In memory of my good friends
Bob Liberles and Josh Stein

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Hebrew and Aramaic are mine. In preparing the translations of biblical and rabbinic texts, I have consulted published translations of these texts and translations of them quoted in books and articles by writers to whom I refer throughout the book.

The transliteration of Hebrew and Aramaic is based on the "general" transliteration style for Hebrew of *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), with some modifications. Some words are spelled according to common usage in English, even when the spelling differs from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* transliteration style.

PREFACE

Political revolutions and movements of cultural renewal are often guided by a master narrative according to which the problems of the present can be solved by returning to the lost vitality of a golden age. According to the Zionist narrative embraced by the movement's secular majority, rabbinic Judaism, which had dominated Diaspora Jewish life for nearly two thousand years, played a central role in the problematic existence of Jews in their day. Secular Zionists viewed the Talmud and other rabbinic texts, including collections of Midrash and codes of Jewish law, as the source of the negative qualities of Diaspora existence that needed to be removed from Jewish life. To a large extent, Zionists looked to the Bible, which so vividly captured the glorious national past of the Jews, as a source of inspiration from their cultural heritage. The Zionist dream envisioned the physical return of Jews to their ancient homeland, the Land of Israel, and their reconnection with the vitality of their biblical past in that Land. Given the negative view of rabbinic Judaism held by secular Zionists, it is not surprising that from the period of Zionist settlement in the Land of Israel through the first decades following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the voluminous post-biblical literature produced by rabbis, while not completely ignored, played a relatively marginal role in the curriculum of secular schools attended by most Jewish children as well as in broader cultural discourse.

Ideologies based on a rejection of one's contemporary existence and the yearning for a radical renewal of a glorious past do not always survive over time. Once the rejected features of existence have been defeated, it is not uncommon for members of later generations to wonder why their parents or grandparents were so adamant in turning against what had once been viewed as valid. This is what began to happen in Israel in the 1960s, following the fulfillment of the Zionist dream when the State of Israel was established. At this time, some members of the new generation of secular Israelis found the Zionist narrative of rebellion against rabbinic Judaism and a return to the Bible to be inadequate

and sought to reconsider rabbinic literature and other post-biblical traditional Jewish texts as possible resources to guide them in their lives.

This newly emergent dissatisfaction with the anti-rabbinic bias of the Zionist narrative had a number of causes. It can be explained in part by the natural tendency of a new generation to question the ideology of their parents. Such questioning can be particularly acute when the younger generation's historical circumstances differ radically from those of the older generation. In this case, those who questioned the anti-rabbinic bias of Zionism largely belonged to the first generation of Jews born in the Land of Israel. Having lived only in the Land of Israel, they did not have the need felt by the previous generation to actively rebel against a Diaspora existence dominated by rabbinic Judaism, and they therefore could afford to develop a more open-minded attitude toward the rabbis. Furthermore, this new generation had grown into adulthood during a period in which Israel was continuously under existential threat from the Arab countries that surrounded it and had witnessed a tremendous loss of life in wars fought with its Arab enemies. The anxieties and tensions this generation had experienced in living through this period inevitably called into question the secure national rebirth that Zionism had purported to deliver to the Jewish people. The experience of feeling existentially vulnerable opened up members of this generation to an appreciation of how rabbinic Judaism had dealt with the political uncertainties of Jewish life after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The interest in connecting with rabbinic Judaism was also motivated by the realization that those who reject a part of their past impoverish their souls and deny themselves valuable cultural resources.

