

Leather, Lore, and Legacy: A Motorcyclist's Ride Through Jewish History

There is a clarity that only comes with the wind in your face and the hum of the engine beneath you. On a motorcycle, it's not about getting there – it's about the ride. Unlike the linear, goal-oriented nature of automobile travel, motorcycling emphasizes the journey itself – every turn, every sensation, every pause along the way. One is about destination. The other is about journey – a cycle, not a line. Jewish history is like that too. It is not a straight path from past to present, it is a non-linear path shaped by exile and return, persecution and perseverance, memory and reinvention. It is a long ride full of stops, switchbacks, and detours. As riders, we chase landscapes. As scholars of Jewish history and culture, we chase time. This is our ride through both.

The Engine: Nachman Krochmal and the Structure of Jewish Historical Time

No journey begins without understanding the mechanism that enables movement. Just as the motorcyclist ideally familiarizes themselves with the internal workings of the engine before setting off, the scholar of Jewish history may begin by considering the conceptual framework that animates its temporal unfolding. In this context, Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840) offers a point of orientation – at least for the present argument. Krochmal's model of history is recursive, just like a combustion cycle – intake, compression, power, exhaust, and again. This cyclical motion of internal combustion shall serve as metaphor for his idea of historical cycles that do not regress but regenerate.

Krochmal, a Jewish philosopher of the Haskalah and one of the most intellectually ambitious figures of Eastern European Jewish thought, addressed the nature of Jewish historical continuity in his *Moreh Nevukhei Ha-Zeman* (*Guide for the Perplexed of the Time*), published posthumously in 1851. Influenced by the idealist philosophy of Hegel, yet fully embedded in the Jewish intellectual tradition, Krochmal sought to reconcile modern historical consciousness with the peculiar persistence of the Jewish people across centuries of dispersion, crisis, and cultural transforma-

tion. While the idealist conception of history envisions empires and civilizations as following an organic cycle of growth, maturity, and decline, Krochmal asserts that Israel stands apart in its singular capacity for historical renewal. He famously writes:

Indeed, we have deemed it fitting to recall the times that have passed over us from the sprouting of the nation until this very day, in order to show clearly how the patterns of the three phases we mentioned have been repeated and reinforced among us, and how, when the days of decline and dissolution came to pass, a new and life-giving spirit was always renewed within us. And if we fell, we rose again, took courage, and did not abandon the Lord our God.¹

Unlike other nations whose lifespans culminate in dissolution, Israel, he argues, possesses a metaphysical vitality that enables cyclical renewal and allows it to revive after each period of decline. This closely reflects Krochmal's vision in *Moreh Nevukhei Ha-Zeman* (especially chapters 11-13), where he asserts that Israel transcends the dialectic of history because its national life is rooted in a divine and intellectual essence that outlives any particular political or cultural form. Drawing on the German idealist notion of *Volksgeist* – the «national spirit» that animates a people's cultural and historical development – Krochmal introduces his own term, *ruah ha-umah*, to describe the enduring inner life-force of the Jewish people. In Hegelian terms, Krochmal sees this *ruah ha-umah* as not merely a national spirit but a manifestation of the *Absolute Spiritual* (*haruhani hamuhlat*) working through history. This perception reorients our understanding of Jewish historical time. Rather than a linear progression or teleological narrative, Krochmal describes a cyclical structure, wherein rupture does not mark an end but inaugurates a process of return. Catastrophe is not final; it becomes a generative moment that folds memory into identity, and identity into renewed cultural expression. In this model, Jewish history is not characterized by repetition of the same, but by a recursive deepening – a spiraling movement that integrates past into present without being subsumed by it.

This conceptualization offers a valuable paradigm for the journey that follows. Just as the rider does not simply move from point A to point B, but experiences the road as a series of turns, elevations, and recalibrations, so too does Jewish historical consciousness navigate a terrain marked by interruption, resilience, and reconstitution. Krochmal's con-

1 Nachman Krochmal: *Moreh Nevukhei ha-Zeman*, in: Kitvei Krochmal, ed. by S. Rawidowicz, London/Waltham 1961 [Hebr.], p. 299-300. Author's translation.



Fig 1: Motorcycle trip in the Ligurian Alps.

ception thus serves not merely as philosophical commentary, but as the intellectual engine, the structural logic, of the journey ahead. If time gives us the structure of Jewish history, then terrain gives us its texture: the physical and cultural topographies through which that history is ridden.

