

“The Significance of a Jewish University”: A Sermon on the Founding of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem¹

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In his *History of Zionism*, Nahum Sokolow (1859-1936) describes the laying of the cornerstones of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on July 24, 1918:

This was an event...likely to be of great importance in enabling *Jerusalem* to become a spiritual centre for the still dispersed communities of *Israel*, and destined, let us hope, to influence and elevate the mental life, social aspirations and religious conceptions of the Jews of the world.”²

The social, political, economic, institutional, and academic aspects of the founding and opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have received attention in scholarly works. However, we lack basic knowledge about Jewish religious responses to these events and their significance. Overall, we know very little about rabbis’ responses to the establishment of this institution and the worlds of meaning within which these responses were placed.³ Moreover, we know even less about the thoughts rabbis and preachers shared with their followers regarding these events. Clearly, in order to gain a full understanding of the various high and popular religious responses to the founding and opening of the Hebrew University, additional material needs to be uncovered and analyzed.

As a case study, this article focuses on a sermon delivered by Rabbi Dr. Israel H. Levinthal (1888–1982) in April 1918, three months prior to the ceremony of laying the cornerstones of the Hebrew University. This text, strongly in favor of this endeavor, enables us to gain a better understanding about certain perceptions of American rabbis toward the *yishuv*, the university’s role within the Jewish settlement in Palestine, as well as its importance for the Diaspora. In addition, this article highlights some of the similarities and differences between the religious responses in America and those dominant in Palestine,

hopefully shedding light on some of the religious conceptions Nahum Sokolow may have had in mind.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Historic Perspective

The founding of the Hebrew University in 1918, and its opening in April 1925, were important events in the history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine (*yishuv*), making a strong impression on Jews around the world.⁴ Numerous articles in Jewish newspapers and periodicals, as well as countless letters and cables received in Jerusalem attest to the impact these events had on congregations, organizations, and individuals.⁵

The idea of a Jewish university was raised several times in Jewish Diaspora communities in earlier centuries. However, by the end of the nineteenth century it had created considerable debate among leaders of the Jewish national movement, as well as non-Zionists, and facilitated some practical attempts to realize this idea and ideal.⁶ Naturally, most of these discussions, debates, and projects regarding the university and its mission took place within the social, cultural, and political elite circle of the Zionist movement, as well as among Jewish intellectuals and scholars around the world.⁷

These ongoing discussions, debates, and practical proposals drew relatively little attention among many American Jewish scholars and leaders of religious institutions, even though the founding of a university in Palestine presumably would have had various implications for them in the world of Jewish higher education, research, and scholarship.⁸ For example, Judah L. Magnes (1877-1948), who became the Hebrew University's first chancellor (1925-1935) and later president (1935-1948), was greatly occupied with Zionism and Jewish culture while pursuing postgraduate studies in Germany. Magnes knew about Chaim Weizmann's (1874-1952) thoughts about establishing a university in 1912, but was already heavily involved with New York's *kehilah* while the grounds were laid for the university;⁹ David Philipson (1862-1949), one of the leading Reform rabbis in America from the late nineteenth century until the 1940s, does not mention the Hebrew University in his memoirs;¹⁰ and Cyrus Adler (1863-1940) briefly relates to some of the committees he served on and events he attended,¹¹ notwithstanding his support for this institution and involvement with it several years prior to and

following its official opening.¹² Finally, the histories of the Hebrew Union College, the Rabbi Yizhak Elhanan Theological Seminary, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America indicate very little interest in the founding and opening of the Hebrew University. These institutions were busy dealing with their own problems, and the relationships between them which, at times, were quite tense.¹³

Rabbi Dr. Israel H. Levinthal: A Biographical Outline

Rabbi Levinthal was one of the most popular and well-known Conservative rabbis in Brooklyn throughout a career which spanned from the early 1910s until his death in 1982. He gained a national reputation as a preacher and communal leader among both Conservative leadership and laity.¹⁴

Israel Levinthal was born at Vilna in 1888. His parents, Orthodox Jews, immigrated to Philadelphia in 1891, following the invitation his father, Dov Aryeh (Bernard), received to serve as a rabbi. Israel attended public school in Philadelphia and continued his studies at the University of Pennsylvania. After a short period he relocated to New York and pursued his studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Columbia University. In 1909 Levinthal received a bachelor's degree from Columbia University and a year later he was ordained at the seminary. In 1914, while serving as a rabbi, he earned a law degree from New York University and then returned to the seminary from which he received a doctorate in 1920.

Israel Levinthal held his first position in 1909 at Temple Beth-El of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and in October 1910 he began serving as rabbi of Temple B'nai Shalom in Brooklyn. He held this position for four years and in 1915 accepted an offer from congregation Temple Petach Tikvah in Brownsville. In 1919 he left Petach Tikvah to serve as rabbi at the Brooklyn Jewish Center, a position he held until his death.

