

Alexandria: On Jews and Judaism in America

Gershon Shaked

In Memory of Shimon Halkin

Literature here will be different, that is, not Jewish in the commonly accepted sense, but rather human, varied in its concerns and genres. There will also be a different kind of Judaism, adapted to life here and flowing from it. There will be negative phenomena here and there, reduction and decline as well. The foundation will expand, the back will suffer a little, which is reason for neither jubilation nor bitterness. One must simply see and understand.

Yakov Rabinovitz, *Our Literature and Our Life*

New York, New York, to What Shall I Compare Thee?

Many years have passed since the late Shimon Halkin wrote his article, 'Jews and Judaism in America' (Hebrew, Schocken, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1947). My teacher and mentor grew up in the United States and knew the country well. I, who have been there only on occasional trips, merely wish to sum up my impressions from a year which I recently spent there. These remarks are written years after his, in a different social context, and in other

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circumstances. They are the impressions of an outside observer among the Jews of New York, the heart of American Jewry.

My encounters there were unlike my previous meetings with Jews in other cities. The New York community does not resemble those of Cincinnati, Berkeley, or even the thriving enclave in Boston, communities with which I had close contacts in the past. New York is special and unique. There has never been any place like it in the Jewish world. I wouldn't call it the Jerusalem of America, as Vilna was the Jerusalem of Lithuania, and the New York Jewish community is very different from that of Warsaw at its height or that of any other eastern European city before the destruction.

During the 1920s, when the Yiddish theater was thriving, and the *Forward*, the *Morgn-Blat*, and the other Yiddish newspapers rivalled the circulation of the English dailies, one might have seen aspects of a miniature Warsaw in New York, but today, in the 1980s, there is not a smidgen or a trace of that.

It would be difficult to find sister cities or communities during the Middle Ages or in antiquity: New York is unlike Golden Age Seville or Granada, not only because the external cultural circumstances are dissimilar, but also because the reaction of the Jews to their 'Golden Age' is very different: like their ancestors in distant Spain, New York Jews also write Jewish philosophy in the gente vernacular, but no one believes that these works must be translated into Hebrew by today's Ibn-Tibbon in order to assure their survival. Nor does anyone, like Judah Halevi, sing songs of Zion on alien soil, neither in the local vernacular nor in the original Hebrew. With the exception of a small orthodox minority, no Jewish heart is in the east while its owner is far off in the west, and no one even daydreams of the 'beauteous landscape, the joy of creation'. In Jewish Spain, a bilingual culture still was widespread, leaving a great Hebrew heritage. In New York, Gabriel Preil can sing with a quiet conscience and an unbroken heart that he is the last Hebrew poet. And if one should ask Gabriel for whom he labors, he would certainly turn eastward and say that there and only there does the sun of his poetry shine. And before Gabriel, the New Yorker, strides the Tel Avivian major literary critic and publisher, Menachem Peri, proclaiming: 'Thus shall be done for the man from New York, whom Tel Aviv wishes to honor'.

Some New York Jews claim a resemblance to Sura and Pumbedita, the two great Babylonian Yeshivas where the Talmud was consolidated. There a legal work was created, which formed a protective wall around the Torah and reshaped the mores of Jewish society both in that diaspora and throughout the dispersion. The sages of Babylonia devoted themselves to molding a nascent way of life rather than compiling and summarizing the past (Bialik described this phenomenon marvelously in his essay, 'Halakha and Agada'). In Jewish New York, a new Halakha is not

being fashioned, nor does this community seek to follow in the footsteps of assimilationist Jewish Berlin with its 'Wissenschaft des Judentums', a community that sought to prove to the gentiles with the signs and wonders of scientific research that even the 'primitive' Jews had an important culture, at least in the past.

To what then shall I compare New York, greatest of cities, with its enormous Jewish community, of which Shimon Halkin wrote,

Your children love you, New York, more than any city dwellers in any generation ever loved their metropolis anywhere in the world. ... And, if all your children feel that way, your Jews even more so. Seventy nations, with their races and languages, are devoted to you with all their hearts and souls, making your weekday a great sabbath, as though they had never in their lives savored the taste of a homeland until they found a place in your bosom - and, even more so, your Jews. The love of the gentiles is private, that of the Jews, public, out in the open.

Ad Mashber

I can recall only one place in antiquity where the Jews remained Jewish and yet praised their gentile city extravagantly, trying to absorb it while they assimilated within it. To what then shall I compare thee, New York? To ...

Alexandria!

I do not claim that these observations are the fruit of a scholarly comparison between New York and Alexandria. Such a comparison would be both ridiculous and meaningless. I merely adduce Alexandria as a symbol, without claiming a strict parallel between two complex cultural systems, each of which has left its own distinct mark upon history.

In the *History of the Jewish People* Menachem Stern describes the culture of the Jews of Alexandria as follows:

The body of work written in Greek by Jews between the third century BCE and the early second century CE is known as Hellenistic Jewish literature. This literature was not only composed by Jews, but all its subjects were also Jewish, and it dealt with various aspects of Judaism, the history of the Jewish people, and its status in the past and the present. This literature grew up out of Jewish life in the surroundings of Hellenistic culture, and it continued developing under the Julian, Claudian, and Flavian Roman emperors.

It expressed the attitudes and tendencies of the educated classes within Jewish society, who spoke Greek, circles who demanded significant responses to the challenge posed

by the great culture of the Hellenistic-Roman world. These Jews wished to continue to live as Jews while absorbing patterns of thought and Greek literature, and they sought to reconcile these with the Jewish tradition.

[Menachem Stern, 'Hellenistic Jewish Literature', *The Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic-Roman World* (Hebrew, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Peli and Am Oved, 1983), p. 208.]

Allow me to add the following remark to Stern's description, taken from the historian, Graetz:

Their first aim was to disseminate knowledge of Judaism and recognition of its venerable glory among educated Greeks, but, imperceptibly, they themselves forgot the Torah. Their way of thinking was so full of Greek thought, that they took the final message of the Jewish Torah to be the opinions and ideas current among the Greek philosophers.

[Taken from the Hebrew translation by Sh.L. Citron of Zvi Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Warsaw: Achisefer, 1931), vol. II, p. 171.]

These two historians speak of a great culture based mainly on translation (the Septuagint). The greatest thinker of that culture, Philo, made a serious effort of ideological and aesthetic syncretism, bringing the beauties of Japhet into the tents of Shem, commenting upon the Torah and interpreting it according to Greek philosophy. In contrast to Babylonian Jewish culture, the Jews of Alexandria abandoned original Hebrew culture almost completely and created mainly in translation. The Jews of Babylon heaped piles and piles of Aramaic interpretations on the Hebrew original, but the Jews of Alexandria left the original behind until it was nearly forgotten.

After all is said and done, is the comparison justified? Is New York indeed like Alexandria?

Doubtless no two events in history are the same, and, *a fortiori*, one cannot compare two cultures so distant from each other and declare that indeed history has repeated itself, and there is nothing new under the sun. However, one commonly views the present from the perspective of the past, so that it may seem like a reprise.

Jewish New York seems to me like a strange transformation of Jewish Alexandria: its sages are brilliant Hellenistic sages, Jews who read Scripture in translation, for the Hebrew language is forgotten, and, if it is remembered in certain circles, it is considered only a secondary ancient foreign language, which must be interpreted in the vernacular - the quotidian English which rules the roost.

Even among the orthodox, halakhic responsa and rabbinical

literature are translated into English, and, all the more so, among other Jews, who use Hebrew with diminishing frequency. Everyone employs diligent translators, whose task is to transform the Hebrew language of their people into their own current English. I do not refer merely to language here, but rather to the semiotic dimensions behind the language. American Jewry has stamped its own translated tone upon its communal life and on central ceremonies of the religious community, such as Bar- and Bat-Mitzvahs, engagements and weddings.

If Jewish philosophy everywhere, in every generation, has been influenced by the Jews' place of exile, as Julius Gutmann claims in his *Philosophies of Judaism*, in the United States this is doubly true. Even the concept 'Jewish literature' has assumed a new guise. Hebrew literature has been relegated to the sidelines, and English has seized the high ground: I refer not only to current literature but also to the Jewish literary tradition. Irving Howe, one of the foremost American Jewish translators and critics, tacitly assumes (judging by his translations and articles) that the ancestral culture is not Hebraic but rather Yiddish, and the principal task which he has posed for himself and his colleagues is to translate Yiddish culture into English, because, if it is not translated, it will be forgotten.

The Jewish Publication Society has taken up a project like that of the Seventy Sages of Alexandria and is translating the Bible into American English, adding interpretations relevant to the place and the time. Midrash, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, the works of Maimonides, and the Zohar are appearing in new translations, and people refer to them as though they were the original. Commentaries are based on the translations, and writers on philosophy and criticism make do with the translation and the commentaries they find there. This is a translated Jewish culture almost completely lacking the integrity of the original.

I do not wish to pass judgment here, either positive or negative. Any evaluation would only be silly and ridiculous. It seems to me that one must assess the American Jewish culture the way Yakov Rabinovitz assessed the new secular Hebrew culture of the Land of Israel, but with a slight change. He says:

Culture ['literature' in the original] here will be different, that is, not Jewish in the commonly accepted sense, but rather *human*, varied in its concerns and genres. There will also be a different kind of Judaism, adapted to life here and flowing from it. There will be negative phenomena here and there, reduction and decline as well. The foundation will expand, the back will suffer a little, which is reason for neither jubilation nor bitterness. *One must simply see and understand.*

Indeed these two cultures differ: one is a secular culture which is

entirely Hebraic, constantly developing in its old-new language, while the other is an ethnic-religious culture developing in the local vernacular and contributing both to itself and to its locality.

Weekdays and Holidays

Since these remarks are not based on sociological research, and I have no statistics about 'numbers and people', all of my impressions from modern Alexandria derive from encounters I had during my year among the Jews (and Jewry) of America.

