

Ephraim Meir

The Rosenzweig Lehrhaus:
Proposal for a Jewish House of Study in Kassel
Inspired by Franz Rosenzweig's *Frankfurt Lehrhaus*



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THE ROSENZWEIG LEHRHAUS:
PROPOSAL FOR A JEWISH HOUSE
OF STUDY IN KASSEL INSPIRED
BY FRANZ ROSENZWEIG'S
FRANKFURT LEHRHAUS



The Rappaport Center for Assimilation
Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality
Bar Ilan University – Faculty of Jewish Studies
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**The Rosenzweig Lehrhaus: Proposal for a Jewish House of Study
in Kassel Inspired by Franz Rosenzweig's *Frankfurt Lehrhaus***

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to the author and

The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality

The Faculty of Jewish Studies

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2005

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Preface

The Jewish community in Germany has undergone profound changes since Germany's reunification in the wake of the disappearance of the Iron Curtain. The small communities of [the former] West Germany were confronted with their brethren who had been living under the communist regime in the East. Subsequently, these two groups of 'originally' German Jews were faced with an influx of tens of thousands of Jews from other areas of Eastern Europe, especially from the FSU.

These developments have led to complex tensions on the local and national levels. They also have led to an increased awareness of the need to respond to the challenge posed by considering the future: given that what has become the fastest-growing Jewish population in Europe is not about to disappear, what should and can be done to make its future as Jewishly rich, meaningful and attractive as possible?

Prof. Ephraim Meir of Bar Ilan University's department of Jewish Philosophy portrays one response to this challenge in this brief but significant work. Prof. Meir points out that today is not the first time in modern history that the Jewish population of

Germany was deeply secularized and alienated from the wellsprings of Jewish culture. Such a situation obtained also (*mutatis mutandis*) during the Weimar period in the 1920's. Prof. Meir, an internationally known scholar of the thought and philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig, returns to the *lehrhaus* designed and created by Rosenzweig and explicates its significance for a possible renaissance of Jewish existence in 21st century Germany. His vision is a practical one, and at the time this goes to press there are grounds for hope that it will be implemented both in Rosenzweig's home town of Kassel and also elsewhere in Germany and in Europe. The Rappaport Center is pleased to bring Prof. Meir's work to the attention of readers – both Jewish and non-Jewish – who share a concern for the revitalization of Jewish life and culture in the contemporary world.

The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality was founded in Bar Ilan University in the spring of 2001 at the initiative of Ruth and Baruch Rappaport, who identified assimilation as the primary danger to the future of the Jewish people.

A central working hypothesis of the Center is that assimilation is not an inexorable force of nature, but the result of human choices. In the past, Jews chose assimilation in order to avoid persecution and social stigmatization. Today, however, this is rarely the case. In our times, assimilation stems from the fact that for many Jews, maintaining Jewish involvements and affiliations seems less attractive than pursuing the alternatives open to them in the pluralistic societies of contemporary Europe and America. A working hypothesis of the Rappaport Center is that the tendency of many Jews to disassociate from Jewishness is a reflection of

real flaws and weaknesses that exist in various areas and institutions of Jewish life today.

However, since assimilation is not a force of nature, it should be possible to move beyond analysis, towards mending and repair. This is the second stage of our activities, and these two aspects are reflected in our name: The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality.

* * *

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those whose efforts have enabled the publication of this important paper by Prof. Meir: Ms. Iris Aharon, organizational coordinator of the Rappaport center; Ms. Ruhi Avital (text editor); Ms. Mollie Milesi, who assisted in the editing work; Mr. Ya'akov Hasson (proofreading and coordinating with press); the Ben Gassner studio (cover graphics), and Art Plus press.

For all of us involved in the activities of the Rappaport Center, and indeed for all Jews and people of good will concerned with the vitality of the Jewish people, the publication of this paper is an opportunity to acknowledge once again the vision and commitment of Ruth and Baruch Rappaport. It is their initiative and continued generosity that enable the manifold activities of the Rappaport Center – thus making an important contribution to ensuring the future well-being of the Jewish people. May they continue to enjoy together many years of health, activity, satisfaction and happiness.

Zvi Zohar, Director
The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research
and Strengthening Jewish Vitality
Bar Ilan University, June 2005



Introduction

This research and position paper will discuss the rationale for the establishment of a *Lehrhaus* in Germany, explicitly inspired by Franz Rosenzweig's *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt.¹ In order to carry out my research regarding the relevance of Rosenzweig's thoughts on teaching to the present-day situation, I decided to spend two months in Kassel, Rosenzweig's place of birth. How fortunate I felt when Prof. Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, who holds the Rosenzweig chair at Kassel, arranged for me to stay in a mansard room on Schlangenberg 3, right below Rosenzweig's very own parental home at Terrasse 1. Everyday I passed by the *Friedrichsgymnasium*, where Rosenzweig attended school. Daily I traveled to the University on *Holländische Platz*, one bus stop after the *Am Stern* [At the Star] stop. Franz Rosenzweig, author of the celebrated *Star of Redemption* was thus

1 At the very start of this paper, I would like to thank the Rappaport Center which has generously supported my research. I would also like to thank the many people who discussed various aspects of this project with me. I would like to mention Professor Ido Abram, Professor Werner Licharz, Dr. Werner Kahl and Dr. Eva Schulz-Janders in particular in this context.

omnipresent during my research stay, watching over my shoulder what I wrote day by day.

This research paper comprises two parts. In the first, I shall describe Rosenzweig's endeavors in the field of Jewish education² and particularly his concept of the *Lehrhaus* as a place where Jewish life could grow and develop. In the second part, I shall outline my proposal for the foundation of a unique *Lehrhaus* in Rosenzweig's birthplace, Kassel. This *Lehrhaus* would be different from any other institution of Jewish learning in Germany in that the intended pedagogical activities will take into account Rosenzweig's philosophy of education as it is reflected in his manifold educational activities.

The first part of this paper will focus upon two of Rosenzweig's essays: *Bildung und kein Ende*³ and *Neues Lernen*,⁴ both written in 1920, not long after the completion of the *Star*. The first essay was written in early 1920 in Kassel, in preparation for the *Freies*

- 2 See F. Rosenzweig, "Zeit ists...(Ps. 119, 29) Gedanken über das jüdische Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks", in *Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken* (F.Rosenzweig. Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften III), Reinhold and Annemarie Mayer eds., Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984 (=GSIII), pp. 461–481; English translation "It is Time: Concerning the Study of Judaism", Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *On Jewish Learning*, New York, 1955; paperback edition 1989 (hereafter Glatzer), pp. 28–54.
- 3 First published in J.Kauffmann Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, spring 1920. F.Rosenzweig, "Bildung und kein Ende (Pred.12,12). Wünsche zum jüdischen Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks insbesondere zur Volkshochschulfrage", GSIII, pp. 491–503; English translation "Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning", in Glatzer, pp. 55–71.
- 4 First published in Almanach des Schocken Verlags of the year 5695, 1934/35. F. Rosenzweig, "Neues Lernen", GSIII, pp. 505–510; English translation "Upon Opening the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*. Draft of an Address", Glatzer, pp. 95–102.

Jüdisches Lehrhaus. The second was composed in October of the same year as a draft of the inaugural speech of the House of Study, a speech that Rosenzweig made on October 17, 1920. A discussion of Rosenzweig's *Die Bauleute*, an open letter to Martin Buber, written in the summer of 1923 and published in Buber's *Der Jude* in August 1924, can be found in Appendix 1.

According to Rosenzweig himself, the specificity of the *Lehrhaus* lies in that it is realizable everywhere,⁵ because everywhere, maintains Rosenzweig, there are people who ask. In every place, it is possible to take part in conversations and learn through questions and counter-questions. Lernen, which means both to study and to teach, is possible everywhere that people come together and talk about how they live. The Lehrhaus in Frankfurt was not dependent on rabbis or religious teachers. The teachers in the House of Study were also students, people rediscovering their identity. In the absence of an all-or-nothing attitude, people will be willing to read Jewish texts, such as the Bible, Midrash, Talmud, the Siddur or Mahzor together, and discover and build a Jewish life.⁶ It is not the books on their own, but rather the actual living encounter with other Jews that will create the opportunity to build Judaism. I do not wish to imply that Rosenzweig's ideas on Jewish learning are easily applicable to all different situations in different times. Yet I do believe that Rosenzweig touched on themes that are still relevant in the present, and the solutions that he proposed to resolve problems may still inspire us now.

5 Cfr. "Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus. Einleitung für ein Mitteilungsblatt", in GSIII, p. 515: "Das Besondere des Lehrhauses steckt nämlich grade in dem, was mehr oder weniger überall möglich ist".

6 Ibid.

It is my position in this paper that a *Lehrhaus* in Kassel, where many Jews of the former Soviet bloc have recently settled, could strengthen Jewish vitality and stimulate the active discovery of facets of their Jewish identity among the participants. The creation of such an institution in Kassel, rather than in metropolises such as Frankfurt or Berlin with the multiplicity of Jewish services they offer, could in my opinion contend effectively with existing assimilatory tendencies and bring about a rejuvenation of the Jewish community. The proposed institution would be distinguished from the existing ones in that it would adhere to Rosenzweig's ideas on Jewish learning. It would seek to create living contact with Jewish knowledge, as experienced in a dialogical community. The essentially non-ideological House of Study would not expect the participants to conform to any minimal uniform behavior; neither is its aim to provide participants with immediately usable practical knowledge, for example, for liturgical services or other goals. However, it would – true to Rosenzweig's spirit – ask for a commitment to Jewish learning as a desire to live a Jewish life. The Kassel *Rosenzweig Lehrhaus* would promote a commitment to Jewish learning in a non-threatening, convivial manner. The present proposal presents the rationale and plan for the creation of such an institution, or rather such a place and time, to begin functioning in November 2005.

I. Franz Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus*

Learning has always been an integral element of Jewish life. Jewish education took place in the synagogue, in the family and in schools – in the *heder* and in Talmud Torah institutions. Studying in a yeshiva or a *kollel* has frequently been regarded as an ideal for the Jew who wants to progress in his spiritual life. In a letter to Gertrud Rosenstock-Huessy, Rosenzweig defined the activity of *lernen*, of studying together, as a kind of sacrament. The Midrash, which tells us that Adam's son Seth founded the first House of Study, testifies to the great value traditionally attached to Jewish study.

Franz Rosenzweig's modernized *bet midrash* was a renewal of an old tradition. After World War I, during the period of the Weimar republic, Rosenzweig created an institution in Frankfurt in which the living, spoken word was central. Isolated thinkers were not considered ideal teachers, and what Rosenzweig aimed for were teachers who could be communicative, attuned to questions and able to create dialogical situations.⁷ Conversations,

7 To Professor Friedrich Meinecke, who was the supervisor of Rosenzweig's thesis on Hegel and the State and who offered his pupil a university position, Rosenzweig argued his refusal with the following words: "Cognition no longer

discussions and lively company were viewed as the focus of the educational activities in Frankfurt. In sharing with them their enthusiasm for the facets of Jewish identity that they had discovered, the teachers also learned from their students.⁸

In 1919, a *Freie jüdische Hochschule* was founded in Berlin, and another one in Breslau. Rosenzweig, however, had a different aim for his own *Volkshochschule*, a term which he finally abandoned for the more Jewish *Lehrhaus*. He did not like the “Berlin system” where the focus was on knowledge and the stimulation of autonomous thinking. In his own *Lehrhaus*, Rosenzweig preferred to fight against ignorance and indifference.⁹

In a letter to Rudolf Hallo¹⁰ dated December 1922, Rosenzweig

appears to me as an end in itself. It has turned into service, a service to human beings [...]. Cognition is autonomous; it refuses to have any *answers* foisted on it from the outside. Yet it suffers without protest at having certain *questions* prescribed to it from the outside (and it is here that my heresy regarding the unwritten law of the university originates). Not every question seems to me worth asking. Scientific curiosity and omnivorous aesthetic appetite mean equally little to me today, though I was once under the spell of both, particularly the latter. Now I only inquire when I find myself *inquired of*. Inquired of, that is, by people rather than by scholars. There is a person in each scholar, a person who inquires and stands in need of answers”. F. Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher. 2. Band. 1918–1929* (Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften I*), Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann (eds.), in collaboration with Bernhard Casper, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979 (=GSI, 2), p. 681; Nahum Glazer (ed.), *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and Thought*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998, p. 97.

8 See Bab. Talmud, Makkot 10a.

9 See his letter to Eugen Mayer March 12, 1920, after a visit to the ‘*Freie jüdische Hochschule*’ in Berlin; GSI, 2, pp. 668–669, where Rosenzweig writes: “Die Aufgabe der Universität ist: Wissen zu *verbreiten* und selbständiges Denken *anzugewöhnen*. Die Aufgabe unsrer ‘*Volkschhochschule*’ hingegen muss vornehmlich sein: Unwissenheit zu *verringern* und Interesselosigkeit *abzugewöhnen*” (p. 669).

