11

Not to Belong

With his hope of living out the rest of his life with Paula now buried with her in the ancient Jewish cemetery of Venice, Buber faced his declining years largely ensconced in his study. In reply to a query from friends in Tübingen, Germany, about how he coped with the inevitable ills and loneliness of old age, Buber offered a glimpse into a routine that allowed him to carry on and contend with lingering bereavement:

> This is what things are like here: one doesn't really "feel" sick, but if one behaves as though one were well and ventures to go out some evening to hear [the cellist Pablo] Casals play, one has to pay for it the next day. Thus, one sits at one's desk, sits away and reads the last proofs of the last volume of the Bible [translation]—and in between sits on the terrace and breathes one's fill. In doing so, one does, thank God, have one's faith on one's right, but one could not get along without humor on one's left. There are all sorts of things

> to think about, and people keep showing up with questions, among them not a few young people from Germany (including Tübingen), and one imparts information to the best of one's ability. And in the midst of this, again and again one feels memories touching one's forehead, and the living friends with whom one shares them are not anywhere but here [in Jerusalem], all here at this moment. This is what things are like.[1]

In his twilight years, Buber increasingly cherished friendships and visits, particularly by youth from abroad and Israel. To be sure, as he had mused on the eve of his seventieth birthday, "I sometimes close the door to my room and surrender to a book, but only because I can open the door again and see a human being looking up at me."[2]

In mid-February 1961, Buber opened the door of his home in Jerusalem to friends who had come to celebrate the completion of his German translation of the Hebrew Bible. Five of the guests, all but one of whom had known Buber in Europe, read short tributes.[3] Gershom Scholem was the first to speak (in Hebrew). "My dear Martin Buber, somewhat like a traditional *syyum* marking the completion of the course of study, we have gathered today in your home to celebrate the completion of your German Bible translation. It provides us with a significant opportunity to look back on this, your work, its intent, and its achievement. Some of us have witnessed and followed the development of this work from its inception and we can well understand the feeling of satisfaction, which must accompany its conclusion. You are a man who has always brought great perseverance and endurance to his tasks. . . . If I am not mistaken, thirty-five years have now passed since we received the first volume of the translation by you and Rosenzweig."[4] Scholem proceeded to review in nuanced detail what he lauded as the monumental achievement of the translation. He then paused to note that Buber and Rosenzweig had undertaken the

daunting project with the intent of prompting German Jewry to return to the original Hebrew of the Bible, with the concomitant objective of retrieving largely forgotten semantic and lexical registers of language in order to enrich contemporary German. There was thus a "utopian element" in Buber's and Rosenzweig's conception of the *Verdeutschung der Bibel.* In historical perspective, Scholem observed, the translation could be viewed as "a kind of *Gastgeschenk*"—a gift given by a guest to one's host—of German Jewry to the German people, "a symbolic act of gratitude *upon departure.*" But, alas, the "departure" was hardly a cordial farewell. Accordingly, Scholem felt obliged to pose a question that he acknowledged was provocative: "For whom is this translation now [just fifteen years after the Holocaust] intended and whom will it influence? Seen historically, it is no longer a Gastgeschenk of the Jews to the Germans but rather—and it is not easy for me to say this—the tombstone for a relationship that was extinguished in unspeakable horror. The Jews for whom you translated are no more. . . . And what the Germans will do with your translation, who could venture to say?"[5]

The other friends of Buber who were there, having assembled to congratulate him on completing the project he had commenced with Rosenzweig thirty-five years earlier, were aghast at Scholem's suggestion that Buber had labored on the translation in vain. They were painfully cognizant of the tragic shift in the significance of the translation (as undoubtedly Buber himself was), but they found Scholem's remarks inappropriate for the occasion.[6] Moreover, Scholem did not seem to take into account that Buber had continued the translation after Rosenzweig's death in December 1919 in memoriam for his deceased friend.

