

MESSIANIC  
RELIGIOUS  
ZIONISM  
CONFRONTS  
ISRAELI  
TERRITORIAL  
COMPROMISES

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Motti Inbari

## Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises

The Six Day War in 1967 profoundly influenced how an increasing number of religious Zionists saw Israeli victory as the manifestation of God's desire to redeem His people. Thousands of religious Israelis joined the Gush Emunim movement in 1974 to create settlements in territories occupied in the war. However, over time, the Israeli governments decided to return territory to Palestinian or Arab control. This was perceived among religious Zionist circles as a violation of God's order. The peak of this process came with the Disengagement Plan in 2005, in which Israel demolished all the settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the West Bank. This process raised difficult theological questions among religious Zionists: What supreme religious significance could be attributed to these events? Was the State of Israel no longer to be considered a divine tool for the redemption of the Jewish people? This book explores the internal mechanism applied by a group of religious Zionist rabbis in response to their profound disillusionment with the behavior of the state, reflected in an increase in religious radicalization because of the need to cope with the feelings of religious and messianic failure. The research also compares the American Christian Evangelical response to Israeli territorial compromises.

Motti Inbari is the author of *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?*, which won the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise Best Publication Award in Israel Studies (2008) and The Ben Shemesh Best Dissertation Award for the Study of Zionism and the State of Israel (2007). His work has appeared in *Israel Studies*, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, *Nova Religio*, *Modern Judaism*, *Journal of Church and State*, and *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*. Prior to his appointment as an Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke, he served as a Post Doctoral Associate at the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University.



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*To Aliza, Shani, and Shir – the loves of my life*

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## Acknowledgments

The idea to write a book on the messianic religious Zionist response to Israeli territorial compromises came to me in 2005 as Ariel Sharon, Israel's Prime Minister at that time, announced his Disengagement Plan to evacuate all settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in Samaria. The religious-Zionist community was shocked and the debate over the path of resistance was starting to develop. I paid careful attention to the rabbis' comments, and I realized that there is great diversity of opinions. At that time, it was unclear if the settlers' response would lead to violence and bloodshed. Eventually, the events of the evacuation went smoothly without almost any physical resistance. The only path of struggle used was of civil disobedience.

For more than fifteen years, I have been studying active messianic movements in modern-day Israel. The implementation of the Disengagement Plan triggered me to deepen my studies into the patterns of activities that are the result of prophetic failure. I was interested to examine how the settler's theology would face the changing political realities. After the Disengagement, I decided to examine historically other times when messianic religious Zionism had to deal with Israeli territorial compromises, such as the result of the Israel-Egypt peace process (1982) and the Oslo Accords (1993). The book you are holding now is the product of this research.

I wish to express my gratitude to many people who have taught and assisted me in the years in which I prepared this work.

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## Introduction

In December 2009, Israel's Minister of Defense Ehud Barak ordered that Yeshivat Har Bracha, headed by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, be removed from the *hesder* program. The result of this action was that the students of the yeshiva were not allowed to be part of the arrangement that combines religious studies in the institution with a shorter military service. The minister's decision was made following Melamed's ruling that urged soldiers to defy military orders to evacuate settlements in the West Bank, and the resulting demonstration against the evacuation of settlements held by two Har Bracha yeshiva graduates during the end of their basic training ceremony. This removal of Har Bracha from the *hesder* program can be understood to date as the height of the escalating alienation mounting between messianic religious Zionism and the State of Israel.

The call to disobey military orders and the removal of a yeshiva from the *hesder* program are the product of a theological crisis faced by the national religious movement. This book aims to get to the roots of this crisis: to both examine the response of the messianic religious Zionist elite to Israeli territorial compromises and present the changes taking place within that group.

The book starts with the examination of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook's ideology. Rabbi Kook was the head of the prestigious Mercaz Harav yeshiva and the spiritual founder of the Gush Emunim movement, which was established in 1974. The book then presents the reactions of the settler's rabbis to the Israeli evacuations of the Sinai Peninsula, areas in Samaria and Judea (the West Bank), and the entire Gaza Strip, as part of several peace processes and unilateral acts. The political compromises resulting in the territorial withdrawal also served to challenge the messianic expectations prevalent amongst religious Zionists. Against the backdrop of what was an apparent setback in the path toward the coming of the Messiah, a response was required for religious Zionist thinkers that could account for the new situation. Chapter 8 describes the American Christian Evangelical response to Israeli territorial compromises, as a comparison case study.

## Historical Background to Messianic Religious Zionism

Very soon after its emergence, religious Zionism undertook a process aiming to understand how the development of the secular Zionist movement actually represented a stage in an unfolding messianic process. These approaches are identified, in particular, with the religious philosophy of Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook's father, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook (1865–1935). According to Dov Schwartz, many Orthodox Jews found it difficult to identify with the emerging Zionist movement and act within classic Zionist definitions. Zionist rhetoric spoke of the need to “normalize” the Jewish people and make it “a nation like all the others.” The purpose of Zionism was described as being “to build a safe haven for the Jewish people.” All of these definitions are inconsonant with Jewish tradition, which emphasizes a distinction between Israel and the other nations, and proclaims that the Land of Israel has a unique theological function. Accordingly, many of those who developed the religious Zionist approach, integrate the religious purpose as part of the Zionist idea.

These thinkers used the traditional rabbinical technique of *pshat* and *drash* (the literal meaning as opposed to the exegetical meaning) to justify supporting Zionist political activity. While ostensibly adopting the general Zionist definition of the movement's purpose, this approach also imbued it with specific religious meaning: While Zionist activity calls for action in the material realm, simultaneously its innermost core aspires to eternal spiritual life – and this constituted the “real” foundation for the Zionist movement's operations and aims, even if the movement itself was not aware of this.<sup>1</sup> The argument contended that the long-awaited messianic era was about to arrive, and would be realized once secular Zionism chose the true path: the complete worship of God. Zionism would then advance to its second phase, known as the revival of the biblical Davidic monarchy, the reinstitution of sacrifices on the Temple Mount, and the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin.<sup>2</sup>

Though this position was present within religious Zionist circles almost from their inception, it occupied only a marginal position. Thus, although this vision of transformation to a Torah nation was advocated by certain religious Zionist voices during the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State of Israel (1948), it was soon abandoned. Asher Cohen argues that many religious Zionists did continue to aspire for the establishment of a theocratic regime; but, during the transition to statehood, they recognized this was unachievable and unrealistic at the time, as they were a minority with limited public power and status. Accordingly, the vision of a Torah state was not manifested in Religious Zionist's overt political demands. They instead focused mainly on preserving the status quo on religious matters – agreed to during the pre-state

<sup>1</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Faith at a Crossroads – A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism*, Leiden, Boston & Koln: Brill, 2002, 156–92.

<sup>2</sup> Motti Inbari, “Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma: Key Trends,” *Israel Studies* 12 (2) 2007: 29–47.

era – on the right of the religious public to maintain its own way of life. Overall, religious Zionist leaders confined themselves to recognizing the secular state, while struggling to preserve its religious character in certain fields.<sup>3</sup>

This all changed with the Israeli victory in the Six Day War (1967) in which Israel captured additional areas of its Biblical homeland. These dramatic events led to the strengthening of religious Zionism's activist wing, dominated mainly by the younger generation of the National Religious Party.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, it created a groundswell of opinion that would ultimately fuel the establishment of the Gush Emunim settlement movement, which would soon after become the dominant stream within religious Zionism.<sup>5</sup>

### Gush Emunim

The Six Day War (June 1967) created a new reality in the Middle East. In the course of the war, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. These areas were not annexed to Israel, and have continued to have the status of occupied territories administered by Israel pending their return in the framework of a peace agreement. Immediately after the war, Israel did not, on the whole, initiate Jewish settlement in the occupied areas, with the exception of East Jerusalem, which was formally annexed to the State of Israel. From the outset, however, this principle was not strictly applied, and soon after the war a number of Jewish settlements were established in the occupied territory.<sup>6</sup>

In 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel. Although Israel would eventually push back the attacking armies and win the war, the Israeli public was shocked and outraged at both the large number of fatalities Israel suffered and by the military's poor performance, at least at the beginning of the war.

Immediately following the war, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger undertook intensive diplomatic activity aimed at attaining a ceasefire between the sides that would invariably include Israeli territorial concessions. It was against the backdrop of these two events – the trauma of the war and the expectation of imminent territorial retreat – that the Gush Emunim

<sup>3</sup> Asher Cohen, *The Tallit and the Flag – Religious Zionism and the Vision of the Torah State during the Early Days of the State*, Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1998: 48–55 (in Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> Yoni Garb, "The Young Guard of the National Religious Party and the Ideological Roots of Gush Emunim," in: Asher Cohen and Yisrael Harel (eds.), *Religious Zionism: The Era of Change*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2005: 171–200 (in Hebrew); Eliezer Don Yihya, "Stability and Change in the Camp Party – the National Religious Party and the Young Revolution," *State, Government and International Relations* 14 (5740–1980) 25–52 (in Hebrew).

<sup>5</sup> Gideon Aran, "A Mystic – Messianic Interpretation of Modern Israeli History: the Six Day War as a Key Event in the Development of the Original Religious Culture of Gush Emunim," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 4 (1988), 263–75.

<sup>6</sup> Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire – Israel and the Birth of the Settlements*, 1967–1977, New York: Times Books, 2006, 72–98.

("Block of the Faithful") movement was founded in February 1974. Led by young religious Zionist activists, Gush Emunim was supported by both Orthodox bourgeois urban circles and secular supporters of the Whole Land of Israel movement.<sup>7</sup> Gush Emunim sought to prevent territorial concessions and to push for the application of Israeli sovereignty to Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. It attempted to actualize its objectives by settling Jewish communities in the occupied territories.

At the time of its establishment, Gush Emunim did not project a messianic vision. The first settlement action undertaken by activists from the organization came when, without official permission, they established a makeshift settlement at a site in the West Bank called Sebastia. Israeli authorities evicted the settlers several times. Finally, the settlers reached a compromise with Minister of Defense Shimon Peres in which they agreed to instead be housed in a neighboring Israeli Defense Force (IDF) base. This decision effectively led to the establishment of the settlement, despite some opposition within the Israeli government led by Yitzhak Rabin. In 1977, with the rightist Likud party coming to power, settlers suddenly enjoyed enthusiastic support from the government, including provision of financial benefits, assistance in the construction of settlement infrastructure, and legal protection.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the pace of construction in the settlements quickly increased. Since then, the number of Israeli citizens living in the settlements has risen steadily. As of 2010, the settlements' population was estimated at 300,000, and some 40 percent of the Judea and Samaria territory was included in the settlements' municipal areas of jurisdiction.

Immediately following its inception, Gush Emunim was joined by a group of Mercaz Harav yeshiva's graduates under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook, who soon assumed leadership roles in the movement. The members of this group held a religious perspective, which motivated them to political action. They believed that the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel under the auspices of the secular Zionist movement reflected the first stage in God's will to redeem His people. Accordingly, the spectacular Israeli victory in the Six Day War of 1967 was perceived as a manifestation of the Divine plan, and as a preliminary stage in the process of redemption.<sup>9</sup>

In general, Mercaz Harav followers then as now, see themselves as implementing the philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook.<sup>10</sup> They try to integrate the senior Kook's philosophy into Israeli reality, emphasizing two key concepts: the holiness of the land of Israel and the holiness of the

<sup>7</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology*, Boston: Academic Press, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: the War Over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967–2007*, New York: Nation Books, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Moshe Hellinger, "Political Theology in the Thought of 'Merkaz HaRav' Yeshiva and its Profound Influence on Israeli Politics and Society since 1967," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 9 (4) (2008) 533–50.

<sup>10</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Faith at a Crossroads – A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism*, Leiden, Boston & Koln: Brill, 2002, 156–92.

State of Israel. According to the junior Kook, the Land of Israel – comprised of land within the 1948 borders, the territories acquired in 1967, and even Transjordan – is one unit, a complete organic entity imbued with its own will and holiness. This entity is connected and united with the entire Jewish people – present, past, and future – so that the people and the land are in a complete oneness. Therefore, no one has a right to give away part of the land.<sup>11</sup> Since the unity of the Whole Land came as a result of the actions of the Zionist movement, it could, therefore, be understood as a tool that was and could be further implemented to actualize God's will. As such, the Israeli state, though secular, should be sanctified as it is part of the messianic process.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Mercaz Harav philosophy, the sanctity of the Whole Land of Israel and the sanctity of the State of Israel are expected to complement and complete one another. However, this has not always been reflected in Israeli reality. After the peace process between Israel and Egypt (1978) and the resulting Israeli withdrawal from Sinai (1982), many Gush Emunim supporters were forced to confront the increasing erosion of their basic beliefs regarding the character and destiny of the State of Israel. The Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, together with the subsequent Madrid talks (1991) and Oslo process (1993), which led to an Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank, provoked a theological crisis for followers of Mercaz Harav's philosophy. The fundamental religious dilemma this presented is of a profound character: How can a state that uproots settlements and hands over parts of the Biblical Land of Israel to Arab rule be considered "absolutely sacred" as it had been? What sublime religious meaning can be attributed to the actions of a secular state which threatens to destroy, by its own hands, the chance of realizing the messianic hope? Could it be that viewing the Jewish state as a fulfillment of the divine will was a mistake? These questions constitute the background for this book's study of religious disappointment.

### Cognitive Dissonance

The subject of prophetic failure is critical to an understanding of the development of any messianic faith. With this in mind, it is worth drawing on the theory of cognitive dissonance. *When Prophecy Fails* (Festinger, Reiken & Schachter 1956) presented the salient features of this theory: If a person believes in something fervently, he attempts to maintain his faith, often by taking irreversible steps. However, if confronted by irrefutable evidence that the path he had followed in the name of his faith was mistaken, the believer nonetheless becomes strengthened in his faith, making a renewed effort to convince and convert others to adopt his worldview. Therefore, according to the theory, crisis of faith that results from prophetic failure may paradoxically lead to the

<sup>11</sup> Aviever Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 122–44.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–41.

strengthening of religious commitment rather than to its dilution. In other words, while in logical terms the failure of the prophecy might be expected to weaken its justification, a diametrically opposite phenomenon sometimes develops, characterized by a strengthening of faith and religious practice in an attempt to set the messianic process back on course.

According to Festinger, the process ensues in the following manner: The gap that develops between expectation and experience generates cognitive tension. This dissonance creates discomfort in the believer, thus producing pressure to reduce it. Individuals must then either change their beliefs, opinions, or behavior, secure new information that mitigates the dissonance, or forget or belittle the importance of the information that resulted in the internal contradiction. In order to succeed, the believer must receive support from either his psychological or his social environment. Without such support, the chances are that the effort to moderate the dissonance will prove unsuccessful. Thus, prophetic failure increases the believer's devotion as well as his proselytizing efforts. In some cases, it is easier to cope with dissonance than to admit that a belief has failed. Accordingly, the believer will not abandon his faith, but at the same time he cannot deny that it has failed to materialize, as he had understood it would. Therefore, the believer must secure new information that corroborates his faith. One sure way to do so was to reassert his belief and attract new committed followers. This argument revolves around the idea that if he is able to convince more people that his beliefs are correct, then his beliefs must indeed be correct.<sup>13</sup>

### *Testing Festinger's Thesis*

The theory of cognitive dissonance has also been examined by other scholars in additional studies. However, these studies have not necessarily reached the same conclusions as those presented by Festinger and his colleagues.

Accumulated research has shown that the response to a failure of prophecy generally tends to focus on mystical interpretations that deny the failure and argue that prophecy has been maintained on divine or ethereal levels. The liberating power of mysticism, especially in Jewish history, lies in the fact that it is rooted in paradox, exposing inner truth outward appearances.<sup>14</sup> Thus, mystical interpretation enables the rejection of reality as it appears externally, and acceptance instead as covert spiritual fulfillment. In rationalizing the apparent failure of prophecy, the believer may also argue that the crisis was a test of faith; that human errors occurred in calculations; or, that others were to blame for the failure.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Leon Festinger, Henry W. Reiken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956, 3–32.

<sup>14</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1960, 1–39.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Melton, "Spiritualization and Reaffirmation: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails," *American Studies* 26 (2) (1985), 17–29; Lorne L. Dawson, "When Prophecy Fails and Faith Persists: A Theoretical Overview," *Nova Religio* 3(1) (1999) 60–82.



A different and pragmatic course is also possible, however, which admits that the failure of prophecy indicates a misappraisal of what was understood as impending messianic redemption.

An example of this may be found in the history of the Sabbatean movement in the Jewish world, disciples and believers in Shabbtai Zvi (1626–1676), who was proclaimed to be the Jewish Messiah in 1665. In his study, Gershom Scholem described how the Sabbatean movement split into two groupings following the conversion of its leader, Shabbtai Zvi to Islam in 1667. Following the prophetic failure, most of the movement's supporters returned to normative Judaism; meanwhile those who remained in the movement adopted a mystical interpretation of their leader's conversion to Islam, depicting it as part of his battle against the forces of impurity.<sup>16</sup> A more recent example from the Jewish world is the case of the Chabad movement, which acknowledge its leader, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Schneerson, as messiah and was then forced to confront his death in 1994. Following the failure, a split occurred within the movement between those who recognized his demise and concluded that he was not the messiah, and those who refused to accept this. (Some accepted that he had died but urged him to return to complete his mission, while others refused to accept his death, claiming that he was actually merely "concealing himself.")<sup>17</sup>

A further example is the Millerites movement, based on the leadership of William Miller, who calculated that the end of the world would arrive in 1843. After the calculation proved incorrect, he twice postponed the date to 1844. *When Prophecy Fails* claimed that after the third failure the movement collapsed,<sup>18</sup> but this is inaccurate. After the failure of the calculation and the "great disappointment" this created, the supporters of the prophecy developed from a disorganized mass awaiting the end of the world into two distinct sects – the Advent Christian Association and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.<sup>19</sup> The former of these sects admitted that the calculation had failed, but still expected the imminent coming of Jesus; the latter claimed that William Miller's prophecy had been accurate in terms of the date, but not in terms of the nature of the event. Indeed, two of the three prophecies (redemption and absolution) occurred on the predicted date, but in the divine sphere. The third prophecy, they claimed, would occur only when God returned to earth.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, [Translated by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky], Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*, London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001; Simon Dein, "What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails: The Case of Lubavitch" *Sociology of Religion* 62 (3) (2001) 383–401; Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem M. Friedman, *The Rebbe: the Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> David Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets – Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800–1850: AAR Studies in Religion* 38, California: Scholars Press, 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Morgan, "The Adventist Tradition," in: Eugene V. Gallagher and Michael Ashcraft (eds.) *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2006, 38–61.

In his study of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement, which itself experienced six failures to predict the end of the world, Joseph Zygmunt claimed that failure was interpreted as a wakeup call to the movement to arouse the members that they needed to more fully repent and prepare themselves for the coming of the messiah; accordingly, they argued, the prophecy had not in fact failed, but had been realized in the spiritual realm rather than in the physical realm. Failure in this world was perceived as partial realization in the divine world. They contended that the divine plan resembles a jigsaw puzzle in which all the pieces must fall into place. Every day that passes brings redemption closer.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, we can see that contrary to Festinger's theory, there is no single way that is used to overcome prophetic failure through conversion. The failure of prophecy does not necessarily mean the end of the movement. In some cases, failure can be interpreted as a trial of faith or a warning to the world. Accordingly, failure can paradoxically lead to the strengthening of the movement. True believers can continue to maintain their vision regardless of where it takes them, whether in logical or illogical terms.<sup>22</sup>

This book sheds new light on what happens when prophecy fails. However, conditions in this case are somewhat different: Though the territorial withdrawals create *fear* of a failure of faith because of the vision for the Whole Land of Israel's being shattered, it has not yet become apparent beyond doubt that *redemption itself* has failed. Therefore, in this specific case study, messianic believers have a third option: to take the necessary actions that will prevent failure of the redemptive process.

I argue that the messianic Religious Zionist's response to failure of faith due to territorial compromises in certain circumstances may go in one of these ways:

1. There may be a logical explanation to an acknowledged failure of prophecy, in which they admit that a religious mistake had been made, and thus they retreat from their expectant messianic perspective.
2. Alternately, they may have the opposite reaction in which followers reject the idea that the prophecy failed, instead arguing that messianic realization is indeed taking place, but in the unseen sphere. Therefore, they may argue that since messianic failure is definitely not certain, nothing should be changed in their theology and practice.
3. Finally, they may acknowledge the failure of their original messianic prophecy, and yet still be strengthened in their religious zeal in order to prevent complete collapse. The followers of this pattern can be described as "hastening the end." The end vision is political, the establishment of a theocratic regime, therefore, they may be involved in political action, in order to fulfill prophecy.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph F. Zygmunt, "Prophetic Failure and Chiliastic Identity: The Case of the Jehovah's Witnesses," *American Journal of Sociology* 75(6) (1970) 926-48.

<sup>22</sup> Jon Stone, *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy*, New York and London, Routledge, 2000, 1-30.

This book seeks to identify the circumstances that lead to each of these three distinct responses.

### Religious Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is a pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled “true believers” attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to the secular institutions and behavior. All fundamentalist movements interact with the outside world: Some retreat from society in order to avoid the influence of secularity and others attempt to take over the secular regime. The study *Strong Religion* (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003) attempts to define fundamentalists’ interactions with the world in four categories: world conqueror, world transformer, world creator, and world renouncer. Religious movements are not frozen and they can move from one category to the other.<sup>23</sup>

The world creators and the world renouncers focus mainly on strengthening their own enclaves. World renouncers build high walls that separate them from the rest of society. They do not want to transform world outlook or political-legal structure; they just want to be left alone to their beliefs and practices. The world creators also focus on their own enclaves, but they show some interest in changing the secular world, at least for their own benefit. Accordingly, the world creators act in order to recruit more followers from the secular world to their lifestyle.

