

## From *Humanness* to *Jewishness* and Back: Electing the *Human* Dimension of Jewish Identity

"I have decided not to postpone what I have to say. A consciousness of my responsibility urges me to speak before the confusion increases. What I am going to deal with is the unambiguous demarcation of a kind, a degenerate kind of nationalism, which of late has begun to spread even in Judaism."<sup>1</sup>

Martin Buber, (September 1921)

### Opening

I was asked to write about Jewish identity from the point of view of someone that looks from the '*outside*.' It is both an honor and a challenge to receive such an invitation, but a difficult task to fulfill. Jewish identity is one of the most difficult issues to define (if a definition will ever be possible). Judaism and the Jewish people have been and are still crossing one of the most challenging periods of their existence. The drive to transform/convert the Human into the Jewish, without maintaining a clear perspective of the purpose of such transformation has created an ontological/metaphysical gap between the Jewish people and the rest of Humanity that often let to dreadful misunderstandings and catastrophic outcomes. When *Humanness* is converted into *Jewishness*, it becomes difficult to assert where the *Human* ends and the *Jewish* begin, and *vice-versa*. Is being Jewish a way to be more Human, or being more Human a way to become Jewish? After all, it is the Human who bears the divine Image.

During my studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, my learning and understanding of Jewish thought was formed and inspired in contact with a generation

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<sup>1</sup> With these words Buber opened his speech at the Twelfth Zionist Congress in Karlsbad, circa 90 years ago. Cf. Martin Buber, "Nationalism" (Address delivered during The Twelfth Zionist Congress at Karlsbad, September 5, 1921), Israel and the World. Essays in a Time of Crisis, (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p.214. Cf. Nahum N. Glatzer, "Reflections on Buber's Impact on German Jewry," The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, Vol. XXV, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), p.305.

of brilliant scholars with whom I had the privilege to work and call friends. Sadly, some of them have passed away but, fortunately, most of them are still with us today. Allow me to mention their names, as a humble acknowledgement of the memories I treasure from those long years of study and reflection at the Hebrew University. They continue to represent to me an ever renewed source of inspiration and reference in the midst of the complex common world that we share. With special gratitude I remember Marcel Dubois, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, David Hartman (may their memory be blessed), Paul Mendes-Flohr, Moshe Idel, Shalom Rosenberg, Shlomo Naeh, Yehuda Brandes, Rachel Elior, Zeev Harvey, Beni Ish-Shalom, Zvi Zohar, and so many others, among them my Colleagues of study, to name but a few, Avinoam Rosenak, Moshe Halbertal, Zvi Zohar, Shmuel Herr, Yitzik Benbaji, Michael Tauber, Eli Kalmanzon and Michael Kagan. However, both as a student and scholar, my thought was also inspired by the written words of those that had passed, such as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Herman Cohen, Moses Mendelssohn, Emmanuel Levinas, and others.

## **Martin Buber**

"My heart trembles like that of any other Israeli"  
Martin Buber, (May 1948)

Martin Buber, in particular, had a strong impact on my way of understanding the human dimensions of Judaism and Jewish civilization, especially through what he conceived to be the unique opportunity for its renewal as an emergent form of humanistic Zionism. Despite the deep resonance that Buber had on my own thought, as a Jewish thinker he was considered to not be particularly relevant to Jewish religious thought *per se*. For observant Jews, his understanding of Jewish faith was problematic. He was at odds with two major trends of Judaism that marked and in some way still divide the Jewish people since the Enlightenment and Emancipation. Buber's anomalous position in modern Jewish life consisted in the fact that, while vigorously rejecting all forms of institutional religion, he was a man of profound religious faith and spirituality. Further, he dedicated his prodigious talents to clarifying religious teachings of Israel, especially as expressed in the Hebrew Bible and Hasidism. His presentation of these teachings, however, reflect his rejection of the heart of traditional Jewish piety,

the *mitzvot*, which he felt were ultimately irrelevant to biblical faith and the divine service, since for him God is not to be served through such *mitzvot* or other heteronomous systems of religious duty.

Although not accepting the liturgical and ritual commandments of traditional Judaism, Buber felt to be his duty to proclaim what he understood to be the divine "charge" to Israel, which he deemed superior to the commandments. This 'charge,' at the core, consisted in working towards the realization of the Kingdom of God. Further, Buber's conception of *devotio* was emphatically extra-synagogal. Being neither Orthodox nor Reform, he did not adhere to *halacha* nor did he advocate liturgical and ritual reforms. For Buber, service to God could be bound by neither the Synagogue nor the *mitzvot*. On the other side of the spectrum, secular Jews also found Buber problematic. For the most part they deemed his theological concerns to be anachronistic.

Despite his conflicting approach to observant and secular forms of Jewish life, I would like to offer Buber a platform to express his thought which I still consider to be relevant and in many aspects very close to mine. One of the major concepts that marked Buber theological framework was his understanding of Israel's divine Election and his insistence that it be urgently reaffirmed. This highlights his anomalous position in modern Jewish life. He initially presented his concept of Election to a Zionist audience, most of whom were decidedly secular. Buber employed this concept to promote a given conception of Zionism which he characterized as Hebrew Humanism. He enjoined the Election of Israel as a way of restraining the introduction into Zionism of what he regarded as a negative form of nationalism - what he called *sacro egoism*. As a religious anarchist, though, Buber had a special problem in evoking Israel's Election, for in classical Jewish faith this concept is associated with the divine Covenant, which binds Israel to the Torah and the fulfilment of specific commandments. Nevertheless, his particular interpretation of the Election to a certain extent allowed him to overcome this problem.

In spite of pursuing his spiritual and social activity outside the conventional forms of Jewish religion, as well as the regnant forms of Zionism, Buber sought to translate Judaism into a language that would speak to his contemporaries. He was deeply concerned with the intellectual and social education of Jews both in the Diaspora and later in the Jewish settlement in Israel. Although earlier Buber occasionally alluded to Israel's Election, for example, in his address on "Nationalism" at the Twelfth Zionist

Congress in Karlsbad, in 1921, it was just on the eve of World War II that he devoted a sustained meditation on the topic.

In 1938, in a last effort to offer spiritual strength to his despairing brethren in Central Europe, Buber wrote an essay, entitled “The Election of Israel: A Biblical Inquiry.”<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the exceedingly tragic concerns apparently prompting the essay, he deals with the subject from a theological-exegetical point of view. He restricted himself to the Biblical period, beginning with two prophecies of Amos, spoken in a context of the imminent crushing of the Kingdom of the North, and concluding with the prophecy of a New Covenant uttered by Jeremiah, just before the collapse of Jerusalem and consequent destruction of the Temple. The fact that Buber chose to write on the topic of Israel’s Election as his last legacy to the threatened Jewish communities of the European Diaspora is not fortuitous.<sup>3</sup> The theme of Election has been crucial to the understanding of Jewish history and identity, from the early Biblical period to the present. In the modern period this concept became particularly poignant as a reference of Jewish self-understanding and as a point of contention with the non-Jewish world in which Israel increasingly desired acceptance. Interestingly, as an expression of this desire, many Jews have sought to eliminate conceptions of Election from the lexicon of Judaism as inappropriate to modern, democratic ethos. In this respect, given his constituency, Buber was an exception.

As they sought entrée and acceptance in non-Jewish society and culture, Jews had to increasingly confront Christian conceptions and perceptions of Judaism. Accordingly, the concept of Election, which is central to the Christian understanding of Judaism, acquired a saliency, indeed an unprecedented saliency in Jewish thought, although not necessarily positive. Having appropriated Israel’s own title - i.e., that of being God’s elected people - Christianity saw itself as ‘the true Israel’ [*verus Israel*]. Within a Christian context, the Jewish people was seen as devoid of any effective

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Buber, "The Election of Israel: A Biblical Inquiry (Exodus 3 and 19; Deuteronomy)," in: On the Bible. Eighteen Studies, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, introduction by Harold Bloom, (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), pp.80-92. First published in: Almanach des Schocken Verlags auf das Jahr 5699, (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1938); cf. idem, "Die Erwählung Israels," in: Werke. Zweiter Band: Schriften zur Bibel, (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider & München: Kösel-Verlag, 1964), pp.1037-1051.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber recurrently dealt with the concept of Election throughout his writings, starting in 1901, when writing for the organ of the World Zionist Organization, Die Welt, at the beginning of his literary career and until the end of his life. In the middle of the twentieth century, in a very elegant book - Bein ‘Am le-Artzo. Iykarei Toledotav shel Raiyon (1945), [later on published in the English version under the title On Zion. The History of an Idea] - he summarizes his thought concerning the Election of the people of Israel as related to the Election of the Land.

religious significance, having been spared from utter disappearance, in the eyes of Christian theologians solely as a reminder of what had passed. Israel, though, understood itself differently; it acknowledged its sinfulness, which included the sins of humankind as a whole, but it knew that it had not been rejected by God. Israel knew this from within, and had to demonstrate it to the outside world.

For Buber, the Election is a correlative aspect of Israel's life in the Land of Zion. Buber held that a proper conception of Election should guide and regulate Israel's activity and role in concrete history. At the core of his message is a demand that Israel establish a justice society, serving the rest of humanity as a constructive and inspiring paradigm. Although other nations have made use of the concept of election in the process of their self-definition, Israel's conception is radically different: for, unlike other nations, according to Buber, Israel's Election was not meant as a pretext for exclusive nationalism; on the contrary, Election was intended to enlarge Israel's horizons and concern to include all humanity. Buber gives particular emphasis to this proposition, speaking both as a theologian and as Zionist.

Buber made use of two literary genres, namely, the academic disquisition and the ideological essay (or address). In the first, Buber's arguments and method are formal and syllogistic, while in the latter, he is polemical, albeit learned. Not insignificantly, Buber's two principal essays on the Election fall within each of these genres; "The Election of Israel: A Biblical Inquiry" is a scholarly study, while "The Gods of the Nations and God" is a polemical-ideological exercise. Taken together, these two essays, although each of distinct genre, complement one another and illuminate Buber's conception of Israel's Election as well as the place of this conception within his overall philosophy of Judaism. With its specific genre and theme, the first essay prepares the ground for the discussion and study of the second, which touches the problem of Election without necessarily making an explicit use of the concept. Although Buber sought to maintain a distinction between his scholarly and ideological writings, they ultimately overlap. The reason for this ultimate interlocking of his two distinctive intellectual postures is to be elucidated by a consideration of his hermeneutical technique.

Buber has a distinctive hermeneutics. As Michael Fishbane explains in his introduction to Buber's work on *Moses. The Revelation and the Covenant* (1946, 2nd ed, 1988), differing from conventional Western hermeneutics, Buber sought to conceive intellectual research, reading, and life instruction as one integrated activity. Buber's

reading of the Bible is certainly unique among modern biblical scholars. For Martin Buber, great texts like the Bible are genuine witnesses to the human and religious reality that precedes their literary formulation. Following his teacher in the logic and methodology of the humanities and social sciences, Wilhelm Dilthey (1858-1918), Buber believed that one could intuit and imaginatively identify oneself with the primordial experiences of great figures of the past. In his particular way of relating to the past, specially to the Biblical past, Buber manifests the influence of neo-Romanticism, according to which the ‘experiential’ kernel of a text is preserved in all successive renditions of it, what permits its being penetrated by the disciplined and attentive reader of later times. Such an imaginative re-living of great moments of historical ‘enthusiasm’ inspired not only Buber but a whole generation of intellectuals of the *fin-de-siècle*.

When dealing with this topic, special attention should be given to the influence that New Romanticism, and specifically of the nationalistic ideologies inspired by the Germanic *Volkish* movement, might have had in the formation of Buber’s Zionist thought, and specifically in his conception of Israel’s Election. His writings on subjects such as the ‘Renewal of Judaism’ clearly reflect such an influence. This influence bore with it the danger of a-political *Schwaermerei* which Buber sought to reject, sometimes in a vehemently manner, particularly in the wake of World War One, when for a short while he was given to mystify, and thus glorify, the *Kriegserlebnis*. The affinity of Buber’s thought to neo-Romanticism is striking and profound. Many Romantic thinkers attributed to their respective nations or *Völker* an elevated ‘mission’ to the rest of humankind. In its modern guise ‘mission’ is a Romantic notion, and Buber used it in his writings and speeches. But the fact that his creative work was most decisively inspired by the Hebrew sources of Judaism, conferred him a special place among his contemporaries.

Additionally, Buber’s conception of Election is intimately bound to his teachings of dialogue. In order to understand his theological thought and hermeneutical methods, one has to comprehend the existential basis on which he builds his conception of God, man, and the world. The axis of Buber’s philosophical thought as a whole is his teaching of dialogue, the I-Thou dialogical meeting between two individuals. In this ‘meeting’ - or, preferably, ‘relationship’ - something unique takes place ‘between’ them. Each partner to the relation transcends his/her own isolated individuality, in the act of creating a space for the presence of the other. This space is characterized as ‘the

Between,’ a concept that Buber adapted from the sociological theory of his former teacher Georg Simmel (1858-1911). It is in this apparently ‘empty space’ between two beings relating to each other that Revelation takes place. The Eternal Thou is introduced into and realized in the world through this phenomenological ‘window’ created in the meeting between an I and a Thou.

In the case of Israel’s relationship with God this meeting first takes place at Sinai, where they face each other through the prophetic intervention of Moses. It is in this context that God’s Covenant with Israel is established. This Covenant, though, implies the fulfilment of specific commandments that are stated both in the biblical narrative and in the subsequent rabbinic interpretation of this same Covenant. A religious anarchist, Buber ignores the content of these commandments and points rather to a demand, ethical in nature, that he considers to be the overarching impulse or intention of those commandments. He characterizes this demand as a ‘charge’ from heaven which has as its goal the implementation of a just and exemplary society in which righteousness and truth will be the contents of the relationships between its members, between one community and another, between one nation and another.

