

AHAD HA-AM AS BIBLICAL CRITIC

by

ALFRED GOTTSCHALK

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Cincinnati

Ahad Ha-Am had a great reverence for the Bible. He considered it the bedrock out of which Judaism was built. Fully schooled in its contents and in the commentaries and master commentaries which comprise traditional Jewish biblical scholarship, he was at ease in its complex thought-molds and its exegesis. His veneration for the Hebrew Scriptures, upon which he drew so heavily in the development of his own philosophy of "Spiritual Zionism," did not, however, preclude a critical approach to biblical materials, nor the selective use of the biblical scholarship of his day.

Ahad Ha-Am's attitude toward the Bible and its exegesis flows from other than traditional religious considerations. He was an agnostic and he regarded reverence for the past and its religious heritage a vital psychological attitude, even when the past's vast body of belief is no longer deemed tenable in the modern world. Criticism of the Bible meant, for Ahad Ha-Am, the constructive, selective use of those aspects of biblical thought which would enable Judaism to have historic continuity and national purpose.

Reverence for the tradition and for criticism of tradition abide in tension in Ahad Ha-Am's thought and are held together by the mortar of "Spiritual Zionism." The founder of the philosophy of "Spiritual Zionism" held the belief that the literary creations of the Jewish people were the product of the Jewish "national spirit," brought into being to assure the national survival of the Jewish people. With this notion as a premise for the investigation of the Jewish past, the Bible and tradition must be viewed both as inevitable consequences of the creativity of the "national spirit" and simultaneously as its objects of reverence.

The *Tanak*, Ahad Ha-Am maintained, exercises a certain "hypnos"¹

1. The term "hypnos" came into vogue in Ahad Ha-Am's day. It was believed that ideas of the past could be brought through hypnosis into the present.

upon us, tying us to it through a close and unique feeling which transcends the generations (1956a, p. 408). Ahad Ha-Am's *feeling* about the Bible was certainly a factor which prevented him from engaging in that rigorous discipline of biblical studies which characterizes modern biblical scholarship. His emphasis on feeling, as well as his reluctance to engage in the kind of critical inquiry which was characteristic of the *Wissenschaft* school,² was due also in part to his rejection of objective canons of scientific inquiry which conceivably might have led him from his primary concern, namely, finding a solution for the plight of Judaism. Since Ahad Ha-Am proceeded to project such a solution in a somewhat doctrinaire manner, he used the results of biblical scholarship selectively and without particular concern for inner consistency. Leon Roth (1962, p. 29) is undoubtedly correct when he observes,

Ahad Ha-Am *used* ideas he found ready to his hand in order to enable him to master and systematize the problems of his age and environment. He *used* ideas he found. He did not examine them over-minutely first; and he did not worry overmuch if they were—ultimately—not sound and—ultimately—incompatible with one another.

If the Bible, the historic repository of Jewish national feeling and consciousness, was to have value as the buttress of his system, Ahad Ha-Am most likely felt that in essential respects he had to keep the *textus receptus* free of that penetrating criticism which might have interfered with his philosophic predispositions and the conclusions which were already inherent within them. In this respect he is guilty of being orthodox, but for reasons different from those of his orthodox religious confreres.

Another reason for Ahad Ha-Am's anti-critical attitude to such problems as textual emendations, documentary hypotheses, and philological problems is that he felt these researches to be inconclusive and confusing. A telling synopsis of his views on such subjects of criticism as mentioned above may be obtained from his observations on the Bible curriculum offered at the Hebrew Gymnasium of Jaffa. The Gymnasium, which was founded by the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*, a philanthropic organization for the assistance of Jews in Eastern Europe and the Near East, was Germanic in its pedagogical methodology (1946, p. 347, n. 55). While the Gymnasium ultimately adopted Hebrew rather than German as the language of instruction, and became more Zion oriented, it was under the *Hilfsverein* influence when Ahad Ha-Am made a tour of inspection of it.

