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In Search of the
“Harmonious Jew”

*Judah L. Magnes
between East and West*

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orn 115 years ago, Judah L. Magnes has had a posthumous existence no less ironic than the life he led. Grandly memorialized by a prestigious scholarly press and an impressive museum that bear his name, Magnes has nonetheless dwelt in relative anonymity since his death in 1948. In considering the pantheon of luminaries of twentieth-century Jewish history and culture, we quickly call to mind the brooding Central European genius of Kafka, Freud, Scholem, and Einstein. Though Judah Magnes was a contemporary, acquaintance, and occasional adversary of these men, his own reputation has proven far more evanescent. Were one to walk the streets of San Francisco or Oakland, where Magnes was born and raised, or Cincinnati or Berlin, where he studied, or New York, where he first gained wide fame, one would encounter blank stares at the mention of his name. Even in Jerusalem, where he spent the last quarter of his life, Magnes is hardly a household name—unknown to many of my own generation, including those who study at the very University which Magnes helped found.¹ What may explain this obscurity is the fact that Magnes created no school of thought or academic discipline, led no coherent ideological movement, and attracted few students or followers. When perusing his writings, we are not struck, as the philosopher Hugo Bergmann has noted, by a rigorously-argued, architectonic system of ideas.²

What then warrants our attention? What prompts an observer as sophisticated as Hugo Bergmann to count Magnes as “one of the crucial figures in the develop-

ment of Jewish religious thought and life in our time?"³ To begin with, Magnes' life path traversed the major centers of Jewish culture world-wide. From his formative years in San Francisco and Oakland, Magnes travelled to Cincinnati, home of Reform Judaism in America, and from there to Berlin, New York City, and finally Jerusalem. At each stop, Magnes found his way to, and became an adjunct member of, leading circles of Jewish intellectuals. In part, entry to these circles was gained by his anomalous status: Magnes was variously a Californian boy among East Coasters, an American among Europeans, a traditionalist among reformers, a Zionist among non-Zionists. In part, Magnes also won acceptance to these different intellectual circles because of his unusual blend of idealism and pragmatism. It is most unusual to encounter a personality as confirmed and articulate in his convictions as Magnes who, at the same time, was an innovator or leader of major Jewish organizations—from Temple Emanu-el and the fascinating communitarian experiment of the Kehillah in New York to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His mix of principled commitment and organizational involvement—avoiding the extremes of a *Luftmensch*, on one hand, and an *apparatchik*, on the other—led Gershom Scholem to designate Magnes a "true radical." With his typically acerbic judgment and ambiguous praise, Scholem underscored the "fatal seriousness" with which Magnes clung to his principles.⁴ And yet, this righteous seriousness did not yield to an unbending authoritarianism or an appetite for destruction. Magnes believed that ideas and ideals were most meaningful when in the service of a constructive agenda serving the spiritual and social needs of the people.

Between the idealism and pragmatism, theory and praxis, of Judah L. Magnes lies a complex and multi-faceted personality. My own personal encounter with Magnes began while I was conducting research in Jerusalem on the first generation of Jewish historical researchers at the Hebrew University. Insofar as Magnes was not himself an active scholar in Jerusalem (though he did receive a Ph.D from Heidelberg in Semitics), he began as a figure of secondary import to my project—relevant more to the institutional than the intellectual history of the period. Yet, the more I came to know Magnes—by exploring his extensive correspondence, journal entries, and essays—the stronger a hold he exerted on me. The Judah Magnes who emerged from my archival inquiries was a man of stunning contrasts: not only fiercely passionate in his convictions, but also consistently aloof in his social bearing; a visionary of great institutions and an often mediocre administrator of them; a bitter opponent of political Zionism and a man committed in word and deed to a spiritual

homeland for the Jewish people in *Erets Yisrael*. This last set of oppositions had particular resonance in the summer and fall of 1989 when I was conducting research in Jerusalem. At that time, the struggle between Jew and Arab appeared ever more intractable, with rhetorical and physical violence reaching new depths. Magnes' sixty year-old pleas for intercommunal harmony, strewn throughout his letters and speeches, were utterly compelling. As I walked back at night from the Magnes Archive to his old neighborhood of Rehavia, past the location where an eminent Jewish historian had been murdered shortly before, I couldn't help but think of Magnes' total abhorrence and condemnation of violence. And as I witnessed the intensification of the Intifadah, the Palestinian uprising, with its deleterious effect on Palestinian society and economy, as well as on a generation of Israeli soldiers, I couldn't help but think of Magnes' uncompromising insistence on moral responsibility. To be sure, Magnes would have challenged the leaders of the Palestinian uprising to justify the often violent means used to achieve their desired ends; but he would have called upon Jewish leaders to search their souls as well. This is not an uninformed conjecture. In 1930, long before there was a Jewish state or a powerful Israeli army, Magnes wrote to his American colleague, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, that the welfare of the Arab majority in Palestine must be a matter of moral concern to the Jewish minority. After all, he asked:

What is the nature and essence of Jewish nationalism? Is it like the nationalism of all the nations? The answer is given by our attitude towards the Arabs, so that the Arab question is not only of the utmost practical importance; it is also the touchstone and test of our Judaism.⁵

Magnes' call for moral responsibility and self-accountability, decried as naive by many in his own day and subsequently, has not lost its urgency for me. Indeed, though his ultimate impact on the political culture of Jewish Palestine seemed, at times, to be little more than that of a troublesome gnat, he had a measure of integrity and vision, even clairvoyance, which is sorely lacking today.