The Mirror: Jewish Museums and the Spatial Construction of Historical Consciousness

The engine propels, but the mirror informs. On a motorcycle, mirrors offer spatial awareness and a sense of how one is positioned in relation to movement and surrounding terrain. They are instruments of orientation, allowing the rider to navigate the present in relation to what lies behind. In the study of Jewish history, space functions similarly – as a reflective surface where memory, identity, and interpretation converge. Nowhere is this more evident than in the domain of Jewish museums – curated spaces where the material past is brought into visibility, narrativized, and made accessible for contemporary publics.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1942-), a foundational voice in museology, has argued that museums, by way of exhibitions, do not merely preserve heritage; they perform it. »Exhibitions,« she argues, »are fundamentally theatrical, for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create.«² The museum is not a static container of the past but an active stage where Jewish history is interpreted and recontextualized. Here, Henri Lefebvre's concept of »representational space« as part of a theory of the production of social space becomes crucial: the museum does not merely *contain* history, it constitutes a space where memory is lived, imagined, and emotionally charged.³ Unlike abstract, conceived space (e.g. maps or zoning plans), representational space is where cultural meaning is enacted through symbols, gestures, and narratives. In this sense, the Jewish museum becomes a representational space *par excellence* where curators and visitors alike produce historical consciousness.

The museum, like the mirror, does not show »the past« in an unmediated way. It shows a *perspective* on the past – partial, contingent, and curated. It invites the visitor, like the rider, to position themselves in relation to objects and narratives that are both familiar and disorienting. In this view, Jewish history is not only told through documents and chronicles, but through objects: a pair of Shabbat candlesticks, a Yiddish theatre poster, a tombstone. These are not inert relics. They are charged artifacts – evidence of lived experience. Yet they require interpretation to become meaningful. Therefore, the museum becomes a mirror frame that structures the visitor's reflection, prompting questions about whose memory is preserved, whose is omitted, and how historical meaning is produced.

This is particularly notable for everyone skeptical of the concept of »collective memory.«⁴ Jewish museums often operate in precisely that contested zone when they curate what appears to be a shared memory, while in fact navigating competing claims, fragmented voices, and divergent genealogies of loss and identity. The mirror does not unify the view, it complicates it. Jewish museums, thus, demand that both curator and visitor, like rider and historian, remain aware of their position, their speed, and their blind spots. And this is exactly why we need mirrors for

2 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Berkeley 1998, p. 3.

3 See Henri Lefebvre: *The Production of Space*, Oxford 1991.

4 See Erik Petry: *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung: Das »Pack in Zürich«*, Köln 2014.

our ride: what the mirror reveals is never just what is behind or hidden, it is what is still *with* us, shaping the road ahead.

From Machine to Motion

Having so far considered the motorcycle's structural components – the engine as a symbol for the cyclical propulsion of Jewish historical time, and the mirror as a metaphor for spatial awareness – we are now ready to shift from mechanism to movement. The motorcycle, after all, is not an object to be admired at rest; it is designed for motion, for exposure, for risk and responsiveness. The following part therefore turns to the dynamics of the journey: the lived process of navigating history. The road ahead is neither straight nor smooth, and that is precisely the point. Jewish history has rarely offered the comfort of predictability. But in mounting this metaphorical motorcycle, we accept the terms of the ride: exposure to the elements, reliance on judgment, and an openness to what may unfold beyond the next bend.

We begin with the moment of ignition – the kickstart – and proceed through conceptual moments of ideological and political transformation (gear shifting), the communal pauses of pit stops, and the storms of rupture and crisis, where vulnerability meets resilience. These are not merely conditions of travel but metaphors for the interpretive work of engaging with Jewish history: work that is never linear, never fully shielded, and always contingent.

Kickstart (in Mesopotamia)

Every ride begins with a kickstart – the moment of ignition, the choice to move forward into the unknown. In Jewish historical imagination, that ignition is often located in the figure of Abraham, who, according to biblical tradition, sets off from Ur in response to a divine call and departs into the unknown. While the historicity of Abraham remains outside the bounds of empirical historiography and within the domain of theological narrative, the motif of the journey – of setting out into uncertainty, of leaving behind the familiar – becomes a foundational trope for Jewish self-understanding.