Characteristic of their always rocky relationship, Scholem had no inhibition about questioning the aging Buber's intellectual legacy. Later that year, upon learning of a lecture Scho-

lem had given in London criticizing Buber's interpretation of Hasidism, the editor of *Commentary* invited Scholem to publish his critique in the respected monthly magazine, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. Scholem unhesitatingly accepted the invitation; his trenchant critique of what he held to be Buber's tendentious presentation of Hasidism (which Scholem felt was of questionable scholarly merit) appeared in the October 1961 issue of *Commentary*.[7]

Though generally averse to public polemics, Buber reluctantly felt he had no choice but to respond to Scholem's critique. As he told Maurice Friedman: "I must clarify the difference between a scientific and religious approach to a great fact in the history of religion."[8] Due to illness and the mounting infirmities of advanced age, he could not muster the concentrated effort to reply to Scholem until just after his eighty-fifth birthday. Buber's rebuttal, published in the September 1963 issue of *Commentary*, began by noting that there are "two ways in which a great tradition of religious faith can be rescued from the rubble of time and brought back into the light." The first is historical scholarship, and the other is an "essentially different" way of "restoring a great buried heritage of faith to the light." The latter approach seeks "to recapture a sense of the power that once gave it the capacity to take hold of and vitalize the life of diverse classes of people." The intent of this (that is, Buber's) approach is "to convey to our time the force of a former life of faith and to help our age to renew its ruptured bond with the Absolute." Historical scholarship, Buber contended, is inherently incapable of inspiring this renewal, even should it succeed in "unearthing a forgotten or misunderstood body of teaching." To effect the desired renewal, one must "convey the reality of the way of life that was once informed by these teachings."[9]

Buber failed to appease Scholem. The divide between them, as Buber made clear, was not just a question of methodology, but more fundamentally, a matter of divergent concep-

tions of Judaism and Zionism. Like many of his generation of German Jews, Scholem had been initially enthralled by Buber's portrayal of Hasidism, although he already had doubts then about the authenticity of his sources and their exposition. In 1932, he visited Buber at his home in Heppenheim, and in the course of their conversation, he expressed his hope that Buber would write a comprehensive study of Hasidic theology. Buber assured him that he would, but only after Scholem, then a young lecturer in Jewish mysticism at the Hebrew University, had written a compendious work on kabbalah. Recalling that exchange, Scholem observed, "At the time I did not yet understand that [Buber] was unable to maintain a scholarly attitude toward this topic." He came to realize that some ten years later when he visited Buber, this time in Jerusalem, to give him a copy of Scholem's recently published *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.* It was also an occasion to explain to Buber his "fundamental doubts about [Buber's] interpretation of Hasidism; doubts which have grown during the long years of continuous study of the texts."[10] Buber listened attentively.

> When I was done he was silent for a very long time. Then he said slowly and stressing every word: "If what you are now saying is true, my dear Scholem, then I have worked on Hasidism for forty years absolutely in vain, because in that case, Hasidism does not interest me at all." It was the last conversation I had with Buber about the substantive problems of [his interpretation of] Hasidism. Words failed me. I understood that there was nothing more to be said.[11]

Buber was undeterred by Scholem's criticism. In 1946, his long-awaited comprehensive anthology of Hasidic legendary anecdotes, *Or ha-Ganuz* (The hidden light), was published in Hebrew (it would also be issued later in English and German).[12] In the preface to the Hebrew volume, he noted that it represented work largely done after his immigration to the Land of

Israel, the air of which, as the rabbinic sages taught, "makes one wise," and by virtue of which he gained "the strength to begin anew." As a result, he had rejected his earlier approach of poetically adapting Hasidic tales and anecdotes, for when he revisited them in his later years, he was "shocked by the pathetic lightheartedness" of his youth.[13] He then sought to adhere to the spirit of the original texts. In an autobiographical essay published a decade later, he spoke of his earlier representation of Hasidism as that of an "immature man" who could not "hold in check my inner inclination to transform poetically the narrative material." An ill-conceived need to render Hasidism palatable to Western aesthetic sensibilities had "led me to pay all too little attention to its popular vitality." The transformation of his relationship to the "inner reality" of Hasidism was incremental, and eventually led him to focus on the exemplary lives of the Hasidic masters. He now understood his task as reconstructing the "life-event" (*Lebensvorgang*) they exemplified. This gave life to the literary form that Buber called the "legendary anecdote"—a genre that "enabled me to portray the Hasidic life in such a way that it becomes visible as at once reality and teaching."[14]

