

# ***Wissenschaft* and Jewish Thought: Ismar Elbogen's Early Influence on Franz Rosenzweig**

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## **Abstract**

Ismar Elbogen (1874–1943) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) were both pioneers in Jewish thought and culture. Elbogen authored the most comprehensive study on Jewish liturgy, while Rosenzweig's magnum opus *The Star of Redemption* has emerged as one of the twentieth century's most innovative and elusive works of Jewish thought. Even though Rosenzweig is not known for his work on or appreciation for the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, this article will explore this overlooked aspect of his thought by exploring the influence of Ismar Elbogen. Commentaries to Rosenzweig's views on prayer are numerous, yet none mention the work of Elbogen. This is a problem. By comparing Elbogen's work on Jewish liturgy with Rosenzweig's writings on prayer in the *Star*, we are able to demonstrate how methods seminal to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* helped articulate several of Rosenzweig's most innovative contributions to Jewish thought.

## **1. Introduction**

“There is only one truth. No honest man can pray to a God whose existence he denies as a scientist.” (Franz Rosenzweig)<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy, dated November 8, 1918, Franz Rosenzweig lamented Germany's defeat in World War I by evoking a verse from the Book of Jeremiah (31.5): “one again plants the vineyards of the Samarian mountains.”<sup>2</sup> To express his profound disillusionment with political

<sup>1</sup> Franz Rosenzweig: A Note, in: Nahum Glatzer (ed.), Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and Thought, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Indianapolis 1998, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Inken Rühle / Reinhold Mayer (eds.): Franz Rosenzweig Die „Gritli“- Briefe: Briefe an Margarit Rosenstock-Huessy, Tübingen 2002, pp. 169–70.

liberalism and the Enlightenment's confidence in reason, politics, history, and humanism, Rosenzweig adopted the rabbinic practice of employing midrashic aphorisms or quotations from the Hebrew Bible. Less than a year later, in a letter penned to his cousin Hans Ehrenberg, Rosenzweig argued that this particular rabbinic practice is essential to understanding the power of language in the Jewish liturgy. He suggested that while a person communicates to God through the language of Jewish liturgy, God too responds through a concatenation of biblical quotations. He writes, "besides the explicit relation with the Old Testament (manifested by citation), there is a secret relation to Jewish Liturgy, which commands partly unfolding the categories."<sup>3</sup> Rosenzweig argued that God's response, God's word, is ascertained through a study of the biblical text. God speaks by quoting Himself. Furthermore, a person's response is also comprised of quotations – through Jewish liturgy – which, although at times remarkably intimate, is an expression of the overall communal religious experience. Jewish liturgy, as quotations of God's word in the Hebrew Bible, is for Rosenzweig, as one commentator wrote, a "citation of a citation" that sends "back to God as He whose true essence is absent from the text that speaks of him or that cites his words."<sup>4</sup> The community evokes the divine by quoting the divine word. The task of liturgy then, for Rosenzweig, was to grasp not only the dialogical nature of this divine-human relationship, but also to discern a Jewish dialogical hermeneutic, which is found precisely in the process of quotation.

Shortly after the publication of the *Star of Redemption*, in a lecture series from January to March 1921 entitled "An Introduction to Jewish Thought," Rosenzweig started to write about the role quotations play in modern Jewish life. "Everyone should be his own poet, be his own musician (singing *Niggunim*)," he wrote. "He should not let this source flowing from his breast, which is already sparse, spill. At least he should—quote quite freely; the words of the Great One should be good enough to throw them as firewood into his own little fire."<sup>5</sup> Like many during his lifetime, Rosenzweig sought life in the words of others. Yet "quoting freely" clearly belonged to a Jewish poetic and liturgical

<sup>3</sup> Edith Rosenzweig (ed.): Franz Rosenzweig, Briefe, Berlin 1935, p.367. Letter 275 to Hans Ehrenberg 7.7.1919.

<sup>4</sup> Stéphane Mosès: System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig, Detroit 1992, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Rosenzweig: Anleitung zum Jüdischen Denken, in: Reinhold Mayer / Annemarie Mayer (eds.), Franz Rosenzweig. Der Mensch und sein Werk, Bd. III.2, Dordrecht 1984, p. 613.

imagination, which became even more evident in the “Afterword” of his translation of the work of the medieval Jewish poet Jehudah Halevi, in which he argued that *Musivstil*—a complex intertextual style found in medieval poetry, in which quotations from the Hebrew Bible form a mosaic throughout the poem—characterizes a Jewish liturgical world steeped in language.<sup>6</sup>

Until recently, little work had been done on Rosenzweig’s use of quotations.<sup>7</sup> Commentaries to Rosenzweig’s views on liturgy, however, are numerous,<sup>8</sup> though none of them mentions “Weimar’s premier Jewish historian,”<sup>9</sup> Ismar Elbogen, who in 1913 published the “most exhaustive compendium of factual information about the Jewish liturgy,” *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*.<sup>10</sup> This is a problem. Many of the biblical and rabbinic texts Rosenzweig used in his discussions of Jewish prayer in the *Star of Redemption* (1921) appear in Elbogen’s seminal work on Jewish liturgy, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst*. Rosenzweig was not only familiar with this text, but also,

<sup>6</sup> See Barbara Ellen Galli (ed.): Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi. Translating, Translations, and Translators, Montreal, 1995; Mara Benjamin: Rosenzweig’s Bible. Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>7</sup> See Irene Kajon: Some Literary Sources in The Star of Redemption. Vita Nova, Hamlet, and Don Quixote, in: Wolfdietrich Schmieid-Kowarzik (ed.): Franz Rosenzweigs ‘neues Denken’. Internationaler Kongreß Kassel 2004, Band II, Freiburg/München 2006, pp. 431–445; Jacob Turner: A Reading of Psalm 90 in Light of Franz Rosenzweig’s Notion of Time, in: Martin Brasser (ed.), Rosenzweig als Leser, Tübingen 2004, p. 500; Luc Anckaert: The Literary Genres and Alterity. Plato and Rosenzweig, in: Wolfdietrich Schmieid-Kowarzik (ed.), Franz Rosenzweigs ‘neues Denken’. Internationaler Kongreß Kassel 2004, Band II, Freiburg/München 2006, pp. 470–486; Nobert Samuelson: Exploring Rosenzweig’s Sources – The God of Maimonides, in: Rosenzweig Yearbook 1. Rosenzweig Today, Freiburg/München 2006, pp. 155–165; Benjamin E. Sax: Das geflügelte Wort. Franz Rosenzweig as Post-Goethekenner, in: Naharaim 5 (2011), pp. 115–148; Mara Benjamin: Rosenzweig’s Bible. Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See Martin D. Yaffe: Liturgy and Ethics. Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig on the Day of Atonement,” in: Journal of Religious Ethics 7 (1979) 2, pp. 215–228; Moshe Schwarz: The Idea of Prayer in Franz Rosenzweig’s “Star of Redemption,” in: Gabriel H. Cohn/Harold Fisch (eds.), Prayer and Judaism: Continuity and Change, Northvale, New Jersey 1996, pp. 163–178; Almut Sh. Bruckstein: Zur Phänomenologie der jüdischen Liturgie in Rosenzweigs Stern der Erlösung. Ein Versuch über das Schweigen mit Husserl, in: Martin Brasser (ed.), Rosenzweig als Leser. Kontextuelle Kommentare zum “Stern der Erlösung,” Tübingen 1994, pp. 357–368; Norbert Samuelson: Rosenzweig’s Epistemology. A Critique of the Way of Drawing Lines between Philosophy, Theology, and Liturgy, in: Wolfdietrich Schmid-Kowarzik (ed.), Franz Rosenzweigs ‘neues Denken’, Band 1, Freiburg/München 2006, pp. 90–110; Steven Kepnes, Jewish Liturgical Reasoning, Oxford 2007, pp. 79–130.

