

### THE THOUGHT OF ELIEZER SCHWEID

#### *A SYMPOSIUM*

The Jewish thought of Eliezer Schweid was the subject of a symposium held under the auspices of "Immanuel" on August 7th, 1978 at Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem with the participation of Professor Schweid, Dr. Shalom Rosenberg, and Dr. Warren Z. Harvey of the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University, and Dr. Pinhas Peli, Senior Lecturer at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-sheva who was also the moderator of the symposium.

This symposium, said Dr. Peli in his opening remarks is intended for "Immanuel" which is read mostly by people outside of Israel. These people are hardly familiar with contemporary Jewish thought as it evolved and developed in Israel in the last three decades, since the establishment of the Jewish state. Even in Israel itself very little, if anything at all, is known about the creative thought within Judaism that is developing round us. In this new thought a central place is occupied by Professor Eliezer Schweid, who in his books, which comprise quite a small library by themselves, deals not only with the history of Jewish thought, research in medieval Jewish philosophy and more recently in modern Jewish thought, but dwells no less on actual issues facing the Jew as an Israeli and the Israeli as a Jew. Schweid seems to be trying to bring together his commitment to the Jewish heritage with the day to day issues of contemporary Israeli society whose roots are seemingly secular – or should we put secular in quotation marks? In this symposium we would like to deal with the unique contribution of Professor Schweid to contemporary Jewish thought in a general way, and also try more specifically to examine some of its basic assumptions. We would like to explore together with Professor Schweid who is here with us today, what are the new elements in that thought as compared to Jewish thought fifty years ago, or prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. When compared for instance with classic Zionist thought, does it represent a revolution which took

place as it moved into the second half of the twentieth century, after the Holocaust and after the emergence of Israel – or, is this thought merely a continuity of prior Zionist thought? Furthermore, at this stage in our thinking, could we rightly assume that there is indeed a new thought of some distinction, or are we only pointing to directions and asking questions which will eventually bring about the new thought which many of us feel is needed when we find ourselves face to face with the new reality of Jewish life? May I propose therefore that one of the questions we should deal with be the question of the continuity of Jewish thought from the past into the new era in which we live, as this continuity is seen from the perspective of the works of Professor Eli Schweid. A second question which I would pose as part of these remarks would be, that we should try to explore within the creative thought of Professor Schweid what are the immediate motivations – and that will help us grasp and understand their meaning – that made him apply his erudition with regard to classic medieval and Jewish thought to immediate issues like, for instance, the relationship between the religious and the secular camps in Israel, or the attitude of the modern individual Jew to prayer or to the Sabbath. And thirdly, what, if any, ideal destination or dream for the future emerges from this thought? Does it correspond to that which appears in classic Jewish thought, in other words, what is the relationship between the modern Israeli scene and messianism, or for that matter between modern Israel and the socialist dream of two generations ago, which bring us to A.D. Gordon who seems to be a great influence on the thinking of Schweid? How would any of those dreams of the past stand now? Where then does the old Jewish dream fit into the new reality? We would like to pose these questions to be dealt with in the light of the creative and scholarly thinking of Eliezer Schweid as it appears from his writing and from his personal statements, both of which exert a definite impact on Israeli thought at the present moment.

HARVEY: Dr. Peli has raised the connection between the early Zionist thought and the contemporary Zionist thought of Professor Eliezer Schweid. The most striking difference is that the early Zionists wrote in Europe; it was the thought of men who dreamed of creating something new, creating something great in the land of Israel; something which some of them thought would be an evolution, a continuation of previous Jewish thought, and others thought would be a revolution, a break with previous Jewish thought. But these were men who grew up in cultures outside of the land of Israel, outside of Zion. They wrote about Zion in terms of their dream about what the future would be. Professor Schweid is a sabra – a native born Israeli. In his writings, in his thought about Zionism, and about Judaism, he expresses eloquently the existential situation of the Jew who has been born in the land of Israel, who has grown up in the land of Israel, been educated in the land of Israel and who lives in the environment which one way or another, had been dreamt up by these early Zionist thinkers. The next point which must be made is that most of these early Zionist thinkers were secularists. The great Zionists who built the land of Israel, the State of Israel, the kibbutzim, the leading national institutions were to a large degree non-religious and in many cases anti-religious, rebelling against the traditional Jewish religion. To be sure, there were great Zionist thinkers in all