10 Rudolf Hallo, who returned to Judaism, served temporarily as director of the *Lehrhaus*.

offers us insights into the genesis of the *Lehrhaus*. He writes that lawyer Eugen Mayer, social worker Paula Nassauer and liberal rabbi Georg Salzberger conceived the idea of a Jewish *Volkshochschule*. The first lecture cycle started in early 1920. Rabbi Nehemia Anton Nobel, a leading Frankfurt rabbi who had gathered around himself a circle of people interested in Judaism, and biochemist Eduard Strauss, who loved to study Bible, considered Rosenzweig to be the most suitable candidate for director of the future *Lehrhaus*.¹¹ Rosenzweig, who at that time held an academic position, was delighted to accept the position and on August 1, 1920 was appointed director of the House of Study.

The *Lehrhaus* functioned for only a brief period, mainly due to the fact that Rosenzweig became ill with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease). Without his active involvement, the *Lehrhaus* soon lacked the necessary inspiration, until it finally ceased to exist as an institution in 1927. Other *Lehrhäuser* were opened in the 1920s and 1930s in several German cities, e.g. in Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Wiesbaden, Breslau, Freiburg and Munich. In 1933, Martin Buber reopened the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*, but under entirely different circumstances. Buber's educational activities came to an abrupt end in 1938 as a consequence of *Kristallnacht*.¹²

11 GSI, 2, p. 850.

12 For the history and spirit of the *Lehrhaus*, see Michael Bühler, "Erziehung zu Tradition und geistigem Widerstehen. Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus als Schule der Umkehr ins Judentum", in Raimund Sestershenn (ed.), *Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus – eine andere Frankfurter Schule*, Munich and Zurich, 1987, pp. 12–32; Michael Volkmann (=Michael Bühler), *Eine andere Frankfurter Schul'. Das Frei Jüdische Lehrhaus 1920–1927* (Prophezezy Schriften im TVT, 2), Tübingen, 1994; Regina Burkhardt-Riedmiller, *Franz Rosenzweigs Sprachdenken und seine Erneuerung humanistischer und jüdischer*

Rosenzweig's thought on education: *Zeit ists*

In 1917, Rosenzweig wrote an essay on the reform of education in which he strived to overcome the gap between study and life. The article, written at the Balkan front in March of 1917, was printed as a brochure and quickly went through a second edition by January of the next year. In the wake of his essay, *Zeit ists*, “It is Time: Concerning the Study of Judaism”,¹³ Rosenzweig became a celebrated figure in the German-Jewish world. He sent his essay as an open letter to his teacher Hermann Cohen because “the majority of those German Jews who intend to live as Jews in Germany honor you as their intellectual leader”.¹⁴ He maintained that it was time for a change, and that the problem of Jewish education was that of religious schooling, and especially religious education, which he felt was sadly restricted to a few years of religious classes and some High Holiday sermons.

Rosenzweig had two things in mind. First, he wanted to create a new type of Jewish teacher, a kind of theologian who would be

Lerntraditionen, Frankfurt, 1995; Isabell Schulz-Grave, *Lernen im Freien Jüdischen Lehrhaus* (Oldenburgische Beiträge zu jüdischen Studien 2), Oldenburg, 1998.

The volume Werner Licharz (ed.), *Lernen mit Franz Rosenzweig* (Arnoldshainer Texte 24), Frankfurt, 1984 contains several articles pertinent to our subject. In this last volume (pp. 206–220), there is an outstanding article by Ernst Simon. Also W. Schmied-Kowarzik (ed.), *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) Internationaler Kongress-Kassel 1986. Bd.I: Die Herausforderung jüdischen Lernens*, Freiburg-Munich, 1988 contains articles pertaining to the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*.

13 The essay was written in the beginning of 1917 in Macedonia and appeared in the *Verlag der Neuen Jüdischen Monatshefte* at the end of 1917. It constitutes the Jewish counterpart of his “Volksschule und Reichsschule” on German education, also called the “Putzianum” (GSIII, pp. 371–411). For the essay: GSIII, pp. 461–481.

14 Glatzer, p. 27.

trained in Jewish science but also practically engaged in a concrete community, one who ascribed to his belief that life and science were intertwined. Secondly, the renewed program would contain subjects such as Hebrew, Talmud and the study of synagogue prayers and the yearly cycle. This was an innovation, a bold program for the many German Jews who had grown increasingly distant from tradition. The proposed curriculum contained elements designed to lead students out of a dead past into a living present. *Zeit ists* was aimed at countering the conflict between education and life.

Rosenzweig's intentions were good, but when the *Academy for the Science of Judaism* (*Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*) in Berlin was finally established, with the help of Hermann Cohen, this learned institution did not at all correspond to what Rosenzweig had in mind. The Berlin Academy focused on theoretical, scientific research and did not relate to the practical aspects of Rosenzweig's essay. True, the Academy was very progressive when compared with the old Science of Judaism, with its overly exclusivist historicist approach,¹⁵ but Rosenzweig still could not see how the new scholarship in the Academy was related to the people themselves. He protested against this disassociation between research and teaching and continued to develop his own thoughts on education, while attempting to build a solid bridge between knowledge and life, in the belief that this would lead to a rejuvenation of Jewish life itself.

15 Among those whose works were published in the Academy were Yitzhaq (Fritz) Baer, Chanoch Albeck, Leo Strauss and Hermann Cohen. Leo Baeck, Ernst Cassirer, Ismar Elbogen and Isaac Heinemann wrote essays in a volume that marked the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Academy. Eugen Taubler headed the research program.

A concrete occasion to become active in Jewish education was created when people such as Rabbi Nobel, with whom Rosenzweig studied Talmud, approached him and offered him the directorship of a new Jewish educational institute in Frankfurt. Rosenzweig, who had opted out of an academic career because it was incompatible with his decision to dedicate himself to Jewish life, was delighted to accept the offer.

Before continuing our discussion on Rosenzweig's educational writings, let us first define some of Rosenzweig's ideas on returning to the faith, Judaism, dialogue and translation, which are of crucial importance to the understanding of his thoughts on education.

Returning to Judaism and dialogical thinking

Before beginning the analysis of Rosenzweig's essays, which are directly linked to the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt, it is important to recall a little about Rosenzweig's spiritual odyssey. It is indeed impossible to understand Rosenzweig's commitment to Jewish learning without considering his own biography.

Rosenzweig was himself the product of assimilation. Under the influence of his friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, a Jew who converted to Christianity at the age of eighteen, he too was on the verge of becoming a Christian. Following a nocturnal conversation with Rosenstock and in the presence of his cousin Rudolf Ehrenberg on July 7, 1913, Rosenzweig declared his decision to convert to Christianity. Yet, during the Jewish High Holidays of the same year, he retracted his decision and proudly wrote to Rudolf Ehrenberg:

“I must tell you something that will grieve you and may at first appear incomprehensible to you: After prolonged, and I

believe thorough, self-examination, I have reversed my decision. It no longer seems necessary to me, and therefore, being what I am, no longer possible. I will remain a Jew (*Ich bleibe also Jude*).¹⁶

Rosenzweig spent the rest of his life trying to understand the meaning of his own existential decision. Discovering an assortment of facets in his own complex German-Jewish identity, he brought with him an incisiveness and enthusiasm that transformed him into a spiritual Jewish leader for an entire generation of Jews who desired as he did to explore their Jewish identities and to make an inward return – back to Jewish life.

Equally important to the understanding of Rosenzweig's commitment to Jewish education is the development of his dialogical "speech thinking" that found its ultimate expression in the *Star of Redemption* (1921), which he considered to be a commentary "leaving out the text" (*unter Weglassung des Texts*).¹⁷ Although he did not regard the *Star* as a Jewish book,¹⁸ Judaism occupies a prominent place in it and new thoughts are formulated

16 F. Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher. 1. Band. 1900–1918* (Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften I*), Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann (eds.), in collaboration with Bernhard Casper, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979 (=GSI, 1), pp. 132–133; English translation in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and Thought*, New York, 1961, p. 95.

17 GSI, 2, p. 1196.

18 See "Neues Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum 'Stern der Erlösung'", GSIII, p.155; English translation "'The New Thinking': A Few Supplementary Remarks to the *Star [of Redemption]*", in *Franz Rosenzweig's 'The New Thinking'*, Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (eds. and transl.), Syracuse, NY, 1999 (=The New Thinking), p. 92.

in ancient Jewish words. Rosenzweig's New Thinking, his *neues Denken*, is palpable in the *Star*, but also in his educational activities. In both contexts, a person must develop from a *Selbst*, a mute and lonely being, a non-absorbable self, into an animated being, a soul, a *Seele*.

Gradually Rosenzweig became conscious that he could no longer continue to be a student of Friedrich Meinecke, his professor of German history. He felt he could no longer be the representative of an academic discipline, someone who would dedicate his entire life to scholarship and to the kind of paralyzing activity that would cut him off from his most cherished treasure, his Judaism. For the author of *Hegel and the State* (1920) it had become clear that concrete service, *Dienst*, to human beings must replace scientific curiosity and pure cognition. Instead of thinking without being asked, he no longer desired to inquire without being "inquired of", but the inquiry should be by people rather than scholars.¹⁹ The scholar now allowed himself to become engaged in everyday life rather than only in his own thoughts. As Eric L. Santner formulates it in his book on Rosenzweig and Freud, the scholar could now master his talents instead of being mastered by them.²⁰ The paralyzing activity of a dead science²¹ was now replaced by commitment to living people in real life.

It was this link to real people that made Rosenzweig feel genuinely alive. His magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption*, ends with the words "into life". He had found the cure for his paralysis,

19 Glatzer, pp. 96–97.

20 Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life. Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, Chicago, 2001 (=Santner), p. 16.

21 See F. Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy. A View of World, Man and God*, transl. N. Glatzer, Cambridge, 1999.

he was ready to let go of his former fixation on science, and pave the way for life itself.²² Instead of a theory of knowledge in which reality is thinking and thinking reality, he conceived a “messianic epistemology” in which one does not verify abstract truth, but rather makes the living of truth true in life itself.²³ At the same time, he found himself willing to address others rather than write for no one. He could now invite other people to connect to the same vital source that gave him a fuller life and a boost of energy so that they too could become more alive.

In his dialogical thinking, Rosenzweig recognized that acknowledging is higher than knowing. He abandoned the paralyzing Old Thinking, the lonely monologue, for the animating New Thinking, in which dialogue is central.

Dialogue and translation

In 1925, Rosenzweig and Buber began working on their translation of the Bible, *Verdeutschung der Schrift*, which Buber ultimately completed in 1961. As they were translating, they surprised the host language with something unfamiliar to that language, and they performed an eminently dialogical act, an act of peace. They opened up the original text to the readers of a different time, space and culture, allowing them to respond to the Divine word spoken “today”.²⁴

22 F. Rosenzweig, *Die “Gritli”-Briefe. Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy*, Inken Rühle and Reinhold Mayer (eds.) with a preface by Rafael Rosenzweig, Tübingen, 2002, p. 770.

23 “Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, GSIII, p. 159.

24 See Barbara E. Galli. “Translating is a Mode of Holiness”, in *idem, Cultural Writings of Franz Rosenzweig*, Syracuse, New York, 2000, pp. 3–57.

For Rosenzweig, translation was the true goal of the spirit (*das eigentliche Ziel des Geistes*). Only the Greek translation of the Bible ‘domesticated’ revelation and made it accessible to the world: Homer was not a fact until he spoke Latin. Language, according to Rosenzweig, only becomes audible and public (*wirklich laut*) in the conversation between people as an act of translation.²⁵ He himself translated and commented on ninety-five of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi’s poems.

In sum, Rosenzweig believed that speech is fundamentally dialogue and that every conversation is a translation. This position has profound implications for the understanding of Rosenzweig’s pedagogical concepts. He did not oppose the study of the Bible in translation and believed that translating into another language and in a personal way was a *sine qua non* of real understanding.

On homes and homelessness

For Rosenzweig, the move from abstract science and the scholarly study of history to a life in the service of man meant real freedom, a renewed link to the mainstream of life. He wrote to his teacher Meinecke that he had found value in all the little things of everyday life, in what Goethe called the “challenges of the day” (*Forderung des Tages*). With completion of the *Star*, he had freed himself from the shackles of dead science and written himself “into life.” His next task was to verify what he had discovered as the concrete truth in the *Star*. The living encounter with the Other and life in a community that is not absorbed in a totality became his main concern. For him, the living community referred something irreducible to what is – a ‘more’, a ‘higher’ or a ‘beyond’ – that

25 See the letter of October 1, 1917 to Rudolf Ehrenberg. GSI, 1, pp. 460–461.

lends meaning to what is. In connecting himself to real people, Rosenzweig, found himself in the midst of life.

At the end of 1919, Rosenzweig discussed Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* in the Kassel Theater. He concentrated upon Lessing's question "Are Christ and Jew first Christ and Jew, then human?" (*Sind Christ und Jude eher Christ und Jude als Mensch?*).²⁶ In Lessing's humanistic thought, what is crucial is to be a human being. Rosenzweig criticized Lessing in the following terms: "Christ and Jew are not first Christ and Jew; but Christian man and Jewish man are more than naked man and naked institution alone" (*Christ und Jude sind nicht eher Christ und Jude als Mensch, sondern christlicher und jüdischer Mensch sind mehr als nackter Mensch und nackte Institution*). Rosenzweig argued that the individual person "is" not his people, and that therefore the people of the Middle Ages had to free themselves from this in order to make room for the "purely human" (*rein Menschliche*). Institutions, Rosenzweig says, must cease to be God's bride and become homes for people. "Man is more than his house. But not homeless" (*Der Mensch mehr als sein Haus. Aber nicht der unbehauste*). In other words, man has roots, there is no such a thing as an abstract human being. This would lead to the "naked man" (*der nackte Mensch*), a man resembling a flower in a vase, a flower that has no roots. Rosenzweig protested against the concept of an abstract man: Such a man simply does not exist. A human being always exists within a particular human context. Outside this context, he is just a cut flower in a vase, without roots, that soon withers.

