

ABSTRACTS

Honi the Circle Drawer and the Two Thousand Year Sleep

Tsafi Sebba-Elran

The wide distribution of homiletic (aggadic) anthologies at the turn of the twentieth century bears witness to the formative role they played in the construction of the new Hebrew canon. This article examines the first popular, modern anthology, *Sihot Minnei Kedem*, by Ze'ev Jawitz (1887), an anthology that paved the way for the famous anthologies of Berdyczewski and Bialik. The article interprets one of the stories from the anthology as an allegory to the Jewish condition at the turn of the twentieth century. It is the story of Honi the Circle Maker who slept for seventy years and woke up to a changed world in which his knowledge and beliefs were put to the test.

Like other modern storytellers, such as Goethe and Washington Irving, Jawitz confronts Honi with the rule of time and compels him to choose between eternal life (*chayei olam*) and mortal life (*chayei sha'ah*). This dilemma reflects the fragile state of Jewish faith in Jawitz' time but also the new horizons that were opening before it.

Orthodoxy's Attitude toward the Hebrew Language: the Case of *HaLevanon* Periodical

Roni Beer-Marx

The year 1889, in which the Safa Brura Company was established in Jerusalem, is generally considered the starting point of Jewish Orthodoxy's struggle against the Hebrew language. Orthodox literature, and the studies that followed, reveal that

until then the Orthodox leadership paid little attention to the modern cultural and national attributes of revived Hebrew, and therefore saw no reason to counter it.

This paper challenges the validity of this assumption. Was the Orthodox leadership oblivious to the magnetic appeal of the renewed Hebrew language? Did the Orthodox leaders misidentify the revitalized language as a mounting threat to tradition?

A study of *HaLevanon*, the mouthpiece of Lithuanian Orthodoxy in the second half of the nineteenth century, reveals a much wider and more complex view of the issue. It shows that as far back as the early 1860s, various Eastern European authors, philosophers, and rabbis were clearly aware of the power of a rejuvenated Hebrew, and addressed the threat of its secularizing potential. The fact that secularized Hebrew was adopted by their opponents, the Maskilim and Zionists, motivated the Orthodox leaders into fostering the Hebrew language upon the pages of *HaLevanon*, and in this way Hebrew was used to safeguard the religion and buttress the camp of the faithful.

Superficial Identity and the Secularization of Judaism in *Altneuland*

Gideon Katz

The utopia *Altneuland* begins with descriptions of two typical Jewish problems: poverty and suffering from anti-Semitism; superficial identity and loneliness. The article explores the importance of the second problem in the novel, and shows how secularizing Judaism is the solution that Herzl offers to his readers.

The Attack on ‘Neo-Hasidism’ in Religious Zionist Yeshivot

Nicham Ross

This article focuses on the current opposition of Zionist rabbis and educators affiliated with Israeli *batei midrash* (religious study halls) to the phenomenon of neo-Hasidism – namely, the tendency of some students to adopt various mannerisms and characteristics associated with the spiritual legacy of the Hassidic movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov in the mid-eighteenth century. In so

doing, I demonstrate the extent to which the historical memory of the original Rabbinic-Mitnagedic opposition to the Hassidic movement at its inception serves as an active presence, resurfacing in the rhetoric and arguments employed by both protagonists in the controversy.

The article also discusses a few singular aspects of the religious Zionist scene that serve to distinguish the current conflict from its historical predecessor.

The article concludes with the influence of the original debate on another modern controversy: the empathy with Hassidism displayed by certain literary figures connected with Jewish national revival at the turn of the twentieth century.

Cultural Zionism as an Alternative to Reform in Ahad Ha'am's Writings

Einat Ramon

This article focuses on a dominant theme in Ahad Ha'am's works that has not been widely researched: his criticism of certain trends in the 'Jewish Emancipation', such as Reform Jewry, and his view of Zionism as the alternative. Ahad Ha'am argued that 'Jewish Emancipation' strove towards integration and acculturation in Western countries, and the pressure to become citizens in Western states and demonstrate 'loyalty' to them was destroying Jewish national identity and generating an inner conflict between Jewish identity and newly gained national-civic identity. In this light, emancipation was preventing Jews from modernizing and upgrading their religion according to Jewish values. Thus 'Jewish Emancipation' was dividing the Jewish people along liberal versus traditionalist lines.