What began as a reaction to the anti-rabbinic bias of secular Zionism in the 1960s persisted throughout the subsequent decades of the twentieth century and has continued to be a factor in Israeli culture to the present day. The title of this book, *The Charm of Wise Hesitancy*, is taken from a 1999 essay by Ruth Calderon, one of the important leaders of the rediscovery of post-biblical Judaism in Israel in recent decades. In that essay, Calderon wrote that she was motivated to participate in this cultural trend after she came to question the marginalization of the post-biblical textual tradition in her education in secular schools. Her shift, and that of others of her generation, to a more positive attitude toward this tradition was the product of their realization that secular Zionism had unfairly condemned rabbinic Judaism as the source of the very qualities and values of Diaspora Jewish life against which

Zionism had rebelled. "We knew," she wrote in a rather sarcastic tone, "that the Talmud was distanced from us and we were distanced from it so that we would not catch the 'viruses' of the 'non-productive' and 'pale' Diaspora Jews."[1]

Furthermore, she and other members of her generation had difficulty identifying with the heroic Zionist culture that had been presented to them as the antidote to Diaspora life. No longer worried about being pulled into aspects of Diaspora culture and no longer enamored of the alternative Zionist culture in which they were educated, they were open to seeing that which was positive in the rabbinic culture central to the Jewish Diaspora existence that had been so denigrated by their educators: "We met for the first time new kinds of role models: alongside the hero of the Six-Day War who 'did not hesitate for a moment,' alongside heroes of 1948 … and their eternal youth, we met old heroes, sitting on the benches of the study house. Like the grandfathers we never had. By means of them were uncovered the charm of wise hesitancy, of a Diaspora liberated from the bounds of provincialism and religiosity. The virtual reality of the Talmud became for us a ready-made option."[2]

Parallel to the positive reappraisal of rabbinic literature by secular Israelis, some religious Israelis have undertaken a positive reappraisal of legendary texts belonging to the genre of rabbinic literature known as *aggadah*, a genre which had been largely marginalized at the highest level of text study in yeshivot and therefore had been of lower cultural status than legal texts belonging to the genre of rabbinic literature known as *halakhah.* Just as secular Israelis began to realize how much they were missing by not engaging in rabbinic literature in general, these religious Israelis began to realize how much they were missing by not engaging in any serious way with rabbinic legendary texts. In response, they sought to revive the dialogic relationship between *halakhah* and *aggadah* that had come to be abandoned in previous generations. In doing so, they discovered a new way to deepen their understanding of the religious truths embodied in traditional Jewish texts.

The turn of religious Israelis to *aggadah* and the turn of secular Israelis to post-biblical literature, with a focus on *aggadah*, has led to a shared interest in the positive reevaluation of rabbinic legendary texts. A sub-genre of *aggadah* in which both religious and secular Israelis have been engaged is that of what has come to be known as Talmudic stories, which tell of the life and times of the sages who established and developed rabbinic culture in the Land of Israel and Babylonia before, during, and following the period of the destruction of the Second Temple.

The idea to write a book about the resurgence of interest in Talmudic stories began in the bookstores of Jerusalem that I frequent every time I visit Israel. Beginning in the early 2000s, I noticed a number of recently published books that were anthologies of Talmudic stories. My own previous books have been about the relationship of modern Hebrew belles-lettres (primarily Israeli poetry) to the Bible, post-biblical Jewish texts, and traditional Jewish religious experience.[3] It occurred to me that what the authors of these anthologies of Talmudic stories were attempting to do was similar to what the writers I had studied in my previous scholarship had aspired to accomplish. Both sets of writers sought ways to bridge the gap between traditional texts and contemporary consciousness. The writers of fiction and poetry, about whom I had written, did this by turning to the Bible and other traditional Jewish sources with the purpose of creating versions of these texts that reflected contemporary concerns; the authors of the books I was now discovering were collecting and writing interpretations of Talmudic stories that reflected contemporary concerns. The genre was different, but the cultural impulse was the same.

In addition, a central theme of my scholarship has been the breakdown of the barriers between religious and secular culture in Israel in recent decades. I have written on secular Israelis engaging with classical religious texts and exploring the nature of religious experience, and I have written on religious Israelis adopting literary genres developed primarily by secular writers and exploring themes found in secular literature that had once been taboo in religious culture. I was therefore delighted to discover another manifestation of the convergence of the interests of religious and secular Israelis as they came to appreciate the relevance of a genre of rabbinic literature that both, for different reasons, had once ignored.

