

Post-Holocaust American Judaism and the Jewish Renewal Movement

Scott Kommel Meyers

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David Shneer, Honors Thesis Advisor

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DO NOT CIRCULATE

List of Abbreviations

Works by Arthur Green

- HS*** *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era: The Religious Writings of Hillel Zeitlin*
RJ *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition*

Works by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

- DV*** *Davening: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Prayer*
FS *The First Step: A Guide for the New Jewish Spirit*
HF *Wrapped in a Holy Flame: Teachings and Tales of the Hasidic Masters*
HR “Higher Regions.” *Reb Zalman Teaches*
JWF *Jewish with Feeling: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Practice.*
ML *My Life in Jewish Renewal: A Memoir*
PS *Paradigm Shift.*

Post-Holocaust American Judaism and the Jewish Renewal Movement

The Jewish Renewal movement is perhaps best characterized by its apparent contradictions: its eclectic blend of Hasidic mysticism and radical egalitarianism, its messianic utopianism alongside its passionate belief in the separation of religion and state. The theology of the Jewish Renewal movement engages in what can be termed a “dialectic of *Haskala*,” a play on the Frankfurt School’s diagnosis of the crisis of modernity in their influential *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Traditional Judaism and the Enlightenment dialectically transform and negate each other. Similarly, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of Jewish Renewal, calls for “spiritual democracy,” in which radical Enlightenment ideas offer a corrective to parochial Hasidism, asserting the spiritual and political equality of all people, regardless of religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation (*FS* 15). Schachter-Shalomi's own autobiography captures this tension perfectly: “My father was a hasid who developed a great interest in Western ways and ideas. He remained a devout Jew (he taught me to pray), but he also steered my education toward a pluralistic path-- I went to yeshiva and at the same time attended a leftist Zionist high school where I learned Latin and modern Hebrew. I danced the hora with Marxist Zionists also celebrated the farewell to the Sabbath with Orthodox anti-Zionists” (*FS* 1).

First, I will begin with a brief history of Jewish Renewal. Jewish Renewal is a small yet influential movement in contemporary American Judaism. Observers agree that the Jewish Renewal movement has exerted “an influence on American Judaism vastly out of proportion to its actual numbers” (Kaplan 267). As the founding generation of Jewish Renewal leaders are entering their twilight years, there is an

increasing willingness to acknowledge their contributions to mainstream denominations. At the 80th birthday celebration of Rabbi Arthur Waskow, an activist-scholar associated with the Jewish Renewal movement, Reform rabbi David Saperstein (named America's most influential rabbi by *Newsweek* in 2009) said of Waskow, "he has had a profound impact on the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements and it is time — and then some — that he be acknowledged" ("Video"). The hesitancy to recognize the contributions of the Jewish Renewal movement to American Judaism may be partially political; Jewish Renewal is associated with 1960s counterculture and protest politics (e.g. its support of drug use to attain spiritual experience, its "questionable" Israel politics, radical environmentalism, racial justice advocacy, anti-war activism) which are not always well received in the American mainstream, Jewish or otherwise.

Jewish Renewal emerged from the *havurah* movement of the late 1960's (Kaplan 267). A *havurah* (translation: "fellowship") is a gender egalitarian, non-denominational collective of Jewish practitioners that emphasize a mystical interpretation of Judaism and place importance on heartfelt prayer (Kaplan 266). Schachter-Shalomi and Rabbi Arthur Green, another important leader in Jewish Renewal, were among the founding members of the first *havurah* in 1967, Havurat Shalom in Cambridge, Massachusetts (*HS* xix). *Havurot* were created by young Jewish clergy and social activists to fill a perceived vacuum of spirituality in the mainstream denominations of American Judaism. The Reform and Conservative movements, the dominant forms of American Judaism, consciously broke with religious mysticism as an outmoded superstition in their embrace of rational, Enlightenment values. A diminishing of spirituality was the unintended consequence of eliminating mysticism from the Jewish-American curriculum; "it is almost universally agreed that young American Jews found their religious education to be incredibly uninspiring" (Kaplan 263). Although Jewish Renewal and the

havurah movement share many of the same participants and “much of their basic thinking is complementary if not identical,” the two movements began to diverge in the early 1980s (Kaplan 269). Their differences mostly revolved around the issue of leadership, when Jewish Renewal opted for charismatic leaders (e.g. Schachter-Shalomi, Shlomo Carlebach, Waskow, etc.) while the *havurah* movement preferred to remain closer to the egalitarian spirit of decentralized power and consensus driven decision-making (Kaplan 269).

The innovation of the *havurah* movement, which was inherited by Jewish Renewal, was that Judaism did not have to abandon mysticism to embrace the rational, democratic values of the Enlightenment. In many ways, this insight resembles the earlier neo-Hasidism of Y.L. Peretz, S. Ansky, and Martin Buber, who sought “to describe Hasidism as a humanistic, philosophical movement, seeking social justice and benefiting the simple and ignorant as they told folktales and rejoiced in their worship of God” (YIVO). This interpretation of Hasidism appealed to spiritually hungry Jewish-Americans, many of whom did not possess a high degree of Hebrew literacy or Jewish learning. The life work of Schachter-Shalomi and his colleagues has been to reinject mystical experience into Judaism, which Dana Evan Kaplan has called an effort to “respiritualize Judaism” (Kaplan 264). In Schachter-Shalomi’s words “Judaism today is oververbalized and underexperienced” (Kaplan 259).

Schachter-Shalomi, himself a refugee from Nazi-occupied Europe who left on one of the last boats from Marseilles, France, understood that many important teachers of Jewish spirituality had been killed during the war, and that he was figuratively among “the last of the Mohicans of pre-Holocaust Jewish mysticism” (*JWF* xvi). Owing to a constellation of influences, including the writings of wartime neo-Hasidic thinker Hillel Zeitlin, Schachter-Shalomi and his colleagues sought to create a new “Yavneh,” an institution that could rebuild Jewish learning and spirituality after the Holocaust, much like

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai had done at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple (*HS* xix).

Hillel Zeitlin, a Chabad Hasid who came under the influence of the *Haskalah* (“Jewish Enlightenment”) while living in Warsaw during the early 20th century, sought to build a neo-Hasidic community called “Yavneh” that could fuse lofty Jewish mysticism with universal social justice concerns. Zeitlin, who died wearing tefillin and clutching the Zohar on a forced march to Treblinka in 1942, never lived to see his dream of Yavneh come to fruition (*HS* 32).

Schachter-Shalomi and Green see their efforts as a continuation of Zeitlin’s project.

Schachter-Shalomi writes, “Arthur Green gathered another kind of Yavneh in Cambridge and founded the matrix, the first of many *havurot*, Havurat Shalom. It too was another fractal, a gestalting of Zeitlin’s Yavneh. I was fortunate to be able to participate in that amazing first year...the emergence of Jewish Renewal since that time is deeply connected to what happened there, as it is to Zeitlin’s dreams of Yavneh” (*HS* xix).