It is tempting to argue that all fundamentalist movements hold a desire to have their theological-political vision come to dominate the world. However, the desire to rule society can be moderated. Fundamentalist world transformer movements know that they must act in a specific time and place, and if they do not hold enough power, they may lose their battle. Therefore, fundamentalist movements may instead adjust themselves to the secular regime, and to be part of it even though they reject the values of the secular world. In order to pursue their goals, they may enter the political arena and try to influence the institutions, structures, laws, and customs of their society. By contrast, a different pattern of fundamentalism – world conqueror – has sought to replace secular government through revolution.

In this situation, patriotism could become an integral part of the religious identity of certain fundamentalist movements. This pattern is particularly evident in the case of American Christian fundamentalism. A long-standing tradition of the separation of church and state, alongside encouragement for freedom of religion in America, led to the emergence of a cultural climate of religious and ethnic pluralism, that ensured the independent and autonomous presence of religious expression and competition amongst sects of believers. Against this background, American evangelical Christianity could develop social and

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel A. Almond, Scott R. Appleby & Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion – The Rise of Fundamentalism around the World*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003.

organizational networks that separate it from the liberal streams of Christianity without developing hostility to the government or revolutionary aspirations.<sup>24</sup>

The Gush Emunim movement can also be identified as a world transformer movement. Its theological framework sees redemption as a gradual process that may take centuries. Therefore, its mission is protracted. When the movement was established, it had some government opposition, but after the 1977 general elections and the victory of the Likud party, there was a gradual support for the movement's goals. The fact that 300,000 Israelis live in the West Bank today is a direct result of the movement's ongoing political campaign over the past three decades.

What creates change in the behavior of a fundamentalism movement, pushing it from a stance of world transformer to that of world conqueror? In what circumstances does a movement no longer maintain its position of reconciliation vis-à-vis the world and instead move into a confrontational posture? In what conditions can the movement no longer conform to the secular regime?

The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt underwent this type of development process. In 1928, the movement was established by Hassan Al-Banna in order to correct the flaws of Egyptian society, which Al-Banna attributed to the penetration of modernization and western values into Egyptian society. Al-Banna saw the establishment of a theocratic regime as the sublime goal of his movement, but the way to achieve it was through mass education and re-Islamization of the society. The movement was persecuted by the Egyptian regime and Al-Banna was assassinated. This situation did not change even after Gamal Abed Al-Nasser came to power in Egypt in 1952, partly through the help of the Muslim Brothers. The new Nasser regime instead continued to persecute followers of the Muslim Brothers. As a result, the movement underwent a period of radicalization, and some of its followers turned to terrorism. The most prominent example was the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Saadat in 1981.<sup>25</sup>

Shiite revolutionaries in Iran learned the lesson of the Society of Muslim Brothers. Due to the ongoing failure of the Brothers to win the hearts of the masses in Egypt, a new tactical approach was taken. The conclusion the Shiite reached was that they must first take control over the state powers, and only then restore the role of Islam over the populace. This conclusion was also the result of the severe government persecution of religious leaders in Iran. All those persecuted pushed the religious establishment into the revolution that took place in 1979.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 168–9; Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, 225–53.

<sup>25</sup> Laurence Davidson, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998, 19–30; Richard Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>26</sup> Laurence Davidson, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 31–48.

Accordingly, the feelings of persecution and siege led Muslim fundamentalists into trends of revolution and violence. My argument is that the messianic Religious Zionist establishment is also undergoing a religious crisis due to the government's decision to uproot settlements. As a result, theocratic and revolutionary sentiments can find roots within the hearts of many followers. Believers need to cope with feelings of messianic failure that can push them into political action. In such a case, it is likely that a movement can change course from accepting the authority of the state and working within the state's institutions into working *against* the state as an independent entity. This internal debate over the sanctity of secular government's authority to messianic Religious Zionists constitutes the heart of this book.

### Other Publications Written on the Subject

To date, no comprehensive study has been published relating the response of settler rabbis to territorial compromise. Furthermore, research on Gush Emunim has usually been divided between the humanities and the social sciences. While some study the theological aspects of the rabbinical literature, others examine Gush Emunim as a social phenomenon; however, there has been no attempt to combine the two and explore the ways in which ideology pushes people into action. The present study aims to fill this gap. Moreover, there are only limited studies on Gush Emunim. Most of them are only in Hebrew and some tend to be polemic, written with strong ideological agendas.

In 1987, Gideon Aran wrote a PhD dissertation on the origins of Gush Emunim. At the time, it was the most comprehensive attempt to study the settler community.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, he never published his research. Recently, journalist Gershon Gorenberg published a detailed study on the emergence of the settlement project. His book reviews the political and international background, in addition to the motivations of the first settlers. His book focuses only on the first years of Israeli occupation of the territories after 1967.<sup>28</sup> Another book recently published, *Lords of the Land: the War Over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967–2007* (Zertal and Eldar 2007) attempts to write the historiography of the settlement movement, and to psychoanalyze this unique phenomenon, but it is motivated by hostile political agenda and it is unbalanced in its research. In 2009, Michael Feige published a book on the Gush Emunim movement, which is an anthropological analysis of settler communities. His book is an important milestone in the study of this unique

<sup>27</sup> Gideon Aran, "A Mystic-Messianic Interpretation of Modern Israeli History: the Six Day War as a Key Event in the Development of the Original Religious Culture of Gush Emunim," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 4 (1988) 263–75; Idem, "From Religious Zionism to Zionist Religion: The Roots of Gush Emunim," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 2 (1986) 116–43.

<sup>28</sup> Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire – Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977*, New York: Times Books, 2006.

movement. Unfortunately, Feige almost completely ignores settler rabbis and their ideology.<sup>29</sup> Dov Schwartz wrote very important scholarly works on the history and the ideology of religious Zionism.<sup>30</sup> However, most of his work is written in Hebrew.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, this study exposes individuals and opinions that have received little research attention to date, and will provide an additional strand in professional knowledge relating to contemporary religious society in Israel, and religious right-wing circles in particular. It delineates the variety of attitudes among the religious leadership, showing the connections between the different trends and revealing the inherent potential for subversion and violence.

The book examines how a political process contributed to changing religious doctrines, and explores the influence of secularity over religious ideology. It provides better assessment tools in the case of further Israeli pull-back from the West Bank and the uprooting of settlements. It also sheds new light into the global trend of fundamentalism and its response to the secular world.

The materials drawn upon in researching this book are collected mainly from rabbis' writings. Two other important sources are the settlers' monthly periodical *Nekuda* and the settler's weekly *Besheva*, where much of the theological debate that we investigate is discussed. Additional sources include some internet sites that have recently become a major place for ideological discussion as well as weekly Torah portion newsletters distributed for free in orthodox synagogues, both contain considerable writing on political-religious issues.

I choose to examine the reactions of the rabbinical elite as the crux of my book on the development of the ideology, because of their importance in shaping the opinions that eventually push people into action. One might argue that the rabbis do not represent the entire movement.<sup>32</sup> However, one should not underestimate their power – these are the teachers of almost the entire religious Zionist young guard stream, who are defining the values of a new rising generation. Therefore, I can argue with confidence that the theological crisis studied in this book is an important element in lives of the youth, and will have broad impact the entirety of Israeli society.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Faith at a Crossroads – A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism*, Leiden, Boston & Koln: Brill, 2002; Idem, *Religious-Zionism: History and ideology*, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Challenge and Crises in the Circle of Rabbi Kook*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001 (in Hebrew); Idem, *Religious Zionism between Reality and Messianism*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999 (in Hebrew); Idem, *The Land of Reality and Imagination – The Status of the Land of Israel in Religious Zionist Thought*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997 (in Hebrew).

<sup>32</sup> Nissim Leon, "Religion, Class and Political Action in Religious Zionism in Israel," *Democratic Culture in Israel and the World* 12 (2011) 61–114.

## Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 discusses the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. As indicated, the rabbi is one the most important spiritual leaders within Religious Zionism and a significant figure in the shaping of Israeli society. It was under his spiritual leadership that the Gush Emunim movement was established in 1974. During Kook's teaching and writing career, there was an important transformation of what he imagined Zionism should be, and this dialectical process pushed him to develop a unique political theology blending complete identification with the state, on the one hand, with an assault against the secular government on the other.

Chapter 2 describes the impact of the Egypt-Israel peace process (1978) and the ensuing evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula in 1982, on the followers of the movement. The struggle against the evacuation helped to formulate Gush Emunim's major pattern of resistance – civil disobedience. In this chapter, I present the debates over the resistance pattern and the creation of the “statist” response.

Chapter 3 deals with the response that was articulated in Mercaz Harav Yeshiva circles to the Oslo process (1993–1996), and focuses on three rabbis – Zvi Tau, Shlomo Aviner, and Yoel Bin Nun, who all head major yeshivas and are considered central figures. The three lead the statist stream and argue that the political process does not represent a messianic failure.

Chapter 4 presents the path taken by Rabbi Yehuda Amital, head of Har Etzion Yeshiva. The rabbi profoundly transformed his religious beliefs to reject the messianic identification of Zionist action. This reversal occurred during the early stages of the Oslo process. As a result, the rabbi became a prominent advocate of the agreement, in order to prevent bloodshed against the changing reality of the Middle East. Amital's approach in coping with messianic failure was to offer a pragmatic interpretation of reality. This enabled him to diffuse messianic tension, admit that he had made a mistake, and retreat from messianic mysticism.

Chapter 5 discusses a radical response to territorial compromises, with the establishment of the Jewish Leadership Movement. I define this movement as post-Zionist because it declares that the classical secular Zionist mission has come to an end, and now the role of the religious Jews is to take it over and to establish a Jewish theocracy. The movement became involved in parliamentary politics while seeking to realize its “religious revolution” through involvement in the Likud party. Their response to the fear of prophetic failure was with the intensification of messianic zeal.

In August 2005, Israel evacuated the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip – mainly Gush Katif – as well as four settlements in northern Samaria. This action constituted a profound crisis for the settlement movement in the Territories. Chapter 6 examines the attitude of the rabbinical leadership of the settlers toward the Disengagement. The chapter reveals a widening fault line within the dominant settler rabbis regarding the question of the status and religious

significance of the Zionist state in light of a volatile reality. It examines the internal mechanism applied by a group of religious Zionist rabbis in response to their profound disillusionment with the behavior of the state, which is reflected in an increase in religious radicalization because of the need to cope with the feelings of messianic retreat.

Chapter 7 discusses the rabbis' response to political violence and incitement. It presents the debates over the Patriarch Cave/Ibrahmic Mosque massacre in Hebron in 1994 carried out by Baruch Goldstein, and later their reactions to the assassination of Israel Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin in 1995. The chapter then exposes an internal discussion inside the rabbinical elite over the rules of *Erev rav* (mix multitude), a growing trend to use mystical terms in order to identify their political rivals in demonic terms and to cast them out of Judaism.

Chapter 8 discusses the American Evangelical movement's attitude to Israeli territorial compromises, as a comparison case study. The chapter presents the ideology of two major religious authorities: Hal Lindsey and John Hagee. During the last decade especially, many American Evangelists developed a very supportive attitude to the State of Israel, and the success of Zionism has been understood as a sign of Christ's imminent return. Would Israeli withdrawals be understood as a messianic retreat? This chapter examines the response of the Christian right.

Israeli society is standing at a crossroad. It might be that further territorial concessions are just around the corner. Studying rabbinical reactions to territorial compromises allow deeper insights into Israeli society and, in particular, the religious Zionist camp. Therefore, this book hopefully provides the reader with better understanding of the challenges that the State of Israel will have to face in further attempts to relinquish settlements and return lands to Arab rule. This ideological community is a major player in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Accordingly, the research contributes to a more precise evaluation of their social and political power. The comparative dimension in the book offers a further angle for examining the wave of fundamentalism that has swept not just the Middle East, but the entire world.



## Zionist Perceptions in the Thought of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and the Roots of Gush Emunim

In January 2008, the Israel Police arrested seven seventeen-year-old girls, all members of the Land of Israel Youth movement, during the eviction of an unlawful settlement they had initiated. For three weeks, the girls were held in detention because they refused to identify themselves and claimed they did not accept the legitimacy of Israeli law or the authority of the court. “We were educated in the ways of the Torah, and there is no reason that we should not also be trialed in accordance with those ways,” the girls argued in an interview after their release.<sup>1</sup> This incident illustrates the profound changes that have taken place in messianic religious Zionist circles since the implementation of the Disengagement Plan.

The phenomenon whereby graduates of the settlers’ education system reject the authority of the State of Israel’s courts reflect a theological crisis whose origins lie in the Oslo process (1993), which peaked (for the present) during the execution of the Disengagement Plan. This crisis revolves around the basic question of whether the faith-based infrastructure of the Gush Emunim (“Block of the Faithful”) movement is still valid – that is to say, whether Israeli reality constitutes a manifestation of the messianic process, so that the State of Israel is imbued with a status of sanctity because it functions as a tool for the Divine will. The peace process raised thorny theological questions: does withdrawal from territories within the Land of Israel constitute a retreat in the process of redemption, and has the secular state lost sacred quality as a result of these concessions and withdrawals?

The inherent tension between the perception of the state as a sacred institution and the doubts about its authority to manage policy independently has accompanied the settlement enterprise since its inception. The origins of this tension lie in the thought of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982), the spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Hagit Rotenberg, “Judging Their Judges,” *Besheva*, 17 Shvat 5768, 24 January 2008, <http://www.inn.co.il/Besheva/Article.aspx/7163>.

leader of Gush Emunim, who fashioned the worldview of its leaders, graduates of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem.

This chapter focuses on the development of Kook's spiritual philosophy over the years. Analyzing the changes in his teachings allows better understanding of the reasons that pushed him from being a spiritual authority to being a leader of a mass movement active in the political sphere. I propose a distinction between two key phases in this process, with the 1973 (Yom Kippur) War serving as the watershed between both. During the first phase, Kook completely identified with the Zionist enterprise and was fiercely critical of Orthodox opponents of Zionism. After the war, however, a transformation occurred in Kook's philosophy and he began to move away from total identification with Zionism, challenging the legitimacy of the state as it attempted to return territories to Arab rule. This analysis also presents the spiritual and religious background during the emergence of Gush Emunim and highlights the internal tensions that continue to accompany the movement.

Since Rabbi Kook's death in 1982, his leading followers have chosen to emphasize different aspects of his thought and his approach to the secular state. The rabbi's philosophy included internal contradictions that created the potential for division among his students.

Because of the importance of the settlement movement within modern Israeli reality and the crucial role played by the thought of Rabbi Kook and Mercaz Harav yeshiva within the movement, this subject has already been studied.<sup>2</sup> However, in this chapter, I discuss and debate the position of Aviezer Ravitzky, who argues that the establishment of Gush Emunim should be considered an example of messianism's victory and progress. Ravitzky claims that although sociological theories attribute the development of messianic movements to conditions of distress, disaster, or discomfort,<sup>3</sup> the case of Gush Emunim is one of messianism resulting from conditions of success and the hope of changing the course of history.<sup>4</sup> He argues that the messianic activism of Zvi Yehuda Kook and his followers was a product of their complete belief in the determinism of the process of redemption, but that did not lead them to adopt a passive position of quietly awaiting messianic fulfillment. In keeping with the changing character of modern social movements, deterministic expectation led, in this case, to a release from constraint and a desire to break through to the End of Days. Certainty in the outcome of the process was mirrored by a growing

<sup>2</sup> Gideon Aran, *From Religious Zionism to a Zionist Religion: The Roots and Culture of Gush Emunim*, doctorate thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987 (in Hebrew); Dov Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis in the Circle of Rabbi Kook*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001 (in Hebrew); Idem, "Theological Justification for a Nationalist-Messianic Belief: The Work of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook," *Hatziyonut*, 22 (2000), 61–81 (in Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> Yonina Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," *Archive européennes de sociologie*, 2 (1966), 156–200; Michal Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Messianism of Success in Contemporary Judaism," in: Stephen Stein (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3: *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, New York and London: Continuum, 1998, 204–29.

confidence that inspired believers to take action to realize the course of history. "One who has deciphered the secret, redemptive direction of history has no fear of failure."<sup>5</sup>

A similar analysis was offered by Richard Hoch in his dissertation on the thought of Zvi Yehuda Kook and the origins of Gush Emunim. Hoch suggests that most theories of messianism emphasize its development as a response to real or imagined disasters, although the teaching of Zvi Yehuda Kook is essentially optimistic and based on the success of Zionism. Social tension played a part in the emergence of Gush Emunim.<sup>6</sup> However, the worldview of this movement challenges the basic assumptions of research into the phenomenon of messianism. The movement is an example of messianism of success because it sees the State of Israel's establishment, particularly Israel's victory in 1967, as a manifestation of messianic fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>

In my opinion, however, the background to the establishment of Gush Emunim was not success and prosperity, but the fear of failure and messianic retreat. After all, Gush Emunim was not founded after the Six Day War (1967), when the Israeli army secured a remarkable victory over the Arab armies and occupied areas considered part of the Biblical Land of Israel. After the war, Kook described the Israeli victory as the "visualization of the Divine politics" and the appearance of God's leadership over Israel and the entire world.<sup>8</sup> It was the 1973 War, and the subsequent negotiations for the return of the territory occupied in 1967 in return for a peace agreement, that led to the establishment of Gush Emunim by way of a counterreaction. Messianic activism was created to prevent a retreat from the achievements secured in the Six Day War. This period also changed the rhetoric of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who began to qualify his support for secular Zionism and show a loss of faith that the Zionist course could lead to complete redemption. This rhetorical change intensified following peace agreements with Egypt and Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Accordingly, this chapter examines Gush Emunim against the background of the threat to the Whole Land of Israel's vision. As Israel reached peace agreements with its neighbors, the perceived threat intensified and the messianic approach of Gush Emunim became more pronounced and extreme.

<sup>5</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 130.

<sup>6</sup> In this context, Hoch emphasized the emergence of Gachelet (Ember), a national-religious youth movement that emerged in Kfar Haroe'h residential school, and whose young members felt that religious Zionism had for too long "played second fiddle" to its secular counterpart. These youngsters later joined the Mercaz Harav yeshiva and found in Rabbi Kook an admired teacher and leader. On the subject of Gachelet, see: Gideon Aran, "Between Pioneering and Torah Study," in: Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Religious Zionism: Ideological Aspects*, 3, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 5763–2003, 31–72 (in Hebrew).

<sup>7</sup> Richard L. Hoch, *The Politics of Redemption: Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Ha-Kohen Kook and the Origins of Gush Emunim*, PhD Dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1994, 107–9.

<sup>8</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, "Go See God's Work," in: Zalman B. Melamed (ed.) *Erets Hatzvi: Our Rabbi in the Battle over Our entire Land*, Bet-El: Netivei Or, 1994, 11–20 (in Hebrew).

### Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook: A Biographical Sketch and Its Significance for the Future Establishment of Gush Emunim

Zvi Yehuda Kook was born on the eve of Passover, April 22, 1891, in Zaumel, Lithuania. He was the only son of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, who also had three daughters. His father was a well-known Lithuanian rabbi and a prominent supporter of the Zionist movement.<sup>9</sup> In 1904, Rabbi Kook was invited to serve as the rabbi of the new yeshuv in Jaffa. After arriving in the Land of Israel, Zvi Yehuda was sent to study at the Torat Chayim yeshiva in Jerusalem, headed by Rabbi Zerah Epstein. A few years later, Zvi Yehuda returned to his father's home in Jaffa where he continued religious studies. In Jaffa, he met Rabbi Yaacov Moshe Harlap (1883–1951), who was a member of his father's close circle, and the two men studied Kabbalah together. According to Dov Schwartz, Avraham Yitzhak Kook and his son Zvi Yehuda, along with Harlap and David “Hanazir” Hacohen, were prominent examples of a mystical circle, and their philosophy should be regarded as a single coherent unit.<sup>10</sup>

In 1908, Zvi Yehuda Kook began to edit his father's writings, a task he would continue until his death in 1982. Zvi Yehuda saw himself as the sole authority empowered to interpret his father's works; therefore, he supervised and edited all the publications. In 1912, at the age of nineteen, Zvi Yehuda published his first essay, *Israeli Culture*. Around the same time, he returned to Jerusalem and began to study at the Porat Yosef Yeshiva. Later, following friends' advice, he traveled to Germany to study in Halberstadt with his friend Rabbi Yitzhak Auerbach. Zvi Yehuda also acquired a general academic education in Germany alongside his religious studies.<sup>11</sup>

In the summer of 1914, Avraham Yitzhak Kook departed for Germany to attend a gathering of Agudat Israel. However, the meeting was canceled because of the outbreak of the First World War. Rabbi Kook was arrested by the Russian authorities but eventually released following an intervention by local rabbis. He traveled on to Switzerland, where he was joined in the spring of 1915 by his son Zvi Yehuda, who was still studying in Germany. In 1916, Rabbi Kook Senior moved to Britain and became active in the local Jewish community. His son joined him and worked on his behalf to establish a movement named Degel Yerushalayim (The Jerusalem Flag). The two rabbis' movement reflected their dissatisfaction with the Mizrahi movement, which represented religious Zionism at the time, and sought to provide the spiritual dimension to the process of national renewal. The Kooks argued that whereas the Zionist movement was concerned with the material aspect of

<sup>9</sup> The biographical information here is based mainly on Hoch, *The Politics of Redemption*, 110–58.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis*, 7–22.

<sup>11</sup> See the remarks by Avraham Naveh, “A Lesson with Rabbi Zvi Yehuda,” *Ha'aretz*, 14 Av 5737–1977, in: Yosef Bramson (ed.), *The Public Campaign: From the Press*, Jerusalem: Zhabav Haaretz Association, 1986, 39–58.

Jewish redemption, their own movement would attend to its spiritual dimensions. The Degel Yerushalayim initiative did not prove a success.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Zvi Yehuda was committed to the ideals of Degel Yerushalayim and traveled around the Jewish world in an effort to recruit Orthodox support for the movement, opening branches in Britain, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and the United States.