This then amounts to a genealogy of my affections for Magnes. No doubt, in concentrating on his "incurable idealism," as Paul Mendes-Flohr has labelled it, I have drawn attention away from one of Magnes' most paradoxical qualities: his proclivity for compromise. Magnes the idealist repeatedly found himself in the role of arbiter, mediating between his own ideals and organizational demands, between tradition and innovation, Judaism and Zionism, Diaspora and Palestine. His ready

embrace of this role was inspired by his lifelong quest for the "Harmonious Jew," the contours of which he outlined as a young rabbi in New York.⁶ In a 1907 sermon at Temple Emanu-El (of New York not San Francisco), Magnes spoke of a Jewish ideal type who would be able to bridge the cultural gap between East and West. In geographic terms, the polarity between East and West referred both to different ends of the European continent and to Oriental and Occidental parts of the globe. In cultural terms, East represented the source of a primal Jewish authenticity; West was the locus of a rational, scientific, Jewish accommodation to modernity. Of course, the desire to join these two poles has engaged Jewish philosophers and theologians for centuries—from Philo to Maimonides to Joseph Soloveitchik. Magnes' own attempted synthesis followed a circuitous path eastward, commencing in the American West and culminating in Palestine, in the Near East.

The man whom Magnes regarded as the paradigmatic "Harmonious Jew" in modern times, and from whom he drew direct inspiration, travelled a different, even opposite route. That man was Asher Ginzberg, the essayist and cultural activist who was known universally by his Hebrew *nom de plume*, Ahad Ha-am. Born in the Kiev province of Russia in 1856, Ahad Ha-am was raised in a Hasidic household where he became a prodigious student of the classical texts of Jewish law and philosophy. From an early age, he also displayed an ardent interest in secular fields of study which he would pursue throughout his life without formal academic training. Ahad Ha-am's importance as a modern Jewish personality stems not only from his firm grounding in traditional Jewish sources, but also from his willingness to adapt these sources to modern concerns and to a modern Hebrew idiom. By virtue of his skillful mediation between old and new, Ahad Ha-am developed both a tight-knit coterie of followers and a larger audience of enthusiastic readers which made him one of the most influential advocates of a Zionist national revival at the turn of the century. Unlike Theodor Herzl, who is commonly (and somewhat misleadingly) believed to be the founder of Zionism, Ahad Ha-am was far more interested in the revival of Jewish culture than in the creation of a political state. Indeed, his primary concern, as he proclaimed in a critique of Herzl's Zionism in 1897, was not the physical survival of the Jews, but rather the spiritual survival of Judaism.⁷

In the estimation of Judah Magnes, Ahad Ha-am was the "first of the modern Jews who has seen the great light in the distance"—the light which illuminates the meeting point of tradition and innovation, Jewish and non-Jewish cultures.⁸ And yet, Judah Magnes' formative milieu, and the direction of his cultural journey, were

quite different from his hero's. Unlike Ahad Ha-am, he was raised in a society free of anti-Jewish persecution and without a large critical mass of Jews. His first two languages were English and German, not Yiddish and Hebrew. His formative religious upbringing came not in an unruly Orthodox *shul*, but rather in the dignified, classical Reform Temple Emanu-El of San Francisco. If anything, this profile fits the composite drawn by Ahad Ha-am and other Eastern European Jews of the assimilated Western Jew who stood perilously close to complete alienation from Judaism. Nevertheless, Magnes wittingly and unwittingly defied that composite.

For one thing, despite the lingering traces of German culture carried forth by his mother and grandmother, Magnes was of mixed German lineage. His father was born in a small town outside of Lodz, Poland to a Hasidic family. And his mother was born in Posen, then a Prussian province contiguous with Poland which served as a gateway to the west for Eastern European Jews. Many Jews from Posen, passionately devoted to high German culture, language, and literature, were themselves barely a generation removed from the Pale of Settlement in Russia. This was not always a well-advertised fact; the impulse to deny one's Eastern European origins went hand in hand with the desire to fortify one's status and self-identity as a German. However, the American-born Magnes, who experienced little of the social pressures facing nineteenth-century Posen Jews, felt no such need. He was not embarrassed by his Eastern European roots. On the contrary, he was interested in exploring them, believing that, in the process, he might discover some of the secrets of Jewish national life.

In a precocious article published in 1896 when he was not yet twenty years old, Magnes served notice that he had begun his intellectual and spiritual journey eastward. What is remarkable about this essay, starkly entitled "Palestine—or Death," is that Magnes wrote what amounted to a proto-Zionist treatise while studying at an overwhelmingly anti-nationalist institution, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Even more remarkable is that the essay was published in the newsletter of Magnes' home congregation, Temple Emanu-El of San Francisco, an institution which also defined itself as fiercely anti-Zionist. In intellectual terms, this essay reveals Magnes' first intuitive appreciation of Ahad Ha-am. He inveighed against the ideology of assimilation found among the kind of Reform Jews who patronized Temple Emanu-El and Hebrew Union College, warning that their willingness to surrender large chunks of their Judaism risked an irreversible loss of identity. He

then concluded by arguing that “the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish Church and State [is] the only salvation of present-day Judaism.”⁹

Magnes’ words must have been jarring to the Reform sensibilities of his family and friends. The rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, Jacob Voorsanger, who was Magnes’ first mentor, did allow the article to be printed in the Temple newsletter, but immediately issued a rejoinder to Magnes assailing Zionism as a dangerous doctrine. Voorsanger was not alone; it seems that Magnes’ parents were not enthralled with their son’s nationalist inclinations either.¹⁰ To place this in a wider context, it is fair to say that the degree of receptivity to Magnes’ views was proportionate to the enthusiasm of American Jews for Zionism in general at this time—which is to say, quite limited.¹¹ Still, in retrospect, this article is significant in identifying the starting point of Magnes’ journey in search of the “Harmonious Jew” who stood at the crossroads of East and West.