Beyond participating in *havurot*, Schachter-Shalomi went on to found his own organization in Philadelphia, the *B’nai Or* Religious Fellowship (*b’nai or*: “children of light” or “sons of light”) (*ML* 181). Eager to leave the conservative atmosphere of Winnipeg, where he had been teaching at the University of Manitoba, Schachter-Shalomi became interested in moving to Philadelphia after Green started teaching Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in the mid-1970s (*ML* 181). In 1975, Schachter-Shalomi enthusiastically accepted a professorship at Temple University and moved to Philadelphia (*ML* 182). Philadelphia’s Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where eventually Schachter-Shalomi was also on faculty and Green served as president, became a “vanguard of the neo-hasidic movement that is usually labeled under the moniker of Jewish Renewal” (Magid 57). With its progressive Jewish community, Philadelphia proved to be fertile soil for Schachter-Shalomi to “train

rabbis and other leaders who would bring Jewish Renewal into the world” (*ML* 183).

B’nai Or created an urban retreat center in a house on Emblem Street in Philadelphia, where devoted practitioners lived and others visited to study and pray (Kaplan 275). In 1985, members of *B’nai Or* voted to change the organization’s name to *P’nai Or* (“Faces of Light”), as the word *b’nai* (trans: “sons of”) felt exclusionary to the women participants (Kaplan 278). Politically active with humanistic sensibilities, many remarked that *P’nai Or* resembled Reconstructionism in its orientation, in that it presented “Judaism as a human-made folk culture” (Kaplan 278). It is probably no coincidence that several major leaders of the Jewish Renewal movement (e.g. Green, Schachter-Shalomi, Waskow) have held teaching or administrative positions at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. In his essay “Neo-Hasidism and Reconstructionism,” Schachter-Shalomi acknowledges his intellectual debt to the Reconstructionist movement (*PS* 131).

In 1995, *P’nai Or* merged with the Shalom Center, another organization of Jewish spiritual progressives founded by Arthur Waskow, to form ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal (Kaplan 270). ALEPH is a core institution for what is today known as the Jewish Renewal movement, and it runs a campusless seminary that trains rabbis, pastors, and cantors. Students in the ALEPH program participate in annual retreats, teleconference learning, and relationships with a personal mentor, often while pursuing an advanced degree in Jewish Studies at an accredited university (Aleph.org). The curriculum at ALEPH is deeply informed by liberal values and a Hasidic interpretation of kabbalah.

Through meditation and prayer techniques practitioners in Jewish Renewal are initiated into spiritual experience. Following Jonathan Garb, a leading scholar of modern Jewish mysticism, the Jewish Renewal movement focuses on “mystical techniques and ecstasy, sometimes even as an alternative to halakhic Judaism” (Garb 80). While respect for halakhic liturgy is maintained (at least outwardly), there

is an expressed recognition that “true prayer is the bursting forth of the soul to God” and that one should pray to God in the language that one feels the most comfortable in (*DV* xi). In other words, true prayer exceeds the boundaries of formulaic liturgy. Such ideas have their antecedents into the antinomian streams of Hasidism, perhaps most obviously in Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (A. Kaplan 309).

Jewish Renewal is spiritually eclectic, as demonstrated by its “readiness to absorb non-Jewish traditions as a source of mystical inspiration” (Garb 80). Schachter-Shalomi’s close ties with Buddhist, Sufi, and Native American reflect this, and at any given Jewish Renewal service one may encounter a number of practices that have a non-Jewish origin (Fishman 182). “While there are differences between Jewish and non-Jewish approaches to mysticism in specific methods, observances, and rituals,” Schachter-Shalomi writes, “there are no differences in the impact of the experiences themselves. When it comes to what I call the ‘heart-stuff,’ all approaches overlap” (*FS* 10). Later on, I will examine the unique tension between Jewish and non-Jewish influences within Schachter-Shalomi’s movement.

Next, I will give a brief literature review of academic research relating to the Jewish Renewal movement. As Jewish Renewal is a relatively recent religious movement, there is a limited body of academic literature that addresses it. Important examples of scholarly work concerning Jewish Renewal include Shaul Magid’s *American Post Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Post Ethnic Society* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2013), Jonathan Garb’s *The Chosen Will Become Herds: Studies in Twentieth-Century Kabbalah* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), and Dana Evan Kaplan’s *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009).

In *American Post-Judaism*, Magid undertakes the first ever book-length scholarly analysis of the Jewish Renewal movement. As a participant-observer within the Jewish Renewal movement for the

last several decades, Magid is able to write with a rare level of detail about the movement and its leaders. Nonetheless, he vigilantly maintains a critical lens and connects his writing about Jewish Renewal to broader issues within the field of Jewish/Religious Studies. Magid's basic assertion is that the Jewish Renewal movement was pathbreaking in its anticipation of the sweeping changes that American Judaism is currently undergoing, i.e. new notions of Jewish peoplehood and a shifting relationship to the Holocaust and the state of Israel. He sees Jewish Renewal as a response to "postethnic America" (a term borrowed from the historian David Hollinger) in which "the ethnic bond is broken or dissolves into a multi-ethnic/multi-racial mix" (Magid 1). Despite Magid's insistence on the idea of a postethnic America, I seek to explain Jewish Renewal as a response to the crisis of modernity after the Holocaust.

In *The Chosen Will Become Herds*, Jonathan Garb gives a thorough analysis of the development of recent Jewish mysticism and its political implications for the state of Israel and the global Jewish community. Garb offers a persuasive explanation for the resurgence of religion despite the best efforts of Western secular society: "The erosion of the rationalist narrative facilitated the emergence of a variety of religious phenomena that did not obey the dictates of rationality" (Garb 101). I endorse Garb's assertion that a crisis in the rationalist, Enlightenment metanarrative is driving the renewed vigor of religion in the last several decades. I also agree with his observation that information technology and transnational population flow help to create a "global village" that is slowly dissolving "barriers between regions and religions" (Garb 6). While Garb is an Israeli scholar who focuses mostly on his home country, he makes several important references to Jewish Renewal leaders within the United States. He calls Schachter-Shalomi "an outstanding figure of the neo-Hasidic movement" and discusses his relationship to Buddhism and the New Age (Garb 79). Shlomo Carlebach receives an extended

treatment as his influence was felt in Israel perhaps even more than it was in the United States. Garb places Jewish Renewal and Neo-Hasidism within the context of other major religious trends, such as New Age spirituality and religious Zionism, arguing they are various responses to the weakening of the Enlightenment narrative in the wake of the World Wars.