Scholem had never voiced in print his criticism of Buber's interpretation of Hasidism until the *Commentary* article of 1961, on which he subsequently elaborated in a feuilleton in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in May 1962. Less than a year after Buber's death in June 1965, Scholem expanded the scope of his critique to include Buber's conception of Judaism and Jewish renewal. Before an audience of leading scholars of religion, who were gathered at the shores of Lake Maggiore, Switzerland, for the annual Eranos Conference, Scholem's critique of Buber resonated as an ideological polemic that extended well beyond scholarly issues. At the very outset of his lecture, it became clear that he harbored a personal ambivalence toward Buber. "No one who knew Buber," he confessed, "could avoid the strong

radiance emanating from him and making an intellectual engagement with him doubly passionate. To engage Buber intellectually meant to be tossed hither and yon between admiration and rejection, between the readiness to listen his message and disappointment with that message and the impossibility of realizing it."[15]

Scholem's disappointment lay in Buber's ambivalence about the Zionist project, which, as Scholem saw it, was evidenced by Buber's failure to honor his own call for the renewal of Judaism to be realized through the reconstruction of Jewish national life in the land of Israel. Scholem still perceived as a betrayal Buber's apparent earlier reluctance to join a generation of European youth who had been inspired by his message to immigrate to Palestine, such as Scholem had done in 1923. Moreover, Buber's consciously and defiantly "heretical" vision of Jewish renewal proved to be exasperatingly utopian, given its nearly exclusive focus on spiritual sensibility and its lack of normative content.[16] Thus, Scholem depicted as a tragic paradox that while Buber's teachings enjoyed a receptive audience among non-Jews, he failed to speak to his own people.

Buber did not exercise the level of influence in the Jewish world that he might have wished. But in the years prior to World War II, especially in the Nazi period, he was indisputably a leading voice within the Jewish community of Central Europe. And in the post–World War II years, he was feted by non-Jews with honors, receiving honorary doctorates and prizes in Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. In the United States, he was likewise a figure celebrated by both the non-Jewish and Jewish public. Nor was he by any means utterly irrelevant on the Israeli scene, even though he often took unpopular positions that would, he knew, cast him as an outsider—as an outsider, he had his constituency. His consistent call for Israel to acknowledge its responsibility for both the Arab refugees of Palestine and the abuse of the rights of the

Arabs who remained within the boundaries of the state found resonance, especially among the radical Left, which nominated him to be the third president of the State of Israel.[17] But it was also Buber's post-traditional conception of Judaism that increasingly spoke to youth raised with the secular values of socialist Zionism. Typical was a letter Buber received in May 1956 co-signed by two teenagers—one of whom was the sixteen-year-old daughter of Moshe Dayan, the Israeli war hero:

> After having read your writings and attempting to understand them, and because we are dissatisfied with our environment, with its scientific creed, and the conventions of the society in which we live, we have decided to turn to you. The central problem we face is basically simple: is it possible for human beings, young people like ourselves, fully recognizing the need to have faith, the need to feel life, to attain self-perfection based on faith and feeling, on knowledge and love of Jewish culture and the Bible? We were raised in a secular, non-religious environment that deified science and its laws. This year we shall graduate secondary school with a rather considerable store of scientific knowledge and general knowledge, but where do we go from here? . . . We would be grateful to you if you could give us an appointment for a conversation or write to us how it is possible to escape the fetters of our environment.[18]

Buber duly extended to his two young correspondents an invitation to visit him. "He received us two sixteen-year-olds," Yael Dayan reported, "like friends his same age, and conducted a serious conversation with us for two hours in the study and garden of his home. He explained that the road to faith was intuitive and that love of our fellow men and creative work would also bring us to faith. He answered our surely naïve and childish questions patiently and lovingly, as though we were the first who ever struggled with these questions."[19]

In his waning years, Buber's counsel was sought particu-

larly by young, Israeli-born members of kibbutzim. Most of those kibbutzim had been created as an expression of a socialist ethos and a radically new Jewish culture and identity, free of the seemingly self-abnegating religious values and practices that were seen as debasing the life of the Jews in the galut. Beginning in 1960 and until a year before his death, Buber received regularly in his home delegations of youth from various kibbutzim. The meetings were largely organized at the initiative of Avraham "Patchi" Shapira, a twenty-four-year-old member of a kibbutz in the Jezreel valley. In his memoirs, Patchi recalls that he and his comrades were at first puzzled by Buber's adamant refusal to entertain abstract, theoretical questions, insisting that "I am not an idealist and I do not know what ideas are. I know only matters that are tangible and emerging." To a young *kibbutznik*, who sought advice on a personal problem, he explained that there "are things we must do—here and now. I have no principles, only a direction and sense, and an act to fit the situation."[20] As he later explained to Patchi, "People want me to provide them with generalities, to spare them from having to make the personal decisions which are required of them." Buber was aware that the young *kibbutznikim* came to him with the hope that he would be their "rabbi," but he consistently refused to accept the pastoral mantle or serve as a theological oracle, insisting that he was at most a teacher. "Whoever expects of me a doctrine, something other than teaching, will invariably be disappointed."[21]