Hence I shall take an empirical approach, summing up the impressions of my meetings with our American brethren as I react to them and describe the conclusions to which they led me. I have chosen certain data, a selection from a thousand and one possible events. The reader will have this data before him. He may accept my conclusions if he wishes. If not, he may reject them. The choice of data was rather arbitrary and accidental, and it depends on the eye of the observer no less than on the facts themselves. Yet I submit that any other method would have led me to the same conclusions, for even the statistician with his questionnaires anticipates certain responses, whispered in his ear by an investigative intuition or preconception.

Religious experience is given form in ceremonial divisions which shape the routine of its days, months, and years: morning, afternoon, and evening services, the Biblical portion of the week, the new moon, and mainly the yearly cycle of holidays. These are the most distinctive features of Jewish life. When Friday evening falls on in Tel Aviv and the streets empty, to fill up again later on, public transportation stops, and multitudes of taxis begin prowling the streets – you know that you're in Jewish Tel Aviv, which is different, of course, from Jerusalem, where more people go to synagogue than to the seashore. The atmosphere testifies to the character of these cities and to that of the Jewish state. Even though some of us (on both sides) oppose the character of the Sabbath in these two cities, one might say that everyone agrees that their character is part of our own.

When a Jew is in the diaspora, where Jewish holidays, being marginal to the majority culture, are not predominant, his sensitivity to them is greater than in Israel, even if he is removed from religion. In Israel you are among Jews all year long, including the holidays. In the diaspora the holidays are occasions for Jews to meet. Thus on the eve of Rosh Hashanah my wife and I went to the synagogue of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the spiritual center of the Conservative movement. The prayers there were mainly in Hebrew with only a sprinkling of English, unlike the services in Reform synagogues, where that proportion is reversed, though both on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur the rabbi's sermon was central to the service.

The sermon in every synagogue is entirely in English, explaining the Hebrew, which is not understood by most of those who take part in the prayers, and setting up an analogy between the current concerns of American Jewry in general and the texts which were not heard in the original or which were heard but not understood. But this, as Mendele Mokher Seforim used to say, is not my concern.

What is my concern is a meeting that took place after the services. As we left the synagogue we joined a friend from Jerusalem. We were invited to a social gathering in the home of a woman member of the congregation, with whom he stays when he comes to New York. This woman was an Israeli, the widow of a distinguished professor at the Hebrew University. She herself is an academic, and, after her husband's death, she returned to America and married a non-Jewish professor, who served as the host to this whole group of Jews returning from prayers.

We Jews sat and spoke about Israel and about American Jewry, and the non-Jewish husband sat and listened, accepting the Jewishness of his wife and her friends as something entirely natural. This was a mixed marriage without any conflict. What we saw was a way of life typical of a great many mixed Jewish families: assimilation which is neither complete assimilation nor the complete preservation of particularity. Different cultures and religions can live side by side, and everything is open. Rosh Hashana is without penitence or religious conflict. Pluralism permits Jews to live and let live, without converting the gentiles or submitting to baptism.

We also spent Hanukkah in New York. Underlying our experience, of course, was the overriding commercial nature of the season: not the holiday of the Maccabees or the birthday of the Redeemer, but the festival of the sale before the storewide sales, where everybody makes money on everything. First of all it's a good living for the communications media, because during the fir tree festival advertising for consumer goods and other assets transcends any possible limit and entices buyers to pile the foot of the tree with presents, gifts, and donations. The more one gives and consumes, the better.

The gentiles have their fir tree, and the Jews have their Hanukkah bushes, and that's what impressed me so much about the display windows: in tranquility and security the two dwelled beside each other like the wolf and the lamb at the end of days - fir trees and Hanukkah menorahs. Consumer capitalism doesn't distinguish among symbols. Everything speaks the word of the living god of commerce, and if you can increase sales by using decorated trees, you can also enhance them by kindling menorahs.

Moreover, in the lobby of our apartment house a Christmas tree was lit for the Christian holiday, and a menorah was lit for ours. Everyone eats, no one protests, and it is all with tidings of comfort

and joy. Everyone gets his bite of the advertising bagel and of the consumer society's fruitcake.

When we went to visit my cousin, naturally we brought a present for her little girl, who expected to get eight times more bounty during the eight days of Hanukkah than her friends got on the one birthday of little Jesus. They won out, perhaps, in the overall holiday atmosphere, but they got less concrete benefit.

In honor of Christmas, Handel's *Messiah* is performed in Lincoln Center and in churches, and in honor of our holiday the same composer's Judaea Maccabeus is sung in Lincoln Center and in synagogues. The messiah and Judah the Maccabee dwell together without hostility, and (usually) a young Jewish man conducts them both. But on the margins of the capitalist festival of increased consumption of various types, from the garment industry to the concert industry, I encountered another phenomenon, which, if I had met with it in Israel, would certainly have put me off. Indeed, I would have fled for my very life, but, when I encountered it in New York, my heart swelled, and I learned something important and very positive about the strange character of this Alexandrian Jewry.

One day during Hanukkah - I believe it was the third - in the little square adjoining the subway station near our house on the upper West Side of Manhattan, a small group of ultra-orthodox Jews (Lubavitcher Hassidim, by the looks of them) appeared on a truck bearing a large menorah. They recited the blessing over the Hanukkah lights, using a loudspeaker as if they were set up for a big rock concert. After the benediction, they broke out in 'Maot Tsur'. To my great surprise, passersby, most of them wearing yarmulkas, and some of them bareheaded, gathered on Broadway and joined in the song. To my astonishment, I found myself singing along too, standing at attention as though I was singing *Hatikvah* on Independence Day, loudly trolling the one and only verse of that old song, whose words I can recite correctly. It would never have occurred to me to join in such a congregation in Jerusalem. I certainly would flee to more than a stone's throw from any group of ultra-orthodox Jews if they came to organize singing like that in any kind of public forum.

I wondered to myself: what had happened to this son of an agnostic home in Vienna to make him act foolishly and be carried away by these missionaries, as it were? What made me proud of these Jews, who proudly displayed the signs of their faith and didn't view them as shameful? They walk among the gentiles as if this city were theirs, and they don't hesitate to spread and reveal their doctrine to the masses.

I remembered that Jewish boy in Vienna at Christmas time, envying his gentile friends who received ten measures of the beauty of the holiday, when white snow covered the roads, the bells rang, Santa Claus came, and the marvellous infant was born,

an infant whom, the children claimed, I and the likes of me had murdered. I hid my menorah as well as I could, a shameful thing, and I knew that the oil would suffice only in my grandmother's house. But here Jewish children strode before me with heads held high in public, without fear.

I am told that even in New York Jews have dared to walk with pride only since the 1960s, when the 'new' Maccabees in the Holy Land, in the image of Ari Ben-Canaan (the hero of *Exodus*), repeated the brave exploits of the Maccabees of antiquity, making their own contribution to the esprit de corps of the Lord of the Universe's commando unit.

But that doesn't matter: proud Jews in a gentile land, or, if you will, proud Jews, extreme in their faith, living their lives openly and publicly. But they too live and let live, without trying to impose their doctrine on anyone, and are unwilling to submit to anyone. They live and let live. Only in Alexandria-New York do they behave that way. In Jerusalem they want the whole kit and caboodle. Everyone must dance to their tune. If not, they change the commando unit of the Lord of the Universe from a spiritual army to a physical one, making themselves and everything they stand for obnoxious. Henceforth anyone who is not in their camp must be in the enemy's.

Is it possible that Jews will only let others live in a country where Jews are free to live, but that in a state where they must live together, they are unable to live and let live?! I am very sorry to say that here in the Land of Israel, of which the pioneers sang, 'Here shall the Divine Presence dwell, here shall the tongue of the Bible flourish too', the Divine Presence does not dwell in most of our precincts, and we have returned to the stone age, where the language of flying rocks has taken the place of that of the Bible. Perhaps Jews need a smidgen of diaspora and more than six measures of gentiles so that four measures of Jews can live together. At any rate, the ultra-orthodox Jews of New York live in peace with other Jews, and with the world around them, because they don't try to dominate their fellow Jew. All they ask is freedom for themselves and freedom to try to influence others, and of that they are given their fill with a liberal hand.

The 'orthodox' Jews live on the margins of Alexandria. They live in the shtetl, and, despite their fluent English, many of them read the weekly portion twice in the original Hebrew and once in Yiddish translation.

What is, of course, surprising, is that one may live in the greatest metropolis of the world and still dwell in a shtetl. One may use the communications media afforded by that metropolis and broadcast a message that sounds like something out of the 'dark' Middle Ages to modern people.

These Jews belong, as we have noted, at one extreme of the spectrum. I met their brethren from the other end of that spectrum on

the secular New Year. The governors of the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, the largest church in the world (larger than St. Peter's), published huge advertisements to announce a gala concert in honor of the new year. The orchestra, accompanied by choruses and soloists, would be conducted by Leonard Bernstein. The mistress of ceremonies for the entire event would be the well known actress, Ellen Burstyn. Since the concert sounded interesting, and I hadn't heard that Bernstein had converted, my curiosity overcame my hesitations, which derived from the rumor that the cathedral would be so full that the public would only be able to hear the performers' voices, but not see them.

Indeed the church was bursting at the seams. The audience was estimated at 6,000 or more, and it would be no exaggeration to say that at least half of the listeners were our Jewish brethren. Many of my acquaintances and relatives in New York were present at the greatest performance in the city, and, though I didn't know in advance, this proved to be a fine occasion to run into friends and family without making any arrangements.

The performance was dedicated to the idea of peace and the struggle against the Reagan administration. First an altar of peace, designed by a Japanese sculptor, was dedicated, and then a couple of WASPS (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) carried in a cross that had been brought from Nicaragua and which also received a symbolic dedication in the church. The crowd, composed of Jewish and WASP gentry, cheered as though at a Vietnam demonstration, in memory of the 1960s and 1970s, so dear to them.

