

“JEWISH RELIGIOSITY” ACCORDING TO BUBER

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I

“Jewish Religiosity” is the title of the fifth address in a series of “Addresses on Judaism”,¹ which Buber inaugurated in Prague when he was 31 years old in 1909, and continued to present for many years as an “Ongoing Speech” in Vienna, Berlin, New York, London and Jerusalem.² In fact, Jewish religiosity

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1. So are entitled the first three addresses delivered by Buber in Prague between 1909 and 1911, and printed as *Drei Reden uber das Judentum* in Frankfort-am-Main in 1911. Three additional addresses that he delivered between 1912 and 1914 were printed in the book *Vom Geist des Judentums* Leipzig 1916. The seventh address, “Der Heilige Weg” was delivered in May 1918 and was published in Frankfort-am-Main in 1919. The eighth address, “Heruth. On Youth and Religion”, was published in Vienna, 1919. A collection of the eight addresses with a new introduction appeared in Frankfort-am-Main in 1923 as *Reden uber das Judentum*, and in a second edition by Schocken in Berlin in 1932. After a long interval new “Addresses” appeared, this time in Hebrew, at first under the title “*ha-Ruah ve-ha-metsi’ut*”, Tel Aviv 1942, and again as “*Be-Mashber Ha-Ruah, Shelosha Neumim ‘al HaYahadut*”, Jerusalem 1951. The Addresses were republished together in Hebrew, but not in consecutive order in *Te’uda VeYi’ud*, Jerusalem, 1963, Vol. I. The most recent complete English translation of the eight early addresses plus four later ones is found in the book, *On Judaism*, edited by Nahum Glatzer, Schocken, New York, 1972. This edition follows the last German edition prepared by Buber himself in the Book, *Der Jude und Sein Judentum*, Cologne, 1963.

2. Buber himself, in his later work “*Be-Mashber ha-Ruah*” considers the newer three addresses he delivered shortly before the establishment of the State in Jerusalem, London and New York, as supplementary and of a continuation nature to the seven addresses on Judaism that he had

(without quotation marks), or piety, as a subject for intellectual struggle and creative thought, is one of the central themes in Buber's work. It is therefore probably not accidental that the address entitled by Buber as "Jewish Religiosity" includes some of his fundamental ideas many years before the creation of the philosophy of "I and Thou", and before Buber arrived at some of his conclusions in the field of Hasidism, or his penetrating interpretation of Scripture. An examination of this address will, it seems, lead us to the conclusion that, in a sense, all of these were partly anticipated in it.

We could say that in this address there is something akin to what has been called "The primal visions" of the poet, which he absorbs in a certain period of childhood or youth; visions from which the writer or poet cannot be freed and, willingly or unwillingly, returns to over and over again, dealing with them in different ways. The complex systems of original thought and interpretation which Buber produced in the many decades of his creativity are impressive. But among the many-storied palaces erected by Buber, those addresses on Judaism appear as half-way inns in which he lodged occasionally, in the course for the broad public, and perhaps even for himself.

II

What precise place should be assigned to these "Addresses on Judaism" within the total system of Buber's work? To what extent do the latest of them reflect conclusive formulations for broadly extended cogitations in the past, or do the earliest of them presage long stretches of development in the future? In our attempt to provide answers to these questions, we shall have to deal with these addresses from *two* points of view:

A. What is the real historical role played by these addresses in Buber's influence upon his generation, an influence that perhaps was not unrelated to a fruitful symbolic flow between speaker and audience, master and disciples?

B. What special importance should we attribute to these speeches as vehicles for the expression of Buber's thought?

delivered in the years 1918-1909 in Prague, Vienna and Berlin (see the beginning of the book). In another place in the introduction to "*Te'uda VeYi'ud*", p. 15, the translators refer to the addresses as *Massot* (Orations), and the address we are speaking of is called the "fifth Oration" (Ibid. 17). However in the article by S.H. Bergmann in *Hashiloah*, 26 (1912) they are referred to as "sermons". In English they have been translated as "addresses" while in their German original they were called "Reden". Despite the interval of so many years between the first addresses (1909) and the final ones (1915) it appears from the words of Buber that he considered all the addresses as belonging to the same subject, in the nature of what we have called "An address in installments" or an "Ongoing Speech".

As for the first of these questions, the reply is evident. We have the testimony of some notable contemporaries of the addresses as to the powerful influence exerted by them on people such as Samuel Hugo Bergman,³ Franz Rosenzweig⁴, the brothers Robert and Felix Weltsch⁵, Hans Kohn the biographer of Buber,^{5a} Max Brod, Franz Kafka⁶, Gershom Scholem⁷, Akiva Ernst Simon⁸, and others. These men testify that the first three addresses, and three additional ones, and finally the eight that were issued in the collection in Frankfort-Am-Main in the year 1923 as "Reden uber das Judentum", altered the course of the life of an entire generation of young and confused Jewish intellectuals in Central and Western Europe.

