

IDEOLOGY AND REALITY: THE AMERICAN HEBREW MOVEMENT IN ITS INCEPTION- IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

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Ever since the establishment of the Histadruth Ivrit of America in 1916, on the heels of several attempts to form a unified Hebrew movement in America, the pundits of the movement attempted to delineate the ideology, purpose and character of Hebrew culture in America. Three early Hebrew ideologues, Moshe Halevi, Kalman Whiteman, and Daniel Persky, discussed in this article, typified the ideological trends as they struggled with the concepts and means of preserving and promoting Hebrew culture in the diaspora, while American soil presented them with its unique and not too welcoming reality.

The article discusses the ways they attempted to define Hebrew culture vis-à-vis the needs of American Jewry, as they perceived them, and how they coped with the American Jewish experience, while they were attempting to translate their ideology and lofty undertaking into practice.

Some other aspects deal with topics that tantalized the Hebrew ideologues from the inception of the organization. Such are the question whether the Hebrew movement should cater to the elite or to the masses; should it emphasize cultural Hebrew activities, such as speaking Hebrew, or concentrate on the publication of books and literary journals; should the movement be part of the Zionists organization or outside of it.

Histadruth Ivrit—the Hebrew Language and Culture Association of America—was founded in New York in June, 1916. An announcement in the Hebrew weekly *Hatoreh* heralded the birth of the organized Hebrew movement in America.¹ Its founding was preceded by years of cultural and literary effort by various associations of Hebraists and a few writers and editors in the United States.² Prior to this, a number of unsuccessful attempts had been made to unify the various Hebrew societies under a sin-

¹ *Hatoreh*, III (14, 1916) pp. 14-15. Alan Mintz published an overview of this journal and the beginning of the Hebrew movement in "A Sanctuary in the Wilderness," in *Hebrew in America*. Alan Mintz, ed. (Detroit, 1993) pp. 29-67. A book-long history of the Hebrew language and culture movement in America which I wrote will be published in 1995-96. It covers the period 1916 to 1995. A few of my articles on the early years of the Hebrew movement in America have been published in *Etmol*, XVII (6, August 1993) pp. 22-23, and *Hadoar*, LXXIII (13, May 13, 1994) pp. 16-18, (14, May 27, 1994) pp. 22-23, *Mahut*, 14 (Fall, 1994) pp. 49-58, *Am Vasefer*, 9 (Winter, 1995) pp. 161-171; another article, on *Hadoar*, is scheduled to be published in *Kesher*.

² See A. R. Malachi, "Toldot Hatenu'ah Ha'ivrit Ba'america," *Hagut Ivrit Ba'america*, III (Tel Aviv, 1974); K. Whiteman, "Bresheet," *Hadoar*, XXV (11, 1946) p. 259.

gle umbrella.³ There had also been various attempts to establish in Europe a worldwide Hebrew movement.⁴ The ground was now ready for establishing a national Hebrew organization in America.

The founding of the Hebrew organization came as the result of complex societal, cultural, and political developments that took place in America and in world Jewry. Although a detailed analysis of these developments is beyond the boundaries of this article, it is worthwhile to cite briefly some of these changes. These include the strengthening of the Zionist movement in America and concurrently the recognition that the center of world Jewry was already passing from Europe to the United States.⁵ Undoubtedly, the presence of various Zionist leaders and well-known Hebrew writers in America—on the heels of the war—contributed to the establishment of the Hebrew movement at this juncture.

The newspaper announcement reporting the birth of the *Histadruth Ivrit* of America also contained an outline of a plan comprising a major change in the character of Hebrew cultural activities. Until this time, Hebrew activities had been confined to local efforts and limited to Hebrew speaking and cultural events on a small scale. Now the movement's founders sought a wider, more ambitious role for Hebrew. Their goals were to disseminate Hebrew culture, language, literature, and ideology—a concept which had yet to be clarified and crystallized—among the American Jewish population at large.