In *Abraham's Journey: Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarch*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) presents Abraham not merely as a figure of antiquity, but as an enduring archetype whose existential leap inaugurates the historical drama of the Jewish people:

As the architect and founder of our nation, Abraham left such an indelible imprint upon our unfolding historic identity that he has been integrated in our historical consciousness; he is so singular a motif of our historical emergence that the whole paradoxical, complex experience of our charisma would be impossible if we denied the reality of the Abraham-personality.⁵

Abraham's journey is thus not only a theological event, but a paradigmatic movement – a »kickstart« to Jewish historical becoming. »Abraham is not only the biological father of the people,« Soloveitchik continues, »he is also its spiritual father. He paves the way for our people. His life is a paradigm and a symbol for the future.«⁶ Abraham embodies what the rabbinic tradition would come to describe as *ma'aseh avot siman le-banim* – the deeds of the ancestors as signs for the descendants. Or as Soloveitchik, referring to Nahmanides, summarizes the Midrash: »Kol ma-she ira [le Avraham] ira le-vanav, Whatever happened [to Avraham] happened to his children (Midrash Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha 9, paraphrased by Nahmanides, Gen 12:6).«⁷

Abraham's departure, then, constitutes a leap into a future not yet mapped. His journey marks the beginning of Jewish historical consciousness as an active, unfolding process, initiated not in certainty but in response to a call. In this sense, the »kickstart« always involves commitment: to move forward without full knowledge of the terrain, to engage history as a living path.

Shifting Gears: Zionism and the Recalibration of Jewish Continuity

Every act of ignition initiates movement, and every movement requires adjustment. Once the engine turns over, the rider must navigate shifting terrain – demanding changes in speed, posture, and perspective. So too in Jewish history: with the journey now underway, we encounter the challenge of adaptation. How does a tradition respond to new conditions? How are structure and meaning recalibrated without halting forward momentum? Jewish thinkers, leaders, and communities have rarely had the luxury of cruising on flat, familiar roads; they have had to navigate hills, bends, and breakdowns. But it is precisely this capacity for

5 Joseph B. Soloveitchik: *Abraham's Journey. Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarchs*, Jersey City 2008, p. 2-3.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

calibrated movement that has allowed Jewish life to persist – not as a static inheritance, but as lived, responsive traditions. This section addresses this very process: the shifting of gears within the ongoing ride of Jewish continuity.

A paradigmatic instance of such a historical gear shift is the emergence of modern Zionism. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jews stood at an existential crossroads – confronting antisemitism and persecution on the one hand, and, on the other, pursuing self-determination and liberation under the modern conditions of secularization and liberalism.⁸ Among those who gave voice to this urgency was Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), who responded with a bold recalibration: political Zionism. He argued that only a political solution could safeguard Jewish existence in the modern world. In *Der Judenstaat* (1896) he asserted that Jewish survival required sovereignty, self-determination, and a national homeland:

Ich meine, die Juden werden immer genug Feinde haben, wie jede andere Nation. Wenn sie aber auf ihrem eigenen Boden sitzen, können sie nie mehr in alle Welt zerstreut werden. Wiederholt kann die Diaspora nicht werden, solange die ganze Kultur der Welt nicht zusammenbricht.⁹

His vision involved a shift in Jewish historical tempo – from passive endurance to active agency. But Herzl's was only one gear among many. Ahad Ha'am (Asher Z. H. Ginsberg; 1856-1927), the theorist of cultural Zionism, resisted the idea that political power alone could sustain Jewish continuity. In his 1897 essay *The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem*, he wrote:

For this purpose Judaism needs at present but little. It needs not an independent State, but only the creation in its native land of conditions favourable to its development: a good-sized settlement of Jews working without hindrance in every branch of culture, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature.¹⁰

For Ahad Ha'am the challenge was not merely territorial but civilizational: the revitalization of Hebrew culture, ethical ideals, and intellec-

8 See Shlomo Avineri: *The Making of Modern Zionism. The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*, New York 2017, p. 10.

9 Theodor Herzl: *Der Judenstaat. Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*, Zürich 1988, p. 111.

10 See Achad Ha'am: *The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem*, in: *Ten Essays on Zionism and Judaism*, transl. by Leon Simon. London 2018, p.37.

tual life. His gear shift was subtler but no less radical. Rooted in Eastern European Jewish life, Ahad Ha'am was deeply skeptical of Herzl's political Zionism. He feared that the pursuit of a Jewish state without a corresponding spiritual and cultural renaissance would result in a State of Jews, but not a Jewish State.¹¹

Other figures proposed entirely different transmissions. For Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), the Zionist movement represented not merely a political shift but a stage in the unfolding of divine history – a national return that marked the spiritual renewal of the Jewish people and the beginning of redemption. As he wrote in *Orot*: »The real life of sanctity of Judaism cannot be revealed other than by the People's return to its Land, which is the way paved for its renaissance.«¹² In this view, the land was not just a geographic destination, but the medium through which the latent holiness of Jewish life would be reawakened.