During one of his meetings in Warsaw, Zvi Yehuda visited the home of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Hanter and met his eldest daughter, Chava Leah. The couple married on February 24, 1922, and moved to Jerusalem, where Chava Leah worked in the field of education. In 1944, she died suddenly. The couple had no children. Zvi Yehuda refused to remarry, therefore, his students came to take the place of children. In 1952, after the death of Rabbi Harlap, Zvi Yehuda was appointed head of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, which had not yet gained a reputation as a serious institution of higher study. However, a group of students from the Gachelet movement joined the yeshiva. These students were torn between their commitment to the world of Halacha and their desire to be involved in Zionist action. They attached particular importance to the writings of Zvi Yehuda, because these offered a synthesis of Halacha and Zionism. Zvi Yehuda's new students found in him the character of a spiritual and political leader, and later the ranks of Gachelet would produce leading figures in Gush Emunim such as Moshe Levinger, Hanan Porat, and Chaim Druckman, among others.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1960s, Zvi Yehuda and his students were active in the campaign against Christian missionaries in Israel. In 1964, students from the yeshiva were among the leading forces behind the establishment of a faction within the National Religious Party called "the Faction of the Faithful." The faction discontinued its activities after Zvi Yehuda instructed its leader, Rabbi Chaim Druckman, to choose between "politics or Torah."<sup>14</sup> Zvi Yehuda was also active in efforts to ease the tension between secular and religious Jews, hoping this would attract more secular Israelis to the faith. For a short period, Zvi Yehuda was even active in the League against Religious Coercion, but he later left the organization, which in practice advocated anti-religious coercion (the movement activists refused to change its name to the League to Prevent Coercion of Conscience).

In May 1967, three weeks before the outbreak of the Six Day War, Zvi Yehuda made an impassioned speech at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva on Israel's Independence Day. His cry of "Where is our Hebron – are we forgetting that?! Where is our Shechen (Nablus) – are we forgetting that?!" was engraved in his students' collective memory. It was also later perceived as prophecy, because

<sup>12</sup> On the Degel Yerushalayim movement, see: Yossi Avineri, "Degel Yerushalayim," in: Avraham Rubinstein (ed.), *On the Paths of Resurrection: Studies in Religious Zionism*, 3, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 5749–1989, 39–58 (in Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> Gideon Aran, *Pioneering and Torah Study*.

<sup>14</sup> *The Jerusalem Post*, March 8, 1964.

just a few weeks later the war broke out and these cities were occupied by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and again came under Jewish control.<sup>15</sup>

During the Six Day War, the IDF Paratroopers broke through to the Western Wall. The soldiers included a number of graduates of the yeshiva, and the brigade commander, Motte Gur, sent an army vehicle to bring Zvi Yehuda to the site together with David “Hanazir” Hacoheh, who was also based at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva. Zvi Yehuda interpreted the war in a completely religious context, as proof that the process of redemption was underway.<sup>16</sup>

Rabbi Kook refused to sign a petition advocating Israeli control of the Land of Israel because it failed to include Transjordan. Instead, on September 19, 1967, he issued his own declaration, “You shall not fear,” emphasizing that it was a sin and a crime to deliver any part of the Land of Israel to gentile rule. His declaration was an example of a growing trend among the younger members of the National Religious Party to demand that their movement change its approach to Israeli politics. They called to end its preoccupation with protecting the rights of the religious public in areas such as observance of the laws of Sabbath and Kashrut or imposing Halachic definitions of marriage and conversion. The younger generation insisted that the National Religious Party (NRP) reject any discussion of territorial compromise.<sup>17</sup>

Although Gush Emunim was not founded immediately after the Six Day War, the graduates of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva were involved in two limited settlement projects. They renewed the Jewish settlement in the Gush Etzion area, which had been occupied by Jordanian forces in 1948. In 1968, the first Jews also revived the Jewish settlement in Hebron, on the initiative of Rabbi Moshe Levinger and graduates of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, by moving into the Park Hotel in the heart of the city.

In 1977, the era of Labor party hegemony ended with the election of a government headed by Menachem Begin, leader of the Herut and Likud movement. Begin was an adherent of the Whole Land of Israel ideology, and as such enjoyed the support of Gush Emunim. Following the establishment of the government, the rate of settlement construction increased under the direction of Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon enjoying enthusiastic government support in the form of financial benefits, construction of infrastructures, and legal support. In 1978, the Amana movement was established as the settlement wing

<sup>15</sup> Gideon Aran, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Land,” in: Scott Appleby (ed.), *Spokesman for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 294–327.

<sup>16</sup> Gideon Aran, “A Mystic-Messianic Interpretation of Modern Israeli History: The Six Day War as a Key Event in the Development of the Original Religious Culture of Gush Emunim,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 4 (1988), 263–75.

<sup>17</sup> Yoni Garb, “Young NRP Members and the Ideological Roots of Gush Emunim,” in: Asher Cohen and Israel Harel (eds.), *Religious Zionism: The Age of Change*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 5764–2004, 171–200 (in Hebrew); Eliezer Don Yihya, “Stability and Change in the Party of the Camp – the NRP and the Youth Revolution,” *State, Government and International Relations*, 14 (5740–1980), 25–52 (in Hebrew).

of Gush Emunim. Over the following decades, the number of Israeli citizens living in the settlements consistently increased.

Not long after he came to power, however, Begin astonished the graduates of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva by choosing a political direction based on a peace agreement with Egypt entailing the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egyptian sovereignty, as well as agreement to establish Palestinian autonomy in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). Gush Emunim attempted to thwart the planned withdrawal from Sinai. On March 9, 1982, in the midst of the campaign, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda passed away, leaving his students without a leader and uncertain of the future of their struggle.<sup>18</sup>

### Development of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook's Religious Identity: The Early Stage

Zvi Yehuda's thought reflects an attempt to translate his father's philosophy from theory to practice.<sup>19</sup> In keeping with fundamentalist approaches that attack secularization, Zvi Yehuda was alarmed by this growing trend among the Jewish people. Yet like his father, he also saw the Zionist national enterprise as a catalyst for Jewish renaissance, despite its essentially nonreligious character. This ambivalent approach is evident throughout Zvi Yehuda's thought. He rejected Western influences that led many Jews to abandon religion, arguing it a betrayal of Jewish uniqueness. His attitudes on this question are based on Rabbi Judah Halevi's book, *The Kuzari*. This work, which has a place of honor in the religious Zionist curriculum, centers on the theme of the Jews' status as the chosen people. According to Halevi, God's choice of the Jewish people sets them apart from the other nations. The Jews carry a divine spark that prepared them to accept the Torah – given to them only, not to humanity as whole – in recognition of the essential difference between the Jewish people and other nations. Accordingly, Halevi's book was interpreted as implying an ontological distinction between the Jewish people and the remainder of humanity.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Halevy goes on to claim in *The Kuzari* that just as the Jews are different from all other nations, so the Land of Israel is set apart from all other lands. Jews in the Land of Israel enjoy direct divine providence and are entitled to the land in accordance with prophecies. The Land of Israel forms the heart of the settled world, and only there is prophecy possible. Jerusalem and the Temple are the gate connecting heaven and earth. Accordingly, it is preferable that Jews pray in the Land of Israel, because prayers uttered there are heard more forcefully. The Land of Israel serves as a kind of mirror for

<sup>18</sup> Gideon Aran, *The Land of Israel between Politics and Religion: The Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai*, Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for the Study of Israel, 1985 (in Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 122–5.

<sup>20</sup> Gdalia Afterman, *Understanding the Theology of Israel's Extreme Religious Right: "The Chosen People" and "The Land of Israel" from the Bible to the Expulsion from Gush Katif*, PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne 2007, 27–39.

the heavenly world. The outcome of all these beliefs is that Jewish life in the Land of Israel, based on observance of the commandments – particularly those commandments that can only be observed in the Land – operates according to the laws of the heavenly world. Only the combination of the chosen people and the chosen land can yield perfection. The Land rejects all those of its residents who are not Jewish; as for the Jews themselves, only when they dwell in the Land can they manifest their greatness.<sup>21</sup> This is the reason why for Zvi Yehuda Kook the most important commandment a Jew can perform is to live in the Land of Israel.<sup>22</sup>

On the basis of this approach, Kook published an article in 1914 on “Israeli Culture,” in which he expounded for the first time on his view of the cultural renaissance the Jewish people should undergo. In the article, he attempted to blend the two strands of his thought, attacking the secular pioneers for abandoning Jewish tradition, but praising the Zionist revolt against exile. Zvi Yehuda’s approach, as presented in this article and in other written texts until 1973, can be described as statist, supporting resurgent Jewish nationhood and showing complete identification with the Zionist cause. He argues that every social group has its own inherent nature – the “soul of the nation.” This is particularly true of the Jewish people, who were chosen to receive the Torah. Accordingly, it is improper for Jews to follow gentile practices, as the essence of Jewish life is observance of the Torah’s laws.

Zvi Yehuda’s article expresses a position rejecting secularization but supporting cooperation with nonobservant secular Jews in order to secure the sublime goal of messianic fulfillment. Life in exile impedes Jewish development: “The dulling atmosphere of exile, filled with the filthy influence of alien cultures, prevents the course and ideals of our life.”<sup>23</sup>

Kook claimed that although the Zionist desire for Jewish nationhood emerged as part of life in exile, it can only draw positive values in the context of the Land of Israel. For example, Zionism sought to provide a “refuge” for the Jewish people, according to its famous slogan, thereby ignoring and deviating from the religious significance of the Land of Israel.

Kook viewed the heresy of secular Zionism as a grave error. Zionist Jewish nationhood emphasized Israel’s function as a safe haven for the Jews, and strove to normalize the Jewish people. This approach contradicted and ignored the religious significance of the Land of Israel and the concept that the Jews are a chosen people. According to Kook, the goal of Jewish nationhood should be to transform the Jews into a “nation of priests and a holy people.” Therefore, secular national revival should be examined on the basis of religious parameters, and in this sense it reflects the “beginning of redemption” or the

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–8. See also: Schwartz, *Land of Reality and Imagination*, 106–7.

<sup>22</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “Behind Our Wall,” *To the Paths of Israel*, 13, Jerusalem: Hoshen Lev Association, 5749–1989, 22–5.

<sup>23</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “Israeli Culture,” *Ibid.*, 1: 11 (in Hebrew).



inception of a messianic process. Thus, the purpose of redemption is not merely to end the exile and persecution of the Jews; it carries a sublime religious goal.

According to Zvi Yehuda Kook, if Zionism became a mere imitation of Gentile culture, it would then lose its value. Only by adopting Jewish tradition can the people regain the holy spirit. In political terms, the real aspiration cannot merely be to settle the land and build a shelter for persecuted Jews. The goal must be to aspire to redemption, which means establishing a Jewish theocracy defined in terms of parameters that can be realized by humans. On the one hand, this synthesis of nationhood and religiosity requires the abandonment of the passive tradition of Jewish behavior. Tradition and nationhood can only be bridged through theocratic activism. In turn, this led to the value of sanctifying nationhood. Israeli politics cannot be dominated by the base cut and thrust of competition, but must serve as the foundation for a great and sacred vision. This was the foundation on which the rabbi permitted cooperation with secular Jews. The process of national revival was seen as a dialectical one perfected by means of the reacceptance of Torah.<sup>24</sup>

Kook mentioned the approach of Rabbis Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874) and Eliahu Guttmacher (1796–1874) as examples of the proper approach to Zionism. These rabbis urged Jews to return to the Land of Israel and were profoundly influenced by the innovations of the modern era. Kalischer proposed a gradual and mundane process of redemption, which would ultimately be completed through a divine miracle. For example, Kalischer's book, *Seeking Zion*, suggests purchasing the Temple Mount from the Muslims and holding the Passover sacrifices there, because this ceremony can take place even in the absence of proper priests. He also advocated Jewish agricultural settlement in the Land of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Guttmacher was a Polish rabbi and Kabbalist who supported Kalischer's call for Jews to settle in the Land of Israel. He established and headed an association devoted to this goal. According to Kook, both of these rabbis were motivated by a mundane messianic activism manifested in their longing for rebuilding the Temple; this led to the movement to settle the Land and the emergence of the Hibbat Zion movement – the pre-Zionist movement, beginning in the 1880's, advocating revival of Jewish life in the Land of Israel.<sup>26</sup> On the basis of these examples, Kook emphasizes that Zionism should be guided not by the distress faced by the Jews, but by the goal of reinstating the religious kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

Kook saw Jewish nationhood as a cosmopolitan concept. The moral development of the Jewish people is intended to serve the entire world. Jewish

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5–11; Also, Dov Schwartz, *The Land of Realization and Imagination*, 101–27.

<sup>25</sup> Jody E. Myers, *Seeking Zion: Modernity and Messianic Activism in the Writings of Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer*, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement (1882–1904)*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Behind Our Wall*.

settlement in the Land of Israel is designed not only to benefit the Jewish people, but all humanity. Thus, national revival eliminates the phenomenon of Arab antisemitism. Accordingly, only by emphasizing the messianic vision of Israel, which would benefit the entire world, is it possible to moderate the Arab hostility to Zionism.<sup>28</sup>

The negation of the Diaspora was a central element in Kook's philosophy, separating him clearly from non-Zionist Orthodoxy, which saw the Jewish way of life in the Diaspora as a manifestation of the ideal Jewish life.<sup>29</sup> Kook believed that a proper Jewish way of life could not accept exile and could not compromise on this aspect. "Only in the Land of Israel the Torah and Judaism can be observed detrimentally and regularly," said the rabbi.

Kook also said the sacredness of all the synagogues and Talmud centers abroad are not permanent. The messianic expectation is the manifestation of the spirit of Judaism, which negates the exile, and stands against the "rotten" exilic Jewish life.<sup>30</sup> After the Holocaust and the annihilation of six million Jews became known, Zvi Yehuda Kook became even more clearly opposed to the Diaspora, and saw the Holocaust as a necessary event in order to eliminate exile. He came to see the Holocaust as the breaking and uprooting of inferior Jewish culture and integrated the Holocaust in his messianic scheme. The collapse of the Diaspora carried the promise of national revival. Following the destruction of the Diaspora, the settlement of the Land of Israel demands the appearance of the value of Torah on the public level among all sections of the nation. Thus, the destruction of the Diaspora and the rebirth of Jewish nationhood will inevitably lead to the revival of religious life on the national level.<sup>31</sup>

In 1948, following the State of Israel's declaration of independence, Kook refined still further his perspective regarding Jewish nationhood through a messianic prism. He argued that God was taking the people through various phases that would lead to redemption. Although history is leading to the end of days, he acknowledged that the course could undergo setbacks, though these were actually intended to move the process forward. For Kook, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which Britain announced the right of the Jewish people to a national home, constitutes a key milestone in the course leading to the messianic end. The declaration brought to an end the oath God sworn the children of Israel "not to ascend up the wall from exile" (Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111a).

In his statement, Kook discussed the messianic passivity that characterized traditional Judaism, which was justified in theological terms by the oath sworn to God by the Children of Israel in Song of Songs 2:7: "I charge you, O ye

<sup>28</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, "Al Haperek," *To the Paths of Israel* 1: 20–1 (in Hebrew).

<sup>29</sup> Menachem Friedman, "Jewish Zealots: Conservative Versus Innovative," in: Laurence J. Silberstein (ed.), *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective: Religion, Ideology, and the Crisis of Modernity*, New York: New York University Press, 1993, 148–63.

<sup>30</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, "The Torah and Redemption," *To the Paths of Israel* 1: 36–7 (in Hebrew).

<sup>31</sup> Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 126–8.

daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.”

Interpreting this verse, the Midrash comments: “He swore Israel not to rebel against the sovereigns, and not to ‘force the End,’ and not to reveal their mysteries to the nations, and not to ascend up the wall from Exile” (Shir Hashirim Raba 2,7). The practical significance of this oath for the Jewish people is the strict prohibition of rebelling against the nations that host the Jews in exile; a prohibition against calculating when exile will end; and, a prohibition against collective migration to the Land of Israel. These prohibitions sanctified Jewish life in exile, and prevented Jews from associating to reinstitute Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. Only God would do that, through miraculous acts.<sup>32</sup>

The Balfour Declaration was ratified by the countries that emerged victorious from the First World War. According to rabbi Kook, this act was tantamount to the annulment of the three traditional oaths. Following this declaration, God gave the Jews political power, and this was followed by the “Divine surgery” manifested in the annihilation of six million Jews in the Holocaust. The subsequent establishment of the State of Israel constituted a further stage in this process of redemption.<sup>33</sup>

Kook refused to accept Zionism’s own definition and sought to attribute hidden motives to the movement. He claimed that although Zionism defined itself in narrow terms as a “refuge,” it was nevertheless driven by longing for the people’s Land, home, and inheritance. This longing was not merely the product of the desire to evade antisemitism and persecution, but an inner desire to return to a sublime life whose peak is the construction of the Third Temple as the manifestation of Zionist fulfillment. Accordingly, the inner goal of Zionism, the hidden force behind the national movement, is “the hope, desire and fierce longings in the heart of every Jew for the Temple, for redemption, and for the Land of Israel.”<sup>34</sup> The proof of this, Kook claimed, was the rejection by the Zionist Congress in 1904 of the proposal to establish a temporary Jewish state in Uganda, rather than in the land of Israel.<sup>35</sup>

Kook also disagreed with those who compared Benjamin Zeev Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, to Shabbtai Zvi, the founder of the Sabbatean Movement who claimed to be the Jewish messiah. He argued that Shabbtai Zvi actively led Jews to abandon the Torah and commandments, and sought to impose himself from above. Kook said Zvi’s insanity brought about the collapse of Zvi’s own movement. Herzl, however, was the latest chain in a movement that began with the rabbis who advocated observance of the commandment to settle the Land, such as Kalischer and Alkalai. Against this background, Kook argued that the Zionist movement grew from the grassroots

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 211–34.

<sup>33</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “To Israel’s National Guard,” *To the Paths of Israel*, 1, 112 (in Hebrew).

<sup>34</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “On the Agenda,” *Ibid*, 1, 14 (in Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15.

up, reflecting rejection of exile and the covert guidance and direction of God. Although Zionism had adopted a secular course, Zvi Yehuda chose to emphasize Herzl's remark that "our nation is a nation only in its faith."<sup>36</sup> As such, Kook grants Zionism the stamp of divine approval and providence:

It is not for nothing that the Holy One, blessed be He, King of the Universe, is gathering the dispersed of Israel to their Land; it is not for nothing that He is reviving the wilderness through them, and rebuilding with them its ruins; . . . it is not for nothing that He is arranging the opinions of nations and the thoughts of peoples; . . . it is not for nothing that He is thwarting the plots of the evil and disrupting their schemes; . . . it is not for nothing that He is breathing the wondrous spirit of heroism into the remainder of His chosen seed; . . . it is not for nothing that He is taking the adherents of the Torah, the carriers of its flag, and the soldiers of its army and bringing them here to its place, to magnify and adorn and restore it to its true and eternal state, for the life of the inheritance of choice and sanctity.<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, national resurrection is an organic concept that blends religion and messianism, with no contradiction between the two.

Based on his position, Zvi Yehuda expressed clear support for the establishment of a Jewish state. In 1946, he was asked how he could support a state that does not operate according to the laws of the Torah, and replied that it was precisely by joining in the effort to establish a state that it would be possible to ensure it would follow the Torah. According to Kook's logic, the declaration and development of the state would enable Jews to immigrate to their Land, where Jewish presence would ensure God's revelation in the world.<sup>38</sup>

Rabbi Kook approved of military service on behalf of the newly established state. Service in elite units and promotion through the ranks of the army would later become one of the hallmarks of religious Zionism, particularly from the 1990s onward. Zvi Yehuda quoted three reasons for military service: First, in the realm of mundane life, it is an important commandment to save Jewish life, and a sin to shirk from doing so. National existence in the Land of Israel means existence as dictated by the Torah, particularly in an age when God's signs are so evident. Second, in the realm of eternal life, it is a commandment from the Torah to settle the Land – indeed, the sources state that this commandment is equal to all the others. Zvi Yehuda argued that the end of exile is being revealed in our age, and the barriers between the people and their Land are being removed. The wall of alien rule that surrounded the Land, based on the three oaths, is being replaced by public expressions of support among the nations of the world for the Jewish people's right to its Land. Now God was calling by His actions in the mundane world for His people to come to the Land: "It is not we who are pushing [this process], but the Master and Ruler of the universe is pushing us and the nations of the world, urging us not to be

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. Cf. Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis*, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, "The Torah and Redemption," *To the Paths of Israel*, 1, 42 (in Hebrew).

<sup>38</sup> Kook, "Torah Judaism – Seeking the Jewish State," *Ibid.*, 67–70.

lazy . . . The involvement of the Holy One, blessed be He, is an act of He who 'set the heavens in place, laid the foundations of the earth, and who says to Zion, you are my people' (Isaiah 51:16)."<sup>39</sup>

In a state of war, it is an imperative to save lives; military service is therefore a duty borne by all Jews, and this overrules all the prohibitions in the Torah. Third, in the realm of both mundane and eternal life together, protecting the Land is an act that sanctifies God's name and brings God's influence onto all humans; it will lead to the appearance of the Divine Presence in every facet of public life.<sup>40</sup>

The conventional approach of Jewish tradition is that redemption is the product of repentance. Therefore, the purpose of exile is to prepare the Jewish people for its ultimate redemption, which is completed when the entire nation has repented. Thus, redemption is the result of religious action by the people, and all that must be done to secure it is to observe the commandments. Full redemption follows full repentance, when the entire people believes in its God and observes all his commandments as written in the Torah and interpreted in the Halacha.<sup>41</sup> In the thought of Zvi Yehuda Kook, however, this order is reversed. He argues that redemption precedes repentance. The process of redemption is already at an advanced stage, because the resurrection of the nation must also lead a process of repentance. Redemption cannot be complete without the repentance of the secular public. This explains Kook's efforts to forge links with the secular public, as well as his position that a movement of repentance cannot be built on coercion – a position that led him to join the League against Religious Coercion, as already noted.<sup>42</sup> In his interviews, Zvi Yehuda repeatedly referred to kibbutzniks who had become religious and began to study at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, it is only natural that Gush Emunim attached great importance to recruiting secular public figures. Kook instructed one of his students, Yaacov "Katzele" Katz,<sup>44</sup> to develop ties with the secular public and encourage its support for the settlement project. Katz contacted members of kibbutzim and moshavim, and in April 1976 formed the Ein Vered group to this end.<sup>45</sup>

Alongside his total identification with Zionist action, as early as 1947, Zvi Yehuda emphasized his total rejection of the United Nations partition proposal, which called for the establishment of a Jewish political entity and a

<sup>39</sup> Kook, "The Commandments of the Land," *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–127.