Two central trends began to emerge at the outset of the new movement. On the one hand, there was an attempt to define the identity of the new movement and to determine its ideology. On the other, was the required application of this ideology to a practical language. Transforming the ideology to the reality, however, required a confrontation with the American Jewish experience, involving an immediate attempt to build a Hebrew substructure and establish a cultural, institutionalized framework. The movement's leaders also attempted to identify the Jewish audience that would potentially comprise the members of the movement.

This article will deal with the Hebrew movement's first ideologues, whose writings typified the tenor of the ideological thinking in its first few years and its attempts to adjust to the American reality. They were, of

³ See Daniel Persky, "Beterem Noldah Hahistadrut Ha'ivrit," *Hadoar*, XXV (11, 1946) pp. 262-264; also: Jacob Zausner, "Bresheet," *Hadoar*, XXVI (29, 1947) pp. 851-853.

⁴ See Avraham Levinson, *Hatenu'ah Ha'ivrit Bagolah* (Warsaw, 1935).

⁵ Compare "Have'idah Ha'ivrit," *Ha'ivri*, VII (5, 1917) p. 11.

course, different in their modes of thinking and manners of expression. Some were intellectuals, who were inclined toward abstraction, while others were men of action, whose theories were more practical and were intentionally geared for immediate application. There was no apparent consensus pertaining to the definition of their ideology, which was given different orientations and forms, both since the inception of the Hebrew movement in America and throughout the eighty years of its existence.

Three personalities contributed to shaping the ideology of the new movement at its inception. The first of these, following the chronological order of the publication of their works, was Moshe Halevi (Levine, 1881-1935), who later taught in the Teachers and Rabbinic Colleges of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Halevi considered Hebrew to be the basis for Judaism itself. Without it, Judaism would be severed from its connection with historical Judaism. He elevated Hebrew to the level of an ideological value, paralleling Jewish nationalism, as a vital foundation of Judaism itself and a necessary component for its survival. As a result, Halevi realized that the aims of the Hebrew movement and those of the Zionist movement were not identical in their essence. The nationalist movement indeed saw Hebrew as *one* of its three necessary principles, those being the rejuvenation of the people, the revival of the land, and the revival of the language. The Hebrew movement, however, considered the revival of Hebrew culture an essential fundamental, not just for nationalism, but for Judaism in its entirety.⁶

Consequently, Halevi came to adopt the expansionist orientation that desired broadening the framework of the Hebrew movement, a subject of debate among the movement's ideologues and activists. That debate centered on the question of whether the Histadruth Ivrit must be an elitist movement, serving writers and artists of refined taste, or one which must reach down to the people and become a mass movement. Halevi anticipated the risk of Judaic ignorance (*am ha'aratzut*), which, in his words, "is spreading out as a plague in the nation's soul." He demanded "to create a large and strong movement" to forestall this danger, which hung over American Judaism.

Realizing this ever-present tension between the Zionist and the Hebrew movements, Halevi proposed that the Histadruth Ivrit break out from the confined membership of the Zionist movement and turn to the broader

⁶ *Hatoreh*, III (15, 1916) p. 3; (17, 1916) p. 4; (18, 1916); republished in *Kitvei Moshe Halevi* (New York, 1937) pp. 117-133.

American Jewish public, which was not necessarily Zionist. In fact, he demanded that the new Hebrew movement work within the congregational synagogues, a network which had not been fully developed at that time. A few years later, the Hebrew movement did make special efforts to enter the organized Jewish community, but its goal was essentially to benefit from the Kehillah's fund allocations while still aiming to spread the Hebrew ideology.