Although the kibbutz youth who turned to Buber for guidance were, indeed, often disappointed by his failure to provide more concrete instruction on how to face the imponderables of communal life, they found his writings on Judaism more inspiring and formed reading groups to study them. A journalist who joined one of the sessions organized by Patchi at his kibbutz, in which they read Buber's *Gog and Magog*, published a vivid description of their deliberations:

> A simple, wooden hut, guests sitting for many hours on hard wooden chairs. Only a few of those gathered had dealt many hours in their lives with spiritual matters. Most of them were enveloped with a certain, imperceptible smell of dealing with concrete, real things—the land to be ploughed; the cows to be milked. . . . I was astonished to see the extent to which this secular group transcended its normal categories of thought and agreed to the symbolic mixing together of the higher worlds and the lower ones. . . . The group in which I was sitting understood the meaning of the book [*Gog and Magog*] to the full and adapted it to their own quest, their own struggles. . . . They understood the full meaning of this struggle [portrayed in Buber's novel] between strong forces, at its base ideological, and this so-human a quest laden with passions of desire for power, jealousy, and religious zeal. Within all this they perceived the tiny voice of the human.[22]

Buber also enjoyed a measure of public recognition in Israel. In April 1953, he received the Israel Prize for the Humanities, in a ceremony presided over by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. In a brief address on behalf of the other recipients of that year's Israel Prize, Buber pointedly spoke (in oblique criticism of Ben-Gurion) about the relationship of the state to culture. There are, he noted, two principal understandings of this relationship; one is that culture is to be mobilized in the service of the state and its interests; the second is that the state must view culture not as an instrument to further its political agenda, but as an autonomous and independent dialogical partner.[23] In 1959, he was elected the first president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and the Humanities. (There had been only one objection to his appointment—which was widely speculated to have been by Scholem.) In December 1961, the city of Tel Aviv awarded him the Bialik Prize for his contribution to Jewish studies. Other prizes and honorary degrees in Israel and abroad followed.

There were also nominations that never came to fruition. In 1946, Hermann Hesse had recommended Buber to the Academy in Stockholm for the award Hesse himself had received three years earlier in 1946. In January 1959, Shimon Halkin, professor of modern Hebrew literature, on behalf of the senate of the Hebrew University, nominated Buber for a Nobel Prize in literature. In September 1961, Swedish diplomat and secretary general of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld was about to nominate Buber for the Nobel Prize when Hammarskjöld died in an airplane crash, en route to negotiate a cease-fire between contending parties in Katanga, Africa. Among his charred belongings, a draft of the Swedish translation of *I and Thou* was found. Although the Nobel Prize ultimately eluded Buber, he was especially gratified to receive the Erasmus Prize, which had been established in 1958 at the initiative of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to recognize individuals and institutions that have made seminal contributions to the spiritual and cultural life of Europe and humanity at large. It is one of Europe's most distinguished awards.

After the July 3, 1963, Erasmus Prize ceremony in Amsterdam, Buber vacationed in Switzerland. Upon his arrival at Hotel Sonnmatt, a sanatorium nestled in the Swiss Alps, overlooking Lake Lucerne, he was greeted by Naemah Beer-Hofmann. The youngest daughter of his late friend, the Austrian Jewish poet and playwright Richard Beer-Hofmann, Naemah was an American-trained physical therapist who had come to Jerusalem the previous summer in order to accompany a frail Buber to Sonnmatt. She had stayed in Jerusalem for over a month, visiting him daily, before traveling with him to Switzerland. During this period she, in her early fifties, and the eighty-four-year-old Buber developed a warm, mutually affectionate relationship. Rumors in scandalous tones circulated and eventually reached the Israeli press, but they were fed more by the imagination than genuine knowledge.[24] In the correspondence

between them, initiated by Naemah in September 1961, she allowed herself as a "family friend" to address Buber endearingly as "Mein Lieber" (my dear) but with the formal third-person pronouns "Sie" and "Ihnen"). It was only after her visit to Jerusalem in August 1962 that she and Buber addressed one another with the informal second-person pronouns "Du" and "Dir." Indicative of the depth of the relationship is that, from 1961 until his death in June 1965, Buber wrote her some sixty letters, and she a similar number to him. The correspondence, however, does not suggest anything romantic or erotically intimate. What Naemah seems to have provided Buber is a nurturing feminine, if not a maternal, presence, which he had lost with the passing of Paula.[25]