<sup>41</sup> Ela Balfar, *The Kingdom of Heaven and the State of Israel*, Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991 (in Hebrew).

<sup>42</sup> Aran, *The Father*.

<sup>43</sup> Yaacov Edelstein, "The Newly Religious in the Presence of Rabbi Kook, May a Tzadik's Memory Be a Blessing," *Hatzofeh*, 5 Tishrei 5726–1965, in: Bramson (ed.), *The Public Campaign: From the Press*, 37–43 (in Hebrew).

<sup>44</sup> Katz later initiated the establishment of the settler media, such as the radio station Arutz Sheva and the weekly newspaper Besheva. At the time of writing, Katz serves as chairperson of the National Union party in the Knesset.

<sup>45</sup> Gershon Sheft, *Gush Emunim: The Story behind the Scenes*, Beit El: Sifriat Beit El, 1995, 246–7 (in Hebrew).

Palestinian political entity within the Land of Israel. He proclaimed that the Torah prohibits the transfer of any part of the Land to gentile control. During the Sabbatical year, land may be delivered to gentiles on a temporary basis, but the Torah completely prohibits allowing gentiles a permanent foothold in the Land. Any transfer of land to gentiles is illegal and invalid, because “any legal provision that is inconsistent with the law of the Torah is void and unbinding, and the word of God and the law the Torah of He who created the world and gives liberty to it shall stand for ever.”<sup>46</sup>

Kook explains that the prohibition on transferring land is the result of the revelation of the Divine plan, and the connection between this plan, the Land, and the people demands the integrity of the Land. Accordingly, any talk of partition is “warped, fraudulent, foolish joking.” The unity of God, the people, and the Land can be revealed only in a state of perfection.<sup>47</sup>

Given this position, it might be asked why Kook and his supporters did not vocally oppose the acceptance of the partition plan, just as Gush Emunim would later oppose the division of the Land? The answer to this question may be found in comments made by Kook at a party to mark the nineteenth Independence Day of the State of Israel. The rabbi explained to the students his behavior and feelings during the practical division of the Land in May 1948. He related that when the United Nations resolution was announced, embodying acceptance of the establishment of the State of Israel, and the people went out to the streets to celebrate, he could not share in their joy:

I sat alone and red with shame. For many hours I could not reconcile myself to the events, to this terrible news that the words of God in the prophecy of the Twelve – “and divide My Land!” Where is our Hebron – have we forgotten that?! And where is our Shechem (Nablus) – have we forgotten that?! And where is our Jericho – have we forgotten that?! And where is our Transjordan?! Where is every clod of land? Every part of God’s country? Are we permitted to relinquish even one millimeter of this? Heaven forbid and protect!

The following day, the rabbi continued, Rabbi Harlap came to visit him and “we sat in shocked silence.” At last, they recovered and consoled each other: “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes. The seal has been set!”<sup>48</sup>

Kook’s comments show that despite his fierce opposition to the partition of the Land, and his profound emotions on hearing this news, he accepted this development with humility and saw it as a manifestation of God’s will and as a fact he must come to terms with, even if he could not understand it. His resignation was not total, however: the messianic expectation still simmered under the surface, threatening to erupt at the next station in the path to messianic fulfillment.<sup>49</sup> Zvi Yehuda’s reply contains considerable evidence

<sup>46</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “Let Us Be Simple in the Torah and the Land!” *To the Paths of Israel*, 1, 95 (in Hebrew).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–8.

<sup>48</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “The 19th Psalm of the State of Israel,” in: Melamed (ed.), *Erets hatsvi*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis*, 60–2.

of a moderating factor in the messianic approach, namely an awareness that humans cannot understand the details of God's calculations. For some of his students, this recognition became a key factor in their acceptance of the partition of the Land. Many years later, however, the rabbi would again face an initiative to divide the Land, but his response on this occasion would be much firmer and far less passive.

After the establishment of the state, Kook wrote of the possibility that the event might lead to a civil war among the Jewish community. The "statist" approach of David Ben Gurion, who unified all the military factions in the pre-state Yishuv in order to form a single army, had not yet secured universal approval. Some circles sought to maintain their independence. Rabbi Kook urged the factions to unite, and described as "wicked" those who fomented dissent or even used violence against their fellow Jews.<sup>50</sup> In later years, his position on this question, too, would undergo changes.

During the twenty years from the establishment of the state through the Six Day War, Kook's positions remained relatively stable. His sanctification of statism led him to adhere to the belief that redemption precedes repentance; accordingly, he attributed an element of sanctity to Israeli reality and to the army as part of this reality. He severely criticized the Haredim for their refusal to take part in the affairs of state and for their rebellion against secular Zionism and against the Zionist aspiration to transform the Jews into a "warrior nation." Kook argued that the State of Israel is holy, a "revealed end," and, therefore, it is important to be part of such a process. This position enabled him to define secular Zionism in a paradoxical manner as sacred: "Every criminal in Israel is holy, against his own will." He argued that it showed a lack of faith to decline to see this reality and identify with it, even if this lack of faith was disguised in the pious garb of the Haredim. It was this evil – the refusal to accept the divine status of the Jewish state – that was preventing the revelation of God in the world. However, Zvi Yehuda resented the fact that the state chose to apply British and Ottoman law, rather than the laws of the Torah, and he was appalled at what he saw as its failure to combat Christian missionary activities.<sup>51</sup>

After 1967, when Israel occupied areas identified as part of the Whole Land of Israel, this philosophy may have been expected to reach a point of catharsis, particularly because Kook's identification with the State of Israel intensified further on the basis of an identification of the victory as a still more sublime manifestation of Divine realization. Kook claimed after the war that the situation was no longer one of the "beginning of redemption," or the initial phase of messianic realization; rather, this process was already in its middle phase.<sup>52</sup> However, the new era evoked a constant sense of anxiety that

<sup>50</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, "I Seek My Brothers," *To the Paths of Israel*, 1, 106.

<sup>51</sup> Kook, "The 19th Psalm of the State of Israel," 1–10.

<sup>52</sup> Shabtai Daniel, "The Observer's Mission," *Hatsofe*, August 31, 1973, in: Bermeson (ed.), *In the Public Campaign: from the Newspapers*, 86 (in Hebrew).

a government might arise that would hand parts of the land back to the Arabs. At this point, Kook's rhetoric begins to draw away from his previous complete identification with the Zionist enterprise. An early sign of this shift can be seen in a pamphlet written by Kook under the title "You Shall not Fear." Graduates of the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva relate that this pamphlet was written after Kook was asked to sign a declaration by the Movement for the Whole Land of Israel. Shortly after the war, the movement sought to publish a declaration demanding that the territories occupied in the war must not be returned. Zvi Yehuda was asked to sign the declaration but refused. His students claim his reasoning was that the declaration failed to emphasize that Transjordan also constitutes part of the Land of Israel. Instead, Kook published his own declaration urging Israelis not to be afraid of the Gentiles and not to return land – despite the fact that the concept of land for peace had not yet become a central thread in Israeli public discourse. Kook defined the return of territories as a sin and a crime caused by ignorance. Therefore, he urged any person in Israel, whether a Torah scholar or a military leader, to prevent and delay such action with all their courage and strength, promising that this would earn them a Divine blessing. Kook emphasized that any action of returning territories was null and void and lacked any legal or practical force. This was the first time that he had presented such uncompromising demands regarding the Whole Land of Israel. During the immediate post-war period, however, his conclusions did not yet form the basis for consolidating a large section of the public. Only after the 1973 war did Kook's opinion formulate into a mass movement that sprang out of the young guard of religious Zionism.

### **Zvi Yehuda Kook and the Establishment of Gush Emunim**

The Yom Kippur (1973) War caught Israel by surprise and was followed by a period of national confusion and depression. After the fighting ended, negotiations began to determine the borders of the state. As U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger began his shuttle diplomacy, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook launched a direct attack against the possibility of territorial compromise. In the post-1973 era, the rabbi abandoned his previous defense of Zionism and complete identification with the state. As the Israeli government began to discuss political compromises, Kook's rhetorical style shifted. He argued that the Divine demand for the integrity of the Land of Israel superseded any human desire for compromise. Kook also implied that he considered himself bound by Divine law above and beyond any other law. Accordingly, Zionist action was meaningless if it was contrary to the Divine commands. The implicit message in his remarks was that following the miraculous military victory in 1967, secular Zionism had begun to lose its prominent role in the messianic drama. Kook's philosophy began to present the view that the laws of the Torah must take precedence over any mundane law. As previously noted, before 1973, Kook had opposed any reservations about Zionism due to its secular character and its failure to accept the discipline of Torah. Secular Zionism itself was



identified as absolutely sacred. By contrast, I suggest that his new positions in the post-1973 era be considered post-statist.

In a special talk given by the rabbi at Mercaz Harav Yeshiva on Independence Day in 1974, in the presence of Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, Kook employed the terminology of warfare and assault, appealing deliberately to Dayan's ears. He began his speech by emphasizing that the settlement of the Land of Israel is a commandment of the Torah. The political situation that emerged following the war, and the international pressure to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967, led him to declare that defending the territory of the homeland demands devotion. This is a value for which the public must be willing:

... to give its life. When it comes to Judea and Samaria, the Golan Heights – it will not happen without a war! Someone asked me whether I want to wage a “civil war.” I will not enter here into matters of terminology and I will not use names as to how this will happen, but the fact is that it will not happen without a war! Over our bodies and limbs! All of us! The Gentiles will not manage this, and neither will our own political complications – no way in the world!<sup>53</sup>

Kook argued that the territories of the Land of Israel bear Divine sanctity; therefore, there is no possibility of relinquishing them. In his speech, Kook presented the view that the Land of Israel constitutes a single entirety – a uniform and organic entity with its own will and sanctity. This complete entity is bound and belongs to the Jewish people in its entirety – past, present, and future. Thus, the land and the people are completely blended and combined. Accordingly, no person has the right to relinquish even one clod of this land, because it belongs not to any particular group, but to the entire “Gathering of Israel.” The merging of the people and land reflects the Divine will for the redemption of the Jewish people.<sup>54</sup>

Kook's fierce attacks on the policies of the Israeli government and his conviction regarding the need to thwart these political initiatives led him and his students toward political activism. Gush Emunim was founded as a coalition of organizations, mainly from within religious Zionist circles, although a number of figures identified with secular Zionism also joined the new grouping. However, the graduates of Mercaz Harav Yeshiva soon became the dominant power within the growing movement. The force motivating the graduates to leave their desks and go out to establish settlements was their desire to create facts on the ground in the occupied territories, thus preventing any political process of compromise and withdrawal. Their actions were informed not by a sense of progress and prosperity, but by their fear of withdrawals, whether territorial or spiritual. Their fright that territories might be returned led them to a messianic activism intended to thwart the planned process. This is the

<sup>53</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “The nation of Israel Stand up and Live,” *Erets hatsvi*, 25 (in Hebrew).

<sup>54</sup> Dov Schwartz, *The Land*, 101–27 (in Hebrew).

background to understanding the motivations behind the establishment of Gush Emunim.

At this point, the rabbi became increasingly convinced that the Israeli government was illegitimate, as is reflected in his writings. Under the title “The Government is Subject to the People, and Not the People to the Government,” Kook emphasized that mere mention of compromise is “null and void, it shall not come and shall not be.” He referred to Kissinger as “the goy woman’s husband,” because Kissinger was of Jewish origin and had married a non-Jewish woman.<sup>55</sup>

Kook’s opposition to the government of Golda Meir in the period after the Yom Kippur War was also because this was a minority government that lacked a Jewish majority in the Knesset; accordingly, he considered that the territorial concessions it made in the separation of forces agreement were illegitimate. Kook argued that a minority government did not reflect the general will of the people. In letters to the Central Committee of the National Religious Party, he begged the party not to join this “wicked” government.<sup>56</sup> Zvi Yehuda could not accept that a government that was dependent on gentile support could be considered dominion; indeed, such a situation offends God’s dignity. A government that relies on non-Jewish votes is no government, Kook argued. He compared it to non-kosher food – “it is all as impure as pork.”<sup>57</sup>

Rabbi Kook himself took part in the first attempt to establish a settlement in Sebastia in Samaria (1975), although he was already elderly and very sick. He subsequently wrote that the government is for the people, and not the people for the government. “When the government betrays the people and its homeland and life, then all the more so the living and sentient people in no way belongs to such a government.”<sup>58</sup>

In another letter written after the eviction of the settlement in Sebastiya, Kook went further still: “We are commanded by the Torah and not by the government. The Torah takes precedence over the government – the Torah is eternal, while this treacherous government is transient and void.”<sup>59</sup> Kook also considered the proposal to hold a referendum on the future of the territories as illegitimate, because no such referendum could overturn a prohibition in the Torah.<sup>60</sup> The rabbi urged the public to ignore the government’s plot to return land to alien control and to devote their body and soul to this struggle.<sup>61</sup>

In 1975, Kook wrote a letter to Chief of Staff Motte Gur that was more extreme than his previous positions. He claimed that “the full realm of our life’s

<sup>55</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “The Government is Subject to the People, and Not the People to the Government,” 21 Iyar 5734–1974, *Eretz Hatzvi*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, untitled, 4 Nissan 5734–1974, *Ibid.*, 72–3.

<sup>57</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “A Lesson in the Laws of the Dignity of the Dominion of Israel,” undated, *Ibid.*, 73–8.

<sup>58</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “To Clear things,” July 19, 1974, *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “The Settlement Affair,” August 2 1974, *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “Judea and Samaria,” August 4 1974, *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>61</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “To Inform, to Tell and to Know,” undated, *Ibid.*, 33–4.

Land in Judea and Samaria” must be under the state’s control. If not, “there will certainly be a war amongst us.” The Torah demands absolute devotion in the face of any violation of the commandments concerning the conquest and control of the Land, whether this comes from gentiles or those married to gentiles; again, Kook referred to Kissinger as “the goy woman’s husband.” He expressed the hope that “we will not have to come to a war between the people of Israel and its failure of a government.”<sup>62</sup>

In a lecture to his students, Kook emphasizes that he had no desire to reach a situation of civil war, but the threat was real.<sup>63</sup> In a letter to Minister of Defense Shimon Peres, Zvi Yehuda added a further plank to his position, claiming that the territorial compromises were opposed to the people’s will. Because the government is for the people, and not the reverse, the uprising would come from among the people.<sup>64</sup> He argued that a government that goes against the people’s will is tantamount to a dictatorship.<sup>65</sup> The role of the state is to maintain an honest and just organizational system; it has no right or permission to relinquish parts of the Land.<sup>66</sup> Only a few years ago, Zvi Yehuda had seen the state as absolutely sacred, and its actions as the embodiment of God’s will for the redemption of His people. Now Zvi Yehuda described it as a tyrannical regime acting against the common will of the people and against the commandments of the Torah. It is important to note that these comments were made against the background of the struggle to establish the settlement in Sebastia, long before any practical plans were formulated to return territory or dismantle settlements. When the authorities decided to evict the Elon Moreh group, which had settled in Hawara close to Nablus, Kook participated in the attempt to prevent the eviction. Kook’s assistant, Rabbi Yosef Badihi, recalls that he opened his coat in front of the soldiers and shouted at them several times “take a machine gun and kill me. Just as you cannot force me to eat pork, so you cannot evict me from this place.”<sup>67</sup> This event left a profound impact on the rabbi’s students. Although his language could be interpreted as a call for violence, as some of his students interpreted, many of them understood his actions as a manifestation of a passive struggle (see Chapter 2).<sup>68</sup>

Kook emphasized, however, that the settlers’ struggle must be one within the state, and not from outside it: “Despite all its cruelties toward us, we shall aggrandize and amplify the validity of our faithful Israeli awareness, and shall

<sup>62</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, untitled, 3 Sivan 5735–1975, *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>63</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “A War for Judea and Samaria,” undated, *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, untitled, *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>66</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “Further Clarification of Basic and Fundamental Matters,” *Ibid.*, 42–3.

<sup>67</sup> Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers: The History of the Jewish Underground*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1987, 29 (in Hebrew).

<sup>68</sup> To support the interpretation of the nonviolent argument see: Moshe Hellinger, “Political Theology in the Thought of ‘Merkaz HaRav’ Yeshiva and its Profound Influence on Israeli Politics and Society since 1967,” *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 9 (4) (2008) 533–50.

continue to act within it in the entire completeness of our Land, and the Lord God of Hosts is with us, and our actions for the eternity and inheritance of Israel are all pleasant to Him.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, Kook began to retreat from his total and automatic identification with the State of Israel. The process was at an early stage, however, and had not yet reached the point of a complete detachment from the state. Kook emphasized that actions in opposition of the state should still come from within the collective.

In 1977, Menachem Begin won the general elections and the supporters of Gush Emunim felt a profound sense of relief in light of his well-known support for the settlement enterprise. Gush Emunim even began to prepare to support the Likud in its efforts to secure the leadership of the nation. To their extreme surprise, however, Menachem Begin launched a peace initiative with Egypt, expressing his willingness to relinquish the entire Sinai Peninsula and to grant administrative autonomy to the Arabs in the West Bank. Kook rejected Begin’s promise that any agreement be brought before the Knesset for approval. It might be thought that a situation where the Knesset supports a peace agreement by a large majority could be considered to reflect the will of the people. Kook, however, commented that even if “most or all of them vote now for such feebleness [a peace agreement], God will gather us up and carry us away from all this.”<sup>70</sup> He reiterated his view that such actions constitute “treason,” “null and void actions,” and “an eternal shame.” The rabbi swore that such a process would not occur: the land would remain in its entirety and its resurrection, and God’s spirit would appear among the nation and renew its days as of old. Kook also emphasized that Sinai constitutes part of the Biblical Land of Israel.<sup>71</sup>

The traditional concept of “peace” differs from its modern usage. In the rabbinical literature, the term “shalom” generally occurs alongside the concept of perfection and absolute justice; accordingly, it is usually depicted in utopian contexts removed from the realms of mundane history. For the sake of absolute justice, it is sometimes necessary to use the force of coercion. By contrast, the modern concept of peace is generally associated with the principled rejection of the use of force, and with a recognition that compromise is the principal means for the resolution of disputes.<sup>72</sup>

Rabbi Kook’s position on the question of peace reflects these different approaches. In its traditional context, peace is associated with an era of total redemption when there shall be no wars. As such, the era in which the Jewish people secure redemption will be one in which the Temple stands, the biblical Land of Israel shall be its homeland, and the nations of the world shall be subservient to the Chosen People. In this era, peace will reign. Thus, political

<sup>69</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, “The Settlements Affair,” *Eretz Hatzvi*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–50.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 59–60.

<sup>72</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, “Models of Peace in Jewish Thought.” *With God’s Knowledge – Studies in the History of Jewish Thought*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1991, 13–33 (in Hebrew).

peace, which entails the division of the Land of Israel and a territorial compromise, stands in contradiction to the traditional vision. Therefore, the rabbi argued that the political process was “false peace,” and striving for false peace actually pushes away true peace.<sup>73</sup> For this reason, the autonomy plan was considered by Kook to be a “rebellion against God.”<sup>74</sup>

On March 9, 1982, during the height of the campaign against the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt under the terms of the peace agreement, Rabbi Kook passed away. His students and disciples who had listened eagerly to his guidance were left confused and without clear leadership. In the context of the struggle against the withdrawal from Sinai, Kook’s legacy was perceived as ambivalent. On the one hand, he had advocated a statist approach that identifies Zionist action with complete sanctity; on the other, his post-statist comments criticized Zionist action and refused to accept the legitimacy of decisions by the state that fail to support the settlement of the Territories or that provide for the division of the land as part of a political agreement. Kook’s supporters eventually chose a moderate path, focusing on opposition and passive action against the transfer of Yamit to Egyptian rule; the events did not lead to violence.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Gush Emunim was founded under the leadership of Mercaz Harav yeshiva graduates following the crisis created by concern over the possible division of the Land of Israel. The movement was forged in a state of cognitive dissonance in which the founders of the movement believed that enormous messianic progress occurred following the conquest of the Whole Land of Israel in 1967, although doubts also emerged due to the authorities’ willingness to make territorial compromises following the Yom Kippur War. This sense of crisis sparked a process of messianic radicalization that led the rabbi and his students to move beyond activity in the world of Torah and become public figures – spiritual leaders of a mass movement that changed the face of Israeli society. The solution the rabbi found to his messianic distress lay in a process of radicalization leading to aggressive action in the public arena.

As discussed, the messianic crisis led the rabbi to move from the status of a “world transformer” more to that of a “world creator.” The dialectical process the rabbi began to undergo with the establishment of Gush Emunim developed into an assault against the secular government.

The dialectical philosophy of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and the internal contradictions it embodies continue to challenge his graduates and supporters to this day. Tense messianic expectation and the intermittent realization and

<sup>73</sup> Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Eretz Hatzvi*, 51.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>75</sup> Segal, Haggai. *Yamit, The End – The Struggle to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai*, Jerusalem: Beit El Library, 5759–1999 (in Hebrew).

setbacks in this process, which reached their height in the Oslo process and the Disengagement Plan, present the spiritual leadership of messianic religious Zionism with constantly growing dilemmas. To date, the religious Zionist public chooses to oppose the political process in a manner that has not deteriorated into a generalized physical conflict.

It has been argued that when Rabbi Kook advocated civil war and physical and spiritual resistance, he was not referring to actual violence. Rabbi Zalman Melamed, one of the leading Halachic arbiters that emerged among the graduates of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, claimed that Zvi Yehuda did not support violence, but civil disobedience.<sup>76</sup> It is true that in all the withdrawals from territories occupied in 1967 – the eviction of Yamit, the Oslo process leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the Disengagement Plan – the settlers engaged in passive opposition that did not descend into bloodshed.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the responses of Rabbi Kook's students to the eviction of Yamit, including their activities in the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai and within other frameworks.

