

# Isaac Breuer : the Hungarian grandson of Samson Raphael Hirsch

Autor(en): **Balog, Yeshaya P.**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Judaica : Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums**

Band (Jahr): **74 (2018)**

PDF erstellt am: **20.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-960601>

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern. Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

Ferne liegenden jüdischen Staat). Der dritte Band umfasst Erzählungen, Kurzgeschichten und Gedichte Breuers – unter Einschluss eines Dramoletts, das anlässlich der Hochzeit seines Bruders Raphael Breuer (1881–1932) geschrieben wurde. Eine kommentierte Neuausgabe von Breuers Hauptwerk „Der Neue Kusari“ (Frankfurt 1934) ist als vierter Band (2019) vorgesehen.

Matthias Morgenstern

## Isaac Breuer – The Hungarian Grandson of Samson Raphael Hirsch

By Yeshaya P. Balog\*

Isaac Breuer “was ‘the real grandson’ of Samson Raphael Hirsch”.<sup>1</sup> I do not want to dispute this statement. Rather, the contention of my paper is to argue that Isaac Breuer’s interpretation of Hirschian thought reflects the foundations of his Jewish religious personality, which is less the product of Hirschian neo-orthodoxy, than the Hungarian Judaism formed by the small social circle established around the study of Talmud in Frankfurt am Main. I want to argue that although Isaac Breuer engaged with the challenges of his time, and often expressed his ideas in the framework of Hirschian thought, his theory of Judaism remains rooted in the traditional East-European Jewish values instilled by his father, Salomon Breuer (1850-1926).

My paper contains three parts. First of all I want to demonstrate that a careful study of Isaac Breuer’s biography sheds light on his experience of disharmony as a result of attending two different educational institutions. Secondly, I will argue that Isaac Breuer lived as an outsider figure. In the third part I will attempt to show that what until now has been referred to as “Breuer’s Hirschian legacy” can be interpreted as a symptom of Isaac Breuer’s tackling his experience of being a social outsider.

---

\* Dr Yeshayahu P. Balog, Universität Tübingen, Seminar für Religionswissenschaft und Judaistik, Liebermeisterstr. 12, D-72076 Tübingen. – This paper is based on two lectures delivered by the author on two separate conferences in memory of Isaac Breuer (יצחק ברויאר: הגות ומעש. בכנס לקראת 70 שנה לפטירתו) on June 1, 2016, and the *International Isaac Breuer Symposium* on June 6, 2017, both at the Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan). For a more extensive and in-depth analysis of the connection between Breuer’s schooling and theory of education see my PhD thesis *Die kämpfende Persönlichkeit. Isaac Breuers Konzept der jüdischen Erziehung* (Berlin/Münster 2018).

1 MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN, *From Frankfurt to Jerusalem. Isaac Breuer and the History of Secession Dispute in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*, Leiden / Boston 2002, p. 212.

## 1. *Educational Disharmony*

Isaac Breuer was born in Pápa, about half-way between Budapest and Vienna, at the high point of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on September 19, 1883. This geographical location is symbolic of his Talmudic-intellectual, and Jewish-religious position between German-Jewish Orthodoxy and Jewish traditionalism in Hungary. His father, Salomon Breuer, was a disciple of Rabbi Simon Wiener, and later a student at the Pressburg Yeshiva under the leadership of Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer (1815–1871), known as the *Ktav Sofer*.<sup>2</sup> Even though Salomon Breuer had received his PhD at the University of Heidelberg, he essentially remained committed almost exclusively to his Talmudic studies up to the end of his life. In his autobiography, Isaac Breuer describes the atmosphere of his parent's home as follows: "Schon rein äusserlich orientierte sich die ganze Hausordnung an den Lehrvorträgen, die mein Vater, wenn keine Störungen dazwischen kamen, zweimal täglich in seiner Jeschiwa hielt."<sup>3</sup>

Salomon Breuer was chief rabbi of the Orthodox community of Pápa, Hungary. During his studies at Heidelberg he was introduced to Sophie Hirsch, a daughter of S. R. Hirsch, whom he married in 1876.<sup>4</sup> After the death of the revered founding leader of the *Austrittsgemeinde* in Frankfurt am Main in 1888, Salomon Breuer became the successor to this unique rabbinical post. In 1890, he moved with his family from Pápa to Frankfurt am Main.<sup>5</sup>