Throughout the next six decades Levinthal was active in the Rabbinical Assembly of America and in Brooklyn's Jewish communal life. He founded the Brooklyn Board of Rabbis and served as its first president (1929–1931), the Brooklyn Zionist Region (president 1933–1935), and the Brooklyn Jewish Community Council (president 1940–1944). Levinthal was a visiting professor of homiletics at the seminary between 1947 and 1962. He also published several books, which were based for the most part on sermons, lectures, and

addresses he had delivered throughout his career.¹⁵

Since the sermon on the Hebrew University was preached while Levinthal served as rabbi at congregation Petach Tikvah, two short notes regarding the character of this congregation are in order:

1) Petach Tikvah's membership drastically increased during the years Levinthal officiated: by 1918 it grew from twenty-two to two hundred seventy-five members, with a synagogue holding twelve hundred seats.

2) Many of Levinthal's congregants at Petach Tikvah were immigrants who "had the learning of the Old World," namely from East European *yeshivas*. Their acquaintance with traditional sources allowed Levinthal to incorporate them into his sermons.¹⁶

When preaching this sermon, Rabbi Levinthal was close to ending eight years as a full-time rabbi, three of which had been at Petach Tikvah, his second congregation. At this stage of his life, Levinthal was a local rabbi at an average congregation and not well known much beyond Brooklyn and its bordering neighborhoods. Therefore, his sermon allows for a good case study of an American Jewish, popular religious response to the founding of the Hebrew University.

"The Significance of a Jewish University"

Israel Levinthal preached this sermon on "Fri. April 19th, 1918. [At congregation] Pet Tik. [Petach Tikvah]." These details, as well as its "effect: good," are provided by Levinthal, who wrote them on the neatly folded paper, as he did with most of his handwritten sermons. Levinthal noted that he planned to deliver this sermon on "mar [march] 22 - 1918," but due to an illness he delayed speaking about the founding of the university until almost a month later.¹⁷

The title is a good point to begin analyzing the main issues raised by Levinthal in this sermon and placing its content in a historical context. In relating to this institution as "Jewish," Rabbi Levinthal takes a clear stand on one of the main debates among Zionist leaders and laymen in the *yishuv* regarding the character of the university, its role, and goal.¹⁸ In a letter to Solomon Rosenbloom of Pittsburgh, dated March 20, 1925, Cyrus Adler outlined the basic dilemma and its practical implications:

If, for example, they mean to establish a Hebrew University which shall differ from other universities only in the fact that the language of instruction is Hebrew, there is no point in any further discussion [regarding academic freedom and Jewish studies]. In the Department of Jewish Studies, all that this would mean would be that the instruction should be given in the Hebrew language; that the Professor of Bible might be from the neighboring Dominican School. I assume that this is not the point of view and that so far as the Department of Jewish Studies is concerned, it is not going to be merely Hebrew but also Jewish.¹⁹

Rabbi Levinthal consistently refers to this institution as a Jewish university, and not as a Hebrew university. His word choice suggests that its importance and mission lay in it being a Jewish institution, not simply one in which lectures are given in Hebrew. Levinthal's perception can be traced throughout his sermon. For example, in connection with his demand that the Jewish land be "consecrated to the highest and noblest ideals known to man," without unrighteousness, corruption and injustice, Levinthal hopes that the Jewish university "from which shall radiate the true teachings of Israel's law will be the guide and chart to the Palestinian Jew, inspiring him more and more with the thought that in Zion the Law of God must reign supreme." By connecting between "Israel's Law," "the Law of God," and "the teachings of social justice that permeate all Hebrew religious writings," Levinthal expresses an idea well rooted in Reform Judaism and American religious thought but uncharacteristic of a Conservative rabbi grounded in Orthodoxy.

Furthermore, the emphasis on social ideals with regard to the Jewish land reminds us of certain Jewish and Zionist social, socialist, and labor trends in America, Europe, and Palestine. Levinthal connected these social ideals with traditional Jewish sources in the Zionist context, something uncommon for a religious personality of his affiliation at the time.²⁰

Interrelated to the issue of a Hebrew university versus a Jewish university is the place of the university in the *yishuv*: Should it be a source of spiritual and cultural inspiration for the *yishuv* and/or Jewish Diaspora, or primarily an institution with practical goals such as providing skilled and intellectual workers? It seems as though many

Zionist leaders tended to emphasize the former, whereas laymen sided more with the material and practical potential contribution of this institution to the *yishuv*.²¹

From the other side of the ocean, Rabbi Levinthal did not see any contradiction between the two aforementioned goals of the university. He recognized that “the land will need men of science, men of learning. It will need physicians and chemists, architects and engineers to meet the new conditions that shall arise,” as well as the settlers’ need for ongoing cultural and spiritual reinforcement. In other words, spiritualism and materialism should be seen as complementing each other, a theme that will appear several months later in Chaim Weizmann’s speech at the laying of the cornerstones of the university.²²

In addition to focusing on the university as a source for material and spiritual needs of the *yishuv*, Rabbi Levinthal also related to its importance to individual Jews and Jewish communities in the Diaspora. The emphasis of this role of the university differs from that raised by several personalities in the years before and after the university’s founding, focusing on its contribution to academic scholarship, primarily in Jewish studies.