As for the second question, the more substantial one of the two, a careful examination of them, in the light of the subsequent creations of Buber, will demonstrate the fact that it is incorrect to assume, as has been claimed,⁹ that too much importance is attached to these addresses in dealing with Buber's overall contribution, and that they *do not* in fact represent his views. On the contrary, with respect to several of the addresses, especially the fifth one, "Jewish Religiosity" (even if not for all of them), it is quite plausible for us to say that they contribute what we have called above, "the primal vision" behind all his later

3. See S.H. Bergmann, *The Philosophy of Buber* (Heb.) in his book, *Hogey Hador*, Tel Aviv, 1935, Jerusalem, 1970, p. 179. See also his article "Three Sermons on Judaism" (Heb.), 26 (1912), p. 549–556, and Bergmann's comments there (p. 550): "The little book, 'Three Sermons on Judaism' which Martin Buber preached, can be for us, if we but will it, a cornerstone for a new Jewish world-view".

4. See Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig, His Life and Thought*, Schocken, New York, 1953, p. 36, for a letter of Rosenzweig to his parents dated March 19, 1916, about his receiving a copy Buber's *Vom Geist des Judentum* at the Balkan front. Also there, p. 234, where Rosenzweig debates intensively with Buber concerning the seven addresses that had appeared in Frankfort, in 1923.

5. So Robert Welch in his introduction to *Te'udah ve-Yi'ud* (above note 1), Vol. I, p. 9–13: "His first address on Judaism was in the nature of a revelation of truth for which his fellow Jewish students in Prague were yearning in their hearts... he brought hope into the hearts of European Jewry of the year 1909 and presented them with a goal... his addresses made a powerful impression and utterly changed the spiritual course of Jewish youth in Central Europe".

5a. See Hans Kohn in his book, *Martin Buber, His Work and His Times*.

6. On the influence of Buber upon Brod and Kafka, see Glatzer, *On Judaism* (above note 1), p. 241.

7. See G. Scholem, "Lidmuto Shel Martin Buber" (Towards an image of Martin Buber), in *Devarim Bego* (Heb.), Tel Aviv, 1975, p. 455–462: "And here was the voice of Buber, speaking from out of 'Three Addresses on Judaism'... a powerful echo reverberated in us to this voice: it promised something, it enchanted, it demanded... more than all the other Zionist spokesmen did he penetrate into the area of the Jewish individual".

8. See A.E. Simon, "Martin Buber Ve-Emunat Yisrael" in "Divrey 'Iyun Mukdashim L'Mordecai Buber Biomlot lo Shemonim Shana", Jerusalem, 1948, p. 20. Also in the work "Hamorasha ha-haya shel Mordecai Martin Buber Biomlot Me'ah Shana Le-holadeto" (reprint from "Tefutzot Hagola", No. 83/84), Jerusalem, 1978. Comp. also Simon: "Gosher Gesharim" in *Molad*, Vol. XVI, 1958. Also "The Builder of Bridges" in the periodical *Judaism*, 27, p. 148–160.

9. See Simon, *Ibid.* (note 8) in *Divre Iyun*, p. 14.

thought. The terminology changes — but the problem with which that address deals gave no rest to Buber from beginning to end.

These two points of view, the historical and the ideological, from which we have chosen to examine the addresses (or sermons, as Hugo Bergman preferred to call them when he first brought them to the attention of the Hebrew reader in his article in *Hashiloah*¹⁰), are inseparable when we attempt to deal with their seminal impact on Buber and his generation.

III

We should remember that these “addresses” were not born as the fruit of reflection unconnected with the problems of the time in which they were presented. On the contrary, most of them were “ordered” and were intended to fill the concrete, sometimes urgent needs, of the day.

When Buber responded to the call of the Zionist students, the members of “Bar Kochba” in Prague, to come and lecture to them on Judaism, he understood well what was expected of him, and why he in particular was chosen to offer guidance in the searching quest in which they found themselves. He was to lead them on the tortuous road from the ideals and “isms” of progressive Europeanism to Zionism, which placed all hopes on the building of Eretz Yisrael, a distant and rejected country at the end of a backward East. He knew this perplexed youth which was yearning for some new Jewish content, different from what it saw in the existing Jewish world which it had recently discovered. It expected to find this differentness in Buber, whose literary work, at that time quite modest in quantity,¹¹ indicated a Jewish creative force, completely European, and yet not engaging in talk about “Judaism” or moralistic apologetics, but in essentials, in authentic Jewish themes that were so intimate — for the Hasidim and Hasidism were as close to them as a one-hour trip by train — and yet so distant. In the form presented by Buber, Hasidism and Hasidim were not at all repellant as were the strange types, with their black garments, who had come to the West from the East. The Hasidic tales as retold by Buber were appealing and inspiring.¹²

In our opinion, we cannot justify the merciless criticism of Nahum Glatzer¹³ that Buber deliberately said what he said, in order to find favor with those young peo-

10. See above, note 3.

11. Up to 1909 Buber published very little, including several books on Hasidism. Comp. *Bibliography of Writings of Buber*, edited by M. Katan, Jerusalem 1970.

12. On the confrontation between Hasidism as it existed in Eastern Europe and as it was described by Buber in a manner which was appealing to the Gentiles, see the short story written in typical Agnon-like irony, in “*Sippur Maaseh Lem'lot LeBuber Shmonim Shana*”, in S.Y. Agnon, *Me'atmi le 'atmi*, Jerusalem, 1976, p. 256–268.