2. See Gottschalk (1980) on Ahad Ha-Am's attitude toward Zunz and Jewish *Wissenschaft*.

He published the results of his visit in *Haššilló'ah* in 1912. In his review (1956a, pp. 415–420), Ahad Ha-Am apologizes for what will be a scathing critique of the school, since he wished no harm to such a young and fragile institution as the Gymnasium. The truth, however, must be told. Ahad Ha-Am attended the lectures of Dr. Mosensohn who, alone among his colleagues, publicly set forth his methodology. According to Ahad Ha-Am (1956a, pp. 417–418), Dr. Mosensohn taught that until the present time *Tanak* research was not carried on as an independent course of study. Jewish biblical scholarship was the peg upon which generations fastened the creativity of their spirit until finally the Bible's original natural lustre was lost. The time is now ripe, claimed Dr. Mosensohn, to return to study the *Tanak* itself. The *Tanak*, Dr. Mosensohn held, was the sole source to which a poor, despoiled and driven people, such as the Jews, could look for a different life—one of freedom and honor. To accomplish this, it was necessary to study each period, hero or sage in proper order and in proper context, so that all the particulars and minutiae surrounding the subject could be integrated and made to yield a complete picture. For this purpose, Dr. Mosensohn held, the *Tanak* was to be divided into four divisions for purposes of study: (1) the historical books of the Bible, (2) the books of the Prophets, (3) the books of poetry and metaphor, and (4) the books of law. According to the present order of the books of the *Tanak*, these divisions are intermeshed. What is required is to sort out the literature of the same genre and to present it to the student in its sequential unfolding. It is necessary first to begin with the historical materials, then the prophetic and so on. For example, in the Prophetic books as in the historical, there are intertwined within the same book early and later materials which, in fact, are, at most, diverse. What is required, Dr. Mosensohn held, is the restoration of material to its proper source and time so that each prophet will be fully and clearly portrayed and the interconnected chain of ideas among the prophets fully understood in relation to their historical causes and settings. In order to achieve clarity, in the prophetic literature for example, it may be necessary to correct or change a letter, a word, or even a full sentence so that all difficulties in meaning can be reconciled. The poetic literature is to be studied in the same manner and according to the same principles.

Ahad Ha-Am, seeking to test the effectiveness of this method of instruction, questioned students and found them knowledgeable in certain areas. When Ahad-Ha-Am asked one of the more alert students to read a passage from one of the Prophets, the student hesitated and offered the excuse that he had studied the book during the previous year and had for-

gotten it. Ahad Ha-Am showed his astonishment, only to have the student reflect, "How is it possible to remember? Everything is so completely mixed up!" Ahad Ha-Am concluded that while the students knew about the Prophets, they did not know the prophetic books (1956a, p. 418). This incident, Ahad Ha-Am observes, opened his eyes. The multiplicity of corrections, deletions and emendations, all undertaken in the hope of achieving clarity, led instead to ambiguity and confusion. He adds the further caustic observation that part of the students' training required the rewriting of a prophetic book in accordance with the *schema* laid down by the professor. This was to include all of the rearrangement of passages and the professor's proposed emendations. Ahad Ha-Am observes that if the student lost his notebook, all the copies of the *Tanakh* extant were of no avail to him, while a knowledge of German and Professor K. Marti's *Commentary on the Old Testament* (1897-1903) might rescue him. Marti's work alone, even without the aid of an instructor, would make it possible for the student to re-create his notebook, as though Marti's work constituted the revelation at Sinai (1956a, p. 418). Ahad Ha-Am concluded that if knowledge of the *Tanakh* was to be the basis of a nationalist education, such an education could not rest

. . . on a castle suspended in the air . . . The basis of a nationalist education must be solely the *Tanakh* as it is, as it has been transmitted for more than two thousand years through the inner depths of our national life, serving as its foundation, through all the generations (1956a, p. 419).