To-day there is not a Jewish higher school for the Jewish layman. We have our Theological Schools and Seminaries for the professional training of Rabbis. But if a Jewish student desires to become acquainted with the literature of the Jew, along modern and systematic lines, he enters the Semitic Department of any of our universities. There in most cases, he studies the partisan and biased opinions of Christian scholars, which have a very telling effect upon his Jewish consciousness.

Levinthal’s statement regarding the lack of departments of Jewish studies in American universities and the need for Jewish studies within Semitic departments is generally correct.²³ However, his judgment of “the partisan and biased opinions of Christian scholars” teaching in these departments overlooks the fact that a host of Jewish scholars taught in some of the most prestigious departments for Semitic studies in American universities toward the end of the nineteenth century: Cyrus Adler, who began teaching at Johns Hopkins University in 1890; Felix Adler (1851–1933), who taught

Hebrew and Oriental literature at Cornell University as of 1874; Richard J. Gottheil (1862–1936), Semitic languages professor at Columbia University starting in 1886; Morris Jastrow (1861–1922), Semitics professor at the University of Pennsylvania beginning in 1892; and Max L. Margolis (1866–1932), who began teaching Semitic languages at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1897.²⁴

Interestingly, Levinthal's perception that Jewish theological schools and seminaries, namely the Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary, were incapable of teaching Jewish literature "along modern and systematic lines" contradicts the picture we gain from scholarly works on these institutions published over the last few decades.²⁵ This assessment, made while Levinthal was a doctoral candidate at the seminary, would have undoubtedly been challenged, for example, by Professor Solomon Schechter (1847–1915), who accepted Levinthal to the seminary and was one of his teachers. As president of the seminary, Schechter made every effort to academize Jewish studies at this institution on the highest possible level.²⁶

It should be noted that although Levinthal was troubled by the state of the field of Jewish studies in American universities, East European Jews had been struggling since the late nineteenth century with *numerous clausus* policies in national gymnasiums and universities. This exclusionary movement was largely alien to the American experience and was a major reason behind why many in the Zionist movement, and some European Jewish personalities, sought to promote a Jewish/Hebrew university in Palestine.²⁷

Levinthal undoubtedly believed that studying at a Jewish university, located in "Zion," "surrounded by a healthy Jewish environment and stimulated constantly by Jewish idealism," would have an extremely positive effect on any Jewish student. In other words, the surrounding atmosphere in Jerusalem would be more conducive for a Jewish student than at an American university, and he "will be a better Jew, a more loyal and faithful Jew, a more devoted and proud Jew" because of this environment "which will have a lasting effect upon him." Furthermore, the student coming to study at the Hebrew University would carry this positive experience back to his community, where "it will radiate... not only in Jerusalem, but in the north and south, in the east and west, wherever Jews will reside."

Levinthal's strong emphasis on the cultural-spiritual aspects of

this impending institution of higher learning explains two contexts within which he relates to it in his sermon: connecting it, symbolically, to Raban Yohanan Ben Zakkai and Yavneh, and speaking about it in terms of a *yeshivah*. The location of Mount Scopus, which historically was “associated with the extinction of the last relic of Jewish sovereignty,” led, associatively, to Ben Zakkai and Yavneh. This connection was utilized in various ways, both religious and secular, in order to tie the founding of the university to the rebuilding of Jewish life in Palestine. Most of the people who linked Yavneh with the university perceived Yavneh as a spiritual-religious center, but their understanding of the role of the university was different, especially regarding the religious aspects of this comparison.²⁸

It seems as though Rabbi Levinthal believed that this institute had not only spiritual but also a certain religious meaning. Despite knowing the religious character of Ben Zakkai’s institute in Yavneh, Levinthal still called it a university: “When Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome, a Jewish University arose in Jawnia [Yavneh], founded by Rabbi Jochanan ben Zaccai.” Using such language linked the historic movement to the university to be founded in Jerusalem. This could be dismissed as a rhetorical device so common in oral discourse, and sermons in particular. However, Levinthal creates an analogy between the Torah as the text used by God to create the world, and the university as setting the guidelines for the renewed *yishuv* in Palestine. The university will “let the world know that in the restored Judea—Torah, the Divine Wisdom of God shall still be Israel’s watchword, Israel’s guide in life.” On the basis of this statement it appears as though Rabbi Levinthal’s choice to apply the verse “Out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem to the university” to the university is not only rhetorical, but also intentional.²⁹