periods, in all times who were true to the Jewish religious tradition, but they were in the minority. In general, the Zionist ideology was secular and this had its effect on the educational system and the culture of modern Israel. In his book, *Judaism and the Solitary Jew*, Professor Schweid lays bare the soul of the modern Israeli. He is a modern man like any other modern man, like his modern European counterpart. He has grown up with a secular education. He has grown up as an individual in a world of individuals, and suddenly he finds out that as an individual something is lacking in his life. He sees himself as an atom, dissociated from the universe, he finds himself alone, he finds that the very individualism which he had sought has been suffocating his cultural life. The individual lacks something, and at this point he searches for a richer cultural plentifulness. Professor Schweid argues that any modern man — all modern men are faced with this cultural deprivation. The individual when he is separate from the family, from the nation, and from the larger community is lacking. The solitary Jew searches for a community. He finds however that there is no one single Jewish community today. In Israel we have various different kinds of secular Jews and various kinds of religious Jews; also abroad throughout the world, there are different kinds of Jewish communities. There are Reform Jews and Conservative Jews and Orthodox Jews and Hassidic Jews, and Jews of this group and Jews of that group — but there doesn't seem to be *one* Jewish community today. And this causes a problem for the contemporary Jew. He wants to break forth from this individualism, from this solitary state, and he wants to find his national and his cultural roots. But seemingly there is no place to turn — the Jewish community is fragmented. This same problem holds for the contemporary European who is also trying to find his national roots. But here, and this is perhaps an original observation of Professor Schweid's, there is a difference between the modern solitary Jew and the modern solitary European, and the difference lies in the difference between Jewish nationalism and European nationalism. It has been a general, popular view held by the Marxists and others that the Jews are not a nation. But the Jews are even more correctly called a nation than the European nations. Historical analysis will prove that the core of nationalism in ancient times has generally been religion and culture. Each nation has its own cultural patterns, the focus of which is generally religion. However, what happened in medieval Europe is that supra-national Christianity broke down the distinctive national religions of the various nations, and therefore suppressed the development of nationalism in medieval Europe. When with the modern period, in a process that began with the Reformation, and carried through the nineteenth century, the centralized power of the Church was thrown off and Europe became more and more secular together with the throwing off of the centralized power of the supra-national Church there arose new European nationalisms. But what happened was that these nationalisms no longer had as their content religion, but the state, the raw political machinery of the state, and this has led to the situation in modern times where modern nationalism has often been corrupted into fascism, and no people more than the Jews have suffered from this kind of nationalism. Therefore the solitary European seeking to find his national roots has a problem, for they are not cultural but rather grounded in the state — political — whereas the Israeli Jew

seeking his roots, finds that they are cultural and religious. Therefore in one way, the solitary Israeli is in a better position than the solitary European in finding his roots. On the other hand, however, he is in a worse position because these roots are religious, and modern man is by his nature, and by his education, secular. Therefore the national problem for the Jew turns out to be for Professor Schweid, a religious problem. How is it possible for modern man, educated to be an individual, educated to be a secularist, how is it possible for him to return to religion? In the solution that Professor Schweid attempts to offer the modern Israeli, he is expressing the agonizing searching which many young Israelis join him in today. Professor Schweid argues that the very desire to affirm one's roots of family, one's roots of nation, one's historical continuity, this very affirmation, is at base – whether the person knows it or not – an affirmation of faith in God. Namely the affirmation of faith in life which drives a person towards his family roots, towards his national roots and towards his historical roots. This affirmation is at base – whether the person knows it or not – an affirmation of faith in God. Thus has Professor Schweid's thought moved from modern secular individualism to modern Jewish nationalism and finally to a new kind of religious nationalism which poses a challenge both for the Israeli secularist and the Jewish religionist wherever he may be.

ROSENBERG: First of all, let me state that I am one of Professor Schweid's many students and disciples, and there is so much that I owe him. Talking about the writings of Professor Schweid, one has to see their dual aspect: the aspect of research which is dominant mainly in his historical work; then there is the other aspect, that of the original and creative part of his work. In both we find ourselves in a very rich field, a field in which many years of research have produced an abundance of fruit. Following Julius Guttman's book on Jewish philosophies, Schweid's work – even his historical works – represent something utterly new. This expresses itself first of all, in a philosophical creation from the perspective of literature and within the framework of sociology. A finished work of philosophy is of course also a literary work, which emerges not only from the philosophical system but also from the relationship between thought and life. This relationship between thought and life appears also in all the parts of Professor Schweid's creative work. Various motives dominate Schweid's works, the way I see them. While there is some kind of integration between these motives, their separation would help us understand the complexity of his thinking. First of all, he presents us – as Ze'ev Harvey has said previously – with a new approach to the problem of modern man. From a somewhat different perspective, I would say that the problem which Schweid is attacking is the problem of modern man as one who has greatly progressed in knowing the universe and science, but has no foundation for the solution of moral problems. If we would remember, for example, one of the many problematic issues that arose in recent years, education for values – and that is an issue not only in our little country but in the whole world: what are the values towards which modern man is to structure education? Isn't it amazing that our generation cannot find a foundation for its moral positions? It is because a foundation for a moral position cannot be grounded in scientific thought and research. What do we do then? The solution

