

63 Yosef Haim Brenner: *On the Spectacle of Jewish Conversion* (1910)

Translated by Avi Aronsky; introduced by Daniel Zohar

Introduction

A novelist and essayist, Yosef Haim Brenner (1881–1921) was born to a poor family in Mlynyn (a town in modern-day north Ukraine).^I Following his twelfth birthday, the precocious child was sent off to study at a yeshivah. Brenner, though, was more interested in Russian and Hebrew literature. At the age of nineteen, he published his maiden book. In 1901, the fledgling writer was conscripted into the Russian imperial army. However, some two years later, Brenner escaped to London^{II} and immersed himself in literary pursuits – a path that he would continue to tread upon moving to the Land of Israel in 1909.^{III}

During the Jaffa riots of 1921, Brenner was murdered by Arabs. Owing to his elevated standing in the *yishuv*,^{IV} he was anointed “the great martyr of the Jewish rejuvenation project in Palestine and, subsequently, an icon of Hebrew culture.”^V Over his truncated lifetime, Brenner critiqued literature, society, religion, and Jewish politics. Despite immigrating to the Land of Israel, the intellectual denied that he was a Zionist.^{VI} By dint of his radical pessimism, Brenner was reluctant to acknowledge that the *yishuv* was better than any centre or outpost of the Jewish diaspora. Moreover, he rejected Ahad haAm’s “spiritual Zionism,”^{VII} especially the idea of “the chosen people.”^{VIII} As an existentialist, Brenner held a secularist-cum-atheistic view, excoriating those who clung to faith. Rebelling against any and all dogma, the author slaughtered many of Jewry’s sacred cows, be they religious or cultural. Brenner also assailed superstitious customs, which he imputed to decline and ignorance.^{IX}

I Shapira Anita, *Yosef Haim Brenner: A Life* (Stanford, NJ: Stanford University Press, 2014), 3–4.

II *Ibid.*, 37 ff.

III *Ibid.*, 3–4.

IV Among Jews, the *yishuv* (‘settlement’) was the common name for the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel/Palestine before 1948.

V Shapira, *Yosef Haim Brenner*, 1.

VI *Ibid.*, 235.

VII Ahad haAm (“One of the People,”) was the pseudonym of Jewish intellectual Asher Zvi Hirsch Greenberg (1856–1927).

VIII Shapira, *Yosef Haim Brenner*, 387.

IX Nurit Govrin, *The Brenner Affair: The Fight for Free Speech* (Jerusalem: Yad ben Tzvi, 1985 [Hebrew]), <https://benyehuda.org/read/10314>.

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These philosophical and ideological leanings are evident in the featured essay, “On the Spectacle of Jewish Conversion.”^X Published in *HaPoel haTzair* (the Young Worker) on 24 November 1910, the piece triggered one of the Jewish world’s more vitriolic public debates in the run-up to the Great War. Dubbed “the Brenner affair,” the intellectual was accused of “heresy and incitement.”^{XI} For over two years, a long row of distinguished figures weighed in on this heated matter, not least Ahad haAm, A. D. Gordon, and David Ben Gurion. Transcending religion and secularity, the discourse also touched on freedom of speech, Jewish *yishuv*-diaspora relations, and spiritual-cum-national identity.

Brenner’s legacy endures in Israeli mainstream society. His ideas are not only “a-theological” or “anti-theological,” as he put it, but laden with differentiation. Drawing on the featured essay, some researchers argue that the intellectual championed a secularist “state of the Jews” model, as opposed to Ahad HaAm’s “Jewish state.”^{XII} As such, Brenner is cited in Hebrew textbooks on Judaism, the state, secularization, and politics to this day and age.

Bibliographical Information

Yosef H Brenner, “Ba’itonut uva’sifrut: ‘al hezion ha’shmad” [In Journalism and in Literature: On the Spectacle of Jewish Conversion], *Hapo’el Hatza’ir* 4, no. 3 (1910): 6–8.

Translation by Avi Aronsky

The Hebrew press along with that in the spoken Jewish language in all the Exile’s dispersions made extremely morbid summations (*bilansim*) for this past year – exactly like the two prior years – with respect to our lives [. . .] in these same Diasporas. Only a small handful of [. . .] all the Jewish papers throughout the globe reach us in the Land of Israel. However, all of them “covered the scream” [Isa. 15:8], in each one we found a single refrain, which surely also recurs time and again in those same Jewish papers that do not reach our hands. In each and every place [i.e., Jewish community], there are spectacles of hatred and destruction from outside, of waning and decline, material and spiritual, internally – this was our entire world over the course of the past 365 days [. . .] or, in the words of the press “the yearly final balance”.