The application of this verse to the university was a rather sensitive issue at the time for some leading American Orthodox Zionist rabbis, as well as for some of their contemporaries in Palestine. For example, in addresses made in the spring and summer of 1918, Rabbis Yehudah L. Maimon (Fishman) (1875–1962) and Meir Bar-Ilan (Berlin) (1880–1949) resented the application of the verse “Out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Several years later, in response to criticism from within certain Orthodox circles regarding his speech at the opening ceremony of the

university, Rabbi Avraham Y. Kook (1865–1935) claimed to be misunderstood for applying this verse to the university.³⁰

Another sensitive issue for Rabbi Kook was the comparison between the university and Yavneh. Rabbi Kook did not find favor in the founding of the Hebrew University, or in its opening. He perceived it as an institute which would be a secular-spiritual center and proceeded to found a *yeshivah* as an alternative institute. Initially, Rabbi Kook intended that this *yeshivah* be located in the actual Yavneh, in direct response to the symbolic associations of the university with Yavneh. However, since the university was to be built in Jerusalem, he came to the conclusion that his alternative institution must also be established in Jerusalem.³¹

Although Rabbi Levinthal was very close to Orthodoxy, if not part of it, in its early-twentieth-century definitions,³² he did not share some of the Orthodox suspicions regarding the Hebrew University. Therefore, he did not adopt the view regarding the use of the aforementioned verse and the comparisons to Yavneh which characterized several Orthodox leading rabbis.

It seems as though the influence of the emerging Hebrew University on the development of the *yishuv* in Palestine, its role within the *yishuv*, possible implications on the *yishuv's* character, and its stand vis-à-vis world Jewry, was, if anything, an issue for many American Jewish religious leaders on the national level. Local religious leaders had a host of other issues to deal with. It is reasonable to assume that only a few of the many hundreds of American local rabbis and preachers officiating during the years before and after the founding of the Hebrew University devoted a sermon to the significance of this institution or to the ceremony marking its foundation. Some may have mentioned the event, but they probably did not devote an entire sermon to it because they felt that this topic should not be discussed from the pulpit, or because immigrant congregations had other issues to address which were perceived by their rabbis and preachers as more relevant to their congregations.

This enhances the importance of popular religious responses to the founding and opening of the university, raised by those who are not as involved in Palestinian or worldwide Jewish politics. Furthermore, sermons enable us to gain some understanding of the religious terms and associations used in relating to this institution on a popular level.

Serving as a Conservative rabbi in Brooklyn and preaching to a congregation of hard-working immigrants, Rabbi Levinthal did not share the same views and sensitivities as Orthodox rabbis in Palestine regarding the “sacred canopy” spread over the university by secular Zionist leaders. This, notwithstanding his affiliation with Orthodox thought and way of life, which was probably due to the significant differences between Orthodoxy in America and Palestine. As an advanced graduate student who exposed himself extensively to modern Jewish historical-critical studies as well as general studies for years, Rabbi Levinthal could not see modern subjects and methodologies as posing a threat to the traditional text and its interpretation. Consequently, he spoke freely about a Jewish university and saw no problem with relating to its importance in religious terms.

Finally, living in the Diaspora, Rabbi Levinthal emphasized the university as a potential source of spiritual inspiration and positive influence on world Jewry in general and, especially, on Jewish students coming from the Diaspora. These students would come to study for limited periods and bring back to their communities their enlightened experiences.

As we have seen, most of Rabbi Levinthal’s views of the university are quite different than those of several Orthodox rabbis, both in Palestine and in America. However, it seems as though they all shared an ideal—some would even say naive—picture of the university’s fundamental role as an educational institute, instilling certain values and beliefs. Based upon their opinions and expectations, most, if not all, of these personalities were probably equally surprised, for good or for bad, when they discovered the marginal role of the university in teaching values and beliefs.