I have set for myself two primary goals in writing this book. I have sought to convey to readers an understanding of the growing interest among Israelis in the study of Talmudic stories in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. I have also aspired to present a wide range of contemporary Israeli interpretations of selected Talmudic stories. To my knowledge, no one has attempted to present such an overall picture of the reinterpretation of Talmudic stories in Israel today. In presenting these interpretations, it is my hope that readers will learn about how these readings have been shaped by contemporary Israeli concerns and also how they themselves might read these stories in light of their own experiences.

In anticipation of questions about terminology that may arise in the minds of readers, I offer two points of clarification. First, I use the term "Talmudic stories" to refer to legends about rabbis of the periods in which the Mishnah and Talmud were developed in the Land of Israel and in Babylonia. This genre is often referred to as *ma'asei ḥakhamim* ("sage legends"). Not all sage legends were published in the Talmud; some appear only in collections of rabbinic Midrash. Nevertheless, since the Talmud is such a vast repository of these stories, they are often referred to as "Talmudic stories," and I have adopted that practice. In fact, almost all of the stories on which I focus in this book are from the Talmud.

Second, any sophisticated analysis of Israeli culture will recognize the inaccuracy of the view held by many Israeli Jews that they can be neatly divided into two categories based on their relationship to the Jewish tradition: *dati* (religious) and *ḥiloni* (secular). There are many so-called *dati* Israelis who participate actively in secular society and culture, and there are many so-called *ḥiloni* Israelis for whom religious faith and at least some traditional ritual practice are central to their lives. In this study, I have made use of these terms when I have sought to distinguish between Israelis who in principle accept the authority of the system of traditional Jewish law (for whom I use the term "religious") and Israelis who do not (for whom I use the term "secular").

I would like to acknowledge the following people who generously agreed to meet with me and provide insights into the resurgence of interest in Talmudic stories in Israel and the larger contexts of the secular return to the study of post-biblical Jewish texts and the religious turn to the study of legendary texts: Ronen Ahituv, Mordechai Bar-Or, Yehuda Brandes, Ruth Calderon, Dov Elbaum, Ari Elon, Shmuel Faust, Shlomo Glicksberg, Micah Goodman, Ido Hevroni, Admiel Kosman, Chani Kroyzer, Binyanim Lau, Yehoshua Levinson, Yehudah Mirsky, Nira Nahliel, Inbar Raveh, Tsafi Sebba-Elran, Naama Shaked, Avigdor Shinan, Amram Tropper, Ruhama Weiss, Oded Yisraeli, Anat Yisraeli-Taran, and Be'eri Zimmerman. In particular, I want to express my gratitude to Tsafi Sebba-Elran, whose comments on the manuscript have been invaluable. I also thank Brown University for a sabbatical in the academic year 2012-2013, during which I was able to make substantial progress in my research and in writing this book. In addition, I am grateful to the Program in Judaic Studies and the Brown University Faculty Travel Fund for financial support that enabled me to undertake research travel to Israel. Finally, I want to express my love for my wife Shelly and my deep gratitude for our steadfast commitment to living as mutually supportive partners in the beautiful life we share.

INTRODUCTION

RECOVERING A REPRESSED PAST

On February 12, 2013, Ruth Calderon was invited to the dais of the Israeli Knesset to deliver her first speech as a newly-elected member of parliament.[1] The speech was unlike any given in the history of deliberations in Israel's legislature in that it consisted primarily of her reading and interpreting a Talmudic story. The Talmudic story that Calderon read before the Knesset, first in the original Aramaic and then in Hebrew translation, was, as is typical of these stories, very brief:

> Rabbi Rahumi studied under Rava in Mehoza. He would regularly come home to his wife on the eve of Yom Kippur. One day [on the eve of Yom Kippur] the topic [he was studying] drew him in. His wife anticipated him, "He is coming. He is coming." He did not come. She began to grieve. She shed a tear from her eye. He was sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him, and he died. (B. Ketubot 62b)[2]

The story reflects what appears to have been a common practice among rabbinic scholars in Babylonia: to absent themselves from home for long periods of time to study Torah. The author of the story expresses his disapproval of this custom by portraying empathically the emotional stress experienced by Rabbi Rahumi's wife when he was so engaged in Torah study that he forgot to return home for the sacred holiday. The excitement captured in her cry of anticipation, "He is coming. He is coming," dissipated when she realized he had failed to appear. The tear that she shed in response to her profound disappointment was followed immediately by Rabbi Rahumi's death when the roof on which

he was sitting collapsed, thereby suggesting that in the end he received a well-deserved divine punishment for being so immersed in Torah that he abandoned his wife.

