.

CHAPTER VI

76. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

77. Compare especially the [illegible] of Bialik and Ravnitzsky.

78 One Volume has thus far been published. See Footnote 2 (3) in Introduction, p. vi.

CHAPTER VII

79. Arachin, op. cit., p. 45.

80. Ibid., p. 47.

81. Ibid., p. 46.

CHAPTER VIII

82. קלויזנר-אשכול, השפעת ביטאן ראשונים על ס.י. בן גריון, תל אביב, רמ"ר, 1954

83. Ibid., pp. 23-24.

84. Letter 19 May 1898 in [illegible], "[illegible]", [illegible], אגרות אחד העם, שפר א', ר'223, 1925

85. Voyeslavsky, op. cit., p. 24.

86. Ibsen's Peer Gynt, for example, is a man who has transvalued values.

87. Arachin, op. cit., p. 49.

88. Following is a summary of Klausner-Eshkol's thesis, op. cit., pp. 27-36.

89. "In order to build a temple, one must destroy a temple." "[illegible]", [illegible], op. cit., p. 32.

90. Ibid., p. 48.

91. Lachover, op. cit., p. 57.

91a. Voyeslavsky, op. cit., p. 33.

92. Ibid., pp. 24-25.

93. Spiegel, Hebrew Reborn (New York: MacMillan, 1930). pp. 370-371.

APPENDIX

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

OF SOME OF THE WRITERS MENTIONED IN THE ESSAY

AHAD HA-AM: (nom de plume of Asher Ginsberg, 1856-1927). Critic, journalist, publicist, essayist and philosopher, founder and editor of HaShiloach (השלח) an influential literary and philosophical journal, under the influence of Positivism, a critic of Jewish existence and an advocate of a re-birth of a national culture with Israel as its center, but withal an opponent of the political Zionism of Hertzl.

Eliezer BEN YEHUDAH: (1857-1922). Generally recognized as the "father" of Modern Hebrew as a spoken language, Ben Yehudah moved to Palestine early in the 20th century and began a campaign for the re-establishment of the Hebrew language as the day-to-day vehicle of communication between Jews. He began work on an enormous Dictionary and thesaurus of the Hebrew language, which was completed only many years after his death.

Hayyim Nahman BIALIK: (1873-1934). One of the greatest of the modern Hebrew poets, the writer who best gave voice to the sorrow and despair of the Jewish community in East Europe, to the desires of the Jew for a new life and his attempt to create it. A genius comparable to any in Western literary history, a legend in his own lifetime, Bialik's influence on Jewish literature is immeasurable.

Yosef Hayyim BRENNER: (1881-1921). Novelist and short story writer, one of the most severe and sarcastic critics of Jewish life, violent and almost demonic in his anger at the inadequacies of Jewish existence. Brenner was one of Berdichevsky's closest friends, and they corresponded extensively.

Martin BUBER: (1878-). Jewish philosopher and exponent of Jewish mysticism and the Hasidic movement.

David FRISHMAN: (1860-1922). Critic, poet, essayist and writer of short stories. Frishman was one of the first in Hebrew literature to champion secular, West European aesthetics. In contradistinction to his predecessors, most of whom were specifically interested in Jewish life, Jewish religion, Jewish culture, etc., Frishman saw himself as a spokesman to the Jewish people of the values of the Western World.

Y. L. (Yehudah Leib) GORDON: (1830-1892). Poet and prominent figure in the Enlightenment movement; at first a romantic poet he later lost faith in the power of Enlightenment to solve the Jewish problem and became a satirical critic of Jewish life.

Theodore HERTZL: (1860-1904). Founder and principal leader of the World Zionist Organization, champion of a political solution to the Jewish problem by the recognition by the various European governments of the right of the Jewish people to re-build their own state in Palestine. Hertzl's book, The Jewish State, was eagerly received by the mass of European Jews, who found in it a program to fulfill their own aspirations, and in a real sense its publication marked the beginning of the concerted political, economic and social drive which eventually led to the establishment of the State of Israel.

Moshe Leib LILIENBLUM: (1843-1910). Publicist and critic, advocate of social, religious and cultural reforms for East European Jewry, and a leading thinker in the Hibbat Zion Movement.

MENDELE MOCHER SEFORIM: (nom de plume of Shalom Jacob Abramowitz, 1836-1918). Hebrew and Yiddish novelist. One of the first to depict the life of East European Jewry in works of fiction and, consequently, a great influence on the writers of Hebrew (and Yiddish) who followed him.

Y. L. (Yitzhak Leib) PERETZ: (1851-1915). Brilliant writer of short stories, most famous for his works in Yiddish, sympathetic exponent of Hasidism and the simple piety of the ghetto and the small town. His masterful (if romanticised) recreation of the world of East European Jewry made him one of the most beloved and influential writers of his generation.

RAV TSAIR (nom de plume of Hayyim Tchernowitz, 1870-1949). Scholar, essayist, and critic. Professor of Talmud at the Jewish Institute of Religion, New York.

Nahum SOKOLOV (1860-1936). Journalist and essayist, president of the World Zionist Organization (1931-35), founder and editor of several Hebrew journals, and author of many books on Zionist movement and Jewish history.

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