Thus, Israel received its ‘vocation’ in the context of its Redemption from Egypt. It is from within this ‘redemptive event’ that Israel is ascribed its central commandment, intended to be realized throughout its historical existence, namely, the commandment ‘to be holy’ which, from that moment on, becomes its eternal destiny as well. In fact, as Buber further declares: “Freedom and destiny are linked together in meaning. And in this meaning destiny, with eyes a moment ago so severe, now filled with light, looks out like grace itself.”<sup>4</sup> The content of this ‘meaning’ is realized in the ‘meeting’ between an I and his/her thou. In this meeting the Thou is revealed. ‘Destiny’ is thus recognized in the revelation shinning from within a relationship.<sup>5</sup> The content of this relationship is the Thou. In the case of Israel, God is the eternal Thou that manifests Himself to the people as ‘God.’ The content of their encounter in Sinai marked, forever, the ‘destiny’ of the people. In this special encounter one of the partners involved is Holy. In order for their relation to be established in Time and assume a dimension of continuity, He demands ‘holiness’ from the other partner. Henceforth, the content of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to remark that ‘freedom,’ in Buber’s view, is acquired (or conquered) through knowledge - knowledge of the One who is involved in the relational act: “Only he who knows relation and knows about the presence of the Thou is capable of ‘decision.’ He who decides is free, for he has approached the Face.” Cf. ibid., p.51.

Israel's 'destiny' cannot be another but 'holiness.' The demand is thus transformed into a highest command: 'Be holy as I am Holy!' (Lev.11,4f).

Concerning Buber's conception of 'holiness' in the Bible, in his work The Prophetic Faith, he argues that up to the Babylonian exile, being 'holy' meant 'to be distinct' but not severed, distinct and yet in the midst of the people, i.e., distinct and radiating at the same time.<sup>6</sup> In the same way as God being the absolute Master of the world is distinct from it, though at the same time in any way withdrawn from it, so is Israel called to be holy as its God is Holy (cf. Ex.19,6: Lev.11, 44f.; 19,2; 20,7.26; Deut.7,6; 14,2.21; 26,19; 28,9). It is from this conception that the highest expression of the demand to 'imitate God' is issued. The demand of 'being distinct' is not given to the people in order to withdraw itself from the world of nations, but in order to influence them by the radiance of its way of life.<sup>7</sup> In the Book of Isaiah, the hallowing of Israel is dependent upon God's own Holiness, in a way of 'imitation of God,' by receiving His influence to follow His footsteps, and placing human activity at the disposal of His activity.<sup>8</sup> For this prophet, Buber contends, 'hallowing' is the acting movement of God's holiness towards the world, towards man.<sup>9</sup> The demands implied in the imitation of God, and revealed along one single generation of prophets - that of 'righteousness' with Amos, the one of 'loving kindness' with Hosea, and of 'holiness' with Isaiah - unfolded the meaning of God's name revealed to Moses in the thorn bush.<sup>10</sup>

In Buber's view, the Maharal [known as Der Hohe Rabbi Loew and, MahaRal mi-Prag; ca. 1525-1609] offers an interesting explanation to this specific point: "Just as man was the last living thing to be created, so Israel was the last of the nations; and just as human nature cannot be deduced from that of other creatures, so the nature of Israel cannot be deduced from that of other nations."<sup>11</sup> And yet, Buber concludes: "Israel is a beginning, in fact the real beginning."<sup>12</sup> Drawing a parallel between the expression of Jeremiah - that Israel is consecrated to God as 'the beginning of His harvest' - and the Midrash commenting on the opening words of the Bible 'In the beginning', Buber concludes that "God created heaven and earth for the sake of this beginning."<sup>13</sup> In his

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. "The Turning to the Future - The Theopolitical Hour," The Prophetic Faith, p.128.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.129.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>10</sup> See: Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work. The Later Years, 1945-1965, (New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1983), p.42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.83.

view, the ‘Messianic world-harvest’ is the seed of Creation and Israel is destined and called to become its beginning dedicated to God, just as everyone in Israel dedicates the first-fruits of all his harvest, of every product of the soil, as an offering to God.<sup>14</sup> This ‘beginning’ is bound up with the Kingdom of God. A certain people is established in a certain historical situation under the divine sovereignty, so that this people is brought nearer the fulfilment of his ‘task,’ which is: “To become the beginning of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>15</sup> Although the people as such is not always faithful to its own destiny, a nucleus which does not betray the Election is preserved through the generations. Through this nucleus, the living connection between God and the people is held, in spite of the great guilt. These members of the people, Buber maintains, are ‘the small beginning’: “They are the beginning before the beginning.”<sup>16</sup>

Buber describes the event of Revelation upon Sinai, as a ‘meeting’ between God and His people: “What takes place here is a meeting between two fires, the earthly and the heavenly.”<sup>17</sup> ‘Meeting’ [*Begegnung*] is the key word to understand both his philosophical and his theological concept of revelation. These two dimensions of Buber’s thought meet and interact with each other dialectically. Although at times his reading and comprehension of the Bible illuminate the course of his philosophical activity, it also becomes quite clear that his own philosophical thought has a major influence in the formation of his perception and interpretation of the Biblical Word.

In order to perceive one of the nodal points present in the development of Buber’s conception of Revelation, we will now approach some extracts taken from one of his central philosophical works, where this structure of knowledge - ‘Revelation through meeting’ - is crystallized into the primary elements of every meeting: ‘I’ and ‘Thou.’<sup>18</sup> This typology of dialogical relationship prepares the ground, not only for his

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Martin Buber, "The Turning to the Future - The Theopolitical Hour," The Prophetic Faith, p.135; [my own emphasis]. See also Buber’s chapter entitled "Upon Eagles' Wings," of his volume Moses: “Only here, only in the Sinai covenant and its later renewals, is it a berith between YHVH and the people, between Him and Israel; no longer as the ‘seed of abraham,’ out of which a people has to grow, but as a people which has grown out of that seed. And in accordance with this the concept of Royal dominion is also expressly introduced here.” Idem, Moses. The Revelation and the Covenant, p.104.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. "The God of the Sufferers - The Mystery," The Prophetic Faith, p.232.

<sup>17</sup> See: Martin Buber, "The Covenant," Moses, p.110.

<sup>18</sup> See: Pinchas Erich Rosenblueth, Martin Buber. Sein Denken und Wirken, herausgegeben von der Niedersächsischen Landeszentrale fuer Politische Bildung, (Hannover Westerfeld: Sponholz Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt GmbH., 1968), pp.42ff.: “In diesem Sinne ist die Bibel das klassische Dokument des dialogischen Lebens, von der Begegnung zwischen Gott und Menschen in der Welt. So wird die Beschaeftigung mit der Bibel in diesen Jahren (von 1923 an) von gleicher Bedeutung, wie es in frueheren Jahren die Begegnung mit der Mystik des Chassidismus war.” See also: Emmanuel

concept of Revelation, but for other correlated concepts as well, like those of Election, Community, Kingdom of God, and Redemption itself.

In Buber's work I and Thou, these concepts are not related to a specific people, within an 'historical' setting, but are mostly arranged around the figure of individual Man, considered as a potential element and polarized center for a life of dialogue. In the third book of this volume Buber speaks of 'grace' as confronted with 'will.' In the relational event, he says: "we have to be concerned, to be troubled, not about the other side, but about our own side; not about grace, but about will. Grace concerns us in so far as we go out to it and persist in its presence; but it is not our object."<sup>19</sup> This movement from grace to will - i.e., from attention being placed on 'the other,' as a potentially active center and subject of dialogue, and his approaching us through grace, to the assuming of our own place within the relationship through will - is important to the study of the concept of Election.

The level of relation presented above is that of the meeting between two individuals. After 'stability' has been won in this state, one is able to go out to the 'supreme meeting.'<sup>20</sup> What is important for us in this stage of discussion, is this 'double dimension' involved in the act of chosenness: the dialectic between 'choosing' and 'being chosen.' 'Being elected' does not imply a passive attitude alone, but an equally active one as well, that of 'choosing to be elected.' There is, so to say, a full engagement of the one who is chosen, in the act of his being or becoming elected. In what way does 'the act of choosing' differ from that of 'being chosen'? Buber does not give us enough material to support an accurate answer. He says, though, that this 'act or relation' involves the participation of 'one's whole being,' without which the uttering of the 'primary word' I-Thou is not possible.<sup>21</sup> The 'concentration and fusion into the

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Levinas, "Buber and Theory of Knowledge," The Philosophy of Martin Buber, pp.144, 148: "The I-Thou relation is nothing but a realization of the 'meeting'... The transition from the 'subject-object' relation to that of the I-Thou implies the passage of consciousness to a new sphere of existence, viz., the internal, 'betweenness' or Zwischen; and this is a passage from thought to Umfassung. Buber forcefully affirms in this connection the radical difference between the silent dialogue of the mind with itself and the real dialogue it has with the other. But is it not, after all in consciousness that Zwischen and Umfassung are revealed? Buber himself admits that 'all dialogue derives its authenticity from consciousness of Umfassung'; it is only in consciousness that we can know the latter."

<sup>19</sup> I and Thou, p.76. Concerning the place that 'grace' and human 'autonomy' have, in the dialogical event, Buber affirms that, "the meeting happens 'from grace,' but it is not 'done to the human person,' it is 'performed by him.'" See: Martin Buber, "Replies to my Critics," The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, (La Salle: Illinois & London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.701. Cf. idem, "The Holy Way," On Judaism, p.113.

<sup>20</sup> I and Thou, p.77.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.11.

'whole being' is not an autonomous act, yet neither does it dispense one's own participation. One's becoming 'I' is dependent upon the relation to the 'Thou' facing us.<sup>22</sup>

But how does this work, when applied to the relation between Israel and its God? In this case, the link and actual assurance of the relation is determined by the Covenant and its observance. This kind of relationship differs from the one established between individuals, in that the latter is conceived as being 'direct,' one in which no system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy, intervene between 'I' and 'Thou.'<sup>23</sup> This virginal state of soul, so to speak, which is conceived as the necessary foreground for a relationship to take place can it be attained in the relationship between a people and its God? The answer to this question creates a certain problem, for on one hand, the 'meeting' itself is already an essential part of the contents of Revelation - 'Revelation par excellence'<sup>24</sup> - and on the other, from the perspective of man (or of the human community), this same 'meeting' cannot assume an 'eternal' dimension, but is condemned to be reduced into the 'historical dimensions of Creation,' into an 'It.' The Covenant is the historical sign of this relationship which, although projected and extended into the Eternal, remains circumscribed to the referential qualities of Space and Time accompanying man on his way towards the goal. In other words, the contents of the 'meeting' is 'eternal,' because it reflects the essence of the One revealing Himself, but at the same time it is and becomes circumscribed to the 'historical.'

Buber regards the 'true community' as the realm where that goal can be realized. This community, he says, does not arise "through peoples having feelings for one another," but rather in the conjunction of the two crucial dimensions of every

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<sup>22</sup> See: Emmanuel Levinas, "Buber and Theory of Knowledge," op. cit., pp.138f.: "The I-Thou relation is one in which the self is no longer a subject who always remains alone and is for this reason 'relation par excellence,' for it extends beyond the boundaries of the 'self'... The relation is the very essence of the I: whenever the I truly affirms itself, its affirmation is inconceivable without the presence of the Thou... Furthermore, I, in the relation, rediscovers 'its original community with the totality of being.' The relation cannot be identified with a 'subjective' event because the I does not represent the Thou but meets it. The 'meeting,' moreover, is to be distinguished from the silent dialogue the mind has with itself; the I-Thou meeting does not take place in the subject but in the realm of being. However, we must avoid an interpretation of the meeting as something objectively apprehended by the I, for the ontological realm is not a block universe but an occurrence. The interval between the I and Thou, the Zwischen, is the locus where being is being realized(...). If the notion of 'betweenness' functions as the fundamental category of being, however, man is the locus where 'the act of being' is being acted. Man must not be construed as a subject constituting reality, but rather as the articulation itself of the 'meeting'(...). Man does not meet, he is meeting."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> In Revelation, man receives not a specific 'content,' but a 'Presence,' a Presence as power. There are three things included in this Presence and power: 1. the whole fullness of real mutual action, of the being raised and bound up in relation; 2. the inexpressible confirmation of meaning in life; 3. the confirmation that this meaning is not that of 'another life,' but that of this life of ours. See: I and Thou, p.110.

relationship - the vertical and the horizontal: a) "Taking stand in living mutual relation with a living Center"; b) "Being in mutual relation with one another."<sup>25</sup> The latter has its source in the former, but is not given when the first alone is made present.<sup>26</sup> This statement is set against the background of a 'mechanical state,' in which citizens, alien to one another in their very being, are 'linked together' without a true 'being together' having been established or promoted. Buber differentiates between what he calls a 'collectivity' and a 'community.' He defines the first one, not as a binding, but rather as a bundling together: "Individuals packed together, armed and equipped in common, with only as much life from man to man as will inflame the marching step." Contrastingly, in a growing 'community,' he says, people are no longer 'side by side,' but 'with one another.' In this, he is influenced by Feuerbach, to whom man's being is contained only in community, in the unity of man with man - a unity which rests, however, only on the reality of the difference between I and Thou. The multitude of persons forming the true 'community,' although 'moving towards one goal,' yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou.<sup>27</sup>

Buber observes that, although a living mutual relation includes feelings, it does not originate with them: "The community is built up out of living mutual relation, but the Builder is the living effective Center."<sup>28</sup> This shaping of the community of man, has

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>26</sup> As Mendes-Flohr explains: "This founding fact of Gemeinschaft, Buber writes in "Der Heilige Weg," is something that occurs in the region of the Center: the Between, in that 'seemingly empty space' between men who meet each other in immediacy. Ontologically, Gemeinschaft then is not established by the mere relation of men to each other but by their mutual relation to the realm of the Between [das Zwischen], or to the Center [die Mitte]." See: Paul Mendes-Flohr, "From Mysticism to Dialogue - Buber's *Volte-Face*," From Mysticism to Dialogue. Martin Buber and the Transformation of German Social Thought, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp.85-97 (esp. pp.96f.).

