
A Response to “A Note on ‘One of the People’ ”

Alfred Gottschalk

Dr. Samuel Schafler’s “A Note on ‘One of the People’ ” is most interesting. It is, of course, well known that Asher Ginsburg was a learned student of traditional Hebrew texts and that he was therefore conversant with Rashi’s comment on Genesis 26:10. However, to argue that this verse is the *raison d’être* for Ginsburg’s pen name is to ignore the clear and cogent reasons he himself gives for the adoption of *Ahad Ha-Am* as his literary name.

When I attribute Asher Ginsburg’s adoption of the name *Ahad Ha-Am* as an indication of his modest view of himself as a writer, I base the conclusion on his own description of his choice of pseudonym which appears at least twice in his writings.

In his *Pirkei Zikhronot* (Dvir edition, 1956, p. 469, col. 2, end of the first paragraph) he states how he began to publish his works and that he first used the pseudonym on 12 Adar 5649 in *Hamelitz* because he wanted to indicate that “I am not a writer, and I had no intention of entering into the community of writers, now or in the future. It is only a happenstance that I reveal my opinion on this issue, but *k’ahad ha-am* [as an ordinary individual].”

The introduction to the first edition of *Al Parshat Derakhim* (reprinted in the 1956 edition, page 3, col. 1, middle) has his description of the formative factors which influenced him to become *lesofer beyisrael*—“a writer in Israel.” He states that for many years it did not occur to him to seek *ateret sofrim*—“the status of an author.” He thought of himself *lo k’ahad hasofrim, ki im rak k’ahad ha-am*—“not as one of the writers but as an ordinary person.” He goes on to say that were he a real writer he would have written a good deal more.

Asher Ginsburg’s clear apposition of his writing “as one of the people” to his clear expectations of the productivity and standards of a “real author” demonstrate his self-image to be one of modesty. With

the benefit of hindsight we can appreciate the greatness of his mind and his contribution, but we should still respect his view of himself as *ahad ha-am*—“one of the people.”

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