According to Ahad Ha'am, different types of Western Jewry (Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodoxy) were diluting Judaism and alienating Jews from their 'true' national identity. He regarded Zionism as essentially a return to Jewish national identity and the cure to this identity crisis. Secular Jews would study Jewish texts and commit themselves to Jewish values just as Orthodox Jews did, but for different (secular-national) reasons. This process would reunite the Jewish people and Jewish law would regain its original balance.

Jewish Secularisms: Philosophical and Educational Perspectives

Yuval Jobani

The object of this study is to mine the rich and diverse legacy of Jewish secularism in light of a typology that encapsulates key patterns of secular worldviews and pedagogies underlying Jewish existence in modernity. This pioneering typology will contribute to a new understanding of current Jewish secularity, as well as assist in the re-shaping of its future trajectory in light of the recent reassertion of power by religious forces in the spheres of politics and culture worldwide.

Secular Theology: Israeli Secular Criticism through the Prism of Hans Jonas' Thought

Avner Dinur

The theological works of Hans Jonas can be taken as a critique of Israeli thinkers who speak in the name of 'Jewish secular identity' and 'Judaism as a culture'. Many of these thinkers view secularism as a historical and sociological phenomenon rather than as a way of thinking and set of beliefs. Others are so occupied with their struggle against religiously observant Jews that their portrait of secular Jewry looks like a weak antithesis of the former.

The first part of the paper examines a number of Israeli thinkers and shows that their ideas on secularism are split between the need to say something positive about secular identity and their admission that secularism is nothing but the negation of religion and therefore lacks any positive content.

The second part briefly presents Hans Jonas and his theological writings. Jonas had a number of original ideas about the nature of God and the creation myths. He believed that the idea that man was created 'in God's image' put a burden of responsibility on humans. The term 'secular theology' in Jonas's work refers to the use of the term 'God' as one of the theology's main pillars even though the theology remained essentially secular.

The third part of the article describes 'secular theology' as a school of thought that straddles the line between secular and religious while challenging both. It is

secular in that it is free of tradition, ritual, worship, sets of beliefs, rabbis, and religious communities and institutions, but it is also theological in that it accepts the idea of God as the basis for some of its philosophical and ethical claims.

Post-Secular Theology and the Jewish-Feminist Discourse in Israel

Hagar Lahav

Post-secular theology is a general term for theologies that introduce concepts of the Divine into most of secularism's normative and epistemological preconceptions. This study is based on a *post-secular* sociological analysis of Jewish Israeli society, on the one hand, and Christian-oriented feminist theologies, on the other. As such, it seeks to achieve two goals: On the theoretical level, it discusses the concept of feminist *post-secular* theology as a category of feminist thinking on religiosity and spirituality; on the empirical level, it presents a thematic analysis of the Jewish-feminist theological discourse, suggesting that numerous postsecular manifestations are found in the Jewish-Israeli population, especially among those whom I term secular-believers. This group is characterized by a lack of commitment to traditional Jewish religion as an authoritative source of knowledge, a belief in a divinity, and powerful Jewish self-determination. However, the postsecular perspective has not penetrated the Jewish feminist theological discourse in Israeli academic circles.

This study claims that the structure of Jewish feminist theology excludes postsecular manifestations, views secularism and Judaism as mutually contradictory, preserves the dominant position of religious schools of thought (both orthodox and pluralistic), and offers no place to women who consider both secularism and a relationship with the Divine and Judaism to be central, integral components of their identity.

Levinas in the Wake of Buber: From Spiritual Regeneration to a Moral and Just Society

Hanoch Ben-Pazi

This article examines the attempt to renew Jewish identity in our time by employing Emmanuel Levinas' teachings against the background of Martin Buber's dialogical thought. Jewish identity, as the article brings out, seeks to overcome the traditional division between religious and non-observant Jews, between being Jewish by religion and being Jewish by nationality.