<sup>27</sup> See: Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, trans. and introd. by Ronald Gregor Smith, (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1979), p.51. See also: Pfade in Utopia. Ueber Gemeinschaft und deren Verwirklichung, (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1985), pp.297ff. Concerning an approach to the difference between Buber and Feuerbach, see Nathan Rotenstreich's essay on "Buber's Dialogical Thought": "Buber attempts to be concrete while Feuerbach identifies concreteness with sensuality; as Feuerbach puts it: the secret of immediate knowledge is sensuality. The main point in Feuerbach's philosophy seems to be the shift from philosophical distinctions, including that of subject and object, to what he considers to be sensual distinctions, the main one of them being that between I and Thou. Hence the frontal attack of Feuerbach is against the philosophy of identity which nullifies, according to his view, the immediate distinctions; this is not unlike Buber's attack against doctrines and philosophies which do not put in the center of their systems the relation between concrete human beings.... Feuerbach puts into relief the relation between I and Thou because he objects to idealism, while Buber puts into relief this relation because he is interested, in the first place and even mainly, in the scope of human relations." Nathan Rotenstreich, "Buber's Dialogical Thought," The Philosophy of Martin Buber, pp.112f.:

<sup>28</sup> I and Thou, p.45. Cf. Ich und Du, in: Martin Buber, Werke. Erster Band: Schriften zur Philosophie, (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider GmbH & Muenchen: Koesel-Verlag, 1962), p.108.

at its source ‘a response to the Thou,’ an act of the being, made by the spirit on ‘an original relational incident.’<sup>29</sup> However, it is impossible to remain continuously in the state of ‘pure relation’: “The Eternal Thou can by its nature not become It; for by its nature it cannot be established in measure and bounds, not even in the measure of the immeasurable, or the bounds of boundless being; for by its nature it cannot be understood as a sum of qualities, not even as an infinite sum of qualities raised to a transcendental level; for it can be found neither in nor out of the world; for it cannot be experienced, or thought(...).”<sup>30</sup> We, though, in accordance with our nature, are continuously making the Eternal Thou into It, into something, making God into a thing.<sup>31</sup>

How does the Presence and the power received by men in Revelation change into a ‘content’? Buber answers this question on two levels: the ‘outer psychical,’ and the ‘inner factual’ one. While the first, considers ‘man in himself,’ separated from history; the second, defined as ‘the primal phenomenon of religion,’ replaces man in history.<sup>32</sup> Confronted by the tremendous insecurity of life man searches in God a confirmation of meaning that might overcome the continual brokenness of space and time. God is thus transformed into an ‘object’ of faith: “Man’s thirst for continuity is unsatisfied by the life-rhythm of pure relation, the interchange of actual being and of a potential being in which only our power to enter into relation, and hence the presence (but not the primal Presence) decreases. He longs for extension in time, for duration. Thus God becomes an object of faith. At first faith, set in time, completes the acts of relation; but gradually it replaces them. Resting in belief in an It, takes the place of the continually renewed movement of the being towards concentration and going out to the relation.”<sup>33</sup> The risk of the inexpressible exposure to the revealing Presence is reduced

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.112. One of the most interesting facets of Buber’s thought consists in his attempt to show that the truth is not a content and that words cannot summarize it in any way; that it is more subjective, in a sense, than any other type of subjectivity; yet, as distinct from all purely idealist conceptions of the truth, it provides the only means of access to what is more objective than any other type of objectivity, i.e., to that which the subject can never possess since it is totally other. Concerning the a-priori impossibility of rendering ‘objective’, the knowledge emerging from the genuine dialogical relationship, Levinas maintains that: “A content would imply mediation, and therefore would compromise the integrity and simplicity of the act. Buber denotes by the use of the term Geschehen [‘happening’], this transparent act of transcendence which is incapable of being described. Each encounter must be considered as a unique event, a momentary present which cannot be connected to other temporal instances in order to form a history or biography.” See: Emmanuel Levinas, “Buber and the Theory of Knowledge,” The Philosophy of Martin Buber, pp.135, 144.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> I and Thou, p.113.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See: Idem, “What is Man?” Between Man and Man, pp.203ff.

to a certainty granted by the belief in the existence of "One who will not let anything happen."<sup>34</sup> The longing for 'extension in space,' engenders the formation of the 'community of the faithful.' This community forms the spatial context of the living prayer, where the immediate saying of the Thou and its linking with 'the life of senses' is completed and gradually displaced by 'the cult of God.' The personal prayer becomes thus a communal one, and the 'act of the being' - which admits no rule - is replaced by 'ordered devotional exercises.'<sup>35</sup>

Buber affirms that, if pure relation is to be raised to constancy in space and time, it must be 'embodied in the whole stuff of life.'<sup>36</sup> This can only be achieved by 'realizing God anew in the world,' according to one's strength and the measure of each day. By fulfilling pure relation 'in the growth and rise of being into Thou,' the time of human life is shaped into a fullness of reality. In this way it reaches the authentic assurance of 'duration in time.' As for the assurance of 'constancy in space,' Buber observes that: "It consists in the fact that men's relations with their true Thou, the radial lines that proceed from all the points of the I to the Center, form a circle. It is not the periphery, the community, that comes first, but the radii, the common quality of relation with the Center. This alone guarantees the authentic existence of the community."<sup>37</sup> Finally, these two dimensions - the binding up of time in a relational life of salvation, and the binding of space in the community made one by its Center - form man's dwelling place in the universe, where the 'meeting' with God confirms the meaning of the world<sup>38</sup>: "Israel camps at Sinai, opposite the mountain. God and His people stand opposite one another."<sup>39</sup>

Sinai is the *locus par excellence* of God's Revelation to His people. Although seeing Creation to be in the origin of world history, and Redemption as its goal, Buber

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp.113f.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.115. Buber considers the building of community to be the achievement of the same power that works in the relation between man and God. This relation is conceived as "the universal relation, into which all streams pour, yet without exhausting their waters." In it, we find only the one flow from I to Thou, unending, the one boundless flow of the real life. Ibid., p.107. In his Ph.D. dissertation on Buber's dialogical thought, James Mundackal wonders whether 'true community' - as Buber understands it - is 'historically possible'; for, since the origin of community is the I-Thou relationship - which, in itself, is momentary - it seems that such a community cannot by definition be a 'lasting' one. Mundackal, though, forgets to bring into consideration the fact that community is, in Buber's mind, formed by the 'interface' of the extended lines of relations meeting in the Eternal Thou (cf. I and Thou, p.75). See: James Mundackal, The Dialogical Structure of Personal Existence According to Martin Buber, (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1977), pp.258f.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Cf. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "From Mysticism to Dialogue - Gemeinschaft as the Locus of God's Realization," From Mysticism to Dialogue, pp.97-110 (esp. p.106).

<sup>39</sup> "The Election of Israel," p.88.

does not conceive Revelation as a fixed, dated point poised between the two. Revelation at Sinai is for him not this midpoint itself, but the perceiving of it, a perception which is possible ‘at any time’<sup>40</sup>: “That is why a psalm or a prophecy is no less Torah (...) than the story of the Exodus from Egypt.”<sup>41</sup> In Buber’s view, Creation and Redemption are true only on the premise that Revelation is a present experience: “It is the perception of Revelation, that creates the basis for perceiving Creation and Redemption.”<sup>42</sup> Buber conceives Revelation as the ‘meeting’ that occurs between God and man. In his view, the moment of ‘meeting’ is not an ‘experience’ that stirs in the receptive soul and grows to perfect blessedness; rather, in that moment something happens to man.<sup>43</sup> The man emerging from the act of pure relation draws into his being something he did not know before, and whose he cannot rightly indicate. Buber refuses to identify the source of this new thing as ‘sub-consciousness, or any other apparatus of the soul’: “We receive what we did not hitherto have, and receive it in such a way that we know it has been given to us.”<sup>44</sup>

Again and again, Buber warns against the great dangers inherent in the idolization of a people. This warning is often directed against the growing tendency to nationalism within the Zionist movement. In his speech delivered during the Twelfth Zionist Congress at Karlsbad, in September 5, 1921, Buber admonished the assembly that although a certain kind of nationalism can have an important function, in some periods of the people’s history, giving it self-consciousness of its existence as a nation - awareness which at the outset pretends to point to a certain lack in the national life, like unity, freedom, or territorial security - most often it becomes ‘a program,’ exceeding the function it was destined to, thus making of the nation an end in itself, forgetting that it is but a part in the building of a greater structure, which in the final analysis consists in the implementation of God’s Kingdom among and within the great community of humankind.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See: Martin Buber, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," Israel and the World, pp.94f.,99.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> I and Thou, pp.109f. See also: Arthur A. Cohen, "Revelation and Law: Reflections on Martin Buber’s View on Halakah," Judaism, 1 (July 1952), pp.250-256; Maurice Friedman, "Revelation and Law in the Thought of Martin Buber," ibid., 3 (Winter 1954), pp.9-19; Emil L. Fackenheim, "Martin Buber’s Concept of Revelation," The Philosophy of Martin Buber, pp.273-296.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Buber, "Nationalism," Israel and the World, pp.218f.; originally published in German: "Nationalismus" (Rede in Karlsbad anlaesslich des XII. Zionistenkongresses, am 5. September 1921), Kampf um Israel. Reden und Schriften (1921-1932), (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1933), pp.225-242; cf. Der Jude und sein Judentum, pp.309-319.

Further on, Buber declares that he who regards the nation as an end in itself will refuse to recognize this greater structure, avoiding direct confrontation with reality. He considers the nation its own judge and responsible to no one but itself, thus converting it into a '*moloch*' [Semitic deity, to whom parents sacrificed their children]. The moment, national ideology makes the nation an end in itself, it annuls its own right to live, thus growing sterile.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, a people fully aware of its own character regards itself as an element without comparing itself to other elements: "It does not feel superior, but considers its task incomparably sublime, not because this task is greater than another but because it is creation and implies a mission."<sup>47</sup> Buber contends that there is no scale of values for the function of the peoples, for they are serving someone greater than themselves; God wants to use what He created, as an aid in His work.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, "he who regards the nation as an end in itself will refuse to admit that there is a greater structure, unless it be the world-wide supremacy of his own particular nation(...). He considers the nation its own judge and responsible to no one but to itself. An interpretation such as this converts the nation into a *moloch* which gulps the best of the people's youth."<sup>49</sup>

During this Congress, Buber confessed his failure and that of his co-workers, "to save Jewish nationalism from the error of making an idol of the people."<sup>50</sup> He argued that Jewish nationalism is largely concerned with being "like unto all the nations," with affirming itself in the face of the world without affirming the world's reciprocal power. Jewish nationalism, Buber contends, "has frequently yielded to the delusion of regarding the horizon visible from one's own station as the whole sky. It too is guilty of offending against the words of that table of laws that has been set up above the nations: that all sovereignty becomes false and vain when in the struggle for power it fails to remain subject to the Sovereign of the world, Who is the Sovereign of my rival, and my enemy's Sovereign, as well as mine. It forgets to lift its gaze from the shoals of 'heathy egoism' to the Lord who 'brought the children of Israel out of the Land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir' (Amos 9,7)."<sup>51</sup> Previously, in a lecture delivered in 1918, and written in memory of Gustav Landauer, entitled "Der Heilige Weg. Ein Wort an die Juden und an die Völker. (Dem Freund

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.221.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.224.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Gustav Landauer, auf Grab), Buber had already referred to this when responding to a growing tendency among Jewish ideologists who refused to commit themselves to the building of a community at all different from the ways of other peoples. He said: "You are assimilated to the dominant dogma of the century, the unholy dogma of the sovereignty of the nations. Every nation, so teaches this dogma, is its own master and its own judge, obligated only to itself and answerable only to itself. Whatever it adopts as its cause is a good cause."<sup>52</sup>

## The Threat of Mystical Nationalism

"What is the Center of this 'center'?"  
Martin Buber, (1941)

The fusion of nationalism and mysticism has proven to be a source of unpredictable danger. The mystification of a people when considered as an end in itself<sup>53</sup> can lead to its self destruction as well as bring untold suffering to other peoples.<sup>54</sup> The prospects of these dangers, of course, threaten all nationalist movements.

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Buber, "The Holy Way: A Word to the Jews and to the Nations" (In Memory of my Friend Gustav Landauer), On Judaism, p.135; this lecture was originally published in German, under the title: "Der Heilige Weg. Ein Wort an die Juden und an die Voelker. (Dem Freunde Gustav Landauer, aufs Grab)," - Reden Ueber das Judentum - Der Juden und sein Judentum, pp.89-122.

<sup>53</sup> In 1921, in the aforementioned address delivered at The Twelfth Zionist Congress in Karlsbad, Buber contends that "national ideology, the spirit of nationalism, can be fruitful just so long as it does not make the nation an end in itself; just so long as it remembers its part in the building of a greater structure." Further on, in this same address, Buber maintains that "in that it proclaims the nation as an end in itself, instead of comprehending that it is an element, formal nationalism sanctions a group egoism which disclaims responsibility." Ibid., pp.221, 225. Eighteen years later, in an address given at Cernauti, in April 1939, as guest of the Friends of the Hebrew University, Buber would come back to this central idea: "National egoism may seem to result in success, but in the end it must lead to catastrophe." This truth is inspired in the Hebrew prophets who themselves insisted that a people does not exist for its own sake: "Its historical mission is to act upon its fellow nations in accordance with the task it assumed, that of 'being a blessing.'" Idem, "On National Education," Israel and the World, pp. 153f. Cf. "National Erziehung," Das Morgenblatt, 15th, 16th, 18th IV. 1939.