It is clear from the above illustration of Ahad Ha-Am's attitude toward the scientific study of the Bible that he believed such study to be inimical to his program. What was required in biblical studies was the cultivation of a love for the Bible and a knowledge of it as it was traditionally transmitted. What differentiates Ahad Ha-Am from the strict traditionalist is the use to which this kind of biblical knowledge and reverence for the Bible is to be put. For the fundamentalist Christian or Jew the Bible is a hallowed, immutable document because it is God's timeless revelation to man. Ahad Ha-Am was anything but a fundamentalist. For him, the Bible was the prime document reflecting the activity of the Jewish "national spirit." The Bible was the blueprint of the evolution of Jewish national existence. Criticism of a radical nature could only revise the lines of that blueprint, blur its outlines and undermine its authority. Carving the Bible up, as Dr. Mosensohn had done, created confusion. Since confusion is not conducive to reverence, love or awe, Ahad Ha-Am concluded that the *textus receptus* presented fewer problems toward the furtherance of his program than did the new scholarship. Particularly in light of his general viewpoint of the

evolution of Judaism, it was easier to explain the pre-logical or the miraculous elements in the Bible as stemming from the nation's spiritual childhood than to perform drastic surgery on the biblical text itself. The Bible, in Ahad Ha-Am's system, was a static document to be spiritually and dynamically interpreted. He required that it be respected but not that its theological ideas be believed. He reserved to himself the right of the liberal interpreter of the Bible, to make selective use of its contents. If Ahad Ha-Am is a critic of the Bible, it is in this sense that his criticism must be understood.

The world of scientific criticism against which Ahad Ha-Am reacted, and which he accused the followers of the *Wissenschaft* school of imitating, was essentially the creation of middle and late nineteenth century German biblical scholarship. What characterized this scholarship, by and large, was its rejection of the traditional view that the Holy Scriptures contained a timeless revelation of God to the world. This revelation was viewed as immutable and categorically binding upon the believer. The modern biblical criticism that had been set in motion challenged this doctrine of revelation. Holy Scripture soon came to be viewed as the literary record of man's slow growth in his understanding of moral imperatives and of the divine. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, the contents of the Bible were viewed as reflecting the evolutionary process and in some instances as being tied to the rectilinear mode of development.³ Such a supposition carried with it implicitly a dateline on the contents of the Bible. The latter came to be viewed in terms of their primitivism or sophistication as the nineteenth century critic understood "primitivism" and "sophistication."

A prime example of this approach may be found in the work of Karl Heinrich Graf (1815-1869) who, in a letter to Eduard Reuss (1804-1891) in October 1862, contended that the middle section of the Pentateuch in its entirety was post-exilic.⁴ In his work *Die geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testament: Zwei historisch-kritische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig, 1866), Graf concluded that the Priestly Document (P) was a post-exilic work to be assigned to and connected with the age of Ezra in the fifth pre-Christian century. This dating was arrived at because the document contained a universal history, an extensive legal code dominated by priestly interests, and was formal and precise in its style and "given to stereotyped

3. Note, for example, De Vries' comment (1963, p. 43) on K. H. Graf: "His standard of judgment was to a great extent the law of linear evolutionist development."

4. Kraus (1956, p. 224). Reuss also had believed that "P" was the latest source of the Pentateuch (Kraus, p. 227).

expressions" (Hahn, 1954, p. 5). Far from being the most ancient source of the Pentateuch, it was really the latest. This theory transferred, so to speak, Mosaic law from the beginning to the end of Jewish history. Graf's thesis, a particular expression of the documentary hypothesis, impressed Abraham Kuenen (1818–1891), who had earlier come to a similar conclusion (De Vries, 1963, pp. 41–42, 43). Kuenen differed with Graf, however, on the splitting up of the *Grundschrift* into a pre-Yahwistic *Grundschrift* and what Graf had called "the pseudo-*Grundschrift*." Both documents, Kuenen reasoned, had to be either early or late. Kuenen believed that the entire *Grundschrift* was post-exilic.

Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), to whom Ahad Ha-Am had referred as an important source of modern biblical scholarship (1956b, II, p. 18), enlarged and developed Graf's viewpoint. Wellhausen's *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1886) depicts the religious development of the Old Testament with masterful strokes and lays bare with impressive clarity the complex literary and critical problems of the Hebrew Bible. What is particularly germane to our discussion is the similarity of approach between Ahad Ha-Am and Wellhausen regarding some salient aspects of the history of the religion of Israel. Ahad Ha-Am's dependence on Wellhausen is difficult to gauge. Were it not for the unusual reference in one of his letters to Wellhausen, the mutuality of ideas of these two thinkers might have escaped us. The similarity of thought between Wellhausen and Ahad Ha-Am lies in their placing a higher value on the prophetic movement and a lower estimation of the priestly cult, as well as on their common emphasis on an evolutionary development in ancient Jewish thought.⁵

In his *Prolegomena*, Wellhausen reconstructed the history of Israel as beginning with the Exodus, not the patriarchs. An evolutionary hypothesis precluded the patriarchs' holding the lofty monotheism mirrored in Genesis. The patriarchal narratives were the creation of late Judaism (1886,

5. Kraus (1956, p. 240) points to four major influences on Wellhausen: (1) The source criticism with regard to the *Urkundenhypothese* from Astruc to Hupfeld; (2) The work of Reuss, Graf and Kuenen on the historical priority of the legal and priestly materials; (3) The efforts of DeWette and Ewald in creating out of the source criticism a composite picture of the history of Israel; (4) The Hegelian philosophy of history received through Vatke. According to Kraus, the confluence of these influences are to be found as *Forschungstendenzen* in Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*. However, a number of scholars have recently argued against the idea of Hegelian influence on Wellhausen through Vatke (e.g., Blenkinsopp, 1977, p. 21; Smend, 1982, p. 14). Even though it is particularly with reference to Vatke's evolutionary schematization that Wellhausen and Ahad Ha-Am share some points of view, denial of Hegel's influence on Wellhausen would not lessen the similarity between Wellhausen's and Ahad Ha-Am's views on prophecy and priesthood.

pp. 330-340). Only with the Exodus from Egypt did the history of Israel commence (1886, p. 367). Moses' religion was not monotheism but monolatry (1897, pp. 30-31). The cult grew out of life:

Hier ist alles lebendig und im Fluss; wie Jahve selber, so arbeitet auch der Mann Gottes im lebendigen Stoff, praktisch, in keiner Weise theoretisch; geschichtlich, nicht literarisch (1886, p. 362).

From these beginnings Israel's religion became more complex. The prophets pushed the religion to a new crest of development by the growth of monolatry into ethical monotheism (1897, pp. 110-111). Righteousness became the basic requirement of religion. The Deuteronomic Reformation, growing out of prophetism, centralized the cultus in Jerusalem which in turn led to the Priestly Code (1897, pp. 132-134). The codification of the ritual law was post-exilic, carried out during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah (1886, pp. 427-428).

While the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis was broadly attacked, the general overview of the hypothesis dominated biblical scholarship for half a century. There is much in the hypothesis that compelled assent. Yet, remove from it the presuppositions of evolutionary development, add to it the archeological evidence since the turn of the century, focus upon it the remarkable researches of Gunkel, and the hypothesis begins to weaken. The *evolution* of the religious thought of the Bible, through these researches, became much more complex and far less arbitrary than heretofore supposed.