When the religious ceremonies ended, Ms. Burstyn took the podium and delivered a short speech in favor of peace on earth. She then gave the floor to Leonard Bernstein, who began by reciting a few verses from Ecclesiastes in Hebrew and then went over to a 'rap' (doggerel in black American style) chastening Reagan and his minions. Afterwards he conducted the orchestra, and finally the chorus and orchestra together. So, between a rap chant and a Bach mass, the year of 1987 was inaugurated, in tranquil security, in that great hall, and Jews and gentiles prepared to greet it with songs and traditional midnight kisses. My wife and I grew tired and left early, but our Jewish friends stayed till midnight, when one seals the outgoing year with a kiss. Once again we discerned the typical outlines of this new Alexandria, in which Jews and gentiles are intermingled in a kind of easy and comfortable assimilation, where both sides hug and kiss each other openly, and neither need convert.

Both sides here were part of the culture of protest, and it seemed, judging by the distribution of roles that evening, that most of the cultural leaders were actually Jews. The gentiles take pride in their progressive Jews, and the Jews are proud of their progressiveness, as they fulfil their own vision of the 'Jewish mission'.

Europe had the benefit of Jewish reformers, but these were never accepted as Jews. In contrast, America is graced with Jews who reform the world for the sake of heaven and who not only affirm their origins (though here and there some people do conceal them) but also are accepted by the gentiles as Jews in every respect (and again I emphasize that Bernstein began his speech by reading *Ecclesiastes* in Hebrew). Left-wing assimilationist Jewry, which is closely associated with the progressive WASP bourgeoisie, is the ideal embodiment of the Reform program, if not more. In contrast to the Reform Jews in the past, these are Jews (according to their own lights) both at home and in the street, and they believe that, as they fight for every progressive cause, they are also fighting for Jewish ideals. Even when they condemn Israel, which, in their opinion, oppresses the Palestinian people, they speak in the name of Judaism as they understand it. From Judaism they take those verses from the prophets which fit their liberal views (just as followers of Meir Kahane have taken the Book of Joshua as their one and only source, imbibing it and trying to carry it out in the real world).

The best of idealistic Jewish youth is part of this group. The daughter of one of my close friends, a former Israeli, spent her last summer vacation building roads in Nicaragua. If we wonder why Israel has no charm for these young liberals (and for others who are no longer so young), and why they won't give of themselves for the Zionist cause, the answer is difficult. In the 1940s some of these young people were captivated by leftist Zionism (Hashomer Hatsair). When the state was founded, many of them preferred to remain leftist de luxe, i.e., to continue struggling for liberal causes of the most exalted sort without forfeiting the comforts of American life. They chose to be parlor socialists and demonstration liberals among their own kind, without being obligated by their ideas, as it were, to move from a civilized country to a backwater.

For that matter Israel is no longer so enlightened and fine in their view: since the Six Day War, which brought the Jewish people to rule over another nation (and for the present purposes it does not matter whether this was justified or not, whether or not there was any alternative), the Bernsteins, their heirs, and the heirs of their heirs have distanced themselves from Israelis and Israeliness, in the name of that universal Judaism which, they believe, is contrary to a Judaism with national roots, which led to Zionism.

Unless one understands this segment of American Jewry, which is no less interesting than the ultra-orthodox segment, one cannot understand this Jewish community, many of whose intellectuals belong to this liberal contingent.

Let us pass on to another topic, though one which is connected to the present subject: the most interesting 'religious' experience we had was that of the Passover Seders. Like the Jews of America, we

took part in two Seders: the first was at the home of a progressive Conservative rabbi, and the second was with a distant cousin. At both of these Seders I learned more about that Jewish community, than, perhaps, could be learned from any two sociological studies of it such as appear daily. At the rabbi's table a collection of guests gathered such as no Jew back in the old country could have imagined in his wildest dreams. Foremost among the guests was the deacon of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, where Bernstein recited his rap. The deacon was present with his wife and son. At his side sat a Japanese member of the pro-Jewish Makoya sect. Next to him sat a black Jewish woman (a Jew, not a member of the black Hebrew sect) who spoke excellent Hebrew, having lived in Israel and completed a doctorate in Bible. Her path to Judaism is a story in its own right. After these guests came my wife and me and a few Jewish relatives of the hosts. The rabbi led the ceremony in Hebrew and English: sometimes first in the original and then in translation, but mostly in translation. He tried to answer the Four Questions for the gentile guests, as well as other questions which were not asked but which might have been asked.

Since he was a progressive person, he did not pour out his wrath upon the gentiles, who did not know Him, and the entire Seder was a constant act of interpretation, presenting the ceremonies and their historical meaning to the other side. No mention was made of the blood libel or of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but rather Passover was a day of liberation for all of humanity and the rebirth of society and freedom everywhere. This interpretation deviates considerably from the literal meaning of the words, and makes the Seder part of that common liberal current which makes it possible for Bernstein to recite a rap in the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine and for the deacon of that church to take part in a kosher Passover Seder.

Things of a similar nature transpired at the Seder we attended with my cousins. My cousin's wife's brother married a non-Jewish woman from Oklahoma, and Judaism is not exactly the focus of her life. He himself is now developing a deep interest in the subject and is taking courses in Jewish studies. In order to explain the meaning of the Torah to his wife and her parents, who had come to visit them for Passover, he made his own Haggadah, surpassing in originality even the Hagaddot of the HaShomer Ha-Tsair Kibbutz Movement. The connection between it and the original was occasionally interesting and sometimes entirely coincidental. The assumption was that the text was not sacred, and that you could choose more relevant sections from it and add new passages and modern midrash, making it into a suitable platform for the spirit of good, liberal, Jewish America, which wants to have the Jewish cake and eat it too.

I asked myself whether what was happening there was positive

or negative, and I couldn't reach an unequivocal answer. From an orthodox point of view, this was a desecration and a mockery of a holy tradition, and from the point of view of an Israeli, national Jew, it was clear that none of the American participants entertained the notion that in every generation one must regard oneself as if one had left Egypt, and obviously only a few poor, archaeological traces of Hebrew were left there. However, if one regards the matter from the Alexandrian viewpoint, for better or for worse, a new and different culture has emerged here. This is a syncretistic culture with some foundations in Jewish tradition. This is how these young people reach out for a significant bond with the tradition of their forefathers.

Is it still the same tradition? Admittedly, the secular Jewish tradition which has taken shape – and which is continuing to take shape – in Israel also differs from the ancestral tradition. However, one must ever bear in mind the 'small' difference between these two metamorphoses of the tradition: the Israeli version is entirely Hebrew and shot through with linguistic and cultural sources from within the Jewish tradition, whereas the American version is entirely English and attempts to adapt to the social surroundings of another society. This difference is notable not only among the assimilated, but also in more conservative circles. Throwing the bride's bouquet at the end of the wedding, Sunday brunches, bagel and lox (which are not among the 613 commandments or given by the Torah) – all these are customs which have grown up in the American Jewish community. They are forms of expression of a new social culture, and any connection between it and Jewish sources is entirely coincidental.

But one must recall that Rachel and Leah didn't cook gefilte fish and Queen Esther didn't eat Hamantaschen, and that Maimonides didn't eat fried dumplings at the Moroccan festival of Maimuna. In every generation, in every locality, new customs arose and Jewish culture was mixed with various and sundry spices and ingredients.

The truth is that the distance between the substance and the spice is increasing in America. Although the ultra-orthodox Jews of America still retain the taste of the Eastern European shtetl, among most of the Jews here new and different ways of life have arisen, and only a blind man, a deaf-mute, a fool, or a minor could fail to acknowledge them.

Increasingly, closeness to the outer world has brought about a joyous, mutual assimilation, the likes of which was unknown to the Jews of Europe. Jews leave the fold and gentiles convert, and, although there is no real apostasy and no real conversion, there is a constant potential for conversion and apostasy, from Rosh Hashana through Passover. Jews eat at gentiles' tables, and gentiles eat at Jews', and no one squawks in protest.

To sum up: the new Alexandria has created a new Jewish sect,

prouder and freer than other communities: open to all and penetrating everywhere, close to WASP liberalism, but also close to the Christian fundamentalists, and this is reason for neither jubilation nor bitterness. One must simply see and understand.'

The Jewish Booklover and the Hunger for Translation

What inner conclusions are to be drawn from all these descriptions? One cannot deny that there is Jewish culture in America. One could, perhaps, bury one's head in the sand like an ostrich and argue that anything unlike Jewish culture in eastern or central Europe cannot be called Judaism. But I see no purpose or reason for blinding oneself, just as I see no value in foolish bedazzlement, claiming that everything that glitters there is pure gold.

A great many publishers took part in the Jewish Book Fair here in the autumn, exhibiting a multitude of books. But I did not see many books in Hebrew or Yiddish. Most of the books were written – to use the phrase coined by Cynthia Ozick – in the 'New Yiddish', otherwise known as English. The Jewish community of New York visited the Fair in droves, paying an entrance fee and a membership fee, and affirming their culture with their feet.

Cynthia Ozick and Hugh Nissenson took part in the symposium on the subject of Jewish literature in America which was held at that fair. Isaac Bashevis-Singer, who had been supposed to participate, sent a young female assistant to represent him. It is difficult to describe the interest of the Jewish community of New York in the cultural products of the ethnic group to which it belongs. Occasionally it seemed to me that the visitors were no fewer than at the Hebrew Book Fair in Jerusalem. I don't know whether all the books exhibited at the Fair were sold, or whether those which were sold were also read, but, judging by the multitudes who thronged the gates of culture, it seemed to me that this public was avid for its Judaism (I emphasize: *its* Judaism!). Its language is imbibed with true thirst.

I learned this not only from the Fair but also from the lecture which I gave at a Jewish cultural institution. The place where I was invited to lecture is not an academic institution, nor is it a synagogue or the YMHA, the most famous Jewish cultural center in Greater New York. Rather it is a kind of open university connected to a synagogue, where Jews get together night after night and, for their own pleasure, study various aspects of Jews and Judaism – from the Kabbala in English through the Talmud in English, as well as lectures like my own (in English) on Jewish aspects of Kafka's work.

It was a bitter New York winter night. I had no high hopes as to the number of participants, being certain that there would be no more than a quorum of ten Jews. The cold weather, the other outstanding cultural offerings available in New York, and the fact

that no one knew who the lecturer was or anything about him sent me there with my eyes wide open, knowing full well that I would have to start my lecture with a substitute for the Hebrew phrase which I often use at difficult hours like these: 'My dear walls, ladies and gentlemen!'