<sup>54</sup> In 1941, three years after his arrival to Palestine, Buber strongly admonished his Jewish brethren, declaring that "a nation with no other aim" but that of asserting itself, "deserves to pass away." In saying this, Buber sets up 'Hebrew humanism' in opposition to the type of Jewish nationalism which regards Israel as "a nation like unto other nations" recognizing no other task save that of preserving and asserting itself. See: Martin Buber, "Hebrew Humanism," Israel and the World, p.248; first published in Hebrew: "Humaniut Ivrit," Ha-Poel ha-tzair, XXXIV, 18, 30.5.1941. In an age of Jewish nationalism, the tremendous choice imposed upon the people of Israel, at the hour of their being congregated into a nation by the establishment of the divine covenant at Mount Sinai, is expressed in a renewed form. The divine commandment expressed in Deuteronomy (chap.30, vv.15ff.), demanding a decision from the people to choose 'between life and death,' is understood by Buber as having been transformed in the present into an imperative which requires the making of a decision between "legitimate and arbitrary nationalism." Ibid., p.226.

Martin Buber, in his life-long Zionist work, manifested a deep concern for what he perceived to be the threat that a mystical nationalism<sup>55</sup> would overwhelm Zionism and the human and spiritual goals it originally assigned to itself. In an effort to find an answer to the deep crisis of identity which threatened the great majority of post-Enlightenment European Jews, Martin Buber searched for inspiration in different sources, including *fin-de-siècle* German Neo-Romanticism.<sup>56</sup> This ideology sought to promote attachment to one's Volk as the way back to a revivified cultural and spiritual life, as well as to the renewal of the true community. Furthermore, it taught that membership in any particular Volk should not be regarded as a privileged exclusive status,<sup>57</sup> for one's Volk is simply a 'primordial Community,' which is the source of one's 'innermost nature,' thus forming the ground from which one's relation to the

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<sup>55</sup> Speaking in a general sense, Buber considers 'nationalism' to be a phenomenon that makes its appearance at certain moments of the life of a nation. Its function, he contends, is to indicate disease: "Bodily organs do not draw attention to themselves until they are attacked by disease. Similarly, nationalism is at bottom the awareness of some lack, some disease or ailment. The people feels a more and more urgent compulsion to fill this lack, to cure this disease or ailment(...). When nationalism transgresses its lawful limits... it crosses the holy border and grows presumptuous. And now it no longer indicates disease, but is itself a grave and complicated disease." Idem., "Nationalism," pp.218f.

<sup>56</sup> George Mosse maintains that the atmosphere of the fin-de-siècle is fundamental to an understanding of the Völkisch [from now on we will present it in the English transliteration, i.e., Volkish] movement and especially that part of it which had an influence on Jewish youth. All over Europe the younger generation felt the urge to break with the bourgeois world, to revitalize a culture which seemed to have lost its vitality. See: George Mosse, "The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry," Studies of the Leo Baeck Institute, edited by Max Kreutzberger, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1967), pp.84f. As Hans Kohn explains: "In den ersten Jahrzehnt des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts erwachte das Interesse für die Romantik wieder. Novalis und vor allem Hölderlin werden die meist gelesenen 'Klassiker' unserer Jugend, die in jene Zeit fiel. An ihnen lerten wir die Grösse des Menschen empfinden, von Hölderlin die Macht der Sprache verehren... Hölderlin und Nietzsche waren uns in ihren Werken, in ihren Leben und in ihren Ende das Beispiel des 'grossen, das ist: stellvertretenden, vorbildlich sich vollendenden Menschen, eine Maske des Gottes...' Aus diesem gesteigerten Lebens- und Allgefühl erwachte die neue Religiosität der Mystik." Hans Kohn, "Der Durchbruch. 1905-1912," Martin Buber. Sein Werk und seine Zeit. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte Mitteleuropas 1880-1930, (Koeln: Joseph Melzer Verlag, 1961), pp.57-136 (esp. pp.61f.). See also: Karl Joeels, Nietzsche und die Romantik, (Jena: Verlag eugen Diederichs, 1905), pp.2ff. Idem., Der Ursprung der Naturphilosophie aus dem Geiste der Mystik, (Jena: Verlag Eugen Diederichs, 1906).

<sup>57</sup> At a certain point in his intellectual development, Buber conceived Judaism as a system of faith which is inherently concerned with the redemption and realization of humankind as a whole. In his second address to the students of the Bar Kochba association of the University of Prague, Buber maintains that the Jew's striving for 'unity' makes Judaism 'a phenomenon of mankind,' thus transforming the 'Jewish question' into a 'human question.' See: Martin Buber, "Judaism and Mankind," On Judaism, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p.25; first published in German, under the title: "Der Jude und sein Werk," Jüdischer Almanach, 5670, (Vienna: Vereinigung Bar-Kochba, 1910), pp.9-15. Moreover, as Zionism would do later on its strive to implement a reconstruction of Jewish values, some considered to have been lost or in danger of disappearance, Paul de Lagarde called upon a 'purification' of the German soul from all that was deemed to be foreign to it. He argued that, "by exorcising all that was alien, cant, and ungenuine (...) they [Germans] could revive a consciousness of self and thereby effect a rebirth of the German nation: a nation whose very essence was its soul." See: Werner E. Braatz, "The Völkisch Ideology and Anti-Semitism in Germany," pp.168f.

Spirit can be most readily obtained.<sup>58</sup>

Concerning the background against which German Romanticism developed, Daniel Gasman explains that it was the conviction of the French *philosophes* that reason was superior to authority, tradition, and human intuition. The romantics, on the other hand, believed that certain truths were outside of the field of reason and appealed to man's need for faith and deeper emotional feeling. As a form of conservative nationalism, Romanticism held that the abstract concept 'Man' was a fiction and substituted in its place the notion of the uniqueness of national and cultural identity.<sup>59</sup> Whereas for the French *philosophes* nationalism was subordinate to the universal community, for the German intellectuals the reverse was true. Moreover, despite its call for faith, Romanticism, as it developed especially in Germany, lacked a religious sense of God, and replaced the deity with the worship of nature and the religion and philosophy of pantheism. They opposed the eighteenth-century notion of abstract and universal man who supposedly organized his society after an abstract social contract. Culture, and not abstract ideas, was the key to a nation's history. All aspects of culture were organically related to the same universal process. Religion, art, mythology, and science were therefore intimately bound up with the political and social structure of any given age. Taken together they expressed the spirit or *Geist* of a society. In this unity

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<sup>58</sup> Concerning his own understanding of the 'sovereignty of the spirit,' Buber averred that, "recognition of the nation as a fundamental reality in the life of mankind can no longer be eradicated from man's consciousness, nor should it be. But this recognition must, and will, be augmented by another: that no people on earth is sovereign; only the spirit (...) which gives shape to the nations that are but lumps of clay is one and indivisible." Martin Buber, "The Holy Way: A Word to the Jews and to the Nations - In Memory of my friend Gustav Landauer," On Judaism, pp.135f. Paul Mendes-Flohr maintains that, according to Eugen Diederichs, Buber's friend who coined the term 'New Romanticism,' *Geist* itself is not the property of one particular Volk or people, thus providing an ontological ground for the 'unity' of peoples. Cf. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Politics of Covenantal Responsibility: Martin Buber and Hebrew Humanism," Orim: A Jewish Journal at Yale, Vol.3, No.2, (Spring 1983), p.9. See also: George L. Mosse, The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich, (New York: Schocken Books,1981), pp.52ff. As George Mosse explains: "Eugen Diederichs (...) summarized the feeling so prevalent at the time: that the world picture must again be grasped by an intuition that is close to the sources of nature." From this, Mosse observes, man's spirit must flow and bring his soul into unity with the community of his Volk. See: G. Mosse, Germans and Jews. The Right, the Left, and the search for a 'Third Force' in Pre-Nazi Germany, (London: Orbach & Chambers, 1971), pp.88f. See also: Idem., "The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry," p.92.

<sup>59</sup> See: Daniel Gasman, The Scientific Origins of National Socialism. Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League, (London: Macdonald & New York: American Elsevier Inc., 1971), pp.XIIIIf.,XVIIIf. See also: Paul Mendes-Flohr, From Mysticism to Dialogue. Martin Buber and the Transformation of German Social Thought, (Detroit Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1989); Peter Gay, "The Enlightenment in its World - The Little Flock of Philosophes," The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism, (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), pp.3-27; Eugene Lunn, Prophet of Community. The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973).

both the internal world of man and the external world of nature were one.<sup>60</sup>

Concerning the term ‘Volk,’ in his major volume on The Crisis of German Ideology George Mosse explains that, “‘Volk’ is one of those perplexing German terms which connotes far more than its specific meaning. ‘Volk’ is a much more comprehensive term than ‘people,’ for to German thinkers ever since the birth of German romanticism in the late eighteen century ‘Volk’ signified the union of a group of people with a transcendental ‘essence.’ This ‘essence’ might be called ‘nature’ or ‘cosmos’ or ‘mythos,’ but in each instance it was fused to man’s innermost nature, and represented the source of his creativity, his depth of feeling, his individuality, and his unity with other members of the Volk.<sup>61</sup> In his volume Germans and Jews, Mosse observes that the word ‘Volkish’ derives from ‘Volk,’ which, in its simplest translation, means the people. But this translation is not quite accurate, for in this case the Volk became a metaphysical entity, an eternal and unchanging ideal which encompassed all the German people. The use of the word ‘Volk’ to describe a system of absolute values dates back to the rising national consciousness of eighteenth-century Germany. Within a disunited Germany, many men longed for an unchanging ideal of peoplehood to which they could relate themselves, and they found it in the concept of the Volk.<sup>62</sup>

Johann Gottfried Herder [1744-1803] stood at the beginning of the evolution of Volkish ideas.<sup>63</sup> Herder saw in the German Volk an entity whose spirit was eternal, coursing underneath all the changes that history had wrought. Just as individual men had a soul, so there existed a ‘Volk soul,’ which, like man’s soul, gave the Volk its unique and unchanging character. Organic growth was contrasted with human

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> See: George Mosse, The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich, (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p.4. Cf. Daniel Gasman, pp.XXIIIf. For Paul de Lagarde, the Volk played a major role in the process leading to the fulfilment of the Volksgeist which ultimately would become the vehicle of God’s own revelation: “Binding the present to the past and the future, this spirit [the Volksgeist] manifested itself only when the soul of the Volk succeeded ‘making itself heard through the individual,’ and when the consciousness of common roots and a common stock was awakened, and ‘perceived clearly’ its relationship to the great development of history. The Volk... could attain this consciousness by means of a religious transfiguration which linked it with God.” See: Werner E. Braatz, op. cit., p.169. Cf. Paul de Lagarde, “Ueber die gegenwaertigen Aufgaben der deutschen Politik,” Deutsche Schriften, (4th ed.: Goettingen, 1903), p.118.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, “Introduction: The ‘Third Force,’” Germans and Jews, pp.8-25 passim.

<sup>63</sup> According to Isaiah Berlin, who wrote a seminal study on Vico and Herder, Johann Gottfried Herder is considered the father of the related notions of nationalism, historicism, and the Volksgeist, and one of the leaders of the romantic revolt against classicism, rationalism, and faith in the omnipotence of scientific method, advanced by the French philosophes and their German disciples. The notion of the spirit of a nation or a culture, though, had already been central not only to Vico and Montesquieu, but to Karl Friedrich von Moser, whom Herder read and knew, to Bodmer and Breitinger, Hamann and Zimmermann. See: Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder. Two Studies in the History of Ideas, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), pp.145, 149.

invention; only through organic development could the Volk truly unfold its potential. The Volk must grow like a tree from its roots in the historical soil, striving toward a genuine creativity within the collective whole. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, whose German Volk (Deutsches Volkstum, 1810) was a seminal work in the development of Volkish thought, made the ‘family’ the chief biological foundation of the Volk.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, though, George Mosse avers that one must not be misled by the term ‘Völkisch,’ for the movement which bears that name does not stand in any inevitable causal relationship to the later National Socialist movement. In fact, starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Volkish movement became linked to a revolt by the youth of the bourgeois classes, which took the form of a deepened feeling by its initiators toward the Volk, of which they felt themselves a part.<sup>65</sup>

The influence that Neo-Romanticism exercised on Buber’s intellectual and spiritual growth can be detected as early as 1901, when, as a doctoral student at the University of Vienna, he published an essay in the Wiener Rundschau, entitled "Über Jakob Böhme" [On Jacob Böhme], on the mystical thought of Jacob Böhme [1575-1624]. This essay was developed from a series of lectures on Jacob Böhme that Buber had given two years earlier, in 1899.<sup>66</sup> In 1904, Buber finally submitted his doctoral dissertation. It dealt with a specific aspect of German mysticism and was entitled Zur Geschichte des Individuationsproblems (Nikolaus von Cues und Jakob Böhme) [On the History of the Problem of Individuation - Nicholas of Cusa and Jacob Böhme].<sup>67</sup> Buber had intended to write a comprehensive study on the problem of individuation from Aristotle to Leibniz, but the work remained unfinished, and the thesis itself would never be published. In choosing Nicholas of Cusa as his starting point, Buber reveals the influence of his teacher Wilhelm Dilthey [1833-1911] who himself had been influenced by medieval German mysticism. As Grete Schaeder points out, from Böhme’s obscure

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See: Idem, "The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry," p.84. See also: Werner E. Braatz, "The Völkisch Ideology and Anti-Semitism in Germany," YIVO, Vol.XV, 1974, pp.166-187; Arthur Hertzberg, ed., The Zionist Idea. A Historical Analysis and Reader, (New York: Atheneum, 1986), pp.36f.; Eugene Lunn, Prophet of Community, pp.258-261.