Ahad Ha-Am was at one with Wellhausen in describing the period prior to the prophets as one which was characterized by polytheism, in which the phenomena of nature became gods and the world was peopled with as many deities as there are good and bad forces in nature (1956a, p. 79). Ahad Ha-Am projects a double polytheism—one natural, the other national—which corresponded to the needs of life in this primitive period. The national god was appealed to in times of trouble and war, and was called "the God of their fathers." When danger was past, the people reverted again to the everyday gods of nature (1956a, p. 79). The prophets, however, spoke of the one God. Their message fell on deaf ears until after the destruction of the Temple, when historic circumstances firmly established the monotheistic idea in the heart of the people. There it developed together with the hope for a national restoration and the return to Eretz Yisrael (1956a, pp. 79-80). For Ahad Ha-Am, prophecy is the distinguishing characteristic of the "Hebrew national spirit." Out of Jewish tradition, as well as Wellhausen's scholarship, Ahad Ha-Am understood that Moses initiated the major religious and historical thrust of Judaism. In his essay

"Moses" (1912, p. 311), Ahad Ha-Am reiterates the traditional belief that Moses was the "lord of the prophets," a truly unique man. "And there arose not again in Israel a prophet the likes of Moses."

Ahad Ha-Am further agrees with Wellhausen on the religious coloration of pre-Mosaic times. Ahad Ha-Am is virtually silent on the patriarchal period. This is noteworthy, since the promise of Canaan to Abraham is crucial for the Zionist idea and finds its first explicit statement in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis.

On the question of the role of the priest in ancient Jewish society, Ahad Ha-Am has much to say. Without going into any analytical discussion on the Priestly Code and its relationship to pre-existing documents of the Bible, Ahad Ha-Am places a negative value on priestcraft. Nevertheless, in his 1893 essay "Priest and Prophet" (1956a, pp. 90-92), Ahad Ha-Am concedes that priestcraft had a purpose since it mediated prophetic ideas and ideals. The prophet is the radical man, the initiator of a primal force. By definition, the prophet is an extremist, an absolutist in truth-telling, epitomizing truth in action. The prophet stands for a society based on absolute righteousness. The prophetic ideal requires accommodation and compromise. This task falls to the priest. He accommodates the prophet's teaching; he develops laws, rituals, and institutions to make the prophetic ideals function in society. The priest seeks "not what *ought* to be, but only what *can* be" (1956a, p. 91). This treatment of the priesthood as a secondary force in society presupposes the pre-existence of the prophetic community; hence the idea that the prophets produced the teaching of the priests.

Ahad Ha-Am follows the Graf-Wellhausen school when he asserts that the centuries that elapsed between the end of the prophetic period and the rise of the Maccabeans were essentially dominated by the priestly class.⁶ Ahad Ha-Am distinguishes between Hebraism, which is especially exemplified by Moses and the prophets, and Judaism which is the handiwork of the Pharisees (L. Simon, 1912, pp. 22-23). In his close adherence to the critical school of scholarship, Ahad Ha-Am is virtually in total agreement with the Jewish "reformers" whom he nevertheless castigates for this very same position. Ahad Ha-Am differs with them and Wellhausen in his nationalist emphasis. The prophets, he points out, were not solely universalists. They were also Jewish particularists (1956a, p. 92). While the prophets emphasized Israel's mission to the nations, they did not predicate the success of the mission to bring absolute justice to the world on the basis of permanent dispersion. It was not, as the "reformers" maintained, a ques-

6. L. Simon (1912, p. 19); cf. Ahad Ha-Am (1956a, pp. 350-352).

tion of either universalism or particularism, but of both. A further difference between Ahad Ha-Am and Wellhausen was that Ahad Ha-Am's concerns were practical while Wellhausen's were primarily historical and critical. Temperamentally, both thinkers responded to the same religious values but their goals were worlds apart. Ahad Ha-Am was a staunch defender of the Pharisees as being in the prophetic tradition and revivers of Hebraism. In the last days of the Second Commonwealth, when all seemed lost, ". . . the political Zealots remained sword in hand on the walls of Jerusalem while the Pharisees took the Scroll of the Law and went to Jabneh . . ." (1956a, p. 351). As the prophets before them, the Pharisees believed in the unity of people, land and ideals; of flesh and spirit. Here, Ahad Ha-Am pulls away from Wellhausen and the "reformers" to carve out his own position. Unlike the historical-critical school, Ahad Ha-Am used biblical criticism to further a particular practical philosophy which he sought to implement. The foundation for this program can be found in the Bible.