A. D. Gordon (1856-1922), by contrast, saw redemption not in transcendence but in labor: a return to the land as a moral and physical regeneration of the Jewish people. For Ber Borochov (1881-1917) and the Marxist Zionists, the shift was grounded in class struggle and historical materialism. Where Gordon viewed labor as a spiritual act, Borochov saw it as a revolutionary means to correct the distorted class structure of the diaspora.¹³

Yet Zionism was never solely the domain of its (mostly male) theorists. Women such as Golda Meir (1898-1978), Henrietta Szold (1860-1945), Ada Maimon (1893-1973), and Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi (1886-1979) played pivotal roles in shaping its lived realities – from healthcare and education to labor organizing, agricultural training, and political leadership. Henrietta Szold, founder of the Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization of America, reframed Zionism through a lens of care, establishing medical infrastructure that addressed the urgent needs of Jewish communities in Palestine and laid the groundwork for modern Israeli public health.¹⁴ Ada Maimon, a fierce advocate for women's rights within the Zionist movement, fought not only for national liberation but also for women's full civic and religious participation. As one of the few women present in early Zionist political institutions, she helped se-

11 Ibid.

12 Avraham Isaac Kook: *Orot*, transl. by Bezalel Naor. Northvale (NJ)/London 1993, p. 165.

13 See Avineri (fn 8), p. 76.

14 See Michael Brown: Henrietta Szold. Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/szold-henrietta> (30.09.2025).

cure women's suffrage in the Yishuv and later became one of the first female members of the Knesset (Israeli parliament).¹⁵ Their contributions remind us that recalibration occurs not only in thought, but in practice: not just in ideological discourse, but in the building of homes, schools, and communities.

These divergent visions created friction, but also propulsion. Zionism was not a smooth or singular ride – it was a recalibration of Judaism, community, and future. And like all gear shifting, it involved risks: false starts, missed connections, ideological breakdowns. Yet in the plurality of its gears, the movement demonstrated something essential about Jewish adaptability: the capacity to respond differently to the same terrain, to alter posture and pace without abandoning the shared journey. Not all Jews agreed on the direction of travel though. Orthodox and *Haredi* communities, for example, often saw in Zionism a dangerous acceleration – one that bypassed divine providence or undermined religious tradition. Their resistance, too, belongs in the metaphor: a form of braking or refusal to shift under imposed terms.

To shift gears is to meet the demands of the road ahead with intention and responsiveness. The Zionist movement exemplifies how Jewish history is not a straightforward progression but a continuous process of recalibration – shaped not only by competing ideologies but also by diverse communities and decisive moments of collective action. Within this dynamic lies the true art of riding well: not maintaining unbroken momentum, but discerning with care when and how to shift, ensuring the journey remains true to its path without losing sight of where it has come from.

Pit Stops: Where Time Opens to the Other

The metaphor of the motorcycle journey invites reflection not only on individual movement through time and space, but also on the fundamentally social dimension of travel. In Jewish tradition, the journey is rarely a solitary undertaking. The road is shared – with companions who ride beside us, with those whose tracks we follow, and with those we carry in memory. Jewish tradition has been emphasizing the communal character of experience – whether in study, ritual, or suffering – and so it fits our perspective that the journey be conceived not in isolation, but in relation.

As we pause at pit stops along the way, we find not only rest or reflection, but encounter: the opening of the self to the other, the making of

¹⁵ See Einat Ramon: Ada Maimon (Fishman). Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/maimon-fishman-ada> (30.09.2025).

meaning in dialogue. Here, the road becomes more than a route through time; it becomes the site of relationship.