Following his ordination from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1900, Magnes decided to pursue advanced graduate training in Germany. Though the direction from America to Germany was in fact eastward, one might think that Magnes had abandoned the path of Jewish self-discovery. After all, was not Germany the bastion of Jewish assimilation? Was it not there that the pressures of anti-Semitism created a desperate Jewish thirst for German culture and Gentile norms—to the point of self-negation? Of course, there were more than a few German Jews who either felt no residual attachment to their Jewishness or felt the need to renounce their Judaism in order to advance socially or professionally. But the Germany which Judah Magnes visited in the first years of the twentieth century was a more complex Jewish environment than one of unchecked assimilation. For instance, Berlin, the cosmopolitan capital, was home to a growing community of Eastern European Jewish émigrés. These were not the primitive and pitiable *Ostjuden*, traditional in faith and habit, who were stereotyped in German-Jewish literature of the time. They were rather students in search of higher education who were driven from Russia by strict quotas on Jewish university attendance. This stream of Eastern European Jewish students, which numbered in the hundreds, even low thousands, by the first decade of the twentieth century, carried to Germany a wide array of Jewish nationalist and socialist ideologies. Their presence in Berlin no doubt scandalized some German Jews who deemed their expressions of Jewish national pride threatening. But their influence on a smaller sub-set of the German-Jewish intelligentsia was of a different nature. Chaim Nahman Bialik, the great Hebrew

poet, once pondered the impact of the meeting between Eastern European and German Jews in Berlin with the following words:

Many of...the bearers of Hebrew culture (from the East) found their way to Berlin, the same Berlin which was the birthplace of the Jewish Enlightenment and the seat of Jewish scholarship in its Western dress....Relatives who had been separated by force happened onto the same inn. Is it conceivable that their meeting will be for naught?¹²

Recent memoirs and scholarly studies have suggested that their meeting was not for naught—in fact, that the presence of the Eastern Europeans in Berlin initiated a process of what has been called “dissimilation,” recoil from the ideal of assimilation and social integration—among certain elite segments of German Jewry.¹³ The process of dissimilation reached its heights during and after the First World War, though the phenomenon can be noticed earlier in the neo-Romanticist ambiance of the turn of the century when a newly-positive evaluation of Eastern European Jewish culture, especially Hasidism, first surfaced. The Eastern Europeans represented to dissimilating German Jews a holistic Jewishness which the latter or their parents had surrendered in their zealous embrace of *Deutschtum* (Germanness). The Eastern Europeans knew intimately the ritual practices and folkways of the traditional Jew, even though many had ceased to practice them; they spoke the gritty Jewish vernacular, Yiddish, and the ancient national tongue, Hebrew; and they were unapologetic in their support of a Jewish national revival. For those Eastern Europeans who managed to migrate westward, Berlin provided a breath of fresh air, liberation from the repressive measures of Czarist Russian authorities. They, in turn, created a vibrant Jewish sub-culture in Berlin which drew in small numbers of German Jews. Home to this sub-culture were Berlin’s bustling cafés such as the famed Café Monopol where competing factions of Jewish students and intellectuals occupied their own tables, debating throughout the night the fine points of their respective programs. Out of this café culture, populated by struggling students and those who had already advanced to the status of professional “Café Jews,” emerged an impressive roster of Jewish political and cultural figures, including Micah Yosef Berdyczewski, Martin Buber, Berthold Feiwel, Shai Ish Hurwitz, Shmaryahu Levin, Heinrich Loewe, and Nahum Sokolow.¹⁴

One important by-product of this cultural milieu was that the stereotypical opposition between East and West was challenged. It seems to be the case that even

the first-generation leaders of the fledgling Zionist movement in Germany maintained a paternalistic stance towards Eastern Europeans.¹⁵ But there is also evidence that small groups of German Jews, such as those studying in the modern rabbinical seminaries of Berlin and Breslau, were undergoing a process of dissimilation and exhibiting a positive interest in Eastern European Jewish culture. The interest of these German Jews, and their actual interaction with Eastern European Jews, point to a fascinating cultural moment when national, class, religious, and educational barriers collapsed.