offered by Eli Schweid, is that the ideas on which moral positions are founded are in something called culture, culture as an independent source for our thinking and for doing. Now if you accept culture, it will take you out of your isolation, by which we mean the impossibility of obtaining answers to your problems. Furthermore, if you accept culture you must accept with it some kind of transcendental presupposition, because according to Schweid, the only basis for culture, and that is indeed a strange and perhaps faulty affirmation in our age, of culture is religion. That is the reason why the problem of moral issues and the search for the solution of this problem brings us to the acceptance of religion not only in Jewish life but in world civilization. It means that the roots of civilization are religious roots. This to Schweid is something that cannot be disputed; we must thus accept religion as an independent source for our thinking and our deeds. Now, this idea, which is an universal idea, can also be applied to the second motive in Schweid's problematics, that is, to the definition of Jewish identity. The problem is how do you define your being a Jew, and here is Schweid's position that you define your Jewish identity through culture. However, culture in this context, could also mean anti-religious roots but one cannot separate, claims Schweid, Jewish nationalism from the Jewish religion. I would say – and here I come to one of the questions that was put to us by Dr. Peli, regarding the difference between Schweid's position and other positions – that there is a very strong affinity between Schweid's position and Ahad Ha'Am's. The difference, however, is that for Ahad Ha'Am religion has no validity by itself, and is only one of the expressions of Jewish identity, of Jewish nationalism in its historical development, but for Eliezer Schweid religion is a much more serious matter and he is against using religion to serve other mechanisms. It must be studied for its own intrinsic value.

PELI: May I call attention at this point to the comprehensive essay by Schweid on Faith, ("Ma-hi Eemunah?") in his book on Jewish faith and culture of 1976 which is an example of what you're trying to say, Shalom, where the thinker does not rely on what was said before but tries to get to a definition of religion, his own definition, by working his way through the primary sources starting from the Bible, to a new presentation which will be acceptable to modern man, to the secular Israeli, by taking religion not as something which was given, but as something which has to be discovered and absorbed on your own terms.

ROSENBERG: I agree with you on this, and would like to add (of course everyone has his own personal preferences) that this book you just mentioned *Emunat 'Am Yisrael ve Tarbuto*, is one of Schweid's best books and this essay in particular is a novel and interesting example of modern Biblical exegesis.

PELI: It would indeed be interesting to Jewish and non-Jewish readers to see a new Jewish, or shall we say, new Israeli reading of the Bible, which may serve as a foundation for a new Israeli theology.

ROSENBERG: The point you just brought up, brings me to the third motive in the

thought of Schweid. It is problematic. Schweid as we have suggested, accepts religion, either as a binding factor or at least, we may say that we found ourselves with him in what we may call a basically religious situation. But there is the problem as to what has become of religion. There is another book by Schweid, *Democracy and Halakhah* that deals with the relationship of Judaism and *halakhah*. Here we find a dual position concerning Schweid's relationship to religion. First of all, what I find new is Schweid's interpretation of the classic sources; here he offers us some new possibilities in theology but what is more important and also more problematic are the new possibilities in *halakhah*. According to Schweid, the whole people of Israel is the subject of *halakhah* and it is up to the people to take a position on the issues of our times and to legislate on *halakhah*. The fourth and last motive I would like to touch is Zionism. Why speak about Zionism in *Immanuel*, a periodical that is dedicated to theology? Because in the thought of Schweid there is hardly any difference in Judaism between the religious component and the nationalist component. Every generation speaks about a crisis in Zionism. I would say that the principal thesis of Schweid's ideas is that the real crisis of Zionism is that it has not been realized yet. That means that we ought not to seek a new definition of Zionism but a fulfillment of classical Zionism, its ideas and plans.

If I am now to sum up and tie together the four main motives in Schweid's work to give the reader a general idea, I would say that Schweid posits himself in a struggle against all parts of the Jewish people and that means of course that he is making a remarkable new contribution. I would say this contribution is very important because it is not only theoretical but his ideas also cut through into many areas of our day to day life. For instance, one of the problems that we are faced with, is the problem of a lack of any real religious-secular dialogue in Israel. Perhaps there cannot be such dialogue in our times, but the thinking of Schweid makes possible a new dialogue, a dialogue *within* the so-called secular community, which is really a new religious-secular dialogue, something which was not possible to envisage between the Orthodox and secular community. In the same way, the Orthodox will argue with his ideas not only in their theological implications but in their practical relation to *halakhah*. They will reject the very fact that he is trying to give legitimation to the cultural parts in Judaism, recognizing the people's right of intervention in the creation of theology and *halakhah*. These are issues of political importance. Thus Schweid's thinking is not a kind of ivory tower thinking but has an impact on everyday life.

PELI: I believe that what has been said till now, in different directions is enough of a starting point for us to hear now from Eliezer Schweid himself.