Why, one might ask, would a secular Israeli politician devote her first parliamentary speech to reading and interpreting a selection from the Talmud, a compendium of rabbinic teachings that is at the center of religious Jewish study in yeshivot, but largely ignored by secular Israelis? Furthermore, how could a story critical of a husband who has neglected his wife hundreds of years ago possibly be relevant to the political discourse of Israel's parliament?

In her speech, Calderon signaled to her fellow parliamentarians and to Israelis as a whole that the Talmud was no longer just for religious Israelis and that as a secular Israeli, she advocated studying it outside the confines of the yeshiva. She also made clear that she believed that the Talmud was a relevant source to which one could turn to find solutions to the issues faced by contemporary Israelis. In particular, in her speech she declared that this text could serve as the basis for a discussion of one of the burning political issues of the day: whether the military draft exemption of ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students, dating back to the early years of the State of Israel, should be eliminated or at least modified.

The drafting of ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students had been one of the central political issues during and in the immediate aftermath of the recent election, due largely to two factors: (1) Before the election the Israeli Supreme Court had struck down the yeshiva draft exemption law, which meant that the Knesset was obligated to replace it with a law that did not grant such an exemption. (2) For the first time in many years, no ultra-Orthodox party was included in the governing coalition. Therefore, there was a high likelihood that a new law passed by the Knesset would define the obligation of ultra-Orthodox youths to serve their country in a way that would infuriate that segment of society. The dominant ultra-Orthodox leaders were determined to fight to preserve the draft exemption. Their fierce opposition to eliminating the exemption was due largely to the fact that the ultra-Orthodox feared that if their youths were engaged in either military or civilian national service, they would be exposed to a larger cultural world that might alienate them from the ultra-Orthodox way of life in which they were raised.

Calderon had just been elected to parliament as a member of the Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party, headed by Yair Lapid, which had campaigned on a platform opposed to the fact that ultra-Orthodox Israeli men were allowed by law to engage in extended periods of time studying

in yeshiva rather than submit to compulsory military service. Israelis of a wide range of political orientations opposed this draft exemption, because it resulted in a high percentage of ultra-Orthodox Israeli men not sharing equally with other Israelis in the responsibility of defending their country. Opponents of the draft exemption also disapproved of the fact that in their full-time yeshiva study, these ultra-Orthodox men did not typically learn skills that would make them employable citizens, causing them and their families to become unnecessarily dependent on government welfare throughout their lives. As Calderon explained in her interpretation of the story, Rabbi Rahumi represents for her the typical ultra-Orthodox Israeli man who, in choosing to devote his entire life to studying Torah, neglects his other human obligations. In the case of Rabbi Rahumi, the neglected party is his wife; in the case of the ultra-Orthodox Israelis, the neglected obligation is military or at least civilian national service and contributing to Israel's economy.

Despite the association she suggested between the story's critique of Rabbi Rahumi and the negative image of the ultra-Orthodox found in Yesh Atid's campaign rhetoric, Calderon was careful not to make use of the story in her speech to excessively fan the flames of political controversy. She magnanimously declared that she learned from the story "that often, in a dispute, both sides are right."[3] In her reading of the story, both secular Israelis, represented by the wife, and ultra-Orthodox Israelis, represented by Rabbi Rahumi, could be seen as justified when they asserted the value of their way of life and criticized the way of life of their political opponents: "Many times we [secularists] feel like the woman, waiting, serving in the army, doing all the work while others [the ultra-Orthodox] sit on the roof and study Torah; sometimes those others [the ultra-Orthodox] feel that they bear the entire weight of tradition, culture, and Torah on their backs while we [secularists] go to the beach and have fun."[4] It is only when she could come to appreciate the point of view of both sides, she declared, that she would be able to contribute to finding a solution to this much debated political issue.