The main problem in reaching a mass audience was that a cultural movement such as Histadruth Ivrih was inherently limited to those who were fluent in the language and interested in partaking in an active cultural Hebrew life. The many attempts to recruit English-speaking "friends of Hebrew" to their ranks did not go well in general. Only years later was the barrier of language removed upon the foundation of the Hebrew Arts Committee. That committee, established in the latter part of the nineteen-thirties through the initiative of Hano'ar Ha'ivri, the Hebrew Youth Organization, was able to break through the language barrier by means of the Hebrew theater, choir, orchestra and dance. These activities attracted a culture-seeking public, whose language was not necessarily Hebrew yet was able to enjoy the universal expression of Hebrew arts.

A more prominent ideologue than Halevi was Kalman Whiteman (1882-1946), a founding father of Histadruth Ivrih and one of the signatories of the original announcement about the foundation of the Hebrew organization. He served as its first secretary and, consequently, his views on the Hebrew ideology were doubly important, carrying an authoritative and somewhat practical tone.

A fundamental problem typifying the writings of these Hebrew ideologues surfaced in Whiteman's articulation. It derived from their inclination to express their ideological objectives in abstract slogans, which often came across as lofty *melitzot*, in a style of speech-making which was common among the Zionist leaders, writers and activists in Hebrew culture in Europe. The use of those slogans in speeches and articles created an unrealistic air and an attitude of disrespect for the *batlanim* [idlers] and their verbiage. These slogans were seen as somewhat dishonest and insincere, as detached from all practicality, and as lacking any attempt to come to grips with reality. At times, such slogans resulted in a cynical attitude toward these speakers.

We can assume that Whiteman accepted Halevi's message in his article regarding the danger of Jewish ignorance which plagued American Jewry and adopted it as the "battle cry" of the new movement, as it attempted to

confront the new American reality. In an attempt to define the ideology of Histadruth Ivrit and broaden its perimeter, Whiteman adopted the slogan, “the flag of Israel’s Torah in its broader and more comprehensive meaning,” which he used as the movement’s own.⁷

The ambivalence of the concept *hatorah hayisre’elit* (Israel’s Torah) testified to the desire and need to build a broad coalition of Hebrew circles encompassing every aspect of the political spectrum—from the religious right to the secular left. Those who accepted the goal of broadening the movement were aware of the inherent potential in a cultural organization comprising diverse groups. Such difference of opinion among the group made them unwilling to sit together in any other social or political setting. They were prepared, however, to come together under the canopy of Hebrew culture.

Actually, this “broadening” notion contained a hidden danger of creating an abstract, undefined and blurred coalition, with a compromising and nebulous ideology. In order to forestall such a danger, the Hebrew organization rejected Halevi’s stand, which advocated involving non-Zionist elements in the Hebrew movement. To counteract this possibility, Whiteman emphasized “the idea of rejuvenation and redemption” (*ra’ayon hatehiyah vehage’ulah*) as binding in the ideology of the Hebrew movement. If there were any doubt as to what he meant by that phrase, Whiteman explained that it was “the Zionist idea.” This idea of *ge’ulah*, previously a sacred concept in Judaism, had now been adopted by the Histadruth Ivrit, just as was adopted by modern Hebrew literature and by the Zionist movement, as a self-contained, secular concept, detached from its religious connotation and expectations.

In another article, published prior to the first national conference of the new Hebrew movement, Whiteman expounded his views of the ideology of Histadruth Ivrit.⁸ He explained that “the Hebrew ideology” (*hara’ayon ha’ivri*) has two meanings. The first, which is a synonym with Judaism, is religious and ethical. The second, which was coined in the previous generation, is a “political and public (social) concept.” Whiteman does not attempt to define the first concept and does not succeed in answering the question, “What is the Hebrew ideology?” in its latter meaning. He argues that the Hebrew ideology “has not yet assumed a definite and specific form” and was connected with a few other public ideologies which came into

⁷ *Hatoren*, III (20, 1916) p. 13.