Toward the end of his sermon, Rabbi Levinthal states that “the project of a Jewish University in Jerusalem has already passed the stage of dream. It is gradually becoming a reality.” Rabbi Levinthal’s ideal vision, high expectations, enthusiasm and full support for the university-to-be suggest that he would have made every effort to attend the opening ceremony of the university at Mount Scopus, on April 1, 1925. For unknown reasons Rabbi Levinthal could not attend this event; however, together with Rabbi Israel Goldstein (1896–1986), a Conservative rabbi and personal friend who also could not attend this ceremony, they issued a resolution, conveyed by Levinthal. This

text "spoke of a new era in the spiritual and cultural life of Israel and envisaged the university unfolding the 'old yet ever new beauties of our Torah, so that, in the light of knowledge, we may once more proudly walk along our own board, clear, distinctive Jewish way of life.'" ³³

Unfortunately, we do not know what Rabbi Levinthal thought about the Hebrew University as the years went by, but it seems as though most of his visions and expectations regarding the university's character, role, and mission did not materialize. Nevertheless, Rabbi Levinthal would most likely have found symbolic significance in the fact that at the dawn of a new millennium, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem received permission from the American Office of Patents to register as the University of the Jewish People. ³⁴

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APPENDIX

"The Significance of a Jewish University"

Every Jew will be thrilled by the news that recently came to us from across the sea, that the first step in the organization of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, that the first work to engage the attention of the Zionist Commission, the members of which have already reached the Holy Land, was to be the founding of a great Jewish University that shall have its seat in the ancient capital of Israel—Jerusalem. A good and noble Jew—by the name of Israel Goldberg, ³⁵ for many years actively identified with the Palestinian movement, ³⁶ has already purchased the site—out of his own funds—in the Mt. of Olives,—overlooking the site where once stood the Holy Temple. And in the near future, we may hope to see a magnificent set of buildings, whence the words of the Prophet shall be [...] fulfilled: "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." ³⁷

A University as the first step in the founding of the new Jewish homeland! —How typical that is of the Jew! Other nations have different methods of establishing themselves in new lands. Rome when she conquered a piece of territory and desired to transform it

into Roman territory, stationed there her garrison of soldiers. That was to mark her entry into the domains of Rome. Egypt, Greece, Babylonia or Assyria of old knew no other method.³⁸ Even to-day the mighty nations of the world in their ambition to subjugate other peoples and by conquest to add to the territory of their own, signalize the event by the erection of heavy forts, of large cannon that tell the story of the new regime.³⁹

Not so with Israel! The Jews—upon their entry into their new land—mark the event not by the erection of fort or citadel, not by the establishment of gun or cannon, but by the establishment of a University, of a home for Wisdom and Learning, from which the new settler may derive his strength and his inspiration.

When Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome, a Jewish University arose in Jawnia [Yavneh], founded by Rabbi Jochanan ben Zaccai. And though the land was no more, this University kept alive the Jew and gave him strength and sustenance to endure the manifold hardships that were his lot.⁴⁰

To-day when Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, again a University is to be established—to let the world know that in the restored Judea—Torah, the Divine Wisdom of God shall still be Israel's watchword, Israel's guide in life.

There is a twofold significance in the establishment of a Jewish University. First of all, for the inhabitants of Palestine, for those who live there now and for the thousands who will undoubtedly flock there after the war,⁴¹ a Jewish University will be of incalculable service. The land will need men of science, men of learning. It will need physicians and chemists, architects and engineers to meet the new conditions that shall arise. The graduates coming from a Jewish University, will be inspired with Jewish idealism, they will then work in the regeneration of Judea, not with the thought of self, but with the thought of being of service to their own people, to their own land. It will afford an opportunity to the children of these pioneer settlers to receive a higher education, where they will learn the fullest statement, in terms of modern knowledge, of the whole span of Jewish life and thought—its traditions and aspirations. Nay more, giving the fullest attention to the study of Hebrew Literature, it will emphasize the teachings of social justice that permeate all Hebrew religious writings, and thus it will help to guide the pioneers in the Holy Land in establishing a land where justice and righteousness shall reign supreme, where love of

and service for fellow-man shall be the motive of their every day acts.

The Rabbis in their picturesque language tell us that when God created the world he used the Torah as His guide and chart.⁴² Just as a king who wants to build a palace does not build it himself, but secures first an architect, and the architect draws his plans and his charts, giving explicit directions, so too did the Torah serve as God's plan in the creation of the world. A fine thought underlies this Rabbinic homily. God desired that religion and morality be the foundation stones of the earth's sustenance and so He used the Torah as His guide in its creation. So too we may say of the new Jewish settlement that is to be. The new Jewish land must be consecrated to the highest and noblest ideals known to man. There un-righteousness dare not be, there corruption and injustice must not make their appearance. A Jewish University, from which shall radiate the true teachings of Israel's Law will be the guide and the chart to the Palestinian Jew, inspiring him more and more with the thought that in Zion the Law of God must reign supreme.

But a Jewish University will have a wider significance. It will influence not only the life of the Palestinian Jew, but the life of the Jews scattered throughout the world.