<sup>66</sup> For Buber, Boehme was relevant to the modern age, for he expressed the unity of all living matter in God: “Man longs for a deeper link with the world in which he lives and he can find this by giving free place to his inner experience, ‘for everything grows outward from man’s inner spirit.’” See: George Mosse, Germans and Jews, p.86; idem., "The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry," pp.90ff. See also: Ernst Benz, Les Sources Mystiques de la Philosophie Romantique Allemande, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1968), pp.7-18 (passim).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Letter No.301, n.6: Hans Kohn to Martin Buber, (London, March 8, 1924), The Letters of Martin Buber, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr, translated by Richard and Clara Winston and Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

language, Buber was able to extract and explain the myth by which the "*philosophus teutonicus*" influenced the Romantic movement and German idealism, and had helped determine the "German line" in philosophy from Eckhart to Hegel.<sup>68</sup>

In George Mosse's view, Buber's personal concern with the revival of Jewish mystical thought<sup>69</sup> is strikingly similar to the contemporary German revival of mystics like Meister Eckhart and Jacob Böhme. Germans, George Mosse contends, also wanted to go beyond 'Liberal' or 'Orthodox' Protestantism to an earlier heritage, apparently more dynamic and less fossilized by a dogmatic type of rationalism.<sup>70</sup> German mystics believed they could intuit cosmic forces linking the German Volk with nature itself. In this system of mystical thought, the 'soul' was conceived as "a bridge between these two regions."<sup>71</sup> For Buber, Hasidism could perform a similar function within Judaism. As a movement, Hasidism was the practical result of a certain form of mysticism linked to a revived love for the Jewish Volk. In Hasidism, Buber thought, modern Jews could rediscover the inspiration they lacked in order to return to the roots of their lost faith, thus regaining inner unity through the lore of their forefathers' heritage.<sup>72</sup> This

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<sup>68</sup> As Buber would later on reveal to Fritz Mauthner [1849-1923] - philosopher and belletristic writer - in a letter dated 17.8.1911: "Cusanus wäre mir natürlich die schönste Aufgabe. Nur dürfte man sich meines Erachtens keinesfalls mit der docta ignorantia begnügen, man müste vielmehr eine Auswahl der wichtigsten Schriften zusammenstellen, wobei mir eine Linie persönlicher Entwicklung vorschwebt, der ich vor mehreren Jahren in einer Arbeit über Cusanus nachgegangen bin(...)." Martin Buber, Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten. Band I: 1897-1918, mit ein Geleitwort von Ernst Simon und einem biographischen Abriss als Einleitung von Grete Schaeder, (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1972), pp.298f. See: Grete Schaeder, "Mysticism and Myth - Studies in German Mysticism," The Hebrew Humanism of Martin Buber, trans. by Noah J. Jacobs, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), pp.54f., 60. Cf. Martin Buber, "Über Jacob Böhme," Wiener Rundschau, Vol.XII, (June 15, 1901), pp.251-253.

<sup>69</sup> In 1913, Buber dedicated a whole essay to the study of 'myth' in Judaism, entitled "Der Mythos der Juden." See: "Der Mythos der Juden - Aus einem Vortrag von Martin Buber," Vom Judentum - ein Sammelbuch, (Prague: Verein Jüdischer Hochschüler Bar Kochba; Leipzig: K. Wolff, 1913), pp.21-31; and the English translation: "Myth in Judaism," On Judaism, pp.95-107. In bringing about a positive re-evaluation of myth, Buber manifested a clear influence from Nietzsche. In fact, mysticism and myth had been the two realities most absent in the mind of the nineteenth century post-Emancipation individual Jew. As Buber expressed in the "Introduction" to his book on The Legends of the Baal-Shem, originally published in the German version in Frankfurt am Main, in 1908: "Die Juden sind vielleicht das einzige Volk, das nie aufgehört hat, Mythos zu erzeugen." But, nonetheless: "Die Geschichte der jüdischen Religion ist die Geschichte ihres Kampfes gegen den Mythos." Martin Buber, Die Legende des Baal-Schem, (Frankfurt am Main: Literarische Auktalt / Rütten und Löning, 1920), pp.VIII-IX. Cf. Gershom Scholem, "Martin Bubers Auffassung des Judentums," Eranos Jahrbuch, XXV (Zurich, 1967), pp.9-55; and in Judaica 2, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp.133-192. We follow the English translation: "Martin Buber's Conception of Judaism," On Jews and Judaism in Crisis. Selected Essays, edited and translated by Werner J. Dannhauser, (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp.126-171 (esp. pp.141-147). See also: Grete Schaeder, op. cit., pp.77-88.

<sup>70</sup> George Mosse, "The Influence of the Voelkisch Idea on German Jewry," p.90.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. In his study on "Myth and Judaism," Buber conceived 'myth' as "an eternal function of the soul." Cf. "Myth in Judaism," p.105.

<sup>72</sup> As Gershom Scholem explains, Buber himself was deeply touched by the mystical experience. He gave it a central place in his first philosophical major work, published in Leipzig, in 1913, under the

connection between the Hasidic heritage and modern Jews had utmost significance for Buber. He believed that a peaceful and genuine relationship of the individual to the Volk could be maintained only if there were an unbroken growth of Volks feelings, where the individual did not have to choose between his inner self and his environment.<sup>73</sup>

An essential element of Volkish ideology was the linking of the human soul with its natural surroundings, with the ‘essence’ of nature: “According to many Volkish theorists, the nature of the soul of a Volk is determined by the native landscape.”<sup>74</sup> Thus the Jews, being a desert people are viewed as shallow, arid, a ‘dry’ people, devoid of profundity and totally lacking in creativity.<sup>75</sup> Because of the barrenness of the desert

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title Daniel. Gespraechen von der Verwirklichung, (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1913). Expressing a measure of criticism, Scholem considers Buber’s studies on Hasidism to be far from ‘objective’: “Buber wrote not as an observer but as one deeply affected. For all that, his first pronouncement on Hasidism that we possess in print (from the year 1903) is still characterized by unpathetic objectivity, and can lay claim to validity even today.” Scholem remarks that Buber’s treatment of the Hasidic tradition oscillates between the two poles of mysticism and myth. The relation between these two poles, though, would never become clear in Buber’s work, for he radically projected the influence of Jewish mysticism on history. Cf. Gershom Scholem, “Martin Buber’s Conception of Judaism,” pp.143f.; Hans Kohn, Martin Buber. Sein Werk und seine Zeit, p.23. See also: Theodore Dreyfus, “Le retour aux sources hassidiques: Entre raison et mystique,” Martin Buber, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1981), pp.43-58.

<sup>73</sup> Such a formulation was strikingly similar to the attitudes which Germans manifested towards their own mystics. For both Jew and German, such ‘historic identification’ was meant to signal the end of the alienation of the modern man. But, unfortunately: “The modern Jew was to be ‘uprooted’ only to become rooted again in a neo-Romantic mysticism.” George Mosse, “The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry,” pp.85f., 91. This appeal to the ‘emotions’ of a people can be first detected in the “propaganda for Zionism” of Nathan Birnbaum [1864-1937], an Austrian Jew of Vienna who, in his programme of ‘national redemption,’ underlined that “the emotions of a whole people are a force,” which should be used to mobilise the Jewish masses. See: Robert S. Wistrich, “The Clash of Ideologies in Jewish Vienna (1880-1918). The Strange Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum,” The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, Vol. XXXIII, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1988), pp.201-230 (esp. p.209).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. George Mosse, The Crisis of German Ideology, p.4. As we learn from the fifth chapter of this same work, entitled “Racism,” Volkish theorists found in Immanuel Kant a source of inspiration for their speculations on race. In his writings they found a theory of race which was based primarily on geographic factors, holding that geographically determined racial characteristics were accompanied by an “inner life force.” Finally, this Kantian tenet would be applied in correlating landscape and the Volk soul. Ibid., pp.88f. In the case of Birnbaum’s Zionist apology, to the “quasi-mystical view of the link between land and people, tinged with an agrarian romanticism,” was added the conviction that Palestine was a ‘Semitic country’ located in the Orient: “Only when the Jewish nation was reconnected to its ‘natural’ surroundings in the Orient would its creative energies be fully released and radiate outwards throughout ‘Semitic’ Asia, helping to bring its backward peoples into the orbit of Europe.” R. Wistrich, ibid.

<sup>75</sup> In Mosse’s view, this condition of ‘rootlessness’ of the Jewish people in its long exile was viewed by the Volkish thinkers as the force most antagonistic to Volkish values. Indeed, this uprootedness of the Jew was used to make of him “the enemy of the Volk.” Ibid., p.28. It is perhaps relevant to remember that, as Buber taught in one of his early addresses, all creative work of the people of Israel took its strength and its form from its organic ties to the soil. Now that these ties have been sundered, he says, the inner cohesion of the Jewish spirit has been sundered as well: “All creative work took its strength and its form from its organic ties to the soil. And now these ties were sundered, and, with them, the inner cohesion of the Jewish spirit. God, the Lord of the soil, became the patron of piety; His festivals, once agrarian, became synagogue festivals; His law, once agrarian, became a ritual law.

landscape, the Jews are a spiritually barren people. They thus contrast markedly with the Germans, who, living in the dark, mist-shrouded forests, are deep, mysterious, and profound. Because they are so constantly shrouded in darkness, they strive toward the sun, and are truly 'Lichtmenschen' [light-people]."<sup>76</sup>

As an attempt to overcome the frustrations incurred by the social chaos of industrialization and urbanization, aggravated by thwarted national aspirations of the post-revolutionary period of early nineteenth-century Europe, a new pantheistic ideology begun to take shape, which linked the Volk to the cosmos as the true and deeper reality. Idealized and transcended, the Volk symbolized the desired unity beyond contemporary reality. It was lifted out of the actual conditions in Europe onto a level where both individuality and the larger unity of belonging were given scope. The Volk provided a more tangible vessel for the life force that flowed from the cosmos; it furnished a more satisfying unity to which man could relate functionally while being in tune with the universe. Volkish thought, George Mosse contends, made the Volk the intermediary between man and the 'higher reality': "Common to both the individual and the Volk was the romantic pantheistic concept of nature. For the romantics, nature was not cold and mechanical, but alive and spontaneous. It was indeed filled with a life force which corresponded to the emotions of man. The human soul could be in rapport with nature since it too was endowed with a soul. In this way the individual linked himself with every other member of the Volk in a common feeling of belonging, in a shared emotional experience."<sup>77</sup> Nature played an essential role towards the aspired realization of this ideology. Identified first of all as 'landscape,' it became a vital part of the definition of the Volk through which it retained continuous contact with the life spirit of the transcendent cosmos: "Man was seen not as a vanquisher of nature, nor was he credited with the ability to penetrate the meaning of nature by applying the tools of reason; instead he was glorified as living in accordance with nature, at one with its mystical forces... Not within the city, but in the landscape, the countryside native to him, was man fated to merge with and become rooted in nature and the Volk. And only in this process, taking place in the native environment, would every man be able to find

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The spirit became detached from its roots. It was then that the Jews did indeed become a nomadic people." Martin Buber, "The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism," p.73. Cf. "Der Geist des Orients und das Judentum," Der Jude und sein Judentum, pp.46-65 (esp., p.60).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.5. Needless to say, it is not the purpose of this work to prove the absurdity of such insidious statements.

<sup>77</sup> See: George Mosse, "From Romanticism to the Volk," The Crisis of German Ideology, pp.14f..

his self-expression and his individuality."<sup>78</sup>

Buber considers the relation between man and the earth to be fundamental for the realization of both. In fact, he says, one cannot be realized without the other. He substantiates this affirmation in the Biblical narrative of Creation. In the creation of man, he says, God united once and forever the wordly with the divine nature. Man thus became the element conjoining God and His Creation: "From the very start the whole destiny of man is indissolubly bound up with the soil, but the converse is likewise true. First there is (Gen.2,5) an *Adama*, a fertile earth, but there is no man, no *Adam*, to serve it. God the potter forms man of the dust of the *Adama* and puts him in the garden the fruit trees of which He causes to grow out of the *Adama* (...). Man and the earth are united one with the other from the beginning and to the very end of time."<sup>79</sup> In the case of Israel, this union between people and earth is depicted in terms of a "holy matrimony" between a "holy" people and a "holy" land.<sup>80</sup> The unity between the people and the land is a reflection of a deeper relationship established in terms of a *berith* [covenant] between God and the people and God and the land.<sup>81</sup>

Buber rejects the theories of Biblical criticism which attributed the category of the Holy, as applied in the Hebrew Bible to the people and the land, to the priests of a later age. In his view, it appertains, rather: "to the primitive conception of the Holy as we find it in tribes living close to nature, who think of the two main supports of national life, man and the earth, as endowed with sacred powers. In the tribes which united to form 'Israel' this concept developed and became transformed in a special way: holiness is no longer a sign of power, a magic fluid that can in people and regions as well as in people and groups of people, but a quality bestowed on this particular people and this particular land because God 'elects' both in order to lead His chosen people into His chosen land and to join them to each other. It is His election that sanctifies the chosen people as His immediate attendance and the land as His royal throne and which makes

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Martin Buber, "The Testimony of the Bible - Man and the earth," On Zion. The History of an Idea, trans. by Stanley Godman, with a foreword by Nahum N. Glatzer, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1985), pp.10f. This work was first published in Hebrew under the title Bein 'am le-'artzo. 'Iykarei toledotav shel rayon, (Yerushalayim: Schoken, 1945). Five years later it was translated into German: Israel und Palaestina. Zur Geschichte einer Idee, (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1950); and into English, in 1952: Israel and Palestine. The History of an Idea, trans. from the German by Stanley Godman, (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Young, 1952).

<sup>80</sup> On Zion, p.XVIII.