In *Contemporary American Judaism*, Dana Evan Kaplan offers a balanced and comprehensive history of American Judaism since 1945. Jewish Renewal leaders such as Schachter-Shalomi, Waskow, and Carlebach are featured prominently in Kaplan's book, particularly in the chapters "The Reengagement with Spirituality," "Radical Responses to the Suburban Experience," and "The Popularization of Jewish Mystical Outreach." Not only does Kaplan describe Judaism in postwar America, but he depicts a Judaism that is uniquely American. Among other things, Kaplan argues that the turbulence of the 1960s and dissatisfaction with suburban materialistic values led many Jewish-Americans to seek refuge in emerging subcultures, notably within Jewish Renewal and the *baal teshuva* movement (newly Orthodox Jews). Kaplan writes "Jewish Renewal and the baal teshuva movement thus differed enormously in the type of individual who was attracted to them...[but] what they shared in common was that both saw the suburban Judaism of their youth as superficial and lacking in spirituality" (Kaplan 266). He claims that Jewish Renewal is an effort to "respiritualize" American Judaism, an assessment that I argue in favor of in the following pages (Kaplan 264).

The Theology of Jewish Renewal

Scholars have described the Jewish Renewal movement, and the kabbalistic theology it emerges from, as "panentheistic" (Magid 99). According to the Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, panentheism is a theological view that says "the world exists in God (all reality is part of the being of God); but God is not exhausted by world; the divine is both transcendent and immanent" (Bowker

730). As kabbalists, the rabbis of Jewish Renewal reckon God's transcendence as *ein sof* (אין סוף, “infinity”) and God's immanence as *shekhinah* (שכינה, “Divine Presence”). Even more radically, God as *ein sof* is often interpreted as *ein* (אין, “nothingness”). Thus, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi is able to say with pious sincerity that “if there is a God, He doesn't exist” (Rubenstein 230). In his book “Radical Judaism”, the Jewish Renewal theologian and philosopher Arthur Green recalls questioning his mentor Abraham Joshua Heschel about radical theology, a movement that speaks of “the death of God.” Heschel said, “Radical theology is very important...but it has to begin with the teachings of the later Hasidic masters” (*RJ* 14). Undoubtedly, the Jewish Renewal movement is neo-Hasidic, having extracted orthodox Hasidism into a modern American context. But being born out of the 1960's American counter-culture, the Jewish Renewal movement is also influenced by imported Eastern religions, in particular American Buddhism (Magid 70). The following section will trace the theological inheritance of the Jewish Renewal movement, both as it is received through neo-Hasidism and also the more recent influence of American Buddhism.

Hasidism descends from a lineage of Jewish mysticism referred to as the kabbalah. The kabbalistic tradition began in thirteenth century Spain and Southern France, and its most important text is the Zohar (Scholem 156). Written in medieval Aramaic, the Zohar takes place in 2nd century Palestine, where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai wanders around the Galilee and partakes in mystical conversations with his companions. Ostensibly their mystical conversations revolve around the Torah, but indeed the Torah is only a jumping off point for their creative imaginations (Matt 7). Unselfconsciously, the rabbis in the Zohar (and later kabbalists), radically reinterpret the Torah to substantiate their own mystical claims. For instance, the first words of Genesis are not read as “In the beginning, God created...” (בראשית ברא אלהים). Instead, the Zohar gives its own interpretation: “With

beginning, the unknown concealed one created the palace, a palace called God. The secret is: 'With beginning, ____ created God'" (Matt 53). Through a creative rereading of Genesis, God (אלהים, Elohim) becomes the object and not the subject of creation. The implied subject of creation is the ineffable *ein sof* ("infinity") which had to conceal itself to make room for finitude. In the Zohar's kabbalistic theology, creation is revelation.

The circulation of kabbalistic texts was mainly restricted to religious elites in the western Mediterranean until 1492, when Spain expelled its Jewish population (Scholem 244). Bringing the kabbalah with them, many of those exiled Jews relocated to the eastern Mediterranean where they joined pre-existing Jewish communities (Matt 12). Notably, the Spanish expulsion was indirectly responsible for the next flowering of Jewish mysticism in 16th century Ottoman-controlled Palestine (Matt 13). At that time, a group of Spanish Jewish exiles formed a mystical fraternity in Safed, near the Galilee, the original setting of the Zohar. It was in Safed that several rabbis began to offer a novel interpretation of kabbalah. Two outstanding figures among them are Rabbi Moses Cordovero and Rabbi Isaac Luria. Cordovero's masterful *Pardes Rimonim* ("The Pomegranate Orchard") synthesized kabbalah from the previous three centuries. His liturgical poem *Lekha Dodi* ("Come my beloved") is still sung in synagogues throughout the world every Friday night (Matt 13). However, it was Cordovero's student, Isaac Luria, who exerted the most profound influence on later Jewish mysticism (Matt 14). Expanding on the Zoharic theme of creation from nothingness, Luria claimed that when primordial infinity (אין סוף, "ein sof") contracted within itself to form a void (אין, "ein"), a cosmic catastrophe transpired. The light of infinity filled vessels that God made within the void, but the light was too intense and the vessels shattered violently, creating the broken world we now inhabit. Luria articulated a complex system of ten *sefirot* ("emanations") composed of divine light mixed with broken

vessels. Scholars such as Gershom Scholem have persuasively argued that Lurianic myth likely reflects a tragic sense of brokenness that Spanish Jewish exiles felt after being forced to leave Spain, which they in turn projected onto the cosmos (Scholem 244).

Luria's *sefirot* have different qualities, such as *Chesed* (חסד, "Love"), *Gevurah* (גבורה, "Strength"), and *Shekhina* (שכינה, "Divine Feminine"). The broken *sefirot* in the mystical body of God are rectified through a Jew's performance of *mitzvot* (מצוות, "commandments") with the correct *kavvanah* (כוונה, "intention"). The sparks of light trapped within the emanations of God can be returned to their divine source, effecting a healing within the cosmos. Luria's theological schema is particularly relevant for my thesis in light of Schachter-Shalomi's belief, reflective of a larger trend within Post-Holocaust American Judaism, that the Earth is a shattered emanation of God in need of healing through the performance of *mitzvot*, uniquely construed (*JWF* 180).

Lurianic kabbalah underwent widespread popularization amongst *Ashkenazim* (Yiddish/German speaking Jews) with the development of Hasidism in Eastern Europe during the 18th century (Scholem 325). The founder of Hasidism was Israel Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name"), a charismatic folk healer and mystic. Within a few generations of the Baal Shem Tov's death, his movement had overtaken much of Eastern European Jewry (Scholem 324). Schachter-Shalomi puts Hasidism's kabbalistic lineage more succinctly, "the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov are based on the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, which are based on the teachings of the Zohar" (*PS* 146). Not content to allow the kabbalah to remain confined to circles of religious elites, the Baal Shem Tov sought to popularize the kabbalah and make its teachings accessible to common Eastern European Jews, many of whom were illiterate. Arthur Green writes that "the ensuing generations of Hasidic preachers, themselves raised in the kabbalistic tradition, sought to strip it of what they saw as burdensome complexity and turn

directly to the task of describing the experience of intimacy with God” (*RJ* 67). Thus, the esoteric panentheism of Lurianic Kabbalah was made accessible in the popular teachings of Hasidism. Whereas the Lurianic kabbalah of the Safed School demanded grueling study of arcane treatises, Hasidism simply asked Jews to pray not merely out of obligation, but also with passionate mystical intentions.