To-day there is not a Jewish higher school for the Jewish layman. We have our Theological Schools and Seminaries for the professional training of Rabbis. But if a Jewish student desires to become acquainted with the literature of the Jew, along modern and systematic lines, he enters the Semitic Department of any of our universities. There in most cases, he studies the partisan and biased opinions of Christian scholars, which have a very telling effect upon his Jewish consciousness. What a different effect his studies will have upon him and his life if he will take his course of studies in a Jewish University in the Jewish city of Jerusalem, in the Jewish land of Palestine!

And the Jewish student who is anxious to do research work in other fields of science, instead of going to Oxford and Cambridge and Heidelberg, where he gradually learns to forget his Jewish identity,— what will be the result if he will take the same course in a Jewish University, surrounded by a healthy Jewish environment and stimulated constantly by Jewish idealism!

The young student, no matter in what land he will live, coming from his studies in Jerusalem, will be a better Jew, a more loyal and

faithful Jew, a more devoted and proud Jew, because he will become influenced by the surroundings of Palestine which will have a lasting effect upon him.

We can almost see the vision of Jewish students from near and far taking a pilgrimage to the Jewish University, spending, if not years, at least a few months under the influence of this University, and then bringing back to their bretheren in their own lands the lessons they have there been taught. The Jewish University will thus place Jewish culture upon the high plane where it belongs. It will instill a love for Jewish knowledge and Jewish wisdom, it will radiate its influence not only in Jerusalem, but in the north and south, in the east and west, wherever Jews will reside.

With the learned Professor Israel Abrahams⁴³ I too say "I wish that I may live long enough to see this founded, and that I may myself have the honor to be one of its alumni."

The project of a Jewish University in Jerusalem has already passed the stage of dream. It is gradually becoming a reality. Already the famous Henry Bergson,⁴⁴ the world's greatest living philosopher, who until recently had naught to do with his Jewish bretheren, has now offered his services to teach for 2 years in this Jewish University gratis—without the thought of re-numeration. Georg Brandes, the world's greatest living critic has enthusiastically given this movement his support.⁴⁵ And the Jewish people everywhere, who will understand and appreciate what good such a University can bring to the Jew and to Judaism, will undoubtedly help in its creation, that it shall be a pride for all humanity. Then indeed, shall we see planted in the garden of Israel a Tree of Knowledge which will be a Tree of Life for Israel and for all mankind.

NOTES:

1. I thank the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, for their permission to read and make use of the Israel Levinthal Papers Collection in their archives. The sermon discussed may be found in Box 2, File 1918. I am greatly indebted to the anonymous reader and Richelle Budd Caplan for their helpful comments.

2. Nahum Sokolow, *The History of Zionism 1600-1918* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1919), vol. 2, 145. On the choice of Mount Scopus, the ceremony, and the symbolic, at times sacred meanings of this site, see Arthur A. Goren, "Sanctifying Scopus: Locating the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus," Elisheva Carlebach et al., eds., *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi* (Hanover, N.H., and London: Brandeis University Press, 1998),

330–48; Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the 19th Century: Emergence of the New City* (Jerusalem and New York: Yad Ben Zvi, 1986), 430–34; Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Tekes Hanahat Avnei Hapinah Launiversitah Haivrit Be15 Beav Tara" (24 Beyuli 1918)," Michael Heyd et al., eds., *Toledot Hauniversitah Haivrit Biyerushalayim: Shorashim Vehatehalot* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 90–120.

3. The speech of Rabbi Avraham Y. Kook (1865–1935) at the opening ceremony has been analyzed by Israel Bartal, "'Yehi Razon Shelo Te'era Takalah Al Yadi': Neumo Shel Harav Ay" h Kook: Diverrei Pareshanut," Heyd, *Toledot Hauniversitah Haivrit*, 315–20. For a discussion of the reaction of five Orthodox rabbis, see Kimmy Caplan, "Hamesh Teguvot Shel Rabanim Ortodoksim Leyisud Hauniversitah Haivrit Biyerushalayim Ulepetihatah," *Yahadut Zemanenu* 10 (1996), 139–64.

4. Surprisingly, the centrality of these events has little expression, if at all, in some of the classic works on Zionism. For example, Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) fails to mention the founding of the university, and on page 134 he states, incorrectly, that "the high commissioner himself completed his term of office in June 1925. *In that month* the Hebrew University was inaugurated on Mount Scopus..." (Italics mine). Finally, Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), does not mention either events.

5. Collections of these documents are located at the archives of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mount Scopus Campus.

6. Israel Kolat, "Ra'ayon Hauniversitah Haivrit Batenuah Haleumit Hayehudit"; Heyd, *Toledot Hauniversitah Haivrit*, 3–75; David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42–9; Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Crown of Wisdom: Sixty Years of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1985), vol. 1, 16–67.