X AA: Brenner wrote this piece under the pseudonym Yosef Haver.

XI Ibid.

XII E.g., Lior Tal, “Secular Judaism and IDF,” in *Between the Yarmulke and the Beret: Religion, Politics and the Military in Israel*, eds. Reuvan Gal, and Tamir Libel (Ben-Shemen: Modan, 2012), 439–63.

Regarding all this distress – what should be added [. . .] [and] subtracted? In the final analysis, what is to be gained from this grousing each and every year, in the same style?

Yes, in the same style; and at any rate, the tone has yet to change either. In these annual observations, there still prevails those same methodical explanations, whereby everything is attributed to known factors – external, transient factors – such as the reactionary political situation in Russia or the unexpected election [. . .] of some delegate to some country's parliament, which [. . .] stoke the hatred, pave the way for anti-Semitic agitation, and so on and so forth. Among all these same writers there still reigns an obdurate misunderstanding with respect to the crux of the matter, [. . .] the very nature of the ghetto life that miraculously persists.

And the Land-of-Israel observer? He might also have the right to preach a few drops of consolation into the brimming poisoned chalice and to call attention to our small yet important attempts. To [sic] lay down a cornerstone for the Hebrew *yishuv* on more secure foundations – our land and our labour – on which we will be able to safely dwell at some future point in time . . . The answer is no! Even our observer will no doubt be wary of pouring a consolatory cup, if he recalls all those same comrades who left us [i.e., the *yishuv*] over the past year, who found no satisfaction in all the heartening scenes that, nevertheless, have touched our lives here – for example, an unrestrained Hebrew childhood, the courage of a number of young workers, and exemplary patience on the part of renowned elders – and returned to once again seek “their bliss” in those same places that had disgorged them and where they will forever and ineluctably render “summations” and “final balances” of the sort that were done for the 5671 [1910–1911] Jewish New Year.

Of all the tragedies to befall *knesset Yisrael*^I over the past year that our newspapers looked into, the conversion phenomenon was canvassed and underscored. The “conversion (*shmad*)”,^{II} which was a common sight among West Europe's Jews from as far back as the days of Henriette Herz and the Mendelssohn daughters, has proliferated among Russian Jewry's youth in recent years due to the severe limitations that the authorities have placed on Torah scholars from the progeny of the holy seed and on Yahweh's [i.e., religious Jewish] learning . . . In recent months, heaps upon heaps of articles and feuilletons have been written on this issue in our newspapers [. . .]; upon closer inspection, we even find [. . .] a quasi-division of labour: those [authors] who randomly cry thief and pour fire and brimstone on the “convert (*meshumadim*, slur)^{III}”; and those who touch upon “the deeper aspects of this development,” partake in the scholarly debate, and reveal the commendable sides of Judaism *vis-à-vis* its Christian foe . . .

Owing to the hard work steadily being invested in both these respectable undertakings [. . .], we can practically envision the following picture: religion in general

I AA: Literally the “assembly of Israel”, *knesset Yisrael* was a moniker for world Jewry.

II AA: A derogatory term for Jewish conversions to other faiths (above all Christianity), *shmad* is a derivative of the Hebrew word for oblivion or decimation.

III AA: See previous footnote.

and the study thereof in particular – this is indeed the essence [. . .] of life and the essence in life; and behold, upward of ten million people in all corners of the world who are dubbed Jews and still uphold the Jewish religion and faith (*haDat veHaE-muna*) [. . .] Hasten the salvation!

That said, between you and me, and as opposed to [the consensus within] our entire nation – this is not how it is at all. For this entire “problem” – the [so-called] pledge of our nation – does not warrant such introspection. Not [sic] only with regard to the upwards of ten million [Jews across the globe], but the thousands of intelligent people among us in each and every [Jewish] community suffice with this too.

In fact, each and every year, tens of hundreds of Jewish men and women “extirpate (*mashmidim*)” themselves from our assembly in return for some benefit, accepting the Christian faith practically without any emotional struggle, just as tens of hundreds are increasingly straying into prostitution in Buenos Aires and other places – these developments are of course among the more unpleasant ones in our society, from among the phenomena – [. . .], for instance, the exigency in the large cities of working on the Sabbath and resting on Sunday, in contradistinction to our custom – that show us what our ghetto lives are in general and the conditions we are up against. Be that as it may, please refrain from deceiving our souls with the falsehood that for this reason the survival of the entire Jewish people is at stake, and I beg you please do not put this item on the agenda!