When I entered the room I was astonished: there were no fewer than a hundred and fifty people present. This was by virtue of the subject and the place. Jews are interested in Jewish subjects, and the place nurtures Jewish 'culture'. The demand was a result of the supply, and vice versa. Not only did the audience listen to the lecture, but it also displayed a degree of expertise, and people asked interesting questions.

Jews are interested in Judaism and the problems of Jews, hence they are interested in Israel more because it's a country with a lot of Jews than because of the Zionist ideal, in principle or in application. Evidence for this can be found, for example, in the lecture given at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to a packed house by Amos Oz, who is well known here and has gained wide recognition.

Let us return to the Jewish book fair. Cynthia Ozick made enthusiastic statements about her Judaism and about Jewish literature and the right of American Jews to create their own culture. I didn't quite understand what she meant when she emphasized the Jewish aspect of the literature produced by Jews and the rights and duties of Jewish authors to emphasize that aspect, but the intention was more important than the argument. The intention was the argument itself: as long as there are Jews who wish to express themselves as Jews and who see their art as a Jewish expression, there is a Jewish expression, and there is Jewish culture - in English or in any other language. The audience drank in her remarks thirstily. The auditorium was packed. People had to sit on the floor, and I myself only managed to sneak in, using techniques perfected at concerts in my indigent student days. Hence there are producers of literature who are convinced they are manufacturing from Jewish materials for the Jewish reading public, and there are consumers of these products. The society is based on supply and demand, therefore everything is all right, and everyone is pleased, profiting from each other and supporting each other.

Furthermore, this applies not only to belles lettres, but also to general works about Judaism. Jewish studies in English are flourishing in the United States. The university presses and commercial publishers are wooing writers rather than the reverse. Make yourself an author: his books get printed and are sold no less (if not more) than books of criticism and research dealing with American culture. All this is founded on scores of translations of books on Judaism.

Young authors base most of the arguments in their research on

translated materials, which the reader may run down and consult. In fact there is no need to know or examine Hebrew or Aramaic sources in order to publish a book that will be widely accepted, receive excellent reviews, and gain a decent circulation.

One scholar said, regarding one of my books, that it shouldn't be translated into English, because it demanded too much knowledge of the American reader. This audience does not seek books based on a strong background but rather works about Judaism which present an unfamiliar topic. In fact, any scholar with the right style can present any Jewish subject to this audience without himself having consulted a single original Hebrew source. He may read in translation and still be read with admiration.

If a book harps on the note of nostalgia or reminiscence, plays the strains of collective fear, or trumpets historical pride of a (formerly) non-territorial ethnic group, this is highly praiseworthy, and all's well that ends well.

Nonetheless these books perform an important function, and not everyone takes the easy way out. Many scholars, both veteran and young, try to take the hard way with their audience, and they are not willing to compromise (I prefer not to list them here, because I would be risking my neck for every name I might omit, and perhaps also for those I mentioned), but the contrary direction is common, and one cannot ignore it. It derives from the translated nature of the Alexandrian community, which does not always examine the qualifications of its scholars.

However this matter has a further aspect which does not touch upon New York alone, but rather it reaches the very heart of Jerusalem. I gave a lecture in America at a departmental seminar to the faculty members of a university. My lecture touched upon the decline of Yiddish and Hebrew literature in the United States. I argued that Yiddish literature existed only in English or Hebrew translation, that only those works existed which had been translated into these languages, and that they did not exist until after their appearance in those languages (the outstanding example is Singer). I also argued that Hebrew literature in America was atrophied and in decline, and that Gabriel Preil exists only because he was resurrected by young admirers in Israel.

After I concluded my remarks, the floor was opened to questions, objections, and responses. One of the discussants, a well known professor (but not of literature) in the institution where that seminar took place, raised several severe difficulties regarding the cultural relations between Israel and the diaspora. He asked whether Hebrew literature in Israel was not going the way of Yiddish literature in America. He argued that it often seemed to him that a good number of Hebrew books in Israel were written for an audience which would read them in translation rather than the original readership. He did not blame these writers, but

rather praised them, because there was no comparison between these audiences in quantity and quality (he meant that the Jewish-American audience is bigger and better!), and he knew that certain writers – and he mentioned Appelfeld (correctly, I regret to say) – publish their books in English before they appear in Hebrew.

I do not know whether or not that professor was exaggerating, but it must be said that the avidity to be translated among Israeli writers (and professors) is no small matter. Works are being translated from Hebrew to English today at an unprecedented rate.

Interest in authors, in literature, and in synoptic research from Israel is quite high, and that is the only reason why writers such as Amichai, Yehoshua, Oz, Shabtai, Appelfeld, Kaniuk, and others were able to penetrate the American market. Most of those who buy these books are New York Jews, for whom these books have become part of their Jewish identity, not because they have become Israeli Zionists in their latter days, nor even because Ben-Canaan is still the greatest hero in the world, but because the protagonists of these stories and their plots are close to their hearts.

Just as ancient Hebrew literature is being translated into English to make it part of the cultural heritage of American Jews, so also modern literature is being translated for the same purpose, and even criticism of modern literature (mainly after it has been translated!) appears in *Prooftexts*, an academic quarterly devoted to Jewish literature, as well as in other magazines like *Midstream*, *Commentary*, and *Tikkun* as well as in general publications such as *The New York Times* and the *New York Review of Books*, and others.

I cannot say with certainty whether that professor is right, nor can I say with certainty that he is not right. I consider translation to be legitimate, a characteristic feature of our shrinking world, where all cultural borders are blurred, and Goethe's ideal of a 'world literature' is actually coming into being, through the offices of cultural export companies, which sell translation rights the way one sells patents and production licenses.

What could be grave is that a writer might lose contact with his natural readership and, in that way, with all readers, because he is directing his writing to an imaginary audience. This is far more serious with regard to imaginative writing, which has no life without a natural readership, than with respect to scholarly work, whose stage is the whole world of learning. Literature written for an imaginary audience, which does not speak its language, is counterfeit and untruthful. It tends to create a factitious world rather than a fictional one, and it loses its reliability as dialogue with readers. A writer without a real readership has no readership at all. Only someone speaking in his own language to speakers of that language can also reach speakers of other languages, though, with a certain interpretation or a certain change

in the way the text is understood, he might even be more popular with speakers of a foreign language than with those who speak his own.

At any rate, literature for export is Alexandrian literature that has lost its Israeli uniqueness. It is not exported to Alexandria but rather becomes part of it, whether the author lives in Jerusalem, New York, or elsewhere.

If Israeli culture wishes to retain its unique character, it must struggle for its life against the seductive enchantments of Alexandria. Of course there are certain works of scholarship which are intended for export from their inception, because their target audience lies in another country. But all literature which is not intended from the start for the language of its audience, has committed cultural suicide before it reaches the target language.

The Workshop for the National Soul, or a Cultural Massada

Some of my remarks here might be misunderstood. You are confronted with an easily assimilated, syncretistic culture, yet one which is not assimilated easily, and you wonder how, with such a high percentage of intermarriage, with the increasing penetration of Jews within the American social establishment, nevertheless a kind of Jewish pseudo-culture still manages to flourish. Perhaps the prefix 'pseudo' is unfair, and I ought to have said: how and why does that peculiar and strange Jewish culture still flourish? The answer to that question is complex, and it has various and sundry aspects.

Perhaps I ought to preface these remarks by saying that this flourishing might be merely superficial, and that, internally, the process of assimilation proceeds at an accelerated pace. Perhaps I have been looking at the container and not at the content, and perhaps I am a guest who looks more carefully at things that concern him than at those that leave him cold, and for that reason the contents of the container are out of his range of vision. Or, perhaps this flourishing is not at all in the center of community life, but only at its margins, so that the vibrant center is actually a minority, and the majority can be found at what look like the silent margins: among the members of my family the fourth native-born generation is lightyears away from Judaism. One grandson of one of my wife's aunts married a Japanese, and another married a Mormon. Among my relatives too, who reached the United States later, there are already intermarriages. Physical assimilation is rampant. Once we attended a social gathering at the home of a professor at one of the local universities in New York, a man with a highly developed Jewish consciousness who has spent a good number of semesters in Israel, and there we met his wife, a convert, from a deeply rooted French Catholic family. A Jewish colleague of his was also present. That man mar-

ried a proper WASP, who did not convert, and their children are receiving no Jewish education. Yet another friend, a psychologist, came with his black wife, who apparently converted to Judaism. The last couple was of Hungarian extraction and 'seemed' Jewish. When we learned they were Catholic, we were amazed. Perhaps one should search their family tree for Jewish ancestors.

It's hard to say whether these are the margins or the center, because Jewish identity is cultivated by those with the closest affinities with Judaism, whether the family is halakhically Jewish or mixed, whether or not the non-Jewish spouse converted to Judaism for some reason.

At any rate, the cultural identity of Americans who identify themselves as Jews is fostered by cultural institutions which translate Judaism into the language of American Jews, whether the translation is verbal or semiotic (the transfer of rituals and customs). The rabbinical seminaries of the Reform and Conservative movements, chairs of Jewish studies in universities, Jewish publishers, Jewish writers, Jewish magazines in English, congresses and organizations responsible for various areas of culture and Jewish survival (like Bnei Brith), are the workshop producing the soul of the old-new nation known as American Jewry.

I do not know whether they are fighting a rear-guard battle, which will culminate in suicide or self-destruction, or whether they are the 'glowing coal in the ashes of the altar' (H.N. Bialik), a 'smouldering log saved from the fire', or yet whether they are 'the great workshop of the national soul'. Only time will tell whether the mammoth translation effort being carried out here will consolidate American Jewish culture and give it its own identity, or whether it will flatten out the culture and deprive it of its uniqueness.