A little later, in 1920, Rosenzweig completed the picture when he wrote that being a Jew does not imply that one is separated

26 "Lessing's Nathan", GSIII, pp. 449–453.

from the rest of the world. Talking about the “Jewish human being”, he remarks that there is no line drawn to separate us from other kinds of humanity. There is no “relationship” between a man’s Jewishness and his humanity that needs to be discovered: “As a Jew he is a human being, as a human being a Jew”.²⁷ Santner calls this phenomenon a “singular universal”.²⁸ Rosenzweig did not see Judaism as a cultural identity different from other cultural identities; he conceived it as necessarily escaping the all, or the bulimic whole. To him, Judaism was the way of life in which one frees oneself from paralysis and from paralyzing ideologies, in order to be alive in history and in the midst of life.

Assimilation and dissimulation

In his own Jewish existence, Rosenzweig was marked by the presence of his great uncle, “*Onkel Adam*”.²⁹ Adam Rosenzweig

27 Glatzer, p. 56.

28 Santner, p. 128.

29 Adam (1826–1908) was a brother of Rosenzweig’s grandfather, Louis. In the Jewish cemetery of Kassel, I found the following inscription on his grave:
 “Sein Beruf war sein Glück
 Menschenliebe sein Ideal
 Hingebend und treu weihte er
 sein Dasein
 denen die ihm nahestanden
 In ihrem Herzen lebt er
 unvergeßlich fort”
 (His profession was his joy,
 Love of humanity his ideal.
 Devotedly and faithfully, he dedicated
 His life
 To those dear to him.
 In your hearts
 He lives unforgettably).

impressed the child with his Jewish approach. After Rosenzweig's breakdown (*Zusammenbruch*) in 1913, when a new, more dynamic life came into perspective, people such as Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber and Rabbi Nehemia Nobel supported the brilliant young man on his way back home. However, within the circle of his Christian friends and relatives, he received no support at all for his return to Judaism. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, especially, did his utmost to convince his friend that his future did not lay in being a Jew, which – for him – would have no meaning after the coming of Christ. Eugen only wanted Franz to become part of the ecumenist world that had overcome particularistic, ethnic belonging.

Rosenzweig, however, felt that Judaism rejects totality and opposes absorption, that it is a life that rejects any attachment to ideologies³⁰ in history. He further felt that his personal path was close to the way of many assimilated Jews and that he had to develop a model of return, without the nostalgia for ancient forms and without abruptly cutting off the ancient lifestyle in favor of an entirely new one dominated by the Law and free of any linkage to a problematic past. He thus did not become fanatical in his return to the faith. He progressively came to love being Jewish. He left his parents' home and married Edith Hahn. As already mentioned, he turned down the academic career offered by Friedrich Meinecke and instead of becoming a professional historian, opted for cognition in service of people: "Cognition no longer appears to me as an end in itself. It has turned into service, a service to human beings".³¹ In a letter of August 30, 1920, in which he describes

30 See Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered*, Princeton, 2000.

31 N.N. Glatzer (ed.), *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, New York, 1961, p. 97.

what happened to him in 1913, he proudly stands up for his Judaism.³² Judaism granted him a complete life. Acknowledging this became more important than knowing, which had left him deadened.³³ He thus freed himself from dead science, from mere cognition in order to enter into the flow of life. He himself exemplified the movement of the new learning, moving from life to Torah, not from Torah to life.

In the *Lehrhaus*, he used his talents to provide living answers to questions from a living public, not to write books. His life became a one of humble service. He stopped writing scholarly books and connected himself to a concrete Jewish people. His home life also became increasingly Jewish. Rosenzweig even came to see himself as the reincarnation of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Levi. Because his grandfather had been named Yehuda Louis (Levi), and he should have been named after his grandfather, Rosenzweig believed that he too should have been named Yehuda ben Shmuel (his father's Jewish name was Shmuel). Like Yehuda Ha-Levi, Rosenzweig opposed exaggerated rationalism and preferred experience. He believed that empirical knowledge was preferable to abstract knowledge, and defended Judaism.³⁴

32 GSI, 2, p. 675. Rosenzweig said to Meinecke on June 6, 1919 that the Jewish problem had already begun to occupy his attention before the war. Meinecke thought the problem would only be solved when Judaism was absorbed into general culture. Rosenzweig responded that Judaism is his "most inner life cell" (*innerste Zelle*), for which history and philosophy were only "house tools" (*Hausgerät*).

33 See Hilary Putnam's introduction to F. Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy. A View of World, Man and God*, transl. Nahum N. Glazer, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 9–10.

34 Like Yehuda Ha-Levi, he placed the miracle of revelation at the centre of his system and loved words and songs. And finally, like Yehuda Ha-Levi, he attributed special status to Hebrew as a holy language, and to Israel's election

Yet all this did not suffice for him. He also wanted to bring others back. He wanted other Jews to abandon assimilation and opt for a conscious Jewish life. The *Lehrhaus* was an instrument to bring Jews that had strayed afar back to their innermost selves. He wanted to infuse new life into Jews, to make them alive (*lebendig*)³⁵ and help them acquire more vitality (*Lebendigkeit*).³⁶

“Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning”

Significantly, Rosenzweig’s essay *Bildung und kein Ende* (“Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning”) is addressed to an actual person, Eduard Strauss (1876–1952). Intended as a preparation for the *Lehrhaus*, it expressed criticism of the new Berlin Academy, which had disappointed Rosenzweig. The document alludes to the verse in Ecclesiastes (12:12) that admonishes that of the making of many books there is no end. The subtitle “Wishes Regarding the Problem of Jewish Education of Today, Especially Concerning the *Volkshochschule*” (*Wünsche zum jüdischen Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks insbesondere zur Volkshochschulfrage*) evinces the need for a brand new approach to Jewish adult education. In it, Rosenzweig demonstrates that he was no longer interested in questions related to curricula, but rather in dealing with Jewish existence itself. The essay is a marvelous piece of writing, an astute analysis of the difficult situation that German Jewry faced at that time. It proposes a completely new

under the Nations. He agreed with Yehuda Ha-Levi that Christianity had a function, and in the *Star*, even cites Yehuda Ha-Levi’s famous allegory of the seed and the tree which grows from the seed. However, unlike his predecessor, Rosenzweig did not appreciate Islam at all.

35 GS III, p. 501; Glatzer, p. 69.

36 GS III, p. 502; not translated in Glatzer.

type of *bet midrash*, because Rosenzweig felt that a new type of learning had to be created, one that would engender a renaissance of Jewish learning and Jewish life.

At the beginning of his essay, Rosenzweig writes that there is no longer a need for books on Jewish subjects, that what is needed now are not new Jewish books, but new Jewish human beings. However, these human beings should not be separate from the rest of the world, because as a Jew, one is a human being and as a human being, one is a Jew. Let us note once again: the Jewishness Rosenzweig writes about is neither nationalism, a creed listed in the civil registry, nor literature. For Rosenzweig, one simply *is* Jewish.

Literature is only relevant when one wants to transmit what has been achieved to those who are in the process of development. But between the achieved and the developing, remarks Rosenzweig, there is life itself. Life itself at this moment does not need books. Children ask only in order to live; and here again is an end to the making of books. There is no end to studying the past or writing about it; nor is there an end to teaching and education. But studying the past and teaching for the future cannot replace the present moment. Only the lively, spoken word in the here and now can help in the present situation. “Teaching and study have both deteriorated. And they have done so because we lack that which gives animation to both science and education – life itself”.³⁷

Rosenzweig starts from the “bookless present”.³⁸ Up to the time of emancipation, he notes, there was the Jewish Law, the Jewish home and Jewish synagogue services. Now, the unity

37 “Towards a Renaissance”, Glatzer, p. 60.

38 Id., p. 61.

between these three realities no longer exists. The Law brings out the difference between Jew and Jew more than between Jew and non-Jew. The Jewish home too has lost its dominant position, and life comes from outside, from one's professional life and public activity. The synagogue no longer fulfills a function in life: One no longer hears knocking at front doors to summon people to *shul*. The synagogue, the Law and the home, Rosenzweig concludes, can no longer provide Jewry with a platform on which to base Jewish life.

Rosenzweig then asks the pertinent question as to what has been holding Jews together since emancipation. All German Jews want equal rights. It is because of this desire that Jewish scholarship and Jewish education are in such a bad shape: They are apologetic and not performed out of the joy of belonging. Zionists have rightly seen that the only important thing is the Jewish person himself. But although Zionism recognizes the disease, it has prescribed the wrong treatment.

What Rosenzweig suggests in *Bildung und kein Ende* is not a plan. He proposes starting with the simple will to be Jewish. To say, "Nothing Jewish is alien to me".

"All recipes, whether Zionist (with their Jewish tasks), Orthodox (with their Jewish duties), or liberal (with their Jewish ideas), produce caricatures of people that become more ridiculous the more closely the recipes are followed. And a caricature of a man is also a caricature of a Jew; for as a Jew, one cannot separate the one from the other. There is one recipe alone that can make a person Jewish and hence – because he is a Jew and destined to live a Jewish life – a full human being: That recipe is to have no recipe, as I have just tried to show in

what I feel are rather inadequate words. Our fathers had a beautiful word for it that says everything – confidence”.³⁹

Confidence, Rosenzweig continues, is a readiness. One does not ask here “What shall I do” or “How can I do that”. One is not afraid of the distant future. In confidence, one lives now, knowing only what is nearest.

In a way that reminds the reader of Kant, Rosenzweig suggests that Jews need an empty form of readiness and to achieve this, they must be given ‘time’ and ‘space’.⁴⁰ Someone who wants to help will not give more; those that give more give less. Provide ‘time’ and ‘space’ to speak. Nothing more is needed, but a bookless start. The *Lehrhaus*:

“...would begin with its own bare beginnings, which would be simply a space to speak in and time in which to speak. Nothing more? Yes, nothing more. Have ‘confidence’ for once. Renounce all plans. Wait. People will appear who prove by the very fact of their coming to the discussion room of a school of Jewish adult education (will someone suggest a better word?) that a Jewish human being is alive in them. Otherwise, they would not come. To begin with, don’t offer them anything. Listen. And words will come to the listener, and they will join together and form desires. And desires are the messengers of confidence (*Und Wünsche sind die Boten des Vertrauens*)”.

³⁹ Id., p. 66.

⁴⁰ Ernst Simon, “Franz Rosenzweig und das jüdische Bildungsproblem (1931)”, W. Licharz, *Lernen mit Rosenzweig*, p. 212.

Rosenzweig wanted the participants to know how to listen to real wishes (*Wünsche*) and perhaps to point out the desired way. To achieve this, one does not need a teacher and a plan; one needs a master who is at the same time a pupil:

“He who can desire must be the teacher here (*Lehrer muss hier sein, wer ‘wünschen kann’*). The teachers will be discovered in the same discussion room and the same discussion periods as the students. And in the same discussion hour, the same person may be heard as both master and student. In fact, only when this happens will it become certain that a person is qualified to teach”.⁴¹

People will discuss together. Discussion will be based on their being Jewish human beings, on a common desire, even if it remains unsatisfied. What is important for Rosenzweig is aliveness, *die Lebendigkeit*.⁴²

In the essay *Bildung und kein Ende*, it becomes clear that Rosenzweig was profoundly concerned with the situation of the assimilated Jewry of his time. He does not merely complain about endless lists of books, which do not lead to real life outside the book; he also creatively seeks a strategy to bring the remote Jew back to the core of his Jewish existence. How? Not through dead scholarship or anemic religious instruction; not even through a plan, certainly not an encyclopedic one, but rather through the pure readiness of the empty vessel. The readiness to receive is judged greater than any active search for content.

41 “Towards a Renaissance”, Glatzer, p. 69.

42 GSIII, p. 502.

In his essay, Rosenzweig distanced himself from the term ‘Jewish adult education movement’, the *Volkshochschule-Bewegung*, because the term was too close a parallel of the German adult education movement and its intensive group study.⁴³ But it was not only the term that he found problematic: He found the very reality that the term alluded to unacceptable. It was a substitute, supplying that which religious instruction neglected to provide and what the universities did not offer. Rosenzweig wanted his *Lehrhaus* to be a place where people could discuss and desire, where they could voice their wishes. There would be people who wanted more; so let them remain undisturbed with the ‘much’ they possessed. The people who think, “If only such a thing existed” were invited to come to the *Lehrhaus*. If not, Rosenzweig ends his essay, Ecclesiastes would again be right in saying that ‘of the making of many books there is no end’.

His thoughts on the *Lehrhaus* are not a denial of the importance of knowledge or teaching. Rosenzweig only wrote that books cannot replace life and that only concrete life can make knowledge and teaching ‘alive’, that one becomes alive only in living speech. Speech needs both the other and time.⁴⁴ Jewish human beings are the prerequisite for the *Lehrhaus*, nothing else: they will come with the confidence that a Jewish person is alive in them.