⁸ K. Whiteman, “*Hara’ayon Ha’ivri*,” *Hatoren*, III (48, 1917) pp. 3-5.

being in the modern age. Among them, he cites the ideology of Haskalah, the Zionist ideology, and even the diaspora-oriented “national” ideology. Evidently, Whiteman was trying to connect the Hebrew culture with one of the social and cultural movements which started among the Jews in modern times. He was referring to the Hebrew Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) and the national movement, Zionism. He even alluded to the possibility of the emerging Hebrew movement being another major cultural and social phenomenon paralleling both of the others. His viewpoint can be characterized as eclectic. It contains echoes of the spiritual center idea of Ahad Ha'am, the theory of national centers in the diaspora of Simon Dubnow, and the attitude toward the diaspora in the writings of Jacob Klatzkin and others.⁹ Not only is his definition unclear, but it contains contradictions and discrepancies: it has both nationalism and its antithesis, *galutiyut* (diaspora-orientation) in the same context. Indeed this ambiguity typified both the ideology and the reality of the Hebrew movement not only in its formative years, but for many years to come.

As a matter of fact, Whiteman did not arrive at an ideological or philosophical definition. He did not even address the question, “What is the Hebrew ideology?” In order to make his eclectic position easier to understand, he preferred to revise the question, adopting a social orientation which asked, “What are the Hebraist’s views on our lives?” That change of question guided him in the desired direction, which traced the Hebraists’ current state of mind and existing mental trend.

Whiteman argued that the uniqueness of the American Hebraist is exemplified in “his negative attitude toward the Jewish masses, their ways of life and their spiritual profile.” Accordingly, the Hebraist is full of contempt for the national and cultural degeneration of the Jewish masses “and their terrible ethical and religious decline” (page 3). This envisioned Hebraist detested any form of assimilation and defilement (*temi'ah* and *tum'ah*) prevailing among the American Jewish masses. This definition has a negative basis, as it attempts to reject an existing situation. It contrasts the Hebraist and his idealism with the existing American Jewish reality of the masses. American Jewry, according to this conception, is an *ama reika* (empty-headed people), a satirical play on the word “America.” Whiteman

⁹ A discussion concerning the relations between the center in Eretz Israel and the diaspora occupied the attention of many pundits of the Zionist movement and the Hebrew movement. See, for example, Yechezkel Kaufman, *Golah Venechar* (1939/40), the writings of Jacob Klatzkin, and Simon Rawidowicz in connection with the founding of Brit Ivrit Olamit.

hinted that any approach of Hebrew culture for the masses would not come as a cultural compromise.

Whiteman also articulated a positive attitude on behalf of the Hebraist, and he did it with respect to Jewish religion, which Whiteman considered one manifestation of Hebrew culture. The Hebraist was conceived by Whiteman as a person who has respect for Jewish tradition but who does not necessarily have to belong to the religious establishment. The subject of observing the *mitzvot* in a normative sense is not discussed at all.

In order to sketch the spiritual image of the Hebraist in America, Whiteman posed the question, "Who is the Hebraist?" He then answered in a bombastic declaration: "The Hebraist constitutes the Israelite personality, in which all the spiritual aspirations of the people of Israel, from the day it became a nation until this day, have been combined and merged together" (p. 4). Needless to say, this image owes more to a visionary utopianism than to reality. This all-inclusive conception saw in Hebrew culture an entity which tended easily to be attached to other ideologies. As a result of this pairing, Whiteman wrote, Hebrew "deepens and enriches these ideologies and emanates its spirit and its glory on them" (p. 4). Hebrew intensified, for example, religious faith or the social belief of the person. Whiteman depicted Hebrew as naturally accompanying another ideology, easily appended to a separate ideological setting; and in so doing, he tried to depict the all-encompassing image and the complementary nature of Hebrew ideology. But with this notion he inadvertently pinpointed a major problem of the Hebrew movement in America. The Hebrew movement attempted to remain politically non-partisan. Consequently, it had to struggle with the basic, continuous problem of how to unite people of different religious and social ideologies within one cultural setting.