In contrast to some of my colleagues, I believe that the spiritual survival of the Jewish people in Israel is perhaps more important than physical survival, though there is no absolute assurance of our physical survival. The paradox is, of course, that physical survival depends on spiritual survival, because without spiritual survival, society will disintegrate here, and there will be no one left to fight for physical survival. I am confident of the physical survival of American Jewry (barring unforeseen circumstances), but I am not prepared to swear that this Jewry will survive spiritually, and the exceptions, orthodox Jews, are a minority which proves, or is liable to prove the rule. There, perhaps, the paradox is reversed: spiritual survival depends on physical survival, for if the society disintegrates in the accelerating processes of physical assimilation, no one will be left to preserve Jewish spiritual identity, nor will anyone be left for whom to preserve that identity.

Nevertheless, anyone who belittles that enormous translation project, though it comes at the expense of the bilingual and bi-

cultural existence of the Jewish people, simply doesn't know what he's talking about. This is serious work, proper, and significant, but it must be looked at with open eyes and without burying one's head in the sand or holding something in contempt which is unworthy of contempt. Developments in America are distancing Jews from the Zionist solution because they do not feel they need Zion in order to live a Jewish life. They, perhaps, remember with difficulty that part of their revival was made possible by the State of Israel as a social and cultural challenge, and that they still have not created an autonomous culture with true, inner creative powers. The contents of such autonomy as they have are mainly based on nostalgia for an old world and on the nightmare of the return of past dangers, but in the meanwhile, frameworks for renewed contacts with the content of the tradition have been erected, despite neglect of most of the forms in the area of language and way of life.

'Which is reason for neither jubilation nor bitterness. One must simply see and understand.'

Dr. Left and Mr. Right

The inner contrasts within American Jewry are not far removed from the contrasts and tensions typical of other ethnic groups of and the general population of that continental state. 'Vus kristelt zikh azoy yidelt zikh' - what the Christians do, the Jews do too. This has occurred in the past: I do not claim that the social circumstances are comparable, but Jewish society in the Weimar Republic was polarized by the same ideological division that split German society: a great many Jewish communists and socialists clustered on the left, and a lot fewer leaned to the right, remaining there until the right made anti-Semitism a plank of its platform. Gershom Scholem describes this polarization in his autobiography, using the example of his two brothers, one of whom tended leftward, while the other turned to the right, and only Gershom Scholem himself went forward in glorious isolation to Zionism.

The American intelligentsia is divided in reverse proportion to most of the country. While the majority of Americans are conservative (as we see in the elections), most of the intelligentsia (at least it seems that way from the outside) is 'liberal'. Relations between left and right are extremely polarized: Reagan's opponents versus his supporters; liberals open to the secular world as opposed to fundamentalists who want to drive the writings of Darwin out of the schools. We find that this American polarization is also reflected in the Jewish community.

Commentary, a bastion of liberalism in the distant past, has become a conservative publication, and its editor, Norman Podhoretz, is not well-liked by liberal intellectuals. To oppose it, another magazine, *Tikkun*, has recently been established. With

other publications, it is combatting *Commentary*, a pariah on account of its conservatism. This situation is not terribly unlike phenomena familiar to us from the Israeli scene.

The polarization of American Jews is mainly manifest in their attitudes towards Israel, which cover a broad spectrum: there are many who support the left everywhere, and on every issue, but who do not accept its views on Israel. In contrast, most of the right, who are identified with Reagan's line, also take a harder political line in Israel.

What interests us are the polar oppositions, which are a perfect expression of American Jewish existence, which tends to take extreme positions on America, whether pro-establishment or anti-establishment.

Again I would like to describe these positions by relating my encounters with various Jews. I became friendly with a former Israeli, who now lives in the United States and wants to write a doctoral dissertation on the sociology of literature. I asked to see some of his work, so I could find out what it was like. He gave me a strange paper, which had appeared in a leftist academic publication there. Its subject was the disaster wrought upon the Jewish people by the Zionist idea: as long as that idea continues to guide the state in the Middle East, the author argued, there will be no peace in the region, because the idea contains the seeds of disaster within it. The article dealt with the works of certain Israeli authors, from Yizhar to Oz, and the interpretation it gave them was, shall we say, rather bizarre: most of the literature seemed too Zionist to the author: literature still lags behind his demands for a change in Zionist life. Naturally a paper like this could just as well have been written in Israel by a number of people who hold similar views.

I spoke with the man. He has a great deal of personal charm. He fought in the War of Independence, and most of his family are still in Israel, but he has built a new life for himself in the United States. He believes in his world view with perfect faith, and he is the kind of person whom one respects, even if one disagrees with him.

I tried to fathom the attitude of this charming man to his country and homeland, and my first effort to solve the riddle was as follows: he is attempting to explain his emigration (which is a fact) and justify it by an ideology, which is a kind of rationalization. However this solution did not pass the test of my own self-criticism. On second thought, it occurred to me that this view, emotionally speaking, is strangely similar to that of most of the Israeli writers of the 1940s. A large proportion of them behaved towards their cherished country like disappointed husbands, as though their beloved wives had betrayed them. You can find some of that aggressive sensitivity as early as Hanoeh Bartov's *Spiritual Accounting* or in David Shachar's *The Moon of Honey and*

Gold, in most of the works of Amos Keinan, and mainly in those of Benjamin Tammuz, following *Anton the Armenian* and *The Life of Elyakum*, up to the *The Minotaur* and *Requiem for Naaman*. Certainly these works show various degrees of disappointment - from the limited disappointment of Aharon Megged and Hanoeh Bartov to the utter disillusionment of my emigré Israeli friend. The roots of this attitude lie in wounds to a faithful love, hatred drawn from passionate love.

This Israeli introduced me to his teacher, 'Dr. Left', a social scientist from one of the better respected universities of the city. The two spoke the same language: the voice was the voice of 'Ishmael', while, in the case of the Israeli, the heart was the heart of Jacob, who wanted the Land of Israel to be Rachel, though she proved to be Leah. However, the social scientist, an American Jew, was distant from all these matters. He spoke about Israel the way people once spoke of Argentina or now speak of South Africa and Chile. His basic assumption was that all national states were superfluous, and Israel, as a religious-national state, even more so. He was prepared to accept, at the very most, a secular democratic state. When one asked him what would happen if, in that secular democratic state, they slaughtered the surviving remnant of the Jewish people, he said that that subject didn't concern him. He didn't wish to be intimidated by the business of the Holocaust. He had had more than enough of that business. You have to give a state to the Palestinians who are oppressed everywhere in the Land of Israel. The country belongs to them, and not to the Jewish colonialists.

He is more radical than most members of the PLO. His friends from the American left like him. Apparently some of his friends belong to a group called 'The Alliance', an alliance between persecuted blacks and guilt-ridden whites. These white Jews justify Farakhan or try to justify those who justify him, condemning Israel every step of the way: it is an imperialist country which will ultimately bring a plague to the world.

Dr. Left reminded me of an American Jewish student I met at Berkeley after the Six Day War: it was a scandal and a shame that we Israelis had won the war, he told me at our first meeting. Jews must be victims, not 'victimizers'; vanquished, not victors. I suggested to him that, if he yearned to be a victim, he might as well jump off the Berkeley tower, but he wasn't impressed by my sense of humor and continued his harangue, with all his heart and all his might, arguing that the Jewish people must be a lamb among the wolves, that it was meant to be a servant of God and bear the sins of the nations.

Like that student, Dr. Left is fixated upon certain examples which are accepted by his leftist affinity group, and he wants to seem like more of a leftist than his entire affinity group, which is mostly Jewish, but which bends over backward to please the most

radical black or WASP among the membership. Something which we in Israel occasionally fail to understand is that those who advocate radical leftist positions are not the miserable victims of the establishment. Most of them derive great pleasure from the benefits conferred by the establishment, they hold and enjoy positions of power, and at the same time they command great prestige among the counter-establishment, that of the left, which, in the academic world and in literary life, is often identical with the establishment of that particular social group.

The spiritual leaders of the left, both in Israel and in the United States, may make speeches, write, and present any idea which occurs to them and always receive more applause than protests from readers and listeners, because they will always remain heroes of the establishment which they run, and, a fortiori, of the counter-establishment. In most academic and artistic institutions their radical position does not harm them or their careers in any way. On the contrary, it advances them, because those who promote them belong to the same establishment.

This is not to say, God forbid, that their ideas are worthless. On the contrary: they are often right about one thing or another, but their radicalism is part of their wooing of minds and hearts. The radical Jew can top anything bad that anyone might say about the enemies of the Third World (and not necessarily against the bourgeois! The Saudis, for example, are glat kosher). This Jewish leftist, bending over backward to please those near and far, is trying to prove he's objective on the subject of Jews. He finds Israel no less repugnant than his comrades, who are his allies on this matter just as he is their ally regarding Vietnam and Nicaragua. 'Dr. Left' does not represent the entire left, because many leftists have had their eyes opened regarding the total condemnation of Israel, and a large part of them - like their Israeli counterparts - are quite justified in their criticism of the occupation of the West Bank and of injustices in the Israel administration.

I entered into a discussion with this professor and tried to explain to him that indeed the Israelis were not without flaws, that I too objected to a large number of the actions committed by the present government, and that I, too, for various reasons, objected to the occupation and wanted to replace it with another regime which would give the Arabs freedom without endangering Jewish lives, but the man didn't want to hear about solutions that would permit both Jews and Arabs to live. He was prepared to sacrifice the Jews on the altar of his principles, which appealed to him because they find favor in the eyes of God, but mainly in the eyes of man. It is very difficult to change the minds of the high priests of a holy truth, righteous in their own eyes, spokesmen for liberty itself, personal friends of peace and justice, who, in the name of all those exalted values are perhaps prepared to sacrifice more human life than some of their fiercest enemies.

On the other side of the barricade stands Mr. Right, the year-round Jew, the follower of Rabbi Kahane, who would like to crown him king of all Israel. This man is a hard-core Zionist, who argues that he won't move to Israel because he can't deal with the Histadrut, an argument often echoed by right-wing Zionists here, who want to justify their radical nationalism, which dwells in security under the gray skies of New York.