Buber's public and educational endeavors are of special importance. Through them he influenced and participated in the discourse on Jewish identity in the early twentieth century. His call for Jewish renewal transcended the religious/secular dichotomy by addressing the profound dimensions of spirituality from which a surge in Jewish discourse would emerge.

Buber tried to inspire spiritual renewal on the basis of his dialogical thinking. Levinas too tried to change the language of Jewish identity, but on the basis of the ethical demand for justice and responsibility. For him, the change that Zionism wrought in the Jewish public sphere regarding ethical responsibility through the creation of a Jewish state required a redefinition of Jewish identity. Such a redefinition, an ethical exposition of Judaism, would make it possible to go beyond the question of 'religion and state'. Terms, such as *tikkun olam* (healing the world), ethics, and a just society that Jewish religion had always been involved with, could now be realized in action, which made it imperative to redefine what being a Jew meant. This would also entail rethinking the meaning of Zionism, not in the national political connection but in an earthly ethical context.

Both Levinas and Buber sought to redefine Jewish religion and its relevance. They introduced Jewish youth to a new message that went beyond traditional dichotomies, but they laid out two different paths of thinking: Buber's, which led to the spiritual quest for religiosity in the modern, alienated world; and Levinas', which sought justice and morality in a world where interests and constitutions formed the basis of societies.

Inventing Jewish Rituals: Non-Orthodox Marriage and Funeral Rites in Israel

Anna Prashizky

This article explores the main features of non-orthodox weddings and funerals in contemporary Israel from the postmodern, postsecular perspective. The term *post-secular* refers to the non-binary division linking secularity to religion. Non-orthodox rituals combine secular and anti-religious features with religious elements that are based on traditional Jewish texts and practices. The postmodern nature of these events expresses ritual invention and improvisation, where rituals serve mainly as a medium for self-expression. A key feature in these events is the participants' creative relation to the ritual.

The article contributes to a better understanding of the changes taking place in religious ritual today and the emergence of a new postmodern, postsecular form of ritualization in Israel.

Between Tradition and Renewal: The First Anniversary of the Liberation of Safed and the *Hilula* in Meron, 1949

Oded Bar

In May 1949 events occurred in Safed and nearby Meron that gained widespread press coverage. In the Galilean periphery, separate celebrations commemorated the anniversary of Safed's liberation, the dismantling of the Palmach, Israel's first Independence Day, and the traditional festivities of Lag Ba'Omer. All these ceremonies over a short period of time in a relatively small region turned Safed and Meron into the focal point of the struggle over the narrative of the establishment of the State of Israel and, as a consequence, over the country's identity. Although the newspapers in the spring of 1949 published snippets of the events, each paper according to its political-ideological affiliation, most readers did not receive the full picture.

Palmach veterans arrived in Safed to celebrate the previous year's victory and protest the dismantling of their brigades, the new norms in force building, and the alleged attempts to minimize their contribution in the War of Independence. Etzel

veterans also came to Safed to demonstrate against the state leaders' orientation, and demand recognition of their contribution and sacrifices during the war.

The religious festivities (*hilula*) in Meron in 1949 were characterized by an attempt to introduce official and national content into the ceremonies and the first time the holiday was celebrated in the sovereign State of Israel. The two major institutions – the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Military Rabbinate – were the driving forces behind the revival of the celebrations.

The uniqueness of these events is that they constituted the phenomenon of simultaneous old and new ceremonies, each celebration separate and directed to its own community. These seemingly detached events concealed an essential discourse in the newly found state and established a precedent.

The Jewish-Zionist Discourse in Young Task-Oriented Secular Communities in Israel

Naama Azulay and Ephraim Tabory

Parallel to the recent spate of privatization in Israeli society, a new model for cooperative, task-oriented communal life has developed as an alternative to the traditional kibbutz. Approximately 2,000 relatively young people have established about one hundred groups, mostly in towns and cities, since the early 1980s. These groups constitute a new social movement aimed at ameliorating society mainly through involvement in education. They hope to serve as models of cooperation, solidarity, and mutual assistance.