<sup>9</sup> Ismar Schorsch, From Text to Context. The Turn to History in Modern Judaism, Hanover, NH 1994, pp. 166.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond P. Scheindlin: Foreword, in: Jewish Liturgy. A Comprehensive History by Ismar Elbogen, Philadelphia 1993, pp. xi.

as we will learn below, admired Elbogen's talent as a teacher and scholar. This is important. Elbogen's history of Jewish liturgy was not only widely understood as a paragon of scholarship, but also the critical importance of Elbogen's life's work, as Michael Meyer argued, was found "in his conceptualization of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*."<sup>11</sup>

In this article, I will argue that to better understand how Rosenzweig employed his midrashic method of quotation to provide a living commentary through liturgy and prayer, it would be helpful to put these two texts – Rosenzweig's *Star* and Elbogen's *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* – in conversation with one another. When we compare Elbogen's rabbinic and biblical sources in his *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* to those found in Nahum Glatzer's list at the end of the second edition of the *Star*,<sup>12</sup> we immediately discover similar sources, especially in Elbogen's constructions of the *Amidah* and *Shema* prayers. A hyperbolic response might be that the structure of the *Star* could be based on Elbogen's research on the *Shema*, since when dissected, the *Shema* prayer bares an uncanny resemblance to the structure of the *Star*: there are three categories of prayer that evoke creation (*ha-me'orot*), revelation (*ve'ahavta*) and redemption (*ga'al Yisra'el*). The structure also corresponds to the Sabbath: creation on Sabbath evening, revelation in the morning, and redemption at *Minchah* (*mi ke-'amkha Yisra'el*). By comparing the research of Elbogen on Jewish liturgy to Rosenzweig's use of it in the *Star*, we can better understand parts of the third book of the *Star* and how Rosenzweig uses the texts quoted in Elbogen's work. In so doing, we learn how the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* played a critical role in the development of Rosenzweig's philosophical methodology.

This article is divided into four sections. In the first section, I will briefly highlight Rosenzweig's thoughts on Elbogen and his work. In the second, I will lay out how Elbogen's work on Jewish liturgy played a role in how Rosenzweig developed his own views on liturgy and prayer. The third section is an analysis of these connections: Here I will argue that examining Elbogen's

<sup>11</sup> Michael A. Meyer: *Without Wissenschaft There is no Judaism. The Life and Thought of Ismar Elbogen*, Ramat-Gan 2004, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Rosenzweig: *The Star of Redemption*, William W. Hallo (trans.), Notre Dame, 1985, pp. 427–436. Glatzer wrote in the "Foreword" to Hallo's translation that "Rosenzweig [...] shortly before his death, asked [Glatzer] to prepare an extensive list of references to his Judaic sources to be included in the second edition of the work." p. ix.

influence on Rosenzweig can help us provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the place of prayer within Rosenzweig's philosophical system. The final section is the conclusion.

## 2. Rosenzweig's Experience with Elbogen

Shortly after his acclaimed conversion experience in September 1913, Rosenzweig studied Moses Maimonides' (1135/38–1204) *Guide for the Perplexed* with Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* during the winter and spring of 1914. During this time, he also read Ismar Elbogen. Throughout his diaries and letters, Rosenzweig discussed his studies of Jewish texts and concepts. In a letter to his parents from September 10, 1914, Rosenzweig first mentioned his experience with Rashi's commentary to the *Shema* prayer.<sup>13</sup> On February 15, 1915, he first mentioned Ismar Elbogen as the "Vorsänger" (precentor) in his *Geschichte des jüdischen Gottesdienstes*.<sup>14</sup> Three years later, in a letter to his mother, Rosenzweig commented how much he enjoyed a lecture by Elbogen presented in the *Brannsche Zeitschrift*, where "everything was correct."<sup>15</sup> Rosenzweig's portrayal of Elbogen was hardly unique. Elbogen was a scholar of immense erudition.<sup>16</sup> Michael Meyer has argued that: "Indeed, no scholar was more central to the development of Jewish studies in Germany in the early twentieth century than Ismar Elbogen."<sup>17</sup> As the most seminal and influential member of the faculty at the *Hochschule*, Elbogen was regarded as a master pedagogue.<sup>18</sup> Through the course of his thirty-five-year tenure there, students always remarked on his capacity to explain extremely difficult or seemingly opaque texts in ways that appealed to each student's interest or ability. He was well known for his wit, humor, and occasional sarcasm. Elbogen was able to communicate to a variety of Jewish

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Rosenzweig/Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann (eds.), Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, Band I, Haag 1979, p. 175.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Bd. I, p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Bd. II, p. 609.

<sup>16</sup> See Alexander Marx: Ismar Elbogen. An Appreciation, in: Ismar Elbogen, *A Century of Jewish Life*, Philadelphia 1944, pp. xi–xx; Regi Elbogen: Ismar Elbogen 1874–1943. A Bibliography, in: *Historia Judaica* 8 (1946), pp. 69–94; Erwin I. J. Rosenthal: Ismar Elbogen and the New Jewish Learning, in: *Judaism, Philosophy, Culture*, Richmond, Surrey, 2001, pp. 327–352; Meyer, *Without Wissenschaft There is no Judaism*.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, *Without Wissenschaft There Is No Judaism*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

movements, most likely, according to Meyer, due to his “middle of the road position on Zionism.”<sup>19</sup> Similar to the prevalent Orthodox attitude towards the movement, Elbogen was wary of the Zionist’s secular interpretation of Jewish history and identity. He also resented how the Zionists seemed to ignore the genuine cultural success of German Jews. These efforts to delegitimize German Jewish culture were, in Elbogen’s view, historically untenable. However, like many Eastern European Zionists, Elbogen appreciated the cultural benefit of Hebrew language.<sup>20</sup> Like the early Zionists, Elbogen was also anxious about the peripheral status of *Wissenschaft* in contemporary culture. Because it was regarded as part of the larger ambit of assimilation, and to no small degree, Jewish emancipation, *Wissenschaft* was limited to a German-speaking world and thus only accessible to a limited number of Jews. This number would grow as soon as *Wissenschaft* appeared in other Jewish languages and, Elbogen argued, as a result the cultural benefits would abound. By producing scholarly works in Hebrew, yet with an explicitly German *modus operandi*, Elbogen sought to associate philological scholarly efforts with a living, breathing Judaism.<sup>21</sup> The cultural and intellectual malaise characterizing German-Jewish society was, according to Elbogen, not a result of a devitalized Jewish tradition. Similar to the position of nineteenth-century German-Jewish rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Elbogen maintained Jews, not Judaism as a whole, needed to be reformed.