Calderon then went on to advocate an alternative to the existing dichotomy between ultra-Orthodox Israelis spending their time studying Torah and not serving in the army and secular Israelis serving in the army and neglecting the study of Torah. In her ideal world, the ultra-Orthodox would fulfill some form of national service and the secularists would engage in the study of Torah. "I aspire," she announced, "to bring about a situation in which Torah study is the heritage of all of Israel … in which all young citizens of Israel assume the responsibility of both

Torah study and military and civilian national service."[5] In addition to the obvious implication of this statement that she favored a law that would draft ultra-Orthodox young men into the army or some form of civilian national service, she stated explicitly that she would work for financial support from the government for Torah study by secular Israelis equal to that provided to religious Israelis who study in yeshivot.

Calderon's speech evoked a number of strong reactions from Israelis along the political and cultural spectrum. Many responded enthusiastically to this Talmud lesson by a secular Israeli, which publicly broke down the barriers between secularism and religiosity that have dominated Israeli culture for so long. Others, particularly those on the two cultural extremes of ultra-Orthodoxy and secularism, were taken aback by this highly unconventional speech; it confirmed their political anxieties evoked by the establishment of the new government coalition led by Binyamin Netanyahu, of which Yesh Atid became a member in early 2013.

In an article in "Kikar Shabbat," an ultra-Orthodox web site, Yaakov Blau wrote that he believed that Calderon's speech revealed a strong connection between her party's support for proposals to draft ultra-Orthodox men and her encouragement of Torah study from a secular perspective, both of which presented dangers to the future of the ultra-Orthodox way of life.[6] Blau argued that the speech represented a contemporary revival in Israel of the efforts of the modernizing, anti-traditional, late eighteenth and nineteenth-century European Jewish movement known as the Haskalah to destroy traditional Judaism. This new Haskalah, in his opinion, is more dangerous than the original one. It had been clear in its day that the older Haskalah was determined to undermine the authority of the Torah and encourage Jews to assimilate into gentile society, asserted Blau, and so one could understand it as an enemy force to be resisted. While the newer Haskalah is also an enemy of tradition, Blau maintained that it presents itself more ambiguously than the older Haskalah did, and thereby deceives people about its true purpose, causing them to let down their guard. "[It] is not at all like the Jewish Haskalah in Europe," argued Blau, "it understands religious faith and does not reject it out of hand. … [It] does not want to transform us into a nation like all the nations. On the contrary, [it] wants to increase Torah study."[7] From Blau's point of view, however, this newer Haskalah resembles the older Haskalah in one way. Just as the older Haskalah resorted to the deceptive use of rabbinical figures (presumably here Blau includes not only Haskalah-oriented traditional rabbis but also rabbis

identified with Reform Judaism) to seduce Jews away from tradition, so the newer Haskalah makes use of the secular Talmud teacher Calderon (whom he mockingly refers to as a "woman rabbi," which she is not) and two other Yesh Atid members of Knesset, the religious Zionist Rabbi Shai Piron and the ultra-Orthodox Rabbi Dov Lipman, as "fig leaves who use our weapons [i.e. sacred rabbinic texts] … against us."[8]

On the other end of the political spectrum, secular left-wing journalist Uri Misgav felt threatened by Calderon's speech for a different reason.[9] For him, the speech confirmed the dangers inherent in the joint participation in the government coalition by the Yesh Atid party, led by Yair Lapid, and the religious Zionist Habayit Heyehudi (The Jewish Home) party, led by Naftali Bennett. Misgav argued in an opinion column in the daily newspaper *Haaretz* that it is likely, due to this political cooperation between the two parties, that Yair Lapid will sell out the political principles that are so important to his secular supporters. Indeed, he maintained, a significant sign of this selling out can be discerned in Ruth Calderon's speech. The speech, he declared, followed the typical pattern of alliances between the secular and the religious, which he believed always involved the self-denigration of the secular and the compromising of their principles to satisfy the religious. He sarcastically critiqued the "excited song of praise sung with a trembling voice … [and] the bending of knees" in submission to the values of the religious that he discerned in Calderon's speech.[10]