13. In his conclusion to *On Judaism* (see above, note 1), p. 240.

ple in Prague, who wanted to hear something positive from some authoritative source concerning Judaism, while at the same time negating it, and that Buber said those things for personal advantage, so that he could be *that* authority for alienated young Jewish generation who were returning to Judaism. Glatzer has no satisfactory evidence upon which to base this serious accusation. It is more accurate to assert, as indicated by Buber's own struggles with these subjects in the course of several decades, that Buber was presenting his true attitude at that moment. Once articulated, they attained a momentum of their own, and remained Buber's view for many years to come as he tried again and again to formulate it into a consistent system of thought.

We referred to attitudes "at that moment", for as the speeches were given, they were well rooted in their time and place, to which Buber reacts, and were not necessarily what was expected of him or what his listeners "wanted to hear" from him. Buber responded to matters which then stood at the top of the agenda of Jewish youth in central and western Europe, as he himself was indeed one of them. Those deal with what we simply refer to as the "solution of the Jewish problem," that had occupied, not academically but with painful relevance, young Jews in the west as well as in the east, in each place according to its cultural climate and environment.

IV

The confrontation with this question did not begin with Buber, or with Zionist students in Prague or Vienna. In 1909 when Buber gave his first address on Judaism, this question had already been in the center of Jewish thought for sixty or seventy years, since the advent of Moses Hess, and ran through the problematical Jewish speculation of the 19th century, as can be seen in the kalaelescopic presentation of this material in the two volumes of "Jewish Thought in Modern Times" by Nathan Rotenstreich,¹⁴ and in the second volume of "Exile and Alienation" by Yehezkel Kaufman.¹⁵ The number of attempts to find the solution for what was called "the problem of the survival of Judaism" was equal to the number of thinkers and publicists who related to the subject. When Buber accepted the assignment to deal with the subject, he was expected, by his listeners and by himself, to say something *new* and this is precisely what he meant to do, and did.

However, notwithstanding the novelty in his words, we must view them as part of the Jewish thought of his time and as a direct response to it. It can be demonstrated by analysis of the material that even the Judaism of East Europe

14. Nathan Rotenstreich. "*Ha-Maḥshava Ha-Yehudit Ba-'et Ha-Ḥadasha*", Tel Aviv. 1966. Comp. his book. *Tradition and Reality*. New York. 1972.

15. Yehezkel Kaufmann. *Golah Ve-nekhar*. Tel Aviv, 1961, 2 v.

was not unknown to him, for it was during those years, from 1906 to 1914, that there raged stormy public literary debate on this very question, spurred by Shai Ish Hurvitz in his article, "On the Problem of the Existence of Judaism."¹⁶ This applies to all eight addresses delivered between 1909 and 1919. To demonstrate our point we shall limit ourselves to the fifth address, entitled "Jewish Religiosity", since all the preceding addresses, in particular the first and the third, prepare the way for it.

The "novelty" in this address does not inhere in what is conspicuous and prominent in it, which was indeed picked up both by those who wished to depend on it or to attack it — viz. the revolt against *Halakha*, the emphasis upon the sterility of the religious establishment, when compared to the primal force found in the "other", hidden, subterranean Judaism. This was achieved by many predecessors of Buber, among them the trailblazers of Reform on the one hand,¹⁷ and some of the powerful figures of modern Hebrew literature (Y.L. Gordon, Ahad Haam, Berdichevsky)¹⁸ on the other. The novelty in this address is not in the *negative*, despite the fact that Buber succeeds in sharpening and polarizing the rift, real or artificial, between "Torah" and "Mitzvot" — for which he was to be attacked subsequently by Franz Rosenzweig in his letter "The Builders" (Die Bauleute)¹⁹ — but rather in its *positive* aspect. "All of Buber" could be said to reside in this one positive element. If we may use traditional terminology here, we could say that it constitutes a nuclear, one-time "revelation". Continuing in this language we could say: Mordecai-Martin Buber approached the thick cloud where God is found, and in this cloud he remained! It is here that we have the problem of Buber's "Jewish Religiosity".

On the one hand we stand in amazement at the courage of the words, particularly against the background of all the previous thinking on the "solution to the question of Judaism". Yet, on the other hand, we are groping our way to find the fulfillment of the "promise" which in the words of Gershom Scholem,²⁰ Buber

16. *Hashiloah*, Vol. 13, 1904.

17. On the attacks of the Reform spokesmen on the "frozen" Halacha, see Zvi Zahavi, *Tenu'at Hahitbolelut BeYisrael VeHaPulmus Ba'adah Ve-negdah Besifrut Ha'ivrit HaHadasha*. Jerusalem, 1948, especially p. 86 ff.

18. On the antinomian and anti-establishment direction in modern Hebrew literature, and on the changing values and renewal of the face of Judaism through the revelation of the subterranean "hidden Judaism", comp. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Ibid.* Vol. II; also Baruch Kurzweil, *Safrutenu HaHadasha — Hemshech o Mahpekha*, Tel Aviv, 1962.