<sup>81</sup> This same approach is expressed in Buber's conception of Zionism: "Zionism could avoid the insidious allure of false nationalism... only if it would recall that its national idea is ultimately rooted in Israel's covenant with the one God." Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Politics of Covenantal Responsibility," p.11.

them dependent on each other.”<sup>82</sup> He further explains that: “In Israel the earth is not merely, as in all other primitive peoples or peoples that preserve their primeval energy, a living being, but it is also the partner in a moral, God-willed and God-guaranteed association.”<sup>83</sup>

This point is crucial for the understanding of one of the major differences between Buber’s Jewish thought and other currents of nationalist ideology that had their origin in nineteenth century European Romanticism. The ethical dimension elevates the contact between man and the earth to a level that, in Buber’s philosophical system, has the potential to reach the revelational realm. In this system of thought man and the world are not conceived as ends in themselves, but as constitutive elements of a relationship that surpasses the immediacy of the encounter; each one of the partners is thus transposed into a phenomenological level of realization in which the eternal Creator, Revealer and Redeemer becomes simultaneously ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of this realization. Buber’s conception of holiness, as expressed in this context, is extremely important when we consider his deep criticism of certain forms of Jewish nationalism. In his view, modern Zionism does not reflect the service of God and the human community, implicit in his messianic conception of election, but rather the idolization of the people, concealed behind what he would describe as a type of ‘group egoism’ or, ‘*sacro* egoism.’<sup>84</sup>

Delving deeper into the concept, in the Volkish conception of the ‘Chain of Being,’<sup>85</sup> the Volk stood in-between the individual, who was himself isolated and alienated by the forces of modern society, and the universe or cosmos at the opposite end of the scale. The Volk, which partook of the universal, allowed the individual to belong to something greater than himself. It gave him a sense of identity with cosmic

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<sup>82</sup> On Zion, p.XVIII.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp.13f.

<sup>84</sup> As Buber declared in the Zionist Congress in Karlsbad: “In that it proclaims the nation as an end in itself, instead of comprehending that it is an element, formal nationalism sanctions a group egoism which disclaims responsibility.” Martin Buber, “Nationalism,” p.225. See: Paul Mendes-Flohr, “The Politics of Covenantal Responsibility,” p.10.

<sup>85</sup> Concerning the influence that the Romantic ideal came to exercise in the nineteenth century and down to our own days, Arthur Lovejoy says the following: “It has lent itself all too easily to the service of man’s egotism, and especially - in the political and social sphere - of the kind of collective vanity which is nationalism or racialism. The belief in the sanctity of one’s idiosyncrasy - especially if it be a group idiosyncrasy, and therefore sustained and intensified by mutual flattery - is rapidly converted into a belief in its superiority.... A type of national culture valued at first because it was one’s own, and because the conservation of differentness was recognized as a good for humanity as a whole, came in time to be conceived of as a thing which one had a mission to impose upon others... The tragic outcome has been seen, and experienced, by all of us in our own time.” See: Arthur O. Lovejoy, “Romanticism and the Principle of Plenitude,” *The Great Chain of Being*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp.288-314.

significance. In this mystical union of the people with the life forces of the cosmos, the Volkists dreamed of binding the individual German to his natural and topographical surroundings, thus creating an indissoluble bond between them.<sup>86</sup> According to Mosse, idealized and transcended: "the Volk symbolized the desired unity beyond contemporary reality. It was lifted out of the actual conditions in Europe into a level where both individuality and the larger unity of belonging were given scope. The Volk provided a more tangible vessel for the life force that flowed from the cosmos; it furnished a more satisfying unity to which man could relate functionally while being in tune with the universe. Volkish thought made the Volk the intermediary between man and the 'higher reality.'"<sup>87</sup>

Buber himself attempted to translate the emphasis on the irrational cosmos into Jewish terms by employing the concept of the individual soul's proximity to the shared inner experiences of the Volk as a vehicle for the transformation of modern man. However, Buber broadened this concept by making YHVH - the Jewish national deity - into the God of 'all,' the God of Humanity, the Lord of the soul. Nevertheless, the similarities between Buber's thought and that of the advocates of a new German self-consciousness are so startling, that they imply "a common root in the general Volkish surge of the times."<sup>88</sup> The longing for a 'lost' identity and the exhaustion caused by a long and burdensome exile of nearly twenty centuries created in the Jewish soul a desire to seek security in a changing and most often controversial world.<sup>89</sup> The Enlightenment and Emancipation offered the Jews, mostly as individuals, the illusory possibility to 'feel at home' in a world that had accepted 'reason'<sup>90</sup> as the measure of its values. In this modern society, faith and inherited power were no longer the commanding elements of human life. With the rationalist revolution, man became the center and judge of his own values.

Following the Emancipation of the late eighteenth century, a certain split began to take place in the Jewish soul. Placed between two worlds - the world of tradition and a secularized world - the Jew had to chose a mode of inter-action between these two dimensions of life that would allow him to adapt himself to the newly created situation;

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<sup>86</sup> Daniel Gasman, The Scientific Origins of National Socialism, p.XXIV.

<sup>87</sup> George Mosse, "From Romanticism to the Volk," The Crisis of German Ideology, p.15.

<sup>88</sup> Idem, Germans and Jews, pp.88f. See also: Lulu von Strauss und Tornay, ed., Eugen Diedrichs Leben und Werke, (Jena, 1936), p.52.

<sup>89</sup> See: Eleonor Sterling, "Jewish Reaction to Jew-Hatred in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, Vol.III, (London: East and West Library, 1958), pp.103-121.

<sup>90</sup> See: George Mosse, "The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry," pp.87f.

most often he came to abandon the world of faith of his forefathers. A renaissance in Judaism began to emerge.<sup>91</sup> Besides the renewal of its cultural and spiritual heritage, Jewish renaissance brought with itself national aspirations as well. The renewal of what Buber would characterize as ‘the primal forces of Judaism’ served as a way for many individual Jews to return to certain aspects of a lost identity. In this, Jews were not alone. Many other nineteenth century European nations searched for a redefinition of their own identities. Many reached this goal through a conscious return to elements that had remained in the level of the subconscious, or even the unconscious. The two most important elements to be considered were blood and soil. They represented both the people’s ‘soul’ and the external ‘body’ of this soul. As George Mosse explains, the Volkish ideal predated the development of racism: “Blood and soil were wedded in the thought of many Volkish adherents only toward the end of the century, particularly after Germany’s defeat in the First World War(...). Volkish thought was not favorable to Judaism. Yet many young Jews who wanted to emphasize their unique Volk turned to this body of ideas for inspiration.”<sup>92</sup>

A similar inspiration can be perceived in the mystical national writings of Abraham Isaac Kook [1865-1935], who became the first Chief Rabbi of the Jewish *Yishuv* [settlement] in Palestine. In his thought, Jewish nationalism was elevated into a ‘sacred entity.’ He considered the ‘natural’ - if not racial (although his Volk ideology is primordially enrooted in a monistic vision of the national ‘soul,’ and not necessarily on the idealization of its organic body alone) - holiness of the people as preceding, and eventually superseding, God’s own revelation. As he wrote in 1921: “It is a misconception to maintain that we are a holy people because we revived the Torah and its Commandments. The Torah was given to us to augment our primordial, natural holiness.”<sup>93</sup> And, in an essay entitled "The Land of Israel," Buber sustains that: “*Eretz* [the Land] Israel is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people... *Eretz* Israel is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of *Eretz* Israel... What *Eretz* Israel means to the Jew can be felt only through the Spirit of the Lord which is in our people as a whole, through the

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<sup>91</sup> See: Martin Buber, "Hebrew Humanism," Israel and the World, pp.240f.

<sup>92</sup> George Mosse, "Introduction: The 'Third Force,'" Germans and Jews, pp.8-25 (passim).

<sup>93</sup> See: Orot, (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1921), p.155; cited by Gershon Mamlak, "On the Integrity of Judaism," Essays on the Thought and Philosophy of Rabbi Kook, edited by Ezra Gelman, (New York: Herzl Press, 1991), pp.162f.

spiritual cast of the Jewish soul, which radiates its characteristic influence to every healthy emotion(...).”<sup>94</sup>

It is pertinent to remark that, in this specific case, the unity of people and land can be properly understood only through the assistance of the divine Spirit. As Gershon Winer attests: “It was Rabbi Abraham Isaak Kook, Chief Rabbi of Palestine, who commanded the stature necessary for successful and fruitful fusion of Orthodoxy and Zionism, developing a philosophy firmly rooted in the religious heritage, simultaneously embracing the nationalist program in complete consonance with it. He established religious Zionism as a spiritual force within the historical continuity, charging it with the power to galvanize large segments of traditional Jewry in behalf of the reclamation of the ancient homeland.”<sup>95</sup>

Daniel Gasman claims that the Volkish movement represented a trend in German thinking which diverged sharply from traditional Western nationalism and traditional Western religion. It attempted a fusion of nationalism with neo-Romanticism.<sup>96</sup> In place of the legally constituted state, it stressed the importance of ‘blood’ and the supposed basic racial differences between people.<sup>97</sup> The goal of such an ‘organic state,’ established on a racist foundation, would later be conceived as the preservation of the Volk for all eternity<sup>98</sup>: “By being outfitted ‘spiritually’ with these ideas, Germans would be ready to master the task which destiny had thrust on them: to

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<sup>94</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook, "The Land of Israel" (1910-1930), The Zionist Idea. A Historical Analysis and Reader, edited and with an Introduction by Arthur Herzberg, p.419.

<sup>95</sup> See: Gershon Winer, "On Religious Nationalism," Essays on the Thought and Philosophy of Rabbi Kook, pp.211f.

<sup>96</sup> Daniel Gasman, idem., p.XXIV. Despite the great influence that the Volkish movement had on the formation of Zionist national ideologies, there remained a certain difference between Jewish and German thought. Cf. George Mosse, Germans and Jews, pp.93f.

<sup>97</sup> As Walter Laqueur explains, at the same time that the Romantic Movement rediscovered the beauty of the Middle Ages and preached the ideal of a Christian-German state, the war against Napoleon produced a wave of xenophobia, thus giving a powerful impetus to Teutomania [Teutschütumelei]. This new form of patriotism, the precursor of the *völkisch*-racial movement of the latter part of the century, was a reaction to the humanitarian-cosmopolitan movement of the eighteenth century. It stressed national exclusivity, only as a first step before insisting on the inferiority of other races. See: Walter Laqueur, A History of Zionism, (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p.21.

<sup>98</sup> As Hans Kohn reminds us, Theodor Herzl [1860-1904], the founder of the Zionist movement, thought in terms of nationalism inspired from German sources. According to the German theory, Kohn explains, people of common descent or speaking a common language should form one common state: “Pan-Germanism was based on the idea that all persons who were of German race, blood, or descent, wherever they lived or to whatever state they belonged, owed their primary loyalty to Germany and should become citizens of the German state, their true homeland. They, and even their fathers and forefathers, might have grown up under ‘foreign’ skies or in ‘alien’ environments, but their fundamental inner ‘reality’ remained German.” In his own life time, though, Herzl’s conception of Zionism as a pan-movement was not carried to an extreme. See: Hans Kohn, “Zion and the Jewish National Idea,” The Menorah Journal, (Autumn-Winter 1958), Vol. XLVI, No. 1&2, pp.17-46 (esp. p.27); cf. Hannah Arendt, “Zionism Reconsidered,” *ibid.*, (Autumn 1945), Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, p.188.

establish what heretofore had not existed on earth; namely, the holy Reich of the German soul.”<sup>99</sup> Professor Fischer, a member of the faculty at the Humboldt University in Berlin, declared: “We have raised up a national state (...) a state out of blood and soil, a state out of the bonds of the German Volk on the basis of race and the German soul... We are again building the nation on old German volkish soil, we are building... on a volkish foundation, on the thought that we belong to the same type, the same blood, the same race, the same spirit of volkish Germanness out of which in all past centuries German culture has grown.”<sup>100</sup>

Towards the end of nineteenth century a certain trend in Zionism embraced and adapted, to its own ends, the reigning fallacy of a purportedly scientifically demonstrable race stratification among different groups of people.<sup>101</sup> Nathan Birnbaum, the founder of Austrian Zionism,<sup>102</sup> and for a while a protagonist of ‘cultural’ as opposed to ‘political’ Zionism,<sup>103</sup> argued that: “Not only a millennial Jewish history but also the natural sciences and political economy, supported the hypothesis of deeply-

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Werner E. Braatz, "The Völkisch Ideology and Anti-Semitism," pp.182f.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.183. See: Bekenntnis der Professoren an den deutschen Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und dem nationalsozialistischen Staat, überreicht vom Nationalsozialistischen Lehrerbund Deutschland/Sachsen, (Dresden, n.d.), pp.9-100.

<sup>101</sup> See: Robert S. Wistrich, "The Clash of Ideologies in Jewish Vienna," pp.201-230. See also: George Mosse, Germans and Jews, pp.111ff.

<sup>102</sup> Nathan Birnbaum was one of the co-founders of Kadimah, the first Zionist-minded student fraternity. Kadimah was founded in Vienna, in 1882, by him, Reuben Bierer, Moses Schnirer, Oser Kokesch and others, in reaction to Dühring’s attack on the Jewish people and fought for the defense of Jewish honor. The name chosen to the fraternity was suggested by Perez Smolenskin, a pioneer of Jewish thought among Russian Jewry, and meant both “eastward” and “forward.” Birnbaum also founded the first Zionist periodical, “Selbst-Emanzipation,” in Feb. 1885, which he edited for several years. He wrote several tractates on a Jewish renaissance, among them a pamphlet the title of which expressed his program: Die Nationale Wiedergeburt des jüdischen Volkes in seinem Lande, als Mittel zur Lösung der Judenfrage (1893). He is credited with coining the term “Zionism,” and he wielded considerable influence among the socialist-minded youth of Vienna and Galicia. See: Marvin Lowenthal, ed., The Diaries of Theodor Herzl, (New York: The Dial Press, 1956), pp.446, 460f. See also: Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, “Nationalism and Jewish Socialism: The Early Years,” Modern Judaism, Vol.8, No.3, (October 1988), pp.217-248 (esp. p.233).