The answer was the formulation of the Hebrew culture ideology as an entity which was easily attached to other ideologies that, in turn, they enriched and complemented. Thus, for example, the Hebrew ideology aspired, according to Whiteman, for perfect Zionism—"and there is no perfect Zionism but Hebrew," he wrote. However, this example also testifies to the very essence of the problem in its attempt to combine two ideologies, which may complement each other but may also be contradictory. For example, unlike the Zionist movement, the Hebrew movement was not promoting *aliyah*. By its very nature, the movement recognized the existence of the diaspora and advocated living a complete Hebrew cultural life in the *golah*, yet with a profound spiritual and cultural affinity with the Hebrew culture being created in the land of Israel.

As if in response to this contradiction, the Hebrew ideologue declared that “the Hebrew ideology is...to establish Judaism in the world and to correct (repair) the world through the Kingdom of God” (*letaken olam be-malchut shaday*). Nothing less and nothing more than the prophetic idea of messianic times. By resorting to the florid *melitzot*, Whiteman attempted to solve the lurking contradiction between these two ideologies. And thus this Hebrew activist employed these expressions, which were borrowed from the traditional Jewish corpus and related to the hope of redemption. He pronounced these familiar slogans and relied on the power of the word and imagination to do the rest.

This abstract notion of “correcting the world” fits well with Whiteman’s demand to broaden the perimeters of the Hebrew movement. He aspired to bring the Hebrew culture to bear upon American Jewry in general and to activate the Hebrew movement as a “popular public movement.”¹⁰

Whiteman’s inclination, at this stage of development of Hebrew ideology, was not intended to set up a center for Hebrew literature in America. This demand came from the author and critic Reuven Brainin, who was the president of Histadruth Ivrit in the early nineteen-twenties. Brainin made this demand public at the first Conference of the Histadruth Ivrit in 1917.¹¹ Whiteman did not possess such high aspiration for Hebrew literature. In his view, the primary goal of the Hebrew movement should be to return the Hebrew book to the People of the Book.¹² Nevertheless, in 1918 an attempt was made to establish an association of Hebrew writers, and this attempt already manifested the desire to create a literary center for Hebrew literature in America.

We must note that Whiteman was primarily an educator, and therefore he considered Hebrew education to be the main activity of the Hebrew movement, in accordance with the needs and conditions of American Jewry.¹³ He aspired to form a vast Jewish, Zionist, and Hebrew basis for the Jewish and Hebrew education network in America—unlike any of the existing systems in other countries. His goal was to instill in the students the values of Judaism so that they might live fuller Jewish lives. It is important to point out that Whiteman did not cite any existing East European Jewish culture organization as a paradigm to be emulated. He certainly did not cite

¹⁰ *Hatoren*, III (26, 1916) p. 5.

¹¹ Reuven Brainin, *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Va'aidotehah* (New York, 1917).

¹² *Hatoren*, III (30, 1916) p. 23.

¹³ *Hatoren*, III (28, 1916) pp. 4-5.

Tarbut as an example because he could not have envisioned the change of the name *Hovevei Sefat Ever* to *Tarbut* which occurred in Russia on April 23, 1917. (The Polish *Tarbut* was established later, in July 1921.)¹⁴ Instead, he sketched the outline of a plan to establish educational institutions fashioned according to the Zionist and Hebrew spirit, of Hebrew teachers' colleges,¹⁵ a Hebrew youth movement, and an adult education system in Hebrew culture and language.

In his plans Whiteman always considered the unique American Jewish reality, and he did not ignore the difficulties which he anticipated for the new Hebrew movement in America. With this in mind, he adopted a realistic view of the existing circumstances and admitted that a complete Hebrew life was likely to be realized only in the land of Israel. Yet even if it was impossible to create a complete Hebrew life in America, "they must create at least some sort of a Hebrew environment."¹⁶ In spite of the realistic approach, Whiteman argued, one must also set up some distant goals in order to achieve at least part of them (p. 24).