Naemah's visit to Buber in Jerusalem coincided with his preparations for an introduction to an edition of her father's collected writings. The tone and analytical thrust of the introduction may also reflect his experience of his relationship with Naemah. Buber identified the overarching theme of Beer-Hofmann's poetry, plays, and novels as an ongoing "struggle for the answer to death."[26] With his own death closing in on him, Buber identified Beer-Hofmann's ultimate answer to be "love—the gracious love of God for men and the active love of man for his fellow men, indeed, for all existing beings, but above all for those who are dependent upon him and are thus entrusted to him." This is, he said, "the central message" of Beer-Hofmann's final and most mature work, *Jacob's Dream*—that loving God and one's fellow creatures "signifies the ever renewed overcoming of death." One hears in this exhortation Rosenzweig's identification of a passage in the Song of Songs as the heart of biblical faith: "Love is strong as death" (2:8)—love does not conquer death, but it removes its sting by affirming the bond of mutual care and affection between human beings.[27]

Another woman with whom Buber bonded in his last years was the Austrian Jewish writer and psychotherapist Anna Maria

Jokl. In 1959, she first visited Buber in Jerusalem in order to express her gratitude for his Hasidic stories and their image of man, which had served to establish the foundations of her approach to psychotherapy. She had the impression that Buber, who had sequestered himself behind his big mahogany desk as if it were a "wall," was hardly listening. "I soon wanted to leave 'mission accomplished,' since he made it clear that he sought to shield himself from being run over by idolizing visitors from all the world." As Jokl was about to leave, however, she said something that piqued Buber's interest and immediately changed the tone of the conversation. "As if he were liberated from the isolation of a monument," he stood up and came from behind his desk, opened his arms and "pressed me against his heart and offered me his great friendship"—a friendship that eventually led to her decision to move from Berlin to Jerusalem (though sadly, she arrived shortly after Buber died).[28]

In their great appreciation of Buber, Anna Maria and Naemah were joined by Grete Schaeder. The widow of the esteemed Orientalist and Iranologist Hans Heinrich Schaeder, she wrote to Buber in 1961 to express her interest in coming to Jerusalem to consult with him regarding a monograph she had hoped to write about his philosophy. Perhaps to make amends for her husband's Nazi sympathies, she was eager to present to the German public a portrait of Buber's "Hebrew humanism."[29] Over the next four years, she would become a frequent visitor at Buber's home. A friendship blossomed between them, as attested to by the nearly 120 letters they exchanged. In October 1964, Buber handed Schaeder a poem in his study and left the room for a few minutes to allow her to read it alone. It was dedicated to her and entitled "The Fiddler":

> Here on the world's edge at this hour I have
> Wondrously settled my life.
> Behind me in the boundless circle

> The All is silent, only the fiddler fiddles.
> Dark one, already I stand in covenant with you,
> Ready to learn from your tones
> Wherein I became guilty without knowing it.
> Let me feel, let there be revealed
> To this hale soul each wound
> That I have incorrigibly inflicted and remained
> in illusion (*Schein*).
> Do not stop, holy player, before then![30]

Grete Schaeder recalled that upon reading this poem, she "felt only a wave of sadness rise up in me over the fact of how close [Buber] felt himself to death."[31] When Buber returned to his study, Grete said to him, "Your relation to death has changed." And then, "half reflecting, half asking," she said "illusion" (Schein). Buber merely nodded. She did not discuss the poem further with him, "out of shyness before the nearness of death that was expressed in it."[32] Schaeder understood Schein here in light of Buber's interpretation of Psalm 73, in which he read its "music of death" as revealing whether one has unknowingly committed acts that make one "guilty towards one's fellow men"—and is thus without ethical blemish only *im Schein*, in appearance.[33] But she concurred with Maurice Friedman that Schein also refers to Buber's distinction between "seeming" (Schein) and "being" (Sein)—two contrasting modes of interpersonal life.[34] One may project an image of how one would like others to perceive oneself. "Seeming" engenders mutual mistrust and "existential guilt"; in contrast, "being" is a mode of meeting others, a mode free of the obfuscations of Schein and thus one that allows for bonds of mutual trust.