Pit stops are, first and foremost, places of encounter. The rider is no longer focused on the road ahead, but momentarily attuned to who rides beside them. In these moments, a different kind of awareness takes hold. Martin Buber, in his seminal work *Ich und Du* (1923), gave this meeting its most profound formulation: »Alles wirkliche Leben ist Begegnung.«¹⁶ Real life, Buber insists, is found in encounter – in the turning toward another as a *Thou*, a presence, rather than an *It*, an object. Pit stops, in this light, are more than pauses in forward motion. They are invitations into relation and occasions where the traveler turns toward others not as means to an end, but as companions. Buber underscores this when he writes: »Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich.«¹⁷ In other words, it is through encounter – through relation with another – that the self is constituted. This relational stance, deeply embedded in the Jewish context, underlies everything from *Havrutah* learning¹⁸ to the rituals of mourning. Historical consciousness, too, emerges not in solitary contemplation, but in dialogical exchange – between past and present, between texts and interpreters, between individuals and communities. Thus, in Buber's terms, the shaping of Jewish history occurs not only in events but in encounters. Memory and meaning emerge not simply through continuity, but through relation – with those who travel beside us and with those we meet along the way.

Yet pit stops are not only about lofty ideals of presence. They also attend to basic needs. Every rider, no matter how committed, must eventually stop – to drink, to eat, to pee, to refuel. The motorcycle itself needs care as well: gas, oil, a check of the tires. These pauses are not interruptions in the journey; they are what make the journey meaningful. Jewish tradition, too, recognizes that sustenance is not peripheral to the sacred – it is part of it. In this sense, the pit stop, where riders sit, eat, and speak, is not a detour from meaning but one of its richest expressions.

The body – and the bike – must be tended, yes, but so must the bonds that make the journey worth continuing. And once we have stopped, we talk. Stories are exchanged: where we have come from, what we have

16 Martin Buber: *Das Dialogische Prinzip*, Heidelberg 1948, p. 15.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

18 A traditional mode of Jewish study conducted in pairs, where two students engage in dialogical learning of sacred texts, especially Talmud. The term derives from the Hebrew root *חבר* meaning *to join, to connect, or to befriend*.

seen, what weather we have endured. So too in Jewish life, where history is carried not only in books but in the voices of those who tell it. Just as the road shapes the rider through movement, so too does *Halakhah* shape Jewish religious life through practice – prescribing how to act, where to go, and how to navigate the terrain. But if *Halakhah* is the ride itself, then *Aggadah* is the stop along the way: the moment of pause in which the journey is remembered, told, and reimagined. The halakhic path allows for drive, but it is *Aggadah* that gives meaning to the movement. It allows the rider to articulate not just *that* they traveled, but *why* it mattered – what they saw, endured, and learned. In Jewish tradition, both are necessary: the doing and the telling, the going and the gathering, the law and the lore. As Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) famously wrote: »Halachah and Aggadah are two things which are really one, two sides of a single shield. The relation between them is like that of speech to thought and emotion, or of action and sensible form to speech.«¹⁹

In other words, *Halakhah* and *Aggadah* are not separate domains, but two inseparable aspects of a single lived experience: the form and its meaning, the path and its story. The vitality of Jewish continuity lies in the interplay between them – between the lived road and the stories that make its bumps, turns, and vistas intelligible across generations.

So, the pit stop becomes a literal and metaphorical site of transmission. In these informal moments – over coffee at the gas station or lunch – we retell who we are. But eventually, the engine hums once more. We stretch our legs, wipe our visors, kick the stand, and hit the road again. Yet the ride continues differently – refracted through conversation, nourished by pause, shaped by those who stopped with us. Jewish continuity, likewise, is not a product of unbroken forward momentum. It lives in rhythms – in stopping and going, solitude and companionship, memory and motion. The journey endures not because it never pauses, but because it knows when and how to pause well.

19 Chaim Nachman Bialik: Halachah and Aggadah, transl. by Zali Gurevitch, in: Global Secularity. A Sourcebook, vol. 2, The Middle East and North Africa, ed. by Florian Zemmin, Nequin Yavari, Markus Dressler, and Nurit Stadler, Berlin 2024, p. 440.



Fig. 2 and 3: »Annual« motorcycle trip of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Basel, 25.5.2019. Southern Black Forest, Germany. From left to right: Samuel Müller, Veit Arlt, Erik Petry, Sarah Werren. Source: Elias Kreyenbühl.

Storm on the Highway: Jewish Vulnerability and Resilience

No rider chooses the storm, but once it breaks, we must ride through it – or take shelter until it passes. In such moments, speed becomes perilous, vision narrows, and every movement demands care. And yet, storms still strike without warning. So too in Jewish history: rupture arrives unbidden, often violent, demanding not just adaptation but resilience and a re-orientation of the journey itself. In Jewish life, storms arrived in the form of expulsion, persecution, war, or theological upheaval. The destruction of the Temples, the Inquisition, the Shoah, October 7 – each marked not only a historical crisis but a moral and metaphysical one. The terrain itself seems to shift beneath the wheels.

