Unable to expand outward, the Jews were forced inward to expand their spiritual territory, including Hebrew. For some time prior to the revolt in 66 CE, Hebrew had apparently been in decline. It was largely superseded by Aramaic in rural Palestine and Greek in the Hellenistic or Hellenized cities. After the war, Greek continued to be used by most Jews in the Roman empire. In the school in Yavneh (Jamnia) of Gamaliel the Second, grandfather of Judah Hanasi, half the students reportedly studied Greek wisdom *(Bava Kamma 83a)*. Yet, many survivors of the revolt were suspicious of Greek culture (all the more as the Judaean ruling class had embraced it) and, to an extent, the Greek language. The early second century CE rabbi, Elisha ben Avuya, was stigmatized as a heretic, among other reasons ‘because he kept singing Greek songs’ *(Hagigah 15b)*. ‘During the war with Quietus [of 115–17 CE],’ according to Mishna Sotah (IX 14), ‘the rabbis decreed that a man should not teach his son Greek.’ By the time the Mishna was edited nearly a century later, there was some relaxation in this attitude: the word for ‘war’ here is not the Hebrew *milhama* but the Greek *polemos*. In fact, rabbinic literature is full of Greek (and, to a far lesser extent, Latin) words. Still, non-Hebrew languages were generally frowned upon by the rabbis, even though they used them. During the 66–138 CE period, suspicion and hatred of Greek and Greek culture among the Jews increased as Greek became the universal language of the Christians and was used to proselytize among Hellenized Jews. (Partly for this reason, perhaps – as Hellenistic Judaism was, in effect,
taken over by Christianity – the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible fell into disfavour among Jews in the second century CE [Schürer, 1986, IIIi 493].) In any case, Torah study was meant to take up as much of one’s time as possible, leaving no time for anything else (Menahot 99b). Rabbi Ishmael, a colleague of Akiva’s, put Greek in a cultural twilight zone: when asked by his nephew if it was permitted to study Greek philosophy after mastering the entire Torah, he replied, ‘find a time that is neither day nor night’ (ibid.). The same view was expressed by Joshua ben Hananiah, who knew Greek and praised Aquila for his Greek Bible translation (Jerusalem Talmud Sotah IX 15; Megillah I 9).

As non-Jewish education declined in status among Jews after 70 CE, Hebrew emerged as the vehicle of a social and educational revolution. For the first time in history, the written word was put in the hands of a large number of working-class people. Prior to 70 CE many important Jews were politicians and warriors, such as Judah Maccabeus and Herod. After 70 CE, Jewish history is dominated by masters of halakhah. As late as the time of Nero, Jewish fathers were somewhat erratically in charge of teaching their children. According to rabbinic tradition, Jewish education was systematized by the High Priest Joshua ben Gamla around the time of the outbreak of the 66–70 CE revolt: ‘He decreed that teachers be sent to every province and every city and that children should begin their studies at the age of six or seven’ (Bava Batra 21a). These developments stimulated the creation of original Hebrew culture. Jewish education compared favourably with Graeco-Roman education:

The Roman state neither created an educational system itself nor gave anything like adequate financial support to the system which developed of its own accord. Education was not made compulsory even at the primary stage, and the acquisition of literacy was haphazard.

(Bonner, 1977, p. 328)

Intellectual egalitarianism among the Jews after the destruction of the Temple contributed to the widespread obliteration of social division which had previously characterized Jewish life. Power passed from the Jewish kings, warriors and priests to the