Among my people I dwell. Yours truly, the writer of these columns, is a Hebrew man with an open mind. Therefore, I do not consider the question of religion and faith, which gives my people no rest, to be a personally vexing issue. I do see Jewish breadwinners provide for houses of worship, at times zealously and moved by anger and always out of habit, due to inertia, which will surely continue for many years to come. At any rate, nowadays their prayer houses lack that same warmth, that same enthusiasm, of yesteryear. However, this is already a different kettle of fish, and the worrywart shall worry . . . (to me, for example, that same warmth [. . .], the gist of which was kowtowing to and entreating some father in heaven for a livelihood, was nothing to write home about . . .) On the other hand, I have once again met Hebrew youth, the sons of those same breadwinners, who certainly love to dabble in the problems of life. I indeed hear them talking about the relations between man and man, between man and woman, between nations, [and] between classes; they [. . .] take a general interest in the mystery of life and existence, in the material and spiritual realms, in the various developments in Man’s poetry, in the different streams of world literature, as well as the [. . .] shortcomings in our very own literature too [p. 6/7], but none of them would so much as ponder the idea of sitting down and dealing with theological balderdash: Which is the better faith – the religion teaching that the messiah has already come, or the one [claiming] the messiah has yet to arrive? Is it the faith of “do not onto others that which is hateful onto you”, or “whoever shall smack you on one [sic] cheek” etc . . . These questions are of absolutely no concern to our youth, not because they are so content with their inner world and worldview. To

the contrary, these same youth are cognizant of the many ruptures in their soul and of the difficulty of life without god; they know and sense that they are not whole human beings, that as Hebrew youth without a complete Hebrew language, without a Hebrew homeland, and without a Hebrew culture not everything is going smoothly [. . .] In any event, it is crystal clear to them that, despite all those who wish to teach them that there is no Jewish people without the Jewish faith (*ein Israel bli dat Israel*), a Jew and a prayer shawl and phylacteries are not the same thing [. . .] At any rate, the Jewish faith and religion of their fathers is not what weighs on their mind, it is not the absence of these that constitutes their main difficulty in life, and it is not the religion [. . .] of [. . .] the world's nations to which they shall turn their eyes . . .

However, this entails a risk – those who are so inclined as to argue with “the [above-mentioned] fence straddlers” will say – that there is a danger in this, for they laud Christianity at the expense of Judaism.

Danger? For the life of me, I don't understand the nature of this danger. Is the crux of the matter really whether one religion or another possesses loftier ideals? Instead, the main issue is whether this entity or some person is truly ideal, whether you should or shouldn't aspire to it, not if it is the brainchild of Judaism or Christianity. For argument's sake, let us say that Christianity is more ideal, that the Christian rung is higher than that of Judaism on the ladder of human progress, that the power of the daughter outshines that of the mother and she has made nice strides advancing the spirit, so then what? Does this behove me, the free Hebrew, to change something [. . .] to become a Christian?! [. . .]. In other words, must I [. . .] adopt the contemporary lifestyles of the myriad Christian believers, who have no bond with that same virtue? Were they to come to me tomorrow and prove that Buddhism, the religion of Confucius, [or] the religion of Muhammad are superior to Christianity, that the[ir] ideals [. . .] are loftier, would it then be incumbent upon me to become a devotee of these faiths [. . .], namely to accept the religionists' contemporaneous ways of life, even though as a free Hebrew, I have no contact with or debt to the lifestyles of the devotees of my forefathers' religion?

In life – to include the upper, moral life – study (*midrash*) is not the essential element, but the deed. We find this expression in our old literature [Pirkei Avot 1:17], but its taste still endures and its smell has not turned foul. All that I think and, above all, everything that I do, I certainly do not think or do because Talmudic Judaism, in which I was educated, taught me to think or do so, rather I want it or am compelled to do so. Talmudic Judaism, just as it is remote from Biblical Judaism, so too it is not, in effect, a solid whole, and “Jewish life according to the Talmud” can assume various forms: there are many verses in Biblical Judaism and many aphorisms in Talmudic Judaism . . . My contemporaries and I were educated on the knees of all these verses and aphorisms that contradict one another; in the end, they grew up and became what they are and yours truly became what I became [sic] . . . The “study,” then, filled an exceedingly slim role here. If the son of so-and-so is a radical altruist or an incorrigible egoist, and if, say, he has a known, entrenched attitude on the question of sex –

positive, negative, erotic, ascetic – perhaps you believe that these attitudes are tied not to the depths of his psycho-physiological character, but to the numerous exhortations he heard from his Judaism or Christianity teachers, to his affiliation with the Jewish or Christian ethic?