In Frankfurt, Isaac Breuer enrolled at the Jewish *Realschule*, the practical secondary school that his grandfather, S. R. Hirsch had established in 1853 and lead until 1877.<sup>6</sup> In the age of 7 years, he joined the second grade in autumn 1890.<sup>7</sup> He attended the *Realschule* for more than 7 years, until March

---

2 DAVID KRANZLER / DOVID LANDESMAN, *Rav Breuer. His Life and His Legacy*, Jerusalem / New York 1999, pp. 14-15. According to Jacob Katz, Salomon Breuer studied at the Pressburg Yeshiva during the tenure of Simcha Bunim Sofer (1842–1906), known as *Shevet Sofer*, who was a son of the *Ktav Sofer*, see JACOB KATZ, *With My Own Eyes. The Autobiography of an Historian*, Hanover / London 1995, p. 63.

3 ISAAC BREUER, *Mein Weg*, Jerusalem / Zürich 1988, p. 35 ("In my parents' house, the Talmud was ever-present. The daily routine in the household revolved around the lectures that my father held twice a day in his Yeshiva, unless he had another commitments." – transl. by YPB).

4 KRANZLER / LANDESMAN, *Rav Breuer* (Anm. 2), p. 19.

5 KRANZLER / LANDESMAN, *Rav Breuer* (Anm. 2), p. 21.

6 ELIYAHU MEIR KLUGMAN, *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Architect of Torah Judaism for the Modern World*, New York 1996, p. 226.

7 *Zeugnissbuch* (Book of School Records), second, unnumbered page (digitized copy of this document is in the possession of the author).

1898, when he was 15 years old.<sup>8</sup> This school became a vehicle to maintaining the ideas and educational vision of S. R. Hirsch under the leadership of Mendel Hirsch (1833–1900), the oldest son of S. R. Hirsch. Remarkably, in his autobiography, Isaac Breuer devotes separate chapters to his study of philosophy and law and his involvement in the Orthodox Jewish student fraternity, the *Bund Jüdischer Akademiker*, and writes extensively about his Talmudic studies at home and at the *yeshiva* which his father had established, but on the Jewish *Realschule*, he has a few lines only. In addition to that, when listing his classmates according to the social structure of the *Austrittsgemeinde* in Frankfurt am Main,<sup>9</sup> he criticizes the *Realschule* for not applying the educational ideal of S. R. Hirsch, the synthesis of Jewish tradition and positive values found in secular culture: “Vom ‘menschheit-priesterlichen’ Zusammenhang zwischen Judentum und der englischen und französischen Sprache, ja selbst der deutschen Sprache und Literatur, ja selbst der Naturlehre und der allgemeinen Geschichte, von – Mathematik gar nicht zu reden, habe ich den betreffenden Stunden nichts, aber auch gar nichts, zu spüren bekommen.”<sup>10</sup>

As I mentioned above, the daily schedule in the Breuer household was organized around Salomon Breuer’s Talmud lectures. Isaac Breuer himself started learning Talmud at home from an early age. These Talmudic studies were conducted not at the *Realschule*, but independently by private tutors from Hungary: “Schon rein äußerlich orientierte sich die ganze Hausordnung an den Lehrvorträgen, die mein Vater, wenn keine Störungen dazwischen kamen, zweimal täglich in seiner Jeschiwa hielt.”<sup>11</sup> Breuer stated proudly in his autobiography that he became familiar with the Talmudic disputes before he read the writings of S. R. Hirsch: “Ich war mit ‘Abaje und Rawa’ vertraut, lang ehe ich den ‘Chaurew’ gelesen habe.”<sup>12</sup>

S. R. Hirsch founded a Jewish *Realschule*, a practical secondary school in Frankfurt am Main; he did not create a *yeshiva* because his first goal was

---

8 *Zeugnis über die wissenschaftliche Befähigung für den einjährig-freiwilligen Dienst* (digitized copy of this document is in the possession of the author).

9 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 81.

10 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 37 (“I did not feel anything, anything at all of the human-priestly connection between Judaism and English or French, or even German language and literature or natural sciences and general history, let alone maths”).

11 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 36. See KATZ, *Eyes*, 63.