Hasidism streamlined the complex Lurianic cosmology for mass consumption. In this vein, Gershom Scholem writes that Hasidism represents “an attempt to preserve those elements of kabbalism capable of evoking a popular response” (Scholem 329). The ornate sefirotic “tree of life” emanating from God's nothingness is reduced to a dialectic between divine being and nothingness. Hasidism “creates a theology that understands God as an eternal dialectical dance between presence and transcendence, between the revealed and mysterious” (Green 69). Divine being and nothingness are not merely intellectual concepts, but rather they deeply inform a Hasidic Jew's life and death. Consider the following Hasidic tale told by Martin Buber about the dying Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (“The Rav” and founder of the Chabad Lubavitch branch of Hasidism): “On a day shortly before his death, the Rav asked his grandson: ‘Do you see anything?’ The boy looked at him in astonishment. Then the Rav said: ‘All I can still see is the divine nothingness which gives life to the world’” (Buber 271). The dying rabbi communicates his mystical knowledge to his grandson, not surprising since Hasidism places great emphasis on making its teachings accessible to common folk and children, unlike Luria and the erudite Safed mystics. While Lurianic Kabbalah is filled with fairytale-like allegories that resonate deeply with children (e.g. God scattered sparks of light throughout the world that are waiting to be redeemed), it was not until Hasidism that these mystical tales, and the radical theology they contained, were deemed fit for consumption beyond insulated circles of rabbinic elite.

Neo-Hasidism, American Counter-Culture, and Eastern Religion

The major founders of the Jewish Renewal movement, R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and R. Shlomo Carlebach, received their religious education from the Chabad school of Hasidism. Chabad is characterized by its combination of rigorous Lithuanian-style Talmudic study with the spiritual intensity of Hasidism (Fishkoff 14). After its leadership fled Europe for America, Chabad decided on a new means of arousing messianic redemption in a post-Holocaust world—encouraging non-religious Jews to perform more *mitzvot*. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late leader of Chabad, pioneered religious outreach campaigns in the 1950s that were motivated by his desire to revive a global Jewish community nearly eradicated in the Holocaust (Fishkoff 49). Chabad is unique among Hasidic sects for its emphasis on religious outreach towards non-practicing Jews. For adherents of Chabad, any *mitzvah* performed by a Jew has cosmic significance and could be “the key event that tips the scales of universal goodness and ushers in the Messianic Age” (Fishkoff 49). Today, Chabad is one of the world’s most well-developed and influential Jewish organizations, with thousands of official centers scattered across the globe and in virtually every city where Jews reside (Fishkoff 12). However, in the late 1950's the Chabad organizational apparatus was only in its nascent stages, and Schachter-Shalomi and Carlebach were amongst their first rabbinic graduates to be tasked with performing religious outreach on college campuses (Magid 50).

As their rabbinic careers continued into the 1960's, Schachter-Shalomi and Carlebach became increasingly exposed to young Jews who were abandoning Judaism for Eastern contemplative practices, such as Buddhist meditation, yoga, and tai chi. According to several studies, Jews constitute a significant portion of non-Asian American practitioners of Buddhism (Gez 52). Observing the attraction of Jewish spiritual seekers to Eastern religion, Carlebach and Schachter-Shalomi did not appear to be overly troubled by the large number of Jewish Buddhists and Jewish yogis they encountered. Rather, quite the

opposite was the case. Schachter-Shalomi writes, “sometimes paths are blocked for us and others are open. Once Reb Shlomo Carlebach...pointed out that for many Jews after the Holocaust, the path to Judaism was blocked. Many Jews could not get close to God until they first took a detour through Eastern religions” (*HF* 31). The reason the path to Judaism was blocked, according to Carlebach, was that after the Holocaust Jewish teachers had become too angry, broken, and “afflicted with the taint of death” (*ML* 179). His comment about the “taint of death” is a reference to Jewish ritual purity laws that prohibit *kohanim* (“priests”) from sustained contact with dead bodies (*ML* 179). Carlebach continues, “then God in his great mercy sent us people from the Far East, people who were not contaminated by the Holocaust, to teach us about God in the way we could let into our hearts” (*ML* 179). Carlebach's investment in Eastern religion and American counter-culture was so deep that at one point he claimed that if his rabbi, Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Chabad, attended Woodstock in the summer of '69 and met Swami Datchidanada, a great *tikkun* (“cosmic healing”) would have occurred (Garb 80).

While quite happy to absorb the wisdom of Eastern religion, Schachter-Shalomi and Carlebach also felt an urgent need to share the mystical teachings of Judaism in order to return young Jews to their ancestral religion. Steeped in the mystical tradition of Chabad Hasidism, they were well prepared to make a Jewish reply to Buddhism and other Eastern religions becoming popular amongst American Jews during the 1960's. For his part, Schachter-Shalomi emphasizes the affinity between kabbalistic nothingness and Buddhist emptiness (Sanskrit: “*shunyata*”). In Buddhism, because all phenomena are interdependent and impermanent, everything is said to be empty of substantial existence (Garfield 51). In the kabbalah, since all things emanate from the nothingness of God, nothing is said to truly exist except God (Schneerson 72). Rodger Kamenetz, present at a meeting between Schachter-Shalomi and the Dalai Lama, writes "as the Dalai Lama carefully phrased it, there is 'a point of similarity' between the

kabbalistic ain sof and the Buddhist shunyata. It would be exaggerating to say they are identical. The kabbalistic approach says that God is No Thing. But it still affirms an absolute existence-- even if ineffable. In the Buddhist approach, all existence is empty because none of it has inherent reality, or absolute reality in itself” (Kamenetz 86). By demonstrating that Judaism has mystical teachings on par with Buddhism, Carlebach and Schachter-Shalomi invited Jews immersed in 1960s American counterculture to return to Jewish practice. For many young Jews, the path of Buddhism unintentionally led them to Jewish mysticism, a “detour” desperately needed in a post-Holocaust world.

Post-Holocaust American Judaism and the Jewish Renewal Movement

Yet even before the Holocaust, freethinking Hasids have had a sustained interest in the Enlightenment and Eastern religions, most notably in the case of Hillel Zeitlin and his milieu in interwar Warsaw (*HS* 11). Schachter-Shalomi and Green both regard Zeitlin (1871-1942) as a major predecessor for the Jewish Renewal movement. Schachter-Shalomi describes Zeitlin as a “saintly and martyred teacher” whose mix of modern thought and Chabad-style Hasidism parallels Jewish Renewal (*HS* xix). In an article published in the *Forward*, Green writes that Zeitlin was “the leading neo-Hasidic thinker in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, [who] was for Hebrew and Yiddish-reading Jews what Martin Buber was for their more westernized German-reading brethren: the person who rendered the passionate religious life of Hasidism accessible to non-Orthodox Jews.” (Forward 2012). Green's comparison of Zeitlin to Buber is interesting because it points to a possible affinity between Jewish Renewal and an important generation of radical 20th century German-Jewish thinkers, of whom Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, and Walter Benjamin are key figures. Not unlike Zeitlin and his neo-Hasidic milieu in Warsaw, their German contemporaries also articulated an eclectic blend of Jewish messianism and secular, revolutionary utopianism (Lowy 14).

