

Chapter 1

Return and Modernity

The special relationship between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel was conceived in the traditional religious context as a relation based on promise, destiny and the overcoming of the exile. The first two components have a clear religious connection, referring as they do to the particular relation between the people and the divine. Promise can be understood as a kind of first step implied with that special relation, while destiny can be understood as pointing to the process and its future unfolding. On the other hand, exile can be understood as a historical, secular occurrence, since it was caused by war and the actions of the Roman Empire. In any event, the Jews' return to their ancestral home constituted a restoration on both historical and religious levels. From the point of view of the consciousness of the Jewish people, the religious and historical components form an integral unit. We shall refer, for instance, to Jeremiah (29:14): "I will turn away your captivity[. . .] and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." We notice here that the historical situation of captivity is related to a suprahistorical cause, that is to say, divine intervention. The historical situation is characterized apodictically as "captivity," and the abolition of that woeful condition is regarded as a "return," effected by divine intervention, to "the place" from whence God himself had removed the People of Israel. Although promise and destiny are not explicitly mentioned in the passage from Jeremiah, we can nevertheless say that the stated dependence on a transcendental cause leaves us to consider the relationship between that cause and the dynamics of promise and destiny.



These remarks are intended to serve as a point of departure for an analysis of the notion of return set against the background of modernity. Few comments on modernity, in its broad sense, are necessary to shed light on the transformation of the concept of return. First of all, let us post modernity's opposition to what is often described as fundamentalism. That is, its rejection of the literalist adherence to ancient texts or to processes expressed in these texts or concepts. Modernity nurtures a concern with preserving trends and thus with changes that have occurred, and are occurring, in the course of history. The rejection of fundamentalism may be characterized as an attempt to regard historical processes in terms of their immanent nature. The modernist attitude regarding the natural process is of course a reflection of the modern understanding of nature and the approach to the study of nature, namely the scientific method. Here nature is understood as a sum-total of phenomena and not, for instance, as a manifestation of the divine presence, as interpreted in traditional religions. The essence of nature as knowledge of phenomena is not a description of the inner structure of nature, but that of the phenomena present, or in a sense visible. This trend of modern natural sciences displays a basic tendency to regard phenomena in their own immanent context and not to attempt to relate them to some primal origin or source beyond the phenomena as such. For the modernist approach, the interpretation of the mundane aspect of nature therefore becomes central.

It can thus be said that the reference to history as an immanent process in the world and not as an event grounded in transcendent causes is an extension of the modernist understanding of nature. Hence, modernity can be understood as an attempt to look at various spheres of reality from an immanent point of view. To underscore the significance of this point we may observe that a conception of nature and history as transcendent processes is an essential feature of traditional religions, including of course, Judaism. What is characteristic of the modern approach is the—explicit or implicit—separation between the phenomena and the transcen-

dent context. Furthermore, in terms of the historical process, the modernist conception emphasizes the aspect of time and thus that of change. By and large, what goes by the term “secularism” is but an expression of that basic attitude.

To continue the description of the elements of modernity, society, and the state become prominent as, in a sense, self-contained entities. The idea of the social contract referring to agreement between human beings and not to divine legislation is a striking example of that shift characteristic of modernity. The notion of emancipation in the broad sense as the freeing of slaves, and in more limited sense as applying to the position of Jews in society and state, is grounded in that same trend of modernity. The limitation of society of state to the immanent context is only the other side of the separation between them and the context in which the religious affiliation of the state expresses the relation to transcendence. To sum up, we may say that the two aspects of modernity, that of separation from transcendence in the metaphysical and historical context and limitation to the immanent interaction between human beings, are relevant to an understanding of the idea of return in the texture of modernity.¹



Thus, modernity brought about an articulation of those elements of return present in the traditional Jewish context, which can be understood as being akin to the immanent interpretation. They are, in the first place, the element of distance between the people and the land as well as of the dispersion of the people and their subjugation to other people or states. If subjugation is too strong a term, we can speak of dependence on other people. It can be said that distance and dispersion have a geographical or territorial meaning, which, as such, carries additional connotations, whereas subjugation or dependence already have a connotation of lack of sovereignty or of an inferior position within the sphere of relations between groups, or as compared with the position of other groups. It might be appropriate to mention here that a kind of premodern interpretation

of the essence of the “Galut” (Exile) of the Jewish people can be found in the Maharal of Prague,² who said that every existing entity and mainly the human being is meant to be self-dependent. Galut is an impairment of that metaphysical principle since it, in a sense, degrades the position of man, equating it to that of an animal. Galut is a change in the order established by God. It departs from that order. Underlying that statement is an interpretation of the space or place as being specific to being in general and to human beings in particular. Human beings are meant to be self-supporting and their position is expressed in their occupation of an appropriate place. Place is not only a correlate of individual human beings, but also of collective entities.