As these groups develop internally and expand their social involvement, they become increasingly interested in issues related to Jewish identity. Their approach is innovative and creative. And while it mirrors many trends in the Jewish Renewal Movement in Israel (JRM), substantial differences exist regarding their view of religion and Judaism in Israeli society.

Despite the similarities between the communal movement and the JRM in Israel, the findings show little connection between the two, the basic difference being that the JRM seeks to foster a sense of social commitment that emanates from study, whereas the communal movement groups view their Jewish identity not as a means towards self-realization, but as collective action in helping others. Their open-ended study provides them with the knowledge and ability to influence

Israeli culture. Group study and the reinterpretation of traditional, contemporary Jewish texts and the works of the Zionist pioneers bestow a collective identity and unique group consciousness – the sine qua non of a social movement that seeks to foster social change.

The communal groups perceive Judaism as part of Zionism, whereas the JRM tends to view Judaism as culture. The communal groups are not satisfied with merely studying texts, performing rituals, or assuming spirituality. They interface with the rebellious pioneering tradition, emphasizing collectivistic identity as the basis of the Jewish-Zionist enterprise in Israel.

Secular Women in the Messianic Chabad Movement

Orit Hirsch

This article examines the binary secular-religious relationship and its integration in Jewish-Israeli society. The research, based on anthropological fieldwork, investigates secular women's participation in a Tel-Aviv messianic Chabad (Hasidic) community. Unlike earlier studies that focused on *teshuvah* (the return to religion), this study examines how secular women, who do not contemplate *teshuvah*, practice religious-messianic rituals. This paradox raises questions about the women's need for a religious milieu and the wish to assimilate secular women into a messianic group.

The women of the Chabad community are single and are searching for a practical framework in which to raise a family. They participate in a workshop that reconstructs their identity as a 'proper wife and mother', guided by a *rebbetzin* (wife of a rabbi) who serves as a mother-like guide. The community also functions as a matchmaker. At the same time, the religious leadership fulfills one of its highest goals – to precipitate the coming of the messiah by hastening the coming of man and building a Jewish family. Thus religious and secular become intertwined in a vortex of identities.

The Baba Sali Facility in Netivot as a Reflection of Society

Hadas Shadar and Liat Vardi

The town of Netivot has two faces. The first is the one familiar to many towns in the periphery built by the authorities after the establishment of the state: long rows of houses, known as ‘public housing’, and the town’s entrance adorned with a water tower. The other face of Netivot is that of holiness, especially the aging visage of Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzaira, known as the ‘Baba Sali’. The rabbi’s grave is situated in the outskirts of the town, close to the cemetery. At some distance are located two yeshivot (Talmudic colleges), an ultra-orthodox school, and the rabbi’s former private residence, which now functions as a magnet for religious ceremonies, administration, and public receptions.

This confluence of religious structures and public housing in a peripheral development town conceals other points of contact, not only between secularism and religion but especially between the ‘first Israel’ (the European-based, modern ruling class) and the ‘other Israel’ (that embodies the stereotype of immigrants from Islamic countries with their customs and beliefs).

This article surveys the physical development of the Baba Sali complex in Netivot and uses it to interpret changes in Israeli society. It also shows that the complex’s architecture reflects its social, ethnic, and religious content. At the heart of the article is the concept that social interpretations can be derived from architecture.

Secular and Traditional Mizrahi Caught in the Israeli Narrative Struggle

Arie Kizel

The new Mizrahi (oriental Jewry) narrative, as presented by radical Israeli Mizrahi groups such as the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, poses a challenge to Israel’s multicultural net of narratives. It repudiates the hegemonic meta-narrative of Ashkenazi-Zionist-Jewish-Israeli history that identifies the Ashkenazi as the pure Zionist. One central assertion of this new narrative is that hegemonic forces sought to silence and marginalize the Mizrahi population by advancing the false claim

that Israelianness had replaced ethnicity. In addition, the new oppositional narrative argues that the status of Jewish Mizrahim in Israel was created by means of personal and collective mechanisms of denial. In essence, this resistance narrative seeks to free Mizrahim through activism from a self-imposed status of inferiority.