By focusing on the theme of Jewish education, Rosenzweig, in his open letter to Hermann Cohen “Zeit ists” (1917), and in contrast to many of his contemporaries, portrayed the development of Judaism not as the verisimilitude of a living, apposite tradition that draws on its historical texts in order to provide contemporary religious meaning, but rather as the transmission of a living cross-generational reality.<sup>22</sup> Elbogen embraced Rosenzweig’s letter to Cohen, adding that Jews needed academicians before establishing an actual academy. By interweaving the relationship between texts, traditions, and customs, in this essay Rosenzweig stressed that each generation discovers its

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Nahum Glatzer: Yitzhak ben Moshe Elbogen the Historian, in: American Jewish Yearbook (5705), New York 1945, pp. 435–436 [Hebrew].

<sup>21</sup> Elbogen, Ein Jahrhundert Wissenschaft des Judentums, Berlin 1922, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Franz Rosenzweig: Zeit ists. Gedanken über das jüdische Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks, in: Zweistromland, Berlin, 2001, pp. 10–11.

own voice by incorporating said relationship into their lives. For him, only by embracing the idea that within the Jewish sources exists an epistemology that informs the reader's experience, and only through dialogue with the sources can a sustainable Judaism be built. Jews learn how to build this Judaism through an understanding of the sources in Jewish liturgy: they are "the secret relation" to engaging the divine word.

### 3. The Influence of Elbogen's *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* on Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*

In his comprehensive history of Jewish liturgy, Elbogen cited hundreds of rabbinic and biblical sources. In this work, Elbogen, like Rosenzweig in the *Star*, argued that the petition is the most important aspect of Jewish prayer. He also contended that a salient feature of Jewish liturgical poetry is its ability simultaneously to employ and reinterpret quotes from the Hebrew Bible. During the period of the *Piyyutim*, there was, according to Elbogen, "no denying a certain connection between the flourishing of *masoretic* studies and the spread of poetry, for a revival of poetry would presuppose the study of the Bible and preoccupation with the Hebrew language."<sup>23</sup> The poets, during this and subsequent periods, had three different approaches to how they employed biblical quotations in their poetry: (1) they simply quoted the biblical text next to the poem but did not incorporate it into the poem itself; (2) they used biblical quotes as ornaments; and (3) they incorporated the quotes into their poetry.<sup>24</sup> For instance, in regard to the first usage, biblical quotes are placed next to the poem and are incorporated into the poem through adjoining words such as *Kakatuv* ("as it is written" [in the Bible]) or *Vene'emar* ("as it is [also] said"). For Elbogen, a biblical quote placed next to the poem determined its meaning. This works differently in the second and third cases, where quotes from the Hebrew Bible determine the poet's hermeneutical innovation rather than his knowledge of the actual biblical texts themselves. Only well-versed members of the liturgical community would discover these

<sup>23</sup> Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 239.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237–270.

innovations and gain a deeper appreciation of the poetry.<sup>25</sup> They would also be more equipped to employ God's word into their own speech and thus to renew God's word through a poet's recreation of it during the liturgy.<sup>26</sup>

We learn in Elbogen's work that the Hebrew Bible in rabbinic literature played a significant role in influencing the creation and innovation of Jewish liturgy.<sup>27</sup> The range of expression in the historical development of Jewish liturgy extended from the actual recitation of biblical passages – for example the public readings of the *Megillah* and the Torah, as well as those in the *Hallel*, *Amidah*, and *Shema* – to prayers that imitated biblical grammar and style. A clear example of the latter is found in the personal prayer of R. Alexandri in *Berakhot* 17a. Here the prayer was written in rabbinic Hebrew without any quotations from the biblical text. Yet biblical forms appeared within the grammar. Even though knowledge of such a reference was limited to a scholar like Elbogen, Rosenzweig quoted this passage in the conclusion of book two of the *Star* – the transition from theology to liturgy, which we will examine in the next section.<sup>28</sup>

Elbogen's *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* (1913) was a work of *Wissenschaft* in relation to the development of Jewish liturgy. Yet, despite its plethora of quotations and references attesting to this colossal mind, the book was not merely a work of pure *Wissenschaft*. The accuracy of inane historical references was a Lilliputian task when compared to the existential and spiritual needs of a generation of German Jews. As a microcosm of challenges confronting the future of Judaism and Jewish religiosity, the fate of liturgy for Elbogen actually represented the fate of Judaism. Liturgy was not only an existential matter, but it

<sup>25</sup> See Joel L. Kraemer: Maimonides. The Life and Work of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds, New York 2008, pp. 50–53; Jakob J. Petuchowski: Theology and Poetry. Studies in Medieval Piyyut, London 1978, pp. 20–30; Raymond P. Scheindlin: The Gazelle. Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul, Oxford 1991, pp. 3–30; Raphael Lowe: Ibn Gabirol, London 1989, pp. 78–104.

<sup>26</sup> As we will learn in the third section of this article, Rosenzweig made a similar point. See also Sax, Das geflügelte Wort.

<sup>27</sup> Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, pp. 4–10.

<sup>28</sup> See Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 253. It is also worthwhile comparing this section of the *Star* to Elbogen's passage, in his Jewish Liturgy, constructing the history of the *Shema* prayer. Elbogen wrote: "The beginning and the end, twelve words in all, are quoted in B. Ber. 11b and 12a; and of what follows, the words 'He who renews every day the act of creation,' occur in B Hag 12b, though not in connection with prayer. Parallel to the opening of the benediction is the eulogy, which is prefaced by the verse "Who made the great lights" (Psalm 136:7)." Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, pp. 16–17.



was also an urgent one. The ability to conform an ancient liturgy to modern sensibilities while at the same time preserving and authenticating seemingly antiquated customs was therefore essential to the survival of Judaism.

In this work, Elbogen sought to highlight the bond between poetry and prayer.<sup>29</sup> In so doing, he also sought to reignite an interest in prayer. While Elbogen was aware of the inability of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to communicate to the contemporary generation of German Jews, he also understood Orthodox Jews' refusal to recognize the immanent spiritual crisis facing the future of Judaism as an indication of what Buber would call a "spiritual Lethargy."<sup>30</sup> For Elbogen, the ancient Jewish liturgy provided Jews with the opportunity to glimpse the mere, simple truths of the tradition. These truths could be only renewed through *Wissenschaft*. He maintained that historical knowledge of the development of Jewish liturgy would afford German Jews in general, but Reform Jews in particular, the capacity to renew the tradition from within. *Wissenschaft*, Elbogen argued, sought to legitimate renewal and change within the tradition. For example, in his historical analysis of *Berakhot* 9b, Elbogen broached the topic of "das Gebet des Einzelnen" [individual prayer] in order to highlight this ancient proclivity toward renewal.<sup>31</sup> By stressing the priority of individual prayer in Judaism, Elbogen emphasized the inherent conflict of Jewish communal prayer. He argued that authentic prayer is personal, yet an "authentic religion" [*echte Religion*] such as Judaism was unable to forsake the communal aspect of prayer, since this aspect characterized the essence of Jewish teachings and religious life. In order to

<sup>29</sup> Elbogen's efforts in some capacity drew upon methods of his teacher Israel Lewy, but he also drew from Leopold Zunz's previous work on liturgy. Even though Zunz certainly benefited from previous scholarship on Jewish liturgy, most would agree, as Elbogen did, that Zunz founded the critical study of this topic. Subsequent scholars were and even today are unquestionably indebted to Zunz's efforts. He examined the myriad ways historically that Jews redressed basic liturgical language as well as rites and customs in the synagogue service. He even ascertained how Talmud-Torah emerged as one of the salient features of worship.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr: *Wissenschaft des Judentums* at the Fin-de-siècle, in: Michael Graetz / Aram Mattiel (eds.), *Krisenwahrnehmungen im Fin-de-siècle. Jüdische und Katholische Bildungseliten in Deutschland und der Schweiz*, Zürich 1997, p. 69. Mendes-Flohr wrote: "There was the feeling that somehow *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had thrust Jewish self-understanding into the grips of a deadening historicism. Already since the early 1890s, there were increasingly voices that complained that the academic study of Judaism had become excessively specialized, scholastic, and removed from Judaism as a living faith – and irrelevant to the Jewish community."