19. Rosenzweig's letter contra Buber on this subject, "Die Bauleute", in *Kleine Schriften*, p. 107–113. Parts of it were published in English in the above-mentioned book of Glatzer, p. 234–240, and in complete form in Hebrew, as translated by Yehoshua Amir, in *Naharayim*, Selected writings of Rosenzweig, Jerusalem, 1961, p. 80–93.

20. G. Scholem, *Devarim Bego*, p. 457.

made of "a revelation of a hidden life under the frozen official forms, an uncovering of preserved treasures, if we but understood how to cross the threshold of the treasure house and enter inside." This and more was promised by Buber as he charmed his audiences, but a clear path of entry into this enchanted world was not indicated by him. All the subsequent attempts by Buber to scatter the clouds and make himself clear, to create new forms of expression and bring about their "realization" did not succeed. Some of these attempts are explicit, as in the famous forward to the 1923 edition of the addresses, and some are only implied. Nevertheless it can be said that the words as enunciated at this point already anticipate, and perhaps even entail, the appearance of the eternal "Thou" before the yearning "I" who seeks Him with profound "religiosity", and here we have the cornerstone of the great structure of the dialogue-philosophy he was destined to establish. However, in this stage it is impossible for us to emerge from the thick cloud which envelops us as soon as we enter the realm of what he calls "the obscure sanctuary" of the soul, in which dwells "Jewish religiosity" as he conceived it in his youth.

V

As said, the address "Jewish Religiosity" belongs to the thought of that generation and the preceding one. The "key word" here (were we to borrow the terminology of Buber's method in Biblical interpretation) is the word *renaissance*, the rebirth of Judaism. Baruch Kurzweil correctly claims²¹ that the very use of the term "renaissance" tells us that we are dealing with something "dead" which has to be resuscitated. This speaking of "rebirth" implies the giving up of the eternal continuum, an exchanging it for "a slice of tragic existence". It is true that in the Torah academies and the courtyards of the Hasidic *Ṣadiqim* in Eastern Europe they did not speak of "rebirth", and did not seek justification for the continued existence of Judaism, nor even new definitions of its nature other than those offered by the traditional notions of Torah and Mitzvot. Yet, it is also true that for a large part of the people, first in the West and later among the young generation in the East, this topic assumed vital proportions and urgent dimensions. The searchings of the individual were paired with the confusion of the community as a whole and in offering solutions for the "Jewish Problem", many were trying to solve as well the problem of the individual Jew. The words of Moshe Leib Lillienblum, one of the foremost "seekers" and "reformers" in East Europe, characterize this thought process which appears in a variety of forms, when he says: "The resurgence of our political life will improve everything",²² Moses Hess, perhaps the greatest of the Jewish thinkers of the modern period, also

21. B. Kurzweil, in *"Ma'avak Al 'Erkey HaYahadut"*, Tel Aviv, 1979, p. 210.

22. M.L. Lillienblum. "Let Us Not Confuse the Issue" (1882), in *The Zionist Idea*, Arthur Hertzberg ed., New York, 1975, 170-172.

assumes that “national regeneration must precede religious revival”.²³ Even Ahad HaAm, whose stress is upon spiritual awakening and inner piety, states in reaction to Judah Leib Magnes (in 1910) that nationalism is prior and that only through it can be found a “safe haven” for Jews, and even for Judaism.²⁴ Very few are the voices of those who deviate from the general chorus who define “renaissance” as essentially national, among them A.D. Gordon who speaks of “spiritual awakening”,²⁵ not in terms of academic revival, revival of ideology, or political upsurge, but in terms of “vitalization of *life*”, and Rabbi Kook, who speaks of “the revival of holiness”²⁶ on a cosmic level. In this entire group, the voice of Buber is outstanding in identifying the renaissance as beginning with the individual, and not in the general terms of “life” or “holiness” but in the specific terms of what many prefer to swallow in a whisper, namely, *religion*. He states clearly:

Jewish religiosity is not, as many prefer to think, something very precious in itself but of little value in the solution of what is commonly called the ‘Jewish problem’, but then and now constitutes the only *reality* for Jews, the absolute reality, the force that determines its fate, chooses its goals, the powerful flame that will *ignite* anew, and whose extinction would sentence Judaism to death...

In all truth, the *renascence of Judaism* means the resurrection of *Jewish piety*.²⁷

A.D. Gordon also spoke of the revival of religion, but his primary stress was upon the whole of life as it is expressed in the areas of *ethics*, *religion*, and *poetry*.²⁸ His panacea is: “In labor we shall be healed” — (in the language of Buber, who admired Gordon, this would be formulated “In the worship of God we shall be healed”). A.D. Gordon wishes to “rescue” Yom Kippur, not to “lose” it, for this would constitute a “national loss”; he expostulates not to dispose of religion, “for in and through religion did we survive during the length of our exile”.²⁹ With Buber, religion is not a means but an end in itself, *the end!* This constitutes the original element.

Ahad Haam³⁰ in the East, as Hermann Cohen³¹ in the West, set all of Judaism

23. Cited from Moses Hess *Rome and Jerusalem*, in Hertzberg, *Ibid.*, p. 116ff.

24. Ahad Haam, “On Nationalism and Religion”, Hertzberg, *Ibid.*, p. 261.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 369ff.