When we met, Mr. Right was dressed with impeccable elegance and wearing a bow tie, the way Amos Oz describes his Revisionist grandfather, the brother of Professor Klausner, who used to wear a suit and bow tie even during Jerusalem heat waves. He immediately began to give me a lesson in Zionism. Mr. Peres is the only national leader in the world who is prepared to give up his country's land. If someone seeks to murder you, rise early and kill him first. If the Arabs took over the Land of Israel, wouldn't they drive out all the Jews who were left after the great slaughter? He went on to present a few more of the sort of arguments we are familiar with from Israel. He was an honorable Manhattan bourgeois with semi-fascistic, fundamentalist views; a great admirer of Congressman Kemp, and perhaps also of Oliver North and Ronald Reagan.

He and Dr. Left are morbid examples of doctrinaire dogmatists, but while Dr. Left is prepared to sacrifice the Jewish people in order to look good in his own eyes and those of his comrades, Mr. Right is willing to push the issue of survival and the struggle against what he views as the enemy of mankind (alternatively: the enemy of the Jewish people) ad absurdum: the paranoiac hysteria of the American right, which sees Reds under every bed and (if only it were possible) wants to drive them off the face of the earth, has here received a Jewish coloring. I tried to explain that like him I believed that the survival of the Jewish people was of paramount importance, but that we can and must survive as a nation for which it is worth living and dying, and not as a nation worse than many others. I also tried to tell him that his plan and Kahane's were not only immoral but also unrealistic, and that the only choice was to come to some kind of accommodation with our adversaries. This argument is a longstanding one, and I had no original points to add.

This was an almost direct transfer of Israeli life to Manhattan, or of Manhattan life to Israel. The dreadful polarization in world views was not born in the 1980s. It has existed in Israel at least since the 1920s, when the Revisionists demanded an active response to the Arab uprising and presented the leadership of the Yishuv as a group of arrant, shameful cowards. But it has received a new dimension from American religious and political fundamentalism, which divides the world into evil reds and righteous capitalists, just as the American left divides the world into evil whites and righteous blacks.

While the American left is far removed from Israeli life, because it associates Israel with the American right (as part of imperialism), the American right also shuns Israel, because, according to their lights, it is still ruled by the remnants of Histadrut socialism, which is manifest in the economy just as it is in the foreign policy of Foreign Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres.

Education for Translation:

The Place of Hebrew in Jewish Education

Judaism, Israel as a Jewish entity, and Jewish community life do therefore occupy some sort of place among American Jews, mainly among the silent majority of older and younger couples who at least send their children to Jewish Sunday school. But, as noted, one mustn't exaggerate in this matter, because the silent majority is also actively involved in the life of the American community as a whole, and it fights on behalf of domestic American concerns no less than for specific Jewish community issues.

The involvement of the Jewish community in the election of senators, congressmen, and presidents of the United States is considerable, and the influence of Jewish money, media advice, and other input in these areas is greater than the percentage of Jews in the population. Some say that, paradoxically, the Jewish community can make demands in favor of Israel because of its involvement in general matters.

Thus, anyone who exaggerates Jewish inwardness is painting a distorted picture. The Jews make larger contributions to universities than to Jewish institutions, and they contribute to general subjects more than to Jewish ones, though Jewish studies departments are cropping up like mushrooms after the rain in universities all over America. Here too the picture is balanced: the Jewish community makes a great contribution to America and influences its life, and, in return, the gentiles endow chairs in Jewish studies in non-Jewish institutions of higher learning.

This is so throughout the United States, and especially in New York. These chairs are generally endowed by the same Jews who also make generous contributions to other chairs. A Jew like Law study halls? What roles do these institutions play? It seems to me area. The status of Jews as major contributors to academic institutions explains why important chairs have been endowed at NYU and Columbia in recent years, at a time when Jewish activity in some of the city's public universities (Brooklyn College, Queens College, and even Hunter) has decreased because these institutions, which were once Jewish strongholds, have been flooded by non-Jewish students or else, among the Jews who study there, interest in Judaism has waned.

What do they teach in these institutions? Who throngs their

study halls? What roles do these institutions play? It seems to me that the rise in Jewish studies in general institutions is somewhat of a mirage. Most of the studies do not deal with the original texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Yiddish, but rather with texts in translation. Taking these courses is one way for a young Jew to identify with his community. Elementary courses in Hebrew language are rather well-developed because students with a Sunday school background can take Hebrew to satisfy the foreign language requirement. But very few students go on to use the language as a means of studying literature, history, philosophy, or the like. The language remains orphaned, and it is put to no use after the students complete their preparatory courses.

Nonetheless language studies perform an important semiotic function, just as great importance accrues to the study of Jewish literature and history in English translation: as noted, aside from their intrinsic importance, these courses are signs of identification on the part of the young people with the community from which they have emerged, and it is also perhaps some kind of sign that they intend to return to it after they have left the great pressure cooker of college.

Many young people believe that the effort of dealing with the language is not worthwhile, but others identify themselves with their community through some sort of Jewish studies, either historical or literary, in translation.

Foregoing the linguistic element hampers prospects for the development of scholarship. Most scholars come to Jewish studies from the orthodox community, whose young people are better versed in the sources and the original language than those from the other streams (as is the case in the Jewish Studies Department at Harvard).

It must be said that in the rabbinical seminaries (Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Hebrew Union College) no small effort is being made to bring the students back to the sources in their original language, but they too have considerable difficulties, because the sources which the students need have been translated into English, and it is easier for the teachers and students to use what Cynthia Ozick calls the 'New Yiddish' than to read them in the original.

The task of Israel in this polarized situation is to do its best to preserve the source as well. It must be the opposite pole to that of translation, though both sides have their own legitimacy. What is ludicrous, of course, is that the Torah of translation is being brought forth from Zion, and that in Israel, under the auspices of a Jewish organization, Hebrew teachers, all of whom know Hebrew, gather to discuss the teaching of Hebrew literature in translation, sometimes in rather broken English, since many of the speakers are originally 'Hebrews'.

It would be foolish to say that there is no place for the teaching of

Hebrew literature in translation. If Russian and French literature, for example, are taught in translation both in the United States and in Israel, I see no reason why Hebrew literature should not also be taught in translation, but I doubt whether that subject must also be Torah from Zion. It would be better if that were organized and established in its own place.

Let us, however, have no illusions: despite the struggle of several institutions to adhere to the Hebrew, the sovereignty of translation has made it certain and will continue to do so that the fate of Hebrew in America will be like that of Yiddish.

The last hope for Hebrew in America lies in emigrants from Israel – and especially their wives – who speak the language and are the bearers of Hebrew culture in the United States today.

As 'educational' figures, these women teach the language of the country they have left behind. They do not necessarily teach Hebrew as the language of the future, but as a language of the present: the language of tourism and visits, and perhaps also the language of the past: the language of prayer and the Bible.

In the past, a large proportion of the Hebrew teachers in the United States were from eastern Europe, living in the west while their hearts yearned for the east. The fathers of Jewish Hebrew education, from the late Ephrat, Lissitzky, Twersky, Feinstein, Zeitlin, Bavli, Wallenrod, and Halkin, upto – may they be blessed with long life – Arpha and Spicehandler, were loyal Zionists, some of whom came to Israel in their old age, and others of whom were not so fortunate. However, unlike this generation of giants, the Hebrew teachers who have come from Israel and are teaching in the United States on every level of instruction demonstrate the meaning of Zionism in their lives by their presence in the diaspora.

Here one must keep one's eyes wide open, for there is no necessary and logical connection between Zionism and the teaching of Hebrew, and perhaps there need be no such connection. At any rate, the teachers from among the recent emigrants from Israel are fulfilling an important function because without them Hebrew might be entirely forgotten, and the fragile equilibrium between source and translation would be even more tenuous. I say this because I believe a certain balance of forces between these things should be preserved, if only so there will be someone to translate, and that treasures will be known to exist which have not yet been translated. This does not change the fact that Jewish culture in America will be mostly a translated culture: from the prayerbook to the novel, from academic writing to folk literature, translation justifies itself, whether or not I myself, a lover of Hebrew and one who makes his living from it, am content with the phenomenon or whether I accept it willy nilly, because the motivation for the teaching of Hebrew has lost much of its significance both among students and among their teachers. The loss of

meaning of the Hebrew sources is what gives the new chairs in Jewish studies their *raison d'être*.

'Which is reason for neither jubilation nor bitterness, etc.'

The Opposite Direction: from Backwater to Civilized Country

Now we reach a grave issue: the role of the emigrants from Israel (and I purposely use the term 'emigrant' rather than the pejorative 'yored'!) in American Jewish culture. This culture was formed over many years with successive waves of immigration from eastern Europe. Nostalgia for the shtetl is still one of the cornerstones of the culture of the third generation of the immigrants. To this day, publishers produce many translated anthologies, to which the shtetl past is central, and the prominence of Bashevis-Singer in that culture must also be attributed to a fixation on the world of grandparents and great-grandparents.

During the past forty years the main concentration of Jewish immigrants to the United States has come from Israel, from the USSR, and from the USSR via Israel. These immigrants outnumber and outweigh those from North Africa (without a long stopover in Israel) or Iran. Those educated in a Zionist world view may or may not like this development, but it is a fact that can not be ignored: Israeli youth is emigrating to the United States, among them many university graduates, especially physicians, the produce of the kibbutzim, and the fine fruit of middle-class neighborhoods, such as Rehavia and Ramat Aviv, young people and older ones from Savyon and from the Hatikva Quarter, religious and secular, from all social classes, ethnic groups and educational levels. Occasionally the sons beat their parents to it, and occasionally the parents lead the way. The United States has managed to put together an Israel within itself, *Israel Shelanu* (Our Israel) as the New York Hebrew weekly is called, the country in miniature, bringing together every social class and political hue. A good part of the so-called aliya from Russia has come, either directly or indirectly to the United States, and these immigrants have swelled the ranks of American Jewry in one way or another.

When Aharon Bachar, who was the correspondent for *Yediot Aharonot* in New York, died in Israel, a eulogy was written for him in *Israel Shelanu*, in which the author revealed that Bachar (like the editor himself and the consumers whom the newspaper serves) had fallen in love with New York and preferred it to Israel. In his emotional words there was grief at the man's death mixed with defensiveness on the part of the eulogist himself. Bachar, who had died in far-off Israel, was in love with New York, stunning proof of the right of former Israelis to prefer a civilized country to a backwater.

