Your life story mirrors that of Israel in the twentieth century, from the Yishuv to the State of today. How did your religious upbringing and intellectual training evolve in this context?

What brought me to write my works on Judaism? The background of my relation to Judaism is, first of all, the education that I received in my parents' home, in school, and in the Zionist-socialist youth movement in which I was educated—all this, against the background of the reality of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel and Europe in that period.

My parents were both members of the Third Aliyah. They were not “religious” people, but they also did not define themselves as “secular,” but as “free.” This was deliberate on their part, because they had a profound connection with the Jewish people, the Jewish heritage, and Jewish culture. My mother came from a home of Mitnagedim, namely, the opponents of Hasidism. My father, however, came from a Hasidic family. His Hasidic soul was quite strong. He was a poet, and his deep Hasidic religiosity was expressed in his poetry—in what he wrote and what he sang. He sang a great deal. In this respect, there was a great difference between me and most of my peers in school and in the youth movement. In no way did I accept Joseph Hayyim Brenner's “negation of the Diaspora” in which many youth of the Yishuv were raised. To be sure, I accepted “negation of the Diaspora” in the sense that the situation of the Jewish people in Exile was bad. But the negation of Jewish existence, of the Jewish essence and the Jewish heritage, was very far from my heart. My parents implanted

---

1 Third Aliyah: the wave of immigration to the Land of Israel immediately after World War I, consisting largely of halutzim whose progressive social ideology helped reinforce the foundations laid by the Second Aliyah (1904–1913) including the establishment of the kibbutzim and the Histadrut workers’ cooperative. All of these had a profound influence on the character of the Jewish homeland-in-the-making.
in me a feeling of profound identification with the Jewish people, and a feeling of identification with its heritage. For my mother, this was ethics, and she spoke of Judaism as ethics. For my father, this was his deep religiosity. To be sure, this did not express itself in a normative religious life regimen, but it was definitely expressed in the fact that Shabbat was Shabbat, and that holidays were holidays; they fasted on Yom Kippur, and they fostered our connection with the Jewish heritage. There was also a connection with Yiddish literature, and a very deep connection to Bialik’s poetry, which influenced me from a very young age.

All this should be seen against the background of daily reality in pre-State Israel. I belonged to the generation of the sabras, that is to say, the first generation Israeli-born children. This generation saw itself as the continuation, in the full sense of the word, or even the realization of Zionism—or more specifically, of Socialist Zionism. My coming of age—my entrance into the sense of adult responsibility as a member of my society—was during the War of Independence (1947–1949). Thus, I belong to the generation for which the War of Independence was a formative experience. Within that context we had to determine our positions on the whole gamut of national issues—the Holocaust, the struggle with Great Britain and with the Arabs, all the problems of the internal division between the religious and the secular. Especially crucial for shaping my Jewish orientation was the great split that took place in the Labor movement, including the kibbutz movement and the Mapai party, as well as the youth movement (Ha-Maḥanot ha-Ölim,2 of which I was then a member). On the one side were advocates of the Soviet orientation, with its extreme negation of the Diaspora with respect to the relation with the Jewish people and Judaism. On the other side, you had the Social Democratic path, the path of Berl Katzenelson (1887–1944), for example, who were dismayed at the in-fighting and the alienation from Judaism and the Jewish people [that the pro-Soviet party manifested], and began to work in the opposite direction. I was influenced by this second path. I knew Berl from reading his books. But the man who had the strongest direct personal influence on me was Katzenelson’s disciple, Yehuda Sharett (1901–1979). All his activity—especially his musical activity—made a

2 Ha-Maḥanot ha-Ölim: a socialist-Zionist youth movement, established in 1929 and continuing in existence to this day. Especially in the pre-State period, this group was a major educational and socializing organ for the youth of the progressive communities and contributed materially to the development of the socioeconomic infrastructure by establishing forty-two kibbutzim.