Thus there is a “natural place” to which human beings are exposed. This premodern interpretation of the place, which is basically an Aristotelian interpretation, is the point of departure for a conception that brings together the relation between human beings and God who assigned to them the place on the one hand, and the naturalness of the place on the other.

In the traditional interpretation of place there is a negative evaluation of the actual place in which the people live, since the place is not the one assigned to the people—as we saw in Jeremiah. One of the basic trends of the modern interpretation of return is a closer analysis of the situation as it is, that is to say an analysis of the position in the present not only the way of comparing it with the past but by bringing to the fore the improprieties of the present situation. Return involves an analysis of the situation that is to be resolved by the return. This leads us to an emphasis on the sociological aspects of the situation and sometimes to what can be described as the sociological contraction of the interpretation of the Galut.

Before going into these components, we should note that one of the aspects of modernity—aspects also present in premodern trends—is the shift toward human acts as rooted in the Galut situation and intended to change it by means of return. We find an attempt of Simcha Luzzato’s writings³ to connect the position of the people in the Galut to the mode of its existence. People subjugated to a state are easily taken advantage of by it. They are compelled to serve the state, since

they have no other choice. Thus the fact that Jews are concentrated in trade and commerce is one of the manifestations of their position of dependence on the surrounding societies and states. Indeed, Luzzato did not speak of the action to be undertaken in order to extract the Jewish people from that position, an attitude that we find again in the premodern trends, for example, in the precursors of religious Zionism.

In this trend, according to J.M. Pines, we find the formulation that it is necessary to shift the demand to reform the cult and the service to the reforms of life: the center of gravity is the reform of the society and its mode of life. This trend was summed up by M.J. Lilienblum when he said that what was needed was not a change in values but a change in our life in the Galut. We can sum up by saying that this first manifestation of modernity emphasizes the aspect of return by focusing on the day-to-day situation, which leads to return or should lead to it. The notion of return is present but the motivation toward it is meant to be placed in the present and not in the return as such with its direction toward the past. Return is an outcome and as such is not, at least not initially, a norm based in the past or echoing it. Return is a future situation to be brought about by action forming part of the rejection of the present.



The interaction between the notion of return and its position as a goal on the one hand and some aspects of modernity on the other can be formulated in the following way. As long as return remains a focal point, an analysis of the present situation is the case even when emphasis is laid not on coming back in the historical sense of the term, but rather on attributes of independent existence. To be sure, in as much as an analysis of the contemporary situation leads to the view that that situation tends toward universalism, which, as such, absorbs differences between collective entities and overcomes them, the correlate of that interpretation is the overcoming of the notion of return. Thus we can say that in the analysis of the contemporary situation the notion of return—whether directly or indirectly—is

retained, whereas the concern with trends of a utopian character; for example, evident in the original Reform movement, brought about an annulment of the notion of return because of universalism conceived as the guiding trend of modern mankind.



We shall attempt now—in a typological approach—to present some of the major issues in terms of the contemporary situation, which focus on the gaps between Jewish existence and the surrounding world and thus turn again to the notion of return motivated by an analysis of the modern situation. First we refer to the aspect of race as it is presented in Moses Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem*: Hess rather poignantly says that the Germans do not hate the religion of the Jews the way they hate the Jewish race.⁴ It is obvious that the shift from the historical religious background to the aspect of race or descent in the biological connotation, is meant to emphasize the limitations of the impact of the historical process, that process which occupies Hess's early writings and is the most prominent element of the system. The emphasis on the racial aspect leads to the conclusion that there are limitations to the harmonistic trend of the historical process. This has to be said precisely because Hess concurrently adheres to the idea or ideal of the unity of mankind, though its realization calls, as a prerequisite for the establishment of the position of the Jewish people. Thus the harmonious aspect of mankind appears to be coexistent with the aspect of the differences between nations, which cannot be erased.