The article surveys the narrative-oriented academic research on the evolution of the new Mizrahi narrative in Israel over the last two decades. The first part explains the social reality in Israel, including the social structure of Jewish settlement activity and the dramatic steps taken by the Ashkenazi majority for dealing with the arrival of multitudes of Jewish immigrants and the history of the Mizrahi struggle in Israel.

The article uses a three-stage model to illustrate the development of the resistance narratives that evolved in opposition to the hegemonic Ashkenazi mega-narrative, and that employed various means to facilitate their expression in social narrative networks. Finally, the perspective of the traditional Mizrahi critique is presented, as expressed in Meir Buzaglo's philosophy on the Mizrahi versus Zionist approach to tradition.

‘Soft’ Religion and ‘Strict’ Religion: The *Teshuvah* Movement in Israel

Asaf Sharabi

Unlike the approach that distinguishes between ‘rigid religiosity’ and ‘soft religiosity’, this article points to a reality where these boundaries are blurred. It examines the case of the religious revival movement in Israel (the *Teshuvah* Movement), which offers a broad range of *Teshuvah* styles, out of which born-again Jews can select ‘*Teshuvah* baskets’, which they fill and pack according to their preferences. These ‘baskets’ are dynamic in that their owners can fill, empty, and modify their contents while they conduct an ongoing critical ‘market survey’. The dynamism creates a reality, accompanied by a discourse that continuously blurs the symbolic boundaries separating various religious ‘supply’ sources. It also demonstrates how practices and beliefs related to ‘soft religiosity’ can even be employed by those who adhere to ‘rigid religiosity’.

Spiritual Traditionalists: A New Social Movement and the Israeli Identity Today

Asaf Leibovitch

This study deals with the elite, which I term the ‘spiritual traditionalists’, that developed in Israeli society in the last decade. This elite is active in the liberal social network and centers of Israeli culture. It combines an active Jewish Mizrahi tradition with the Israeli liberal discourse and New Age spirituality. It challenges academic attitudes toward traditional Mizrahi Judaism. For years, Israeli academia has stigmatized members of traditional society as weak, impoverished outsiders, as the periphery in the ethno-national discourse (that also includes Ultra-Orthodox Jewry, a group at odds with modernity and liberalism). However, the spiritual traditionalists have created a new Jewish identity that crosses lines in the Israeli social discourse by adopting a moderate approach to Jewish religious law, Jewish spirituality, and liberal ethno-national values. Therefore, they challenge the religious-secular divide as typified by the liberal, secular Tel Aviv center, on the one hand, and the conservative, ethno-national periphery, on the other. This identity introduces a new intellectual direction to modern Jewish life in Israeli society.

A Channeler, A Healer and A Shaman Meet at the Rabbi’s: Israeli Judaism(s) in the New Age

Marianna Ruah-Midbar

The emerging alliances between New Age spirituality and Judaism take many forms: channeling with Dvora the Old Testament prophetess, shofar healing, Jewish coaching, Ari-inspired (sixteenth century Jewish mystic) tantra, Hebrew shamanism, and so forth. This new trend is contributing to the renewal of roadmaps to Judaism in Israel.

The article surveys New Age’s encounter with Judaism, and analyzes its allure for Jewish Israelis, its potential impact on broader sections of the population, and the erosion of borders separating Jewish New Age from Israeli mainstream.

The article argues that, paradoxically, the more these phenomena are perceived as alternatives to conventional Judaism, the more they create an authentic emotional

link to it. Only after New Age spirituality passes through the exoticization stage, are New Age Israelis able to connect to more traditional Judaism and find in it their natural, authentic, and welcome habitat.

Was Josef Schächter the Prophet of the New Age Movement in Israel?

Ron Margolin

This paper discusses the philosopher and educator Dr. Josef Schächter (1901-1994), who lived and worked in Israel after fleeing Vienna in 1938. Schächter's writings supported the renewal of Jewish tradition and spirituality by stipulating that it depended on spiritual traditions from all over the world. To promote this idea, he endeavored to introduce religious innovation in Judaism and Jewish education. Although public recognition was denied him in his lifetime, the seeds sown by his books and students, including the founders of the cooperative community of Yodfat in the Galilee, contributed significantly to New Age spirituality in Israel.