12 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 41 (“I was well acquainted with Abaye und Raba long before I read the ‘Horeb’.”). The Talmudic dialectics is often referred to as *הויות דאביי ורבא*, “discussions of Abaye and Raba” (bSuk 28a).

to raise committed Jews, but not rabbinically educated *baal habatim*. And he did not establish a *Gymnasium*, because he did not want his congregants to continue their secular education at the university. Even though S. R. Hirsch envisioned Jewish studies as an integral part of the school curriculum of the *Realschule*,<sup>13</sup> fifty percent of the school lessons should have been devoted to them, the German system forced the school to reduce these hours to a minimum.<sup>14</sup> In 1883, the 12-13 year old pupils of the *Prima* had ten lessons each week devoted to Jewish studies: They learnt one lesson of Hebrew language through S. R. Hirsch's Pentateuch commentary, four lessons of Bible through the study of the *Haftaroth* and five lessons of Talmud with Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), the commentary of the Tosafists, and the commentary of the Rosh (Rabbenu Asher ben Yechiel). In comparison to them, there were 26 lessons for secular studies.<sup>15</sup> Breuer evaluates the Jewish content of the education at the *Realschule* as being limited: "Von der Schule sind mir in jüdischer Hinsicht, offen gestanden, nicht allzu viel nachhaltige Eindrücke haften geblieben, wenn ich von dem trefflichen Talmudunterricht und den wahrhaft hinreissenden Tenach-Stunden Mendel Hirschs, in den beiden obersten Klassen, absehe."<sup>16</sup> According to Breuer, only the last two classes, where the boys were 14 to 15 years old, were worth of praise. The first six years of school were apparently wasting of time in his view. Probably this experience is the source of a passage in his novel *Ein Kampf um Gott* (*Struggle for God*). The protagonist, Heinrich Chajim Thorning, is raised by his pious grandmother in the spirit of traditional Judaism in a small town in Germany at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the age of six until nine, he studies *Mishnah* and *Gemara* at the house of an East-European Jew, the milkman Freilich. At the same time he enrolls at the local Jewish school. The narrator tells us about the relationship between the Talmudic studies with the

---

13 KLUGMAN, *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch* (note 6), p. 223. See Hirsch's ideal curriculum for the Jewish school in SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, *Horeb. A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances*, London 1968, II, pp. 411-412.

14 HANS THIEL, *Die Samson-Raphael-Hirsch-Schule in Frankfurt am Main. Dokumente, Erinnerungen, Analysen*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001, p. 32.

15 THIEL, *Samson-Raphael-Hirsch-Schule* (note 14), pp. 62-64.

16 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), pp. 36-37 ("I have to admit that I don't have very many lasting memories of the school regarding its Jewish content, with the exception of the excellent Talmud teaching and the truly exciting Bible lessons with Mendel Hirsch, in the last two years."). See also ISAAC BREUER, שאלי שרופה. Zur Erinnerung an das deutsche Judentum, in: ISAAC BREUER, *Weltwende*, Jerusalem 1979, p. 181.

East-European scholar and the learning environment at the Jewish school in the following way: “Chajim besucht die drei ersten Klassen dieser Schule, aber er ist seinen Mitschülern weit voraus und hat viel Zeit, zu Freilich zu gehen. Was er in der Volksschule lernt, ist unschädlich. Zu seinen Kameraden hat er kein Verhältnis. Er ist wie aus einem Guss. Nichts Fremdes haftet an ihm. Ganz ist er Jude.”<sup>17</sup> One could argue that this description is based on Isaac Breuer’s own conflicting experiences of traditional Talmud learning with the Hungarian *bachurim* and attending the German-Orthodox *Realschule*.

Breuer did refer to the educational theory of the *Realschule* in a positive manner in his obituary for the German-Orthodoxy *Shaali Serufa* (1942).<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, he concludes with a critical remark regarding Hirsch’s reliance on *Mishnah Avot* 5:25 for his curriculum: “Schwerlich denkt jener Satz der Mischna, den er zitiert, daran, dass gerade wenn das Lebensalter erreicht ist, da das Studium der Gemoro beginnen sollte, die Pforten der Schule sich – schliessen.”<sup>19</sup> This last quote expresses the main source of Isaac Breuer’s reservations, or even aversion to the existing Orthodox-Jewish formal education in the *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*: the lack of and cultural detachment from traditional Talmudic studies.