Ahad Ha-Am's Midraš on Moses

Jacob Agus (1957, p. 289) correctly points out that

The central hero-image in Jewish religious culture is the prophet. Round this image are concentrated the memories of Israel's greatness—Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the emergence of those religious ideals that made possible the return from Babylonia, and the genesis of the two daughter-faiths of Judaism, Islam and Christianity.⁷

So deeply did the prophet leave his impress on Jewish consciousness that the Messiah himself was pictured as a prophet (Sanh. 93b). Saadia (quoted in Agus, 1957, p. 289, n. 1) describes the Messianic age as one in which "prophecy will reappear in the midst of our people so that even our sons and slaves will prophesy." Ahad Ha-Am, as we have seen, thought of the prophets of Israel as those singular-minded men who were uncompromising in portraying the single ideal or truth (1956a, p. 91). Moses, in particular, loomed in Ahad Ha-Am's consciousness as the prime architect of the spiritual life of the Jewish people. When, in 1899, Ahad Ha-Am helped to organize the *Bené Mōše*,⁸ the secret fraternal order charged with the task of revitalizing the Jewish "national spirit," it took its name from Moses.

7. Cf. Saadia Gaon, *'Eminôt vedē'ōt*, Chap. viii, pt. 6.

8. See L. Simon (1960, pp. 42-43). The importance of Moses in the thinking of key Jewish philosophers is comprehensively treated by Atlas (1954, pp. 369-400).

In the career of Moses the members sensed their own purpose and the possibility of their deliverance from spiritual bondage.⁹

Ahad Ha-Am's exposition of the role of Moses in Jewish historical experience is a *midraš*. While it is a form of biblical criticism, it is not a scientific analysis of sources, of linguistic difficulties or of textual problems. The underlying questions of the essay are—Who was Moses and what was his teaching? In the process of analysis Ahad Ha-Am summarizes his views on the nature of historical truth and archeological truth. He also evaluates the role of the great man as an historical force, taking into account the myths that develop about the achievements of great men. It was "obvious" to Ahad Ha-Am that the

Real great men of history, the men, that is, who have become forces in the life of humanity, are not actual, concrete persons who existed in a certain age. There is not a single great man in history of whom the popular fancy has not drawn a picture entirely different from the actual man; and it is this imaginary conception, created by the masses to suit their needs and their inclinations, that is the real great man, exerting an influence which abides in some cases for thousands of years—this, and not the concrete original, who lived a short space in the actual world, and was never seen by the masses in his true likeness (1912, p. 306).¹⁰

Ahad Ha-Am pities the scholars who burrow in sources, attempting to reconstruct through their researches the great men of history as they really were. What such scholars do not understand is that

Not every archeological truth is also an historical truth. Historical truth is that, and that alone, which reveals the forces that go to mold the social life of mankind. Every man who leaves a perceptible mark on that life, though he may be a purely imaginary figure, is a real historical force; his existence is an historical truth. (1912, p. 307).

Conversely, a man who had incontrovertible existence but who left no imprint on life, while he is a "literal fact," he made no difference on the course of events and therefore his existence is irrelevant as far as historical truth is concerned.