For the young Judah Magnes, this blurring of cultural boundaries perfectly suited his desires. Magnes had come to Germany to pursue work on a doctorate at a German university. Germany was the home of serious academic research in Jewish studies, and the imprimatur of one of its universities would provide Magnes with an important measure of intellectual validation. His experience did provide him with that—in the form of a Ph.D from Heidelberg in 1904. But in addition to university studies, Magnes took courses at the liberal rabbinical seminary in Berlin, the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*; there, as the sole American, he developed warm social relations with his fellow students, who were mostly Germans with a smattering of Eastern Europeans.¹⁶ Along with some of them, Magnes helped found a Jewish nationalist student organization at the *Lehranstalt*, an act which angered the institution's anti-Zionist faculty and administration. Beyond the walls of the *Lehranstalt*, Magnes sojourned throughout Berlin, visiting the cafés, meeting halls, and synagogues where the city's recent Eastern European Jewish émigrés congregated. Magnes' previous admiration for Zionism and Eastern European Jewish culture was no longer based on an abstraction. He now came face to face with the bearers of an authentic Jewish national culture, and the result was a bold new sense of mission. In fact, the clarity of purpose which this encounter produced recalls one of the central features of religious conversion discussed in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.¹⁷ In a letter from 1901, Magnes sought to explain the intensity of his convictions to his parents who, in the glorious tradition of parenthood, were more concerned with his livelihood than with his ideology. Zionism, Magnes wrote:

besides making my intellectual, my spiritual interest different, has worked a change in my mode of life. I seek to live now more like a Jew, i. e., you would call it, more like an Orthodox Jew.

To fulfill his newly-discovered *Lebensprogramm* or life mission, as he described it, Magnes felt it necessary to investigate further his own cultural roots in Eastern Europe.¹⁸ He planned a trip to Galicia in the summer of 1901, but was warned off by a prominent Jewish writer of the day, Karl Emil Franzos. Franzos was himself a Galician-born author of German fiction whose upbringing and career epitomized the urgent desire to escape the insular world of Eastern European Jewry. Propelled by this desire (and despite his own heritage), Franzos referred to Russian, Polish and Galician co-religionists by the condescending term "Half-Asian."¹⁹ Given his patronizing attitude, it is no surprise that Franzos counseled Magnes not to make the journey. "It is better," Franzos advised, "that you cling to your present ideas about the Ostjuden (Eastern European Jews)."²⁰ As it turns out, a lack of funds, rather than Franzos' admonition, dissuaded Magnes from embarking on the trip. Twenty years later, however, Magnes did take a trip to his father's home town in Poland. He would have done well, it seems, to heed Karl Emil Franzos' advice. With brutal candor, Magnes recorded his impressions of the visit in a journal entry of August 5, 1922:

[Y]ou think most of the filthy street, with the shallow gutter as sewer, and the bad smells (Oriental also?)—and the people! I am for the Jewish garb, and the Jews, and they are my people and the chosen people, and the greatest of all peoples. But how offensive they get when they mob you...and ask for money. How dirty, and sick, and ragged and unfortunate.²¹

And we might add, how far this observer was from the young man who earnestly sought to rediscover his Eastern roots. Magnes' romanticized image of the *Ostjuden* was abruptly and, at least temporarily, shattered. This episode does expose some of Magnes' youthful idealism and naiveté; but, I hasten to add, it was not representative of his overall attitude towards Eastern European Jews and their culture. In fact, between the time that he first planned to visit Galicia in 1901 and his actual visit to Poland in 1922, Magnes was a frequent champion of the interests of Eastern European Jews. This expanse of time is more or less coterminous with Magnes' tenure in New York where he settled after receiving his doctorate in Germany. In New York, Magnes assumed a number of prestigious rabbinical positions, and became a leading social activist within the Jewish community. It is during this period that he fostered ties with the German-Jewish aristocracy of the Upper East Side—the Warburgs, the Strauses, the Schiffs—for whom he became an eloquent voice of

conscience. Magnes also cultivated his contacts with the Eastern European Jews of the Lower East Side in New York, helping to conceive and finance a host of cultural, educational, and social welfare programs for their benefit. In his myriad activities, Magnes served as an agent for the exchange of cultural values and philanthropic largesse between the uptown German Jews and the downtown Eastern Europeans. This role offered Magnes a concrete opportunity to realize his ambition of bridging East and West, to serve as cultural mediator, indeed, to approximate the "Harmonious Jew" of whom he longingly spoke to his New York congregants one Sabbath in 1907.

New York proved to be a challenging arena for Magnes' fertile ideas and abundant idealism. And yet, the ultimate challenge and final stop in his career came in Jerusalem. By the early 1920's, Magnes was exhausted from his intense involvement in New York Jewish communal affairs, as well as from his controversial and enervating pacifism during World War I. He sought a "replenishment of knowledge and inspiration," as he put it, which required a break from the rigors of fundraising and administration.²² In 1922, Magnes and his family decided to take an extended journey, first to Europe where he visited his father's hometown and then to Palestine which he had already visited on two previous occasions. Magnes initially planned to stay in Palestine only about a year; but he quickly immersed himself in the cultural and political life of Jerusalem, and ended up living there for the remainder of his life.²³

Before elaborating on this final stage in Magnes' career, it should be recalled that the Jerusalem to which Magnes and his family came in the fall of 1922 was hardly the modern city of high-rise offices, luxury hotels, and apartments that it has since become. Of course, partisans of Tel-Aviv will insist that even today Jerusalem hardly merits consideration as a truly modern city. Notwithstanding the interurban rivalry, one might even say *Kulturkampf*, of the present, Jerusalem in the 1920's was a slow-paced town of some 63,000 residents, including about 34,000 Jews, 14,500 Christian Arabs, and 13,500 Muslim Arabs.²⁴ It was only a few years earlier, after the British supplanted the Turks as rulers of Palestine, that a concerted plan to modernize the city by establishing new water, transportation, and electrical systems was developed.²⁵ In cultural terms, the arrival of the British as the new overlords of the region added yet another face to an already diverse populace. Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews of the old *Yishuv*, whose ancestors had been in Jerusalem for generations, mixed with Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Turks, Germans, British, as well as with

recent Jewish immigrants. The result was an environment at once international and provincial, comprised of distinct sub-units, each speaking its own language, which nonetheless overlapped geographically and culturally. Jerusalem's mixture of intimacy and foreignness, which has been humorously and poignantly depicted by the novelist Arnold Zweig in *De Vriendt Goes Home*, was no doubt alluring to Magnes. In fact, this mix flavored the neighborhood in East Jerusalem to which Magnes first moved, a largely Arab neighborhood which also included Jews and British government officials as residents.