While Buber's female friendships late in life did encourage him, as Anna Maria Jokl observed, to emerge from the "isolation of a monument," he was also aware that they came to him in the first place because of the image they had of him.[35] The friendships that unfolded, then, may have softened his ambiva-

lence about his celebrity status. This is suggested by an undated, unpublished poem, in which he muses:

> Fame is a hollow nut,
> It cracks whom it must crack!
> Nevertheless, once cracked, it creates
> For you at times much that is agreeable.[36]

Buber's international fame, however, did not soften his public image in Israel, even in his final years. His misgivings about the direction the Zionist project had taken remained undiminished. He continued to protest in the press and in correspondence what he regarded to be the persistent abuses of Palestinian rights and dignity. His concern for the ethical character of the State of Israel came to a head with the trial of Adolf Eichmann. One of the principal architects of the extermination of Jews in German-occupied Eastern Europe, Eichmann was captured in 1960 in Argentina by Israeli secret agents and brought to Jerusalem to stand trial for crimes against the Jewish people and humanity. At the conclusion of the eight-month trial, the court of three judges announced their verdict on December 13, 1961, sentencing Eichmann to death by hanging. In May 1962, a panel of five supreme court justices rejected the appeal of Eichmann's lawyer to stay the execution. On May 30, a petition to commute the death sentence, among whose signatories were Buber, Hugo Bergmann, the poet Leah Goldberg, and Gershom Scholem, was sent to then-president of Israel Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. He rejected the petition, and on the night of May 31, 1962, Eichmann was executed.

From the very beginning of the trial, Buber had questioned both its participants and its intent. Eichmann, he held, should be tried in an international court, for as victims of Eichmann's heinous crimes, the Jews should not cast themselves as judges, but rather as his accusers. When the Jerusalem district court, which had tried Eichmann, announced its verdict, Buber tele-

phoned Ben-Gurion and requested to speak to him urgently about the court's decision and its ethical and political consequences. The prime minister replied that since he was younger than Buber, he would come to his home. They spoke for two hours. Although he listened attentively and with a measure of sympathy to Buber, Ben-Gurion indicated that he did not have the prerogative to intervene in the court's decision; nor, undoubtedly, did he have the desire to do so. Buber related the gist of the conversation to Aubrey Hodes, a young Israeli who was among Buber's most frequent visitors.[37] Buber, an opponent of the death penalty on principle, told Hodes: "I remember [publicly objecting to it] in 1928 in Germany. And I cannot now agree to it because it would be my own people that would carry out the sentence in its own country. . . . It is more than a question of Eichmann and what I think of his horrible crimes. Anyone who thinks that I wish us to be lenient to Eichmann does not understand my basic position."[38]

If Eichmann is not to be executed, Hodes asked, what then should be his punishment? "Buber sighed. 'This is a very difficult. He should be sentenced to life in prison. But we must remember always he is a symbol of the Nazi Holocaust, and not an ordinary criminal.'" Shaking his head, Buber paused as if groping for a precise formulation of what he had in mind. He then continued, emphatically declaring: "He should be made to feel that the Jewish people was not [utterly] exterminated by the Nazis, and that they live on here in Israel. Perhaps he should be put to work on the land—on a kibbutz. Farming the soil of Israel. Seeing young people around him. And realizing every day that we have survived his plans for us. Would not this be the ultimate and most fitting punishment?"[39]

In interviews in the Israeli and foreign press, Buber's position was given wide coverage—and most often evoked scornful accusations that he lacked an understanding of the psychological need for retribution and Jewish pride.

Buber was disappointed that his opposition to the execution of Eichmann was, he felt, misconstrued, but he was not terribly troubled by the criticism itself, even when it was ad hominem. A self-conscious outsider in the context of pre- and post-1948 Zionism, he was by the end of his life inured to being branded unpatriotic. As Theodor Heuss had perceptively noted, Buber had always "been an inwardly independent person." A conversation Jokl had with him may have elicited an acknowledgment of the existential consequence of his independence of mind and, when he deemed appropriate, his voicing his dissent. Jokl recalled visiting Buber one summer at Hotel Sonnmatt (likely just after the execution of Eichmann, in June 1962), sitting on the terrace overlooking the majestic Alpine summit Jungfrau. Sipping espresso, Buber asked her what she, as a psychotherapist, believed is the source of angst, for "Freud says that angst stems from terrible childhood experiences. I do not believe so. I do not have angst and I had a terrible childhood." Anna was initially at a loss for how to reply, but suddenly blurted out, "I believe angst is *not to belong.*" Buber was silent, reflected, and repeated slowly "*not to belong*," and then said: "Yes—that may be—*not to belong.*"[40]