26. Rabbi A.I. Kook, *Orot*, Jerusalem, 1946, p. 48–98, see also the three volumes of *Orot HaKodesh*.

27. *Te'uda VeYi'ud*, Vol. I, p. 70. *On Judaism*, p. 79.

28. Hertzberg, *op. cit.*, p. 369ff.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Among others see *'Al Parashat Derakhim*, Berlin, 1930, Vol. II, p. 79, on national ethics as opposed to religion.

31. See his *The Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism*, especially the introductory sections.

upon the stand of ethics. Buber's reaction to them, without mentioning them by name, is undoubtedly the following:

"He who sees the *crucial* element in Judaism as ethics alone, is falsifying its meaning. A *religious act*, more precisely, *the* religious act, is the realization of God by man.³² Again: he who intends to erect the structure of Judaism upon "pure ethics" is committing a basic error: the very inner essence of Judaism is found where the absolute is embodied in the Face of the Living God, which yearns for revelation in human action."³³

In Buber's obscure language there emerges the same sharp criticism of Ahad Haam directed against him by Yehezkel Kaufmann³⁴ who says: "Spiritual Zionism as founded by Ahad Haam is based on a faulty perception of the forces operating in Jewish history up to the present, that is, upon an incorrect estimate of the function of the religious factor in Jewish history. Jewish religion did not serve as a means in the hands of the national will to live, and was not a storehouse for 'exilic tools' exploited by the national will to live for its own goals. Religion was the *primary motivation* (emphasis in the original) in Jewish history, and it compelled the people to isolate itself from its environment and to survive in its specialty".

In this, Buber anticipated Kaufmann by several decades, and at the time was considered original, just as today it is considered original by many. In this, as well, Buber was almost unique in Zionist thought. I say "almost" because at that time many similar things were said, in some cases even with greater clarity, with regard to national renaissance and the renewal of the nature of religion and Jewish socialism, by a contemporary thinker who is quite forgotten. We refer to Shlomo Schiller who preceded Buber by a whole generation. He left Europe and emigrated to Eretz Yisrael.³⁵

This statement by Buber that there are no ethical or national substitutes for Judaism itself, and that essentially Judaism consists of religion, requires of him a definition of this religion. Clearly, he cannot accept the Orthodox conception, not even in its Hirschian version³⁶ with its compound of "Torah and *Derekh Eretz*", or that of Reform religiosity which is largely diluted by apologetics and a self-

32. *Te'uda Veyi'ud*, p. 73; *On Judaism*, p. 83.

33. *Ibid.*, 76; *Ibid.*, p. 89.

34. *Golah Venekhar*. Vol. II, p. 355.

35. See the writings of Shlomo Schiller, Jerusalem, 1927, Introduction by R. Binyamin, p. 7-12, and the articles "*Hatziyonut Veba-dat*", p. 3-9, and "*Mahashavot 'al HaYahadut*", p. 35-51. On Schiller, and his peculiar approach, see also Dov Stock (Sadan), *Goral Vehakhra'a*, according to Shlomo Schiller, Tel Aviv, 1943.

36. Re: S.R. Hirsch, father of the Neo-Orthodox movement in Germany, see the volume *Harav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch—His Doctrine and Approach*, edited by Yona Emanuel, Jerusalem, 1962.

effacing obsequiousness towards the external world. Buber, as a proud Zionist, a man of the same generation as Herzl and sharing his faith, could not accept this. On the other hand, Hasidism, as it appears in the tales of Rabbi Nachman and the legends of Baal Shem had a certain charm for the child of the European culture of the time. Leaning upon the antimonian basis he discerns in Hasidism, Buber launches on his own campaign, exploiting what he sees as the positive in this negative to develop his own approach to human life.

The first step in this approach is the distinction — not originating with Buber, although he fashioned new linguistic forms for it — between religion and piety. For a long time there has been a recognition of the tension in every religion and in every spiritual movement between the idea and its realization, between the experiential revelation and its translation into the language of life. In Judaism there are the concepts of *Halakha* and *Aggada*. Buber, with his abundant rhetorical talents, raised this tension to the level of an irreconcilable split, an unbridgeable gap.

“I use the word piety”,³⁷ he stresses, “and it is exactly what I have in mind. I do not say religion and I do not have it in mind.” What is the difference between the two? The list of differences which Buber proceeds to compile with great enthusiasm is long, and these words of his have, as testified by Gershom Scholem,³⁸ “broad wings and the sound of their fluttering was appealing in our young ears”. Here are several of the distinctions between “religion” and “piety”, Buber style:

Religion — is static; piety — is dynamic.

Religion — is cold and frozen; piety — is enthusiastic.

Religion — is sterile; piety — is fruitful.

Religion — is a derivative of piety, but persists in an existence that is served and “legally rigid”, unmindful of the demands of a piety that continues to renew itself, seeking new visions.

Piety is the creative basis; religion the organizing force.

Piety begins with every young person who looks for truth; religion is forced by fathers upon children.

Piety implies activity; the preservation of a primary relationship to the absolute; religion means patience and suffering.

Piety has its own goals; religion has external goals, with the final result that piety is lost because of religion. They are enemies to each other.