The spirit of cultural harmony which Magnes sought and, to a certain extent, found in this neighborhood anticipates his later steadfast commitment to peaceful co-existence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, even to the point of supporting a bi-national political entity. This spirit also informed the major organizational task which he assumed in Jerusalem: the creation of a Jewish university. In random musings and journal entries from the 1920's, Magnes outlined his vision of a grand humanistic institution imbued with the finest Jewish and universal values. What was at stake was not merely the education of young Jewish women and men. Rather, the university, Magnes wrote on one occasion, is no less than "the quest of modern Judaism for a recovery of its soul"—a quest which paralleled his own search for a higher state of Jewish knowledge and self-awareness. To realize this lofty goal, the university must harmonize Jewish knowledge with general humanistic and scientific knowledge, but not at the cost of self-effacement.²⁶ Again, in a projection of his personal credo, Magnes maintained that the university must prepare Jews "to look out upon humanity through our own eyes...to absorb and work over in our own way what humanity has to give us."²⁷

Underlying this broad mandate was Magnes' conviction that the Jew, and by extension, a Jewish university, could serve a uniquely valuable function in the modern world. Recalling past eras of Jewish cultural efflorescence, Magnes declared in April 1925 that:

The Jew has always been a great mediator, a great interpreter. He has had [the] experience of both East and West. Palestine is on the high road, between East and West, and the Jew must regard it as one of his chief functions to explain one to the other.²⁸

Here we are again witness to Magnes' conception of the Jew as cultural mediator—this time as bridge-builder between Orient and Occident. The institu-

tional home of this Jew, the Hebrew University, must be, above all, inclusive; it must never succumb to "any nationalistic, chauvinistic arrogance."²⁹ This last point, reflecting Magnes' own aversion to a doctrinaire political nationalism, almost of necessity insured that his vision of a cosmopolitan, non-partisan, Jewish university would find detractors. For one thing, many Zionist supporters of the University did expect that, as a Jewish national institution, it would fall under the institutional and ideological control of the World Zionist Organization. Unyielding in their own beliefs, this group of Zionists was but one strand in the labyrinthine web of University politics. No amount of organizational experience could have prepared Magnes for the bitter struggles between Zionist and non-Zionist, religious and secular, Diaspora and Palestine Jews over the fate of the University.³⁰

Little trace of acrimony was present in Magnes' earliest discussions of the idea of a Jewish or Hebrew university—as far back as 1913 in his correspondence with a young chemist and Zionist activist by the name of Chaim Weizmann. However, by the time that Weizmann had assumed control of the World Zionist Organization in the early 1920's, strains began to appear in the relationship between Diaspora and Palestine Zionists, and more specifically, between Weizmann and Judah Magnes. The London-based Weizmann increasingly perceived the efforts of the University's supporters in Palestine, who included Magnes and his cultural hero Ahad Ha-am, as a threat to the authority of the World Zionist Organization, which had provided formal institutional and financial support for the university idea since 1913. In an attempt to overcome the differences of opinion among supporters in the Diaspora and Palestine, a conference was convened in London in late July 1924 in which the participants agreed to call for the creation of an Institute of Jewish Studies as the core of a Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The conferees also decided to appoint Judah Magnes as chief administrator of the new Institute.³¹ The unanimity with which the London conferees acted barely concealed the brewing turf war over control of the University. Shortly after the London meeting, one participant from Jerusalem, David Yellin, reported in a letter to his wife that, shortly after the London meeting, Chaim Weizmann accused him and his colleagues of attempting to "pull the [Jerusalem] institute out of the hands of the Zionist Organization."³²

Given this backdrop, it is surprising that no discord was evident five months later—on December 22, 1924 or the first day of Hanukah according to the Hebrew calendar—when Judah Magnes stood on top of barren Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem and delivered the inaugural address at the formal opening of the Institute of Jewish

Studies. One good reason for the absence of acrimony was the absence of Chaim Weizmann. On December 25, the day after the inauguration of the Institute, Weizmann wrote to Magnes that he had only read of the event in the previous day's *London Times*. Apparently, the letter of invitation sent to Weizmann from Jerusalem arrived three days after the event itself, and he was thus neither able to come in person nor even to issue his own statement of congratulations.³³ Accidental or not, this episode exacerbated the strain in the relationship between Weizmann and Magnes. For Magnes, it was a matter of utmost importance that the Institute, and the broader Hebrew University which would formally open three months later, be beyond the control of the World Zionist Organization. By contrast, Weizmann believed that control rightly belonged to the Zionist Organization whose long-time support of the University idea bespoke a legal and historical bond. The differences between Magnes and Weizmann were not restricted to the issue of institutional control; they also took the form of a personal antipathy which threatened to incapacitate the Hebrew University in its first decade of existence. Magnes saw Weizmann as a shrewd and manipulative operator, "through and through the politician [who]...is constantly playing a game, very cleverly" and whose "moral quality...is questionable."³⁴ Specifically, Magnes believed that Weizmann craved the job which he himself came to occupy in 1925: Chancellor of the Hebrew University.³⁵ Weizmann, for his part, reciprocated Magnes' mistrust. As David Biale has described it, Weizmann regarded Magnes as "a lackey of American Jewish money"—a dilettante and puppet of rich German Jews who possessed neither the requisite academic credentials nor the administrative acumen to lead the young University.³⁶ For all of Magnes' efforts to understand and absorb the culture of Eastern European Jewry, he remained fundamentally alien to the Russian-born Weizmann.