At the age of eighty-four, Buber had long reconciled himself not to belong, at least not to belong fully. Within the political culture of the Yishuv and later the State of Israel, it had been precisely his attention to the ambiguities of the Zionist project that had pushed him to the margins of society. Yet in his later years, his voice found increasing resonance (albeit still limited) among those, especially of the younger generation, who shared his concerns for the unfolding ethical character of the country. As he approached his eighty-fifth year, he was duly honored as a venerable forefather of the Zionist movement—even if the tributes occasionally had a note of ambivalence, such as the cable Ben-Gurion sent Buber on February 8, 1963, his birthday: "I honor and oppose you."

Other tributes were unequivocally gracious. At a banquet in Buber's honor, the Hebrew University announced the forthcoming reprint of a German pamphlet, with a Hebrew translation, that he had coauthored and published in 1902, calling for the establishment of Jewish university, preferably in Palestine.[41] The tribute that perhaps moved him most was a nocturnal serenade by some five hundred Jewish and Arab students of the Hebrew University. On the night of his eighty-fifth birthday, bearing flaming torches, they marched from a student cultural center in Jerusalem to Buber's home. Beckoning him to exit his home, a delegation of seven students climbed the stairs to the veranda where Buber stood and placed a garland of flowers around his neck. All those gathered before his house sang the Hebrew equivalents of "For he is a jolly good fellow!" and "Happy birthday, dear Martin." The president of the student association then made a short speech: "When we were born you were already a legend. We are only sorry that we were too late to be your students at the Hebrew University and that we did not have the honor, the pleasure, and the privilege of being taught by you." He concluded by conferring on Buber honorary membership in the student association.[42] As Buber held the membership card he had been given, he made a short speech thanking the students for the honor that they had bestowed upon him: "There was a Dutch professor [Johan Huizinga] who wrote a book about the *Homo ludens*—someone who enjoys playfulness as an expression of freedom." Buber then suggested that analogously one might recognize what he called "the naturally studying person"—someone for "whom learning and study are an expression of human freedom." Such a student is "someone who aspires to know truth, in order to build upon it a structure worthy for people to inhabit. If this is your aspiration, I am delighted that you have made me a partner in it, and by accepting me as a student in your association.[43]

In response to these appreciative words, the students

chanted the traditional Jewish birthday salutation, "Until a hundred and twenty!" Buber interjected to ask, "Don't you think that's a little too much? Well, perhaps we can reach a compromise." One of the students shouted a query, "Professor Buber, when you were young did you ever take part in a midnight serenade such as this?" With a twinkle in his eyes, he replied, "Yes, I did—in Germany, where this was often done for popular professors. But I only went along a few times. And for a very good reason: I didn't like most of my professors."[44]

Buber's spirits were lifted by this exuberant tribute, which concluded after midnight, long past his usual bedtime. His body, however, was in rapid decline. Already in April 1962, there had been troubling lapses of memory, which progressively worsened.[45] Finding it difficult to conduct his demanding correspondence, he became ever more dependent on his secretary Margot Cohn, who had worked for him since Paula's passing. Despite his poor health, his physicians agreed to allow him to spend that summer in Sonnmatt, presumably on the condition that someone would accompany him.[46] (This is when Naemah Beer-Hofmann entered the picture, since Buber's granddaughter Barbara, who usually accompanied him abroad, was traveling in Europe with her husband that summer.) In his last years, Buber would rarely leave his home, even for a brief walk as his doctors had recommended. He nonetheless sought to keep up his spirits, at least externally. As was his wont, he confined his deepest feelings to poetry. In January 1964, he penned a verse while contemplating the engraving by the German Renaissance master Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia*, which features an hourglass showing time running out. Entitled "Beside Me" (*Zuseiten mir*), the poem reads:

> Beside me sits melancholy
> (Thus once the master had seen her).
> She does not speak to me, she never whispers.