All this does not exhaust the list, and Buber promises: “I shall try to elevate the special being of Jewish religion from below the mass of things that cover it,

37. All the quotations from Buber below whose source is not given, are from “Jewish Piety”, in *Te'uda Veyi'ud*, p. 70–79; *On Judaism*, p. 79–94.

38. *Devarim Bego*. p. 458.

loaded upon it by the Rabbinate on the one hand, and by intellectualism on the other.”

What is it that he elevates? The words of Buber in the addresses on Judaism, says Gershom Scholem,³⁹ “possessed a profound duality: on the one hand a stimulating force and a strange ambiguity on the other, an ambiguity never acknowledged by Buber.”

In fact, even now, when one reads his words at a distance of sixty years, it seems that there is an audacious assault upon a high mountain, but when you arrive together with Buber, perspired and exhausted, to the top of the mountain, you discover there was no mountain at all. What appeared to be a mountain wrapped in enigma, has disappeared, retreated, dissolved. All that remains is the thick cloud at the top of the mountain, a total lack of clear indication of the road to the goal he encourages us to reach.

Probably we should relieve some of the harsh judgment of G. Scholem who sees this “strange ambiguity” in Buber instead of the stimulating words, since, as we have seen, they have the ring of trailblazing truth about them, discernible also in the influence they had, becoming for some real turning points. Can this be accomplished with ordinary, beautiful words alone?

How, then, does Buber view this piety whose praises he sings so mighty? First, piety or religiosity means freedom. “The action seen in Judaism of all the ages as the basis of all piety”, says Buber, “is the *decisive* act which concretizes *divine freedom and autonomy* upon earth”.

Here he integrates the act of *repentance* which is anchored in the freedom of choice, for “sin is not living in freedom, that is in decision, but living in bondage... The repentant one ignites a flame of mystery in freedom, and rises from the dependent to the absolute.”

Again: Total independent freedom is the special religious content of Judaism. In itself this thought is not original, but is frequently found in existentialist literature⁴⁰ and is found in classic Jewish thought in the concept of *Teshuva* (Repentance)⁴¹, but it is here expressed in powerful form, with great convincing force.

39. Ibid.

40. See Gabriel Marcel, “Existence and Human Freedom”, in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, New York, 1956, p. 47–90, and Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, New York, 1940. See also E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief*, New York, 1957.

41. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Teshuvah, Ch. 5–6, and see also P. Peli, *On Repentance*. Oral

Second, it means an aspiration towards *unity* in the face of the disunities in life and world. He elaborates upon this aspiration to unity, to which the unifying act or act which makes unique (in the terminology of Hasidism: “For the sake of the unification”) is dedicated, in the third address.⁴² Aspiration and action that fill man’s life lead to perfection. Here he finds occasion to criticize Christianity which is opposed to this Jewish characteristic:

“Ancient Christianity was sterile in comparison with Judaism when it arose and overturned the purely Jewish message of Jesus that very man is capable of being the son of God, if he lives his life in perfection — and converted it to the teaching that man merits the life hereafter when he believes in the son of God”.

From the “no” of ancient Christianity which distorted the teaching of Jesus, we can deduce the “yes” of this teaching itself. Truly, according to Buber, this teaching belongs to those “eternal forces” and not necessarily the “forces existing in certain periods”, that constitute true Judaism. anti-establishment Judaism, esoteric and moving in the depths.

This escape from current, corrupt Judaism to “true” and beautiful Judaism is not restricted to Buber alone. It frequently appears in modern Hebrew literature which sought ancient myths to rely on (Berdichevsky,⁴³ Frischman,⁴⁴ Shneur⁴⁵ and others). The difference is that while the latter, who are more or less known to us, sought a Judaism of power, of passions and lusts, a Judaism emancipated from the complexes of exile, which would be a desertion of religion and piety together, Buber, on the other hand, escapes from religion in order to *reach* it. “Escaping from it to it.” He is running from religion, frozen, established, static — to religion enthusiastic, alive, fruitful. How to reach it?

Buber does not hesitate to draw for us a map which can lead us to true Judaism. According to him there are three stages through which we must pass in order to reach it:

Words of Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, Jerusalem. 1980. chapter on the relation between repentance and free choice, p. 195–258.

42. “*Hidusha shel HaYahadut*” in *Te’uda Veyi’ud*, Vol. I, p. 39–53: *On Judaism*, p. 34–55.

43. On Berdichevsky, his call for change of values, and the influence of Nietzsche upon him and the Hebrew writings of our day, see Kaufmann, *Golah Venekhar*, Vol. II, the chapter entitled “*Dor Navokh*”.

44. B. Frischman in the story “*Hamidbar*”, “We are all in a state of rebellion against the establishment on behalf of a human Judaism, healthy and pure.”

45. In the epic poem, “*Luhot Genuzim*”, in which he seeks to restore to us anew the lost books mentioned in the Bible, and rejected from inclusion in the “official” codex, “because the gatherers, old and fearful men, obscured them.” Comp. G. Kretsel, *Leksikon Hasafrut Ha’ivrit*.