<sup>31</sup> Ismar Elbogen: *Studien zur Geschichte des jüdischen Gottesdienstes*, Berlin 1907, pp. 40–41.

maintain a “living piety” [*lebendige Frömmigkeit*], the vocation of any authentic religion is to reconcile the existential needs of the supplicant with the conventional tendencies of communal prayer. Only because contemporary Christian theologians portrayed the Judaism described in the New Testament as heteronomous did the individual aspect of prayer in Judaism become disregarded. Striking a polemical tone, Elbogen argued that, in contrast to what these theologians espoused, Judaism was the first religion to divorce itself entirely from the sacrificial cult and the only religion that merits the distinction of the “Gottesdienst des Herzens” [“the service of the heart”].<sup>32</sup> He later expounded on this position in his *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* where he argued that this service of the heart,

“freed itself of all external paraphernalia, such as worship sites endowed with special sanctity, priests, and other incidentals, and became a completely spiritual service of God. Because its performance required no more than the will of a relatively small community, it was able to spread easily throughout the world. It was also the first public liturgy to occur with great regularity, being held not only on Sabbaths and festivals, but in every day of the year, thus bestowing some of its sanctity upon all of life. This effect was all the more enduring in that the daily morning and evening services, originally the practice of the community, soon became the customary practice of individuals, even when they were not with their community.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Elbogen, only the Jewish tradition resolved the liturgical predicament. Elbogen stressed that Judaism affords individuals the distinct option to offer their own personal petitions at the conclusion of the communal religious service. In fact, in his essay, “Die messianische Idee in den alten jüdische Gebeten” in the *Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens Siebzigstem Geburtstag*, Elbogen provided several examples, while simultaneously demonstrating how the prayers of ancient Israel deftly interweaved the general and universal prophetic calling for the redeemed future of humanity with the parochial and more particularistic promise of the redemption of Israel and a place in the kingdom of God.<sup>34</sup> Balancing the individual and communalistic aspects

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>34</sup> Ismar Elbogen: Die messianische Idee in den alten jüdische Gebeten, in: *Judaica: Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens Siebzigstem Geburtstag*, Berlin 1912, pp. 669–680.

of prayer is not only animated by a prophetic impulse, but also discloses the ecumenical hope for redemption of all people.

In sum, Elbogen's research disclosed an ancient style of quotation in Jewish liturgy that was not only innovative, but also critical to understanding how the Hebrew Bible played a role in Jewish religious life. Elbogen meticulously analyzed the role of biblical language in relation to the crafting of liturgical poetry. The intimacy involved in reading this poetry, whether communally or individually, leads the supplicant, according to him, toward an encounter with something ineffable. Judaism for him, as we just learned, is unique in this aspect. It is here where we find an important influence on Rosenzweig's views of Jewish prayer. Firstly, Elbogen's balance between the scholarly – bound by a commitment to *Wissenschaft* – and the popular – bound by the commitment toward a future for Judaism – played a crucial role in Rosenzweig's philosophy of translation and its relationship to his liturgical reasoning.<sup>35</sup> Elbogen's work is also helpful in discerning how Rosenzweig argued that communal worship engenders a redeemed world. Secondly, Elbogen's work puts readers in a better position to grasp how the petition in prayer – including thanksgiving prayers and poetic praise – was not only the most salient form, but also why Rosenzweig argues that the *leitmotif* of all petitions is temptation.<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Elbogen's work on how Jewish poets quoted biblical texts stylistically influenced Rosenzweig's early relationship to biblical texts and how they functioned pedagogically and philosophically in distinguishing a Jewish worldview from others. Each case will be analyzed below.

<sup>35</sup> Elbogen was not alone when he argued that the principles of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* could determine Jewish identity, especially in Weimar Germany. For example, in 1901, a then young Martin Buber published a short essay entitled "Jüdische Wissenschaft" where he emphasized that the importance of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* lay entirely in its existential task. The goal is to ameliorate the lot of the Jewish people first by unpacking the development of Jewish Civilization. See Martin Buber: *Jüdische Wissenschaft*, in: *Die Jüdische Bewegung. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Ansprachen*, Berlin 1916, p. 50.

<sup>36</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, pp. 265–267. Compare with Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 23: "The function filled by the second benediction [of the Shema], 'With great love,' which accordingly was called 'The Benediction of Torah,' [Revelation] containing as it does thanksgiving for the revelation [and the giving of the Torah and the commandments]. That originally this was the only benediction before the biblical passages is attested by the liturgy of the priests, reported in M. Tam 5:1–'One Blessing' (compare B. Ber. 11b). 'True and Certain,' in which every community in its time affirms its acceptance of the ancient revelation, served as a conclusion to the expression of faith. After the solemn declaration of God's unity was joined to the morning service, and expression of gratitude for the physical light and for the continual daily renewal of nature was added; appropriately, it took the first place."

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 From Scholarship on Liturgy, to Philosophy, and to the Future of Judaism

In the first case, Elbogen argued that the goal of translation should satisfy both the layperson and the scholar. This is especially important in the translation of liturgy and of poetry.<sup>37</sup> It is also important to highlighting in history the innovative character of Jewish tradition. The urgency to balance the needs of many readers in works of translation can be found in Elbogen's scholarly work on Jewish liturgy. For him, this project met a similar need in the community. The work functioned pedagogically by illuminating the historical context of Jewish prayer. For example, he traced the numerous sources and styles of liturgical language, to demonstrate not only how Jewish liturgy was steeped in biblical terminology, but also how remnants from Temple practices and even some sectarian tendencies endured. He argued that a sanctioned Jewish liturgy emerged in the Talmudic and post-Talmudic periods. Elbogen's work provided a theological role in the Jewish community as well. Not unlike other scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Elbogen was wary of mysticism and other recondite forms of devotion. Yet even though he sympathized with the need for it, Elbogen still resisted reform. Elbogen was, for example, clearly uncomfortable with the gravity of the "Germanic rite (Ashkenaz in the broad sense)"<sup>38</sup> and seemed to neglect the aspects of its theology and Halakhah. In fact, throughout his work, Elbogen investigated the historical development of the cardinal Jewish prayers, but circumvented any of the textual, linguistic, and literary aspects of the minor ones. Even though Elbogen acceded to the reality of more than one "*Ur-type*," scholars today believe that he exaggerated and possibly oversimplified the tendency in the Talmud towards a more normative and fixed authorized liturgy.<sup>39</sup>

The reason for this tendency, Elbogen argued, is that there existed a tension between revealed scripture and fixed liturgy. In the Hebrew Bible, God's

<sup>37</sup> Rosenzweig also took this responsibility seriously. See Galli, Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi, pp. 344–359.