Schächter's approach to spiritual growth was both eclectic and selective. He did not believe in total surrender to only one spiritual doctrine. The risk of sectarian isolation that accompanies such a choice, the loss of independent critical thinking, the primacy of the teacher's spiritual authority above one's own discerning examination, were not to his liking. This approach enabled Schächter to raise doubts and warn his students of the self-delusion sometimes associated with various spiritual schools, without his impugning the ability of such schools to help a person experience what he referred to as 'the other plane of life'.

The Identity Narrative of the Proponents of Jewish Spiritual Renewal in Israel

Rachel Werczberger

This paper explores the identities of two groups in the Jewish Spiritual Renewal (JSR) community – 'Hamakom' and 'Bayit Hadash' – both of which were active in Israel mainly between 2000 and 2006. An analysis of their narratives reveals

that they attempted to link their spiritual search to Jewish tradition and identity. Through introspection they construed a novel and alternative identity based on the idea of autonomic choice and self-spirituality. The ambivalent, dynamic nature of their identity quest challenged the Israeli public discourse on Jewish identity, which is grounded in the religious versus secular dichotomy. Thus, the analysis presented here points to the shifting contours, fluidity, and permeability of Jewish identity in Israel today.

Gender, Ritual, and Video Art

Yael Guilat

More than a decade ago art in Israel turned toward Judaica, which has since become a frequent topic of academic research and curatorial inquiry. This reinterpretation or reinvention of Jewish expression in the arts is not peculiar to Israel; it bears affinity with current developments in postmodern art concerned with Jewish themes in the context of multiculturalism and secularism. In Israel, the process evolved for various reasons, some related to internal artistic factors, others anchored in social and cultural changes whose sources lie in other spheres, such as gender, ethnicity, multiculturalism, and nationality.

For the past ten years I have been studying Israeli video art created by women artists as it relates to texts, ritual, limits and limitations, the body, sexuality, and gender – all within the so-called ‘Jewish way of life’. This video art explores secular and sacred rituals in a new framework, documenting inventive spiritual practices, reimagining old stories, and proposing new rituals. I wish to note Shuli Nachshon (*Prayer*, 2005; *Tvila*, 2006; *Hazkara*, 2010), Dafna Shalom (series *Machlif Zemanim*; *Morning Prayer*; *Evening Prayer*; *Hamavdil*, 2004-2008), Yamim Noraim (*Days of Awe*, 2006-2007), Nira Pereg (*The Sabbath*, 2008), Tamar Ettun (*Standing Prayer*, 2008), and Ofri Cnaani (*Sota*, 2011).

Most of the above artists do not live according to religious precepts, though some grew up in traditional homes and were even educated in religious institutions. Be that as it may, most of them define themselves as secular. In spite of the differences in their treatment of their subjects, recurring procedures can be identified that reveal a double strategy: On the one hand, the works reinforce Jewish tradition and its texts, or at least examine them in the light of Halacha (Jewish Religious Law)

and its customs; on the other hand, as women and artists they reject Halacha's oppressive dictates. The ambivalent position evident in their artworks generates an 'in between' area that is internally and externally open, and that expresses features beyond Jewish Law and artistic canon. It is precisely this ambivalent approach to religion and ritual through the new media of artistic expression that seems to enable them to work apart from the binary religion-secularism dichotomy.

An Introduction to Zen-Buddhist Reading in Yoel Hoffmann's Writings

Dror Burstein

Yoel Hoffmann has been one of the most enigmatic writers in Israeli literature for the past twenty-five years. He began writing belles-lettres after years of teaching and translating Japanese and Chinese philosophy and literature, especially Daoist and Zen-oriented texts, such as the Zhuangzi and haiku poetry. This article contributes to the discourse between Hoffmann's writing and Far Eastern texts by focusing on two kinds of influences: the first is general or contextual and the second particular or intertextual. The first part of the article explains the basic principles of Buddhist thinking (inter-being or mutual co-arising) as background for an understanding of the peculiarities in Hoffmann's writing. The second part looks at the more specific connection between Hoffmann and Zen sources, such as the quotations from and allusions to haiku poems, sutras, and Zen koans in many of his works.