Through this formulation of the nature of historical truth, Ahad Ha-Am has in fact negated the value of objective data of the past. That body of material which he calls "archeological truth," he has sharply separated

9. Cf. Ahad Ha-Am, "*Derek hahavyim*" (1956a, pp. 438-439).

10. Hugo Bergmann, in his 1913 essay on Moses, quotes these lines approvingly, and adds that "in diesem Sinne einer historischen Realität hat Moses wahrhaft gelebt . . ." (p. 5). Robert Weltsch, in his review of Bergmann's *Worte Moses*, also affirms the truth of "Geschichte im Dienste des Lebendigen" (1917/18, p. 630).

from "historical truth." By defining "historical truth" as that which molds history, Ahad Ha-Am has again revealed his method of dealing with the past. If facts do not create our structure of history and determine what our conclusions are to be, then it is clear that the facts of the past can take on meaning only if a philosophy of history is imposed upon them. While no historian approaches the past without some *a priori* hypothesis, this is quite different from foisting an outlook on the data which is not necessarily derived from the facts themselves. Ahad Ha-Am states this position in its most extreme form when he comments that it matters not at all to him that some historians prove, "by the most convincing evidence," that some national hero never existed. Only the picture of the hero in the mind of the people really matters:

. . . real history has no concern with so-and-so who is dead, and who was never seen in that form by the nation at large, but only by antiquarians; its concern is only with the living hero, whose image is graven in the hearts of men, who has become a force in human life (1912, p. 308).

If scholars should conclude, for example, that Moses never lived or had no historical reality, it would really be of no consequence (1912, p. 309). The questions that historians would ask—How and under what circumstances did this myth then arise? Who created it and what purpose did it serve?—would be totally irrelevant for him. They would not change our conception of history in any real sense.

I care not whether this man Moses really existed; whether his life and his activity really corresponded to our traditional account of him; whether he was really the saviour of Israel and gave his people the Law in the form that it is preserved among us; and so forth. I have one short and simple answer for all these conundrums. This Moses, I say, this man of old time, whose existence and character you are trying to elucidate, matters to nobody but scholars like you. We have another Moses of our own, whose image has been enshrined in the hearts of the Jewish people for generations, and whose influence on our national life has never ceased from ancient times till the present day. The existence of this Moses, as a historical fact, depends in no way on your investigations. For even if you succeeded in demonstrating conclusively that the man Moses never existed, or that he was not such a man as we supposed, you would not thereby detract one jot from the historical reality of the ideal Moses—the Moses who has been our leader not only for forty years in the wilderness of Sinai, but for thousands of years in all the wildernesses in which we have wandered since the Exodus.

And it is not only the existence of this Moses that is clear and indisputable to me. His character is equally plain, and is not liable to be altered by an archeological discovery. This ideal—I reason—has been created in the

spirit of the Jewish people; and the creator creates in his own image (1912, pp. 308-309).

The creator certainly does create in his own image. Perhaps this analysis will shed some light on Ahad Ha-Am's understanding and use of Moses. If our appreciation of this great hero of the Jewish past is not bound by "archeological fact," but known through tradition, legend, fable, and fancy, then indeed we can create any image of Moses¹¹ that we choose. What was Ahad Ha-Am's image of Moses? On close inspection we shall find that it varies with both the biblical and the traditional accounts. Ahad Ha-Am denies that Moses was a military hero, though he admits that Moses was on the battlefield against Amalek. Moses was merely an interested observer who helped the Israelites through his moral strength (1912, p. 310). Was he then a statesman? He was not! Moses was an inept politician who had to depend on Aaron for guidance in political matters. Unlike the common image that tradition has of Moses as lawgiver, Ahad Ha-Am argues that he was not a lawgiver because a lawgiver legislates only for his own time and not for the future (1912, pp. 310-311).

What, then, was Moses? For Ahad Ha-Am, Moses was the prophet par excellence, the archetype of Hebrew prophecy. The characteristics of the prophet are extremism and truth-telling. He knows no compromise with the desire for absolute righteousness. But as the prophet will not yield to the world, so the world will not yield to him. His teachings are made the heritage of society by lesser men, who do not believe in extremism and the mediators between the prophetic teachings and the people. These priests of the prophetic word

. . . transmit his influence by devious ways, adapting their methods to the needs of the particular time, and not insisting that the message shall descend on the workaday world in all its pristine purity (1912, p. 314).