The individual and the nation's principal ways of life are nourished and sustained not on account of religion. With all its ceremonies and [its] trifles, faith itself is but a cog in the lifestyles that people created as per their desires-cum-exigencies, owing to the circumstances behind their human-national psycho-economic reality. Religion dons a form, sheds a form, is born, and will perish. Since the days of yore, the life of beliefs and religions – I intentionally refrain from stating: in the annals of beliefs and religions – undoubtedly contain, as do all areas of life, a great deal of fraud, exploitation, control of one man by another to his detriment. Moreover, there is – concerning individuals, not the masses – other elements, [be they] psychological, secret, tragic, [or] replete with content, that are intended to furnish deeper needs. The masses never reach the pulp and always eat the peel, at times with passion, at times reservedly, as though going through the motions; [as to] individuals – the pulp is found in their very selves, or they dream, yearn for, and succumb to it, and they never have any need for the peel. It is a known fact that the first philosophers in Greece waged war against the religion of their contemporaries; they even fought on behalf of the vaunted monotheism no less than our own prophets of Israel. Like them, they were immeasurably more religious than the priests and users of the sacred, who removed them, the former, from the collective. It is also known that love of man and respect for the sublime eternal values can be found, theoretically speaking, at last count in all the scriptures of every faith and religion, in accordance to the spirit of individuals therein, except that in practice – with respect to the multitude – we find subservience, superstitions, irrational laws and bloody wars over deities, idols, altars, and houses of worship, as well as customs, conventions, and other vapid laws. The historic, Roman, idolatrous, Inquisitional Christianity, which oppressed the exalted Greek philosophy and pulled all the tricks [in the book] to render all the [bodies of] wisdom into perfumers and cooks on its behalf [i.e., co-opt philosophy for the Church's own devices^{IV}], followed on the coattails of the wretched Jew Joshua [sic] from Nazareth – is there indeed any affinity between them? Now we have the regnant idolatrous-Orthodox (*elil-it-pravoslavit*) Christianity of the Russians and the regnant bourgeoisie-Lutheran Christianity of the Germans, and a couple more types of Christianity – do you believe that they suckle from the “New Testament” of the Jewish Apostles? No, this was something beyond the realm of the possible. The characteristics of these nations, together with sundry, external historical cases, also built [. . .] their historico-religious ways of life, their Christianity. In addition, our present-day Judaism, for all its countries and modes, is unconsciously influenced by the contemporaneous conditions [. . .] of the

IV AA: See I Sam. 8:13.

masses from the house of Israel in all those lands. However, in the final equation, it [i.e., the Mosaic faith] is foreign and perplexing *vis-à-vis* the lifestyles surrounding it from the outside – is there any further need to remind you how far it is from Biblical Judaism, the extent to which the flavour of the majority of its fundamental directives has changed and how different its worldview is from the assorted worldviews expressed in [. . .] the Old Testament.

Yes, the Old Testament. The Old and New Testament. On this [matter] too, there are those who attempt to sow fear: the New Testament is upon you, sons of the sons of the Old Testament's owners!^V . . . However, I, the free Hebrew, answer this fearmongering thus: From my own standpoint, the Old Testament lacks that same value that everyone screams about in its capacity as “the Holy Scriptures,” “the Book of Books,” “the eternal book,” and so on and so forth. I have already extricated myself from the hypnosis of the Bible's twenty-four books; many profane books from the last few generations are closer to me, greater in my eyes and more profound. In fact, this same importance that I recognize in the Hebrew Bible, *qua* remnants of memories from bygone days as well as [. . .] the embodiment of our nation's spirit and the human spirit within us over the course of many [. . .] an age – this importance I also find and recognize in the books of the New Testament (I will not touch on the literary power of either of them). The “New Testament”, but even an anti-theist, anti-theologist, yet as per my national consciousness there are no open accounts [i.e., connections] with this whatsoever, there are no open accounts with what is above and below the tangible visions, there are no open accounts with the heavens, with the creator of the world and with what follows death. My national consciousness does not preclude yours truly from opining about the value of our religion and the religions of the nations, the faith of our masses and the faith of their masses. Our thoughts and their thoughts, our books and their books – as I see fit.