Misgav then went on to refer to a famous 1952 meeting between a leading ultra-Orthodox rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, known as the Hazon Ish, and then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. At this meeting, it was reported, the Hazon Ish had insisted that secular Israelis would have to accommodate the needs of religiously observant Israelis, for just as when a full wagon (which to him represented the religious culture) and an empty wagon (which to him represented the secular culture) meet on the road, the empty wagon should give way to the full wagon. Calderon's speech, in Misgav's opinion, demonstrated the degree to which she agreed with the Hazon Ish's position that secular cultural is "empty," in the sense of worthless, and that religious culture is "full," in the sense of containing much meaning and significance: "Once again the empty wagon accompanied by self-denigration and feelings of inferiority. … Calderon went up on the stage with a book of the Talmud, devoted her speech to a Talmud lesson, and finished it with a prayer."[11] Even Yair Lapid, the leader of Calderon's party, he noted, indicated his

willingness to sell out secularism when he "declared recently that his dream is that every child in Israel would learn a page of Talmud along with mathematics."[12]

When it comes to compromise between the religious and the secular, complained Misgav, "[t]here is not and never is symmetry."[13] All attempts at reconciliation between these two cultural orientations, he declared, inevitably end up with the secularists compromising their values, while the religious refuse to compromise theirs. In this speech, he noted, Ruth Calderon had read a selection from a classic work of traditional Jewish religious literature, but he was certain that no religious member of the Knesset would ever read in public from the writings of secular Israeli authors or quote the fiercely anti-religious politician Shulamit Aloni.

It is not surprising that Calderon's attempt to bring together elements of the two extremes of ultra-Orthodoxy and secularism so enraged members of both camps. Political extremes tend to be more comfortable with well-defined positions that clearly distinguish them from those on the opposite end of the political spectrum. They have a vested interest in asserting the purity of their positions, and they feel threatened by the possibility that elements of the opposite position might contaminate their world. Ultra-Orthodox Israelis see themselves as the keepers of the Talmud, and they feel that only the ultra-Orthodox can be trusted to prevent it from being undermined. Secular Israelis see themselves as the keepers of democracy, and they do not trust anyone who studies Talmud to preserve the integrity of Israel's democratic political system. A person such as Ruth Calderon, who seeks to build bridges between the two camps, blurs important differences between them and, from the perspective of extremists, makes it more possible for the other side to take power. From an ultra-Orthodox perspective her speech could contribute to the pulling of ultra-Orthodox young men away from traditional faith and practice, and from a secular perspective her speech could contribute to Israel becoming a society dominated by traditional Jewish faith rather than by democratic values.

The Return to the Jewish Bookcase

Ruth Calderon's controversial speech was not simply the idiosyncratic expression of an individual out of step with accepted political and

cultural categories. She spoke as one of the leaders of a cultural trend that has been developing in Israel over the past five decades. This trend, which has come to be known as "the return to the Jewish bookcase" (*haḥazarah la'aron hasefarim hayehudi*), has consisted of secular Israeli Jews rediscovering the treasures of the post-biblical Jewish textual tradition that had played only a marginal role in the secular Israeli school curriculum as well as in secular Israeli culture as a whole. I describe this tradition as playing a "marginal role" in secular Israeli education and culture due to the fact that the post-biblical Jewish textual tradition was never fully absent from either the secular Israeli school system or the cultural consciousness of Israeli society. Even Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, a vocal champion of the secular Zionist rejection of post-biblical Judaism and Diaspora Jewish life, came to see that the lack of an awareness of the entire span of Jewish history in secular Israeli youth was problematic. In 1955, he charged Zalman Aran, the Minister of Education, to develop a Jewish consciousness curriculum for the secular school system. Over the years, various attempts were made to increase the teaching of post-biblical Jewish texts in secular schools. Such efforts, however, never succeeded in fully overcoming the marginalization of the post-biblical textual tradition in secular Israeli culture.[14]