Because of their symptomatic importance, I shall quote the article directly:

The truth must be told. Arele Bachar didn't want to go back to Israel, at least not to Israel in its present guise. He liked it in New York, and he didn't like it in Israel. Beyond all the slogans and rhetoric, it's only natural that someone should prefer to live where he enjoys life.

Enjoys, not in the economic sense, but emotionally and intellectually. That, perhaps, doesn't jibe so well with concepts like 'homeland', 'Zionism', 'love of one's country', and the like. But someone who becomes aware, as Arele Bachar was aware, that he has just one chance to live, and it isn't clear for how long, sometimes opts for selfish considerations rather than the good of the nation or the state. In Israel that's considered a crime. At least with lip service. ... Maybe something else killed him. But he died of love. Love of New York as a place. New York as a concept. The dwelling place of his soul.

I don't understand some of the things said in this eulogy, but I don't intend to discuss it at length. It is sufficient to note here that this eulogy is exceptional and unusual. The writer is one of the few Israeli immigrants who still seeks ideological or emotional justification for leaving Israel. Most of others have no need for excuses, and they are perhaps the simplest, the least complex, and the fairest to themselves. They are in America, which means that they like it better there than anywhere else. Period. They are no different from Korean, Italian, or Mexican immigrants and don't want to be treated any differently. America is a rich country, and they are looking for openness, opportunity and wealth. Anyone who doesn't want those values and is convinced that there are more important ones is welcome to stay at home.

Intellectuals, for whom the economic excuse for immigration is insufficient, also try to present ideological or existential justifications ('New York as a concept. The dwelling place of his soul'). The most common existential excuse is the following: Israel is too small for the person, or the person is too small for the country. Israel is too small for someone like Pinchas Zuckerman or Daniel Barenboim, someone who cannot spread his wings and fly in the economic and scientific conditions of the land of his fathers. It doesn't matter who he is and what his natural size is. People in the arts and academe never judge themselves by their actual accomplishments but rather by their potential accomplishments, and they tend to blame external circumstances for whatever they have failed to accomplish. Some people are more correct in this than others.

Indeed, in the natural sciences and in certain areas of social research the external circumstances have some significance, but in the humanities a person bears himself wherever he goes. However, it must be said in their favor (at least from their point of

view), that it sometimes happens that by moving one improves one's luck and increases one's creativity.

Yet others argue that they are too small for Israel, or that the country is too small to contain small giants like themselves. In a small country they are merely little teachers, little engineers, or little doctors. In a big country even little people are magnified and take on larger dimensions. Someone who was a high school teacher in one place becomes a university professor somewhere else. Again, I don't know whether or not they're right, and it really doesn't matter. The main point is that it's one of the ways in which, without being asked, they see fit to explain themselves.

The most common ideological justification among intellectual emigrants from Israel and among young people (among them a rather large contingent of former kibbutzniks) is that Israel of the 1980s is a militaristic, fascistic country, which oppresses peoples and conquers other nations, and that an intelligent person should find himself another country at times like these, until the Messiah comes and the nations bow down to him. However most of the Israeli emigrants have no need for ideological or existential justification. Many of them read *Our Israel* and are closer to Mr. Right and to that 'ideal' couple, Sharon and Kahane, than to Dr. Left, who is repelled by the racist state. They are avid readers of the 'Sharonological' articles of Uri Dan in *Our Israel*. They need no excuses, but rather demonstrate what brought them to emigrate by their presence and their occupations. In any event, they are no longer regarded as castaways and rejects, neither in their own eyes nor in those of the friends they left behind. Many of them view themselves as true success stories, in contrast to the poor guys who stayed in the backwater and don't get to savor life in a civilized country. Many Israelis who have stayed in Israel also regard themselves the way these successful emigrants or others regard them. The newspapers here frequently publish success stories about this new brand of expatriate hero who has 'made it' in business, in soccer, in music, or in academic life. Achievement-oriented society in Israel has created standards which do not permit one to view the emigrants as failures. It has wiped out its own moral dimension, committed suicide by falling upon the sword of its values.

Yet, nevertheless, I cannot forget a strange event at which I was present in the Steimatzky bookshop in Greenwich Village. Following local custom, two Hebrew writers read their works in Hebrew in a store which still sells Hebrew books. The guests of honor were Matti Megged and Dr. Kronsohn, a Hebrew writer of whom I had not heard until my arrival in the United States. I did know Matti, and I attended the event on his account. I was told that Kronsohn had written a book called *Mother, Sun, and Homeland*, and I thought it would be interesting to hear stories about that subject in Hebrew in Greenwich Village in 1987. Matti

appeared there after he managed to arouse a scandal in Israel by trying to retrace certain chapters of Zionist history in one form or another (according to some accounts, not in a very precise manner). I have seen some pathetic spectacles during my days of woe, but it seems to me that it had been a long time since I saw a phenomenon more pathetic than that evening with Matti Megged, a former member of the Palmach, a leader of the 'Brichah' (the organized 'escape' of Holocaust survivors from Europe to Israel), a prisoner of Israel's wars, a Hebrew writer, formerly the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Haifa, reading lugubrious passages from his book *Mem* about the life and death of a man who wants to die in his homeland and who is eaten up with longing for the country he loves, which, in some passages, he describes as the country he hates.

Dr. Kronsohn's reading provided a kind of comic relief. He read a yarn about the youth movement days of a Hebrew lad from Haifa who is in love with his childhood memories. He is in the west, and his heart is far off in the east. I was told that he is a talented physician, so gifted that no hospital in Israel is prepared to offer him a suitable post. These two men expressed a kind of pathetic and humoristic nostalgia (pathetic in its humor), and I couldn't understand what they were doing in Steimatzky's in Greenwich Village, just as I couldn't understand what all the other Israelis in the audience were doing, those who had come to wallow in these memories.

As I left I was accosted by a young woman who had been a fairly successful actress in Israel. In America she had become a kind of occasional psychotherapist. From my conversation with her and with several of her friends, I got the impression that nostalgia is one thing, reality, something else. The group which had gathered in Steimatzky's was behaving like the Jews who had fled to the United States from eastern Europe. They went to the Yiddish theater, read the *Forward* and the *Morgnblat*, spoke Yiddish among themselves, but they never returned to the old country of their dreams.

During the first years of their immigration, they tried to create a kind of cultural ghetto for themselves, to remind them of the land of their fathers. After they settled in, they liquidated the ghetto in which they had tried to imitate their past, and they made a golden ghetto, of which the shtetl is a component, taken from the distant past, but not as an object of longing. These Israelis aren't very distant in their attitude towards their past from the earlier waves of immigration: they can dwell on the banks of the Hudson and sing songs of Zion, but, at bottom, the die has been cast, and the decision has been made. They will become part of the American Jewish world.

In the meanwhile, a small minority of them have made their Israeliness and their knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish sources

into a profession. These people play a significant cultural role: some of them teach Hebrew to children, and some are professors in various areas of Jewish studies. Over time this too will diminish and die out, and I have already met women who once taught Hebrew but have since gone into real estate. Hebrew teaching was merely a transitional stage, in order to enter the heart of American life.

I visited one of the Ramah Summer Camps, doubtless a splendid achievement of the Conservative movement. This, to quote the poet, is an 'ember glowing among the ashes', where Hebrew is taught, where a Jewish-Hebraic experience is forged, and where a certain positive bond is formed between American Jewish youth and Israeli youth by means of a delegation from Israel. The Rama Camps have played and continue to play a significant role in the most important endeavor in the history of the Jewish people in our generation - survival.

There I met two women with the same name: the first is responsible for Hebrew education at Rama, of which she herself is a former camper, and she has been involved with Hebrew education since her youth. She was born in the United States and has lived all her life there. Deep in her heart she hopes that one of her children or she herself might yet move to Israel and fulfil the dream which she has dreamt all her life. I don't know whether that dream will come true, but the candle has not been extinguished. As a Zionist, this is a promise, a hope, and some chance for the future.

In the same place I met this woman's namesake, who works as a Hebrew teacher in the camp. She is a native Israeli, very intelligent, who followed her husband to an American city. Her husband is a geneticist, and, I gather, a very important scientist, one of those for whom Israel is too small. She still reads the latest books, the ones just published in Israel, and she discusses Oz's *Black Box* and Kenaz's *Individual Infiltration* with warmth. Her children are studying in American colleges. They are lightyears distant from that which is dear to their mother. Since she is an intelligent woman, she no longer plays the game which was so common among Israelis at one time: 'We're only here for a while, until we make enough money, and when the time comes we'll return with our old folks and our infants'. She is there and will remain there, and the teaching of Hebrew is merely a way of making a living for her. As the song goes, 'I see her on the way to the Hebrew class at Camp Ramah, and I think she's lost for us'.

This isn't the whole truth, of course: there are some emigrants who, for some reason or another, in times of crisis or spiritual accounting decide to return, but they are very few. They are the exceptions that prove the rule.

Most of the Israeli Hebrew teachers teach their native tongue to children who yearn only for Bar Mitzvah presents, and it is not

the language of longing for Zion. They do not have 'Hatikvah'. They have, as was rightly said by Arele Bachar's eulogist, their unique, non-repeatable lives here and now. And neither I nor anyone else can reproach them with anything - Israel, apparently, did not give them, or many others, sufficient incentives to permit them to return. It would be useless and ridiculous to reproach them. If someone's land has ceased to be a source of attraction for him, for one or another set of reasons, one must reproach his land.

The fact that this diminishes the 'hopes of generations' and is liable to finish by undermining the Zionist dream, does not concern the person who takes stock of his own world in his unique, non-recurring lifetime. The fact that it makes a couple of his friends sad, who would prefer to have him with them at times of joy and sorrow, that too is of no concern to him. He prefers new friends or a life in which other matters are more important than friends. Sermons and preaching are not only useless - they are ludicrous and ridiculous, because the values of the man who has crossed the ocean and those of the man who has remained on the other side of the ocean are very similar. And if one's norms are no different from those of the person with whom one is arguing about norms, one had better keep quiet.