<sup>38</sup> Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> See Hebrew Translation of Elbogen's *Der Jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Yehosha Amir/Joseph Heinemann (trans. and eds.), Tel Aviv 1972. Heinemann is especially wary of Elbogen's assertion that Jewish prayer remained inactive between the years 600 CE and 1800 CE.

word was usually designated to the whole of humanity; however, prayer was the moment in which individuals speak personally to their God. In fact, there are only a few examples in the Hebrew Bible where the protagonist is able to transpose the dialogue with the divine and petition it. In his section on the *Amidah* in his *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* Elbogen provided a variety of examples from the Talmud, Midrash, and rabbinic liturgy that clarify this point.<sup>40</sup> For example, Nehemiah 9:32 states: “And now, our God, great, mighty, and awesome God, who stays faithful to His covenant, do not treat lightly all the suffering that has overtaken us—our kings, our officers, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all Your people—from the time of the Assyrian kings to this day.” These epithets for God in the prophet’s prayer are repeated several times a day in the introduction section to the *Amidah*.<sup>41</sup> In an effort to delimit the freedom of individual, personal affirmation in prayer, R. Hanina castigated the deeply impassioned recitation of the *shaliah tsibbur* who, in fact, augmented the established number of epithets for God: “O God, the great, mighty, awful, majestic, powerful, terrible, strong, fearless, sure and honored.” He goes on to complain that, “you have no right to add to the sages’ formulation of the blessings [Ber 33a].” While representative of the *amoraic* restriction on any innovative or creative amendments to liturgical custom, R. Hanina’s position, according to Elbogen, was short-lived. In fact, Elbogen argued that the post-*amoraic* period witnessed a proliferation of liturgical innovation and creativity. Rosenzweig, in fact, quoted the same passage from *Berakhot* in the introduction to the third book of the *Star* – “everything is in God’s hands” – to offer his own Midrash on prayer.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, pp. 24–36.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, pp. 266–67: “Thus man must know that he is tempted from time to time for the sake of his freedom. He must learn to believe in his freedom. He must believe that his freedom, limited though it may be everywhere else, is limitless vis-à-vis God. The very commandments of God, ‘graven on stone tablets,’ must be for him, as in the untranslatable rabbinic play on words, ‘freedom on tablets.’ Everything, it says in the same source, everything is in God’s hands except for one thing: the fear of God. And how can this freedom show itself more audaciously than in the certainty of being able to tempt God? In prayer, then, the possibilities of temptation really do converge from both sides, from god’s side as well as man’s. Prayer is strung between these two possibilities; while fearing God’s temptation, it nevertheless knows itself capable of itself tempting God.” Rosenzweig juxtaposes his interpretation of prayer with the Jewish blessing that concludes the public Torah reading. Rosenzweig interprets “in our midst” as emerging from the rays of the eternal consuming fire, which signifies and represents a chain of tradition. The eternal life, for him, characterizes the unification of past, present, and

Rosenzweig advocated for a Jewish world assembled by language as opposed to orthopraxy, which calls for a textually centered Jewish identity. In the *Star* and throughout his post-*Star* writings, Rosenzweig imagined a Judaism experienced through language and study. The Jewish liturgy as an expression of quotations of the Hebrew Bible was evidence that Jews transformed and translated the words of the Hebrew Bible into the language for contemporary Jewish communities, but also that Jewish prayer is a way of life. By analyzing quotations within the *Star* and within the oeuvre of Rosenzweig's writings, we learn, through his quotation methods, how biblical texts operate as inter-texts within his complex concept of revelation. The same is true for Jewish liturgy.

It is thus unsurprising that Rosenzweig quoted the majority of Jewish texts in the third part of the *Star*, which marked the transition in his philosophical system to a form of what Steven Kepnes has termed "liturgical reasoning."<sup>43</sup> In the second book of the *Star*, Rosenzweig employed his method of Speech-thinking to interpret the meaning of religious texts, namely the Hebrew Bible. By tracing the hermeneutic strategies in the second book, we witness a shift in the genre of the texts Rosenzweig chose to quote: he moved from philosophical texts to theological and liturgical texts. By providing an interpretation of the book of Psalms in the second and third parts of book two, which, like the "Songs of Songs," are also interpretations of revelation, Rosenzweig placed these writings at the center of his transition from revelation to redemption. Even though the third book of the *Star* also interpreted sacred texts from the Jewish tradition, it marked the move from textual hermeneutics to liturgical reasoning by interpreting several seminal prayers in Jewish liturgy, namely the *Shema* and the *Amidah*. Interestingly, Rosenzweig employed a hermeneutic found in Elbogen's discussions of *Piyyutim*, the *Shema*, and the *Amidah*.

future, which is experienced proleptically. The divine, then, "planted" this eternal life, which is best exemplified by the genealogy of the patriarchs in the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 15:5, God says to Abraham, "look toward the heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them," and adds, "so shall your offspring be." As such eternal life -- expressed through Jewish prayer -- is best characterized by the eternal people, the community of Israel.

<sup>43</sup> Steven Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, pp. 117–120.

#### 4.2 Liturgy as Polemic and Propaedeutic: Petition and Temptation

The two most prevalent and ancient prayers in rabbinic liturgy are the *Amidah* and the *Shema*.<sup>44</sup> According to Elbogen, “the *Shema* contains the confession of faith, the core of Israel’s belief, while the *Amidah* consists of a number of petitions touching the chief needs of the individual and the community.”<sup>45</sup> Because of the numerous developments in the redaction of the *Amidah*, Elbogen argued that it was a post-biblical text. Even though within the prayer itself there are many allusions to and even direct quotations from the Hebrew Bible, the *Amidah* was composed according to rabbinic sources during the period between the rabbis of the great assembly to the destruction of the second Temple and period of R. Gamaliel.<sup>46</sup> The *Shema*, however, is composed of three biblical phrases (Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num. 15:37–41). Elbogen points out that in *Berakhot* 2:2, the third passage was recited only in the morning.<sup>47</sup> Also, the *Shema* is a “confession of faith” orated to a human audience, the community, rather than a mere prayer.<sup>48</sup> The petitions in both the *Shema* and *Amidah*, for Elbogen, are what distinguish these prayers from others. Not only do they provide Rosenzweig an archetype to distinguish Jewish prayer from Christian prayer, as we will learn below, but also Elbogen’s research into these prayers provide Rosenzweig with the necessary rabbinic texts to construct his liturgical-philosophical argument.

“For Prayer,” wrote Rosenzweig, “everything comes down to this in the final analysis: is the future of the kingdom accelerated by it or delayed?”<sup>49</sup> He argued that individuals yearn for the coming of the Kingdom since the devotional bedrock of prayer is the acknowledgment of the ineffable that has not yet been fully discovered in life. Following a similar intellectual trajectory, the redactors of the fixed Jewish liturgy, according to Elbogen, asked the same question: Can petitionary prayer truly fulfill “the Service of the Heart.”<sup>50</sup> This

<sup>44</sup> Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–37.