Much more could be said about the troubled relationship between Magnes and Weizmann, and its effects on the Hebrew University. But constraints of space require a hurried epitaph. For present purposes, it should be noted that this relationship made manifest a set of conflicting institutional and ideological priorities which rendered Magnes' formulation of a humanistic, Jewish university a virtual oxymoron. At the same time, it also made manifest Magnes' personal limitations as mediator between Diaspora and Palestine, between East and West, and between his own ideals and practical political considerations. These limitations should be measured not only against the many historical forces conspiring to upset the

erstwhile friendship between Weizmann and Magnes, but also against Magnes' own celebration of, and quest to discover, the "Harmonious Jew." In light of his experience in Berlin and New York, and his relocation to Jerusalem, Magnes would have had reason to believe that this discovery was within reach. But the influential Chaim Weizmann, for one, never accepted or understood him, doubted his sincerity and ability, and continually undermined his authority until 1935 when Magnes was "kicked upstairs" from the position of Chancellor to the newly-created ceremonial office of President of the Hebrew University.

One other event during Magnes' tenure as Chancellor illustrates his unrelenting desire—and subsequent failure—to bridge the cultural worlds of East and West. In November 1927, David Shapiro, owner of the New York Yiddish newspaper, *Der Tog*, offered to endow a chair in Yiddish language and literature at the Institute of Jewish Studies.³⁷ Magnes, who apparently had earlier solicited Shapiro for such a chair, enthusiastically embraced the offer while on a fund-raising trip to America. When word of his acceptance reached the Hebrew press in Palestine, a number of faculty members and supporters of the University raised their voices in protest. One professor, Joseph Klausner, announced in a seminar that he would resign from the University if a Yiddish chair were established. At this point, Magnes found himself in an awkward position which led to some less than ingenuous maneuvers. For example, while confiding to a friend in Jerusalem his despair over the negative local reaction, he was simultaneously writing Shapiro that "a very considerable public opinion is forming in Palestine, and particularly in the University, in favor of the Yiddish chair."³⁸ In fact, a vocal public opinion was forming in Palestine *against* the chair, spearheaded by Eastern European academics and activists in Jerusalem—curiously, those who were themselves raised in Yiddish-speaking homes. For this group, Zionism and immigration to Palestine marked a rejection of all cultural vestiges of the Diaspora, including Yiddish. By contrast, support for the Yiddish chair in Jerusalem came from those for whom Yiddish was not the *Mamaloshen*—most saliently, from Magnes and the tight-knit circle of German academics which included Gershom Scholem and Hugo Bergmann.³⁹ For this group of dissimilated Jews, Yiddish was the embodiment of an authentic Jewish national culture and its folk traditions—an invaluable treasure to be preserved. That Magnes found allies among the Germans in Jerusalem on this matter should not come as a surprise. Despite his warm affection for Eastern European Jewish culture, it was the circle of Germans, not the Eastern Europeans, in whom Magnes found his closest intellectual

and spiritual companions—and with whom he shared the most cultural and political sensibilities. And yet, even within the German circle, Magnes was not fully an insider. He did not fit the mold of the single-minded academic researcher which the Germans cherished, and which Sh. Y. Agnon, the Hebrew Nobel laureate, has brilliantly satirized.⁴⁰ Rather, for the Germans, Magnes was a strange breed, possessed of a variety of skills, but expert in none. Perhaps there was an ironic tinge to Gershom Scholem's tribute when he hailed Magnes as a truly "free man"—free not only of institutional inhibitions, but also of the trammels of a fixed discipline.⁴¹

The fact that Magnes was not fully appreciated by the Germans nor fully comprehended or trusted by the Eastern Europeans suggests a somewhat isolated existence within the Jewish academic community of Jerusalem. For all of his involvement in a wide range of activities, and for all of his commitment to cultural ecumenism between East and West, Magnes did not have many close friends. Abba Eban offers a partial explanation when remembering Magnes as a man of "frigid temperament."⁴² Nonetheless, we do know that Magnes had a small circle of intimates in Jerusalem, most notably Max Schloessinger and Norman Bentwich, as well as a larger circle of admiring acquaintances. One of the most unlikely members of the larger group was none other than Joseph Klausner, the Russian-born and Heidelberg-trained scholar of Jewish history and literature, who, we recall, bitterly opposed Magnes' efforts to bring a Yiddish chair to Jerusalem. It would be difficult to imagine a more incompatible pair, given their competing backgrounds and competing political perspectives. Magnes, the American, fiercely opposed the view that Zionism could be fulfilled through the creation of a political state or that it required political control over the local Arab population. Klausner, the Russian, was a leading representative of the Revisionist Zionist party which favored a Jewish state on *both* sides of the Jordan River, and took a far less conciliatory attitude towards the Arabs of Palestine than Magnes. Despite their differences, Magnes and Klausner formed a mutual admiration society whose durability is attested to in a decades-long correspondence. It may well be that their common marginality—in political terms, both men occupied extreme ends of the spectrum—drew them together. It may also be the fact that both men bore the stigma of not being regarded as first-rate minds or scholars by the standard-bearers of academic excellence in Jerusalem, the Germans. However, a more affirmative or "elective" affinity, if you will, may lie in their common pursuit of a grandiose and oft-stated ambition: to effect a synthesis of Judaism and humanism. In Klausner's case, the motto of "Judaism and Human-