SCHWEID: First of all, I must say that I agree to most of the things that my friends said. I wouldn't have put it better than they have done it. I only have to add a bit here and there to redefine some of the points. In the first place, it is not really for me to decide whether I have contributed something original or not. I must say that the first motivation to write is not really to say something original, but really to respond to questions asked in a certain situation. From this standpoint, I feel

myself as continuing a certain line in Judaism and maybe even in Zionism. This represents to my mind, a thinking which is responding to questions of people out of a sense of responsibility towards the people in a particular time and place. One is trying to do his best in giving answers which, of course, are not always complete, but which will perhaps offer something to solve the pressing problems at least at that time and place. I hope that I succeeded in doing this. I feel myself as one who continues, not only in the great Jewish tradition, but even also in the shorter Zionist tradition. And of course Dr. Harvey was correct in saying that most of the Zionist thought — or maybe we should say, most of the thought that influenced our education was secular even antagonistic to religion. When trying to review the history of Zionist thought, not the history of Zionist education, and the history of influences on Zionist thought and ideas on the Jewish people, one will come upon a strange situation where the best thinkers were in a minority and exerted little influence. I feel myself continuing this great minority whose thought, for reasons I try to understand, did not shape education in this country. Let me also state here, in response to one of Dr. Rosenberg's remarks, that I do not consider myself a disciple of Ahad Ha'Am; I feel myself rather more close to Bialik than to Ahad Ha'Am. Though there was a certain affinity between Bialik and Ahad Ha'Am there was also a great difference — a very important difference. I feel myself continuing in his footsteps in my attempt to understand the Jewish situation and the direction of education of the contemporary Jew. I also consider myself a disciple of Aaron David Gordon; I feel that I learned much from Yitschak Julius Guttmann, not only as a man of research, but also as a man who tried to respond seriously to certain religious problems of our times in the Jewish people generally and in *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) particularly. I think that those people followed a certain distinctive tradition which transmitted many fruitful ideas, although did not turn out to be effective. The political situation, the cultural situation was not ready to accept their ideas. Now from this point of view, I see myself as a continuer. There are of course also differences. As already mentioned, I unlike my forerunners was born in Israel, I am thus in a position to evaluate the whole situation from the point of view of an Israeli. This does make a big difference but on the other hand one should try to define what exactly is the difference. Those great thinkers whom I consider as my teachers, tried to influence their situation by projecting their vision of the future, being aware that the time for their idea regarding the meaning of Jewish culture has not yet come. That we have to wait and struggle first for the realization of certain material achievements, the establishment of the *yishuv*, the founding of the state, solving economic problems, defence problems. All those were to tackle the problem of existence. In the course of time something will perhaps be created by itself, by the power of events and of history. Culture? We give it only a certain orientation, and then it will evolve by itself. I think that this was their great mistake. What I consider an immediate Israeli problem is that their *future is now*, and we cannot postpone the confrontation with the problem of the meaning of being Jews, of having a Jewish state, of having a Jewish culture, for tomorrow. It is to be discussed now, it is to be decided now by acting and by creating. We have to reorient ourselves both towards the past and towards the future, trying to redress the mistakes of the

past, reconnect what our predecessors have severed and dissected, willingly or unwillingly. We cannot resurrect the past, yet we have no choice but to find a way and connect ourselves again with the sources which we consider important enough to transmit to the coming generation. My attempt, in the first place, is to try to find out what is really meaningful in Jewish tradition from the point of view of the modern Jew and then to try to understand the essence of the greater tradition created in our own time, which will continue to interpret the variants of Jewish culture in light of the new situation. Here lies my main struggle with the problem of Israeli culture. I agree with Shalom Rosenberg that the main problem in my eyes is to find, and to redefine the relation between the concept of secular culture and religion. I wouldn't put it as Shalom put it mainly that the main source or the only source of culture is religious. This would not be correct. To my mind, there is an imminent source of culture in the very nature of the human being. There is no doubt a justified, secular foundation for culture, but I think that if culture should reflect a whole interpretation of the meaning of being, human being, and the conclusion therefore is that a culture which does not reflect religious values cannot be complete. It lacks one of its major components. I want to re-establish the relationship between religion and secular culture, not as antagonistic but as elements, though, sometimes very tense towards each other, but in the long run complimenting each other. I try to see the religious sources of secularism and the secular sources of religious feeling. I try to find out how a positively secular man can find and re-establish his relations with the religious sources of his culture.