<sup>103</sup> As Wistrich explains, “Birnbaum’s nationalist philosophy developed in Vienna in the early 1890s, clearly anticipated many features of Herzl’s Zionist programme as announced in Der Judenstaat only a few years later.” See: “The Clash of Ideologies in Jewish Vienna,” p.210. In an entry to his diary, the first written after the First Zionist Congress that took place in Basel, in 1897 - dating from Vienna, September 3, 1897 - Herzl expresses his deep discontent with Nathan Birnbaum’s behavior within the Zionist movement. In his words: “This Birnbaum, who had dropped Zionism for Socialism three years ago before I appeared in the scene, poses himself and imposes himself as my ‘predecessor.’ In shameless begging-letters, written to me and others, he represents himself as the discoverer and founder of Zionism, because he had written a pamphlet like many others since Pinsker (of whom too, I had of course been unaware).” One year before, in March 1, 1896, Herzl had referred to Birnbaum in the following terms: “Birnbaum is unmistakably jealous of me.... I judge Birnbaum to be envious, vain, and obstinate man. I hear that he had already turned away from Zionism and gone over to Socialism, when my appearance led him back again to Zion.” Cf. The Diaries of Theodor Herzl, p.226, and p.102, respectively.

rooted racial differences.”<sup>104</sup> Birnbaum certainly believed in a Jewish race. Indeed, “race was to him in these early years perhaps the central concept of human existence, responsible for creating the *Volksgeist* [folk-spirit] with all its national peculiarities.”<sup>105</sup> In this epoch, Zionist race-thinking was founded on positivist ‘biological concepts’: “It sought to ground Jewish identity in secular and ‘scientific’ concepts which were based neither on the religious heritage nor on the liberal abstract Judaism of the post-emancipatory era.”<sup>106</sup> Wistrich concludes his essay saying that although as a “pioneer of Zionism,” Nathan Birnbaum made use of the concept “Jewish spirit,” seeking the secret of its being “in the soul of its Volk,” later in his life he would abandon “the pagan idols of land and Volk,”<sup>107</sup> and return to “the religious sources of the Jewish experience and the ‘inner faith’ of the eternal people.”<sup>108</sup>

Buber himself made use of the concept ‘blood’<sup>109</sup> as a way to define Jewish identity in a world where other bounds had been severed, totally or in part. Speaking to the Zionist students of the Jüdischer Hochschule Bar-Kochba [Bar Kochba Student Association] in Prague,<sup>110</sup> in 20th January 1909, Buber contended that all the three elements that might constitute a ‘nation’ - land, language, and way of life - were

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Nathan Birnbaum, “Nationalitaet und Sprache,” Selbst Emancipation!, Vol.II, Nr.4 (16th February 1886).

<sup>105</sup> Robert S. Wistrich, *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Whether these ‘idols’ will ever again find their way into Jewish nationalism or not - either in its present, or some future form - no one today can guarantee.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230. Cf Nathan Birnbaum, Gottes Volk, (Wien - Berlin: 1918), pp.41ff.

<sup>109</sup> As Maurice Friedman explains in the first volume of his *magnum opus* on Martin Buber’s Life and Work, of all the doctrines he ever enunciated, his “blood” theory is one of the most problematic and most difficult to comprehend. Among other possible sources of events that might have influenced Buber and drawn him towards the formulation of this theory, Friedman suggests his “scientific studies,” which led him to adopt “biological analogies,” and the interest in ethno-psychology stimulated by his studies with the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, at the University of Leipzig during the winter semester of 1897/98. Cf. Maurice Friedman, “The Prague Bar Kochbans and the ‘Speeches on Judaism,’” Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Early Years 1878-1923, (New York: Elsevier-Dutton Publishing Co., Inc., 1981), pp.132ff.; see also: *ibid.*, pp.22ff., 352.

<sup>110</sup> Grete Schaefer argues that Addresses on Judaism were the fruit of an invitation extended to Buber by the Bar Kochba association of Jewish students of the University of Prague. The young Zionist students of this association, she contends, wished to learn from Buber ‘the real meaning of Herzl’s thesis that the Jews were a *people*.’ See: Grete Schaefer, “Realization,” The Hebrew Humanism of Martin Buber, p.127. The Jews of Prague participated in the forefront of German cultural activity. Among them, the Bar Kochba circle was zionistic oriented and counted among its members some of the best minds of the young Jewish generation. Just as Germans accused religious orthodoxy of imprisoning the ‘German spirit,’ so young Jews condemned Judaism as it had been traditionally practiced. Against this background, Buber attempted to revitalize Judaism. His role in the Jewish context of the *fin-de-siècle* has been compared to that of Paul de Lagarde played in the German context. But there is a significant difference. Whereas Lagarde exalted the specifically Germanic, Buber, as has been mentioned above, sought to transcend the specific Volk in order to bring an all-embracing humanism. See: George Mosse, “The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry,” pp.87-90. Cf. Robert Weltsch, “Deutscher Zionismus in der Rückschau,” Zwei Welten, (Tel Aviv: 1962), p.30.

missing in the case of the Jew, specially the Western Jew: “Neither the land he lives in, whose nature encompasses him and molds his senses, nor the language he speaks, which colours his thinking, nor the way of life in which he participates and which in turn, shapes his actions, belongs to the community of his blood; they belong instead to another community. The world of constant elements and the world of substance are, for him, rent apart. He does not see his substance unfold before him in his environment; it has been banished into deep loneliness, and is embodied for him in only one aspect: his origin. That his substance can, nevertheless, become a reality for the Jew is due to the fact that his origin means more than a mere connection with things past; it has planted something within us that does not leave us at any hour of our life, that determines every tone and every hue in our life, all that we do and all that befalls us: blood, the deepest, most potent stratum of our being.”<sup>111</sup>

As Alexander Altmann explains, the theology of Buber’s Reden reflects much of the spirit of the then current Lebensphilosophie [the philosophy of life] of Bergson, Simmel and others who believed in the creativeness of the *élan vital*, in the truths of intuition and in a social order realizing true community in place of mere society.<sup>112</sup> The concept of Blutgemeinschaft [community of blood] was formulated by Buber as a psychological justification for his Zionist ideology. It was Buber’s conviction that, “the Jews should shun assimilation into the respective environmental communities of the Diaspora and return to their ‘blood.’”<sup>113</sup> In the formulation of this and similar notions, Buber relied on Völkerpsychologie, the nineteenth century discipline often considered as proto-sociology.<sup>114</sup> Buber’s work would become the first apologetic attempt to delineate a racial psychology of the Jewish soul.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Martin Buber, “Judaism and the Jews,” On Judaism, pp.16f.; this essay was first published in German under title: “Der Sinn des Judentums,” Jüdische Rundschau, XV/17, 29.4.1910, pp.[1]-5.

<sup>112</sup> See: Alexander Altmann, “Theology in Twentieth-Century German Jewry,” The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, Vol.I, (1956), pp.203f.

<sup>113</sup> See: Paul Mendes-Flohr, ‘Buber’s Erlebnis Mysticism,’ From Mysticism to Dialogue, p.60, n.274.

<sup>114</sup> Völkerpsychologie - the science of racial psychology - was founded by Moritz Lazarus [1824-1903] and Hermann Heymann Steinthal [1823-1899], two nineteenth century German Jewish philosophers. Lazarus wrote various works on the psychology of the nations and, together with his brother-in-law Steinthal, founded a journal entitled Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft, which he edited through the years 1869-1886. See: Ingrid Belke, ed., Moritz Lazarus und Heymann Steinthal. Die Begründer der Völkerpsychologie in ihren Briefen, (Tübingen, 1971).

<sup>115</sup> See: Martin Buber, “Jüdische Renaissance” (1900), Die Jüdische Bewegung. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Ausprachen, Erste Folge: 1900-1914, (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1920), pp.7f.: “Wir leben in einer Zeit, die eine Epoche der Kulturkeime einzuleiten scheint. Wir sehen die nationalen Gruppen sich um neue Fahnen scharen... Es ist eine Selbstbesinnung der Völkerseelen. Man will die unbewusste Entwicklung der nationalen Psyche bewusst machen; man will die spezifischen

In his address entitled "Nationalismus," delivered at the Twelfth Zionist Congress in Karlsbad, in September the 5th, 1921, Buber explains that the word 'people' [Volk] tends, above all to evoke the idea of 'blood relationship.'<sup>116</sup> This factor, though, is not enough for the 'origin' of a people; the concept 'people' always implies 'unity of fate'.<sup>117</sup> It presupposes that in a great creative hour, throngs of human beings were shaped into a new entity by a great molding fate which they experienced in common.<sup>118</sup> This new 'coined form', which in the course of subsequent events develops as 'living substance,' survives by dint of the kinship established from this moment on.<sup>119</sup> The physical factor of this survival is the propagation of the species in more or less rigid endogamy; the spiritual factor, in contrast, is an organic, potential, common memory which becomes actual in each successive generation as the pattern for experience, as 'language' and 'way of life.'<sup>120</sup> The people as such constitutes a particular sort of community, because new individuals are born into it as members of its physical and spiritual oneness, and they are born into it naturally, not 'symbolically,' as in the case of the Church.<sup>121</sup> Buber concludes, saying that although the people survives biologically, it cannot be fitted into a biological category. In the case of Israel, 'nation' and 'history' combine in a unique fashion.<sup>122</sup>

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Eigenschaften eines Blutstammes gleichsam verdichten und schöpferisch verwerten; man will die Volksinstinkte dadurch produktiver machen, dass man ihre Art verkündet(...)." Cf. Alois Schweiger's review of Buber's Vom Geiste des Judentums, in: Monatschrift fuer Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums, Vol. 61, Nos. 1-2, (January-February 1917), p.73.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Buber, "Nationalismus" (Rede in Karlsbad anlässlich des XII. Zionistenkongresses, am 5. September 1921), Kampf um Israel. Reden und Schriften, (Berlin: Schoken Verlag, 1933), pp.225-242. In his first address to the Zionist students of the Bar Kochba association at the University of Prague, entitled "Das Judentum und die Juden" [Judaism and the Jews], delivered in 1909, and published in Drei Reden über das Judentum, in Frankfurt am Main in 1911, Buber explains what he understands by the element 'blood': "[B]lood is a deep-rooted nurturing force within individual man... the deepest layers of our being are determined by blood (...) our innermost thinking and our will are coloured by it.... blood is the realm of a substance capable of being imprinted and influenced, a substance absorbing and assimilating all into its own form.... the innermost stratum of man's disposition, is... blood: that something which is implanted within us by the chain of fathers and mothers, by their nature and by their fate, by their deeds and by their suffering; it is time's great heritage that we bring with us into the world." Cf. Martin Buber, "Judaism and Jews," On Judaism, pp.15ff.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. As Buber declares, in his essay entitled "Judaism and Jews": "We Jews, need to know that our being and our character have been formed not solely by the nature [Art] of our fathers but also by their fate [Schicksal], and by their pain, their misery and their humiliation. We must feel this as well as know it, just as we must feel and know that within us dwells the element of the prophets, the psalmists, and the kings of Judah. Every person among us capable of looking back upon his life, and inside it, will discern the vestiges of this force." Martin Buber, "Judaism and Jews," p.17.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. In an address delivered at the Lehrhaus in Frankfurt on the Main, in 1934, Buber declared that the community of Israel experiences history and revelation as one phenomenon history as revelation and revelation as history: "In the hour of its experience of faith the group becomes a people."

In 1932, in his "Arbeitsplan" [work-plan] for the School of Jewish Youth of Berlin, Buber explains that in order to understand what is meant by 'Jewish memory,' two things should be taken in consideration. First, that Jewish history has an awareness of history of a radically different nature than that is common to all the nations; for, he says, while such awareness is one form of expression of the spiritual life of every nation, the spiritual life of the Jews is part and parcel of their memory.<sup>123</sup> Buber considers the universal awareness of history as a reflection of history, which can change and grow richer in contour and colours in eras of uncertainty, while in years of security it may pale and even be opposed as something 'romantic' and out of tune with the times.<sup>124</sup> In the case of Israel, "the characteristic potency of Jewish collective memory is the very origin of our own characteristic history."<sup>125</sup> The heart of this history does not consist of a sequence of 'objective events,' but of a sequence of 'essential attitudes' towards such events, and these attitudes are the product of collective memory.<sup>126</sup> Secondly, in the case of the Jewish people, it is not a question of sentimentally looking backward or longing for the return of the past, but of the factual connection between generations: "Sons and grandsons have the memory of their fathers and forefathers in their bones."<sup>127</sup>

In relation to the perpetual continuity of the Jewish people, Buber's closest friend Franz Rosenzweig goes even further and affirms that only one community has such a "linked sequence of everlasting life," going from grandfather to grandson, "one which cannot utter the 'we' of its unity without hearing deep within a voice that adds: 'are eternal.'"<sup>128</sup> In the First Book of Part Three, of The Star of Redemption, entitled "The Fire or The Eternal Life," Rosenzweig expands his thought on the eternity of the Jewish people: "There is only one community in which such a linked sequence of ever-

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Only as a people can it hear what it is destined to hear. The unity of nationality and faith which constitutes the uniqueness of Israel is not only our destiny, in the empirical sense of the word: here humanity is touched by the divine." See: Martin Buber, "The Jew in the World," Israel and the World, p.169.

<sup>123</sup> Martin Buber, "Why We Should Study Jewish Sources," Israel and the World, p.146; first published in German, under the title: "Warum Gelernt Werden Soll" (Aus dem "Arbeitsplan" der Berliner Schule der Jüdischen Jugend, 1932), Kampf um Israel, pp.136-140.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp.146f.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. The translation here is not literally correct, for the original reads as following: "Die Söhne, die Enkel erinnern sich leibhaft davon, was den Vätern, den Ahnen widerfuhr."