The third ideologue of the Hebrew movement was Daniel Persky (1887-1962). He was a veteran activist who participated in ideological polemics over the years and belonged to various associations of Hebraists prior to the establishment of Histadruth Ivrit. A journalist, writer and educator, he was not an intellectual ideologue, but his continuous Hebrew activities and his writings bestowed on his personality the ideological and authoritative air of someone who practices what he preaches. Persky's writing was folk-oriented and popular; his articles were conversation-like and informal in style, although he too was inclined to use a lofty and flowery language.

The ultimate objective of the Hebrew movement, in his view, was "to correct our Israelite world through the kingdom of Hebrew culture and its vital contents."¹⁷ This abstract, lofty definition, reminiscent of Whiteman's so-called *tikun olam* (correcting the world) message, was ambiguous enough to be accepted by any Hebraist regardless of his political affiliation. Yet it is unfortunately so unclear that it may have resulted in a total blurring of goals. Even though there appears to be an agreement about this final objective in the abstract, he thought that there were still disagreements

¹⁴ See my article "*Hatarbut Ha'ivrit Ba'americah: Hipus Ahar Modelim Shel Tarbut*," *Am Vasefer*, (1995) pp. 161-171. See Levinson, *Hatenu'ah Ha'ivrit*, p. 36; "*Yisudah Shel 'Tarbut'*," *Atideinu* (1, January 1924) p. 83.

¹⁵ *Hatoren*, III (28, 1916) p. 5.

¹⁶ *Hatoren*, III (30, 1916) p. 24.

¹⁷ *Hatoren*, III (47, 1917) p. 3.

among the leaders of the Hebrew movement over the more immediate goals of Histadruth Ivrit.

Persky opposed those who advocated broadening the scope of the organization's activities because he believed that it was impossible for the Hebrew movement to have its Hebraic culture reign over the whole of Jewish life in America. Also, the slogan of the war on *am ha'aratzut* reflected, in his view, too heavy an undertaking for the Hebrew organization. The grandiose plans to establish educational institutions, a Hebrew theater, and the like were not, in his opinion, practical. Persky was among those who demanded that efforts of the Hebrew movement be limited and its energies concentrated on the Hebraists themselves. He spoke from his own experience as a public servant and a Hebraic activist, reflecting his involvement in Hebrew cultural life in America. Persky's immediate and practical proposals for Histadruth Ivrit derived from his particular experience.

He had three proposals for immediate enactment:

1. Dissemination of Hebrew literature, publication of books written in easy Hebrew and taking care of the general needs of writers and Hebrew literature.
2. Emphasis on spoken Hebrew and continued efforts to revive the language through the publication of reference books, dictionaries, summaries of grammatical rules, and the like.
3. Adult education in Hebrew, including evening courses and public lectures.

This was far from Whiteman's all-embracing program.

REALITY VERSUS IDEOLOGY

Each of the three ideologues envisioned a different image of the Hebrew movement and delineated his own version of Hebrew culture, expressed in his own style. Moshe Halevi imagined a Jewish and Hebrew civilization, whose boundaries were larger than those of the Zionist movement. Hebrew was vital, in his opinion, for the survival of Judaism as a whole. He was concerned about the state of American Jewry and set himself to address its religious and cultural problems which had begun to surface. He was especially worried about the deterioration of the quality of Judaism on the American scene and wanted to come to grips with the phenomenon of *am ha'aratzut*.

His demand to establish a gigantic movement matched his proposal to function within the congregational synagogue framework. But the practical aspect of his proposal was not tested. The Jewish public who belonged to these synagogues throughout the United States did not know Hebrew and could not even be considered "seekers of Hebrew," nor did they have any attachment to Hebrew culture. Membership in the synagogues and temples alone satisfied their need for Jewish identity in those years. The practical aspect of any envisioned plan of actions on behalf of Hebrew culture in all the Jewish *kehillot* all over America was not even mentioned by Halevi. His plan was and remained strictly theoretical, as it lacked the practical touch. Moreover, the Hebrew movement did not have at its disposal the financial resources and the manpower needed for such a task. Neither did any other national Jewish body at that time have the capacity to carry out Halevi's grandiose plan.