**HARVEY:** I should like to focus on the crucial distinction between Ahad Ha'Am and Professor Schweid. According to Ahad Ha'Am's view, the world has evolved beyond the stage of religion, and Ahad Ha'Am foresaw that there would have to be a new kind of base for Jewish culture. Having transcended the religious stage, the Jewish people would have to find a different garment, a different outer clothing, a different expression for Judaism. In Ahad Ha'Am's view, the move from the religious stage to the modern non-religious stage, would not affect the essence of Judaism, it would just affect the external appearance of Judaism, the point being that the religious stage is over, and now we are moving into some kind of new stage which we can't foresee yet. Professor Schweid rejects this view of Ahad Ha'Am which was shared by many who formed Israeli education. I want to raise the question, whether the fact that Professor Schweid rejects this and says what has to be done with Jewish culture is to create audaciously a new Judaism? He speaks of a revolution in Judaism which would be comparable to the revolution of the rabbis of the Talmud over and against the Bible, or of the great medieval philosophers and kabbalists over and against the rabbis of the Talmud. This marks a great difference to the position of Ahad Ha'Am who said that the new kind of evolution would not be religious. On the other hand, isn't it precisely this call on Professor Schweid's part to create this new kind of religious Judaism which is the prime motivation for his recent interest in modern Jewish Orthodoxy in an attempt to see to what extent various rabbinical authorities have been open to the modern situation, particularly in the present century to the new situation brought about by the return of the Jews to the land of

Israel. In his recent book on Rabbi Haim Hirschensohn, he has found one rabbinic authority who had at least to a certain extent displayed the kind of audacity that he seeks. I think that the important question to raise now is what kind of a Judaism will this new Judaism be?

PELI: I would like to somewhat extend the question, asking for a clearer definition to the relationship of Schweid's thinking to *halakhah*. In one of his articles Schweid suggested the possibility of choosing from the totality of the *mitzvot*. How does one choose? What are the criteria? And after the "choosing" is over – do you, Professor Schweid, have an ideal model of Judaism that you want to find at the end of the search or do you suffice yourself with the very search? Reading your books, one sometimes gets the feeling, that there is a constant search going on, an unending search, but does it intend ever to reach a destination? Do you ever want to arrive? If so, what will be the model of the ideal dream to which you strive to arrive at?

SCHWEID: We might say that Orthodoxy never had its models in the future but ex-postfactum. It indeed prescribed at any given time a model Judaism. We may assume for instance that when Yosef Karo wrote the *Shulhan Arukh*, he really did have a definite model. Life and history were always on the way, not in frozen models but in a very live flux. To be sure I am not for an ideology of looking in order not to find. This mood is typical of some Israelis; I am revolted by it.

PELI: Some of your disciples, or some who claim to be your disciples do exactly that!

SCHWEID: Maybe, but I hope that those who claim to have studied something of my writing will not find in them any endorsement for this mood of asking questions not for the sake of getting any answers. When I say that I am looking for something, I am *really* looking for something – and the answer has to be given in a certain way of life. I try to give the answers to myself as well as share them with the public when the questions raised are such that are of interest to the public. But of course, I wouldn't say that I can always offer very definite models of being Jewish. How can one paint such a model now? We are now in a period of tremendous change. There was perhaps no other time in Jewish history when change was so rapid and profound. One can of course try to look for certain foundations in the past. We have sources, and we have to try to look into the sources, to study them with a sense of responsibility, and with a sense of accepting upon ourselves their obligations. Yes, I stress that we have to commit ourselves towards the sources, but then we have also to face the situation in which we live. The solutions thus arrived at are at best temporary. I can think of a certain model of behaving, of responding, but not of a permanent model of the Jewish way of life as it will be created in Israel.

I also wanted to say a word about the thought of Bialik and Ahad Ha'Am. I think that Bialik was very different from Ahad Ha'Am if not in the formulation of his ideas, certainly in his intuitions as a poet. There is the big difference in their ap-

proaches to education and to the way of recreating Jewish culture in *Eretz Yisrael*. The whole idea, juxtaposition of *aggadah* and *halakhah* is a response to the contemporary religious attitudes. Bialik, one may say, remained religious even when he rebelled against it, this is impossible to say about Ahad Ha'Am. He in a way had completely lost his religious feeling. He felt that behind religion there is something which he could identify with, but it was completely secular. Bialik however felt the depth of the religious, even when he rebelled against it.

PELI: Beyond the behavioural attachment.

SCHWEID: Yes, therefore I think that his thinking was much more fertile than Ahad Ha'Am's. Bialik the secular Zionist sensed the tragedy of the impasse where he found himself. Nowhere to go, no future to look to. Bialik tried to find the way out of this dilemma.

PELI: Was there anyone besides Bialik? Would you name anyone?

SCHWEID: I would point to A.D. Gordon and to a certain extent also Yitschak Julius Guttman. There are also other minor . . .

PELI: Rabbi Kook?

SCHWEID: My grasp of Rabbi Kook is quite complex. I can appreciate the greatness of his thought. But I don't feel that there is something fertile in his dealing with the problems. If you want to relate to problems now, not in the far-away future, you will find that Rabbi Kook has nothing to say, at least to me.

PELI: And Gordon's romanticism is more applicable to our age?

SCHWEID: I wouldn't agree that Gordon is a romanticist. He was of course a romantic spirit but he was oriented towards the future. I think that at least his formulations of the future are very acute and very real. I wouldn't accept his solutions as they are; they are not adequate. But the questions he posed are still adequate. One can still learn much from him on ways to face religion, as from the other thinkers I mentioned, Bialik, Yitschak Julius Guttman, and in many respects, Franz Rosenzweig.