<sup>76</sup> Zalman B. Melamed, "Our Rabbi's War for the Integrity of the Land and the Integrity of Jewish Rule Therein," *Eretz Hatzvi*, 82–3.

## Gush Emunim and the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Agreement

The signing of the Camp David peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 and the ratification of the agreement by the Knesset, ended the state of war between the two countries and led to the establishment of peaceful neighborly ties. The agreement included an Israeli undertaking to withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula and to grant autonomy to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The confirmation of the agreements forced the supporters of Gush Emunim to cope for the first time with a tangible intention to withdraw from large areas of territory under Israeli control, and to develop tools for campaigning against such a move. The peace plan also provoked grave fear of a failure of faith, because the withdrawal was perceived as contradictory to the path of messianic redemption. This chapter discusses the attitude of the rabbis and leaders of Gush Emunim toward the political plan, and the tools developed for the campaign against the withdrawal – principally civil disobedience and passive resistance. This chapter also examines the emergence of two camps – the statist, who were considered more moderate and represented the majority position, and the more radical post-statist, who advocated actions against the sovereign state. The most extreme manifestation of the radical approach was the formation of a Jewish underground movement that planned to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount.

In May 1977, a political milestone was reached in Israel after elections led to the formation of a government led by Menachem Begin and the Likud party. In November, the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem and called for the establishment of peaceful relations between the two countries. In March 1978, the Camp David peace conference was held, and in March 1979 the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was signed. The agreement provided for the gradual handover of the Sinai Peninsula to the Egyptians. In June 1981, elections were held to the Knesset in which the Tzohar (Resurrection) movement stood for the first time on a platform of opposition to the peace agreement. The movement secured just three seats in the 120-seat Knesset.

This parliamentary failure, and the overwhelming support enjoyed by the peace agreement in the Knesset, led to the emergence of a mass protest movement. In October 1981, the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai was formed and began to engage in propaganda activities, alongside practical preparations for a struggle against the withdrawal. Within four months, in February 1982, the withdrawal began and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) surrounded the Yamit area. In March, a gradual withdrawal of the rural communities from the area began. By April, the IDF closed Yamit and the final struggle commenced. Supporters of the settlers managed to find their way into the area, strengthening residents who had barricaded themselves in. Between April 15 and 21, the IDF evicted the city, demolishing the homes. On April 26, the Egyptian flag was raised over the ruins of Yamit.<sup>1</sup>

Much of this chapter is based on an analysis of the discussions that took place in the settlers' journal *Nekuda* ("Point"). In 1979, *Nekuda* was founded as a platform for expression and communication among the settlers and their supporters. Following the approval by the Knesset of the peace agreement with Egypt, the journal consciously chose to open its pages to a rabbinical and ideological debate that went beyond the type of content that had characterized the earlier editions of *Nekuda*.

### Consolidation of the Statist Camp Prior to the Withdrawal

The opening shot in the ideological debate in *Nekuda* regarding the approach Gush Emunim should take for the planned withdrawal came in an article by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner entitled "Killing the Messiah son of Joseph." At the time, Aviner was the rabbi of the religious settlement of Keshet in the Golan Heights, and had already gained prominent status among the students of Zvi Yehuda Kook. Aviner offered an analysis of the reasons that had led Israel to agree to withdraw from Sinai and establish Palestinian autonomy – "a nation of inward-facing sword polishers." He preferred a metaphor drawn from the *Sukkah* tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, which speaks of the death of the Messiah son of Joseph and the rise of the Messiah son of David. Based on the book *Kol Hator*<sup>2</sup> ("Voice of the Turtledove," see Song of Songs 2:12), and drawing on the eulogy given by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook for Dr. Theodor Herzl,<sup>3</sup> the founder of the Zionist movement, Aviner proposed a distinction

<sup>1</sup> The chronology of events is taken from: Gideon Aran, *The Land of Israel between Religion and Politics: The Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai*, Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1985, 88–9 (in Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup> *Kol Hator* is a Kabbalistic work attributed to Hillel Rivlin of Shkelov describing the vision of redemption according to his master, the Gaon of Vilna. The authenticity and authorship of the article are the subject of academic debate. See: Raphael B. Shochet, *The World of the Concealed in the Dimensions of Time – The Theory of Redemption of the Gaon of Vilna: Its History and Its Influence Down the Generations*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2008 (in Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, *Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook: Selected Articles*, Jerusalem: The Golda Katz Fund, 5748–1988, 95 (in Hebrew).



between the two messiahs mentioned in Jewish tradition, whereby the Messiah son of Joseph represents the material construction of the nation, but he has to die, while the Messiah son of David is charged with elevating the nation to spiritual heights. Accordingly, secular Zionism has to end, and the theocratic vision of the state has to move forward.

Aviner argued that a disease exists within the Israeli nation, reflected in an inability to appreciate the value and importance of the Land of Israel. The nation sees the Land as a means rather than an end in its own right. Aviner explained that the reason for this disease is a lack of connection to the Torah, and the creation of a Zionist movement that did not draw on the sacred. This leads to a sense of alienation from the Land, embodied in a willingness to consider withdrawal.

Aviner argued it would have been preferable if national resurrection had gone hand in hand with spiritual revival. In practice, however, the two elements were separated. The religious and Haredi public chose to concentrate on Torah study, turning their back on the national vision, while the supporters of Zionism chose to realize their vision without religious commitment. Nevertheless, this vision was waning and even dying. Aviner depicted the secular nationalist vision of the Messiah son of Joseph as moribund, because “without declaring the explicit commitment to God” there can be no future and vitality. However, he predicted that the latter messiah, the Messiah son of David, would emerge from the destruction. “Simple and superficial nationalism is quite adequate when life is proceeding on its normal course, but when winds of evil and foolishness blow, it will shake like a hut, and lacking roots it will fall on its face.”

Aviner sharply criticized the path chosen by Gush Emunim. He claimed that the public was looking on in horror at “the terrible death of the messiah son of Joseph” and was filled with fright. Gush Emunim was attempting to heal the broken nation by patchwork: “Another organization here and another party there; another demonstration and another march; another suit and another appeal; another house outside the walls.” Zionism was nearing its demise and a new generation must take its place. From his sense of messianic dynamism, Aviner urged the few to launch a war against the many; patiently and without rejecting others, they should bring the nation round to its purpose – “teach it to call in God’s name.” By this, Aviner implied the establishment of a state based on the Torah. This was a long-term task requiring considerable patience, and partial failures were not impossible along the way, but they must not shirk from the task. In the short term, Aviner argued, Gush Emunim should not support Techiya, the right-wing party led by Geula Cohen and Moshe Shamir, who left the Likud following the signing of the peace agreement with Egypt. Aviner defined the Techiya as a petty and immature phenomenon, and chastised Gush Emunim itself for its partial and immature nature.

Aviner explained that the failure of Gush Emunim lay in the activities it chose to emphasize, particularly its concentration on establishing settlements. In practical terms, he advocated a mass propaganda campaign, in order to

“bring the Lights” to the public (by this, he meant the philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, known as “the Lights” after the name of his book). This work should take place in every possible channel – small groups and large settings, the mass media, and parlor meetings. The objective was to strengthen the educational message on the assumption it would strengthen and uplift the nation.<sup>4</sup>

Predictably, Aviner’s article provoked a lively response in the pages of *Nekuda*. Some accused Aviner himself of an immature or premature approach,<sup>5</sup> and claimed that his approach would lead to paralysis and introspection.<sup>6</sup> In response, Aviner published a second article clarifying his intentions. If he had to decide where to focus most of the movement’s efforts – on building the Land of Israel or on educating the nation to become aware of the importance of the Land of Israel – his response would be that “faith comes before deeds.” Aviner argued that faith and conviction lead to action, rather than vice versa. Actions imposed on the nation do not necessarily encourage identification with the cause. In many cases, the opposite is the case, and coercive actions lead only to pressure and resentment. Any gains achieved through coercion will sooner or later wreak a heavy price. Sometimes this is unavoidable, but they should always be aware that “payment day will come.” Accordingly, Gush Emunim should certainly continue to establish new settlements and to expand the existing communities, as well as continue its activities in the political sphere. However, its primary obligation was to nurture “the soul of the nation.” Aviner continued Zvi Yehuda Kook’s approach against religious coercion. The priority he later proposed became known by the slogan “settling in the hearts.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Aviner, the criticism leveled at the government following the political agreements was destructive and unproductive. He fiercely criticized the radical elements who had called the government treacherous and evil, claiming that such attacks serve only to create antagonism in the decision-making echelons. Moreover, political factionalism weakens the nation and the national religious camp. Accordingly, he argued, the only way to correct the spiritual void that leads to national weakness is through renewed efforts to spread Torah and faith.

At the time Aviner’s article appeared, the “Jewish Underground” had already begun to crystallize. Comprised of a handful of Gush Emunim members, the Jewish Underground undertook several revenge attacks on Arabs, and even planned to attack the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount (discussed in

<sup>4</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “The Killing of Messiah Son of Joseph,” *Nekuda* 11, June 27, 1980, 10–11 (in Hebrew).

<sup>5</sup> Hillel Weiss, “An Immature Message,” *Nekuda* 12, July 11, 1980, 14 (in Hebrew).

<sup>6</sup> Yochanan Ben Yaacov, “A Messianism that Leads to Paralysis,” *Nekuda* 13, August 1, 1980, 13 (in Hebrew).

<sup>7</sup> Shlomo Fischer has examined in depth the concept of the “soul of the nation” in religious Zionist writings, showing that it draws on European romanticist thought. See: Shlomo Fischer, *Self-Expression and Democracy in Radical Religious Zionist Ideology*, PhD thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007.

detail later in this chapter). In his article, Aviner condemned the attacks on Palestinian mayors, the perpetrators of who were still unknown at that time. He hinted that he believed the attacks were carried out by Jews, and argued that partisan and individual terrorist attacks caused great damage to Israeli statism and reflected a general weakness, because decisions about how the nation should act lay with the authorities of the state. Aviner's article suggests that he was aware, if only in general terms, of the Underground and the ideas it had spawned. For example, in addition to his fierce attack on the concept of revenge, Aviner also argued against Jewish activism on the Temple Mount:

There are those who say, let us do that which is right and proper in building the Land, and the good Lord will finish our efforts. Let us take revenge on the gentiles, let us ascend the Mount of God's Home; and our mundane occurrence with lead to a sublime occurrence; the Lord's salvation is imminent, and suddenly the Lord will come to His Temple.<sup>8</sup>

Here Aviner summarized precisely the essential theological approach that motivate those who planned the attack on the Temple Mount, namely that the mundane effort inherent in blowing up the mosques would lead to a complementary divine intervention, thereby mystically completing the process of Israel's redemption.<sup>9</sup> Aviner claimed that such actions actually created "profound shock in the Upper Worlds" and were extremely damaging. Aviner's comments addressed directly the ideas that motivated the Jewish Underground, although they were published long before the organization was exposed.

Aviner advocated a mystical understanding of political events and processes. As discussed, mystical exegesis provides logical explanations for a reality that apparently looks contradicting to divine will. He claimed that even if it seemed that reality was progressing in a direction contrary to the messianic expectation of redemption, the faithful must not veer from their original course; "sometimes it was actually those who walked in the dark who saw a great light."<sup>10</sup>

A similar approach was taken by Rabbi Eli Sadan, a student of Rabbi Zvi Tau, who was considered one of the more moderate rabbis in the settler movement. (Sadan later founded the pre-army preparatory courses in the late 1980s.) Sadan expounded on the principled argument between the religious Zionist public and the general concept of secular Zionism. He argued that secular Zionism seeks to make peace with the Arab world, and this is the main goal of all streams of Zionism. Zionism was not established in order to conquer the Land or reinstate the Kingdom of David, but to provide a solution for Jews facing antisemitism and pogroms. Accordingly, its fundamental approach is one that seeks security and quiet. Zionist politicians are willing to assume great risks in order to reach a compromise with the Arab world, with the

<sup>8</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "A Double Crisis: The Body of Israeli Nationhood," *Nekuda* 14, October 8, 1980, 12-3 (in Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> Regarding Aviner's belief that Jews should not, for the present, ascend the Temple Mount. See: Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount*, Albany: SUNY, 2009, 27-8.

<sup>10</sup> Shlomo Aviner, *A Double Crisis*.

goal of eliminating antisemitism and ensuring that the Jewish people enjoy peace and calm. Moreover, the democratic value behind the Zionist approach requires that Arabs within the State of Israel must enjoy equal rights. However, these Zionist ideals are contrary to the values of the Torah as represented by Gush Emunim. Sadan emphasized that the struggle between Gush Emunim and Zionism was not directed at one specific political constellation, but represented a fundamental ideological divide. He emphasized that the Jewish people have an exclusive right to the Land of Israel; the Arab minority should not be given equal rights. A new value system must be presented in the face of the Zionist value system. Sadan advocated nothing less than the “re-establishment of the Jewish state.” He argued that the Zionist surge had completed its course; the concepts of the Land of Israel, the People of Israel, and the Torah of Israel must now be reconstructed. Sadan did not reject settlement activities and opposition to withdrawal, but stressed that such actions could not secure their objective “unless there will be those who raise the standard before them – the new flag of the true Jewish state.”<sup>11</sup> Sadan’s position was the harbinger of a post-statist approach that declares the end of Zionism and advocates its replacement by a new entity driven by faith-based values. According to both Aviner and Sadan, education is the tool that would enable the transition to this new ideal reality.

In their articles, Aviner and Sadan sought to consolidate the settler camp, advocating broad-based educational action within the existing Israeli nation in order to reform its ways and lead it toward messianic redemption and the establishment of a theocratic state. They emphasized that this educational campaign should replace settlement activities that served only to create antagonism and opposition. Aviner even predicted that without such educational efforts, the future of the settlement endeavor would be jeopardized. He attacked those whose actions were splitting the camp by forming different parties and movements and fomenting dissent and arguments. In particular, he opposed those who took the law into their own hands, carrying out revenge attacks independently while sidelining the army and police. Aviner completely rejected the idea of ascending the Temple Mount and carrying out radical acts on the site. Those who disagreed with his approach developed their own agenda, epitomized by Rabbi Israel Ariel.

### **Emergence of the Post-Statist Camp Prior to the Withdrawal**

The fiercest response in *Nekuda* to the articles by Shlomo Aviner and Eli Sadan were written by Rabbi Israel Ariel. Like Aviner, Ariel was also a graduate of Mercaz Harav yeshiva. At the time, he was the rabbi of Yamit in Sinai, and he later became the leader of radical opposition to the withdrawal from the city. Together with Yehuda Etzion, the founder of the Jewish Underground, Ariel developed an approach based on the premise that practical action should

<sup>11</sup> Eli Sadan, “Re-Establishing the Jewish State,” *Nekuda* 35, October 30, 1981, 4–5, 9, 11 (in Hebrew).

be guided by religious principles, even if these contradicted or opposed the approach of the secular Jewish state.

Ariel is the youngest son of a respected religious Zionist family. His elder brother Yaacov Ariel is considered one of the leading Halachic teachers to have been trained by the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, and currently serves as the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan. In 2003, Yaacov Ariel was even considered for the post of Chief Rabbi of Israel. All the sons of the Ariel family were educated at the prestigious Mercaz Harav yeshiva. However, in many ways, Israel Ariel has moved beyond the boundaries set by the yeshiva. In political terms, he may be described as a supporter of Kach, the extreme right-wing movement headed by Meir Kahana<sup>12</sup>: In 1981, he was second on the party's list for the Knesset elections. Ariel was one of the leaders of the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai, and took part in confrontations with the security forces. During the riots that accompanied the eviction of Yamit in Sinai, he urged IDF soldiers to refuse to obey the order to demolish the Jewish communities.

Ariel was no stranger to disappointment. He had been among the soldiers who broke into the Temple Mount in 1967, and these events had filled him with dramatic messianic expectations, leading to profound frustration when they failed to materialize. He was also among those evicted from the city of Yamit.<sup>13</sup> At the time his first article was published in *Nekuda*, he had faced further disappointment after the Elon More settlement group was evicted on the orders of the Israeli Supreme Court. The founding group of the first settlement initiated by Gush Emunim had sought to settle in Sebastia military base in Samaria. After several attempts, the group reached a compromise whereby the settlement would be established in Kadum base (this settlement later became known as Kedumim). A further group left from Kedumim and found the new settlement of Elon More. The group settled on land it did not own, and the landowners petitioned the Supreme Court, which ordered that the settlement be evicted. Some of the group eventually agreed to leave and alternative land was found for them. The settlement of Elon More exists on this alternative site to this day, while the settlement of Itamar was later founded on the original site. Gush Emunim and the settlement group itself accepted this instrumentalist compromise, with the exception of a number of dissidents.<sup>14</sup> Ariel was utterly opposed to the compromise and urged the members of the settlement group not to back down and to continue their struggle for the land at all costs.

<sup>12</sup> Kach is an extreme right-wing Jewish movement whose goal was to transform Israel into a halakhic state. The movement advocated the expulsion of Arabs from the "Whole Land of Israel," and the denial of their civil rights. In 1994, the Israeli government declared Kach to be a terrorist organization. Its leader, Meir Kahane, was assassinated in New York in November 1990 by an Arab assailant. More information on the Kach movement and Rabbi Meir Kahane can be found in Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Roots of Kahanism: Consciousness and Political Reality," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 39 (1986), 90–108.

<sup>13</sup> For further biographical details, see Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 31–49.

<sup>14</sup> Gadi Taub, *The Settlers: And the Struggle for the Meaning of Zionism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

The disappointment Ariel felt at the eviction was reflected in his article in *Nekuda*.

Ariel argued that the withdrawal from Elon More marked a milestone in the history of Gush Emunim, reflecting an ideological defeat and the complete paralysis of the settlement enterprise. Moreover, the situation created by the compromise had led to the emergence of a new ideology that sought to justify the retreat. Ariel explained this was the background to various articles published at the time – particularly those of Aviner, which Ariel saw as proof of “ideological weakness.”

Ariel said the struggle for the Elon More settlement group should have been the vanguard of the struggle for the Land of Israel. He rhetorically asked whether the struggle over a rocky hill that was not farmed or used by anyone represented the usurping of the gentile (as the Supreme Court ruled), or rather the restitution of the usurped Land of Israel to its true owners. He rejected the argument that land should not be taken from Arabs, “whose possession of the land is highly doubtful,” and warned against attempts to curry favor with left-wing intellectuals in the hope that this would endear them to Gush Emunim.

According to Ariel, the decision to evict the settlement group conveyed the message that the principle of settling the Land of Israel was not a supreme and overriding value. He recalled the original campaign in favor of the settlement in Sebastia, and quoted Zvi Yehuda Kook, who claimed that just as no one could force him to eat pork or desecrate the Sabbath, so no one could move him from that place. Ariel saw this as a model for the proper way to defend the integrity of the Land.

Ariel criticized Aviner’s view that settlement could not be imposed on the nation. According to Ariel, the commandment of settling the Land binds all Jews, just like the commandment to put on the phylacteries. The residents of Elon More did not set out to settle the Land because of a desire to impose their view on the nation, but on the basis of their desire to observe the commandment of settling the Land. It was the government’s opposition to the settlement’s establishment that imposed on the nation a failure to settle the Land as required by the commandments of the Torah. The faithful should oppose this coercion “as if the nation had been denied the commandment of phylacteries, the Sabbath or circumcision.”

Ariel also attacked Aviner’s comment that where settlement arouses opposition, it should be halted, and educational work undertaken in its place. He argued that settlement itself, with its influential and educational character, should precede education, and that actions would stem from faith. Moreover, he continued, the entire course of redemption in our generation is based on “the quality of positive rashness,” embodied in action and settlement without the permission of the authorities. He claimed that without this quality, the Zionist pioneers would not have built the Land or declared a state.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to

<sup>15</sup> Israel Ariel, “Weakness as Ideology,” *Nekuda* 19, November 14, 1980, 7–9 (in Hebrew).

note that this comment places the sovereign State of Israel on the same footing as the British Mandate, implying that for Ariel the two entities are of equal value.

In conclusion, Ariel's position, as presented in this article, advocated a resolute struggle for the Land of Israel, without compromise or concession, even as a tactical nature. Educating the public would come through determined action, and, accordingly, the faithful should not be concerned with acting in a peaceful or moderate way, but should act tirelessly for their religious truth, even if this is contrary to the desire of the state or the position of the public majority. Ariel's approach represented an abandonment of the statist frame of reference that had thus far typified Gush Emunim. According to Ariel, the state was positioned under the Torah, and those faithful to the Torah were no longer subordinate to the laws of the state.

### **Campaign Against the Withdrawal and the Autonomy Plan**

As the plans for the withdrawal from Sinai under the terms of the peace agreement moved ahead, the rabbis and supporters of Gush Emunim faced an increasingly sharp dilemma of faith embodying a clash between two values – the sanctity of the state and the integrity of the Land. The supporters of Gush Emunim found themselves in an impasse. How were they to act in a situation in which the state was imbued with a sacred quality, yet that same state had decided to render parts of the Land, which also enjoyed a sacred status? Which value took precedence in such a situation? The lines of demarcation between loyalty to the sovereign state and loyalty to the land formed the core of the disagreement within Gush Emunim, as the pendulum oscillated between these two points.

In May 1981, a meeting was held of representatives from the Jewish settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. At the end of the meeting, a militant statement was issued announcing that in view of the political parties' intentions in Israel to hand over Judea and Samaria to Arab or Jordan sovereignty and to transfer the Gaza coast to Egypt, given the government's declared intention to grant the Arabs of the Land of Israel autonomous powers, the signatories declared that the state was not entitled to hand over parts of the Land to foreign rule.

The signatories asserted that the State of Israel was established in order to bring the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and to maintain sovereign rule. The State of Israel was not established as an instrument for tearing the Land away from the Jewish people and delivering it to alien rule. Accordingly, any government that claimed to expropriate the right of Jews to the Land of Israel was destroying the very foundation on which the state was based. "We did not undergo exile, persecution and Holocausts in seventy lands; we did not sacrifice our finest sons; we did not reach here, with God's help, our greatest strength since the dominion of David, merely in order to do now something that no Jew did even in the darkest days: to disconnect the thread of life that binds

us to this Land,” the statement argued categorically. Therefore, the statement opposes the Zionist idea that the Jewish state represents a “safe shelter” for the people, and replaces it with the value of land occupation.