They come to me and say: But the Christian legend about the son-of-God, who was sent to mankind and atoned for the iniquities of [all] the generations with his blood – what is your take on this legend that pervades every Christian European culture and literature? Once more, my response is: As I see fit . . . according to my state of mind . . . In any event, there is no national danger, regardless of how they present it . . . A person [. . .] can be a good Jew, dedicated to his nation with all his heart and soul, without being afraid of this legend as though it were some “*treifah*”;^{VI} conversely, he can refer to it with religious trembling like the gentile Leonardo DaVinci in his day . . . To me, it [i.e., the Jesus narrative] is odd, [p. 7/8 . . .] an object of hatred, as is any lie in the religious outlook, like any abiding tradition, like any deliberate illusion, which always serves to the detriment of man and clogs the horrifying void of the tough riddle of life with straw and stubble . . . However, I understand that there are

V DZ: See Jud. 16:9.

VI AA: A *treifah* is an otherwise kosher animal that is disqualified because of a pre-existing physical defect or injury.

souls who possess an outsized yearning for other worlds, and they occasionally turn their eyes to the “good shepherd” . . .

This much is clear: the question of the Christian legend is the general question of religious mysticism. For a person without a god in heaven [i.e., an atheist], no one can be the messenger or son of that same god. Be that as it may, what type of person was that same “shepherd” – this is certainly interesting from a characterological vantage point, just as [the question of] what was Buddha, [. . .] Moses, [. . .] Isaiah, [. . .] Muhammad [and] what were Shakespeare, Goethe is intriguing . . . Was that Galilean sapling who left the fold really a “good shepherd,” the epitome of perfection, as is customary to believe, a pure spirit with a loving, brave and holy disposition, or perhaps he was actually, as there is room to surmise, a drifter, a poor, idling, arrogant, and derisible hallucinator from the Galilee, who preached to people without lifting a finger [of his own], living like birds and lilies by the grace of our father on high. Who knows? It is nearly certain that he was neither completely this nor that . . . And again, in the final analysis – which of his exclamations was more typical of him: is it that same “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” [Matt. 27:46] or “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?” [Luke 23:24]. Who knows[?] . . . In any event, that same person was not one man straddling quite a few fences on his own, temperamentally mercurial, full of contradictions and incongruities insofar as estimating his role is concerned, transforming himself from day to day, and complex from various angles, both tragic and preposterous alike. Perhaps this too is incorrect, [as] [. . .] we are only seeing things through [the lens] of our broodings . . . If truth be told, what stable answer – characterological, as opposed to theological – can there be for these types of questions if the verses, upon which it is possible to build all the suppositions, contradict one another, are open to several interpretations, and invariably depend on the leanings of the commentator’s heart and his mindset? What is more, if the “sources” are for the most part cloudy and turbid, [do they] only [constitute] a hunting ground for drs. [sic] in theology and salaried missionaries?

All this notwithstanding: say what you will, but I do not tremble in the least when I intermittently see the lists in the Viennese Zionist German paper denouncing apostates by name in the public eye. What is more, I do not understand who is being hurt by the pathetic Adolphs and Bernards, who from childhood were foreign to Jewish society and religion and for the sake of gaining admission into Christian society even accepted its “faith?” What did we gain from them earlier, when they attended or kept away from Jewish temple, and what did we lose from the fact that they [i.e., Christian ecclesiastics] [. . .] sprayed the holy water on them for their pleasure? It is distressing [. . .] for us when they lock the gates before our itinerants, [. . .] when they expel our workers from factories, [. . .] when they place obstacles on our path in the Land of Israel, [. . .] when a Hebrew cultural institution shuts down for lack of resources – all this is a sign of our lives’ destitution, of the hardship of our existence, the meagreness of our needs and the lack of their fulfilment. [In contrast,] it is a joyous occasion [. . .] when a swath of land is purchased somewhere [in Palestine], when a Jewish school is