<sup>47</sup> According to Glatzer’s list, Rosenzweig cites this text twice in the *Star*: first in relation to the afternoon during Shabbat and the meal (*Star*, p. 313); and the second in the section regarding election (*Star*, p. 414).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>50</sup> Elbogen, Introduction, in: *Jewish Liturgy*, pp. 3–11.

question characterizes Rosenzweig's discussion of prayer in general in the *Star*:

"Even if prayer, by opening a window on the world for the supplicant, shows it to him in a distinctive system, does that then have any consequences whatever for this one divine world-order itself? Can prayer possibly have the power to intervene tyrannically in the course of the world as this proceeds from its divine origin at creation? If prayer in essence is no more than prayer for enlightenment, if enlightenment is, consequently, the most that can accrue to the supplicant through the power of prayer, how then is prayer to be able to intervene in the course of events? Enlightenment after all, appears to accrue only to the supplicant; his are the eyes that are enlightened. Of what concern is that to the world?"<sup>51</sup>

Because the "power of prayer" lies in its petitions, individuals who pray are transformed from their present existential and historical situation to the meta-existential kingdom of the redeemed world. By classifying the "act of love"<sup>52</sup> differently than the event of prayer, Rosenzweig explained how prayer, in fact, can impel the world to come. Because the "act of love," for Rosenzweig, "is blind," it lacks intellectual and conceptual introspection, and thus cannot connect to the world or the divine.<sup>53</sup> Yet this "act of love" establishes a bond to the "neighbor" [*der Nächste*]. Conversely, supplicants [those who tempt God] are "not blind." They see "into the light of the divine countenance," which prayer "puts [into] the moment, including the act first performed and the will just resolved which constitute the highest past and highest future of this one lonely moment."<sup>54</sup> For Rosenzweig, the supplicants see beyond the "neighbor" they are "divinely ordained" to love. Because their neighbor exists within time and space, the "act of love" between individuals remains within this domain. For Rosenzweig, "prayer, however, pleads for enlightenment and thereby, without overlooking the neighbor, sees beyond the neighbor, sees the whole world to the extent that it is illuminated for it."<sup>55</sup> In contradistinction to the "act of love," prayer, then, can both illuminate the world and ascertain God's relationship to it. In so doing, Rosenzweig contended that supplicants "appeal to

<sup>51</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 268.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267–268.



enlightenment” and echo the call of the Psalmist, as a petition.<sup>56</sup> Rosenzweig quoted Psalm 13.4 as a proof text so that he can demonstrate how prayer tempts God: “Look at me, answer me, O Lord, my God! Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

By emphasizing the role that the petitional prayer (*Erbeten*) plays in both Christianity and Judaism, Rosenzweig argued that the supplicants, gathered communally, call on God not exactly to tempt them, even though God may only tempt those who in fact tempt God. Here, in the opening sentences to the introduction of the third part of the *Star*, Rosenzweig drew upon obscure medieval commentaries to the Book of Job in considering the ostensibly theological solecism that individuals actually manage to tempt God.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Rosenzweig contended that prayer is contingent upon “two possibilities; while fearing God’s temptation, it nevertheless knows itself capable of itself tempting God.”<sup>58</sup> These possibilities are known only through a model of reasoning that itself assays beyond the efforts of both abstract philosophical contemplation as well as theological hermeneutics. This type of reasoning – “liturgical reasoning” – is also a Midrash on the liturgical use of Biblical texts; otherwise, how would it be possible for Rosenzweig to argue that through penitential prayer the congregation can tempt God? If one were to rephrase Rosenzweig’s position here in the language of the Babylonian Talmud (Ber 33a, cited above), we would revisit the discussion regarding *Havdalah* by two highly regarded third-century *Amoraim*: Shmuel and Rav. If God is truly omnipotent (referred to metaphorically as “*shamayim*”), how can we evaluate and judge the choices and behavior of individuals? The answer is “everything is in the hand of heaven except fear of heaven.” God’s power is limited. God cannot cause people to obey God. Rosenzweig’s earlier use of the *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* is a case in point.<sup>59</sup> However, by drawing on the language of piety

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>59</sup> See Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 171. Quoting the *Pesikta de-rab Kahana* on Isaiah 43.12 in part two of the second book of the *Star*, Rosenzweig writes: “If you testify to me, then I am God, and not otherwise.” This statement might trouble theologians, since divine freedom is circumscribed to human belief. Rosenzweig employed this quotation to address this paradox related to divine love and divine freedom. Because God’s love requires renewal, this love compromises divine freedom. The Midrash Rosenzweig quoted, reminded readers that this love belongs to the individual, which, in fact, preserves divine freedom. Rosenzweig employed this quotation when empirical reason was unable to adjudicate an impasse in axiology. In both cases (in

and worship in this case, we run into another troubling theological predicament: Is the language of fear and obedience appropriate for liturgy, especially for petitions?

To answer, Rosenzweig, like Elbogen, polemicized against Christianity. Rosenzweig, in this move, wanted his readers to look to Goethe: the prayer of the non-believer, what Rosenzweig understood as Goethe's concept of prayer – which he called “Goethe's prayer” – played a formidable role in characterizing the aim of prayer.<sup>60</sup> Although it only serves as a propaedeutic to the archetype of prayer, which is the “prayer of Moses, our teacher,” Rosenzweig, in the *Star*, uses Goethe to challenge conventional Enlightenment tropes.<sup>61</sup> Rosenzweig quotes Goethe's poem *Hoffnung* – “Labor of my hands that I / finish, grant, oh Fortune high!”<sup>62</sup> – to accentuate the idealist image of personal fate when he discusses the efficacy of prayer. We already know, at this point, that Goethe, for Rosenzweig, was a transitional figure. Even before Rosenzweig wrote the *Star*, Goethe, for him, “discovered in himself the first Christian.”<sup>63</sup> In the *Star*, Rosenzweig wrote, “Goethe is truly the great heathen and the great Christian at one and the same time.”<sup>64</sup> So unsurprisingly, then, Goethe shall represent a problematic liturgy when compared to the biblical one, even though Goethe's prayer when compared to Moses', at first “hardly seems distinguishable.”<sup>65</sup> However, Rosenzweig distinguishes between the two midrashically by focusing on the phrase the “labor of our hands.” This phrase is juxtaposed to Psalm 90.17 – “let the labor of our hands prosper” – to once again renew a Jewish religious sensibility predicated on a notion of biblical tradition.<sup>66</sup> Also, similar to the case in the Introduction to the *Star*, Rosenzweig quoted texts from both these cultures in proximity to one another with the hope to preserve the

Rosenzweig's *Star* and in the *Pesikta de-rab Kahana*), the quoted text values ethics over ontology. The quoted text is imbued with a trust in the divine beyond empirical or practical reason, which, even for Hermann Cohen, signified the role quotation played in rabbinic culture and thought. According to Glatzer's list, Rosenzweig is citing the *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* on Isa. 43.10. However, the citation comes from the text's quotation of Isa. 43.12 in section 12.6.

<sup>60</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 287.

<sup>61</sup> Sax, *Das geflügelte Wort*, pp. 121–122.

<sup>62</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 275.

<sup>63</sup> Franz Rosenzweig: “Urzelle” to the *Star* of Redemption, in: Paul W. Franks / Michael L. Morgan (eds.), *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, Indianapolis 2000, p. 69.

<sup>64</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 283.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>66</sup> Turner, *A Reading of Psalm 90*, p. 500.

memory of both by renewing them in the present – by making them living texts.<sup>67</sup> Because Goethe is “truly the great heathen and the great Christian at one and the same time,” Rosenzweig used his poem to revalorize and transform his poem into biblical language. In Psalm 90, “A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.” Moses petitions God to allow the labor of his hands to prosper. As “the man of God,” Moses repeats his petition to God in the same verse. On the other hand, the prayer of Goethe, “the man of life”<sup>68</sup> does not petition God at all, rather he petitions fate and repeats this petition “in ever new formulations for years and decades until he attained a great and visible fulfillment.”<sup>69</sup> The coupling of these two examples of petition prayer, according to Rosenzweig, assist in differentiating between the various types of prayer, more specifically, that of the sinner and of the fanatic and the good form of prayer.