ROSENBERG: I chose to compare the thought of Schweid to that of Ahad Ha'Am, because it is easier to see something by way of contrast, than by way of similarity. It was interesting and important to hear from Professor Schweid that he does not see himself as a disciple of Ahad Ha'Am, a supposition one may get from comparing positions on cultural Zionism of the two. I would only want to emphasize and elaborate on your answer to Pinchas' question. Would it be correct to define your position that what is normative in *halakhah* for you is not substantive-normative but methodological-normative. That means that you are committed more to con-

tinue the *way* of *halakhah*, but not to accept the substantive answers *halakhah* gives to specific problems.

SCHWEID: I don't believe you can continue *halakhah* without an obligatory relation to the substantive. I wouldn't accept Buber's position relating to the *halakhah* for example. I do accept substantive parts of *halakhah* itself, not merely an idea or a general way.

PELI: What then is the criteria for choosing parts from the totality of the *halakhah*? Is it left entirely to the individual?

SCHWEID: It is the individual who finds himself in a community, and wants to be in a community. The existence of a community is determining the individual's relation to *halakhah*. Here I think is the important contribution of Yitschak Julius Guttmann. I think that his thought on this topic is not yet known. It is as if we would put Franz Rosenzweig's thought into a Zionist dimension. It was his tragic mistake to see the individual by himself and not as part of the community.

PELI: At this point let me refer to Schweid's article on *tefillah* (prayer), dealing with the inability of modern man to pray. Now how to pray, what words to say, those are things set by the *halakhah*, but we are now one step *before* that. Whether to pray according to the *halakhah*, or change the liturgy – these are *halakhic* problems. But we are facing the problem which is prior to that and concerns all those who do not accept the first paragraph of the *Shulhan Arukh* which says that man rising in the morning is obligated to pray. . .

SCHWEID: To me prayer is not an obligation but a description of how Jews were doing it, and now many of them are not. Thus it became problematic – even for the Orthodox. If you define it as an obligation, it means that it has become a problem.

HARVEY: I think that the problem of *halakhah* in the context of Professor Schweid's thought can be seen as a cultural problem. There is a general problem that all modern human beings brought up in a secular world face: how is it possible to talk to God? How is it possible to pray? But within the Jewish framework, within the framework of Judaism as Judaism seems to me and as it appears to Professor Schweid, the Jewish religious tradition has manifested itself in *halakhah*, and therefore an attempt of the Jew culturally to find out what prayer means in his culture necessarily becomes somewhere along the line, a *halakhic* question, simply because Judaism as a religion has developed according to the *halakhah*.

ROSENBERG: I think that here we can put a direct question to Professor Schweid, on his attitude to *halakhah*, both as an idea and as a system.

PELI: I would add something along the lines formulated by Professor Schweid: does one go from *halakhah* to culture or from culture to *halakhah*?

HARVEY: Professor Schweid is going from culture to *halakhah*.

ROSENBERG: If that is so, then that is one of the big differences between Schweid's position and that of Orthodoxy. It is a defensible position, but it should be made clear as a point of conflict.

HARVEY: This is an existential position: you have a Jew, Professor Schweid, who was brought up on a non-*halakhic*, non-traditional education. He begins to search for his cultural roots and he comes to the conclusion – and it's a correct conclusion, that to recover the Jewish religion means at least in part to make some sense out of the *halakhah*. So I think biographically speaking, and also structurally speaking, his thought is coming from culture to *halakhah*. In other words, out of an attempt to recover Jewish culture he is forced to try to recover *halakhah*.

ROSENBERG: I don't agree. I wouldn't say that it is something *aposteriori*. I would say that he is confronted with his culture, but his acceptance of his culture is not only retroactive according to the acceptance of *halakhah*, but means in principle some kind of acceptance of the divine law which *halakhah* is. That is perhaps the difference between the position of Schweid and that of Buber. One does not accept *halakhah* because he has no choice, but because it is his heritage. One either accepts or rejects *halakhah* because of inner commitment.

SCHWEID: I think that putting *halakhah* and culture as two opposing forces is incorrect because there is a definite dialectical connection between the two. Culture by its very nature transmits itself via *halakhah*. If culture is not normative, it cannot exist as a culture. As Rosenzweig had put it, there is a dimension of the past in every culture. Past meaning a certain given. If you do not come from a certain given – you have no culture, and the given is normative of course. I think here was the crucial mistake of Zionist thought as represented by Ahad Ha'Am in thinking that there could be a culture without a normative element. For a culture to be transmitted, it must be looked upon as obligatory, obligatory because we feel ourselves committed to it and live with it. We are that very past and this is our point of departure.

PELLI: Obligation? Commitment? Are those too part of culture?