opened [. . .], when some important Hebrew book comes out, when we hear about a couple of Jews who have become *productive* workers – all this speaks to our creative lives, all this is a sign that there is still a pulse in our nation and we are not yet doomed to perish. Conversely, the pain of seeing a talented individual in this or another profession who was born in our midst leave us because he is unable to find his place amongst us is not incomprehensible to me; as a result [of such a departure], we his compatriots remain utter paupers and bereft of culture. On the other hand, what do we have in common with those same [. . .] hundreds of assimilated people from youth who, in order to fulfil some goal, join the Christian fold? For what reason does this slight external change, of all things, [. . .] unnerve us more than their lives before the transformation? Their primary lifestyles were non-Jewish from the outset, and what would we reap from them had they eschewed this last step and remained exclusively on the Jewish community's rolls, without taking part in the hardships of our life and [. . .] war over our national future? With respect to the loathsome careerists, there is surely no reason to cobble together a new eulogy. However, even if we take the unique vision of a moral convert to Christianity like Otto Weininger, the author of the book *Sex and Character*, who found, or believes that he found, a special beauty and great conviction in the Christian faith – the likes of such proselytes do not exist in the practical world, [so] what can we learn from this? In essence, Otto Weininger, of all people, was a Jew dispositionally speaking, with every last bone in his body. However, insofar as our Jewish world, the bane of his existence, is concerned, his value, even if he had refrained from embracing the Christian faith, was truly similar to that of [Ferdinand] Lassalle and all the other Jewish captives, both great and negligible, who for whatever reason are not converting. The step of Christianization on the part of our assimilators, who, like our worrywarts (*ḥardeinu*, i.e., ultra-orthodox Jews), imagine that the *mezuzah*^{VII} and the Jewish people are one and the same, is merely the outer shell of this phenomenon, of which there is no particular need to sound the alarm bells. Needless to say, one should not combat this [wave of conversion] by revealing the brilliance of Judaism.

Not with abstract notions will the concrete and inexorable assimilation of respectable portions of our sick, ghettoized nation's body be thwarted. "Judaism" in quotation marks [sic] will be unable to come to the rescue here, even if they were to pen a thousand grandiloquent sermons on this [phenomenon]. Let us leave, then, the wisdom of theology to their [i.e., Christianity's] and our own priests (*gallaḥim*),^{VIII} who are at leisure to deal with the [ensuing] question: Which among the religions is preferable, in which is there more beauty, more holiness, more justice, more love? This field is broad, containing [ample] room to preen and innovate, to choose a few verses

VII AA: A mezuzah is a parchment inscribed with Biblical passages that Jews traditionally hang on door frames.

VIII AA: Gallaḥim, "the shaven", was a derogatory term for priests.

from all the many lines and draw a connection between them – thereby bringing evidence [for their arguments].

The question of our Jewish lives is not [synonymous with] the question of the Jewish faith, the question of “Judaism’s existence.” This hybrid idea must be extracted from the root. Ahad haAm did so once and regretted it. That said, we, his free Jewish comrades, have absolutely nothing to do with Judaism. Be that as it may, we are no less a part of the [Jewish] collective than those who put on phylacteries and grow side-locks (*tšitsit*).^{IX} In our view, the [pivotal] question of our life is that of the productive workplace for us Jews. We Jews, beleaguered, [. . .] without a country, [. . .] language, and so on and so forth live all over the world; the environment of the gentile majority prevents us from being full-fledged Jews, to the same degree that our comrades the free Russians, Poles, etc. are full-fledged Russians, Poles. The environment of the majority confuses us, eats away at us, blurs our shape, injects tumult into our lives – but we are far from assimilating, oh how far indeed, and the matter of converting to Christianity – it is not even an oddity or a joke. Our nation is Diasporic, sick, [. . .] increasingly coming in harm’s way; seven times it has fallen – only to get back up. We are dutybound to pick it up. Our nation’s willpower is gradually waning – we must bolster it. Let us steel ourselves. There is no messiah for the Jews – let us buttress the fortifications so that we may live without a saviour. The thousands if not legions among us who are already assimilated beyond cure, who have already become capable of embracing the Christian faith – we will not go to such lengths as to spit at them. We the few, members of the living Jewish people, will grow stronger than a rock, working and producing to the best of our ability; we will ratchet up our nation’s output, along with its material and spiritual assets. Regardless of whether we mortify ourselves on the Day of Atonement or eat meat together with milk on this [festival], regardless if we uphold the ethics of the Old Testament [or] whether we are [. . .] adherents of Epicur[us]^X – we have not ceased to feel that we are Jews, to live our Jewish lives, to work, to create *modi operandi* of Jews, to speak our Jewish tongue, to receive spiritual nourishment from our literature, to toil on behalf of our free national culture, to defend our national honour, and to fight the war of our survival in any guise that this war assumes.

IX AA: Brenner is sarcastically referring to pay’ot that Orthodox Jews habitually grow.

X DZ: In the language of the Sages, “Epicurus” connotes a “heretic.”