Three years after his arrival in Frankfurt am Main (1893), Salomon Breuer had established his own Talmudic academy, die *Torablebranstalt*, modelled on the Pressburg Yeshiva. This was much against the will of the board of the community. Disappointed by their negative attitude, Salomon Breuer accepted a rabbinical position at the *Schiffsschul* in Vienna in 1896, but never actually moved there. Instead, he held the office of the rabbi of the *Austrittsgemeinde* and served as Dean of the *Torablebranstalt* until his death in 1926.<sup>20</sup> This is the institutional framework where Isaac Breuer experienced the traditional atmosphere of Talmud learning of a Hungarian *yeshiva*. He describes his first day with the following words:

---

17 ISAAC BREUER, *Ein Kampf um Gott*, Frankfurt a. M. 1920, pp. 67-68 (“Chaim attends the first three classes at this school, but he is way ahead of his classmates and has enough free time to go to learn with Freilich. His learning in the school is harmless. He has no connection with his comrades. He is completely solid. Nothing foreign sticks to him. He is a complete Jew.”).

18 BREUER, Erinnerung (note 16), p. 179.

19 BREUER, Erinnerung (note 16), p. 181 (“That paragraph of the Mishnah that he quotes, hardly considers that precisely when a boy reaches the age [of 15], which he is supposed to start learning Gemara, the doors of the school are – closing.”).

20 KRANZLER / LANDESMAN, *Rav Breuer* (Anm. 2), p. 54.

Sechs volle Jahre sind es geworden, gesegnete Jahre, nur wenig unterbrochen durch die Fron der Maturität: die erste Stunde war und blieb die entscheidende. Ich hatte einiges schon zuvor gelernt. Auf den Abschnitt aus dem Zinsrecht, der zur Behandlung stand, war ich sorgfältig vorbereitet. Aber diese Stunde wirkte auf mich mit der vollen Wucht eines Offenbarungserlebnisses. Mein Verhältnis zum Talmud hat sie für immer begründet.<sup>21</sup>

By setting up a *yeshiva* in Frankfurt am Main, Salomon Breuer departed from Hirsch's educational ethos. He introduced a new paradigm in the *Austrittsgemeinde*: striving towards excellence, first of all in the Jewish tradition. Isaac Breuer's attendance of the Hirschian *Realschule* did not contribute much to his Jewish education, but at least it did not disturb it. He immersed himself into the daily life of a Hungarian rabbinical family at an early age. His Talmudic studies were not equalled by his learning at the *Realschule* between the age 7 and 13. From the age of 15 to 21, he committed himself to *Talmud Torah* – the study of Jewish subjects exclusively. This experience is the basis of his educational concept and relationship to non-Jewish culture. According to him, one could master Jewish tradition first of all by studying the Talmud. The affirmative statement runs throughout his writings: "Der Königsweg zum Judentum ist der Talmud."<sup>22</sup> His courage to confront the non-Jewish intellectual world of the academia grew out of his self-confidence that is rooted in his experience and continued practice of and belief in Talmudic studies. This attitude is the source of the statement, regarding the philosophy of Immanuel Kant: "Als Jude habe ich Kant studiert."<sup>23</sup>

The *yeshiva* not only allowed Breuer to experience the world of the Hungarian Yeshivot, it also offered a new layer of his relationship to his father. He expresses his bond to his father's intellectual and personal legacy in his description of Salomon Breuer as evidence of both God's creation of the world and the revelation of the Torah: "Happy is the man who is in the position to revere his father both as the giver and teacher of the Torah.

---

21 ISAAC BREUER, *Elischa*, Frankfurt a. M. 1928, p. 22 ("It was six whole years, six blessed years interrupted by the drudgery of adolescence only little bit: the first lesson was and remains the critical one. I had learned before the class and had thoroughly prepared the section on the laws of interest, which we were to discuss. This lesson had the impact of a revelation on me. It established and defined my permanent relationship to Gemara.")

22 ISAAC BREUER, *Lehre, Gesetz und Nation*, Frankfurt a. M. 1923, Widmung ("The best road to Judaism is the Talmud."); BREUER, *Erinnerung* (note 16), p. 180 ("Wohl ist der *Talmud* der Königsweg zum Judentum," emphasis in original).

23 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 56 ("I studied Kant as a Jew").