In *Bildung und kein Ende*, listening to the Other and to his desires is fundamental. The essay is an eminent example of

43 Glatzer, pp. 68–69.

44 Schulz, *Lernen*, p. 47: “Nach Rosenzweig missachten Wissenschaft und Lehre den Augenblick, der seiner Ansicht nach dem geschriebenen Wort ein Ende setzt. Denn allein das Leben kann die Kenntnis und das Lehren beleben. Lebendigkeit kann nur im Augenblick des buchstabenfreien, gesprochenen Wortes entstehen. Dieses Wort aber bedarf ... des anderen und der Zeit”.

Rosenzweig's speech-thinking (*Sprachdenken*), which is concrete and dialogical. Rosenzweig was confident that starting from the Jewish person, Judaism would come, because Torah is not far away, but "in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it" (Deut. 30:11–14). He liked the saying from the Ethics of the Fathers: "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children! (Isaiah 54:13) Do not read 'banayikh', thy children, but 'bonayikh', thy builders".⁴⁵ The Jewish person is called upon to be a builder, to actively construct and live his singularity, his particular identity – that which connects him to what escapes the all.

Neues Lernen

In his opening speech in the *Lehrhaus* in October 1920, Rosenzweig explained the principles of the new learning.⁴⁶ He argued that the Torah had kept the Jews alive and that the learning of that book was now a matter for the people, and that it works in both an aristocratizing and democratizing manner at the same time.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the book should not be the jumping-off point to life, but rather vice versa, from life – in which estrangement from the Law is patent – back to the Torah. Rosenzweig was not interested in having professional Jews in his *Lehrhaus*; he wanted people who brought with them a vast amount of foreignness (*Entfremdung*). A teacher at the *Lehrhaus* had to bring with him a

45 The quotation figures as motto of the essay "The Builders. Concerning the Law", which was addressed to Martin Buber. Cfr. the appendix.

46 "Upon Opening the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*", Glatzer, pp. 96–102.

47 In his translation, Glatzer left out the remark on the Book as aristocratizing and democratizing. See "Neues Lernen", GSIII, p. 505.

lot of alienation.⁴⁸ Teachers are mainly on their way back home, returning to their Jewish home (*Heimsuchender, Heimkehrender*), so that they want Judaism to again become central in their lives. One has to come from the periphery to the center, trusting that this center can only be a Jewish one.

At the conclusion of Rosenzweig's rather short speech is a wish that there may be many hours of remembrance. The German word he used (*Erinnerung*) here expresses both memory and internalization. For all participants, Rosenzweig wished to see a changeover from externals to that which is within, "*eine Einkehr aus dem Äussern ins Innere*", a changeover that would become a return home, a "*Heimkehr*", a return into their innermost life. People would once again learn to come from the periphery to the center, from life to the Torah, "from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah" (*aus dem Leben, aus einer Welt, die vom Gesetz nichts weiss oder sich nichts wissen macht, zurück in die Thora*).⁴⁹ Only from the letter-free spirit of the moment can science and teaching receive power and life.⁵⁰

In the same vein, in his essay *Die Bauleute* (The Builders), Rosenzweig praised his friend Martin Buber for having pointed the way to a new kind of teaching: The subject matter of learning (*Lernstoff*) had to become a teaching (*Lehre*), an "inner power".⁵¹ He quotes Hillel's words to the heathen: "Go and learn".

48 The teacher is also an "Entfremdeter", somebody who is alienated; "Neues Lernen", GSIII, p. 508.

49 "Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus", Glatzer, p. 98; "Neues Lernen", GSIII, p. 507.

50 "Bildung und kein Ende", GSIII, p. 494; the sentence on the letter-free spirit is absent in Glatzer's "Towards a Renaissance".

51 "The Builders. Concerning the Law", Glatzer, p. 75.

“But in this manner, the teaching ceases to be something that can be learned, something ‘knowable’ in the sense that it is an already existing ‘something,’ some definite subject matter. The subject matter must indeed be learned and known, and in a far wider sense than either the representatives of ‘Judaism on one foot’ or those of traditional erudition and learning ever demanded...But all this that can and should be known is not really knowledge! Teaching begins where the subject matter ceases to be subject matter and changes into inner power...”⁵²

In other words, for Rosenzweig, the way to teaching leads through what is knowable, but teaching itself is not knowable and is not a matter of transmitting mere Jewish knowledge.

“It is always something that is in the future, and he who asks for it today in his very question may offer a partial answer to be given [to] someone else tomorrow, and certainly affords the larger part of the answer to be given today to the questioner himself”.⁵³

Jewish teaching is lived and experienced; it is not a matter of cognitive contents. The message of the *Star* is that truth has to be made true. Experience of revelation as love has priority over knowledge. Objective knowledge is on a lesser plane than subjective acknowledging, in which knowledge finds its proper context.

52 Id., p. 76.

53 Ibid.

Living dialogue

The monologue of knowledge must step aside for the living speech of the dialogue. The dialogical character of the *Lehrhaus* had its roots in Rosenzweig's philosophy, in which revelation saves man from his lonely, mute existence. In the *Star*, God leaves Himself, reaches out and addresses man. He gives His Name to man and His loving command to love. He asks: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9) To this divine question a human being can react as an answerable being and so transform himself from a lonely 'self' into a living 'soul'. Revelation brings orientation to the human being and "endows the mute self with speech and soul at once" (*recht so wie die Offenbarung dem stummen Selbst Sprache und Seele in einem verleiht*).⁵⁴

The *Lehrhaus* as a dialogical reality is the direct result of Rosenzweig's explicit speech-thinking, his *Sprachdenken*, as distinguished from abstract thinking. For Rosenzweig, speech – like the Song of Songs – was a real simile (*Gleichnis*) and thus more than simile. Speech is human and divine. True language is one of love, and not objective-descriptive.

"Love simply cannot be 'purely human'. It must speak, for there is simply no self-expression other than the speech of life. And by speaking, love already becomes superhuman, for the sensuality of the word is overflowing with its divine super-sense. Like speech itself, love is sensual – super-sensual. To

54 F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Franz Rosenzweig. Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften II), Haag, 1976 (=GSII), p. 221; F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, transl. from the Second Edition of 1930 by William W. Hallo, Notre Dame, IN, 1985 (=Star), p. 198.

put it another way, simile is its very nature and not merely a decorative accessory. ‘All that is transitory’ may be ‘but simile’. But love is not ‘but simile’. It is simile in its entirety and its essence; it is only apparently transitory: in truth, it is eternal”.⁵⁵

Consequently, the mute, ecstatic state of the mystic who isolates himself from the world runs counter to dialogical thinking.⁵⁶ In Rosenzweig’s *erzählende Philosophie* (narrative philosophy),⁵⁷ time and speech are again taken into account after their neglect by paralyzing, time- and speech-empty Hegelian thinking. For Rosenzweig, to think and to talk are never neutral or abstract. To talk is to talk to someone who has ears and a mouth.⁵⁸

Structural Characteristics of the Lehrhaus

1. The Lehrhaus would be non-traditional and not aimed at those who had strong ties to tradition. It would be a place for those with many questions about their Jewish identities, those with more doubts than answers. The *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* was destined for people who had found their “spiritual and intellectual home outside the Jewish world”.⁵⁹ Even the teachers were to bring with them their *amhaarets*-ness (ignorance) and together with their students, discover facets

55 GSII, p. 224; *Star*, p. 201.

56 GSII, pp. 231–232; *Star*, pp. 207–208.

57 “Das neue Denken”, GSIII, p. 148; *The New Thinking*, p. 81.

58 Id., GSIII, pp. 151–152; *The New Thinking*, p. 87.

59 “Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus”, Glatzer, p. 96.

of Judaism.⁶⁰ One can be teacher and student at the same time.⁶¹ The movement is from outside in, not vice versa.

2. The desire to learn would be the sole feature that students and teachers had to share. Both students and teachers would be engaged in discovering their Judaism.
3. The *Lehrhaus* would be 'free' in the sense that one was not required to pass any examinations or fulfill any prerequisites in order to participate.⁶² Registration was free to everybody, including Christians. It was free because it was free from ideologies: liberal, Orthodox or Zionist. Furthermore, it was a place that was free in the sense that the *Lehrhaus* was open to any Jew who might feel at home and enjoy the free spirit that prevailed there. There were no preconceived notions.
4. The House of Study was a dialogical reality, i.e. based upon hearing and answering, upon living speech. It was a place to speak and offered a time to speak.
5. The teachers were not 'professional Jews'. The specialist in Judaism would not be a teacher in the House of Study. Men such as Nobel and Buber could be teachers only insofar as they also desired to return home.

60 "Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning", p. 69.

61 Later, he emphasized the danger of learning without a teacher. He held it nevertheless necessary in a time of transition when the old, learned men were no longer regarded as leaders and the new ones had not yet come. See *Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus. Einleitung für ein Mitteilungsblatt*, GSIII, pp. 515–516. The article was written at the beginning of 1925 for the planned, but never realized "Blätter des Freien Jüdischen Lehrhauses". In a Rosenzweigian way, the planned Letters would not reflect something objective, but would function as a kind of supplement to the personal, oral communication in which Rosenzweig saw the essence of the teaching of the teachers. GSIII, pp. 515–516.

62 GSI, 2, p. 852.

In his *Zeit ists*, Rosenzweig did not view the Jewish teacher as a pure academic: The teacher had to evince an interest in Jewish research, but he also had to be involved in the local community. Interest in Jewish life in the present, and not only the study of the past, was important. In his opening speech at the *Lehrhaus*, Rosenzweig said that the most apt person was the one:

“...who brings with him the maximum of what is alien. That is to say, *not* the man specializing in Jewish matters; or, if he happens to be a specialist, he will succeed, not in the capacity of a specialist, but only as one who too is alienated, as one who is groping his way home”.⁶³

In 1925, Rosenzweig wrote that there would be people with official positions, but in the *Lehrhaus* they would have to remain student-like teachers (*schülerhafte Lehrern*), able to listen and to be leaders of the choir of askers (*Chorführer des Chors des Fragenden*).⁶⁴ As Ernst Simon forcefully expressed it: The rabbi sits on the same bench as the *am-haaretz* (ignoramous), not only as a listener in order to learn, but also as a teacher.⁶⁵ Through the design and conceptualization behind the *Lehrhaus*, Rosenzweig broke the monopoly of ‘professional’ Jews and encouraged everyone who cared to speak up on the issue of living Judaism.⁶⁶

63 “Upon Opening the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*”, Glatzer, p. 99.

64 “Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus. Einleitung für ein Mitteilungsblatt”, GSIII, p. 516.

65 E. Simon, “Franz Rosenzweig und das jüdische Bildungsproblem”, p. 213.

66 Glatzer, introduction, p. 10.

6. The Frankfurt students were Jews who were alienated from Jewish life, but who had most often integrated successfully into general society. It was these assimilated Jews, somewhat cynically called the “*crêpe de Chine public*”⁶⁷ that Rosenzweig wanted to reach. He did not address himself, as Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy did, to the working class, but rather to a bourgeois public that had questions about their Jewish identity.
7. Rosenzweig expressed his desire to study Torah in this way: “Torah is not something knowable; it is my, your and our knowing”.⁶⁸ Torah must be studied for one’s own personal life, not objectively. Rosenzweig might have been referring to a classical interpretation of Psalm 1:2, where man is the object of a macarism that makes the divine Torah ‘his’ Torah: “[Happy is the man...] who desires the Torah of God, and who murmurs his Torah”. For Rosenzweig, knowledge had to become something that functioned in everyday life, something linked to Jewish life and that makes the Jew more alive.
8. Teachers and students are engaged in *lernen*, in the dynamic group process of asking and answering. The *Lehrhaus* grows with everyone who participates in it. Both teachers and students ask questions.
Rosenzweig’s aim was to stimulate interest in Jewish existence. He believed that what is Jewish is the questioning:

67 In a long letter to Rudolf Hallo from beginning December 1922; GSI, 2, p. 869. See also E. Simon, *Aufbau im Untergang. Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland als geistiger Widerstand*, Tübingen, 1959, p. 11.

68 GSIII, p. 702: “Nein, die Lehre ist kein Wissbares, sie ist nur mein, dein und unser Wissen”. The sentence is absent in Glatzer’s translation.

“Sowie du anfängst zu fragen, bewusst, ‘systematisch’, regelmässig (nicht bloss gelegentlich) zu fragen, brauchst Du keine Angst mehr vor der ‘Synagoge’ zu haben. Sie ist ja nicht wie die Kirche die Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen mit den Ungläubigen, sondern die Einheit der Seienden und Fragenden”. (From the moment that you begin to ask consciously, systematically, regularly [and not just wehn the occasion arises] you no longer need to fear the synagogue. It is not like the church, a community of believers together with the nonbelievers, but rather the unity of those that are and those that ask).⁶⁹

Rosenzweig argues that a person who remains engaged in his own monologue will become deadened and paralyzed and consequently, not open himself up to the real questions of the non-I. Living man with his questions must be taken seriously. One has to listen and then speak afterwards. The new type of teacher would give objective answers to the subjective questions of his public. It is of no use to give answers when questions are not asked.