Yet even in the darkest weather, there are riders who find a way forward – not by avoiding suffering, but by transforming it. One of the most powerful voices to emerge from such storms was that of Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), a Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor whose experiences in Auschwitz led him to develop *logotherapy*, a therapeutic approach grounded in the conviction that the human being's primary drive is not pleasure (Freud) or power (Adler), but meaning. Frankl insis-



ted that even the most agonizing pain could be borne if it served a purpose. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, he writes, borrowing from Nietzsche: »He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.«²⁰ In other words, resilience is not the absence of pain; it is the presence of meaning. However, Frankl did not romanticize suffering, but refused to see it as meaningless:

If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.²¹

For Frankl, survival was not merely physical but existential – a matter of holding fast to meaning, even when all external structures collapse. His experience in the concentration camps revealed that life could retain purpose even in extreme situations, but he was careful to draw a critical

20 Viktor E. Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning*, Boston 2006, p. 76.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

distinction: meaning is possible *despite* suffering, not *because* of it. In his essay on logotherapy, Frankl makes this point unequivocally:

But let me make it perfectly clear that in no way is suffering necessary to find meaning. I only insist that meaning is possible even in spite of suffering – provided, certainly, that the suffering is unavoidable. If it were avoidable, however, the meaningful thing to do would be to remove its cause, be it psychological, biological or political. To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic.²²

This insistence on meaning in the midst of suffering finds a powerful parallel in the post-Holocaust theology of Emil Fackenheim (1916-2003). Confronting the moral and theological void left by the Shoah, Fackenheim refused both to explain Auschwitz and to allow it to destroy Jewish existence. His response was the formulation of what he called the 614th commandment: »And my first response was to formulate a 614th commandment,« to the effect that Jews are forbidden to give Hitler posthumous victories.²³ This was meant as moral imperative: to survive as Jews, to remember, and to continue living and believing, even when belief feels impossible. Jewish continuity itself became an act of defiance – a refusal to allow evil to dictate the meaning of Jewish history.

In this light, to continue is not merely an act of endurance, but one of resistance. In the aftermath of October 7, when Israeli and foreign civilians were subjected to unprecedented violence and murder, and amid the ongoing multi-front assaults on Israeli sovereignty and Jewish life, Fackenheim's injunction gains renewed significance. The storm has not passed; the terrain remains unstable. Resilience, in this framework, emerges as both an ethical stance and a collective practice. The road may twist or fracture, yet the journey continues – altered, slower at times, yet infused with purpose. To ride forward after rupture, in the company of others, is to assert that tradition, memory, and meaning still matter. This is the texture of Jewish resilience: traveling on through uncertainty, carrying loss, and remaining attuned to those riding beside us. The journey may falter, detour, or slow to a crawl – but it does not end.

We began with the claim that a motorcycle ride, like Jewish history, is about the journey, not the destination. And perhaps that is always true – at the outset. The ignition, the road, the wind – all speak to the freedom of movement and the unfolding of meaning along the way. But

22 Ibid., p. 113.

23 Emil Fackenheim: To Mend the World. Foundations of Future Jewish Thought, New York 1982, p. 10.

every ride eventually ends. The longer the journey, the deeper the longing to arrive. This tension between journey and destination is poignantly captured in the closing scene of *The Brutalist* (2024), a film that traces the layered story of Jewish displacement, memory, and perseverance. The film follows the Hungarian-Jewish architect László Toth, his wife Erzsébet, and his niece Zsófia as they flee postwar Europe, rebuild a life in America, and confront the silences and traumas carried across continents and generations. As Zsófia reflects on her early years as a young mother in Jerusalem, she recalls the words of her uncle László – himself a survivor, an architect, and a bearer of unspoken trauma: »Don't let anyone fool you, Zsófia, he would say, »no matter what the others try and sell you, it is the destination, not the journey.«²⁴

Perhaps it is both. Perhaps what gives the journey its shape is the vision of arrival – not as finality, but as meaning. And when one journey ends, another begins.

24 *The Brutalist*. Directed by Brady Corbet. 2023. <https://www.imdb.com/de/title/tt8999762/quotes/> (30.09.2025). Movie watched April 28, 2025, in Jerusalem.