Because Goethe petitions fate, as opposed to God, his prayer, for Rosenzweig, exhibits that of the heathen. While stylistically compelling, Goethe’s form of prayer, as pagan, is bereft of the self-disclosing divine love of revelation. By portraying Goethe’s prayer as the prayer of the “man of life,” Rosenzweig not only argues that this prayer is indeed pagan, but that it represents the call of an isolated individual – existing in darkness – who has not experienced the world of revelation. By focusing on Goethe’s form of prayer, Rosenzweig establishes how such a prominent cultural and historical figure was able to exhibit at once the pagan disposition as well as that of the entire culmination of the Christian ideality. Goethe, as he first stated in his *Urzelle* and echoed throughout his life, was “the first Christian, as Christ wanted him, thus of the first ‘man straightforwardly’ – ‘the great pagan’ and the ‘decided non-Christian.’”<sup>70</sup> By repairing the myriad historical foibles of Christianity through his form of prayer, Goethe, for Rosenzweig, radically alters the accustomed prayers of Christianity, since the supplicant in Goethe’s prayer is,

“concerned only that whatever comes should merge into his life, that he be privileged to offer up all in the sanctuary of his own fate, own as well as alien, alien as well as own, all. It is for this that he prays. To preserve his own is not at all what he desires. True, he is prepared to lose himself in the current of the outside, to expand

<sup>67</sup> Sax, *Das geflügelte Wort*, pp. 123-130.

<sup>68</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 275.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Rosenzweig: *Urzelle*, p. 50.

his narrow existence here into eternity. And he does so. But in this desire he feels himself servant to his own destiny.”<sup>71</sup>

By using the prayer of Moses midrashically, Rosenzweig argues that this approach to prayer allows supplicants to accomplish two tasks: the earthly, which merely petitions for one’s possessions, as well as the empyrean, which petitions for a transition from a simple, isolated existence to the redeemed state of eternity. Goethe’s prayer, as a propaedeutic, contains the necessary framework for the true form of prayer, since it affords supplicants the anticipation of eternity. True prayer, for Rosenzweig, affirms the bond between the supplicant, the world, and the divine.

### 4.3 Rosenzweig’s Application of a Jewish Liturgical Hermeneutic

As we have seen above, Rosenzweig developed his concept of true prayer through polemics: a strategy employed by Elbogen. In this process he also developed a unique hermeneutic – one that incorporates aspects of Elbogen’s research – which he applied to the third book of the *Star*, which will be examined below. Despite his unease with historicism, Rosenzweig still wrote positively about the theological underpinnings of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In the *Star* he argued that the divine word is both the event of revelation and act of creation. It is also the hope of redemption. Rosenzweig explained that creation is the a priori for theological discourse. He demonstrated an interdisciplinary analysis that juxtaposes the epistemology of Jewish theological categories with the precepts of philosophy. Rosenzweig argued that just as *Wissenschaft* and philosophy are progressive fields of knowledge that refine their assumptions when older ones are trumped by empirical data, theology, too, is an asymptotic activity that requires it to become more reasonable with each generation’s evolving *zeitgeist*. In this vein, Jewish tradition is a dynamic reaffirmation of itself: it is never static, and its goals and needs change with each generation that accepts and interprets it. Because revelation and creation are incomplete acts that unfold throughout history, only to be completed when God redeems the world, Jewish theology is not even concerned with the origins and sources of the Bible. Rather, it is the result of a “meeting” with the divine that extends beyond the empirical world. As the world continues to

<sup>71</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 276.

change, so does the written account of the Jewish people's relationship to the divine. For Rosenzweig, the Jewish people's relationship to dogma, theology, and revelation changes in time as well. Elbogen, of course, agreed. This point led Michael Meyer to make the following comparison:

“Taken as a whole, Elbogen's writings evidence a tension between the scientific and the Jewish elements in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Like Franz Rosenzweig, he regretted that Jewish studies in the last generation had developed into a specialized discipline (*Fachwissenschaft*), removed from the concerns of the average Jew and therefore unable to affect Jewish life. He preferred that it be a directed discipline (*Zweckwissenschaft*), devoted to the purpose of enhancing Jewish life.”<sup>72</sup>

The major difference here between Elbogen and Rosenzweig is that the former located the virtue and dynamism of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in its material, whereas the latter located it in its method. For Rosenzweig, *Wissenschaft* and philosophy were methods amenable to Jewish theological contemplation. In fact, he argued that they laid the foundation upon which a philosophically cogent conception of revelation could be built. Simply put, creation, according to the sources of Judaism, is incomplete without redemption. Since creation is in fact God's first revelation, and as long as it remains incomplete without redemption, revelation, too, is incomplete.

At the beginning of the *Star*, Rosenzweig also argued that creation – a world marked by God's providence – must be associated with revelation before the above-described experience can ever perforce take place.<sup>73</sup> All knowledge must account for creation. In a *midrashic* play on words, Rosenzweig explored the etymological significance of the German word *Schöpfung* (Creation). By arguing that *Schöpfung* (creation) – which is our source for knowledge – can

<sup>72</sup> Meyer, *Without Wissenschaft There Is No Judaism*, p. 25.

<sup>73</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 103. Rosenzweig wrote: “Thus creation has once more to be placed next to the experience of revelation in the full gravity of its substantiality. More than this: the only connection which hope is able to establish between revelation and redemption, and which today is felt to be the essential core of belief, is the trust in the coming of an ethical kingdom of eventual redemption; revelation itself, together with its involvement in and foundation upon this trust, must once again be built into a concept of creation. Both revelation and redemption are creation in a certain manner that cannot be analyzed as yet. Here, then, lies the point from which philosophy can begin to reconstruct the whole edifice of theology. It was creation which theology neglected in the nineteenth century in its obsession with the idea of a vitally present revelation. And precisely creation is now the gate through which philosophy enters into the house of theology.”

only be discerned through an experience of revelation, Rosenzweig alludes to the myriad ways of applying the verb *schöpfen* (from the noun *Schöpfung*).<sup>74</sup> *Schöpfen* can be used “to draw out,” for instance “to draw breath,” or “scoop out” and “to create.” “It is characteristic of knowledge,” Rosenzweig writes, “to get to ‘the bottom’ of things, and we therefore allow it to realize this characteristic by constructing it on the concept of creation.”<sup>75</sup> By alluding to Hermann Cohen, he continued: “We make belief wholly the content of knowledge, but of a knowledge which itself lays its foundation on a fundamental concept of belief.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, creation for Rosenzweig, is our philosophical first principle from which we explore and experience the world. It is also the first principle from which Jews participate in their liturgical cycle.

Yet, conveying a philosophical method in liturgical language may at first glance seem odd. In order to connect the philosophical first principle with the liturgical one, in the *Star*, Rosenzweig quoted Genesis 10, *Midrash Tanhuma* to Lev 19:2, Psalm 35:10, and Rashi on Talmud Sukkah 55b to evince the ecumenical, universal character of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. By writing about the “number of bones of the human body,” Rosenzweig also referred to the legend of 248 bones in relation to the *Shema* prayer. This is a move from a universal to the particular. In another midrashic move, Rosenzweig demonstrated how the number of words in the *Shema* prayer correlates to the traditional number of bones in the human body (248).<sup>77</sup> In quoting the psalmist, Rosenzweig disclosed how, through liturgy, the words of prayer could culminate in the life of the body.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> See also Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 20. Elbogen’s view on this relationship: “Now in the Talmud (B. Shab. 119b) we find: ‘What does ‘amen’ mean? Said R. Hanina: God faithful King’. When the kabbalists came along and began to count the words of the prayers, seeking the mysteries concealed in numbers, they found that the three biblical passages contain 245 words, so that by adding the three words, ‘God, faithful King,’ they reached the mystical number 248, corresponding to the number of limbs in the human body or the number of positive commandments. The precentor does not say, ‘God, faithful King,’ but he reaches the same total number by concluding aloud ‘the Lord God is true.’”