The staff of the Lehrhaus

The charismatic Hungarian-born Rabbi Nehemia Anton Nobel, a famous *darshan*,⁷⁰ came to Frankfurt in 1911. His success in the

69 See the letter to Rudolf Hallo of 25.2.1921; GSI, 2, p. 694.

70 See the letter to Gertrud Oppenheim dated 6.10.1921; GSI, p. 726. Rosenzweig greatly praised Nobel who knew how to capture his audience and use the right words. In this way, Nobel represented the kind of person who was the model of the *Lehrhaus* teacher par excellence: He was not the kind of lecturer who does not speak correctly because he does not hear the audience. On the contrary, he absorbed the questions of his audience. This was also Nobel's

Lehrhaus was enormous and his courses were the most popular. He lectured on “the spirit of the Halakha” and on Goethe. Nobel gathered many young people around him and among them were Ernst Simon, Siegfried Kracauer, Erich Fromm and Leo Löwenthal.

Erich Fromm lectured on Rashi and on the Karaites. Gershom Scholem lectured on Zohar Hadash and led a seminar on the book of Daniel before leaving to settle in Israel. Other teachers included Martin Buber, who lectured on “Religion als Gegenwart”, (Religion as presence) the basis for his *Ich und Du*, Ernst Simon, Siegfried Kracauer, Dr. Richard Koch and the chemist Eduard Strauss, who taught Bible to a vast audience.⁷¹ Besides these regular lecturers, there were guest speakers such as Rabbi Leo Baeck, Rabbi Dr. Benno Jacob, Leo Strauss, Alfred Freimann and Bertha Pappenheim, who lectured on the memoirs of Glückel von Hameln.⁷²

Another interesting feature of the *Lehrhaus* was that Christian lecturers were attracted too, such as the Kassel pastor Hermann

greatness as a preacher, according to Rosenzweig’s testimony: “When he [Nobel] stood there, the congregation was no ardently and vainly wooed audience: It existed for the sole purpose of carrying him upward. And he stood directly before the countenance. Thus, he could really speak; thus, he could pray. We were no onlookers, but rather as much of his prayers as the words and letters. So he carried us along...”. See Rosenzweig’s review of E. B. Cohn’s “Judentum” in N.N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and Thought*, p. 250.

71 He later emigrated and joined the New York community “Ha-bonim”, a group of German-speaking Jews who named themselves after Rosenzweig’s essay “The Builders”. Cfr. *infra*.

72 Ms. Pappenheim was a direct descendent of Glückel. For other lecturers in the *Lehrhaus*, see N.N. Glatzer, “Das Frankfurter Lehrhaus”, in W. Schmied-Kowarzik (ed.), *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) Internationaler Kongress- Kassel 1986. Bd. I: Die Herausforderung jüdischen Lernens*, Freiburg-Munich, 1988, pp. 303–326.

Schafft⁷³ and the journalist Alfons Paquet. Such lecturers, however, were the exception rather than the rule.

Erich Fromm and Nahum Glatzer are excellent examples of students who transformed themselves into teachers.

Rosenzweig himself was not only the director and driving force behind the *Lehrhaus*, he also taught. For instance, he taught Hebrew in order to understand part of the ritual of the Jewish festivals. However, the level was not particularly high, as became clear from the public's reactions to Shai Agnon when he read from his Hebrew works in the *Lehrhaus*.

The teachers represented a large variety of professions; for example, there was a doctor (Koch), a chemist (Strauss) and an educational theorist (Simon). They all were *Heimkehrer* (returnees), just as Rosenzweig was. Nobel was the only real "professional", but to Rosenzweig he was akin to a modern prophet to whom the Divine words came as a gift: He did not "possess" an answer, but was allowed to give an answer to his own answerless questions.⁷⁴

Dream and reality

It is legitimate to ask whether the teachers were faithful to Rosenzweig's concept of the *Lehrhaus*. It was not easy to be successful in dialogical teaching. Many had to unlearn their previous teaching styles and leave behind the habitual lecture monologue, the *Vorlesung*, and come to an understanding of the public. According to Rosenzweig, Buber, who became known as a great dialogical thinker, only became a teacher in the *Lehrhaus*.⁷⁵

73 Today, there is a Hermann Schafft House, not far from what was once the home of Rosenzweig's parents.

74 "Der Denker. Nachruf auf A.N. Nobel", GSIII, pp. 667–669.

75 It is noteworthy that Buber had to learn to become a real teacher, listening to

He grew sensitive to the questions which were asked in the midst of his talks, and learned to measure the public's "hardness of hearing" (*die Schwerhörigkeit des Publikums*).⁷⁶ Rosenzweig thought he himself was "perhaps too violent" (*vielleicht zu gewaltsam*) in the work groups.⁷⁷

According to Annemarie Mayer, the reactions to Rosenzweig's teaching were manifold and contradictory: Richard Koch, for instance, thought he was much too difficult for his public, whereas Ernst Simon took the view that he never spoke over the heads of his listeners. Viktor von Weizsaecker held the opinion that the public was unable even to guess at the richness of his ideas. A large part of the audience was happy they could understand his thoughts; some realized that they all presupposed their own critical thinking.⁷⁸ Mayer further remarks that Rosenzweig did not "possess" answers, but neither was he a man of questions.⁷⁹ According to Nahum Glatzer, Rosenzweig wanted to be a man of dialogue, but somewhat tragically, he himself engaged in one-directional monologues.⁸⁰

the questions of his audience. He was a mediator, mediating Eastern Hassidism for the West and Jewish life to non-Jews; in his Bible translation, which he undertook with Rosenzweig from 1925 on, he mediated between Hebrew and German. Yet, before the audience of the *Lehrhaus*, he had to abandon the attitude of the lecturer unconcerned by the questions of his public.

76 GSI, 2, pp. 866 and 886.

77 GSI, 2, p. 857.

78 Annemarie Mayer, "Judentum-Christentum-Menschtum. Eine Einführung in Leben und Denken Franz Rosenzweigs unter besondere Berücksichtigung seiner Lehrhaustätigkeit in Frankfurt/M.," in W. Licharz, *Lernen mit Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 61.

79 Ibid.

80 See Nahum N. Glatzer, "Das Frankfurter Lehrhaus", in W. Schmied-Kowarzik (ed.), *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) Internationaler Kongress- Kassel 1986. Bd. I: Die Herausforderung jüdischen Lernens*, Freiburg-Munich, 1988, p. 309.

Alfred Jospe criticized the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt as being over-intellectualized.⁸¹ In his view, the program addressed itself mainly to the intelligentsia and did not really reach the men and women who had questions but lacked a higher education. Secondly, he felt that the school's accent was more on the transmission of knowledge than on the experiencing and living of Jewish values and ideas. While Jospe's criticism may be correct, it does not diminish the value of Rosenzweig's concept of the *Lehrhaus*, that through participating in the programs and projects, people could express the profound questions that dwelled in their hearts and cultivate a sense of at-homeness with Judaism and the community. Rosenzweig needed to realize his dream within a very bourgeois public that was not used to interaction, and he himself had to abandon the attitudes that prevented him from being truly dialogical. However, the very concept of a new, permanent, dialogical learning style was revolutionary and remains so today.

Growth and decline

In 1920, when the *Lehrhaus* first opened, it had more than 600 students. In 1921, the enrollment increased to more than 700 regular students. By January 1923, the peak enrollment of 1100 had been reached, representing 4% of the Jewish population of Frankfurt. From 1925 onwards, enrollment shrank due to financial problems (the income from tuition was insufficient) and because people gradually became indifferent to the presence of brilliant teachers.⁸²

81 A. Jospe, "The Frankfurt Lehrhaus: A Model for American Jewish Education?", *To Leave Your Mark. Selections from the Writings of Alfred Jospe*, Eva Jospe and Raphael Jospe (eds.), Hoboken, NJ, 2000, pp. 82–83.

82 A. Jospe, p. 82.

II. The Kassel “*Rosenzweig Lehrhaus*”

Lehrhäuser after the Shoah

The term *Lehrhaus* is well known by now in religious circles throughout Western Europe. After what the Dutch liberal Rabbi Abraham Soetendorp of The Hague calls “the great death”, numerous adult-education institutions sprouted like mushrooms after the rain. But a *Lehrhaus* as a truly dialogical reality in which ancient Jewish words come alive in the language of today and in which Jewish life is discovered and prepared is not simply an institution for informal adult education through series of lectures.

In Zurich, Switzerland, a *Lehrhaus* functioned from 1951 until 1961. Hermann Levin Goldschmidt, a philosopher and the *Lehrhaus*’ founder, wanted to contribute to Jewish self-awareness. According to his testimony, new learning pervaded his Zurich *Lehrhaus* just as Rosenzweig intended it would in his own *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt. The new learning was specific to the Zurich *Lehrhaus* and distinguished it from other existing adult-education centers. The concept of pupils and teachers coming from outside along with that of recipe-less teaching and anti-apologetics were directly inherited from Rosenzweig’s *Lehrhaus*.⁸³ Goldschmidt wrote a Jewish textbook on modern Judaism that included texts by Mendelssohn, Pinsker, Herzl and Rosenzweig. The present *Lehrhaus*, guided by Michel Bollag and Hanspeter Ernst, is interreligious, open to everybody and intends to contribute to the otherness of other people.

83 H.L. Goldschmidt, “Vom Lehrhaus”, in W. Licharz (ed.), *Lernen mit Rosenzweig*, pp. 165–167.

A *Lehrhaus* was founded in Frankfurt in December 1982. Although it draws its inspiration from Rosenzweig's *Freies jüdisches Lehrhaus* and organizes lectures, discussions and work sessions, practically, it functions as information provider. Lectures have been given there by many people, including Micha Brumlik, Yehuda Radday, Marie-Louise Steinschneider, Daniel Krochmalnik, Bas Meijer, Hermann Levin Goldschmidt, Maurice Hayoun, Max Oppenheimer, Brigitte Kern and Peter Honigmann. However, according to a 1994 report by Professor Alpar, first president of the *Arbeitskreis jüdisches Lehrhaus*, the new *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt has contributed little, if anything, to the building of Jewish identity.⁸⁴ At the end of this section on "*Lehrhäuser* after the Shoah", we will return to the present situation in Germany.

In the Netherlands, many Christian groups or groups dedicated to Jewish-Christian dialogue have their own *Lehrhaus* in which "*neues lernen*" is applied. There are also Jewish *Leerhuizen*. An example of such a Jewish *Leerhuis*, where Jewish-Christian dialogue is also taken into account, can be found in Maastricht. In the Maastricht *Leerhuis*, founded in 1978, the dialogical discussion of texts and the link between study and life are central, and emphasis is laid explicitly on Jewish learning. Studies take place together in small groups and each participant brings his own experience and

84 See I. Schulz-Grave, *Lernen im Freien Jüdischen Lehrhaus*, pp. 104–105. For the first *Lehrhaus* in Zurich and the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt, see Werner Licharz (ed.), *Lernen und Lehren im Jüdischen Lehrhaus* (Arnoldshainer Texte 38), Frankfurt, 1985. The publication of Licharz contains the minutes of an international congress on *Lehrhaus* that took place in December 1984. See further Brigitte A. A. Kern, *Diskussionsbeiträge. Aus dem Jüdischen Lehrhaus in Frankfurt am Main. Eine Sammelchrift*, Frankfurt, 1986, a series of articles reflecting the multiple subjects treated in the new *Frankfurter Lehrhaus* that appeared on the occasion of Rosenzweig's one hundredth birthday.

motivation to the group. In general, most of the participants in Dutch *Leerhuizen* are non-Jews.⁸⁵ At the initiative of Rabbi Yehuda Aschkenazy,⁸⁶ a *Lehrhaus* committee was created in Amsterdam in 1966 in order to coordinate and assist the different study houses in the Netherlands. Three years later, the committee changed its name to the “Stichting Leerhuis”. A wide range of courses are given in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Nijmegen in the spirit of a *Lehrhaus*. However, many of the *Lehrhäuser* in Holland have little to do with Jewish learning and life.⁸⁷

Study houses have proliferated outside the European continent too. When Fred Rosenbaum started his *Lehrhaus Judaica* in Berkeley in 1972, where more than thousand people participated in 120 courses, he made explicit reference to Rosenzweig.⁸⁸ Branches of the Berkeley *Lehrhaus Judaica* were also founded in Stanford and San Francisco. In London, Abraham Joshua Heschel organized *Lehrhaus* courses for refugees in 1940. The New York congregation, “Ha-bonim” (“The Builders”), had a *Lehrhaus* and

85 In Maastricht, Wilhelm Zuidema’s *Gods partner. Ontmoeting met het jodendom*, a kind of introduction to Judaism, is studied, as well as A.J. Heschel’s *God in Search of Man*, but also Mishna and Talmud, and anthropology in the Jewish tradition and psychotherapy. See Jos op’t Root, “Franz Rosenzweig und das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus”, in W. Licharz (ed.), *Lernen mit Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 203–204

86 Rabbi Aschkenazy had his own *Lehrhaus* in Arnhem.

87 Sic Jos. Op’t Root in collaboration with Max Hamburger, “Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus- früher und heute. Ausgangspunkt, Nachwirkung, Methode”, in W. Schmied-Kowarzik (ed.), *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) Internationaler Kongress- Kassel 1986. Bd.I: Die Herausforderung jüdischen Lernens*, Freiburg-München, Verlag Karl Alber, 1988, p. 374.