The first: *Imitatio Dei*, the rule of “be like Him” which already appears in the Talmud as a means of fulfilling the state of being attached to God.⁴⁶

The second: decision action by man which materialized God, as it were. (“If ye be My witnesses, I am God”,⁴⁷ as if His existence or His presence in the world depends upon man — an idea later developed broadly and used as a basis of a philosophy of religion by Abraham Joshua Heschel).⁴⁸

The third layer is derived from Jewish mysticism, the Kabbala, and stipulates the influence of man’s action upon the fate of God. Through his action, man strengthens the forces of heaven, bringing about the ascendance of the world and of the Divine Presence.

Under these three stages “there is revealed... that Judaism of the depths, which despite being hidden and distant, is the *true Judaism, the creative Judaism, in contrast to official Judaism, Judaism of appearance, which usurps power without justification and represents without authorization.*”

Here are powerful words concerning “official Judaism” reminiscent in their expressive fervency and messianic overtones of Sabbatean style. With the same fervency he not only questions the authority of official Judaism, but also tells us that:

“What these three layers have in common and what has always been unique to Judaism is the conception that *human action is of absolute value...* the infinite streams from and pours itself into every single deed of every single man”.

The passage here from the covering layers to piety, from the first which begins with the action of God as a model for emulation, upto the exaltation of God by man, is clean and quick. Suddenly, man is at the center, not God, and man’s action is *absolute* action.

Moreover, man’s action in itself is not significant. “It is not the content of the action that makes it true, but what is determinant is whether the action is performed

46. So does the *gemara* interpret the verse (Deut. 13.5) “‘After the Lord your God do walk... and attach yourselves to him’... Can then man walk after the Shechina? ...but the meaning is to walk in the attributes of the Holy Ones. Blessed be He. as He dresses the naked... so do you dress the naked.” (Sota. 14a).

47. ‘Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God.’ (Is. 43,12), on which the Midrash comments, “When ye are My witnesses, I am God, and when ye are not My witnesses, as it were, I am not God.”

48. See his works, *God in Search of Man*, New York, 1955; *Man Is Not Alone*, New York, 1951.

in the manner of flesh and blood dependency, or in the manner of divine freedom... it is not the content of the act that determines whether it shall be consummated in the courtyard, within the kingdom of the self, or shall it penetrate and enter into the Holy of Holies, but it is the *force of the decision* that is engendered and the sanctity of intention that is inherent in the action... *Every act, be it the most profane, is sacred if it is performed in holiness and in independent freedom*".

"The resistance of piety to religion", according to Buber, is of a dual nature. One aspect of it is: the rebellion of heretics which flares up from time to time, sometimes accompanied by powerful messianic movements, shaking the world to its foundations. The other is: the constant and nagging function of religious mysticism. In his opinion these were expressed in three historical movements: Prophecy, Essenism (or early Christianity bearing the true message of Jesus), and Hasidism. When Buber takes off on the wings of this idea he continues to fly, on one of the peripheral sayings that becomes a road-sign in his world: "*Truth is not a matter of 'what' but of 'how'*". So much so that when he speaks of the war of Elijah against the false prophets of Baal, he says: "The question of worship, *whether it be idolatry or worship of God*, is not decided by what name God is called, but in what service He is served".

So does Buber summon support for his thesis which he presented in order to provide an answer to the problem of Judaism through the revival of piety, by citing historical experience. He, as it were, reveals to us a new Judaism, a depth-Judaism which according to him existed throughout Jewish history. If there is no revival here, there is a *rejection* here, a rejection of significant portions of that which constituted Judaism, despite — or because of — the tension between religious *Halakha* and pious *Aggada*, as these are portrayed, for example, in Bialik's essay,⁴⁹ or in the profound definitions of Rav Kook.⁵⁰ Buber performs his rejection with an air of great confidence.

"Religion" and "Piety" as they appear in the thought of Buber, in which one is accepted and the other rejected, are according to him archetypes in an "eternal" model of Judaism. Here, for example, are his words concerning Moses and Aaron, in which can be recognized the influence of Ahad Haam's essay "Priest and Prophet"⁵¹ minus the synthesis and completion that Ahad Haam finds in the cooperation between the two types in the furtherance of Jewish society and the strengthening of its foundations. Buber sees no cooperation between the two types, only struggle.

49. Bialik, "*Halakha VeAggada*" in *Kol Kitve...*, Tel Aviv, 1954.

50. Rav A.I. Kook, *Orot Hakodesh*, Part I, p. 25.

51. *'Al Parashat Derakhim*, Vol. I, p. 178-184; Vol. III, p. 212.

“So do they stand *side by side* and in *opposition* — these two types of human leaders, between whom the internal history of Judaism passes in the guise of struggle: the prophet and the priest. Moses our Teacher is the demander, who listens to nothing but the *voice* and recognizes nothing but the act. Aaron is the intermediary who is receptive to other voices as he is to the voice, and *it is he who brings the people to disintegration* through a worship of manners lacking direction and purpose... The prophet desires *truth*, the priest wants *power* — these are two eternal types in the history of Judaism.”

It does not require too much imagination to know to which of these two leaders Buber directs us. If so, how do we attain to the hearing of the voice? And how do I know what is the “how” that is desired by God or that should be desired by me, in order to reach perfection, or to the “great realization” which should be aspiring beyond the “what”?