Hess uses the term "race" though the term is not unambiguous. This was the case in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which employed that term. To be sure, the biological component is present in these discussions, stressing the common descent of a distinct ethnic entity, but we notice also that the term "race" appears in the context of humanity as the human race, though it is obvious that the component of the ethnic entity cannot be attributed to that meaning. We find in the literature that probably influenced Hess—a conjunction of the aspect of common descent with

that which points to a civil role or the conjunction between descent and the soul of the people, that is, its spirit or genius. We have to recall that the biological component is present also in the term *natio* and in this case, it is even more prominent because we can easily trace the root of the term to *nasci*. What Hess apparently wanted to present is the constant existence of the ethnical entity, referring to the Jewish people as manifesting a common descent and a continuous collective entity, which has to be related to the process of history in the nineteenth century.

Let us look now at a different presentation of this situation of antagonism between the collective entity of the Jews and the surrounding world. It should be mentioned parenthetically in this context that the term anti-Semitism is a modern term, emerging in the nineteenth century.



When Leo Pinsker⁵ analyzed the collective situation of the Jews, he referred to collective xenophobia, which, as such, is obviously a general concept applicable to collective existences in general. He even uses the term “Platonic hatred.” At the same time Pinsker emphasizes a possibly unique feature of the Jewish situation within the non-Jewish world: the Jews are conceived of as ghosts, that is to say, beings wandering around in the world and eliciting fear. This is so because the Jews somehow embody a past existence that has vanished but they are still visible in the present. Precisely this application of semi-psychological descriptions is relevant in this context because as is well-known, traditional Christianity considered the Jews to belong to the past because Judaism had been replaced by Christianity. To some extent, the Jews did not follow that rhythm of history that prescribed their disappearance.

Pinsker shifted the Christian evaluation of the Jews to a sociological context, emphasizing the permanent quality of the clash between the Jews and the surrounding world. In as much as the shift occurred from the theological judgment of the Jews to a psychosociological analysis of their position, the gap between the Jews and the environment ceased to be

ideological and became psychological. In this sense it is apparently more enduring as a description of the clash. At this point we could say that the precondition for return is an analysis of the situation that will lead to the removal of the Jewish presence from the existing surroundings, that is, from the non-Jewish world.

An additional feature comes to the fore in the context of this supposed change in the situation of the Jews as characterized in the notion of emancipation and its transference to the Jewish context. Concurrently with discernment of the permanent features of Jewish existence, skepticism emerged vis-à-vis emancipation either as an expression of disappointment, or as a disbelief in terms of the validity and effect of the equal rights to be granted to the Jews. Hatred of the Jews as analyzed by Herzl points precisely to the disappointment vis-à-vis emancipation.⁶ That disillusion can refer either to the slow process of emancipation or to the preeminence of hatred, since national existence is but an epiphenomenon of hatred, or else, more empirically—the situation of the exile is essentially a situation of permanent crisis. Any crisis in the surrounding world, for example, the Dreyfus Affair, had an impact on the situation of the Jews. It should be pointed out that the concern with the present day situation does not necessarily preclude the expectation of at least a mitigation of it in the future, and indeed Zionists have been involved since the beginning of the twentieth century in searching in the present for the source of the future, to achieve a mitigation of the present predicament. Yet one of the aspects of modernity is—against all expectations of the remote future—awareness of the pressures of the present day situations. Here, modernity has been interpreted differently, that is to say, concern with reality overshadows the expectation of the goal of history. Here, too, we can define this correlation between the analysis of the situation and the notion of return, that is, that the more the situation is essentially a critical one, the more the adherence to return becomes central as the only way out of the predicament of the situation and its pressures.



In order to emphasize an additional feature of the contemporary situation we shall describe—not the clash between the Jews and the surrounding world—but the impact of the surrounding world on Jewish behavior and the modes of life of the Jewish people. As a general heading of this mode of relation between the Jews and the outside world we can suggest the term: contraction. Jewish existence was contracted both economically and culturally—and we combine two different analyses of the Jewish situation under one heading. The central aspect in the economic analysis, which is the other side of the coin of contraction, is that the Jews did not participate professionally in the full range of economic activities. Their modes of economic subsistence were confined to several and only few directions and thus are described as being nonproductive. Hence the return is meant to be a move from contraction to breadth, as it went under the term—“productivization.” The underlying notion seems to be that only an independent national existence lends itself to a full range of economic activity and at this point the national and political normalcy and the economic one appear to be intertwined. Though return as such does not historically have the connotation of productivization it is turned into a basis for it.