88 See F. Rosenbaum, “Lehrhaus Then and Now”, pp. 353–360, W. Schmied-Kowarzik (ed.), *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) Internationaler Kongress- Kassel 1986. Bd. I: Die Herausforderung jüdischen Lernens*, Freiburg-München, 1988, pp. 353–360.

people such as Eduard Strauss and Rabbi Hugo Hahn were connected with it. Last but not least, in Israel there are many activities in support of adult education which use Rosenzweig as their reference, such as the centers in *Hitahdut Ole Germania* and Kibbutz Hezorea. In Ramat Hasharon, the writer of this paper initiated a *Lehrhaus* in Rosenzweig's style, of which he is the director.

In present-day Germany, the foundation of a *Lehrhaus* using Rosenzweig's Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* as a model, based on the study of classical Jewish texts and dialogue rather than lectures, is not something completely new. Institutions in Frankfurt,⁸⁹ Munich and Göttingen⁹⁰ claim to be inspired by Rosenzweig. Rabbi Gesa

89 In my conversations with Professor Werner Licharz on Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus*, he emphasized the importance of *teshuva* as return and of the movement from life to the Torah, from the periphery to the center, from outside to inside. The secularized and atheistic situation of many people would be a challenge for today. Licharz informs me that in Frankfurt, the evangelical reformed community founded its own *Lehrhaus* where the search for their own Christian identity receives greater weight than the study of Judaism. He also stresses the importance of the *Jüdische Volkshochschule* in Frankfurt, whose activities are inspired by Rosenzweig. He himself lectures there, for instance, on the theme of "Gott und Mensch in der jüdischen Tradition" [God and man in Jewish tradition].

90 The *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Göttingen was founded June 16, 2002. This *Lehrhaus* is independent from the Jewish community, but enjoys good cooperation with it. It goes back to some of the most important principles of Rosenzweig's Jewish educational thinking. In her opening speech, Eva Tichauer Moritz, first president of the *Lehrhaus*, recalled some basic elements of Rosenzweig's pedagogical thinking: the dialogical, experience-bound learning, but also the importance of questions, and "remembrance" (*Erinnerung*). She talked about returning as going from life into the Torah. She finally recalled that the teachers were generally people with scant knowledge of Judaism, but with interest in it and that Jews and non-Jews studied together. Clearly, Rosenzweig's thoughts were in her mind with the foundation of the Göttingen *Lehrhaus*.

Ederberg⁹¹ has developed an interesting initiative in Berlin, modeled on Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus*. By establishing the first Conservative *Lehrhaus* in Berlin, she intends to bring assimilated Jews back to Jewish texts. Studies are being organized around themes announced beforehand, in small groups or in *hevrutot*, with a discussion partner. The texts studied are in Hebrew with translations. There are seminars on passages from the *Siddur*, the Talmud or themes and passages from the Bible, such as women against violence.

While the initiatives in Frankfurt, Munich, Göttingen and Berlin are important, the foundation of an unaffiliated *Lehrhaus* true to the original Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* model, as well as to Rosenzweig's own Jewish and philosophical thinking, is nevertheless rather unique.

New immigrants

Before the great change in the former Soviet Union, there were some 25,000 Jews in West and East Germany. Today, thanks to *perestroika* and the fall of the Berlin Wall, about 140,000 Jews live in dozens of communities throughout the 16 German States. The difficulties inherent in reconnecting these Jews to the identities they were denied in the former Soviet Union are enormous. Learning centers have been created and much has been done to counter the widespread alienation from Jewish life and thought that these Jews have experienced. Yet, an institution of a special

91 Rabbi Ederberg, a Jew by choice, has been working since 2001 as a Conservative rabbi in Weiden, a small city in Bavaria, about six hours from Berlin by train. Her community in Weiden numbers some 300 members, most of them Russian Jews. Ederberg wrote a textbook on Judaism for Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants in Germany, a project supported by the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the School for Adult Education in Weiden.

kind, which takes into account Rosenzweig's thinking concerning 'returning' Jews, still awaits implementation. Such an institute could change passive listeners into actively involved people who bring their personal lives and questions to the study of traditional texts resonating in constantly renewed ways.

Rosenzweig's conception of the Lehrhaus as a model

Many institutions and groups in Western Europe are connected in some way to Rosenzweig. Yet, it seems to me that Rosenzweig's concept of the *Lehrhaus* deserves more attention as a real model for what can be done today. As far as I have been able to ascertain in my overview of the current state of existing forms of Jewish study in Germany today, there is nothing similar to Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus*. There is a need for a *Lehrhaus* modeled on Rosenzweig's conception of the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*.

How can one create a place in Germany today where Rosenzweig's ideas concerning Jewish education can become reality and where ancient Judaism can be lived anew? What needs to be done in order to free the energy that is flowing into the efforts to assimilate and to be exactly like all the others, and channel it into the cultivation of a distinct life, a singularity that does not cut off one's connections to other human beings? How can a Jewish identity be cultivated in such a way that one's own specificity contributes to general society and culture, without falling into the position of merely being a part of a whole? A *Lehrhaus* in Rosenzweig's sense of a meeting place for people who are linked to each other in the study of the *condition juive* and thus the *condition humaine* might constitute an appropriate structure for the exercise of the difficult but valuable task of being distinct from others within our never completely assumable responsibility for them.

Making a play on words, Michael Volkmann has remarked that *the Frankfurter Schule* (school) with such celebrated names as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Leo Löwenthal is better known in Germany than the other *Schul'* (*Lehrhaus*) in Frankfurt, Rosenzweig's, where people such as Eduard Strauss, Nehemia Nobel, Martin Buber, Richard Koch, Rudolf Hallo, Ernst Simon, Martin Goldner and Nahum Glatzer taught. Erich Fromm and Leo Löwenthal are much better known as belonging to one *Frankfurter Schule* than to the other.⁹² Nevertheless, the less well known *Frankfurter Schule*, the "*Frankfurter Schul'*", could function as a model for living Judaism as an attractive reality.

Today there is a strong need to communicate Jewish heritage to those who are estranged from it. Postmodernism has brought with it a radical relativism that calls many fixed sets of values into question. It is not desirable to concentrate only on the few who still share a common Jewish lifestyle. As elsewhere, the degree of observance in Germany is low. Few belong to stable, core-observant communities and take upon themselves full-fledged halakhic observance. On the other hand, many have strayed from traditional paths, or simply have never known about them. It is to them that we need to reach out and present Judaism as a life choice that vivifies, that makes a special contribution to the world, not as part of a whole, but as an exception, an excess and a remnant, irreducible to what is and crucial for the meaning of what is.

92 Michael Volkmann, *Eine andere Frankfurter Schul*, pp. 5–6. The idea of an alternative *Frankfurter Schule* can be found in an article by Rainer Funk in Raimund Sesterhenn (ed.), *Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus – eine andere Frankfurter Schule*, Freiburg, 1987: "Von der jüdischen zur sozialpsychologischen Seelenlehre. Erich Fromms Weg von der einen über die andere Frankfurter Schule". (pp. 91–108).

The planned *Lehrhaus* should be a meeting place where people of all kinds will come to explore aspects of their Jewish identities. The Director and teachers of the *Lehrhaus* will need to demonstrate an openness to a broad spectrum of Jews, especially to those who are not familiar with synagogue life and who perceive their Jewishness as a marginal aspect in the construction of their identities.

Jewish commitment

The aim of the *Lehrhaus* is not to lead people to a more observant life, but to prevent assimilation into the surrounding world and to encourage people to do something concerning their Jewish commitment. Teachers in the *Lehrhaus* will need to possess excellent communication skills and be able to combine a text-centered attitude with a great openness to the human contexts in which the texts function.

Rosenzweig's message today

Obviously, many things have changed since the time of Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus*. The Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel are formative events for the present Jewish consciousness. Nevertheless, today, as in Rosenzweig's day, people are looking for more than just success in their professional lives. They want meaning. Universities may provide people with knowledge, but not necessarily with wisdom.⁹³

In Rosenzweig's day, the dialogical method of learning was something novel. Today, this method is more generalized, and is

93 See E. Meir, "Lernen und Lehren in der ständig sich wandelnden Welt der Kommunikation. Gedanken und Fragen zur Wissensgesellschaft", in *Im Gespräch. Hefte der Martin-Buber Gesellschaft* 7 (2003), pp. 61–68.

used in elementary schools, high schools and at institutions of higher learning. Practically, teaching now means being in interaction with the audience, perhaps less so at universities, where the teacher's long monologues are still largely dominant, but certainly in informal adult education. Yet, Rosenzweig rightly understood that when Jews study together, something else happens. *Lernen* is not merely interactive learning, it means creating a community of people who make ancient texts speak again to the present generation, in constant renewal.

Rosenzweig's message is still current for those Jews who want to return to Judaism. The Jews in Germany presently live within a Christian culture, with Christian architecture and a Christian calendar. Through contact with Jewish sources and interactive study, they may be able to renew their Jewish life. This can be done in an inviting, free and pluralistic atmosphere.

The Nature of the Free Jewish Lehrhaus

The *Lehrhaus* will not be a place where documents are used as the object of scientific dissection. Instead, the living context of the participants will be central. The participants will search for the significant elements in their own identity through existential study.

The *Lehrhaus* will show that Judaism can be autarchic without being deaf or autistic towards the enviroing world. Judaism can and must be understood as being in dialogue with the world, as being deeply linked to it and possibly fertilizing it.

Kassel

I propose the founding of a *Lehrhaus* based on Rosenzweig's style in Kassel. The context of Kassel Jewry is not an easy one. It is likely that most of the children of assimilated Jews do not receive

any Jewish upbringing. How can we create Jewish commitment when kosher food is not easily found and when the synagogue is hardly attractive to Jews, and most of those attending service are older people? How can we halt an expected high intermarriage rate?

A Rosenzweig *Lehrhaus* in Kassel could contribute to heightening Jewish commitment. People would have the opportunity to come closer to Judaism in a non-coercive way. In a time and place of declining synagogue attendance and poor Jewish education, such a *Lehrhaus* presents a unique occasion for Jews to meet each other and raise the level of their consciousness. In this framework, traditional and non-traditional Jews could work together.

With the foundation of a *Lehrhaus* as conceived by Franz Rosenzweig, it would be possible to create a place and a time where people could ask their questions and bring their enthusiasm to the discovery and building of a Jewish consciousness. It is certainly not enough to offer a course or some lessons on life cycle events, although that would certainly help. Understandably, new Jewish immigrants in Kassel are busy with questions of socio-economic welfare. A *Lehrhaus* is a means to raise the level of Jewish identity among these people. Jews in Kassel will not attend a Talmud High School, and the University has no courses to offer on Jewish culture, except for the general introduction taught by Esther Haß for a non-Jewish public in the framework of theology studies. In this situation, the *Lehrhaus* could reach every Jew and enable them to build their Jewish identity. The lectures, courses and discussion groups would not present a popularization of the science of Judaism, but rather an opportunity to build an identity. The House of Study could function within the existing rooms of the Jewish community in Bremerstrasse 3. Unlike the original Frankfurt model, the costs of the *Lehrhaus* would not be paid by the participants; they generally

do not have the means to finance their participation at all since many of them live on social welfare. It will be necessary to request subsidies from the Jewish representative organs, the *Zentralrat* (Central Council of Jews in Germany),⁹⁴ the city of Kassel,⁹⁵ the University of Kassel and from private sources. These funds will have to cover compensation for the instructors and the cost of a light meal for the participants.

Just as they were during Rosenzweig's time, the Jews in Kassel today are largely assimilated. But unlike the situation in Frankfurt in the 1920s, most of them are new immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union. These Jews constitute about 90% of the Jewish population in Kassel, with the others coming from Poland, Germany, Israel, etc. However, neither the present Kassel Jews nor the Frankfurt Jews in Rosenzweig's time live in a Jewish world and the relationship between Jewish books and life is very tenuous. What Kassel Jewry needs, as Frankfurt Jewry did, is not a diluted, popularized 19th century-like *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. They need to move from an almost non-Jewish life into a life in which Judaism once again takes on personal relevance. As Rosenzweig said at the opening of his *Lehrhaus* to the Jews who were alienated from their own Judaism:

“All of us to whom Judaism, to whom being a Jew, has again become the pivot of our lives – and I know that in saying this here I am not speaking for myself alone – we all know that in

94 The Central Council, presided over by Mr. Paul Spiegel, is interested in the future of small communities. See note 91.

95 Ms. Christine Schmarsow, president of the city council, could be instrumental in this. Ms. Schmarsow, of the Social-Democratic party, is in contact with Esther Haß, president of the Jewish community.

being Jews we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism. From the periphery back to the center; from the outside, in”.⁹⁶

The Jewish community in Kassel is like a rose of Jericho, which although dried up and seemingly lacking in vitality now, if properly irrigated, could come alive and flourish.

Complex identities

In greater Kassel, there are about 1,300 Jews registered in the Jewish community. This number of Jewish people in a German region can be compared with that of Hamburg, although not of course with those of Berlin,⁹⁷ Munich, Frankfurt or Düsseldorf. Hamburg has somewhat fewer Jews than Kassel. More than 50 % of the Kassel Jews have had higher education. It is also to be noted that the Jews in Kassel began to take initiative, even before a rabbi came to assist them, in the second half of 2003. They have built a synagogue⁹⁸ and the large kitchen in the building is kept kosher.

96 “Upon Opening the *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*”, Glatzer, p. 98.