Aaron performed this role of mediator in the time of Moses. He translated the eternal prophetic work into the historic framework (1912, p. 320). Israel, freed, wanders in the wilderness and comes to Sinai. Ahad Ha-Am has the prophet reveal the grandeur of God to the people. Ahad Ha-Am has Moses telling the people about the God of their fathers, but Moses gives that God a new form. He is a universal God, the ruler of the whole earth and over all nations (1912, p. 321). Of course, one would be hard put

11. For a thorough account of the Jewish people's images of Moses, see D. J. Silver (1982). Silver agrees with Ahad Ha-Am that while "what is left of the original Moses may be only an afterglow; . . . Moses is inextricably embedded in the Jewish way and spirit" (p. 311; cf. pp. 289-292).

to find this particular God concept expressed in the Exodus narrative. After the theophany, Ahad Ha-Am has Moses go to the top of the mountain to complete the law in solitude. When he descends and sees the people worshipping the gods which the priests, the men of the hour, have fashioned to appease the people, the tablets of the Law "fall" from his hands (1912, pp. 322-323). The prophet, realizing how impossible the task is of molding this rabble into a chosen people, ". . . no longer believes in a sudden revolution." What is required is education and training, "slow steps," to prepare the people for its great mission (1912, p. 323).

The terminology employed by Ahad Ha-Am in this last quotation is that which he often used to refer to the methods and program of "Spiritual Zionism." It is the language of a patient teacher prodding reluctant students to comprehend a great truth. The interesting hypothesis that Ahad Ha-Am saw himself as the reincarnation of Moses¹² is worth mentioning. I find the idea particularly attractive because he remolds so much of the Moses story and the prophetic message to his own needs and program for the rebuilding of the spiritual psyche of the Jewish people along the lines of prophetic ideals.

Ahad Ha-Am resumes the narrative of Moses with the wandering in the wilderness, in which the prophet teaches and hopes that his goals shall be realized at some point in the future (1912, p. 324). He tears from his heart the hope that he shall live to see his people's mission fulfilled. This, the heroism of the "superman," was the greatness of Moses. Another leads the people to its promised destiny. This is the way it must be, for the prophet could not stand to see his lofty idealism compromised with reality. Moses ". . . shall see the land before him, but he shall not go thither" (1912, p. 326; cf. Deut. 32:52). The greatness of the prophet was his vision of a glorious national future. This hope permeated the liturgy and kept the Jewish soul alive in the midst of horrible oppression.

The essay on Moses was written to serve a practical rather than a theoretical purpose; one that would implant hope for the future and would lead to the spiritual regeneration of the Jewish people.

Israel has never lived in the present. The present, with its evil and its wickedness, has always filled us with anguish, indignation, and bitterness. But just as constantly have we been inspired with brilliant hopes for the future, and an ineradicable faith in the coming triumph of the good and the

12. A. Simon and J. Heller (1955, pp. 30-31). In light of the affinity between Ahad Ha-Am's and Wellhausen's views on prophecy, it is perhaps significant that Wellhausen also may have "sensed himself as a modern counterpart . . . [to] the prophets" (Hayes, 1982, p. 56).

right; and for these hopes and that faith we have always sought and found support in the history of our past, whereon our imagination has brooded, weaving all manner of fair dreams, so as to make the past a kind of mirror of the future (1912, pp. 327-328).

Ahad Ha-Am admits that reflection on the past has little other purpose than to supply aspirations for the future. If this is the basic frame of reference, then facts *per se* have no value except as they further this goal. If the "archeological truths" of history deny the practicability of these goals, then these "truths" must be declared as useless. Hope, not truth, is the lesson that Ahad Ha-Am wishes to derive from the Jewish past for the beleaguered generation of his time. Hard, cruel, ever-present reality was the crucible in which Ahad Ha-Am compounded his views of the *Tanakh* and of its criticism of our understanding of the Jewish experience.

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