The second expression of contraction is the danger of the abolition of the national existence including the unity of the Jewish people. The hard core of contraction is the exposure of Jewish creativity to the overwhelming influence of the outside world. That influence negates the possibility of preserving the cultural and spiritual independence of the Jewish people and the cultivation of that independence. This is the central point in Ahad Ha'am's interpretation,⁷ who emphasized that as a result of the removal from the Land of Israel, the national “ego” of the Jewish people does not embrace the whole scope of the individual “ego” or the person as an individual belonging to the Jewish people. The contraction of the influence of the “ego” is due to the lack of essential conditions for that impact, that is to say that the exposure of the Jews to the outside world is concomitant with the lack of conditions for one national existence. Hence the problem facing the Jews—what is described as the tragic fate—is to preserve the separate existence as a people

within the process of the participation in the general culture. Thus the aim is to lift up the clash between the two trends to a level of a synthesis.

Thus we can sum up by saying that an analysis of the present situation in terms of the clash between the position of the Jews underlying the background of return, brings about an emphasis on the political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of that clash. Dialectically the absorption of the impact does not overshadow the aspects of clash, though different ideologies concentrate on different aspects. A synopsis of these ideologies brings about the broad spectrum of the aspects of the contemporary Jewish situation within the structure of the modern world. To be sure, in terms of the analysis the idea of return is an idea within a content of a background, whereas in terms of the application of the national ideology in the modern sense to the Jewish existence the idea of return becomes an explicit notion. We can now turn to this last aspect of our exploration.



Structurally speaking a distinction can be made between the analytical aspect of the problem of Jewish nationhood in the context of modernity and the ideological aspect related to it. The two aspects are correlated but the idea of return becomes prominent more within the context of the ideological approach than within the context of the analytical one. Analytically, to come back to this description, the idea of return looms in the background of the exploration and exposition of the situation of the Jews, whereas that exploration takes advantage of some conceptual tools present in the vocabulary of the modern approach to social existence. Inasmuch as the analytical approach makes central the element of strangeness between the Jews and their environment along with the various manifestations of that strangeness. The idea of return motivates the analytical approach toward greater awareness of the impact of strangeness on return or—from the other end, since return did not take place, strangeness is the most prominent element of the situation as it is. The ideological approach makes the idea of return an explicit component of the horizon of aspirations of the Jewish people.

This has to be said in spite of the Uganda controversy.⁸ In that controversy a kind of distinction became prominent, between the “here and now” solution of the predicament of the Jews and the solution of the national problem of the Jewish people in its various components. As it is known, that controversy even absorbed the previously noted distinction between levels of the messianic realization, that is to say, that insofar as the Messiah the son of Joseph is concerned there is no necessity to assume the realization of return, which amounts to a return to the Land of Israel, and not any digression, that is, Uganda. The overwhelming historical fact is that these distinctions have not been accepted, let alone incorporated into the structure of the Jewish national aspiration. Return remained the focus of the solution either of the predicament of the Jews or that of Judaism or of both.

This point has to be emphasized because the adherence to the idea of return makes Jewish national aspirations somehow unique. This is even more so since there is no question about it that the Jewish national ideology absorbed and incorporated some of the basic notions of the European national ideology.



In the first place we have to notice that the Jewish population entertaining national aspirations is not a native population; that is to say, a population that lives in a certain area and aspires to express its existence in a framework of statehood or through the agency of self-government. If we look, for example, into a statement characteristic of Italian nationalism—we find the emphasis is laid on the nationalities that do not possess a government issuing from their innermost life. These nationalities are subject to compulsion imposed on them from outside. They have become the means for others’ purposes and therefore are mere objects. The distinction between the position of the subject and that of the object, that is, the distinction between the governing authority and the subjugated people, is echoed in Herzl’s distinction between the aspired position of the Jews as a subject and the given position as an object. Yet the object in the Italian context connotes subjugation and thus a distinction between

the people and the government or state. The position of an object in the Jewish context is more comprehensive because it encompasses the difference between the environment and the Jews and not only the difference between the population and the governing body. Thus the very discernment of the features of being an object contains in itself the discrepancy between what should be the position of the Jews in the broad sense of the term, and their actual position. Hence the notion of return leads to the enlargement of the analysis and that in turn leads to a different direction of the analytical basis underlying the ideological aspirations. If a national ideology is meant to present a people's aspirations related to its actual situation, we find that the Jewish national ideology does not present only the attempt to actualize Jewish self-government as a manifestation of Jewish independence. It is bound to go a step deeper, to put it like that, that is to say, to establish a territorial basis and a social comprehensiveness that would find their eventual manifestation in government "issuing from the innermost life." Return becomes therefore both a goal and a precondition for the territorial and social ingathering, which in turn are the preconditions for the embodiment in government.