The signatories of the statement deplored the creation of a conflict and contradiction between the State of Israel and the Land of Israel. “Such an act is illegal, and we will not tolerate it,” they stated. The statement claimed that the Jewish settlement in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, which was based on government decisions and enjoyed the support of the majority of the people, would prevent the imposition of any alien authority or foreign flag between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean. The statement ended by urging the faithful to join a struggle that was not merely for the unity of the state and the Land, but for the very body and soul of the state.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note that this statement made no mention of the Yamit region of Sinai, and did not include it within the borders of the state that mandate a struggle. This fact may explain the resounding failure of the campaign for Sinai. The statement carried an implicit but clear threat of civil revolt against any plan to implement autonomy, which was referred to as an illegal action. In this respect, the signatories were following the approach of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who had argued that the plan to evict the settlements in Sinai was illegal from the standpoint of religious law – and accordingly, he also anticipated that it would not be realized.<sup>17</sup> As the date of the withdrawal approached, the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai sent an official letter to General Chaim Erez, Southern Command, declaring: “Various groups have contacted us and stated that they intend to use the most extreme forms of violence against anyone who attempts to evict them. We have considered the matter and formed the conclusion that we, too, do not reject such a possibility.”<sup>18</sup>

In the face of such militant and belligerent declarations, others sought to moderate the reactions and restrain their friends. Rabbi Zvi Tau, one of the closest students of Zvi Yehuda Kook and a central figure among the students of Mercaz Harav yeshiva, opposed any confrontation with the army: “Let us remove the word ‘demonstrations’ from our lexicon. What is needed now is persuasion. Let us eliminate this error. Gush Emunim is not against the government, it is nothing but positive, as an utter imperative.”<sup>19</sup>

In March 1981, approximately one month before the eviction of Yamit, and after the eviction of the agricultural settlements had already begun, *Nekuda*

<sup>16</sup> Unsigned, “Circular regarding the Unity of the Land and the State,” *Nekuda* 26, April 3, 1981, 3 (in Hebrew).

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 1 about Zvi Yehuda Kook.

<sup>18</sup> The quote appears in Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers: The Story of the Jewish Underground* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1987, 132 (in Hebrew)). There is an English translation to this book, however, the English version doesn’t contain this quote, and apparently there is a difference between the versions. I have decided not to use the English version because it misses important data, and not so correctly translate the prose. See: Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers: The West Bank Jewish Underground*, New York: Beit-Shamai Publications, 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers*, 131–2.



published an article by Itamar Wehrheftig, Zerach Wehrheftig's son who was one of the leaders of the Mizrachi religious Zionist movement. The article included a clear call, backed by a Halachic discussion, not to give one's life for the sake of land.

Wehrheftig discussed the question of the extent to which it was permissible to oppose the eviction physically, and determined: "The Land of Israel is won by suffering, not by death." In other words, it was prohibited to give one's life for the sake of the struggle. The Land of Israel is a worthy cause for which to countenance danger, but it was important to consider carefully the risk that a demonstration might descend into violence, particularly given that the government and army enjoyed a clear majority in support of the withdrawal. Wehrheftig was concerned that violent opposition could lead to the injury of soldiers and the outbreak of civil war, imposing an indelible blemish on the People of Israel. There is a commandment to conquer the Land from the Gentiles, he declared, but not to do so from the government of Israel.

Wehrheftig called for the continuation of the protests by the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai. However, rather than adopting the unrealistic goal of preventing the withdrawal, the movement should convey the message to the nation that such an event must never again occur in the Land of Israel. Wehrheftig supported passive resistance, but once again added conditions to prevent a possible deterioration. He advocated protests by women, on the grounds that these were less likely to lead to violent clashes – soldiers would not raise their weapons against female protesters, while the women would not act with violence to oppose the soldiers. He ended his article by emphasizing that it is God who undertakes the final reckoning. The opponents of the withdrawal must pray for salvation, but they could not dictate to God how He would lead Israel toward redemption. An area of land evacuated now might return to Israeli hands in the future.<sup>20</sup> This message addresses the feelings of contemporary messianic failure and positions this within a relative and broad perspective within which it does not necessarily indicate unequivocal failure.

### Eviction of Yamit

When the moment of truth arrived, the militant declarations proved detached from reality. The opponent of the withdrawal overwhelmingly opted for the course of passive disobedience. There were no serious violent outbreaks and there was no rebellion. The most serious incidents were confined to objects thrown at soldiers attempting to climb onto the roofs where the opponents of the withdrawal had barricaded themselves; in a few cases, blows were exchanged. No one on either side faced any real mortal danger. Under "fire" from foam cannons, the opponents of the withdrawal were taken down from the roofs. In some cases, metal cages were used to this end. After the eviction, army bulldozers destroyed the homes and facilities of the city in order

<sup>20</sup> Itamar Wehrheftig, "Do Not Give Your Souls," *Nekuda* 41, March 19, 1982, 10–1 (in Hebrew).

to prevent the protesters from returning to the homes. The army also blew up a memorial to soldiers who fell in the Six Day War, after a number of Techiya's student members, including Tzachi Hanegbi, who had climbed onto the memorial several days earlier decided to come down.

As noted, Israel Ariel adopted one of the most extreme positions of the members of the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai, and did not reject the possibility of a violent confrontation with the soldiers sent to evict them. Ariel believed that only such a determined struggle could leave the city intact, and he baulked at no means to ensure this end. In the event, however, he did not carry out his extreme threats, having formed the conclusion that the vast majority were against violence, there was no point in a handful of individuals undertaking such steps.<sup>21</sup>

A further obstacle to the eviction emerged in one of the bomb shelters in the city, where eleven young men and women supporters of the Kach movement had barricaded themselves. The protesters threatened to commit suicide if the army broke through. They were equipped with weapons, cyanide pills, and gas balloons, and had prepared a list detailing the order in which they would commit suicide. Over eight days, the army refrained from breaking into the shelter, and attempted to persuade the youngsters to leave of their own accord. Rabbi Meir Kahane was called to the scene to speak with his supporters. Through a ventilation duct, he told them: "If you have decided to sacrifice your lives, I have nothing to say to you, but you should know that even if you do so – this will not prevent the eviction." The protesters were convinced, but refused to leave. An anti-terror unit stormed the shelter and released the protestors.<sup>22</sup> Those who came out of the shelter included Baruch Goldstein, who murdered 29 Arab worshippers in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron in 1994 in an attempt to stop the Oslo peace process.

The events in Yamit revealed the limited power of the rabbis, particularly after their extreme threats. It can also be seen that the divisions and nuances within the religious camp have a moderating effect.

### Reactions after the Eviction of Yamit

After the eviction was completed and Yamit destroyed, the supporters of Gush Emunim were forced to address the significance and ramifications of the event for their movement. They did so against the background of their concern at possible future withdrawals as part of the autonomy plan. An additional factor was soon added in the shape of the Lebanon War, which was initially called the "Peace for Galilee Operation." This event also constituted a watershed in terms of the reactions of the rabbis.

A lead article published in *Nekuda*, approximately one month after the eviction of Yamit, heaped praise on the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from

<sup>21</sup> Haggai Segal, *Yamit*, 271–6.

<sup>22</sup> This summary is based on Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers*, 133.

Sinai. The article claimed that the opposition had never sought to defeat the army, but rather to influence the government and public opinion. Although the withdrawal was now an accomplished fact, the struggle was not over, because the peace agreement with Egypt also included an Israeli undertaking to establish a Palestinian autonomy – a scenario that was regarded by the supporters of Gush Emunim as an even greater threat. Thus, one of the objectives of the campaign against the withdrawal from Yamit was to create a national trauma after which no government would even consider proposing further concessions. Israel Harel, the editor of *Nekuda*, also drew the conclusion from the failure of the struggle that the movement had begun to organize too late, after the political decisions had already been made.<sup>23</sup> Michel Feige, who studied the Sinai episode, argues that despite the settlers' effort, no national trauma was created, and that the "settling in the hearts" project so far had failed.<sup>24</sup>

Immediately after the failure of the campaign, various leaders of the settler movement emphasized that it must strengthen its outreach among the general public. In this sense, they adopted the approach of Rabbis Aviner and Sadan. For example, Moshe Levinger, one of the leaders of Gush Emunim and one of the founders of the Jewish settlement in Hebron, sought to interpret the failure of the campaign as a divine test intended to galvanize the national religious camp and prepare practical and propaganda tools that could be used in advance to thwart any further withdrawals. Levinger stressed the importance of providing clear answers on the Arab question and a response to the claim that it is immoral for one people to control another. Accordingly, he advocated efforts to strengthen outreach to the general public in order to inculcate new moral values consistent with those of the movement.<sup>25</sup>

Hanan Porat, another founder of Gush Emunim and a leading activist in the movement, supported Levinger's approach, and advocated efforts to influence the public through the press, theater, and other tools for shaping public opinion. Porat also urged the movement to find ways to reach out to the population of the development towns and recruit their support. He stressed the importance of exploiting the willingness to volunteer that had been seen in the case of the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai in order to develop additional settlement groups in Samaria and, in particular, the Gaza Strip, which he saw as the next target of a potential withdrawal. Porat proposed that the general public should be exposed to the movement's message by founding a new newspaper and by establishing "our own" radio station within the auspices of the Israel Broadcasting Authority.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that some of Porat's practical objectives would eventually be realized, such as the establishment of the radio

<sup>23</sup> Israel Harel, "Instead of a Lead Article," *Nekuda* 43, May 21, 1982, 14–5 (in Hebrew).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*, Wayne State University Press, 2009, 196–211.

<sup>25</sup> Moshe Levinger, "An Answer on the Moral Level," *Nekuda* 43, 16 (in Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> Hanan Porat, "In Sinai the Fighting Movement was Established," *Nekuda* 43, 16–7 (in Hebrew).

station Arutz Sheva, which represents the settlers, as well as frameworks for training journalists, directors, and actors from within the national-religious sector, such as the Maaleh School of Television and Art, whose graduates have found their place in Israeli television, theater, and cinema.<sup>27</sup>

Pinchas Wallerstein, the head of Mateh Binyamin Regional Council in the West Bank, was the first figure to present the post-statist theocratic conclusion that the event surrounding the withdrawal had created a need to establish new governmental channels. Like his fellow members of Gush Emunim, Wallerstein also called for a renewed emphasis on outreach. However, he focused on a different point:

This distaste for the current regime, the echoes of the destruction it has just wrought in Sinai, and the substantiated fear of the holocausts yet to face us, God forbid, should serve as an incentive for us to establish a national body to be managed in the spirit of Jewish tradition and to replace this regime. Such a process will not occur rapidly, as I have noted, but we must begin to prepare the foundation – that is to say, the whole Jewish people – right now, and quickly.<sup>28</sup>

### The Connection Between Yamit and Southern Lebanon

Two months after the withdrawal from Yamit, “Operation Peace for Galilee” erupted, as an Israeli initiative following the attempted assassination of Shlomo Argov, the Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom, by activists from the organization of Abu Nidal. Israel’s occupation of southern Lebanon raised the possibility, if only on the theoretical level, of Jewish settlement in the area. Moreover, there were those who saw the occupation as an opportunity to expand the borders of the Land of Israel, perhaps by way of compensation for the loss of Yamit.

These voices met with a different and unusual response on the part of Rabbi Yehuda Amital, who at the time was the head of Har Etzion yeshiva in Gush Etzion. Amital was one of the pioneers of Gush Emunim, and the yeshiva he founded in Kfar Etzion formed part of the first settlement established in the territories occupied in 1967. I discuss the profound change Amital underwent in his views in Chapter 4; the first signs of this transformation could be seen against the background of the Israeli military operation in southern Lebanon.<sup>29</sup>

Amital believed that many in the religious Zionist camp had moved in mistaken directions since the struggle over Yamit. After the fighting erupted in Lebanon, Amital noted that he had heard of a young rabbi (the reference was

<sup>27</sup> Regarding Maaleh School and its students, see: Yitzhak Recanati, *Religious Zionism and the Screen Arts: The Students of Maaleh School and Their Films*, Ramat Gan: doctorate thesis at Bar Ilan University, 2009 (in Hebrew).

<sup>28</sup> Pinchas Wallerstein, “Settlement Isn’t Enough,” *Nekuda* 44, June 11, 1982, 4–5 (in Hebrew).

<sup>29</sup> For biographical details about Rabbi Amital, see: Elyashiv Richner, *In His Faith: The Story of Rabbi Yehuda Amital*, Tel Aviv: Yediot Achronot, 2008 (in Hebrew).

to Hanan Porat) who had written to one of the ministers from the National Religious Party and warned him that Israel must not withdraw from southern Lebanon because of the religious commandment to conquer the Land. Amital explained that the struggle over Yamit had created an approach in certain circles based on ensuring control of sections of the Land of Israel at any price, and these circles now sought to apply the same principle to Tyre and Sidon in Lebanon. A further “red light” from Amital’s perspective came when IDF troops broke into Beirut. Prime Minister Menachem Begin hesitated before this operation because of the heavy price it would entail in human life. Amital expected that the religious public would also be concerned with this aspect, or at least raise the dilemmas involved, but instead he saw that this public, more than others, was the most adamant that no attention should be paid to such hesitations.

Amital criticized the militant line adopted by supporters of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook philosophy, which attached tremendous importance to Israel’s status as a military power. Accordingly, these circles saw the attacks on the terrorist bases in Beirut in a mystical way as “the beginning of the uprooting of all evil in the world.” The massacre committed in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Christian militias also failed to move the religious public, creating an impression of disinterest and insensitivity.

A further “red light” mentioned by Amital was the joyous reaction on the part of some religious Zionists following the manifestations of antisemitism that accompanied the Lebanon War. Their response was based on the logic that the worse the antisemitic backlash around the world, the better for the Jews, because this would draw them closer to the Land of Israel.

Amital attacked such views, which implied that Diaspora Jewry was important only as a potential source of immigration to Israel, and which failed to recognize that many Diaspora Jews had abandoned a religious lifestyle and maintained a Jewish identity, based on their affinity with the State of Israel. Accordingly, Israel’s image among this population was crucial. Amital also criticized the assumption that the interest of the Land of Israel was necessarily that of the People of Israel.

Amital argued that these positions jeopardized the struggle for the Land of Israel, because adopting a militaristic stance would entail a constant clash with global powers, global public opinion, and, in some cases, Diaspora Jewry. He argued that an endless conflict without any prospect for peace would lead to a sense of fatigue among the people. Moreover, such positions create antagonism toward the Torah and the faithful among the secular public as well as among moderate religious Jews, who cannot find their place in the Haredi or religious Zionist camps.

Accordingly, Amital announced that he would support territorial retreats if they would secure a genuine and lasting peace with the Arabs. He believed that a peace treaty could lead to massive Jewish immigration from the Diaspora. Therefore, if the choice were between bringing more Jews to the Land of Israel in a smaller area of holy land, as opposed to Jewish control over a larger

portion of the Land of Israel, but with fewer Jews under Jewish rule – he would choose the former option.

Amital emphasized that the conquest of the Land from the starting point of a defensive war is a mighty privilege. However, Israel should not endanger even a single soul in order to “uproot evil from the world” or “kill the Jew-haters,” unless it faced a tangible danger. Talk of obliterating Amalek’s memory was shallow and had no place in the Jewish house of study.

According to Amital, wars weaken the Zionist attachment of the Jewish masses to the Land of Israel; each war heightens their sense of doubt regarding the justice of Israel’s path. Therefore, on the basis of strategic considerations, the religious camp should declare its commitment to peace, even at the cost of territorial compromise, and even if it did not expect such a scenario to materialize in the foreseeable future.<sup>30</sup>

Hanan Porat’s reaction to Amital’s remarks was forthright: Southern Lebanon was part of the Land of Israel, he declared – land that Israel was commanded to conquer and settle. There was no difference between the coastal plain, the Negev, Judea, Samaria, and southern Lebanon – the latter area constituting the inheritance of the tribes of Naphtali and Asher. Moreover, someone who was now willing to relinquish the northern part of the Land of Israel would later be willing to abandon other parts of the Land. Porat expressed his “astonishment” at Amital’s readiness to consider concessions in Judea and Samaria: “Amital’s remarks have caused educational desolation, confusion and weakness of spirit. I told Rabbi Amital just this in person, in his home, in an honest and open manner.” Porat added that, in principle, he supported Jewish settlement in southern Lebanon, although in practical terms he did not think it was likely this would prove possible. He drew on the security-based argument that the settlements in Judea and Samaria filled a defensive function, and suggested that the same argument could be applied to southern Lebanon.<sup>31</sup>

Yoel Bin Nun, another leader of Gush Emunim, also reacted to Amital’s comments and the debate he sparked on the subject of southern Lebanon. Bin Nun agreed that the time was not ripe to extend the Land of Israel into Lebanon, but stressed that this was not a waiver of a right, but merely its postponement. Bin Nun objected to the depiction of the Jewish people as standing in opposition to the Land of Israel, as Amital implied, and accused him of a “Diaspora-like” and distorted approach.<sup>32</sup> In Chapter 3, I discuss how Yoel Bin Nun’s views would also subsequently undergo an interesting transformation. The very existence of this debate demonstrates the circulation of these ideas among the Gush Emunim elite.

<sup>30</sup> Yehuda Amital, “In the Trap of Completeness,” *Nekuda* 52, December 24, 1982, 8–11 (in Hebrew).

<sup>31</sup> Unsigned, “When Does One Not Give Honor to a Rabbi,” *Nekuda* 50, November 12, 1982, 6–7 (in Hebrew).

<sup>32</sup> Yoel Bin Nun, “The Circle Cannot Be Squared,” *Nekuda* 53, January 14, 1983, 4–5 (in Hebrew).

## The Jewish Underground

In the spring of 1984, the Israeli General Security Service (GSS) uncovered the so-called “Jewish Underground,” a group that committed a series of revenge attacks on Arabs. The members of the group planted incendiary devices in the cars of the leaders of the National Guidance Committee, a group of local Palestinian leaders, in response to an attack on a group of Jews in Hebron (May 1980). The mayors of Ramallah and Nablus lost their legs in the action, and an IDF bomb disposal expert was injured while attempting to defuse a third device. At the beginning of July 1983, Aharon Gross, a student at Shavei Hevron yeshiva (which has links with Mercaz Harav yeshiva) was murdered. The Jewish Underground responded by attacking the Islamic College in Hebron, a center of anti-Israeli activities. Three Arabs were murdered in the attack and approximately thirty were injured. An attempt by the Underground to booby trap a bus transporting Arab workers in East Jerusalem was foiled after the underground cell was exposed by the GSS.

Three men initiated the establishment of the Jewish Underground: Menachem Livny, Yehoshua Ben-Shoshan, and Yehuda Etzion. The latter two also had a further objective that was not realized, and this was the true purpose behind the establishment of the Underground. At the beginning of his trial, Etzion confessed that “the action against the mayors took one month of my life. The thoughts, preparations, conceptions, and actions I undertook with regard to the [Temple] Mount occupied years of my life.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, this was the true objective of the Underground – to remove the mosques from the Temple Mount and prepare the site for the establishment of the Third Temple.

Etzion is one of the most original thinkers among contemporary religious Zionists; his positions constitute a right-wing benchmark and draw the entire religious Zionist public toward religious extremism and radicalism.

After learning the price that the Israeli government was willing to pay in return for the peace treaty with Egypt, a number of members from Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai and Gush Emunim began to develop the idea that blowing up the mosques on the Temple Mount could thwart the treaty.<sup>34</sup>

In his analysis, Gideon Aran determines that a clear sociological connection may be seen between the withdrawal from Sinai and the plan to blow up the mosques. The eviction of Yamit was the point at which the barriers preventing this move fell. The traumatic experience of the withdrawal from Sinai, despite the struggle waged to prevent this development, led a number of key activists in Gush Emunim to advocate this idea more forcibly than before. According to Aran, this may be considered a manifestation of frustration and despair, as well as one of destiny, fulfillment, and hope.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The comments were quoted in *Nekudah* 88 (1985), 25 (in Hebrew).

<sup>34</sup> For further details, see: Nadav Shragai, *Mount of Dispute*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishers, 1995, 99–100 (in Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> Gidon Aran, *The Land*, 1–8 (in Hebrew).

Yehuda Etzion acted on the basis of the same logic. The post-Zionist reaction he developed was rooted in the sense that the approach of the general Zionist movement had failed; this was compounded by disappointment with religious Zionism, which had granted its approval for the weak will that led to the withdrawal. Etzion identified the cause of this weakness, and conceived a dramatic move that would put the proper process back on course, accelerating the process of redemption. He argued that the Temple Mount held the mystical key for ending the period of meek Zionism. The removal of the mosques would put redemption back on course.

The main thrust of Etzion's criticism toward the religious Zionist leaders is that they allowed secular Jews to lead the process of redemption. The idea that secular Israelis, unaware of the tremendous mission they bore, would deliver their secular enterprise into the hands of a messianic theocracy proved mistaken. The divine mission was neglected by precisely those who were destined to be its bearers – religious Zionism, and in place of progress came regression. The desire for “normality” led the course of redemption to the edge of oblivion.

Etzion believed the processes of secularization undergone by Israeli society, and the willingness to view the territories occupied in the 1967 war as bargaining chips in order to secure peace agreements and compromise, while totally ignoring their messianic importance, proved that the tactic adopted by religious Zionism had been mistaken. His perception was that general Zionism did not have the strength to lead the journey toward an era of total redemption.

For Etzion, the “supreme strategy” of religious Zionism remained the desire to move closer to a theocratic messianic dominion. In tactical terms, however, an urgent revision was required in the definition of how to lead this process. The answer lay in religious radicalism and theocratic activism. Etzion interpreted the “Return to Zion” as a cosmic process progressing toward the redemption of the People of Israel. However, he argued, the way in which religious Zionism had sought to channel the people toward this goal had actually led to the traumatic consequences of Israel's territorial withdrawals.