7. This explains the focus on these elites in the scholarly works mentioned, as well as Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past*, esp. 1–68; Jehuda Reinharz, "Laying the Foundation for a University in Jerusalem: Chaim Weizmann's Role, 1913–1914," *Modern Judaism* 4,1 (1984), 1–39; idem, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Zionist Leader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), index reference: "Weizmann and Jewish University Project"; idem, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), index reference: "Hebrew University."

8. Jonathan D. Sarna, "Two Traditions of Seminary Scholarship," edited by Jack Wertheimer, *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), vol. 2, 66–67.

9. Arthur A. Goren, *Dissenter in Zion: From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1–58.

10. David Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew* (Cincinnati: J. G. Kidd and Son, 1941). Philipson strongly opposed Zionism, and in 1918 he "attempted to form a national anti-Zionist organization" in America, in response to the Balfour Declaration. See Kerry M. Olitzky et al., eds., *Reform Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1993), 163.

11. Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1941), 356–57, 367–68, 372–74.

12. Naomi W. Cohen, "'Diaspora plus Palestine, Religion plus Nationalism: The Seminary and Zionism, 1902–1948,'" Wertheimer, *Tradition Renewed*, 2: 138–39; Myers,

Re-Inventing the Jewish Past, 49; Ira Robinson, ed., *Cyrus Adler: Selected Letters* (Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society and The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1985), vol. 1, 233–34, 330–31; vol. 2, 58–65, 82–85, 96–100.

13. Evidence to this is the scarce references to the Hebrew University in the following works: Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva: Higher Education, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Samuel E. Karff, ed., *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion At One Hundred Years* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976); Wertheimer, *Tradition Renewed*.

14. Nevertheless, his name does not appear in either the index or the bibliography of Robert V. Friedenberg's "*Hear O Israel: The History of American Jewish Preaching, 1654–1970*" (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989).

15. This basic outline is based upon the following works, which include additional information: Kimmy Caplan, "The Life and Sermons of Rabbi Israel Herbert Levinthal (1888–1982)," *American Jewish History* 87, 1 (1999): 1–28; Deborah Dash Moore, "Israel Herbert Levinthal," in *American National Biography*, John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vol. 13, 549–50; Pamela S. Nadell, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (New York, Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 174–76.

16. Caplan, "The Life and Sermons of Rabbi Israel Herbert Levinthal," 8–9, 19.

17. This sermon was initially intended to be preached on Friday evening before reading the weekly portion of *Zav* but was delivered during the reading of *Aharei Mot-Kedoshim*. In addition to Levinthal's illness, the delay of close to a month in preaching the sermon may have been due to the upcoming Passover holiday, which demands sermons relating to it. It should be noted that there does not appear to be any connection between either weekly portions and this sermon. However, considering the nature of Levinthal's Friday evening sermons and lectures, which many times did not relate to the weekly portion, this is not surprising.

18. For some expressions on these debates, see Kedar, "Tekes Hanahat Avnei Hapinah Launiversitah Haivrit," 91–92; Israel Kolat, "Hauniversitah Haivrit: Bein Universitah Yehudit Leuniversitah Erez-Yisraelit," *Madaei Hayahadut* 35 (1995), 47–60; idem, "Ra'ayon Hauniversitah Haivrit"; Anita Shapira, "The Zionist Labor Movement and the Hebrew University," *Judaism* 45, 2 (1996): 183–99.

19. Robinson, *Cyrus Adler*, 2: 111.

20. For various aspects of Socialist and Labor Zionism, see Avyatar Friesel, *Hatenuah Haziyonit Bearezot-Haberit Bashanim 1897–1914* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1970), 131–35; Allon Gal, *Socialist Zionism: Theory and Issues in Contemporary Jewish Nationalism* (Reprint, Lanham, MD, and London: University Press of America, 1989); Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinhartz, *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 120–44, 196–229; Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998); Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1975), 102–04.

21. Rachel Elboim-Dror, *Hahinukh Haivri Be'erez-Yisrael*, vol. 1, 1854–1914 (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1986), 246; idem, vol. 2, 1914–1920 (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1990), 155, 191–92; Hagit Lavsky, "Bein Hanahat Even Hapinah Lapetihah: Yisud Hauniversitah Haivrit, 1918–1925," Heyd, *Toledot Hauniversitah Haivrit*, 122–26; Reinhartz, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman*, 259; Shapira, "The Zionist

Labor Movement and the Hebrew University," 186–87.

22. I rely on the version published in Kedar, "Tekes Hanahat Avnei Hapinah Launiversitah Haivrit," 110–20.

23. For a detailed historical account, see Paul Ritterband and Harold S Wechsler, *Jewish Learning in American Universities: The First Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 10–77. On the Jewish seminaries in this context, see 139–49.