From the analytical point of view strangeness is discerned as a situation and as a manifestation of the lack of basis for existence, which is considered to be the adequate basis of the Jewish people: from the ideological point of view the return becomes an explicit idea pointing to the goal, the achievement of which is the condition *sine qua non* of the national independence and its manifestations.

We conclude that the ideology of the Jewish national movement exhibits actually the particular situation of the Jewish people, both from the point of view of its aspirations as well as that of its existence. Though the Jewish ideological formulation is in a sense of variation in the general trend of nationalism, the transformation of the concept of the national ideology could not eliminate the particularities of Jewish existence. In this sense the Jewish national aspirations belong to the scope of modern nationalism but at the same time make prominent the unique position of the Jewish people. The notion of return is a focus of that unique position. Without going into problems

of the contemporary situation, which is modern even when it is postmodern, we have to come to the conclusion that the particularities of Jewish nationalism did not disappear. On the contrary, the clashes between Jewish nationalism and Arab aspirations, the position of the State of Israel as a state of its society and of the Jewish people, the coexistence of the problem of the Jews and the presence of the state—all these are illustrations of this complex situation: Jews dwell in modernity but the particular features of their existence did not disappear with modernity or because of it. Some aspects of this situation will be our concern presently.⁹

Notes

1. There is a vast literature on the structure of modernity and its trend. Because of the comprehensive character of the book we refer to Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, transl. by Frederick Lawrence. Foliberg Press, Cambridge, 1967.

2. Judah Loew ben Becalel, known as the Maharal of Prague, took the position that there exists a natural order. The situation of the Galut is a deviation from that order. He is the author of many books.

3. Simcha-Simone Luzzato analyzed the situation of the Jews in the city of Venetia during the Renaissance period, emphasizing their professions, including their shortcomings.

4. Hess's book: *Rome und Jerusalem, die letzte Nationalitätfrage* is significant in its title and subtitle as well. *Rome und Jerusalem* points to the historical antithesis between Rome and the Jews but also to the contemporary development of the unification of Italy. Hence the subtitle presents the Jews' national position as the last national question of the world once the Italian question or problem was possibly solved.

5. Pinsker, Leo (Yudah Leib). His book: *Auto-emancipation* was published in German in 1882. Pinsker coined the term auto-emancipation as self-delivery against the concept of emancipation, which connotes a granting of rights from the external authority. The book was published anonymously.

6. Herzl's stay in Paris evoked his interest, and concern, with the growing anti-Semitism. The Dreyfus case was a turning point in his development. His book: *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State, 1896) suggests a solution for the Jewish question, that is, the plight of Jewish existence as strangers, or the "Ultimate Others," in the countries in which they live.

7. Ahad Ha'am expressed his conceptions in essays and articles. There is no single book that summarizes his ideas. The articles are contained in his four volumes. A selection, translated by L. Simons, is available.

8. The reference is to the proposal to settle Jews in Uganda (1903). Herzl negotiated this idea with the British Government in the attempt to bring about a solution to the unsafe situation of the Jews, in particular in the Russian empire, by way of emigration to a semi-autonomous region. In 1903 the Zionist Congress debated the proposal and it was finally rejected in 1907. Herzl died in 1904. The Zionist Congress resolves at the same time that the Zionist Movement was entitled to initiate settlements in the Land of Israel.

9. Some references are to historical books:

a) Adolf Bohm's book *Die Zionistische Bewegung*, two-volume. 1936–1937, is a very comprehensive study of the history of Zionism. The limit is indicated by the dates of publication.

b) Arthur Herzberg: *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Reader*. Temple Books, 1969, several editions.

c) Martin Buber. *On Zion: The History of an idea*, with a forward by Nahum N. Glazer: transl. by Stanley Godman. London, East and West Library, 1973.

(The original publication Israel and Palestine, the history of an idea)

(d) Jacob Katz: *Jewish Emancipation and Self Emancipation*. The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1980.