Happy is the man whose father is not only evidence of the creation, but also proof, speaking proof of the revelation.”<sup>24</sup>

## 2. *Social Outsider*

Breuer was a social outsider. This was due in part to his introverted nature: “Zum Leidwesen meiner lieben Mutter s. A. hatte ich in meiner ersten Jugendzeit wenig Verkehr.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he was different from the social majority on multiple levels. First of all, he was a Hungarian citizen in Germany. Although he had lived in Frankfurt since the age of 7, he was 23 years old when he became a citizen of Prussia on June 25, 1906.<sup>26</sup> He was also a Jew among non-Jews: “Bei aller Loyalität [...] und bei allem Verständnis für deutsche Kultur und deutsche Geschichte, erachtete ich mich den deutschen Menschen gegenüber als Fremder, als Gast.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, he was an Orthodox Jew among a majority of non-Orthodox, German Jews. In addition to that, he belonged to the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* (IRG), the *Austrittsgemeinde*, the Orthodox secessionist community in Frankfurt, which dissociated itself ideologically from Orthodox communities belonging to the official Jewish community.<sup>28</sup> On top of the ways in which Breuer felt as an outsider as mentioned: members of the Jewish community complained about his father’s foreignness. Salomon Breuer was regarded as “a Hungarian zealot, who despite his fluency and eloquence in German, would always remain, if only because of his accent, an East European Jew.”<sup>29</sup> In his autobiography Isaac

---

24 BREUER, *Elischa* (note 21), p. 25. See also YESHAYAHU PETER BALOG, *The Metaphysics of Jewish Parenthood According to S. R. Hirsch and Isaac Breuer*, in: MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN/ CHRISTIAN BOUDIGNON, *Männlich und weiblich schuf Er sie*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 335-352.

25 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 56 (“To the disappointment of my late mother, I hardly cultivated friendships when I was young.”).

26 *Naturalisationsurkunde*, 1 (digitized copy of this document is in the possession of the author). In 1910, there were 76000 non-German Jews living in the German Reich, AVRAHAM BARKAI / PAUL MENDES-FLOHR, *Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, vol. IV, München 1997, p. 64.

27 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 93 (“Despite my loyalty and my understanding of German culture and German history, I considered myself to be a foreigner and a guest [...] in relation to the German people.”); see also *ibid.* p. 26. The number of Jews in the German Reich on June 16, 1925, was 564’379 (= 0,93 % of the population); see *Jüdisches Lexikon. Ein enzyklopädisches Handbuch des jüdischen Wissens in vier Bänden*, Berlin 1927, vol. IV/2, p. 638.

28 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 21.

29 KRANZLER / LANDESMAN, *Rav Breuer* (Anm. 2), p. 71.



Breuer remembers being different from his classmates, when he mentions that instead of going into business like them, he joined his father's yeshiva.<sup>30</sup>

This portrait of Isaac Breuer's as an outsider largely contradicts his preoccupation with Jewish communal and political affairs.<sup>31</sup> His self-consciousness was linked to his experience of a multi-layered outsider status, and shaped his commitment to communal life, especially to his theory of the ideal Jewish collective. His first-hand acquaintance with the Hungarian culture of Talmud learning, laid down the foundation of his theory of Judaism, as a formative social force.

### 3. *Hirschian legacy or redemption of loneliness through the collective*

Breuer's approach of probing non-Jewish culture against the backdrop of Judaism founded on Talmudic erudition is not identical with the world view based on the paradigm of *Torah 'im Derech Eretz*.<sup>32</sup> The majority view holds that S. R. Hirsch is the main representative of the rabbinic concept of *Torah 'im Derech Eretz* in post-Enlightenment Europe. Breuer argues that this principle is not the central idea, or source, but the outcome of Hirsch's normative philosophy of Judaism.<sup>33</sup> Instead, he declares a sentence in Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* to be the cornerstone of Hirsch's ground breaking idea: "self-comprehending Judaism".<sup>34</sup> *Torah 'im Derech Eretz* as a goal implies a certain quality of connection between traditional Judaism and Western culture, where the

---

30 BREUER, *Mein Weg* (note 3), p. 95.

31 Breuer was not only involved with the Jewish student fraternity *Bund Jüdischer Akademiker*, but was one of the founders and leaders of *Agudat Israel* (MORGENSTERN, *From Frankfurt to Jerusalem* [note 1], pp. 44-45, 224). His most important Agudist writings have been published recently in ISAAC BREUER, *Schriften zum Zionismus und Agudismus* (Werkausgabe vol. 2), Berlin 2017. He was a leading force behind the *Kol Torah Yeshiva* and the *Horev* School in Jerusalem (CHRISTIAN KRAFT, *Aschkenas in Jerusalem. Die religiösen Institutionen der Einwanderer aus Deutschland im Jerusalemer Stadtviertel Rechavia (1933-2004) – Transfer und Transformation*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 52-59).