ism” was actually etched into the archway of his home in Talpiot. For Magnes, this slogan was the consummation of a lifelong desire to preserve a particular and distinctive Judaism, on one hand, and yet encourage its integration into the broader current of world culture and history, on the other.⁴³

It is this desire which renders Magnes especially relevant today. In the midst of an impassioned debate over the boundaries and constituents of American culture, Magnes’ life and writings offer the hope that distinctiveness and inclusiveness may not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, Magnes seems to anticipate a conclusion at which late twentieth-century scholars are now arriving: that neither “Judaism” nor “humanism” (or “humanity”) is a sharply-defined cultural “essence.”⁴⁴ Rather, each is a fluid entity with shifting borders, constantly being redefined through dynamic interaction. This perspective compels us to reconsider altogether the pejorative connotation of the term “assimilation,” for it acknowledges the vitalizing effects—not to mention, the inevitability—of cultural interaction in remolding Jewish tradition and culture throughout the ages. Such an understanding of dynamic cultural interaction also affirms Judah Magnes’ prescience. The disappointments and failures to which I have alluded in his extraordinary career reveal the difficulties in mediating between an unceasing idealism and mundane institutional demands. Yet, they should not diminish our appreciation of Magnes’ persistent efforts to bridge Judaism and Humanism, Diaspora and Zion, East and West. Nor should they prevent us from appreciating Magnes’ intuitive insight that these dichotomies are not quite so rigid as one might suppose, that each incorporates elements of its supposed opposite—Judaism within Humanism, Diaspora within Zion, East within West, and *vice versa*. It was this insight, above all, which animated Magnes’ indefatigable and elusive search for the “Harmonious Jew.” And it is the legacy of this insight which continues to haunt and inspire us in the multicultural world we inhabit today.

Endnotes

1. It could be argued that one of Magnes' last major public acts—his attempt to convince high American officials in May 1948 to support a bi-national rather than a Jewish state in Palestine—so thoroughly deviated from the Zionist political consensus as to encourage the suppression of his memory in Israel. On Magnes' efforts in 1948, see Arthur A. Goren, ed. *Dissenter in Zion: From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 55, 488-497.
2. Samuel H. Bergman, *Faith and Reason: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought*, translated and edited by Alfred Jospe (Washington, 1961), 142.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Gershom Scholem, "Adam hofshi," *Be`ayot* (Tammuz 5707), reprinted in *Devarim ba-go*, vol. II (Tel-Aviv, 1982) paperback edition, 489-491.
5. See the letter of February 6, 1930 in *Dissenter in Zion*, 286. For a more conventional perspective, cf. David Ben-Gurion's 1930 lecture on "The External Policy of the Jewish Nation," translated in D. Hardan, ed. *Sources of Contemporary Jewish Thought*, vol.5 (Jerusalem, 1975), 99.
6. See the transcript of Magnes' sermon, "The Harmonious Jew," at Temple Emanu-El in New York in *The American Hebrew* (January 25, 1907), 311.
7. See Ahad Ha-arn's essay, "Medinat ha-yehudim ve-'tsarat ha-yehudim'," originally published in *Ha-Shiloah* 3 (Tevet 5658) and reprinted in *Al parashat ha-derakhim*, vol. II (Berlin, 1921), 28.
8. "The Harmonious Jew," 311.
9. See "Palestine—or Death," *Emanuel* (January 6, 1896), quoted in Marc Lee Raphael, "Cincinnati: The Earlier and Later Years," *Like All the Nations: The Life and Legacy of Judah L. Magnes*, William M. Brinner and Moses Rischin, ed. (Albany, 1987), 31.