The return to the Jewish bookcase as a significant cultural phenomenon can be said to have begun in the early 1960s, led by a group of secular Israeli kibbutz intellectuals constituting themselves as "Ḥug Shedemot." The name of the group signified their association with the journal *Shedemot* (originally *Shedemot lamadrikh*), which was established at that time. Among the most notable early members were Avraham (Patchi) Shapira, founding editor of *Shedemot*, Muki Tsur, and Yariv Ben-Aharon.[15] Members of this group, who belonged to the second generation of kibbutz members, along with others of their contemporaries, experienced a discomfort with the kibbutz ideology of the generation that had founded the kibbutz movement. Gad Ofaz makes the point that this younger generation's challenge to established kibbutz ideology took place in the context of a perceived decline in the viability of the kibbutz ideology at the time that this second generation was emerging into adulthood: "Many of the beliefs that motivated and sustained the generation of the pioneers collapsed, along with [ideological] struggles and splits. Youths of the second generation felt more and more that a different spiritual basis was needed" to maintain the viability of the kibbutz movement.[16]

At the same time, to the extent that the first generation had been able to maintain the influence of kibbutz ideology, the members of the second generation resisted its imposition on their lives. As Alon Gan observes, their resistance followed a pattern that is often repeated in the relationship between revolutionaries and their offspring. "The generation of the parents," writes Gan, "lived the transition from the dream (the utopian vision) to the reality [of the kibbutz] and sought to preserve it by means of ideology. Individuals in the next generation sought to conduct a reverse process from that of their parents: the parents turned utopia into ideology [and] their children sought to break open the lock that preserved the ideology and to form for themselves dreams (utopian visions) of their own. … they began a journey in search of new dreams."[17]

As Gad Ofaz observes, one of the central elements of kibbutz ideology challenged by members of the second generation was the rejection of the Diaspora Jewish religious culture and the determination to replace it with a culture in which the main role model was that of a "new Jew, muscle-bound working his land and defending it."[18] Ofaz explains that the younger generation came to question the anxiety that their parents had felt, which drove them to an extreme hostility toward Diaspora culture: "[The older generation] had a feeling that the Disapora and its religious culture was lurking, as it were, in the corner like a trap for the weak, the less determined, and the overly sensitive."[19] This rejection of Diaspora religious Jewish culture, writes Ofaz, had a significant effect on the curriculum of secular kibbutz schools. While the Bible, with which they felt an affinity, was taught, "[t]he teaching of Jewish history was cut off at the Bar Kokhba rebellion [in 132-135 CE], and then picked up anew with the emergence of the early Zionists. Thus, the oral Torah [of rabbinic Judaism] was omitted from the curriculum."[20]

Some members of the second generation of kibbutzniks, argues Ofaz, came to believe that this selective, Bible-centered approach to the Jewish cultural heritage left them without the kinds of resources they needed to help them meet the ongoing existential challenges of the immediate pre-State period and of the early years of the State. "The years in which the native-born sons [of the second generation] grew up did not spare them trying moments," writes Ofaz.[21] "From the time that the first sons born in the kibbutzim grew up, until today, Israel has never experienced calm or peace. Its sons have found themselves in the constant tension of struggling for their very existence."[22] A culture that limited itself to the Bible as its main source did not, Ofaz argues, provide

them with the resources to face these existential challenges: "The giving up of all the cultural assets that were collected during thousands of years of challenges in which the people of Israel persisted meant that [this generation had to] stand and come to terms [with its existence] completely naked [in a spiritual sense]."[23] One of the most important potential roles of the post-biblical tradition for members of this new generation was that it could provide a conceptual framework in which to grant meaning to the self-sacrifice to which they were called in the defense of their country. Members of this younger generation, writes Ofaz, "who were aroused to ask about the meaning of national existence and its value in relationship to the life of the individual, were amazed at the strength of persistence that drove the people of Israel during the generations."[24] Ofaz quotes Eli Alon, a kibbutz poet of that generation: "I feel a great hunger to contemplate the nature of this faith for which Jews were ready to die for the sake of the continuity of generations."[25] This is why, Alon has written, he felt driven to retrieve the wisdom of the Jewish tradition that had been excised from the secular education he and his peers received: "We are cut off from Judaism and from its answers … years of education to disparage the Diaspora have succeeded in severing us from it and from its culture in which we might perhaps have found an answer to our existential questions."[26]