'Which is cause for neither jubilation nor bitterness. One must simply see and understand.'

Between Jerusalem and New York

What emerges from all these descriptions, which of course, are very fragmentary? They are largely impressionistic observations, neither the product of systematic research; nor are they statistically significant. Moreover, they ignore a broad spectrum of phenomena in this Jewry, which is rich in its variety and manifestations: it is multifarious in its religious and social streams, and it is even divided and scattered in regionally. In their own opinion, the Jews of the eastern United States are not like those of the Middle West or the South, and every kind of American Jew is different from New York Jews, who are a species unto themselves.

Our description also ignores the rich variety contained here in the broad spectrum of religious Jews: from Satmar Hassidim to Jews who wear knitted yarmulkas, displaying this symbol of identification with great pride and filling the streets of New York. Ranging from right-wing Conservative Jews to other currents, they, perhaps, more than the others represent the positive pole of Jewish continuity.

At times I believe that the silent majority is entirely oblivious of the problems we have raised, living cozily in their homes, making a living, getting ahead, and as interested in the Jewish problem as

in the snows of yesteryear or an onion peel. If I look at most of my relatives (rather than my acquaintances among the professional Jewish intelligentsia) and at most of the Jewish professionals in non-Jewish professions (mainly in academe) this assumption proves to have persuasive experiential underpinnings.

Nevertheless it seems to me that a kind of spiritual center has developed here. It is not exactly the center that Ahad Ha-Am dreamt of, and it is rather closer to Alexandria than to Sura, Pumbedita, or Granada, but it is a center with its own customs (from lox and bagels through women cantors and rabbis), its own developed welfare system, and its own culture. Moreover - it is a center which is developing its own *mythos* and fostering its own history.

Everybody knows Neil Simon's plays about his childhood in Brighton Beach. The writing of plays and novels about Jewish childhoods in Brooklyn or the Bronx is now fashionable (note also the play, *I'm Not Rappaport* and many similar ones which I saw in New York). Woody Allen has made the childhood and youth of a Jewish boy in Far Rockaway into a myth, before which everyone bows down and genuflects. And Vivian Gornik has written about her mother, who was a member of a Jewish labor union.

The Jewish garment workers' union, which by now seems to have been nothing but a fable, has become part of the myth. The Jews now gaze fondly upon the Lower East Side as they once gazed fondly upon Boyberik and Yehupitz.

Irving Howe wrote a long book dedicated to the memory of the first immigrants who created a Yiddish culture on the Lower East Side of New York, and this work is highly regarded in the field of the search for roots. For the Jews of New York this neighborhood is of greater significance for the myth of their existence and past than their primary roots in Central Europe or the Middle East. This is a culture in which the component of translation and that of local folklore are becoming progressively more essential, and the traditional elements of the distant Jewish past or Israel and her language are diminished in comparison to the enormous power of the present and the recent past. Moreover, even on the level of research, the history, sociology, and culture of the Jews of America have become a central and honored academic field. These factors not only fail to strengthen ties with Israel, they actually weaken them. If in the late 1950s and the 1960s *Hebrew and Israel* were still an object of imitation in the Rama camps, today they have become far more marginal.

Israel has been diminished in the eyes of American Jews, because it has become less Israeli. Rather than offering American Jewry a center for imitation and an old-new language brought to life, a new culture created, the Jews of Israel have found a model for emulation in America, so much so that the attractive power of the American center sometimes outweighs that of the Israeli center.

If the tradition that has grown up and been renewed in Israel wishes to influence the balance of forces in the internal development of American Jewry, it must only return to itself.

The more Israel is Israeli, the greater will be its influence on the internal balance of forces between Judaizing and Hellenizing, and other similar tendencies and sub-tendencies at work in the United States.

The more Israel diminishes its image of itself, the more it will become a kind of extension, neighborhood, suburb of New York. Again, it is ridiculous to sermonize: cultural development is not the result of a decision and determination made by groups of intellectuals but it is rather the product of social and economic forces. To the degree that it is the result of the acts of individuals, it is far more dependent on a social and national leadership which offers challenges and goals to the society.

The development of Israeli culture during the Yishuv period was made possible mainly by a unique constellation of cultural forces which were at work at that time, but it was also possible because the Yishuv had spiritual leaders who sought and found certain ways of implementing the cultural possibilities immanent within the new society. I am not certain that the second generation of social, political, and cultural leaders even tried to play a role of that kind. Those who went bankrupt in this matter were not traditional Jews but rather the vanguard of new Israeli culture - Labor Zionism. Just as, over long years, it has failed to create new social goals, it has also failed to create new cultural goals. As the proverb has it: without a vision, the people run riot. Something of the kind has happened. The people have not exactly run riot. They have simply lost their identity, and instead of the lost identity, the doors and windows have been thrown open to a new identity, which can no longer measure up successfully against the cultural identity of the opposing center.

I wonder whether these remarks of mine are of any practical use at all. It does no good to cry over spilt milk: we must let Jerusalem or Tel Aviv or what we have called Alexandria develop, each in its own way, and either the red heifer or the golden calf will come out in the end.

In other words, in the best case there will be two different cultures. In the worst case, there will only be one. American Jewish culture, with all its translations from Hebrew and other languages, will swamp Hebrew culture.

It seems to me that we must not bow our heads and take this as the last word, because a strong and independent cultural center in Israel is not only beneficial to its citizens, who will prefer to remain there rather than migrate to another center of attraction, but it is also beneficial to the Jews of the United States for whose development the State of Israel, during the first thirty years of its existence, was an extraordinary factor.

It was a catalyst, a component in the organization of its welfare activity, and a factor for change. It became part of their ethnic identity and a source of inspiration in Jewish studies. The inner reinforcement of Israeli values in Israel is of concern not only for the Jews of Israel, but also for the Jews of the United States.

Even 'if there were no Jerusalem', New York would exist physically, and there would certainly be a spiritual New York and perhaps even a Jewish New York, but it would be a poorer Jewish New York with more meager Jewish content than the New York which, in the guise of Alexandria, must respond to tension from Jerusalem.

The inner spiritual reinforcement of Israel is likely to somewhat alter the balance of emigration. If we still believe in Zionism (I am still persuaded that it is the optimal solution for the cultural and political problems of the Jewish people), it seems to me that this is the only way to ensure not only the cessation of emigration but also the renewal of immigration.

If Israel is a source of attraction, because it is *different* from the United States, American Jews who prefer Israeli norms to those upon which they were reared in the United States will immigrate. Similarly, Israelis who emigrate to the United States are voting with their feet and declaring by their actions that the norms of American Jewry or those of the United States alone are closer to their hearts than the Zionist-Israeli norms upon which they were raised. I do not refer specifically to the norms of the 'tradition' in the sense commonly given to that concept by orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews, but rather to the norms that developed in various forms in the Yishuv from the 1920s to the 1950s. Of course, time cannot be rolled backwards, and the norms of the 1980s must necessarily be different from those of the 1940s, but we must understand, explain, and formulate what they are and to try to implement them satisfactorily.

Nevertheless, In Spite of Everything

Do I believe in this utopia? Is there any chance for Israeli renewal in response to the Jewry of New York-Alexandria, which, paradoxically, challenges Israel today, just as the State of Israel challenged it during the 1950s? At that time New York had to deal with the Zionist challenge: how and why was it possible to live as a Jew in New York while the Jewish people was renewing itself in its land, and the forefront of the Jewish people was no longer the Lower East Side but rather the Galilee and the Negev?

It had to demonstrate that it was possible to maintain an interesting Jewish identity in a foreign, pluralistic, and democratic society which permitted Jewish existence, free of the pressure of anti-Semitism. It sought to prove that it would not disappear or assimilate, because it had created sources of strength and inde-

pendent existence for itself, while drawing components of its identity from the environment, from the tradition, from Israel, and from the autonomous, indigenous myths it created for itself.

It is still too soon to prophesy as to whether New York Jewry has successfully performed the task assigned to it by Jewish history. One can only say that both consciously and unconsciously some effort is being made there to cope with the unlimited challenges of the American way of life.

Now Israel must give her own answer to the challenge of New York. The burning issues facing us are: is Israel still at the forefront of the Jewish people? Is the culture established in Israel a positive, rich, and interesting one? Is it possible to find an equilibrium between the democratic and liberal aspirations of a young nation and the theocratic tradition of the representatives of an ancient religion which is seeking to dominate it? How will the Israeli balance of forces act? What is the relation between political independence and the national establishment? What is the degree of American assimilation in Israeli culture?

Israel must answer these and other questions as she tries to struggle for her Israeliness against the challenge of 'Alexandria', and it not enough to offer merely intellectual answers to these questions. The main question is, why should an Israeli stay in Israel rather than leave it? And those who confront this question must find an existential answer.

What are my hopes? I am convinced that Israel is the place where a Jewish person is most likely to retain his full, independent identity, if only he struggles for that identity and is not seduced by a false one.

I believe that Israel is the optimal solution to independent Jewish existence, and I am convinced of this to the depths of my soul, perhaps because I, unlike most other Israelis, have seen the downfall of European Jewry, which failed in its effort to assimilate and paid the heaviest price imaginable for that failure. But this is the historical experience of only a small proportion of the Israeli population, a proportion which decreases with each death notice. What will be the case for those whose personality has not been molded by that experience?

Still, in an almost non-rational way, I bring to mind the faces of young men and women whom I know, whose personality encompasses everything which, in my youth, seemed to be the essence of the new Israeli character (values which I myself, to my regret, have left behind by now): they are satisfied with little, contemptuous of materialism, and dedicated to their work; they devote themselves to social challenges, and they love the culture of Israeli life in its most beautiful and positive manifestations.

Then my mind feels easier. These young people are now the age I

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was when I came into my own. As long as they and those like them exist in Israel, then there is a nether Israel, which is also a heavenly Israel. 'A person who reforms himself reforms the world', said Agnon. These young people have the reform of the world in their hands. The future is theirs, and they will provide the answer to the great challenge - to maintain Israel as a historical and spiritual necessity for all the Jews of the world.