Buber was a left-wing cultural Zionist who was famous for his work in existentialism and introducing Hasidism to non-Orthodox Jews. His close friend Franz Rosenzweig founded the Freies Jüdische Lehrhaus, an adult Jewish educational institute in Frankfurt, which attracted many important Jewish intellectuals, and where Buber also assumed teaching responsibilities (Jay 89). Buber found eager students among some members of the Frankfurt School, including Leo Lowenthal and Erich Fromm, whereas Rosenzweig exerted an important influence on a young Walter Benjamin. (Handelman 17) (Jay 200).

Much scholarly writing has commented upon the elements of Jewish thought present within the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, and there is likely some merit to the frequent assertion that Critical Theory contains a “masked theology” (Habermas 4). Similar to Zeitlin, whom Schachter-Shalomi refers to as “the mystic proletarian,” the Frankfurt School thinkers put forth their own experimental blend of secular utopianism and Jewish messianism (*HF* 279) (Lowy 15). Walter Benjamin’s inimitable messianic Marxism is perhaps the most outstanding example of this phenomenon. Benjamin wrote that “in the idea of classless society, Marx secularized the idea of a messianic time. And that was a good thing” (Benjamin 401). Like the notion of a messianic era, Marx’s classless society acts as transcendent critique of society. In this vein, Theodor Adorno, a longtime leader of the Frankfurt School, claimed “the only philosophy which can be practiced responsibly in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption;” a remark that could equally describe utopian aspects of both Judaism and Marxism (Adorno 153).

In their landmark essay “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer seek to undermine the dominance of natural science within modern thinking. They write, “for the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers...is illusion; modern positivism

consigns it to poetry” (Horkheimer 4). Society undergoes “atomization” and humans begin to operate according the “natural” laws of the free market (Lukacs 91). The market, in turn, treats notions like social welfare and ecological integrity as romantic fictions that have no place in the “real” world. The zeal for rational calculation leads to the disenchantment of world, as morals lose their metaphysical underpinning and give way to an ethic of rational self-interest. Increasingly, things are seen in the cold metallic light of industrial civilization. Such is the deep pessimism of the Frankfurt School, a collective of mostly Jewish-German philosophers who first rose to prominence while working in exile during WWII.

Further problematizing the successes of the Enlightenment are the massive body counts of the world wars, “assembly line” genocide, and the invention of the atomic bomb. Not only did the advance of human knowledge fail to prevent the catastrophes of the 20th century, scientific knowledge in fact made those catastrophes possible. It is not simply that humans have access to a more efficient means of barbarism, but rather the tendency towards violence is strengthened by a scientific worldview that turns lives into things. Adorno and Horkheimer write, “knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters” (Horkheimer 2). The same century which saw man walk on the moon was the one that “generated” more dead soldiers, more murdered noncombatants, more torture, and more death from hunger than was ever thought possible (Habermas 45).

The Frankfurt School thinkers posit a mythic quality to the Enlightenment and an enlightened quality to myth. Like science, myths seek to “narrate, record, [and] explain,” albeit with a less sophisticated intellectual method (Horkheimer 5). Patriarchal religion in particular anticipates the Enlightenment with its valorization of spirit over matter and man over nature (women are conflated with nature in the patriarchal worldview). The estrangement from nature in patriarchal religion eventually gives

rise to the Enlightenment; “in their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man’s likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command” (Horkheimer 6). The Enlightenment’s scientific gaze only knows what it can predict and control. All else is fiction.

The Enlightenment’s credo that the spread of secular reason and science would guide human society into a universal and permanent peace found its greatest refutation in the fallout of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and in the crematoria of Nazi concentration camps. Schachter-Shalomi identifies both the Holocaust and looming threat of nuclear warfare as events that demand “entirely new ways of thinking, theological as well as practical” (*JWF* 150). It becomes unmistakable that “rationality,” as construed by the old paradigm, is incapable of offering a code of ethics to guide society. Even if nuclear holocaust seems less likely after the end of the Cold War, the catastrophe of human-caused climate change gives urgency to the need for a new paradigm. Schachter-Shalomi writes, “today it seems that this planeticide may not happen all at once, but little by little. This is no more comforting” (*JWF* 151).

The decline of the Enlightenment’s philosophical prestige results in a resurgence of religion. In the language of Critical Theory, Habermas writes that “the socio-psychological costs of a rationalization restricted to cognitive-instrumental dimension [i.e. the human costs of transforming the worker into a commodity] -- costs externalized by society and shifted to individuals-- appear in different guises, ranging from clinically treated mental illnesses through neuroses, educational and motivational problems, to the protest actions of aesthetically inspired countercultures, [and] religious youth sects” (Habermas 369). Indeed, the Jewish Renewal movement is an outgrowth of 1960s *havurot*, which were, following Habermas, countercultural religious youth groups inspired by a neo-Hasidic aesthetic and ethos. Samuel H. Dresner names the “exhaustion of modernity” as responsible for the return of religion, that is, “the

failure first of technology and then of ‘culture’ (literature--art--music) as substitutes for religion” (Heschel 5). The increased popularity of Hasidism amongst non-orthodox Jews, romantically depicted as an alternative to the materialistic values of capitalism, can thus be explained by the failure of modernity to produce systems of meaning durable enough to withstand the alienating effects of industrial capitalism.

If the Frankfurt School thinkers diagnosed the illness of modernity as the disenchantment of the world due to rampant commodification, the rabbis of Jewish Renewal audaciously prescribe a cure. Their prescription is the respiritualization of the world through the performance of *mitzvot*, uniquely construed. By sanctifying the world through *mitzvot*, the rabbis of Jewish Renewal resist the commodification intrinsic to industrial society. Yet by deferring to science and the Enlightenment on important issues like ecology and governance, the Jewish Renewal movement seeks to avoid the pitfalls of reactionary religion, such as authoritarian theocracy or scientific denialism.

In language that resonates deeply with the Critical Theory, Schachter-Shalomi writes that the alienation of modern life is caused by an excess of “commodity time,” which operates according to “the demands of running an efficient marketplace” (*JWF* 36). Schachter-Shalomi suggests that the *mitzvah* of Shabbat can serve as an antidote to the constant commodification of time and labor. Shabbat, he writes, is “a way of living more in tune with our own deepest needs--well as those of our family and [our] entire community” (*JWF* 37). Furthermore, Schachter-Shalomi observes that Shabbat can connect us to the primordial “dawn of creation” when God created the world in six days and on the the seventh day “‘*shavat va-yinafash*, God rested and was refreshed’ (Exodus 31:17)” (*JWF* 38). The periodic cessation of labor on Shabbat is an *imitatio Dei*; “We see God laboring and recognize and honor the value of labor. And we witness God ceasing all work and taking time to rest and re-ensoul”

(*JWF* 38). Observance of Shabbat is, as the theorist of religion Mircea Eliade puts it, “primordial mythical time made present...[it] represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, ‘in the beginning’” (Eliade 68). Myth is still necessary in the modern world, Schachter-Shalomi asserts, because when “man [is] cut off from vital myths [he] is devoid of life and energy” (Magid 182). Shabbat sanctifies the rhythm of the calendar week by injecting spiritual life into the otherwise soulless world of commodity.