It would seem that the answer to this question, *and it is a crucial question for our day*, (without ignoring the great value of these addresses at the time they were given), will be found according to Buber in the no-man’s-land between mysticism and nihilism, as we are driven by messianic impetus and rebellion of heresy. From these he reaches to the sanctification of secular action, but does this not remove us from the area of Jewish piety or from any kind of piety?

Already in the relatively short speech on “Jewish Piety” and especially in the words that followed it, Buber himself struggles to explain to us what he had in mind when he had spoken of “the great realization” which we are destined to reach. Is not the whole thing a youthful mirage which appears to a poet in the original inspirations that determine his world, and which he himself cannot explain but also sing of them, or is there something here in the nature of direction towards a way of life, some kind of “concretization” (a word most favored by Buber)?

While the address on “Jewish Religiosity” dwells at length on the “how”, if we were to judge from its conclusion, he contradicts some of his opinions internally and attempts to convince us that despite all this, we cannot proceed without the “what”, just as the “how” has no other expression but in action.

So does he speak at the end of the address on “Religiosity”:

“The aspiration of man is to come into living contact with the absolute and his desire to *materialize it in action* and to dedicate to it a special place in the human world. If so, true piety has no part in the dreams of visionaries, nor in the selfish pleasure of the coquettish lovers of beauty, nor in the sophisticated and profound games of the intellectually brilliant. True piety is action, in its desire to provide form for the absolute in the matter of the world. The face of God is hidden in the solid world, but not seen to the eye; it has to be dredged up

and materialized. The religious man is the one who participates in this action and function, and no more. This goal which is destined for us is a direct one, and nothing is more available to us. In particular is it our duty to fulfill it in human life, which are subject to our influence more than anything else in the world. There has been here entrusted to us, more than anywhere else, an abundance of things to do for the sake of unity, before us there is a giant bulk, formless, and we are to stamp upon it the image of God. Human society is the project that awaits us; this project arose in His thought first; this chaos and anarchy into which we are commanded to introduce order are strewn abroad and waits for our ingathering, a contradiction which it is our duty to reconcile, and we cannot do all this, unless each of us performs in his own place, in the natural limits of life, belonging to him and to others in common, the good, the joining, and what creates form. The will of God is not that we believe in Him, to meditate upon Him, and to fight his battle: His will is that we should realize His will."

The "how" is again converted into the "what" clearly and explicitly, its essence consisting of the perfection of human society. Do not the final words of Buber contradict the first? Well does S.H. Bergmann ask,⁵² whether giving form to society is a moral function, and if so, how a moral function can be converted into a religious one? "The social factor", Bergmann decides in speaking of these conclusions of Buber, "has absorbed the religious factor".

Is this true? Is it in this way that the dream of the religious revival comes to its end, the dream of the revival of "piety" that we find in the young Buber?

It seems to me that it is our obligation, especially in the light of the teaching of Rav Kook which tries to destroy the boundaries between sacred and secular, and the teaching of Hasidism concerning "Worship Through the Material" as understood by Buber in his writings,⁵³ to oppose the one-sided statement by Bergmann, who seeks to remove Buber from the area of religious piety to that of secularism, and we must at least give Buber the benefit of the doubt. It is quite possible that Buber himself was in doubt about this at that time and up to the end of his life. In this connection we should cite a story included in Buber's memoirs⁵⁴ dated 1914, one year after he had delivered the speech on "Jewish Piety", about his meeting with Hechler, that elderly priest, lover of Israel, known to us from Herzl's diary with respect to his assistance of the founder of Zionism in his activity. The meeting between Hechler and Buber lasted several hours.

Later I went to accompany him to the railroad station. To reach it we had to walk to the end of the small street in our neighborhood (in Berlin), and then to continue on a narrow lane, covered by coal dust, which was known as "the black path" running along the length of the railroad. When we reached this path, Hechler suddenly stopped, put his arm on my shoulder

52. In his article, "*Buber Veha-Mistika*" in *Divrey 'Iyun* (op. cit., note 8), p. 13.

53. See *Pardes HaHasidut*, Jerusalem, 1950, and the introduction to *Or Haganuz*, Tel Aviv, 1947.

54. M. Buber, *Meetings (Memories)*, Jerusalem 1965, p. 37.

and said: "My dear friend! We live in a great era, tell me: Do you believe in God?" I paused for a moment before I replied. I then tried to reassure the old man as far as was possible: as far as my faith was concerned he could stop worrying. Then I brought him to the station and seated him in the carriage... upon my return, when I again reached the place where the 'black path' meets our street, I paused. I felt I must be honest with myself. Did I tell the truth? Do I really 'believe' in the God to whom Hechler referred? Indeed, what is the nature of the faith I have? For a whole hour I stood there at the edge of the lane, and I decided I would not move from there until I found a proper answer.

The memoirs of Buber and his thoughts about his own faith continue, but it seems that even today, more than sixty years after the events took place, we have not moved at all from that point, and we are still standing with Buber at the end of the "black path" and the "narrow lane", covered by coal dust and struggling together with him to reply to the simple question of the old Hecher.

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