<sup>128</sup> See: Franz Rosenzweig, "The Fire or The Eternal Life," The Star of Redemption, translated from the Second Edition of 1930 by William W. Hallo, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.298f. We will return to this topic in the next chapter. There, though, our reflection will be centered, especially, on Rosenzweig's spiritual and liturgical comprehension of the concept.

lasting life goes from grandfather to grandson, only one which cannot utter the ‘we’ of its unity without hearing deep within a voice that adds: ‘are eternal.’ It must be a blood community, because only blood gives warrant to the hope for a future. For this community alone, the future is not something alien, but something of its own, something it carries in its womb and which might be born any day.”<sup>129</sup> In the above passage, Rosenzweig does not explain fully how the Jewish people differ from all the other peoples on earth, for in some way or another, they all depend upon this continuity of ‘blood.’ Maybe he does not even pretend to do so.<sup>130</sup>

Rosenzweig returns to this point in the following paragraph. There, he places the difference existing between the Jews and the other nations not on the ‘link of blood’ itself, but rather on the ‘relation’ that other peoples have towards their own land. In his opinion, the ‘eternity’ of the Jewish people, contained within and transmitted through the ‘link of blood,’ is given its secured continuity by its having become, so to say, independent from its link with the earth: “The peoples of the world are not content with the bonds of blood. They sink their roots into the night of the earth, lifeless in itself but the spender of life, and from the lastingness of the earth they conclude that they themselves will last. Their will to eternity clings to the soil and to the reign over the soil, to the land. The earth of their homeland is watered by the blood of their sons; for they do not trust in a life of a community of blood, in a community that can dispense with anchorage in solid earth.”<sup>131</sup> In contrast, Rosenzweig continues, “we were the only ones

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<sup>129</sup> The Star, p.299. Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, "Das Feuer oder das ewige Leben," Der Stern der Erlösung, (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann Verlag, 1921), pp.375f.

<sup>130</sup> As Lionel Kochan claims, it was characteristic of Rosenzweig’s method “to make motifs and themes from the Christian opponents of Judaism and turn them to positive ends.” Kochan suggests that here Rosenzweig seems to be responding to Hegel’s essay Der Geist des Judentums und sein Schicksal (ca. 1799) which argued that when Abraham heeded the divine command to ‘Get thee out of thy country’ (Gen. 12,1ff.) he became, in Hegel’s words, “a stranger on earth, a stranger to soil and men alike.” Indeed so, Rosenzweig echoed, but this Erdefremdheit he saw as the very condition of eternity. The commandment to Abraham, and the subsequent periods of exile to Egypt and Babylon, prefigured the fate of a people that did not base its trust in survival on mere autochthonous factors, the mere occupation of a certain area, but, so to speak, bore its eternity with it, in ‘the community of blood.’ Cf. Lionel Kochan, “History Denied: Rosenzweig,” The Jew and His History, (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1977), pp.99-114 (esp. pp.107f.).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. Rosenzweig, apparently, was not ‘a Zionist.’ Reflecting a certain influence from his friend and teacher, Hermann Cohen, he saw in the Jewish Exile a dimension of Redemption, and even of Revelation, i.e., a certain ‘Mission,’ towards the other nations. Emphatically strange, though, in other aspects of his thought, the ‘eternity’ of the Jewish people is realized, and celebrated, on the level of liturgy - for example, the *Shabbat* prayer, and other Jewish Festivals - i.e., on a spiritual level, which is ‘trans-historical.’ Concerning Buber’s conception of ‘Blood Community,’ Prof. Shalom Rosenberg, of the Hebrew University, suggests that what brought Buber to refer to such a Jewish ‘blood bond’ was the fact that while in Exile, and specially after the ‘Emancipation,’ after what the ‘religious bond’ had been seriously severed, that bond was the last link uniting the people that had been dispersed for so many centuries. In an epoch in which all other ‘visible,’ and even ‘invisible’ links had been

who trusted in blood and abandoned the Land; and so we preserved the priceless sap of life which pledged us that it would be eternal. Among the peoples of the world, we were the only ones who separated what lived within us from all community with what is dead. For while the earth nourishes, it also binds. Whenever a people loves the soil of its native land more than its own life, it is in danger - as all the peoples of the world are(...). To the eternal people, home is never home in the sense of land(...). In the most profound sense possible, this people has a land of its own only in that it has a land it yearns for - a holy land(...). The holiness of the land removed it from the people's spontaneous reach while it could still reach out for it. This holiness increases the longing for what is lost, to infinity, and so the people can never be entirely at home in any other land. This longing compels it to concentrate the full force of its will on a thing which, for other peoples, is only one among others yet which to it is essential and vital: the community of blood.”<sup>132</sup>

Although influenced by neo-Romanticism Buber remains unique among some of his contemporaries, in the privileged place he confers to divine Revelation and the Covenant (with its ethical implications) that brought the people into being. These are the ultimate elements that distinguish Israel from other peoples on earth.<sup>133</sup> In his address on "The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism," delivered in 1912 to the students of the Bar Kochba association in Prague, Buber reaffirms his personal faith in a renewal of the spiritual-religious creativity of Judaism. It is Buber's deep conviction that this

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severed, among them the Way of Faith itself, 'blood' was the last element maintaining the continuity, and most often, identity as well, in an exiled world in which the Jew had lost almost everything connecting him to his sources, and was now dangerously about to loose his own Self. Personal conversation in Spring 1990. I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Rosenberg for his enlightened insight. Cf. Hans Kohn, Martin Buber, Sein Werk und Zeit. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte Mitteleuropas 1880-1930, Nachwort: 1930-1960 von Robert Weltsch, (Köln: Joseph Melzer Verlag, 1961), pp.186ff.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp.299f. As Nathan Rotenstreich explains, inspired by Liberal Judaism, Rosenzweig insists on the separation of Israel from objective, vital elements, such as soil, language and state. Unlike Liberal Judaism, however, he regards Judaism as a biological phenomenon rooted in a common blood origin linking successive generations to one another thus ensuring the eternity of Israel: "Jewish existence does not take place in time but in a suprahistorical sphere it has created for itself, the sphere of holiness, to which it transferred the objective, time-bound, historical institutions, such as land and language. Land, language, customs, law were removed long ago from the vital center in life and raised to the level of holiness." See: Nathan Rotenstreich, "The Road Back. S. L. Steinheim and Franz Rosenzweig - The Eternity of Blood and of the Way," Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times, pp.205-215 (esp. pp.208f.).

<sup>133</sup> As Mendes-Flohr observes: "In the case of Israel, the idea of the Jewish Volk evokes the Covenant that called this people into existence - i.e., the 'supra-national task' that defines the Jewish people." This special link between "the idea of the Jewish Volk," and "the covenant that called the people into existence," has a crucial importance for an understanding of Buber's Hebrew humanism. Cf. Mendes-Flohr, "The Politics of Covenantal Responsibility. Martin Buber and Hebrew Humanism," p.11.

renewal will take place once Israel comes into contact with its maternal soil. There, he says, the Jewish people will translate into reality the three basic dimensions of its heritage and vocation: rootedness in the native land; leading a good life within narrow confines; and building a model community on the scanty Canaanite soil. Then, and only then, Buber avers, will the Jew be capable of fulfilling his vocational task and can the mission be realized. As he stated in the "Introduction" to his work On Zion: "Zionism is a movement which derives its name not from the people it serves, but from a place: Zion. And Zion is not simply a geographic designation but the place of God's sanctuary: 'Zion is the city of the Great King' (Ps.48,3)." <sup>134</sup> Specifically, he says, Zion signifies the election and mission of Israel as they are bound up with the Land of Israel, the Land promised by God to the people of Israel as sign of the Covenant.<sup>135</sup>

In the Introduction to his book On Zion, Buber admonishes the secularizing trend in Zionism against what he considers to be "a powerful desire to dissolve" the mystery in which the idea of Zion is rooted. For, he says, the level of mystery seems to belong to the purely 'religious' sphere. Jewish religion became discredited for two reasons: in the West, because of its attempt to denationalize itself in the age of Emancipation; and in the East, because of its resistance to the Europeanization of the Jewish people, on which the national movement wanted to base itself.<sup>136</sup> Against the view that no more is necessary than to be a people like other peoples, and a national movement like other national movements, in a land like other lands, Buber declares that, "the idea of Zion is rooted in deeper regions of the earth and rises into loftier regions of the air; and neither its roots nor its lofty heights, neither its memory of the past nor its ideal for the future, both of the same texture, must be repudiated."<sup>137</sup> For, he

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. Martin Buber, On Zion. The History of an Idea, with a foreword by Nahum N. Glazer, (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1985), pp.XVIIff.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. Cf. Mendes-Flohr, "The Politics of Covenantal Responsibility," p.13.

<sup>136</sup> Martin Buber, On Zion, p.XX.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.XXI. As Buber further explains, in his book On Zion, when dealing with Rav Kook's Zionist mystical thought, there is a holy and mysterious link uniting both the Land and the people of Israel. This link anticipates 'history' itself, for, in fact, it came into being the moment Nature was created. Even before Israel becomes a 'people,' he says, the chosen family which is to become a people learns, in the Land in which it has not yet settled but is merely a wandering guest, by a mysterious Promise, that the Land is preordained for it, and feels that a bond has been made that can never be loosed. History, Buber remarks, can in this case only confirm and develop what has been established in pre-historical times, in fact, in Nature itself. The eternity of Israel is founded on the divine Nature in the character of this Land. Everything that has happened to this day and will happen for all future time follows from that. For, as Rav Kook claims: "The soul of the people and the Land work together to build up the elements of their common existence; they demand that their task may be given them in order to realize the desire for their holiness." And that is why, Buber observes, the love of the Land is the foundation of the doctrine: "it achieves the consummation of the wholeness of the people of God and the wholeness of the whole world." This is a reality which cannot be understood by

proclaims: "If Israel renounces the mystery, it renounces the heart of reality itself. National forms without the eternal purpose from which they have arisen signify the end of Israel's specific fruitfulness."<sup>138</sup> Concerning the 'mystery' that brought the Jewish people into being, Buber contends that the development of the latent power of the nation, without the supreme value to give it purpose and direction, rather than meaning 'regeneration,' might lead to 'self-deception' and spiritual death: "If Israel desires less than it is intended to fulfil, then it will even fail to achieve the lesser goal."<sup>139</sup>

In the first Hebrew edition of his essay on "The Gods of the Nations and God," published in Tel-Aviv, in 1941, just three years after his other essay on the Election of Israel had been issued in Berlin, Buber fearfully confesses that the period that has been granted to the Jewish people to prove itself is reaching its end. And even more drastically, he concedes: "What was supposed to be 'an alternative to the natural development of humanity' - 'the other side of world history' - has simply become apparently nonexistent."<sup>140</sup> Buber closes his speech with an embarrassing statement, denoting a great amount of disillusionment and hopelessness. Thus he says that it was hoped that the 'Settlement' in the Land would become 'the center of the Jewish people'; but an astonishing and perplexing question follows, resounding without end, maybe echoing through time without an answer: "What is the Center of this 'center'?"<sup>141</sup>

Two weeks after the Proclamation of Independence of the State of Israel, on 14 of May 1948, Buber published an article in the Jewish periodical Be'ayot Ha-Zeman, in which he expresses his fear that a certain type of self-sufficient political sovereignty might become a perversion of the Zionist ideal of national rebirth. In the last paragraph of this article, Buber summarizes his fifty years long engagement with Zionism: "Fifty years ago, when I joined the Zionist movement for the rebirth of Israel, my heart was whole. Today it is torn. The war being waged for a political structure risks becoming a war of national survival at any moment. Thus against my

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reason alone. One must honour the 'mystery' as a mystery, in order to approach it. The reality of the 'holy' can only be grasped from the standpoint of the mystery, Buber concludes. See: "The Zionist Idea - The Renewal of Holiness (On Rav Kook)," On Zion, pp.148f.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> "Goyim ve-Eloahav," Knesset, p.295.

<sup>141</sup> "The Gods of the Nations and God," p.213. In the manuscript of the German version of this essay, Buber added two sentences that he struck afterwards and would thus not be included in the final printed form. One of them appeared in the first edition of the Hebrew version; the other remained silent in the shadow of an eclipsed faith, reflection of an identity in crisis: "Solang der Jischuv ohne Mitte ist wird er nicht die Mitte des Jüdischen Volkes werden." See: "Die Götter der Völker und Gott," Ms. Var. 350/C 62, Martin Buber Archives, Jerusalem, p.16.

will I participate in it with my own being, and my heart trembles like that of any other Israeli. I cannot, however, even be joyful in anticipating victory, for I fear lest the significance of Jewish victory be the downfall of Zionism.”<sup>142</sup>

## Closing

Martin Buber’s concern with the emergent self-centred understanding of Jewish national identity is as relevant today as it was sixty five years ago. Israel as a State still finds itself at a cross-roads between the intangible dimension of its divine calling and the political reality of the world in which it dwells. Replacing the final purpose implicit in the divine call that brought this great Nation into being (Humanity as such, I should say), with the dangerous tendency to self-centredness, conceived as an end in itself, might perilously come to represent its unwilled downfall.

The answer to the question how this wonderful people will be able to prevent its self-destruction, would require a larger framework not available in this setting. It would suffice to say, though, that it remains imperative to acknowledge and safeguard the dignity of the *other*, including, and especially, the *non-Jewish other*, with a similar assertiveness to that which the Jewish people regards its own dignity and purpose. That, and that alone, can ultimately guarantee this Nation’s enduring security and wellbeing. Against all odds, that is my hope too!

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<sup>142</sup> Idem, "Zionism and ‘Zionism’" (May 1948), A Land of Two Peoples, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr, pp.220-233 (esp. p.223).