32 Hebrew for *Torah and worldly involvement*, see mAv 2:2; MORDECHAI ELIAV, *Jüdische Erziehung in Deutschland im Zeitalter der Aufklärung und Emanzipation*, Münster etc. 2001, pp. 291-295.

33 ISAAC BREUER, Hundert Jahre „Neunzehn Briefe“, in: SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, *Die neunzehn Briefe*, Zürich 1987/5747, p. XXVII.

34 "Self-comprehending Judaism" in: BREUER, Hundert Jahre (note 33), pp. XXVIII-XXIX, vgl. HIRSCH, *Neunzehn Briefe* (note 33), p. 108; SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel*, translated by Bernard Drachman, New York / London 1899, p. 202.

dynamic Jewish identity is forged both by Judaism and Western culture. “Sich selbst begreifendes Judentum” establishes Judaism as the essential ground of a Jewish identity that is capable to meet and engage in dialogue with the surrounding non-Jewish reality. It operates in the framework of ever-changing phenomena of nature and history. By heralding the truth of God, it engages nature and history with this knowledge. It embraces every individual Jew in a way that is visible and obvious for everyone. The last sentence of the definition contains the essence of Breuer’s understanding of Judaism: “[D]as [ist] nicht auf die Stelzen von Milieu und Autorität gestellt, das vielmehr selber Milieu bildet und Autorität errichtet.”<sup>35</sup> Whereas the ideal *ish halacha*, in J. B. Soloveitchik’s formulation, “fashions an ideal world and then uses it for the purpose of establishing a relationship between it and the real world”, the purpose of “self-comprehending Judaism” in Breuer’s reading is to organize the elements of reality in such a form that corresponds to the Divine truth that constitutes it. The ideal Jew according Breuer’s thought is more proactive, and perhaps more optimistic than Soloveitchik’s “Halachic Man”.

It is true that Isaac Breuer was the most outspoken defender of the Hirschian principle of secession. Nonetheless, he also most vehemently criticized the actual *Austrittsgemeinde* in Frankfurt. This opposition to the Hirsch community were depicted in a literary manner in his German magnum opus *The New Kusari* (1934). The assimilated Jewish protagonist, Alfred Roden, finds his way back to the Jewish tradition gradually. His *teshuvah* culminates when he becomes a member of the Hirsch community: “Ihm war der ‘Austritt’ gar nichts anderes, als der – Eintritt in Keneseth Jissrael, war die Gemeinde Samson Raphael Hirschs lediglich der lokale Repräsentant von Keneseth Jissrael.”<sup>36</sup> Only a few pages later one reads the cynical comment on this community from the mouth of a young member explaining what the principle of *Austritt* means to him: “I cannot help myself, when I hear the word Austritt I think of the enormous amounts of cheese cake that were consumed on the Shavuot (Pentecost) holiday, and the many portions of ice cream eaten at the Passover Seder evenings.”<sup>37</sup> The tension between these two interpretations of the Hirschian *Austritt* community is

---

35 BREUER, *Hundert Jahre* (note 33), p. XXIX (“Not leaning on the pillars of milieu and authority, because it constructs its own milieu and authority.”).

36 ISAAC BREUER, *Der neue Kusari. Ein Weg zum Judentum*, Frankfurt a. M. 1934, p. 243 (“To him secession or ‘Austritt’ meant joining Keneseth Jissrael, Rabbi Hirsch’s community was only the local representation of Keneseth Jissrael.”).

37 BREUER, *Der neue Kusari* (note 38), p. 251.

based on the tension between the ideal and concrete social form of Judaism. Breuer attributes the ideal Jewish community with the Kabbalistic term of “Kenesseth Jissrael”,<sup>38</sup> that is the lowest *Sefira* of *Malchut*/Kingdom or the *Shechina*/Divine Presence.<sup>39</sup> It is the manifestation of God’s will on earth.<sup>40</sup> By embracing a German bourgeois lifestyle, the Frankfurt community is a far cry from its ideal, transcendental identity. Instead of accepting the concrete, bourgeois manifestation of the *Austrittsgemeinde*, or attempting to change it, the protagonist establishes a new sub-society: “Es bildete sich allmählich, innerhalb der unabhängigen Orthodoxie, ein Kreis junger Menschen um Alfred Roden, die von ihm geführt sein wollten.”<sup>41</sup> This act corresponds to Breuer’s definition of “self-comprehending Judaism” which constructs its own milieu and authority. This also reflects Breuer’s wish to perpetuate his social experience based on Talmud study and to utilize that experience in constructing an ideal society.<sup>42</sup>