SCHWEID: Let me say that this culture I talk about is the milieu of our life. We are living it and it gives meaning to our lives. By virtue of this meaning, it becomes a norm. When you educate you are normative. You say to your child – do this or don't do this. The most open and liberal educators are saying to their children certain affirmative things. Maybe they do not consider themselves normative but they are setting rules nevertheless. Unless they do so, they are not educating. So there is a certain element of obligation in culture, at least as a point of departure, for you to continue and to interpret. In the act of self-commitment you are also choosing and re-interpreting. Men of *halakhah* in the classical period were not

dealing with it as with something which was put upon them from the outside. There was a certain milieu of living, they live in it and continued it. Now we have to do the same, but we are in a very problematic position because we are in an age of a revolutionising transition. Everything is in upheaval. So we have to try to find the normative and substantive elements of this tradition. I must find out by myself to what point I am living the Jewish tradition – still living!

HARVEY: I must say that Professor Schweid and Dr. Rosenberg are using the word *halakhah* in a wider sense from that which I had been using it. When I speak of *halakhah*, I am referring to Jewish law which has been passed down by rabbinical institutions throughout the generations. It means certain things – that Jews are not allowed to eat pork, Jews are not allowed to do certain kinds of work on the Sabbath, Jews trade in a certain way, there are various other kinds of ceremonial and ethical commandments. A very serious question has been raised in the modern period by Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish thinkers: what is the place of this Jewish law in the modern world? A thinker such as Micah Yosef Berdichevsky who was a profound religious thinker, came to the conclusion that Jewish law as it has developed has suffocated the Jewish religious instinct. A similar view is held by the second of the two great poets of the modern Hebrew revival – I refer to Saul Tchernichovsky who spoke of the *halakhah*, as having strangled God in the *tefillin* straps, the flat straps of the phylacteries. It is a position that has been held by many thinking Jews, that the *halakhah*, namely Jewish law as it has developed throughout the generations is actually suffocating, strangling the religious experience. Professor Schweid, using the general sense of *halakhah* as something normative, clouds the issue of whether the modern Jewish community should find some way of continuing the *halakhic* tradition, as the Conservative movement in the United States, claims to be doing, by trying to conserve *halakhah* while changing it. Is Professor Schweid's view close to the American Conservative movement, or is there a definite gap between them? Conservative Judaism means to conserve the *halakhah*, but to make changes to meet the needs of the present world. Does this view stand against Professor Schweid's view, as it stands against a view held by many thinking Jews that we must break with the *halakhic* tradition, with *halakhic* Judaism, and create something bold and new, perhaps as some say, to return to the ancient religion of the desert, or even to the religion of the Canaanites?

SCHWEID: First, let me say, that people like Berdichevsky or Brenner rebelled really not against the classical Jewish tradition – even though they put it like that – but the truth of the matter is, that they rebelled against Jewish tradition as it crystallized in their generation. Misunderstanding the whole historical perspective, they thought that the Orthodox conception of Judaism of their day is classical Judaism. In this point they in fact agreed with Orthodoxy. There still is a strange and tragic agreement on this point between secular and Orthodox Jews in Israel of today. Against this Judaism, as crystallized in nineteenth century Europe they rebelled and I think there was a great element of truth in their rebellion. Judaism even Jewish law is not necessarily the way it appeared in East European Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century.

PELI: So where does your thinking come in? Where do you pick up the thread? In the Bible? In the Talmud? Reform Judaism used to argue that we go back to prophetic Judaism. The way of an Orthodox Jew is clear, he just continues; even when he doesn't continue, he claims to be doing so. He goes, or says that one is supposed to go to the synagogue three times a day to recite the prayers prescribed in the authorized prayer book. But you, where do you pick up the thread of tradition? Are you suggesting to break in into any particular period of this long tradition, if you are not ready to "continue" as if no crisis occurred within it?

SCHWEID: I think that not only because of the new situation but also because of my new historical knowledge of Judaism, I can face directly every period and every source in Jewish tradition and relate to it. I can relate myself directly to the Bible, as I can relate myself directly to the Mishnah or the Talmud and try to understand every source in its own context, while trying to derive whatever I am able from each source. This will make it possible to understand the dynamic and the element of change in Jewish tradition. In no way do I confine myself to the Bible only, even though the Bible is really a very living nerve in my attachment to Jewish tradition. By clinging to the Bible, I do not exclude the Rabbis. They too are very important and very meaningful to me, albeit in a completely different way. I am not saying that I can understand the Bible only through the Rabbis. They of course have their own understanding, and I have my own direct understanding of the Bible. I think that while looking at the totality of tradition, I may choose from it what is still living with me in my own situation.

HARVEY: Are you speaking now of a personal choice?

SCHWEID: Yes, a personal choice, but the choice of a person who is conscious of his obligation towards a community.