10. Voorsanger's response appeared in *The American Israelite* (January 23, 1896), 5. See Yohai Goell, "Aliyah in the Zionism of an American Oleh: Judah L. Magnes," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 65 (December 1975), 99-101. However, Moses Rischin has recently brought to light a set of interesting letters from Voorsanger to Magnes which reveals a richer and more complex relationship between the eminent rabbi and his young charge. One of these letters, from 1905, expresses Voorsanger's reluctant approval of Magnes' Zionist activity even though the San Francisco rabbi was vehemently opposed to the new nationalist ideology. Voorsanger was willing to tolerate Magnes' Zionism, first, because he admired his talents, and, second, because he believed that Magnes was dedicated to the revitalization of Judaism and Jewish identity. See Moses Rischin, "The Jewish Experience in America: A View from the West," *Jews of the American West*, Moses Rischin and John Livingston, ed. (Detroit, 1991), 42.
11. Melvin I. Urofsky notes that American Jewry was largely opposed to Zionism at the turn of the century, with especially fierce resistance emanating from Reform quarters. See *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (New York, 1976), 85-91.
12. *Devir* 1 (1922/23), xii.
13. For an elaboration of the term "dissimilation," see Shulamit Volkov, "The Dynamics of Dissimilation: Ostjuden and German Jews," in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, ed. *The Jewish Response to German Culture* (Hanover, NH, 1985), 195-211. See also Gershom Scholem's memoir, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York, 1980).
14. For a brief discussion of the café culture in Berlin, see Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and his Polemics in the Hebrew Press*, (Leiden, 1980), 170-175.
15. See Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893-1914* (Ann Arbor, 1975), 127-133.
16. Though the overwhelming majority of the *Lehranstalt's* student population was German, there were a number of students from Eastern and East-Central Europe. In the years in which Magnes attended this institution, the geographic breakdown during summer semesters was as follows: 1900 (18 from Germany, 5 from Austria-Hungary, 2 from Russia, 1 from America); 1901 (21 from Germany, 5 from Austria-Hungary, 1 from Russia, 1 from America); 1902 (28 from Germany, 4 from Austria-Hungary, 1 from Russia, and 1 from America.) These figures are taken from volumes 19-21 of the *Berichte* of the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*.
17. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), 186-253. Aryeh Goren observes that Magnes took up Zionism in Berlin "with the ardour of a convert." See A. Goren, "Judah L. Magnes' Trip to Przedborz," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* I (1984), 163.
18. Magnes' letter of October 9, 1901 is included in *Dissenter in Zion*, 65.
19. See Steven E. Aschheim's summary of Franzos' life and work in *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison, WI, 1982), 27-31.

20. See Magnes's recollection on the thirtieth day memorial for his friend Max Schloessinger in 1944, published in *In the Perplexity of the Times* (Jerusalem, 1946), 150.
21. Goren, "Judah L. Magnes' Trip to Przedborz," 170.
22. *Dissenter in Zion*, 28.
23. Goell, "Aliyah in the Zionism of an American Oleh," 110.
24. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9:1470.
25. See Gideon Biger, "Binuyah shel Yerushalayim bi-tekufat ha-shilton ha-Briti, 1917-1948," *Yerushalayim ba-toda'ah u-va-ma'aseh ha-tsiyonit*, Hagit Lasky, ed. (Jerusalem, 1989), 183-215.
26. Undated notes from the Magnes Papers, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (Jerusalem), P3/1936.
27. See Magnes' opening address at the Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem on December 22, 1924 in *Addresses by the Chancellor of the Hebrew University* (Jerusalem, 1936), 7.
28. April 14, 1925, Magnes Papers, P3/1934.
29. Journal entry, Magnes Papers, P3/1936.
30. For a more comprehensive discussion of the intrigue surrounding the creation and early years of the Hebrew University, see David Nathan Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah': Jewish Scholarship and the Zionist Return to History," Columbia University doctoral dissertation, 1991, especially 52-120.
31. Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah," 80-81.
32. *Kitve David Yellin*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem, 1976), 206.
33. Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah," 85.
34. *Dissenter in Zion*, 265.
35. In a letter to Felix Warburg, his friend and the leading patron of the Institute of Jewish Studies, Magnes offered to surrender leadership of the University provided that Weizmann resign his position as president of the Zionist Organization and move to Palestine. Magnes to Warburg, July 29, 1925. Felix Warburg Papers, American Jewish Archives, box 222 (microfilm #1884).
36. See Biale, "The Idea of a Jewish University," *Like All the Nations?*, 133.
37. For more extensive treatments of the controversy over a Yiddish chair, see Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah," 124-132, and Aryeh-Leib Pilovski, "Di polemik arum dem plan tsu shafn in 1927 a katedre in yidish in Yerushalayim," *Di goldene keyt* 93:181-220.
38. Magnes to David Shapiro, January 24, 1928, Central Archives for the Hebrew University, file 14/3.
39. Despite the support of Magnes and the German circle, no chair in Yiddish was established in 1927 in response to David Shapiro's offer. In fact, it was not until 1947 that the Hebrew University's Humanities Faculty approved the creation of positions in Yiddish and Ladino. And it was not

until 1951 that the Yiddish position was actually filled by Dov Sadan. Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah," 131-132, 392.

40. See Agnon's unfinished novel, *Shirah* (Tel-Aviv, 1971), recently translated into English as *Shira*, trans. Zeva Shapiro (New York, 1989), as well as Arnold Band's commentary, with specific reference to Magnes, in "Gown and Town," *Like All the Nations?*, 155-163.
 41. Scholem, "Adam hofshi," *Devarim ba-go*, II: 489. This reading gains credibility in light of Scholem's condescending, though fond recollection of Magnes as "an eternal student." *Ibid.*, 490.
 42. Abba Eban, *Autobiography* (New York, 1977), 57; quoted in Bernard Wasserstein, "The Arab-Jewish Dilemma," *Like All the Nations?*, 197. Eban repeated this description at a 1982 symposium upon which the volume *Like All the Nations?* was based. See Moses Rischin's introduction to *Like All the Nations?*, 3.
 43. On Klausner and Magnes, see Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah," 79, 170.
 44. Among the important contributions to a new anthropological literature which challenges the notion of "essentialist" cultures are James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), James Clifford and George E. Marcus, ed., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986), and George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago, 1988).
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