

REMEMBERING OUR COLLEAGUES

ISAAC EINSTEIN BARZILAY (1915–2006)

Stanley Nash

Professor Isaac Einstein Barzilay, who died on April 15 of this year, was a scholar of enormous breadth and a teacher of engaging warmth and dynamism. The son of a Lithuanian rabbi, Barzilay received a traditional Jewish education in Bialystok, Poland; an M.A. from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he studied Jewish thought, literature, and history; and a Ph.D in Jewish history under Salo Baron at Columbia University. Barzilay taught at the Bialik Gymnasium in Haifa until 1941 and then served as an interpreter with the British Intelligence Corps from 1942 to 1944. In the United States he taught at the Herzliyah Hebrew Teachers Institute for twelve years. After receiving his doctorate, Barzilay taught at Wayne State University in Detroit for two years before assuming the position of Professor of Hebrew Language and Culture at Columbia in 1960. During his twenty-five years at Columbia he also held many executive posts at the American Academy for Jewish Research, including its presidency.

Isaac Barzilay's range of interests in many ways reflected the legendary scope of his prodigious teachers, Joseph Klausner and Salo Baron. His own ambitious drive to embrace formidably vast and esoteric subjects helps to explain why he chose to study and write book-length studies of such early modern polymaths as Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, Shlomo Yehudah Rapaport, and Menasseh of Ilya. Barzilay's initial immersion in what he termed the

"Italian Haskalah" and his pathbreaking book on this subject (*Between Reason and Faith: Anti-rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought 1250–1650* [1967]) likewise emerged from his conviction that detailed knowledge of this earlier phase of Jewish Enlightenment was essential for understanding his primary objective, the Berlin Haskalah. Some of his articles on the Berlin Haskalah, which he treated at length only in his unpublished dissertation, are still widely cited as seminal studies in this area. As a product himself of the Lithuanian Haskalah, Barzilay combined the fearless passion of the ingenious and epoch-making autodidacts he studied so voraciously with the discipline of the academy, which he absorbed at the Hebrew University and at Columbia.

For his students Isaac Barzilay radiated a love of history, philosophy, and literature that was infectious. Only rarely teaching the specific areas in which he had done important research, Barzilay sought to impart what was, in a manner of speaking, his striking equality of infatuation with such diverse fields as Maimonidean philosophy, medieval Hebrew poetry and historiography, the literature of the Haskalah and the modern Hebrew Renaissance periods, and modern Hebrew literature. In this last area he focused not only on the classic works of Agnon and Hazaz, and great numbers of Hebrew historical novels by Kabbak, Aricha, Shamir, and others, but also on the works of Yizhar, Tammuz, Appelfeld, and



Oz, and even the output of more modern authors (such as Meir Shalev) of whom he always kept abreast and about whom he continued to publish articles well after his retirement. Loving history as he did, Barzilay gravitated towards the historical novel, and in this subgenre he had total mastery. He also brought a combined historical and literary flair to bear particularly on his reading of Agnon. To be a student of Professor Barzilay meant always striving to catch up, to encompass and to delve into hidden corners and influences in the work of the author or subject under scrutiny. His published articles on Agnon, Shofman, Sadeh, Appelfeld, Yizhar, Tammuz, and Oz indicate just how thorough, probing, and inventive at drawing connections his mind could be.

Barzilay also had a flair for the dramatic and could eloquently discuss a wide variety of subjects. His reputation as a spellbinding teacher at Herzliyah Teacher's College and Wayne State preceded him when he came to Columbia in 1960, and his lecture classes there were always full. In the early years at Columbia, Barzilay taught elementary Hebrew as well, and here, too, he excelled. His postgraduate seminars attracted a

variegated group of individuals, many of whom were captivated by his personality and brilliance. Barzilay cultivated more than a few doctoral students, who wrote on topics ranging from medieval poetry to the work of the early critical Talmud scholar, Tzvi Hirsch Hayyut, the generation of Ahad Haam, the works of the American Yiddish and Hebrew poet Gabriel Preil, and of course, modern Israeli literature. But he also had a profound influence on students who received doctorates in other areas such as Arabic law, Bible and the

ancient Near East, Italian Jewish history, medieval historiography and history of science, comparative literature, Jewish philosophy, and American Jewish history, to name just the sample I encountered during my years of residency at Columbia. For some years Barzilay taught history at the Jewish Theological Seminary, which granted him an honorary doctorate, and his students there spoke of him with much enthusiasm.

Barzilay's associations with scholars in Israel and the United States

through the American Academy for Jewish Research were extensive, and a representative number of articles by these colleagues and students appear in the Barzilay Jubilee Volume, *Bein Historiyyah le-Sifrut* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hame'uchad, 1997). This volume contains a bibliography of Professor Barzilay's writings as well.

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ARTHUR HERTZBERG (1921–2006)

David Starr

Many of the obituaries of Arthur Hertzberg that appeared in *The New York Times*, *Ha'aretz*, and a host of other publications in the aftermath of his death on April 17 charted in considerable detail the path that he traveled from his Orthodox home to the Conservative rabbinate, moral and communal leadership, and great scholarly achievement. Rather than survey once again all of Hertzberg's multifarious activities, I would like to focus on one of the less commonly emphasized dimensions of his career, his accomplishments as an adult educator, the kind of adult educator the likes of which we rarely see. And I would like to reflect a little on the way in which Hertzberg melded in his life and career ideals that are now all too rarely bound together in the same person.

I write these words in June as I prepare to embark on a *Me'ah* study tour in Israel, leading fifteen adults on a two-week exploration of the history of the Zionism and contemporary Israel. In

preparation for this trip, I have asked the participants to read, or re-read, Hertzberg's introduction to *The Zionist Idea* (1959). I have also asked them to bring this book with them. It will be our constant companion as we explore the land of Israel. That we have found Hertzberg's anthology indispensable will surprise no one. But few people remember today that he put it together in the first place, in the 1950s, at the behest of Hadassah, as part of that organization's commitment to adult Jewish education.

A great anthology, like a great performer, makes the difficult look easy. To assemble the material that made up *The Zionist Idea* Hertzberg had to search through the collected works of the key figures in the Zionist movement as well as the ideological writings of innumerable other thinkers and political activists. He had to select from their respective works the essays he judged to be both central to each author's message and accessible to the general reading public. And in many if not most cases he had to translate the essays



himself, typically from Hebrew or German. Like Nahum Glatzer's roughly simultaneous pioneering editorial efforts to bring the work of Franz Rosenzweig to the attention of the English-speaking public, Hertzberg's *The Zionist Idea* reminds us how few of these precious primary sources were available fifty years ago to those who could not read them in the languages in which they were originally written.

As with any anthology, one may take issue with the finished product and the assumptions that drove it. Hertzberg violated the historian's commandment of avoiding anachronism. His very designation of certain early thinkers as "precursors" itself suggests some degree of anachronistic thinking in