Only the hesitant stirrings of her breath
Carry to me, unto my innermost ear.
The lament of the spirit which—when then? How?—
Lost the power of the soul.[47]

For Buber the life of the soul, as Grete Schaeder explained in commenting on this poem, "was the power of relationship." Failing health and the strain of maintaining relationships—the "original spontaneity of the heart"—drew him to Dürer's hourglass.[48]

Time began to make its last run for Buber when on April 26, 1965, he fell as he undressed to go to bed, and yelled for help.[49] Barbara and her husband lifted him from the floor and summoned his personal physician. Upon examining Buber, Dr. Otto Strauss had an ambulance rush him to Hadassah Hospital, where they operated on him that night for a fractured right hip. He would stay in the hospital for nearly a month. Although he had long ago mastered Hebrew, he requested a German-speaking nurse. He was released from the hospital on May 23, but after three days at home he was hospitalized once again. When the patient next to him suddenly died, he insisted that he be taken back home. Although the fracture was healing satisfactorily, the fall had aggravated a chronic kidney inflammation, which quickly led to acute kidney failure and uremic poisoning.

While Buber battled to hold on to life, the mayor of Jerusalem, Mordechai Ish-Shalom, a member of the Labor Party, was in the midst of a struggle to have the city council grant Buber honorary citizenship of the city. The right-wing members of the council adamantly refused, citing Buber's "reprehensible" opposition to the execution of Eichmann, whereas the ultra-orthodox councilors argued that Buber's heretical view of Judaism disqualified him for this honor. By a slight majority, the proposal passed, whereupon the mayor, accompanied by Ag-

non, rushed to inform Buber that he had been named "Yakir Yerushalayim" (worthy citizen of Jerusalem). Sadly, Buber was at that moment too weak to acknowledge the award. He managed soon after, however, to request that a substantial sum allocated in his last will and testament for scholarships for Arab students at the Hebrew University be doubled.

Life steadily slipped from him. He passed away on Sunday, June 13, 1965, at 10:45 in the morning. When fifteen-year-old Tamar came rushing home from school to see her beloved great-grandfather, she found him dead, with Agnon sitting at his side. The Hebrew novelist was soon to be joined by another of Buber's oldest friends, Zalman Shazar, president of the State of Israel. Despite his fears, the "power of the soul," of which he wrote in "Beside Me," was not lost with the approach of death. As he had mused in a meditation on the existential significance of scholarship: "I knew nothing of books when I came forth from the womb of my mother, and I shall die without books, with the hand of another human hand in my own."[50]

After paying a condolence call to Buber's family, Ben-Gurion said on Israeli national radio that Buber's passing was "a great loss to the country's spiritual life." Prime Minister Levi Eshkol asked the members of his cabinet, which met that Sunday for its weekly meeting, to stand in memory of Buber. Afterward he delivered a brief eulogy and sent a message to Buber's family expressing the government's sympathy at their loss.

In accordance with Jewish custom, the funeral took place the next day. Before the burial, Buber's body, wrapped in a tallit, a black and white prayer shawl, was brought to the Hebrew University campus for a funeral service. Classes were cancelled in order to allow students to attend the ceremony, at which Prime Minister Eshkol was the first to speak. He eulogized Buber "as the most distinguished representative of the Jewish people's reborn spirit. Today the people of Israel mourn a light and a teacher, a man of intellect and action, who revealed the

soul of Judaism with a new philosophical daring. Humanity as a whole mourns together with us one of the spiritual giants of this century." The prime minister was followed by Buber's friend of sixty-three years, Professor Hugo Bergmann. Turning to the students, he beseeched them to learn from Buber that Judaism does not mean only "performing existing, static commandments. It means struggling for Judaism, fighting for it, each one of us in his own life. Buber knew how to fight for Judaism and even how to be unpopular. But he was able to defend his kind of Judaism courageously, both inside Jewry and outside it."

Bergmann referred to two instances in which Buber felt the need to go it alone. The first was when "we, his friends" were troubled by his decision to go to Frankfurt in 1953 to accept the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. "We were not sure the time had come to be in Germany again. Buber went. But he did not touch the money. He donated it to [organizations] working for peace with the Arabs." Bergmann also lauded, in retrospect, Buber's readiness to be virtually alone in his opposition to Eichmann's execution, "the stand of a great teacher." Addressing the body of his deceased mentor and friend, a tearful Bergmann declared: "I take my leave from you. You were a blessing to us. May your memory be a blessing to us, and a guide to the coming generations. You have done your share. We shall try to follow in your footsteps and to realize the meaning of Judaism, each of us according to his ability. We thank you, dear Martin Buber."