Schachter-Shalomi states the need to creatively reread Jewish law in the service of universal redemption. For instance, in his discussion of the commandment to keep Shabbat, the day of rest becomes not just a God-given commandment but also the inalienable right of workers to enjoy a day off once a week (Schachter-Shalomi 73). The *shmitah*, the sabbath year in which “the Earth has complete rest” and all debts are forgiven, is both a *mitzvah* and also a radical *tikkun* for the destructiveness of postindustrial society (*JWF* 156). Schachter-Shalomi writes “in this postindustrial world we need to make a conscious decision to define times in which we will try to move in tandem with the cycles of mother nature. Otherwise we will spend all our days fighting her” (*JWF* 38). For Schachter-Shalomi, the organic time of the Jewish calendar is a way for inhabitants of postindustrial society to move with the cycles of mother nature. In his book *Paradigm Shift*, Schachter-Shalomi writes that there was once a time when “our economy took a weekly Sabbath. Now we push merchandise 7 days a week and 24 hours a day. Such a treatment of our financial lifeblood leads to fevers. Even regarding the economy we need to think organically” (*PS* 293).

Organic time is a crucial concept for Schachter-Shalomi, reflecting his strongly held environmentalist commitments. He says “more than I want to talk about *avodat hashem*, serving God, I want to talk about serving the Earth. In fact we can find places in Torah where the two imperatives

clearly merge” (*JWF* 152). While retaining Jewish praxis, Schachter-Shalomi accords ultimate concern to the Earth and its well-being, otherwise he fears soon there may no longer be a world to practice Judaism in. Creatively rereading kabbalistic theology, Schachter-Shalomi considers the Earth a shattered emanation of God, in need of rectification via the performance of *mizvot*, particularly those with environmentalist applications (*JWF* 180). Special attention is given to the *Shabbat*, during which production entirely ceases every seven days, and the *Shmitah*, when “the Earth shall have complete rest” every seven years. The *Shabbat* and the *Shmitah* are critical interruptions of “commodity time” with revitalizing “organic time,” healing the body, soul, and Earth. Although the *Shmitah* year was originally practiced only in the “Land of Israel,” Schachter-Shalomi asks “how can we expand our understanding of ‘the Land’ to include the planet that all faiths share?” (*JWF* 156) Schachter-Shalomi is not without precedent in extending commandments related to the Land of Israel to other lands. His Chabad rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, declared that the task for “the last generation of the exile and the first generation of the redemption” was “to make the land of other nations into the land of Israel” (Wolfson 133). A classic Chabad motto is “Make *Eretz Israel* here,” i.e. make everywhere the Land of Israel (Garb 65).

Schachter-Shalomi applies halakhah towards universal redemption with his concept of eco-kosher, which combines Jewish dietary law with wider ecological concerns. He writes “eco-kashrut is concerned not only with the origin of the things consumed--what animal the meat came from, say, or what dishes the meat was consumed in--but also with the results of consumption, such as the environmental and human toll of our actions.” (*JWF* 158). He intellectually problematizes kashrut in the 21st century with the example of disposable dishes (*JWF* 157). Disposable plates are ideal from a halakhic perspective because “no suspicion exists that they’ve touched *trafe* food,” but from an

ecological perspective "they are disastrous" as they contribute to overflowing landfills (*JWF* 157). Rather than abandon Jewish dietary law for a universal standard of ethical food consumption (e.g. environmentally friendly, organic, fair trade, etc.) Schachter-Shalomi insists on combining Jewish law and universal ethics to form his notion of eco-kosher. This novel stance arises from his personal experience of arriving at global universality through Jewish particularity. He writes "In a world where such universalist spirituality is possible, why be Jewish? So many of my values connect me to nature, to the planet, to compassion for all living beings, that my Judaism at times feels like a confinement-- unless I begin to see that my Jewish values are the very ones that produced my universal concern" (*JWF* xvi). His spiritual experiences in Hasidism produced an interest in the mysticism of other religions, while his experience as a stateless person during the Holocaust produced his concern for displaced persons across the world, so understandably Schachter-Shalomi is loath to leave his Jewish identity behind. Schachter-Shalomi includes his Jewish identity even when he transcends it, as in his notion of eco-kosher, which is simultaneously Jewish and global in its orientation.

In order to mediate the tension between global universality and Jewish particularity, Schachter-Shalomi seizes upon the Earth photographed from outer space as the "the most potent religious icon" of our time (*JWF* 152). He claims that the image serves as a clarion call, "beckoning us to rise beyond social, cultural, or religious formulations of 'us versus them'" (*JWF* 152). The representations of mass media typically lack the uniqueness and authenticity attributed to religious icons, but the sight of the exuberant, blue Earth within the dark vacuum of space provokes awe, a kind of *mysterium tremendum* akin to religious experience. Besides its breathtaking beauty, the Earth viewed from space allows for the recognition of a global community with shared risks and rewards: "on the one hand we have the threat of Earth's destruction, whether cataclysmic or gradual; on the other, we have

the halting emergence of planetary cooperation, countries putting their heads together to control crime and disease, mediate conflict, and protect the environment. Strengthening this whole-Earth cooperation is to me the most urgent and important way we have of serving God, the holiest and most pressing invitation of our time” (*JWF* 152).



“If You Are So Universal Why Be Jewish?”

Schachter-Shalomi acknowledges the intellectual challenge of remaining Jewish while being committed to universality. He rhetorically asks "If you are so universal why be Jewish?" (390 Kaplan). In response, Schachter-Shalomi stresses the wisdom and interconnectedness of all the world's religious traditions. He asserts that Jews have the special responsibility of cultivating a vibrant Judaism so that the

DO NOT CIRCULATE

world can have a healthy spiritual ecology. Known for borrowing scientific images to describe theological concepts, Schachter-Shalomi's theology derives inspiration from the Gaia hypothesis, which claims that the Earth is one organism constituted of various interdependent ecosystems. Likewise, the various world wisdom traditions all function as distinct but interdependent organs within the organism of the global human psyche, according to Schachter-Shalomi. He wants Judaism to be a healthy organ functioning in the global spiritual body. Schachter-Shalomi calls triumphalism, the belief that a religion is superior and should triumph over all others, a “cancerous attitude” within the global spiritual body. Triumphalist religions are like cancerous cells that “want to spread themselves so much that they will consume all the other cells in order to glorify that which is *them*” (*JWF* 185). While Schachter-Shalomi's Gaian analogy for the world's religions is wholly his own, the organismic analogy has a long precedent within the kabbalah. For instance, the system of sefirot are described as the mystical organism of God (Scholem 214). Referring to the frequent usage of the first person plural within Jewish liturgy (e.g. the oft-repeated phrase “אלהינו מלך העולם”, “Our God, Ruler of the Universe”) the ArtScroll siddur, the de facto prayer book of American Orthodoxy, explains that prayers are “formulated in the plural because the Jewish people are like a single body and each one of us is like one of its organs” (119a ArtScroll). The ArtScroll siddur elaborates that “we [Jewish people] are responsible for one another, for the good or evil of every Jew affects us all” (119a ArtScroll). The following section will examine the ways in which ArtScroll's particularist sentiments regarding the Jewish spiritual body (indicative of a larger trend within Orthodox Judaism) are considered good but not good enough by the theologians of the Jewish Renewal movement.