Surprisingly, Etzion argued that the responsibility for this failure on the part of religious Zionism rested with its adoption of the philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, as embodied in the approach of Mercaz Harav yeshiva.

According to Mercaz Harav ideology, the tool for realizing divine will is manifested in Jewish nationhood. The sanctity of the Land of Israel is mirrored by the sanctity of the State of Israel, because the State of Israel advances a messianic process, albeit unwittingly.

Etzion's criticism is that the sanctification of the state by the adherents of approach taken by the Mercaz Harav yeshiva prevented an effective struggle against the state by thwarting processes that can lead to redemption. When the State of Israel decided to withdraw from parts of the Land of Israel, the yeshiva would be trapped and unable to take firm action against such a policy. The



weakness of the Mercaz Harav school is manifested in the clearest terms by its position regarding the Temple Mount. Etzion argues that if the state were to declare its sovereignty over the Mount by removing the Waqf and the mosques, the followers of the yeshiva would laud its actions. If the government refused to do so, however, they justified this inaction by resorting to the traditional formula that “the generation is not yet prepared” for such a step.

When Etzion argued that the approach of Mercaz Harav yeshiva was mistaken, he chose to base his position on the writings of a long-forgotten member of the Lechi movement by the name of Shabbtai Ben Dov, who had combined aspects of fascist political theory with the theocratic ideal.<sup>36</sup> Etzion moved beyond the boundaries of statism as defined by the followers of Gush Emunim and adopted an independent position, establishing an underground movement designed to realize a post-Zionist vision of a Torah state by undermining statist ideology. The distinction was illustrated in the fact that while the vast majority of Gush Emunim supporters opposed the eviction of Yamit through passive resistance, while respecting the limits of the struggle, a group formed on the margins of the camp that crossed the dividing line. For Etzion, the state bore no particular sanctity, unless it chose to realize the religious purpose for which it had been created. The state is a means; redemption is the end. Accordingly, if the state fails to perform as expected, it is no longer required. Moreover, if the state becomes an obstacle in realizing destiny, it may certainly be attacked or, at the very least, its authority may be ignored.

*Nekuda* allowed the publication of Etzion’s ideological approach and provided a platform for his articles. As expected, his writings provoked a fierce debate. Yitzhak Shilat indirectly attacked the ideology of the underground, which he defined as “foolish Messianism.” Shilat claimed that false Messianism is an action that opposes true Messianism, that is the establishment of a Torah state and the imposition of religious dominion. Foolish Messianism, by contrast, seeks to achieve the same ends as true Messianism, but it does so through foolish means – an allusion to the plan to bomb the mosques on the Temple Mount.<sup>37</sup> Shmuel Livne characterized Etzion’s ideas as simplistic and distorted.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, Noam Arnon, a settler in Hebron, attacked the instinctive condemnation of the Jewish Underground among the religious public. He defined these reactions as hysterical and untrue, and as reflecting a lack of pride and camaraderie. Arnon accused the army of failing to provide security solutions for the settlers in the Territories, and claimed that the Underground had acted out of a sense of distress and defensive constraints: “Where there is no law, there will be blood payment, for if not – our blood will be literally abandoned.” Moreover, Menachem Livni had through his actions prevented a

<sup>36</sup> For more about Shabbtai Ben Dov and Etzion’s affinity to his writings, see: Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 55–66.

<sup>37</sup> Yitzhak Shilat, “False Messianism and Foolish Messianism,” *Nekuda* 76, August 10, 1984, 16–7 (in Hebrew).

<sup>38</sup> Shmuel Livne, “Without Breaks,” *Nekuda* 77, August 31, 1984, 22, 25 (in Hebrew).

planned pogrom against Jews:<sup>39</sup> “What more could we have asked of him?” Arnon urged the public to respect the opinion of the members of the underground out of loyalty, and condemned those who were “swept along by leftist propaganda,” as he put it. “Do not try to be nice and beautiful, when our national obligation is to strengthen the holding of the people of Israel in its Land in an absolute manner!”<sup>40</sup> In his article, Arnon completely ignored the question of the Underground’s plans regarding the Temple Mount.

Rabbi Zvi Tau launched a fierce attack on the supporters of the Underground. He emphasized that he has nothing personal against its members, but “we have a disdain for the impure, the psychotic, the false Messianism. We must give out all to condemn and remove such persons.” Tau attacked the concept of the Underground as avant-garde and held the idea that “we must attend to redeem ourselves, since all the people are in the wrong.” He expressed his concern that such ideas might strike roots among broader circles. Tau also criticized the disrespect for the value of the sanctity of the state, and the Underground’s intention to “force” God to redeem Israel by exploding the mosques on the Temple Mount. Tau explained the difference between the approach of Gush Emunim and that of the Underground, arguing that from the outset, Gush Emunim had acted with the support of the people, even if this was not reflected on the level of the government: “The people’s spirit was high, while the government was comprised of private bureaucrats who submitted to their weaknesses.” The movement’s demonstrations had effectively sought to alert the government to the will of the people. However, when Menachem Begin returned from Egypt with the peace agreement and the public supported him in its masses, Zvi Yehuda announced that “the people are not with us” and called off the demonstrations. According to Tau, the activists in Gush Emunim were unwilling to accept this order, and hence parted ways with the movement. “Five thousand people (in Yamit) have no mandate to impose their will on the people of Israel and to rebel against the spirit of the nation [ . . . ] This is a rebellion against the dominion of God, apostasy against His guiding of reality.” Tau also attacked the security pretext behind the actions of the Underground, arguing that the government holds sovereignty, and even if its actions are mundane, it still reflects the order of redemption.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

The political decision to evict Yamit and the struggle against the withdrawal forced Gush Emunim to confront for the first time the reality of territorial

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, precisely the same explanation was used to justify the massacre of Arab worshippers in Hebron in 1994 by Baruch Goldstein. Indeed, it seems that this argument is raised almost instinctively whenever Jews in Hebron are involved in terrorist attacks against Arabs.

<sup>40</sup> Noam Arnon, “Coming Out from Underground,” *Nekuda* 76, August 10, 1984, 18–9 (in Hebrew).

<sup>41</sup> Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers*, 217–8.

compromise by Israel. Despite the movement's defeat in this struggle, it maintained a statist approach. The vast majority of those quoted in this chapter opposed the approach of secular Zionism and sought its replacement with a Torah state. However, two distinct factions could be distinguished. The first sought to realize the revolution through education and outreach, on the basis of the fundamental sanctity of the state; accordingly, outreach and propaganda efforts should take place within the confines of the state, and certainly not against it. The second faction rejected the concept of the sanctity of the state, which it regarded as no more than an instrument for the realization of a religious vision. Accordingly, it had no qualms about opposing the state and acting outside the confines of statism, once it sensed that the state had betrayed its religious mission.

The failure of the campaign to prevent the withdrawal from Sinai created faith-based disappointment. The central faction among the supporters of Gush Emunim reacted by analyzing this disappointment as a call to reinforce its religious faith and its confidence in the justness of its own approach. Accordingly, in most cases, the practical conclusion was to reinforce the movement's outreach. On the margins, however, this disappointment led to two contrary reactions. The more radical element strengthened its position, arguing that the principle of statism should now be abandoned, and preferring the sanctity of the Land to that of the state. The failure led to the idea of blowing up the mosques on the Temple Mount in an effort to realize religious redemption. These positions were represented mainly by Yehuda Etzion and Israel Ariel. The opposite approach was represented by Yehuda Amital, who began to express positions that abandoned the fundamental approach of Gush Emunim, instead placing the value of the sanctity of human life above the value of the sanctity of the Land. These disagreements would continue throughout the campaign by Gush Emunim in favor of the Whole Land of Israel. It is interesting to note that the two camps used Zvi Yehuda Kook's comments in order to justify their actions – this being another example of his “tortured” legacy.<sup>42</sup>

The rabbinical authorities themselves were ambivalent about the sanctity of the Sinai Peninsula, and their declarations demonstrated that. Therefore, the purpose of the campaign against the withdrawal was mostly in order to create a national trauma to prevent any future concessions. According to their logic, the way to fix the national opinion was through propaganda.

The campaign waged by the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai showed that the vast majority of Gush Emunim supporters chose the path of broadly passive resistance. The campaign for Yamit effectively shaped the future course of action of the settler public in the face of later withdrawals. In all of the subsequent instances, such as the Oslo process and the Disengagement Plan, the movement adopted a relatively moderate course of opposition that did not include extreme acts of illegality. It should be recalled, however, that

<sup>42</sup> Shai Held, “What Zvi Yehudah Wrought: Fanaticism and Kookian Messianism,” unpublished paper, Tikvah Project, May 2011.

some opposed this approach and a more radical movement emerged, even if it remained marginal and relatively limited in size. Its strength should not be overlooked, as the extreme actions of marginal figures have the capacity to change the course of history. The plan to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount did not materialize; its perpetrators were caught and imprisoned. We can only imagine what might have transpired had their plan gone ahead. The tension between the majority and the margins would continue to color the disagreements within the movement as it pursued further struggles.

## The Statist Approach Confronted with the Oslo Accords

The Oslo process began with secret negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). However, in 1993, it led to the signing of a declaration of principles by the two sides in Washington, DC. Israel agreed to withdraw from territories in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, and to establish a Palestinian autonomous authority in the area for an interim period, with a view to reaching a permanent settlement between the sides.

This process, and particularly the territorial compromise it entailed, created a profound crisis within those religious Zionist circles that have identified Israeli reality as part of a redemptive process. The political concessions threatened to disrupt their messianic expectations and required a response adapted to the new reality. Accordingly, the Oslo process provides a test case for the way in which the religious Zionist public as a whole faced this crisis of faith, and, more specifically, the manner in which the Halachic guides of this public – those responsible for shaping its religious behavior – responded to this crisis.

In this chapter, I discuss the circle of the mainstream rabbis who form the elite of Gush Emunim. The exponents of this approach are the modern-day representatives of the statist worldview developed by Zvi Yehuda Kook and base their positions on his writings. This chapter examines the approach of three rabbis: Zvi Tau, Yoel Bin Nun, and Shlomo Aviner. For each of them, territorial withdrawals do not represent messianic failure.

### State and Redemption in the Thought of Rabbi Shlomo Aviner

Shlomo Aviner is one of the settler movement's leading rabbis. He lives in Beit El and serves as one of the rabbis of the settlement. Aviner is a creative and prolific writer whose works relate to diverse themes. He studied at Mercaz Harav yeshiva and considers himself a classic student of Zvi Yehuda Kook. Aviner has published over one hundred books, including his edited renditions of talks by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook.

Shlomo Aviner was born in France during the Second World War (1943) to a religious Zionist family that was living in hiding at the time. After acquiring a scientific education in the field of electronics and performing his military service in France, Aviner immigrated to Israel in 1971 under the auspices of the religious Zionist youth movement Bnai Akiva.

Aviner was one of the founders of the revived Jewish settlement in Hebron and was also involved in the settlement activities of the core of Gush Emunim. From 1977 to 1981, he served as rabbi of the community of Keshet in the Golan Heights; since 1981, he has served as a rabbi in the settlement of Beit El in the West Bank. In 1983, Aviner established Ateret Kohanim yeshiva in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.

The signing of the Oslo Accords caught Rabbi Aviner by surprise. In the winter 5754 (1993–1994) issue of the local Beit El settlement's newsletter, Aviner published regular columns commenting on the political process, offering insight into his immediate response to the urgent issues of the day. His remarks were collated in a booklet entitled *Its Land and Its People – The Struggle for the Land of Israel*, which this chapter examines as a tool for understanding Aviner's response to the changing reality. His reaction was not uniform. He initially focused on theodicy – the need to reconcile evil with God's plans and to combat the despair provoked by the agreements – although later he offered operative suggestions, based on his statist agenda, particularly concerning the need for the settlers to intensify their efforts to educate the general public regarding the importance of defending the Land of Israel.

His immediate response was to find theological justifications to the crisis: In his first column after the signing of the agreement, Aviner based his discussion on the Talmud, and recalled that the process of redemption is likened to the early dawn, when darkness and light intermingle. This process has its weak moments and crises alongside victories. Aviner acknowledged that Rabbi Kook (senior) taught that God would not abandon His people, and that redemption is making certain progress, even if this cannot be discerned. However, retreats may occur along the way and, in any case, they are all merely part of God's plan of action. Aviner linked redemption to an egg in a bird's nest. The chick emerges suddenly from the egg, but has been growing there for some time. Therefore, those who follow God's plan by settling the Land and studying Torah, even in times of uncertainty, will receive their reward.

Aviner added that no one should be surprised by crises; the process of resurrecting the nation is long and complex. The problems that arise are a test of perfect faith. Difficulties forge strength, and, accordingly, the public should continue on its path without making any changes, although things will only get harder.<sup>1</sup> Aviner called for the strengthening of the settlements in Judea and Samaria and in Gaza. He urged people to develop their spiritual strength and to ignore a reality that can lead to doom and despair. This, he argued, was

<sup>1</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "Awaiting Salvation," *Its Land and its People: The Struggle for the Land of Israel*, Beit El: Hava Library, 1994, 1–2 (in Hebrew).

the ultimate test of faith. If the settlers adhered to their beliefs and hope and continued their actions, this would guarantee that the evil decree would be nullified.

Moreover, Aviner stressed, the settlement movement could expect countless difficulties and challenges. The new reality symbolizes destruction, albeit of a partial nature: "The destruction of part of the Land, part of Zionism."<sup>2</sup> Zionism fails to understand the value of the Land and is sacrificing it for the sake of peace, defined as a temporary alleviation and period of calm, explained the rabbi.

According to Aviner, the faithful should emerge reinvigorated by such difficulties. God does not impose tests in order for humans to fail them; the purpose of the test is to galvanize the faithful. "When destruction and crisis appear, the forces of repair are created at the same time. Indeed, from out of the destruction an even taller building emerges." Aviner employs dialectical concepts to argue that evil leads to the emergence of something enhanced and improved. God could not bring evil if this were not the case. His conclusion: "We must fight with all our might to prevent crises and defeats, but if they occur, despite our best efforts, we must not despair."

The Hallel prayer for the well-being of the State of Israel has been an accepted part of the service in religious Zionist synagogues; ultra-Orthodox synagogues do not recite this prayer.<sup>3</sup> Since the emergence of the Oslo process, reservations have also emerged regarding this prayer in national religious synagogues. Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, the head of Mercaz Harav yeshiva at the time, reportedly urged his students to stop reciting the prayer, which includes a blessing on the leaders, ministers, and advisors of the state. This report provoked a debate, and Yisraeli subsequently clarified that while he had personally adopted this position, he had not urged others to do the same.<sup>4</sup> Aviner did not follow Yisraeli's position and criticized those who, in their despair, had joined the ranks of Orthodox opponents of the state and accused it of failing to meet their religious expectations. His response was that it was inappropriate to lash out at the state. On the contrary: "We [must] recite the prayer for the wellbeing of the state with even greater devotion."

Aviner emphasizes that his heart broke to see people "drunk on false euphoria" who are willing to tear off parts of the Land, and who believe that peace can be secured at the expense of national betrayal. He claimed that it had been well-known that the day would come when the love of the Land would be tested. His response was to stress that nothing would or could change in the religious activity, although things would only get harder. While he did not know how to overcome the challenge, he was certain in the justness of his course: "We will surely overcome; God does not abandon His people."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "We Will Overcome," 7.

<sup>3</sup> Yoel Rappel, "The Identity of the Author of the Prayer for the Wellbeing of the State of Israel," *Masua LeYitzhak* 1 (2009) 594–620 (in Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> *Newsletter of the Yesha Rabbis* 26, 5755–1995, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "We Will Overcome," 7–9.

Thus, Aviner's initial response was to strengthen the settlers and to argue the path in which the Oslo Accords fit into God's plans: it is basically a test of faith.

As early as October 1993, Aviner foresaw the future development of relations between the settlers and the army. He described a fictional case in which the residents of Beit El harassed, cursed and boycotted a religious officer, calling him a Nazi, due to his willingness to obey the army orders to evict settlements. Do note that a military base of the Maintenance Corps on the edge of the settlement of Beit El was evacuated following the signing of the political accords; accordingly, it is possible that Aviner's story is not entirely fictional.

Aviner pointed out that the refusal to obey commands can work both ways – if one soldier refuses to obey orders, who can guarantee that young soldiers from the kibbutzim will not refuse to protect the settlements or suppress the Palestinian uprising? Speaking for the fictitious officer, Aviner concludes: "We [the army] are not the address for those who want to oppose government policy."<sup>6</sup> Aviner has remained consistent in his approach toward the army, continuing to oppose those who call for soldiers to disobey orders, even during the Disengagement Plan when attitudes hardened on this subject (see the following discussion). This example emphasized his statist approach was not changed, even in times of trouble.

Regarding the settlers' concerns about the future of building projects in the settlements and because of the political uncertainty surrounding their future, Aviner published his response at the beginning of 1994 to a family troubled by this matter. The family asked him whether they should invest money in renovating and extending their home. Aviner's reply was surprising. Naturally, he urged the family to go ahead with their plans. However, the reason he gave them was unexpected. He pointed out that even if their settlement were vacated, the family would receive monetary compensation for the loss of their home, so they would not suffer financially.<sup>7</sup>

The distress and desperation of the settlers in response to the prevailing situation is evident from the letters published by Aviner. Responding to a question about how to cope with the anxiety, and whether to prepare plans in case the eviction went ahead, Aviner replied that in difficult times people should not give in to desperate thoughts, which serve only to weaken them and lead to failure.<sup>8</sup>

Aviner strongly criticized the tendency to factionalism and incitement that emerged within the settler population in response to the despair created by the political process. Some circles began to refer to the supporters of the process by the Kabbalistic term "*erev rav*" ("mixed multitude," often used with the sense of "rabble"). This term implies that the settlers' political opponents were not

<sup>6</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "Don't Bite Soldiers," *Its Land and Its People*, 5–6.

<sup>7</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "Keep on Building," *Ibid.*, 10–1.

<sup>8</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "Preparing for a Bad Future?" *Ibid.*, 33–6.



part of the nation, and should be fought, perhaps even annihilated (see Chapter 7). Responding to this tendency, Aviner commented: "It isn't a matter of 'them and us' here, there is only 'us,' all of us . . . All these expressions such as 'rabble' and so forth used against the secular Jews are nothing more than hatred, and are reminiscent of the situation that led to the destruction of the Second Temple." Aviner also attacked those who called the government treacherous and evil, adding that such rhetoric does nothing to solve the problems. In times of crisis and frustration, responses based on scorn and division are rife; rather than healing and saving the situation, these serve only to pour oil on the fire. Aviner quoted Zvi Yehuda Kook, who claimed that those who foment dispute are the worst "rabble" of all – in other words, he placed them in the very category in which they sought to place others.<sup>9</sup> Aviner called for a greater emphasis on *Ahavat Israel* – the love of all Jews, and urged people not to listen to those who preached hatred.<sup>10</sup>

Aviner advocated a positive propaganda campaign that would not cause people to hate the Land of Israel. Accordingly, he opposed those who called the prime minister a traitor.<sup>11</sup> He believed that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was making a terrible and grave error, and that his name would be besmirched forever. However, he was not a traitor, because his goal was to benefit the state. Aviner considered Rabin's political plan disastrous, and it could even be considered an act of treachery toward the Land of Israel, but Rabin was not a traitor. Accordingly, the proper response was to convince people that the agreement constituted a dangerous national crime, but its opponents should not engage in unlawful activities.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the substantive question as to whether the agreement might actually bring true peace, and, therefore, deserved support, Aviner replied that the Jews are a peace-loving people. The question as to which is more important, the Land or peace, is a foolish one, as there should be no contradiction between the two. Aviner ruled that the agreement was a false peace: "A false peace is extremely dangerous. Our neighbors are hoodwinking us! Their religion permits them to do so for the purpose of territorial expansion, and they even consider this praiseworthy . . . A peace that is not true will not last."

In order to prove they want a true peace, Aviner continued, the Arabs must prove they are not cheating. How could they do this? "First, they should express regret for everything they have done to us since the Return to Zion, by murdering, raping and pillaging innocent and peaceful people." Next, they

<sup>9</sup> An interesting comparative case study of how the Sabbatians and their rabbinical opponents casted one another out of Judaism, while labeling each other as "mixed multitude," can be found in Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "On Those Who Cut Israel with a Knife by Calling Their Fellows 'Rabble,'" *Ibid.*, 12–6.

<sup>11</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "Yesha or Unity of the People," *Ibid.*, 28–30.

<sup>12</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "The Prime Minister Is Not a Traitor," *Ibid.*, 47–8.

should pay compensation to all those they have harmed. If they are genuine, “they should return to us those parts of our Land promised to us by the nations of the world in accordance with its historical Biblical boundaries” – a reference to Transjordan. If they did all of these, their intentions would in fact be peaceful. If not, this is a sign that they are cheating and seeking to deceive Israel. Aviner compared the peace agreement to the appeasement policy of the British Prime Minister Chamberlain during Nazis’ rise to power. Chamberlain was willing to allow the Germans to take control of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia in order to keep the peace; the result was the outbreak of the Second World War. Aviner’s conclusion was that a false peace leads to bloodshed. The days of messianic peace, when the “wolf will lie down with the lamb,” have not yet arrived. The Palestinian peace offer is actually a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.”<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the possibility that settlers could remain in areas evacuated by Israel, Aviner declared his support for Jewish settlement throughout the Land of Israel, including areas that are not part of the State of Israel: “They will guard these places and eventually, through their devotion and determination, these will return to their true fold.” Settling the land is not a personal commandment, Aviner added, but one incumbent on the nation as a whole. Accordingly, if territories are evacuated, these should be held, even if not under Israeli sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> Aviner commented that in the Middle East, everything is fluid and reversible. Even if an area is evacuated, Jews will eventually return to it. His conclusion is that people should remain on the ground, even under foreign sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

As time passed, Aviner’s response to the crisis of faith created by the Oslo Accords seems to have focused increasingly on the need to reinforce the settlers’ educational message. The solution and the way forward must rest on the foundation of education.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Aviner was a leading proponent of the need to strengthen educational activities and launch an informational campaign. Aviner’s way of dealing with the messianic crisis was to consider it a test of faith and determination that could only be overcome through total loyalty. The proper response was struggling to strengthen the settlements and engaging in outreach and education, even in a situation of despair and crisis. Aviner clearly remained faithful to the position he had adopted during the earlier struggle over Yamit’s future.