I want to argue that in postulating Hirsch’s concept of “self-comprehending Judaism,” Breuer found a resonance with his own condition of loneliness and social minority status. The first step towards redemption from this state of mind is to hypostasize loneliness as an ontological condition, by re-interpreting it as being autonomous or “self-comprehending” existence.<sup>43</sup> The second step is to construct a theory of the ideal society that is based on his experience of relationship with others through the study of the Talmud in his Hungarian-rabbinic family, with the private *bochur*-tutors from Hungary and in the framework of the Hungarian modelled *yeshiva* of his father.<sup>44</sup> The third step is to implement the ideal construction of society in reality. Breuer’s ever remaining dissatisfaction with the practical implementation of his social theory is a symptom of his experience of the educational

---

38 BREUER, *Der neue Kusari* (note 38), p. 177 and pp. 216-217.

39 Cf. GERSHOM SCHOLEM, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996, p. 232; ALAN L. MITTLEMAN, *Between Kant and Kabbalah. Introduction to Isaac Breuer’s Philosophy of Judaism*, Albany 1990, pp. 170-171.

40 BREUER, *Der neue Kusari* (note 38), pp. 174, 176.

41 BREUER, *Der neue Kusari* (note 38), p. 379 (“Gradually a circle of young men from the secessionist community formed around Alfred Roden, young men who wanted him to lead them.”). These young men later on establish the “Urzelle einer Bewegung;” cf. BREUER, *Der neue Kusari* (note 38), p. 438.

42 BREUER, *Hundert Jahre*, XXIX.

43 Cf. Num 23:9.

44 Cf. Breuer’s term “Kultur der Thora,” in: ISAAC BREUER, *Erez-Jisroel Probleme*, in: BREUER, *Schriften zum Zionismus und Agudismus* (note 31), pp. 233-280, here p. 264.

disharmony between studying the Talmud at home or in the yeshiva of his father and between learning in the *Realschule* established by S. R. Hirsch.

Professor Mordechai Breuer, Isaac Breuer's son, explains in his recording of the Passover *Seder* Night,<sup>45</sup> that his father continued to celebrate the re-telling of the Exodus at the festive meal according to the Hungarian rite that he knew from his father, Salomon Breuer. Isaac Breuer's socialization in the Hungarian rabbinic tradition is the foundation of his theory of Jewish peoplehood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, what he could not achieve to materialize on a national level (creating a new Jewish people), he fulfilled in his own family.

## The Yishuv of History vs. The Yishuv of Revelation: Jacob Rosenheim's 1934 Response to Isaac Breuer

By *Gershon Greenberg\**

In October 1933, Orthodox leaders in Germany sent a memorandum to Chancellor of the Reich Hitler. It cited the religious oppression of Jews and their economic persecution, which was leading to starvation. The signatories, which included Breuer and Agudat Yisrael World President Jacob Rosenheim, suspected that the national government “knowingly had an eye” to “*das Ziel der Vernichtung der deutschen Judentums,*” and that the NSDAP's *Reichsleitung* was after the *Ausmerzung* (elimination) of German Judaism from the German *Volk*.<sup>1</sup> In an apologetic tone, they explained that Jews did not constitute their own *Blutsgemeinschaft*, such as to compromise, they implied, a German *Blutsgemeinschaft*. Indeed, Jews loved the German

---

45 National Library of Israel, Nr. CD 5118.

\* *Gershon Greenberg*, Department of Philosophy and Religion, American University, Washington D.C. 20016 USA. This text is based on a paper read at an international conference “Isaac Breuer – Studies in his Thought” at Bar Ilan University, 6 June 2017.

1 *Denkschrift an den Herrn Reichskanzler*. Held by the Agudas Israel Organization in London. I am grateful to Yehudah Ben Avner of Bar Ilan University for sharing it with me. According to Morgenstern, the memorandum reflected Breuer's mind-set. MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN, *Von Frankfurt nach Jerusalem: Isaac Breuer und die Geschichte des “Austrittstreits” in der deutsch-jüdischen Orthodoxie*, Tuebingen 1995, p. 276.