For Schachter-Shalomi, the Judaism that is being cultivated today cannot be the same one that was nearly destroyed in the Holocaust. The old-paradigm of Judaism, with its tribal orientation, must be

reinterpreted in the service of universal redemption. Referring to the pre-Holocaust Torah, he writes, "ethically and morally, our weakness was not enough righteousness towards goyim [non-Jews]... Prior to the Holocaust, the Torah of the Jew had proliferated into the most minute levels of life. But the Jewish Torah of the goy, by and large, did not have any specific action directives. Those that it did have were ambiguous and self-contradictory. We, who were charged with responsibility of reproving our neighbor when we saw him involved in a sinful act, had excluded the goy from our reproach. The goy was given the same level of consideration as the compulsive beast: no amount of rational reeducation could help him" (*PS* 64). Schachter-Shalomi seeks to include non-Jews into Israel's lofty messianic destiny by extending the directives of Jewish law beyond the boundaries of the ethnic Jewish community. More radically, Schachter-Shalomi says the prewar Torah was not capable of fulfilling its messianic purpose because it was not universal enough. He continues, "Jews are responsible not only for themselves but also for goyim. Their responsibility as the chosen people (chosen to be responsible and to be a kingdom of priests) must work paradoxically to eliminate their own chosenness by delegation of the responsibility to others who will also become God's chosen people -- Germans, Arabs and Russians included. And here halakhah [Jewish law] enters the picture" (*PS* 65).

There are several ways in which the rabbis of Jewish Renewal attempt to widen Judaism's scope past the ethnocentric sphere. Their most basic assertion is that Judaism has some teachings that can be of value to non-Jews, and that Jewish teachers have an obligation to share them with the larger world. This sentiment is expressed in Schachter-Shalomi's belief that there are "particular strengths that Judaism has to offer the world" (*JWF* 189). In particular, he names the Jewish relationship to time, kashrut, and Torah study as precious inheritances that can be shared with the world (*JWF* 189). Another unique discovery of the Jewish people, and the cause of the Dalai Lama's interest in Judaism, is

the ability to keep a people's spiritual and cultural heritage alive while in diaspora. Describing his 1989 meeting with the exiled Tibetan leader, Schachter-Shalomi writes that "the Dalai Lama's question to the Jews was simple. 'Tell me your secret,' he said, 'the secret of Jewish spiritual survival in exile'" (*JWF* 183). Beyond offering spiritual wisdom to Gentiles, the need to share Torah with non-Jews is an ethical imperative of the utmost urgency, perhaps on the order of life or death. Schachter-Shalomi writes, "What Jewish guilt is there in Auschwitz?...In short, *the Holocaust was partially caused by Jews who did not think it worthwhile, or even possible to reprove the Germans* [emphasis his]" (*PS* 64). The Torah becomes a means to prevent future Holocausts, regardless of the victims' ethnic or religious origins.

Carlebach also states the need for a new Torah after the Holocaust. Consider the following anecdote recorded in Rodger Kamenetz's *Jew in the Lotus*: "'You know,' Rabbi Carlebach said, 'imagine, God forbid, our father's house burns down--and I'm moving into somebody else's house? No. I help my father to rebuild the house. After the six million we had nothing. No yeshivas, no spiritual leadership, no rebbes. All those people who hit it big in other religions, they could be rebbes. They have big neshamas [souls]. Sure it's easy to go away, it's hard to rebuild, but you can't permit them to do that. It shows lack of character. What's going on? Why don't they ask God, 'What do you want me be?'" (Kamenetz 262). Earlier we encountered Carlebach as someone who was eager to absorb the wisdom of Eastern religions, but here he advocates for a spiritual project that is unmistakably Jewish. It seems that Carlebach is willing to borrow tools from his neighbor to rebuild the house of Judaism, but he insists that the structure being built is Jewish. However, like Schachter-Shalomi, Carlebach believes that the Judaism being rebuilt after the Holocaust cannot be the same one that was almost annihilated during the war. While discussing the biblical verse "sing to God a new song" (Psalms 33:3, 96:1), Carlebach is

quoted as saying "How could it be...that with all the Torah that was being studied and with all the great luminaries in Europe, this tragic event [the Holocaust] could have occurred?" (Magid 224). Carlebach's answer is provocative: "'Perhaps,' he said, 'the Torah being studied there was not good enough. Perhaps we need a new Torah'" (Magid 224). Carlebach's comments are intended to be theological and not historical. In no way does he blame Jews for the Holocaust or absolve Germans of their guilt. Rather he attempts to transform the Holocaust into a theologically productive moment in order to honor those who perished. Only in a world without the stain of genocide can the memories of the six million victims be considered redeemed, and Carlebach preached a Judaism that relentlessly sought to overcome hatred with compassion. It is unclear what exactly Carlebach believed the new Torah should be, although it certainly included the mystical teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, whose example Carlebach "emulated consciously and unconsciously throughout his life" (Magid 234). Carlebach's Torah was a Hasidism revitalized by contact with Eastern religions and steeped in 1960's American counterculture, an eclectic blend of the ancient and the avante-garde.

After the assertion that Jewish theology must be renovated towards more inclusivity after the Holocaust, the rabbis of Jewish Renewal have more mystical means to expand the relevance of Judaism to non-Jews. As a devout kabbalist, Schachter-Shalomi subscribes to the notion of reincarnation. Within Judaism, Schachter-Shalomi is far from alone in believing in reincarnation. It is a belief held by many Hasidic sects, including the Chabad school from which Schachter-Shalomi and Carlebach emerge. In Chabad, when a non-Jew yearns to convert to Judaism, it is often thought that the would-be convert is a Jewish soul that has had the misfortune of reincarnating into a non-Jewish body (Chabad.org). Likewise, Schachter-Shalomi is entirely open to the possibility that Jewish souls sometimes reincarnate into non-Jewish bodies. In his book *Paradigm Shift*, Schachter-Shalomi writes

“even if I had not believed in reincarnation as a result of my study of Kabbalah I would have begun to believe in its reality for reasons of fact. My reputation as one interested in spiritual phenomena has attracted people who confided in me about memories of having lived during the Holocaust years in their past life cycle” (*PS* 71).