Kalman Whiteman was, first and foremost, an educator, and he therefore saw in Hebrew education the underlying principle of all Hebrew culture. But he also had an inclination toward non-practical abstractions and pretty slogans, which did not measure up to the test of reality. Due to the gap between his powerfully worded theory and the alienating reality, his words today convey only a hollow ring. His demand to expand the scope of the Hebrew movement and establish a popular public movement did not suit his stated attitude toward the Jewish masses. In many respects, Whiteman was an elitist, and a real "popular movement" was actually far from him. He criticized Yiddish and the Jewish masses who used this language. Nevertheless, several of his proposals were realized in time, including his plan to establish a Hebrew youth movement and an adult education program.

Whiteman's concept of Hebrew as implementing and supplementing other Jewish ideologies proved to be insightful and correct when viewed from a historical perspective. The idea that Hebrew culture may serve as a meeting place for opposing ideologies, which never met in the political arena, also proved correct.

Among the three, Daniel Persky was less of an intellectual ideologue than a cultural *askan* (activist, cultural functionary), whose plans were practical, realistic and based on the actual experience of a Hebrew club. But he could only envision what he had seen done before, namely, the work of a chapter or a club, such as *Ahi'ever*, which included Hebrew speaking, the dissemination of Hebrew books, and evening lessons. He envisioned a broad movement which would be built from chapters and associations such as

those to which he was already accustomed, with the personal commitment of each and every member.

These formative years of the Hebrew movement were marked by groping, soul-searching and bewilderment, but a new orientation also emerged, leading in a definite direction. These early years were also marked by some achievements. Within five or six years, the new Hebrew movement was able to establish a Hebrew Teachers College named Tarbut and to launch a daily newspaper, *Hadoar* (in 1921). These two enterprises attested to the nature of the movement's activities in education (training Hebrew teachers) and journalism (publishing a daily newspaper in order to establish a daily link with the Hebrew readership). Even though the Teachers College was not financially stable, it persisted for seven years and did in fact train about two-hundred Hebrew teachers. The daily paper was published continuously for eight months, then it became a weekly, and is still being published to this day (now as a bi-weekly). Chapters of Histadruth Ivrit were established in those years, as existing associations of Hebraists in various cities joined the organized Hebrew movement. It is difficult to assess the movement's achievements in numbers alone, but it is worth noting that there was a significant increase in the membership of the associations, which numbered 1,200 in the beginning of 1918, while the number of associations consisted of several scores. The Histadruth Ivrit started publishing the classics of modern Hebrew literature in popular editions (under the title *Kadimah*), which attained a wide distribution. The Hebrew movement was successful in its efforts to get inside the established Zionist framework and continuously participated in its national conferences.

The national center of Histadruth Ivrit went through transformations and travail, being alternately closed and re-opened and going through periods of activity and paralysis during the early years of its existence. The leadership of the Hebrew movement was characterized by its temporality and cursory existence, suffering ongoing crises and frequent rotation.

The main problems of the movement derived from the lack of financial resources and personnel. Due to insufficient funding, the majority of the activities were organized by volunteers or by individuals who received partial pay and were not able to devote all their time to the Hebrew effort. These limitations caused the Hebrew organization to become dependent on the Zionist Organization. This distorted its identity, which was not at all clear to begin with. Its future—as an independent and autonomous unit or as a department within the Zionist Organization—was continuously debated.

In sum, these early years fashioned the image of Histadruth Ivrit as an American cultural movement. Even though it was not a central force in American Jewry, the Hebrew movement nevertheless left its mark on the latter's culture, continuing its activities almost eighty years after its founding.