24. See Frederick E. Greenspahn, "The Beginnings of Judaic Studies in American Universities," *Modern Judaism* 20, 2 (2000): 209–26.

25. See above, note 13.

26. On Schechter's efforts to academize the seminary, see Sarna, "Two Traditions of Seminary Scholarship," 55–67; Mel Scult, "Schechter's Seminary," *Tradition Renewed*, vol. 1, 61–68, 76–77.

27. Israel Bartal, "Yehudei Mizrah Eropah Vehahasekalah Hagevohah," Heyd, *Toledot Hauniversitah Haivrit*, 85–90; Kolat, "Ra'ayon Hauniversitah Haivrit," 40–44 Hayim N. Bialik (1873–1934) alluded to this problem in his speech at the inauguration of the Hebrew University, which adds another dimension to his words, "Better one little university but entirely my own...than thousands of temples of learning from which I derive benefit but in which I have no recognized share." See Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), 284–85.

28. Goren, "Sanctifying Scopus," 333–36.

29. Levinthal's vision of the university which strongly emphasized the study of Jewish religious literature also supports this argument: "...giving the fullest attention to the study of Hebrew Literature, it will emphasize the teachings of social justice that permeate all Hebrew religious writings...."

30. Caplan, "Hamesh Teguvot Shel Rabanim Ortodoksim," 142–45, 156–57.

31. This was similar to his major involvement in the 1910s in founding the Tahkemoni school in reaction to the Hebrew Gymnasium (*Hagimnasiah Haivrit*). See Caplan, "Hamesh Teguvot Shel Rabanim Ortodoksim," 155–56; Elboim-Dror, *Hahinukh Haivri Be'erz-Yisrael*, vol. 2, 290.

32. On the problematics of defining what is Orthodoxy and who is Orthodox at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Jeffrey S Gurock, *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, 1996), 103–17, 352–56, notes 2–6; Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in Jewish Life," *American Jewish Year Book* 66 (1965): 30–36; idem, "Religion, Class, and Culture in American Jewish History," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9, 2 (1967): 227–42.

33. Israel Goldstein, *My World as a Jew: The Memoirs of Israel Goldstein* (New York and London: Herzl Press, 1984), vol. 1, 65.

34. See *Toar: Ketav-Haet Shel Bogrei Hauniversitah Haivrit Biyerushalayim* (October 2000), 35.

35. His name was actually Yizhak Leib Goldberg. See Kedar, "Tekes Hanahat Avnei Hapinah Launiversitah Haivrit," 102. The estate was purchased from Sir John Gray Hill of Liverpool. On this estate, see Jacob Wahrman, "Meahuzat Grei Hil Le'migrash Hauniversitah' Behar Hazofim," Heyd, *Toledot Hauniversitah Haivrit*, 163–201.

36. Namely, the Zionist movement.

37. *Isaiah* 2:3 and *Micah* 4:2.

38. Although this grand generalization has merit, it is not correct in all cases. Furthermore, stationing soldiers was not always done in order to mark territories. See for example Israel Shatzman, *The Armies of the Hasmonians and Herod: From Hellenistic to Roman Frameworks* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 36–98, 217–77. I owe this reference to Professor Hanan Eshel.

39. This alludes to the First World War.

40. On Ben Zakkai, this university, and the circumstances in which it was founded, see Gedalyahu Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 269–344; Anat Yisraeli-Taran, *Agadot Hahurban: Masorot Hahurban Basifrut Hatalmudit* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1997), 51–76. On the mythos of Yavneh as to what kept the Jewish people's "strength and sustenance," see Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome: Risk and Realism in International Politics* (Chappaqua, NY: Rossel Books, 1983), 18.

41. Undoubtedly, the First World War.

42. See *Miderash Tanhumah*, Bereshit 1:5; *Miderash Rabah*, Bereshit 1:1.

43. Israel Abrahams (1858–1924) succeeded Solomon Schechter at Cambridge University as Reader in rabbinic and talmudic literature, following Schechter's immigration to America in 1902 to head the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. On Abrahams, see David G. Dalin, "Israel Abrahams: Leader of Liturgical Reform in England," *Reform Judaism* 32, 1 (1985): 68–83; Elliott Horowitz, "Jewish Life in the Middle Ages and the Jewish Life of Israel Abrahams," David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman, eds., *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 143–63.

44. Bergson (1859–1941), famous French philosopher and Nobel laureate, was invited in late 1919 by the "University Commity," to a conference which aimed to help plan the university. Professors Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud were among the Jewish scientists invited to this conference, which never took place. See Lavsky, "Bein Hanahat Even Hapinah Lapetihah," 129.

45. Brandes (1842–1927), a Danish critic and scholar, greatly influenced European and, in particular, Scandinavian literary circles.