Another important way that Jewish Renewal theologians expand Judaism beyond the confines of the ethnic Jewish community is through the common folk etymology of the word “Israel.” As Jacob received the name “Israel” after wrestling with an angel of God, the word “Israel” is thought by many to literally mean “God-wrestler.” In *Radical Judaism*, Arthur Green writes that “Israel, ‘wrestler with God,’ is too big a name to belong to a single people. We need to find a way to share it with others, welcoming them to feel like participants in this legacy, without ourselves being threatened, without feeling that we will lose our uniqueness” (*RJ* 139). For Green, membership in Israel is not limited to just those who are halakhically Jewish (although he recognizes the importance of that category). The central narrative of Israel’s exodus from Egypt is sublimated into the more universal theme of liberation from bondage. Regarding the revelation at Sinai, Green looks to an antinomian Hasidic interpretation from Rabbi Mendel of Rymanow, which holds that “God’s revelation is without or beyond specific content” (*RJ* 90). Only the infinite letter *aleph* in the word *anokhi* (“I am”) was uttered by the divine voice, “all the rest was revealed through Moses” (*RJ* 90). Through R. Mendel of Rymanow’s midrash, Green dispenses with the binding nature of the 613 mitzvot, as they are but a temporal and finite expression of God’s infinite revelation. For Green, anyone who wrestles with God (read: ultimate reality) and seeks to know true freedom can be termed Israel. Nonetheless, Green is wary of “spiritual imperialism” and refrains from foisting the label “Israel” onto every seeker or activist he feels fellowship with, “even though I may experience them as Israel” (*RJ* 138). In this vein, Magid writes, “it is not clear to me

whether a Jew who identifies as a Jew by purely ethnic criteria would be part of Green's Israel" (Magid 105). Indeed, Green does not resolve this tension in his writing. He recognizes the spiritual significance of the ethnic Jewish community because "without that distinctive identity, who would remain as bearers of our hard-learned values into next and future generations?" (*RJ* 133). But on the other hand, Green writes, "I sometimes find us erring on the side of too much insecurity about our own existence, distracting ourselves from our ultimate goal, that of being and building God's *mishkan* in the world" (*RJ* 133). The Jewish community's ultimate concern cannot be limited to its own survival, Green says, as that would distract from Israel's messianic purpose of arousing universal redemption. In both Green and Schachter-Shalomi's appeal for a more outward looking Judaism, it is possible to hear echoes of Rabbi Hillel's famous saying: "if I am not for myself, then who will be? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?" (*Pirkei Avot*). Jewish Renewal theologians might rephrase Hillel's statement to say: "if Jews are not for themselves, then who will be? And if Jews are only for themselves, then what are they? And if not now, when?"

Green's discussion of Israel as a theological notion alludes to another kind of Israel: the state of Israel and the political movement that gave birth to it, Zionism. In the late nineteenth century, there was widespread Jewish disillusionment with the "the Western cult of progress that envisaged a continual improvement of humanity necessarily improving the status of Jews" (Ohana 9). Zionism arose as a national liberation movement after violent European anti-Semitism proved unrelenting despite the claims of the Age of Reason. No longer could the fate of the Jewish people be yoked to the project of universal emancipation, as the *Haskala* had hoped. At its most elementary, Zionism sought to create a Jewish society in the "Land of Israel", i.e. Palestine, considered to be the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. Not a monolithic movement, the term "Zionism" can refer to a diverse set of ideologies,

some openly opposed to each other. Cultural Zionism, for instance, is not preoccupied with statehood but seeks to foster solidarity amongst a dispersed Jewish people through the revival of spoken Hebrew, with a “spiritual center” in the Land of Israel. Political Zionism, on the other hand, holds that the survival of the Jewish people depends on the existence of a nation-state in Israel with sovereignty resting in Jewish hands. The triumph of political Zionism after the creation of the State of Israel, according to David Ben-Gurion, was in the birth of “a new Jew” who had “completely emerged from the distorted environment of the diaspora and its painful complexes” (Cohen 1).

Political Zionism conflicts with Schachter-Shalomi and the Jewish Renewal movement in several ways. First, Jewish Renewal does not ascribe any higher degree of Jewishness to Jews living in Israel than those in the diaspora. Instead, the theology of Jewish Renewal offers a positive evaluation of diaspora. Jews are dispersed throughout the world because “sparks of holiness are scattered everywhere...waiting for Jews to discover them, uplift them, and restore them to their source” (*RJ* 150). The dispersion of the Jewish people is for the sake of *tikkun olam*, healing the world. Green calls this view “a diasporist Judaism,” saying “for us diaspora Jews, having lived this way for so many centuries, our wandering is not to be taken lightly. It is an essential part of the experience and legacy of Israel” (*RJ* 150). Ben-Gurion’s notion that a Jew can only be “a hundred percent Jewish and a hundred percent human” in a particular place, the Land of Israel, is entirely foreign to the Jewish Renewal movement (Cohen 1).

For Schachter-Schachter and Green, Judaism is a religion that primarily accesses the sacred through time and not space. Following Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was an important mentor to both Schachter-Shalomi and Green, they assert that since the Second Temple was destroyed, “we [Jews] no longer have access to God in space but we do have access to God in time. Jews live more in time than

they live in space” (*HR* 6:12). Schachter-Shalomi elaborates, “we replaced that temple in space with what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel imagined as a holy temple in time, a temple in which to build and sustain a connection with the Infinite, a temple that we consecrate by conscious acts of will. That temple is the Sabbath.” (*JWF* 45). Through the observation of the Sabbath, the participants in Jewish Renewal cultivate sacredness regardless of physical location. Interestingly, Zionists (be they secular or religious) whose Jewish identity revolves around a physical place, i.e. the Western Wall, Judea and Samaria, etc. are essentially unrecognizable as observant Jews from the perspective of diasporist Judaism. As Green asserts, “Israel” as a religious category *is* diasporist Judaism. Shneer and Aviv have observed the historical irony that the creation of the State of Israel has had the unintended consequence of negating Judaism for many Israelis (Aviv 133).

Whereas Zionism responds to the crisis of modernity with a turn towards nationalism, Jewish Renewal remains decidedly global in its orientation. “In this sense,” Magid writes, “Renewal is an alternative to Zionism in that it is a Diaspora phenomenon focused on the renewal of Judaism as a world religion as opposed to the reconstitution of Judaism as the backbone of a nationalist movement” (Magid 128). Green and Schachter-Shalomi see Jewish Renewal's task as (re)spritualizing the world by shepherding Hasidism into modernity. A universalized reading of Hasidism is needed in a world riddled with ethnic conflict and ecological destruction, Green writes, since “the most essential truth I glean from Hasidic teachings, the unity and holiness of all life, even all existence, is one the world most urgently needs to hear” (*RJ* 8). Green claims that sharing the neo-Hasidic message is urgent in these tumultuous times because “without marshaling the power of the religious and mythic imagination, we will not be able to make the turn we must in order to exist” (*RJ* 8). By sanctifying existence in a postindustrial society where nothing is sacred, Post-Holocaust American Judaism, as expressed by the Jewish Renewal

movement, rebelliously offers a remedy to the spiritual and ecological sickness of modernity by universalizing Jewish theology to make redemption not just a Jewish issue, but a universal concern.

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