HARVEY: But the problem you raised in many of your works is the community choice – the Jewish community has to choose.

ROSENBERG: Or should we say a choice which is liable to be accepted by the community.

HARVEY: The reason I raised the question is that if cultural pluralism is indeed good and legitimate within Judaism, some people may want to continue the *halak-hah* – fine. Others may want to create something new – fine. Still others may want to half continue and half create something new – that is fine too. So there will be many different kinds of Jewish culture. Maybe there is nothing wrong with this, as the Yiddish culture of Eastern Europe was different from the Yemenite culture, and the Berlin or Frankfurt style of Jewish culture. And some might even think that it is wonderful that there are so many different kinds of Judaism. However, a person making a personal choice may not have to think that his personal choice should have ramifications for the community.

PELI: There is yet another question: how far does one have to move in his “choosing” in order to stop being Jewish altogether?

ROSENBERG: Shall we not postpone judgement to a later stage? Was not Judaism always defined *a posteriori*?

SCHWEID: I think that we have no choice in this matter. The Jewish people has become and will become more and more pluralistic. One should recognize this, because one of our illnesses is that we are not accepting the facts of our life and we don't allow ourselves to be what we are here in Israel. We are pluralistic and we have to allow ourselves to be thus, but then we have to understand that pluralism doesn't mean that everything is possible and that there is no center or no code which is obligatory on all – something which is the point of unity. We have to redefine what unifies us in terms of content and not only in terms of political or national frameworks.

PELI: Could you point to the unifying factor?

SCHWEID: I will try to put it dogmatically. In my paper on the Shabbat, I made an attempt to find, not only in general terms but even in particular terms, what can be accepted as a general consensus regarding a specific Jewish way of life to the whole community as such.

PELI: If I am not mistaken, you draw a difference between the wishful thinking about Shabbat and the actual, and I think that is part of the problem of education, how does one bridge the gap between the fanciful ideal and dreary reality?

SCHWEID: I tried to deal not only with the idea or ideal of Shabbat but also with the practical aspect of what should be done regarding Shabbat and enacted as the law of the State. Compulsory, and yet not as something tyrannical, but as expressing a cultural agreement, or consensus in the Jewish people. It is to be broached both by way of education and through the enacting of a law.

PELI: In addition to Shabbat, are there other problems?

SCHWEID: Well, they are the known, the problems of what defines the Jewish identity. Here too, I think that we have to formulate a certain consensus in terms of family life, in terms of the problem of conversion, etc. The issue should be solved on a certain political and cultural consensus. Pluralism of course should be developed, but that does not have to restrain us from arriving at many a consensus in shaping our forms of life while adhering to pluralism in education. The basis for different movements within Judaism should be educational. I do not agree with the idea that Conservatives and Reform – everyone should have his conception of the law in matters of the general definition of Jewish identity. There should be one accepted norm.

PELI: The Orthodox?

SCHWEID: Well, I would say that the Orthodox is, of course, the point of departure — here it represents historical Judaism. But when we accept the Orthodox norm as a point of departure we put pressure on the Orthodox norm to change itself so that the whole Jewish people should be able to live according to it. And I think that we have to put this heavy pressure so that the norm should be adequate.

HARVEY: Why should it be necessary for the whole Jewish people to live in accordance with the Orthodox norm? A secularist Jew could very well say that I understand that there is a *halakhic* definition of Judaism and that is very fine. It happens to be that most of the Jews in the world today do not observe the *halakhah*, and therefore that definition doesn't speak to me as far as I'm concerned; I am a Jew because I feel I'm a Jew.

SCHWEID: It seems as if you are reformulating the problem of the relations between the secular dimension and the religious dimension within Jewish culture, while referring to the political facet of this problem. There is of course a possibility that a Jewish secularist will say: 'I do not want to have any connection to this religious norm;' however, by so saying he dissected himself completely from Jewish tradition.

HARVEY: But then he is in the majority.

PELI: What constitutes a majority when talking about a national consensus?

SCHWEID: I am not sure, but if Dr. Harvey is correct that the majority of Jews do not care, then we have lost the struggle because we have no basis for a consensus based on Jewish tradition and history.

HARVEY: Personally as a Jew who is observant of the *halakhah* I hope that we will win the struggle for *halakhic* Judaism. But I think that a secularist Jew could very well have said: 'You have lost the battle for the *halakhah*, but we are going to win a greater battle by creating a Jewish culture in the land of Israel, which will be audacious and open new horizons to the Jewish people.'

SCHWEID: I am afraid it is not going to work. Secularism, secular culture, and secular education become problematic to themselves. If I were to believe that the secularist view can leave one freely and happily, and even spiritually, then I wouldn't say anything at all. But this is, as experience proved to us, impossible.

PELI: Being on the scene for the last few decades, do you see this kind of dissatisfaction with secularism among secularists on the rise, or is it on the decline?

SCHWEID: I think that it is on the rise.