97 A praiseworthy initiative in Berlin is the Ronald S. Lauder *Jüdisches Lehrhaus*, dedicated in October 1999. The *Lehrhaus* is located in what was a Jewish school until 1941. It aims to be a place for Jewish learning and living and comprises a Teacher Resource Center, an Adult Education Institute and a Bet Midrash Program for students engaged in intensive study and outreach projects. The Bet Midrash program enables students with little or no background in Jewish studies to acquire Jewish knowledge. Monthly seminars are organized for leaders of small communities, providing them with practical knowledge and learning.

98 The former synagogue was inaugurated in 1839. In May 1933, the community numbered 2301 members. In 1938, the Torah scrolls and other cultural objects were taken out and burned. The representatives of the Town decided to replace the synagogue with ... a parking lot. The new synagogue has been built on nearly the same site.

They also hold a Friday-night *Kabalat Shabbat* service. The local Orthodox rabbi, Shlomo Freyshist, would like to see more young people involved and he hopes to reach them through a Jewish nursery school, which is currently in development.

The great majority of Jews in Kassel came to Germany after they were allowed to leave their countries of origin. They are not ‘only’ Germans, they are Germans ‘too’. They are ‘also’ Jewish, a somewhat vague element they add to their identities as new Germans. Their culture however is Slavic: They read Dostoyevsky, Tourgeniev and Tolstoy and their daily language is not German. They know they are Jewish, but that element is minimal in the construction of their identities and plays almost no role in their lives except for the fact that they are regarded as Jews – Russian Jews – by the dominant German population, and whether they wish to be or not, they are also linked for example to events in Israel. Notwithstanding this German view, they know hardly anything at all about their own Jewish cultural heritage. Culturally, they are Russian, religiously they belong to the Jewish minority, politically they are German and have a German passport and identity card. They themselves are determined to integrate and gradually become engaged almost exclusively in German life.

Without a history, a human being does not exist. The history of the Kassel Jews is definitely Jewish, although they are hardly conscious of it. Judaism for them is not religion and is marginal to their identity; they do not study or understand it, although for the outside world this is the most important element of their identity. Their Judaism remains mainly negative. They nevertheless have a heritage, which was handed down to them in the former Soviet Union, despite the difficulties there.

How can a situation be created in which the Jews in Kassel

can become conscious that Judaism is a lifestyle that makes man alive and that can and must be spoken of, beyond feelings of nostalgia or the memory of remnants of dead rituals? How can these Jews be brought into contact with their specific identity outside the context of a synagogue that has little appeal for them or outside the context of their German neighbors who feel guilty towards them because of the formerly omnipresent anti-Semitism in Germany?

It is here, in the search for something that might allow them to become conscious of their own being that a *Lehrhaus* in Rosenzweig's style takes on its full meaning. One cannot live without a defined identity, and if such an attempt is made, it is hardly desirable. The Jewish heart of the Kassel Jews, of these Jewish Germans and German Jews, asks for more. If they are confronted with the variety of Jewish life, for instance, with Israeli Jews, Western assimilated Jews, Sephardic or ultra-Orthodox Jews, they will have the opportunity to understand and define themselves better, if only in that they are not like them. Some basic self-understanding is needed. Moreover, a certain distance towards the world surrounding them and their incomplete identification with it will become clearer to them, and an awareness of these distances will help them to understand what is vital to them. Foremost, they will be able to reflect on their Jewish condition as a special way of being human.

Special identity

The Jewish identity is a special one. It is neither a part of a whole nor a singularity ultimately to be absorbed into a totality. Hegel perceived Judaism as having a problematic particularity that could not consider itself as linked to a whole in which everything is

“*aufgehoben*”, i.e. elevated and abolished. In protest against the Hegelian schema, Rosenzweig perceived Judaism as a difference, a singled-out entity, a peculiarity that does not remove the chosen one from the midst of life, but rather moves him with extra energy towards the Other. This is what enabled Rosenzweig to identify Judaism with humanity. To be a Jew *is* to be human, as a being elected by and for the Other. This call or revelation, which is coterminous with Judaism, may be forgotten and even repressed at some places or in some times, but the historical task of Judaism and its role in the history of humankind as such cannot be forgotten. It is in this context that the formation of a consciousness of Jewish identity in the *Lehrhaus* is essential. The Jewish difference is a non-absorbable ‘remnant’. The reflection on and daily exercise of this uncanny trait, which in a way defies any identification, is the underlying rationale of any *Lehrhaus* in the Rosenzweigian meaning of the word.

On the basis of the foregoing, I would like to emphasize that Judaism is not simply a sociological phenomenon: it is a special way of life, often forgotten, often repressed, frequently by Jews themselves. This disturbing, special lifestyle is connected to being called, chosen and singled out as a “remnant” among the nations, to being elected. This results neither in a separation from others nor in being unconnected to others. On the contrary, the distinction between the remnant and the surrounding nations adds an extra energy that liberates from identity obsessions and fixed ideologies.

What is at stake in the Kassel *Lehrhaus* is to bring people who have been educated in communist atheism to an awareness that they have been set apart to engage in life with a surplus of energy. The rupture with natural life is what Judaism is all about. The participants of the Kassel *Lehrhaus* are invited not to see their

Judaism as yet another lifestyle in the postmodern mosaic of particularities, ultimately to be reduced to minor differences in our “global village”, but rather as an exceptional openness to the Other in his inalterable otherness. In this sense, the *Lehrhaus* is an exercise in being linked to your neighbor, to the first one who comes; it is a place where Judaism is conceived as a profound humanism that orients us to our fellow humans. The people of the *Lehrhaus* will not have to discover another ethnically distinct identity, different from their Russian and German ones. They will find what it means for them to be without any ‘sense of belonging to’ at all other than belonging to the community of non-belongers, of those who are permanently exiled from themselves, who point in a singular way to a universality that recognizes every human being as a brother or sister.

Unfortunately, in the past, anti-Semitism made Jews conscious that they were Jews. Jewish identity however goes beyond anti-Semitism and in any case, in Germany today, anti-Semitism is not a real, concrete threat. In the formation of identity, one should keep in mind the positive elements that constitute one’s particularity.

Outline

In what follows, I would like to present a detailed outline of the guiding principles of the institution that I propose be established. I would like to do so in the form of a few guidelines for the new House of Study. In my opinion, the new *bet midrash* is capable of watering the dried roots of the Kassel community and reviving Rosenzweig’s idea of a refreshing, new kind of learning:

1. First, one must be confident. Jews that return to their innermost kernel discover that their heart is Jewish before they discover

that they are connected to a long, profound, vivifying Jewish tradition. The fact that one is Jewish is a basis for and an invitation to becoming more Jewish. Nobody should feel ashamed because of their lack of Jewish knowledge: There was not always a real opportunity to learn.

2. Apologetics are superfluous. It is not necessary to justify Judaism vis-à-vis the surrounding world. Apologetics are of no use. Judaism is not reducible to what everybody thinks. Jewish life should be seen as a special contribution to general culture, as a lifestyle fertilizing the general world. Judaism has something unsaid to say to the present world.
3. In order to return to Jewish life, one needs lively contact with Jewish sources.⁹⁹ A return to biblical sources and the traditional commentaries on them may open people to the Jewish experience through the ages. The aim is to become better acquainted with Jewish sources. A text, previously handed out or not, can become the focus of discussion. In this perspective, the preeminence of Hebrew needs to be emphasized, although translations will be necessary.
4. The link to other Jews, to *klal Yisrael*, remains essential, recognizing other Jews as Jews, whatever the lifestyle they may have adopted.
5. Participants in the *Lehrhaus* are asked to become conscious of their heritage and to do something with their Judaism. In the words of the Ethics of the Fathers, quoted by Rosenzweig,¹⁰⁰ they only have to be sons (*banayikh*), in order

99 Cp. Rosenzweig's letter of December 28, 1917 to his uncle Richard Ehrenberg, in Glatzer, pp. 103–104.

100 "The Builders", Glatzer, p. 88.

to become builders (*bonayikh*). There is no need to be anxious for the future. Just be confident that the present is alive and that the very fact of being a Jew implies the construction of an identity.

6. The accent should be on the hearing of the divine word ‘today’. Anyone who engages in Jewish study hears this word anew, in the context of his own existence.
7. The personality of each and every individual who has his own particular insights is necessary in order to hear the fullness of the divine word to which the Jewish sources attest. Studying together means being ‘unhistorically’ in the company of the *tannaim* and *amoraim*, with Rashi and the Tosafists, and with we ourselves, i.e. you and I, in the same *shiur*.¹⁰¹ People of all ages will be together in work groups. Disagreements on different subjects will not be considered regrettable; on the contrary, it is an advantage. Everyone will bring his or her own life experiences to the study of the texts. In learning, it is not ideas or ideals that the students brings with them, but life itself; not an ‘essence’, but rather an ‘existence’. The existential

101 See E.Simon, “Franz Rosenzweig und das Jüdische Bildungsproblem (1931)”, p. 214. In the Christian world of the last decade, it has become evident that all access to the Bible is culturally conditioned and that the historical-critical exegesis is a cultural one. It is in this perspective that Werner Kahl pleads for an intercultural hermeneutics, since every community has its own voice. Kahl himself, a teacher at Kassel University and pastor in the same town, has many years of experience with the African Christian community and the New Testament. See W. Kahl, “Dialogisches Verstehen – Chancen einer interkulturellen Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments, am Beispiel eines religionspädagogischen Projekts zu populären Bibellektüren”, in Silja Joneleit-Oesch and Miriam Neubert (eds.), *Interkulturelle Hermeneutik und lectura popular. Neuere Konzepte in Theorie und Praxis* (Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau 72), Frankfurt a.M., 2002, pp. 111–135.

contact with the sources enables the student to gain contact with the Torah as *Weisung*, showing the way into the midst of life. In this way, the Torah is not far, not overseas or in heaven, but “in your mouth and in your heart, it is to realize” (Deut. 30:11–14).

8. The starting point will be the concrete questions that dwell in the audience. The answers will be non-dogmatic and lead to a lively dialogue, not about any ‘true’ or ‘ideal’ Judaism, but about how to live life as a Jew. Lectures ‘ex cathedra,’ *Vorlesungen*, will be avoided, their place taken by an essential dialogical situation in which the living word is heard.
9. Specificity can be lived without being in contradiction to participation in general culture. On the contrary, every individual brings his or her whole existence and entire cultural heritage to the kernel in them that is Jewish.¹⁰²
10. The mentality of the *Lehrhaus* might be summarized in the adage, “Nothing Jewish is alien to me” (*Nichts Jüdisches ist mir fremd*), Rosenzweig’s rendering of Terence’s “*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*”.¹⁰³ Eighty years before *The Builders*, Shmuel David Luzzatto wrote the Latin phrase “*Judaeus sum, judaici nihil a me alienum (sic) puto*”¹⁰⁴ in one of his Hebrew letters. Openness to all aspects of Jewish existence is a must for every seeker and for every returnee.

102 For example, a person such as Dr. Eva Schulz-Janders could teach both Jewish *and* general literature.

103 “*Bildung und kein Ende*”, GSIII, p. 499; “Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning”, in Glatzer, p. 65. Terence, “*Heauton Timoroumenos*” I:1:25, quoted by Cicero, “*De Officiis*” 1:30.

104 S. David Luzzatto, Letter #318, 29 April 1842, to Dr. M. Sachs in Prague, in *Iggerot Shadal*, ed. Eisig Graeber (Cracow, 1891), vol. 6, p. 780. I am grateful to Prof. Raphael Jospe for this reference.

11. Life is more important than knowledge and takes priority over it.
12. Non-Jews who want to be connected to the Jewish tradition are welcome in the *Lehrhaus*, which will be multicultural. The learning process will come from inside, destined for the Jewish public, but also for those who are interested in Jewish civilization. I think on this point that greater attention to the interested non-Jewish public needs to be given than was the case in Rosenzweig's time. However, having people come with their own agendas must be avoided. Goldschmidt of the *Züricher Lehrhaus* wrote that the doors of the *Lehrhaus* have to be wide open as the prophet Isaiah says: “*ve-yavo goy tsaddiq*” (26:2).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the participation of non-Jews will favor the integration of Jews into Kassel, without their having to give up a particularity that is only meaningful when linked to the general world. Both Jews and non-Jews will benefit from this, as non-Jews will also have the opportunity to further train themselves in being careful listeners. All those for whom Judaism is important and who want to learn about Judaism can be part of the *Lehrhaus*. The non-Jewish relatives of Jews will find an opportunity in the *Lehrhaus* to learn more about their Jewish partner and Jewish culture in general.
13. Teachers or instructors will largely be nonprofessionals, as was the case in most instances in the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*, but they must bring with them the will to be Jewish and the enthusiasm of someone who discovers the great treasure of his own Judaism.¹⁰⁶ Teachers will not be ‘experts,’ or at least

105 Goldschmidt, “Vom Lehrhaus”, in Licharz, *Lernen mit Rosenzweig*, p. 168.

106 Somebody such as Clara Yuditski, who went through the process of

not ‘experts’ first and foremost. They will assist others in learning. They will not be the ones who ‘possess’ knowledge and truth, but rather people who consider themselves to be partaking of the truth. They do not ‘have’ Judaism, they ‘are’ Jews and, being what they are, they positively build their identity, together with others.¹⁰⁷ Most of all, teachers coming from different disciplines will have to be high-quality individuals with excellent communication skills.