<sup>78</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 409. He wrote, “The seventy offerings of Tabernacles [Numbers 29.12–38] are offered for the “seventy nations of the world” – as counted by legend [Sukkah 55b] on the basis of the Tabula Gentium in Genesis [Genesis 10]. The number of the bones of the human body are juxtaposed to the numerical value of a passage in the prayer book so that the words of the psalmist must be fulfilled and all bones [Midrash Tanchuma to Leviticus 19.2] praise the Eternal. The revealed name of God is concealed in the words which recount the completion

As in philosophy, creation plays a role in the liturgy. It also plays a role in the classical rabbinic texts Rosenzweig quotes above. There is a pedagogy involved in these quotations. From the very beginning of the *Star*, Rosenzweig instructs his readers to use his method of “Speech-thinking” to reduce the absolute transcendence of the divine, in order to enter into relationship with God. Rosenzweig characterized the situation of individuals before this relationship as “metaethic.”<sup>79</sup> When the individual’s soul is awakened through divine speech (revelation), it is able to experience the love of *der Nächste* – the neighbor, he or she who is nearest – so that it may emerge as an ethical person. Prayer, then, provides such an opportunity. In fact, this view of the ethical person may be a direct response to R. Hanina’s call in *Berakhot* 33a cited above.

The transition from theology to liturgy (from book two to book three of the *Star*), requires this ethical person to be open to revelation. What is important about the transition here was that Rosenzweig understood revelation to be “contentless” – a mere concatenation of biblical words.<sup>80</sup> As in Jewish liturgy, he gave biblical texts a speaking role in the *Star*, bestowing on them the responsibility of embodying revelation itself. The *Star*’s abundant citations bespoke *sui generis* a distinctive canon within a canon. According to Glatzer’s list, in the third part of the *Star*, Rosenzweig employs 212 quotations from Jewish sources (the majority of the list) to further expound the universal dialectic of God and the world.<sup>81</sup> In this part, Rosenzweig illustrates how a Jewish worldview is characterized by quotations from the Bible, *Midrash*, Talmud, and, at times, from Kabbalistic works. This is where we notice this hermeneutic of quotation at work. As the *Star* reaches its crescendo with the fundamental words of the book, *into life*, Rosenzweig narrated the “Wandering of the Shekhina” midrashically. By citing *Megillah* 29a, *Pesachim* 54a, and *Bereshit Rabba* 1, Rosenzweig described this moment:

of creation. One could continue endlessly. In itself, this biblical exegesis appears peculiar and even ridiculous to the observer unaccustomed to it. But its sense is none other than that the entire creation is interpolated between the Jewish God and the Jewish law, and that God and his law thereby both prove to be equally all-embracing as – creation.”

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften I:2: The Hague 1979*, p. 1196. Letter 1213 to Richard Koch.

<sup>81</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, pp. 427–436.

“God himself separates himself from himself, he gives himself away to his people, he shares in their sufferings, sets forth with them into the agony of exile, joins their wanderings. The Torah was thought to have been created prior to the world, and the world for its part on behalf of the Torah; in this conception, the law had become, for Jewish feelings, more than just the Jewish law; it was really sensed as a fundamental pillar of the world, and even the notion that God himself studies his law thus now gained a supra-Jewish sense.”<sup>82</sup>

By weaving these Midrashim, kabbalistic themes, and biblical texts together in this passage, Rosenzweig’s writing, like in many places in the *Star*, assumed the character of a palimpsest. Each quotation of a Jewish text in the *Star* eclipsed previously quoted texts but does not in any way fully conceal them – Rosenzweig always alluded to previous texts. By quoting these texts and themes, Rosenzweig was not only trying to portray a Jewish literary world, but also exhibit how this textual palimpsest oscillates between innovation, originality, and mimesis. Interestingly, the quotations of Jewish texts in the *Star* are not discerned merely through a list at the end but rather within the text itself. In the passage I just quoted, Rosenzweig demonstrates how the Midrash portrays the Torah as something other than law. He also demonstrated how the myths and narratives within the Hebrew Bible do not define it, but function differently as a condition for a pre-existent Torah. Here, Rosenzweig evokes the relationship of the creation of the world to the Torah as a relationship between the “God of our fathers” and the written law. By clustering these mythic traditions together, Rosenzweig composed an anthology that, in many ways, characterizes a new, living myth as a cultural template of ancient themes and traditions and contemporary sensibilities. For Rosenzweig, the written law of Torah augments divine speech. By emphasizing God’s speech as Torah, Rosenzweig understood this act as the hermeneutical foundation of Jewish thought. God, for Rosenzweig, is ascertained through speech, which, in turn, allows eternity (revelation) to enter into time.

One of Elbogen’s greatest achievements as a scholar was his meticulous reconstruction of rabbinic prayers, more particularly how the rabbis used biblical texts. The rabbis were creative. Biblical quotations for them served, as we learned, a variety of functions. In Rosenzweig’s *Star*, we learn that quotations

<sup>82</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, p. 409.



perform a similar task to not only the construction of these prayers, but also to the use of words in conventional speech. Similar to the process of continually producing new sentences with the same words, these quotations are a cluster of semiotic forms that refashion the antiquated words of venerated religious and cultural texts into continually innovative and renewed ones. In the same fashion as words would appear in a dictionary or lexicon, Rosenzweig, by juxtaposing their linguistic similarities and differences in the *Star*, situated these quoted texts together so that he could not only establish their similarities and differences, but also manifest the various hermeneutical possibilities ensconced in each corresponding quotation, thus opening the reader up to the possibility of revelation. By focusing on the spontaneity of speech in his philosophy of language in the *Star*, Rosenzweig demonstrated that quotations, by appearing elliptically, function in the same way that words do in speech. Quotation and language, then, are inexorably bound to tradition, prayer, and life.

## 5. Conclusion

In 1936, a few years after Rosenzweig's death, the German novelist Thomas Mann was in Vienna commemorating the eightieth birthday of the pioneer psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). In honor of Freud's birthday, Mann penned the essay "Freud and the Future," in which he coined the phrase *zitathaftes Leben* (a life in quotation), which, he argued, sought to establish continuity with the past while renewing it in the present.<sup>83</sup> This phrase appropriately describes Rosenzweig's interpretation of Elbogen's research. "Life" for Rosenzweig denoted living a Jewish life. The "secret" to living a Jewish life, then, is disclosed within the Jewish liturgy, more particularly the quotations of the divine word therein. Elbogen's magnum opus on the history of these texts, as we have learned, influenced one of the twentieth century's most innovative ways into Jewish life, thus, illustrating the important impact of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* on Jewish theology.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Mann: Freud und die Zukunft, in: Gesammelte Werke, Band 9, Teil 1: Frankfurt am Main 1974, p. 497.