In addition, for members of this second generation of kibbutzniks, the study of the entire history of Jewish sources was seen as a necessary process to achieve a much needed Jewish cultural renewal. As Yariv Ben-Aharon puts it, "If you want to be who you are, you want to renew life from within, and you want to reveal the hidden forces of inner renewal … you cannot dismiss the heritage of the past. You have to come to terms with it. You have to draw from it. You have to create from within it."[27]

Alon Gan points out that initially, Ḥug Shedemot played a marginal role in kibbutz society, advocating rebellious ideas that were subversive of the cultural status quo. "*Shedemot* and the group that solidified around it," observes Gan, "were like secret agents who undermined the behavior code of native-born Israelis, while seeking ways to form a spiritual identity that would be an alternative to that of the generation of the fathers."[28] As Gan sees it, the tense period leading up to the Six-Day War in 1967 and Israel's sweeping victory in that war opened up many more second-generation kibbutzniks to seeking the kinds of alternative cultural paths advocated by Ḥug Shedemot. This became very evident, Gan notes, when members of Ḥug Shedemot engaged in a project to interview young

kibbutz members who had fought in the Six-Day War. Transcripts of these interviews were published in a book titled *Siaḥ loḥamim* (*Discourse of the Warriors*), which was widely read at that time.[29] Muki Tsur observes that in the course of conducting these interviews, they discovered "a crisis and a spiritual turning point" in their generation, as demonstrated by the agonized responses to war of the soldiers with whom they met, which stood in stark contrast to the celebratory atmosphere that was dominating Israel at the time.[30] "The newspapers and victory volumes, the ecstatic hikes in the conquered territories, the euphoria that broke out after the deep fears during the period of waiting [before the war] were not compatible with what we revealed," writes Tsur about himself and the others who interviewed these soldiers.[31]

Much inspiration for Ḥug Shedemot's cultural revolution of return to post-biblical Jewish sources came from the writings of the Zionist intellectual leaders and writers of the early twentieth-century wave of immigration to the Land of Israel, known as the Second Aliyah, including Yosef Hayyim Brenner, Aharon David Gordon, and Berl Katznelson. It was the ongoing relationship of these figures to the Jewish tradition that provided a model for members of Ḥug Shedemot of how they could find a path to that cultural heritage. As Gad Ofaz observes, while it is true that these Second Aliyah figures rebelled against the religious Diaspora culture in which they were raised, their relationship to Jewish tradition was more nuanced than that of the generation immediately preceding that of Ḥug Shedemot.[32] When members of Ḥug Shedemot began to explore "the inner life of these [Second Aliyah] pioneers by means of their personal writings—diaries, letters, conversations—[they uncovered] the complexity of a push-pull relationship [with the Jewish tradition], a drive to cut themselves off combined with longings for the Diaspora home and its culture, study, prayer, [and] community relations."[33] Yariv Ben-Aharon recalls that he and his peers were taught only about the rebellion against tradition of these earlier ideological and cultural leaders. However, after he began to explore post-biblical Jewish texts, Ben-Aharon set out to challenge that mistaken notion and to assert that "these leading figures were experts in the language of the sources, made use of it, and depended on it."[34] Indeed, he recalls, he realized later in life that he had never fully understood their writings until he had studied the traditional sources to which they referred.

Muki Tsur has written that a key discovery of members of Ḥug Shedemot in their attempt to reconnect with post-biblical Jewish texts was that throughout Jewish history, each generation has reinterpreted