14. It is not realistic to expect a high level of attendance, or at least not at the start. Quality is more important. At its height, in January 1923, Rosenzweig’s *Lehrhaus* numbered 1,100 registered students. At that time, Frankfurt had 29,000 Jewish inhabitants, representing 6.5% of the population. Approximately ten participants – a minyan! – can be expected for the first year of the Kassel *Lehrhaus* and if the *Lehrhaus* proves successful, a peak of about 30 participants might be expected in the years after.
15. Didactically, a variety of activities may be organized, but the emphasis will be on seminars and small study groups. Whatever the form, questions and doubts must be heard patiently and taken seriously. The most appropriate form of conversation/discussion is that where the teacher speaks only when asked. This is because learning together and learning to learn are the aims of the *Lehrhaus*.

discovering her Judaism, would be a good choice as a person who can enthusiastically share her knowledge with others.

- 107 In Kassel, people come to the rabbi with their questions. It would be good if they could be understood by several people and people could share their joy, but also their doubts, questions and problems with others. The *Lehrhaus* could prevent a situation in which the rabbi is the only teacher.

16. A language program could include German and Hebrew, integrating existing courses into the framework of the Community. A language program is necessary in order to promote integration as well as true, intercultural dialogical thinking and acting.

Program

For the program itself, I envision seminars and workshops on themes such as the Torah and the Prophets; the Psalms; the Ethics of the Fathers; the Talmud; Halakha and Haggadah; Midrash; the Jewish calendar; Jewish history; Jewish literature; Jewish mysticism; Jewish philosophy; German Jewish thinkers; Rosenzweig's writings; Buber's *Ich und Du*; Heschel's *God in Search of Man*; Jewish thinking after the Shoah; Israel and the Diaspora; Judaism and Christianity; Hebrew and German. Again, 'experts' are not needed and the workshops would certainly not be comparable to University lectures. In the *Lehrhaus*, it is the Jewish heart, rather than intellect, that seeks to express itself in many ways.

Towards the realization of the Lehrhaus

Initial discussions regarding the feasibility of founding a *Lehrhaus* have taken place with the local rabbi, who showed genuine interest in the project, and with Dr. Eva Schultz-Janders of Jewish-Christian Cooperation, who is also willing to promote the project. Conversations have further been held with some individual members of the community,¹⁰⁸ especially with Esther Haß, president of the *Vorstand*

108 For example, with Ada Herligen, a Hebrew-speaking woman who is enthusiastic about the idea. People can certainly learn good Hebrew with her. Ms. Herlingen could continue to teach Hebrew as she does now, in the framework of the *Lehrhaus*.

and a representative on the city council. Ms. Haß was instrumental in the building of the synagogue and also brought the rabbi to Kassel. Given the depth and breadth of her experience, Ms. Haß could play an important role in the foundation of the *Lehrhaus*.

The community itself will have to be informed and enthusiasm raised for the project. This last point is perhaps the most crucial one. People who still have to overcome the language barrier in their new country and cope daily with their new economic situations will need to be motivated to explore yet another aspect of their identities.¹⁰⁹

“The inexpressible joy of being a Jew”

The guidelines given above do not aim at a slavish, dogmatic modeling after Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig himself did not want to think for other people; he wanted people to think for themselves. As I was reflecting on what can be done today, I benefited greatly from Rosenzweig’s pedagogical work. It is through his inspiration that the above guidelines and basic requirements were written and they are intended to grasp the spirit of an institution that may once again reach and inspire Jews, in this case the Jews of Rosenzweig’s birthplace.

A new form of learning, as Rosenzweig understood it, may lead to a revival of Jewish life in Germany. It may make people move from a vague awareness of Judaism, from narrow conceptions of Judaism or even *a priori* about it, to a meaningful Judaism, relevant for today. As in Rosenzweig’s day, Jews are called to

109 There is a beautiful series of monthly lectures called *Sonntags-Matinee* (this year on the theme of the Golden Age of Sephardic Judaism), organised by the community, but mainly attended by non-Jews.

become alive again, to discover their own core and to step “into life” (*ins Leben*). They are addressed as Jews, “sons”, destined to become “builders”. Once again, the movement must be organized from the outside to the inside, from the periphery to the center, from assimilation to a Jewish consciousness and life style. The time has come to act, *et la-‘asot* (Ps. 119:126). The unique institution of the Kassel *Lehrhaus*, once implemented, could function as a model and dramatically improve the general situation of Jews in Germany.

In a letter dated August 27, 1919 to his friend Eugen Rosenstock, Franz Rosenzweig refers to the “inexpressible joy of being a Jew” (“*das unaussprechliche Glück, Jude zu sein*”).¹¹⁰ The time has come to discover once again with joy the great happiness to be found in an ancient, constantly renewing treasure.

Appendix I

Die Bauleute

In *The Builders: Concerning the Law*, Rosenzweig proposes a way of returning to Judaism that he had hoped to find from the very beginning of the *Lehrhaus*.¹¹¹ He then details a “*Hygiene des Zurück*” (hygiene of returning) which would safeguard the returning individual from trying to go too fast and too far in his observance of the Law – which the returnee may find tempting after a personal life crisis.¹¹² Without being legalistic about it, Rosenzweig loved

110 F. Rosenzweig, *Die “Gritli”-Briefe, Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy*, Inken Rühle & Reinhold Mayer (eds.), Tübingen, 2002, p. 402.

111 “Die Bauleute. Über das Gesetz”, GSIII, pp. 699–712; English translation “The Builders: Concerning the Law”, Glatzer, pp. 72–92.

112 See the letter to Eugen Rosenstock dated 25.8.1924; GSI, 2, p. 984.

Jewish praxis. In “The Builders”, he suggests that Buber, and the participants in the *Lehrhaus*, not only think Jewishly, but also act Jewishly.¹¹³ Rosenzweig asked Buber, why he left the Law in the shackles put upon it by the Western Orthodoxy of the nineteenth century. Is it really Jewish law he is turning his back on? Reverence is not enough.

“Is that really Jewish law, the law of millennia, studied and lived, analyzed and rhapsodized, the law of everyday and of the day of death, petty and yet sublime, sober and yet woven in legend; a law which knows both the fire of the Sabbath candle and that of the martyr’s stake? The law that Akiba planted and fenced in, and [the] *Aher* trampled under, the cradle Spinoza hailed from, the ladder on which the Baal Shem ascended, the law that always rises beyond itself, that can never be reached – and yet has always the possibility of becoming Jewish life, of being expressed in Jewish faces?”¹¹⁴

Rosenzweig writes that the Torah has 613 commandments, a number signifying something countless and representing the sum of the days of the year and the joints in the human body. He further writes that the Law is the object of the scrutiny of later scholars who put our teacher Moses himself to shame. It is what God Himself studies day after day. The Law is not based on the pseudo-historical theory of its origin or on the pseudo-juristic theory of its power to obligate (Hirsch), or upon the pseudo-logical theory of the unity of God and the pseudo-ethical theory of the love of one’s neighbor (Geiger):

113 “The Builders”, Glatzer, pp. 72–92.

114 *Id.*, p. 77.

“...for a miracle does not constitute history, a people is not a juridical fact, martyrdom is not an arithmetical problem, and love is not social”.¹¹⁵

He distinguishes between the objective Law, *Gesetz*, and the subjective commandment, *Gebot*. The former is transformed in the latter, in the living reality of the deed. The cold paragraphs of the code may be transformed into response to a living call to action in the existential situation. Not all that can and must be done is an accomplished deed. The Law has to become an “inner power”.¹¹⁶ In this way, Rosenzweig linked the “inner power” of the Law to the subject who performs it. He wanted the participants in the *Lehrhaus* to once more give the Torah its actuality and living force, and he refers both to Moses’ words that God has made the covenant “not with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day” and to the Talmud – that we have only to be sons, in order to become builders. He hoped that his words in *The Builders* would be accepted by Buber, although the latter did not give up his standpoint easily: Buber wanted contact with the Divine You, the eternal *Du*, with no mediators, even not the Law. Nahum Glatzer has published the relevant correspondence between Buber and Rosenzweig, which shows how two friends can greatly differ on such a crucial subject as the Law in Judaism.¹¹⁷

The debate that started between Buber and Rosenzweig continues to this very day. There are Jews today who maintain that

115 Id., p. 80.

116 Id., p. 85.

117 The translated correspondence bears the title “Revelation and Law. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig”, Glatzer, pp. 109–118.

God is not a lawgiver and that Judaism is about the whole man freely relating to God. Others believe that Judaism is a life lived according to the Law. There are those today for whom the love of God implies obedience to the Law and those who have a more universal interpretation of Judaism.

Rosenzweig's thesis was that the commandments breach the natural and spontaneous way of living and thus characterize the Jewish existence as surprised and transformed by something unidentical, i.e. the Other. Rosenzweig's letter of November 1924, addressed to the "speakers in the *Lehrhaus*", Martin Goldner, Nahum Glatzer, Hans Epstein and Lotte Fürth¹¹⁸ mentions that Nahum Glatzer thought that the election of the people is divine, but that the details of the Law came from man alone. Certainly Buber also thought that the details of the Law stem from man. Rosenzweig reacted to Glatzer's position that divine election is connected to the minutiae of the Law in everyday life, saying: "...one hears differently when one hears in the doing".¹¹⁹

"To be sure, what is important is less the objective Law than the subjective experience of it in love:

What we can thus state – or even prove – about God is related to our possible 'experience' in the same way that the empty announcement that two persons have married, or the showing of the marriage certificate, is related to the daily and hourly reality of that marriage. The reality cannot be communicated to a third person; it is no one's concern and yet it is the only

118 GSI, 2, pp. 1001–1005; for the translation of the letter, see "The Commandments: Divine or Human?", Glatzer, pp. 119–124.

119 GSI, 2, p. 1004: "...man vernimmt anders, wenn man im Tun vernimmt."; Glatzer, p. 122.

thing that counts, and the objective statement of the fact of marriage would be meaningless without this most private, incommunicable reality. And so even the bare fact of marriage does not become real save where it leaves the sphere of what can be objectively stated and enters the secret pale of the festive days and anniversaries of private life”.¹²⁰

An important remark needs to be made to help us understand Rosenzweig’s *Anliegen*, his concern and intent, when he writes about the Law. In the *Star*, Rosenzweig once and for all rooted the objective Law (*Gesetz*) in the subjective experience of the commandment (*Gebot*) “Thou shalt love”. In other words, the personal experience of “encounter” conditions all the objective “relations” described in a matrix of ordinances and prescriptions. The I-you is constitutive of the I-it. Without this I-you, the I-it applies, but is meaningless for the subject.

This last remark is vital for a correct understanding of Rosenzweig’s ideas on education as following from his dialogical thinking. It is ultimately the living encounter with the other person and not an objective describable complex of laws that is central. One must not confuse instituted laws with the emergence of the I from its solipsism in the encounter with the non-I. True, Rosenzweig thought that there was no contradiction between the laws regulating a life where time is taken into account and the sudden, momentary rupturing and opening up of the I by the revelation of love. Nevertheless, these laws must not be confused with the commandment of love itself that generates these laws and gives them their very significance for the subject. In other words, the

120 GSI, 2, p. 1002; Glatzer, p. 120.

being chosen of the I, his being set apart, his being called by the Other is the rationale for all kinds of regulations which, without this libidinal force of the commandment, would lose their meaning for the subject. The pedagogical consequence of Rosenzweig's position, which in psychoanalytic terms counters the punishing pressures of the superego,¹²¹ is that it would be meaningless to talk about laws to the participants of the *Lehrhaus* without grounding these laws in a personal engagement of the I that follows a setting apart by the neighboring non-I. The presence of a fellow human destines the I to orient itself to the Other, to emerge from itself towards the Other. The Other cannot be neutralized. Without this return, without this *Umkehr*, any talk about laws lacks meaning. They would be valid, but not meaningful.

121 For this issue, see Eric L. Santner. In his book, Santner counters the theses of Regina Schwartz and Jan Assmann, who critique Monotheistic religious traditions as generating negativity and intolerance. These authors refer to Freud in the construction of their respective theses, arguing that monotheism, which wanted to replace polytheism, was less tolerant than polytheism. Santner develops a quite different interpretation of Freud. His lecture of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*, combined with his understanding of Freud, challenges the clear-cut conclusions of Schwartz and Assmann. He claims that in their reading the Biblical traditions, Freud and Rosenzweig understand these traditions less as creating gaps between 'we' and 'they' than as fundamentally promoting pluralism and giving room to alterity: The Jewish-Christian legacy would help to accept the Other. He claims that real pluralism does not lie in the recognition that the Other is somehow like me, but rather in the recognition that the uncanny presence of the Other cannot be abolished and that his undeletable strangeness is accepted in ethical proximity and in political responsibility. For Santner, the monotheistic traditions have the potential to diminish violence and constitute a way of creating pluralism. Of course, the separation between 'we' and 'they' is problematic, but 'separation' is not the same as 'distinction'.

The point is that Rosenzweig avoids the pitfall of meaningless legalism. The meaning of any law whatsoever lies in the personal experience of revelation, the love experience. For the *Lehrhaus*, this means that Rosenzweig trusted that people who experienced love would accept engagement towards the Other as a consequence of their having been singled out for humble service to the Other – an engagement regulated by laws.



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