### **The Idea of the “Settlement Blocs” As Conceived by Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun**

The political process also led Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun to engage in soul-searching. In his youth, Bin Nun had studied in Mercaz Harav yeshiva and was one of the students of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. After the 1973 (Yom Kippur) War,

<sup>13</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “True Peace,” *Ibid.*, 18–20.

<sup>14</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “Jewish Communities outside the State?” *Ibid.*, 26–7.

<sup>15</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “We Will Not Move from Here,” *Ibid.*, 37–8.

<sup>16</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “Crises in Redemption,” *Ibid.*, 31–2.

Bin Nun was one of the founders of Gush Emunim. The movement's founding meeting was held in 1974 in Bin Nun's home in Alon Shvut, in Gush Etzion. Bin Nun served for many years as a member of the secretariat of Gush Emunim, but in 1976 he moved to the settlement of Ofra.

Bin Nun claimed that the messianic process is protracted and takes centuries. Accordingly, the proper way to respond to territorial compromises is pragmatism. The political process, which had begun with the peace agreement with Egypt, and also with the broad public support for such agreements, led Bin Nun to the conclusion that messianic redemption must be realized in small, measured steps. According to this approach, the Land of Israel, particularly those parts outside the "Green Line," was still not held by the people. The religious Zionist public was attempting to adhere to the Land through settlement, public campaigns, and a political struggle. Bin Nun, however, claimed that it would not be possible to secure the entire Land of Israel in the foreseeable future. At best, a substantial part of this expanse could be secured, at a tremendous effort: "Every acre we eventually manage to attach to the State of Israel represents a historical success."<sup>17</sup>

Bin Nun claimed that most of the Israeli public would support a withdrawal into blocs of settlements containing a Jewish majority and control over most of the land. These blocs were recognized in the Oslo Accords, and would remain outside the Palestinian Autonomy, including their access roads. Bin Nun added that this was a significant concession from the Palestinians' perspective. He criticized the leaders of the settler movement for engaging in a political campaign to bring down the government, rather than focusing on what he described as the "true struggle." He referred to "a desperate attempt to stop the immutable flow of history, that is – the shattering of our control over the Arabs."<sup>18</sup>

Bin Nun opposed the personal campaign initiated against Yitzhak Rabin by the Yesha Council, which he claimed had actually caused damage, particularly due to slogans such as "traitor" and "the government of bloodshed," used by extremist elements who seized control of the demonstrations. Bin Nun also complained of the tendency toward religious extremism and the growing gulf between different sections of the nation. He claimed that the style in many quarters was becoming similar to that of Neturei Karta, a religious radicalism, that damages youth and impairs educational efforts. Bin Nun argued that Rabin should be praised for insisting on maintaining all the settlement blocs, despite the fact that a majority in the government favored the dismantling of some of the settlements in the Gaza Strip. Similarly, the army officers who defended the settlements during the negotiations deserved praise. Their involvement in the process, he added, was preferable to that of more concessionary elements such as Shimon Peres, the foreign minister, and one of the architects of the Oslo Accord, or the circle of Yossi Beilin.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Yoel Bin Nun, "Anyone Who Leaves Now Is a Deserter," *Nekuda* 178, May 1994, 34 (in Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–5.

In the case of the peace agreement with Jordan, Bin Nun supported the accord, even though it entailed formal relinquishment of the parts of Transjordan identified with the Biblical Land of Israel. Bin Nun was not surprised by the despair that seized ideologues whose religious and political theory had collapsed, and who found it difficult to cope with the specter of retreat in the messianic process. He claimed that the main question to examine when considering political agreements involving concessions, or acceptance of foreign control over parts of the Land in this generation, was the extent to which most of the nation considered these areas to be genuinely under Jewish control. Military control of the Territories was not enough; there was also a need for the support of the majority of the Jewish public, and for de facto international acceptance. The use of terms such as “treason,” “abandonment,” and “evil” would do nothing to strengthen the basis of such support.<sup>20</sup> This approach continues the principle established by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who sought to secure broad popular support for moves opposed to the government position. The majority of the public did not support Israeli control over the Palestinians, therefore, Bin Nun argued that the settlers should work according to the will of the people, and not against it.

Because Bin Nun viewed the process of redemption as a protracted one, he defined the “real task” as being to secure broad-based popular support based on certain territorial compromises, including the annexation of the settlement blocs, while relinquishing the remainder of the area. However, it was impossible to predict how conditions might change in the future. The only thing that Bin Nun emphasized as certain was that an ongoing process of redemption is underway. Accordingly, even steps that presently seem to constitute a setback do not necessarily create permanent and immutable changes.

### **Messianic Mysticism in the Thought of Rabbi Zvi Tau**

Zvi Tau is one of the most prominent spiritual leaders who emerged from Mercaz Harav Yeshiva. He was a close disciple of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, and many see him as following his path. In 1997, Tau broke away from Mercaz Harav Yeshiva following a disagreement with Avraham Shapira, the head of the yeshiva, regarding the inclusion of an academic teacher-training institute within the yeshiva framework. Tau was opposed to this innovation, left Mercaz Harav together with most of the teaching staff, and established Har Hamor Yeshiva, where he serves as the spiritual leader.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Yoel Bin Nun, “Coming out of the Depths of Rejection and Despair,” *Nekuda* 182, November 1994, 30–4 (in Hebrew).

<sup>21</sup> Yishai Rosen-Zvi, “Metaphysics in the Making: The Dispute at Mercaz Harav Yeshiva – A Critical Study,” in: Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Religious Zionism – Ideological Aspects*, 3, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 5763–2003, 421–46 (in Hebrew).

Although the manner in which he describes secular reality has become increasingly extreme over the years, Tau remains faithful to his basic belief that the errors made by the state, and its failure to follow the messianic course, must be corrected solely by means of mass education in the ways of Torah.

The political process did not shake Tau's confident interpretation of Israeli reality as the reflection of mundane progress toward the ultimate redemption. Accordingly, he argues that the difficulties resulting from the political process do not reflect any retreat. In fact, paradoxically, these setbacks form an integral part of the divine plan.<sup>22</sup> Tau's religious approach and his responses to contemporary challenges reflect a pattern that perceive the crisis not as a set back, but as a sign of strength. According to Tau's approach, the process of redemption is a long and complex one that includes tensions and profound contradictions between the ideal and reality. Yet his approach also continues the deterministic view that there can be only one sole interpretation of the Jewish past and of the Jewish future.

Tau argues that because the Jewish people constitutes a single organic unit, if this people includes even a single Jewish individual who does not accept the entirety of the Land of Israel with all his faith and conscience, this will blemish the entire nation. The existence of Jewish people who may not accept the need to hold on to all parts of the Whole Land of Israel dictates the task facing the present generation: to educate the public in the message of redemption.<sup>23</sup> Even if the secular public has drawn away from the religious public in its opinions and thoughts, the entire Jewish people constitute a united entity, and redemption can develop only from the comprehensive revival of the people.<sup>24</sup>

Tau said that the national revival of the Jewish people is built on two levels, sacred and profane. Each of these complements the other. Accordingly, Tau urged his audience to convey this message to the people; thus, there is a need for people of morality and faith to teach the sacred texts, so that when the age of redemption appears in all its greatness it will find a strong foundation enabling secular externality to adapt to the new reality.<sup>25</sup>

According to Tau, territorial retreats cannot lead to despair because the path of mundane redemption is one that includes ascents and descents. Accordingly, events must be understood on the basis of their inner complexity, and not in a simplistic manner. The process of redemption also operates from within the darkness; the true believers must support it and help it to realize itself.<sup>26</sup>

Tau describes a process of redemption that is protracted and lengthy. It begins with the construction of the nation's body, and only thereafter moves on to the soul. Accordingly, if the present generation seems indifferent to morality

<sup>22</sup> Zvi Tau, *On the Faith of Our Times – Guidelines for Understanding the Period*, 1, Jerusalem: Hosen Yeshuot, 5754–1994, 17 (in Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 34–43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 70–84.

and appears to be exclusively negative, this is a reflection of its greatness, not its insignificance. Even if there are problems, the religious people must recognize what hides behind them and understand the paradoxical nature of Jewish secularism in Israel.

Tau urges his audience to recognize the strength of historical dialectics. He argues that the course of redemption has led to a situation where not only sanctity is absent, but where empty secularity has even come to reject its own values. Discussing the phenomenon of post-Zionism, Tau suggests that empty secularity has created a paradoxical situation in which the absence of ideals actually make souls more inclined to accept sublime values and deeper and fuller understandings. This situation trains Jewish souls to accept the truth, which is to accept Torah and the commandments. In this way, God prepares for His return – through concealment, spoilage, and despair.<sup>27</sup>

As years passed, Tau's rhetoric became increasingly exacerbated. In a book published prior to the implementation of the Disengagement plan, his description of the current generation became more extreme than ever. Tau offered a quasi-psychological explanation for the state of the secular public. He argued that the soul demands full sanctity. The present generation, however, has been educated to pursue honor and to gratify the most immediate and base desires. Accordingly, the soul emits sickness, sadness, and lack. In order to meet this need, it turns to the external dimension. "This explains the spirit of weakness regarding the abandonment of parts of the homeland," Tau determines.<sup>28</sup>

Tau riles against poor moral values and the immodest dress of women and mocks the pursuit of external image. The loss of self-identity on the national level, he explains, has led to obsequiousness to the nations of the world. This has created the weakness that leads to the abandonment of sections of the homeland. The desire to satisfy the nations of the world leads to this degraded condition. The function of the public that is true to the tradition, accordingly, is to cure this sickness and to imbue the people with an alternative spirit based on pure ideals that does not seek permission or admiration from the nations of the world. The purification of the spirit is the main task facing Torah scholars.<sup>29</sup>

Why is the generation going from bad to worse? Tau's response emphasizes the mystical and paradoxical aspects of the process of redemption. He identifies an internal conflict within secularity – on the one hand, the soul longs to burst out; on the other, external forces keep it trapped inside.

Pride and impurity establish a hollow and vacuous world – a virtual reality behind which there is nothing. "An entire world is based on foundations of lies . . . In truth, in the internality of life all is rotten, devoid of love and true connection, and bereft of moral and human values. The inflated externality, it emerges, is intended to conceal the torments of the soul, covering all in a mud

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 90–9.

<sup>28</sup> Zvi Tau, *On the Faith of Our Times – Guidelines for Understanding the Period*, 7, Jerusalem: Hosen Yeshuot, 5766–2005, 48–9 (in Hebrew).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 52.

of crude desires in order to obliterate the longing for truth and good.”<sup>30</sup> Society is being demolished to its foundations, and “in such a situation, destruction must come, in order to shatter this corrupt framework and prevent it from continuing to exercise its damaging and corrupt influence.”<sup>31</sup>

Tau acknowledges that the modern period has secured enormous achievements in science, technology, and medicine. However, the desire for overall truth is disappearing. Tau describes modern culture in depressing terms; he views it as motivated by a false force that leads to the worship of human desires, tendencies, and pleasures. Humanity is conducting itself with complete nihilism and lack of values. The soul is being led to disintegration and bestiality. This culture, in which the divine image is vanishing, is a false one, and hence cannot endure.<sup>32</sup>

This desperate situation is a clarion call to rally behind the flag of Torah. The negative symptoms are not proof of failure, but powerful catalysts for elation. Tau argues that the cloaking and concealment of redemption actually reflect the birth of a new, sublime level that can appear only from within a tremendous crisis. The miserable reality prepares the ground for a more sublime appearance. The function of those who have faith, then, is to repair and strengthen – to educate and to illuminate the way. In natural redemption, everything must be done by mortals, and under the guidance of those who have faith.<sup>33</sup> According to Tau’s theodicy, the individual suffering is of lesser significance, compared to the grand scale of things.

Tau’s solution to this situation is a dialectical one. On the one hand, he urges his audience not to close in on itself or retreat due to despair. On the other hand, however, his solution is to create an enclave disconnected from the secular world by strengthening attention to learning and mental preparation.<sup>34</sup> Note here that the construction of enclaves that detach themselves from the influences of the secular world is a commonplace pattern of action in fundamentalist movements.<sup>35</sup>

The solution to the nation’s distress and the path to redemption, Tau argues, lie in deeper study of Torah, in particular the study of mystical theories: “The more honest hearts are built in complete faith, the more this will illuminate – covertly, and hence also overtly – all reaches of the nation . . . We shall never abandon the foundation that determines everything, the very core of the battle: the building of the nation’s minds and hearts, the direction of intellect and attention to the light of the ‘redeeming Torah.’”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 190–4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 160–1.

<sup>34</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis in the Circle of Rabbi Kook*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001, 136–8 (in Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> Gabriel A. Almond, Scott R. Appleby & Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion – The Rise of Fundamentalism around the World*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003, 23–89.

<sup>36</sup> Zvi Tau, *On the Faith of Our Times*, 7, 263.

An analysis of Rabbi Tau's thoughts identify a response based on the call for religious reinforcement in response to the fear of a failure of faith. Tau urges his followers not to give into the despair created by the political process and to continue their religious and faith-based course without change. When reality is perceived as contradicting the course of religious expectations, the solution is to adhere to the old course. For Tau, the way to cope with the challenge lies in a mystical perspective on reality, adopting an interpretation based on paradox and inversion. Thus, only spiritual reinforcement based on mystical foundations can serve as a barrier between the illusive secular world and the hidden truth. Accordingly, Tau adheres to a course based on insularity and intensified sacred study, until the evil decree passes and the secular world implodes.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the main responses to the Oslo Accords seen in the statist mainstream around the graduates of Mercaz Harav yeshiva.

All of the approaches within the mainstream view redemption as a protracted and complex process that does not necessarily follow a constant upward path. All of the approaches favored a continuation of the moderate line, although individuals differed on the question of how this should be implemented in practice.

One approach viewed the agreement as a test of faith demanding special efforts. This approach advocated the strengthening of the settlements, even in times of crisis and despair, as a manifestation of religious commitment. Those who followed this approach called for a large-scale outreach campaign in order to "settle in the hearts" of the general public.

A second approach argued that there was a national consensus in favor of the settlement blocs, alongside the relinquishing of control over the Palestinians. These thinkers believed that the compromise could lead to the end of the conflict. According to this approach, the messianic process had not failed or ended, because areas that were currently handed to the Palestinians would return to Jewish hands on the realization of redemption.

Conversely, a third approach advocated the intensification of educational efforts within the circles of the faithful, with a particular emphasis on mystical studies. This was accompanied by a retreat into isolated enclaves until the storm passed, for the sake of spiritual reinforcement. According to this approach, territorial retreats do not reflect a failure of faith, but rather serve as a catalysis, because messianic redemption is supposed to come from the depths of despair.

All of these approaches share an adherence to the value of statism and the avoidance of any confrontation with the state or its institutions. The withdrawal is not perceived as evidence of messianic failure and, accordingly, the emphasis is on urging outreach work and internal and external education, alongside a political struggle employing lawful means. The supports of this statist approach did not move toward post-statist positions, as were seen in the



late years of their mentor Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, despite the fact that they emphasize their status as those who follow Kook's approach.

The mainstream of messianic religious Zionist rabbis adhered to the statist approach and maintained their bond with the State of Israel. They perceived the political process as a religious, spiritual, and political challenge to be faced with devotion and determination. This was a test of faith. Although reality might seem to contradict messianic process, they did not believe that the prophecy had failed: it was still progressing, even if this could not be discerned. The best they could do was to cling to their approach without any change. During and after the struggle against the Oslo Accords, it became apparent that most of the messianic religious Zionist public supported this approach.

## Political Reality and Messianic Retreat in the Thought of Rabbi Yehuda Amital

Until 2008, Rabbi Yehuda Amital (1924–2010) served as head of Har Etzion Yeshiva in Gush Etzion. Amital is the founder of the yeshiva, which he ran jointly with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein. An important and respected rabbinical figure in the religious Zionist world, Amital had consistently presented moderate political opinions. Although he considers himself a loyal disciple of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, Amital's practical interpretation of Kook's writings differs significantly from that developed in Mercaz Harav Yeshiva by Kook's son, Zvi Yehuda. However, this was not always the case. Rabbi Amital has undergone a profound theological transformation over the course of his life. Initially, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the approach that views Zionist revival through the prism of a messianic process, as does Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, but Amital withdrew from the messianic interpretation of reality. Following this change, he presented an alternative religious program based on the demand for morality and justice as the manifestation of the Jewish way of life.<sup>1</sup> This theological transformation occurred during the 1990s and, in my opinion, is closely connected to the political process of the Oslo accords.<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Yehuda Amital (Klein) was born in 1924 in Transylvania, Hungary. During the Second World War, he was taken to a forced labor camp; his relatives and other members of his community were sent to death camps. Amital has discussed the time he spent in the camps in many of his lectures. He often describes how the small booklet *Mishnat Harav*, by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, gave him spiritual strength during these difficult years, and accordingly Amital considers himself a disciple of Kook and someone who

<sup>1</sup> Alan Brill, *Worlds Destroyed, Worlds Rebuilt: The Religious Thought of Rabbi Yehuda Amital: The Eda Journal* 5(2) 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Moshe Maya, *A World Built, Destroyed, and Rebuilt – Rabbi Yehuda Amital's Confrontation with the Memory of the Holocaust*, Jersey City, NJ & Alon Shvut, Israel: Ktav Publishing House Inc. & Yaacov Herzog College, 2004, 55–6.

continued his course. In 1945, after the war ended, Amital immigrated to Palestine and continued his religious studies. A year after the Six Day War (1967), Amital established Har Etzion Yeshiva in Gush Etzion, the first settlement established in the occupied territories. His messianic views were well known in religious Zionist circles, and led Hanan Porat and Yoel Bin Nun, who later were among the founders of Gush Emunim, to ask Amital to head the yeshiva. In 1988, Amital founded the Meimad movement, which advocated a moderate religious position on political issues. Meimad participated in the general elections for the Knesset (which take place according to a multi-party proportional representation system), but failed to pass the electoral threshold. In 1996, Amital served in the Israeli government for several months as minister without portfolio following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish assailant. Shimon Peres, who replaced Rabin as prime minister, urged Amital to join the government, which was responsible for continuing the political process with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). After the Labor Party lost the 1996 election and the Likud came to power, Amital once again devoted his time to his educational work as head of the yeshiva.<sup>3</sup>

His religious views underwent profound change. In 1974, Amital published his first book *The Ascent from the Abyss*, a collection of sermons given during and after the Yom Kippur War (1973) addressing the crisis of faith sparked by the war. The collection also includes sermons made by the rabbi during the 16 years preceding the war, from as early as 1958, supporting a religious approach that identifies the Jewish revival in the State of Israel as a manifestation of a messianic process.

In his book, Amital sought to present a paradoxical view of the Yom Kippur War, arguing that while its outcomes ostensibly suggest a messianic retreat, in result of the Israeli military failures, the course of redemption remains unchanged. "It is confidence in the perception of the key events of this period as a single process leading toward the arrival of the Just Redeemer that led to the combination here of comments made in different periods," Amital declared in the collection's introduction.<sup>4</sup>

Amital argues that people are obliged to seek interpretation of events. Although mortals cannot fathom the considerations of divine providence, they must attempt to understand the theological significance of the war. The question is all the more sharp, he adds, in view of what he terms "our certain belief" that this generation is living in a period of the "beginning of redemption." Given this certainty of historical processes, he argued, the war's outcomes serve only to strengthen the impression that this is indeed a messianic process.

<sup>3</sup> The biographical information is based on Elyashiv Raikhner, *In His Faith: the Story of Rabbi Yehudah Amital*, Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2008 (in Hebrew); Moshe Maya, *A World Built, Destroyed, and Rebuilt*, VII–VIII.

<sup>4</sup> Yehuda Amital, *Ascent from the Abyss – Comments on Contemporary Issues, Salvation, and Wars*, Jerusalem: Alon Shvut Yeshiva Association, 5734–1974, 9 (in Hebrew).

Amital draws on diverse arguments from the world of Jewish mysticism in order to explain why the war should be seen as the manifestation of a messianic process:

1. The war erupted against the backdrop of the “resurrection of the kingdom of Israel,” which in the future will completely alter the relationship between Israel and the other nations. Jewish nationhood in the State of Israel is a stage toward ultimate redemption. In a paradoxical and subconscious manner, this process provokes a profound sense of anxiety among the nations of the world, because the redemption of Israel will cause profound changes in the relations between Israel and the nations. As such, Amital argues, what we are actually witnessing are the death throes of the Gentiles as an independent entity. This is the essential point of the war – the Gentiles are fighting for their very existence as Gentiles, as the impure. Evil is struggling for its right of existence, because it knows that when the ultimate redemption comes, there will be no place for Satan and the spirit of impurity. Accordingly, Amital concludes, the war rages against the background of the resurrection of the kingdom of Israel, and this is what imbues it with a messianic dimension.
2. The fact that all the nations of the world participated in the war also reflects its messianic dimension. Amital claims that worldwide support for the Arabs reflects the mystical aspect of the war. “The cultural and moral collapse of Western Christian culture, the talk of the fellowship of nations and international solidarity, all emerges as empty and meaningless . . . Nothing can cover the obsequiousness of the leaders of the world before cultural and moral clowns, before dictators whose lands have been dominated by slavery and darkness since before medieval times.”
3. Israel’s relative successes in the war, and the fact that Israel did not suffer a resounding defeat, are proof of divine intervention and miracles. The fact that despite the massive numerical superiority of the Arab forces, and the poor condition of the Israeli army, Israel managed to block the Arab armies was an overt miracle. “Surely this was in keeping with a divine command, since had [the Arab armies] not been stopped, they would have continued to race forward, burning and destroying everything.”<sup>5</sup>

These three conditions – a war against the background of the resurrection of the Kingdom of Israel, the universal character of the war, and the appearance of great salvations, combined with the fact that the war erupted on Yom Kippur – all show that it had a messianic dimension.

Therefore, the rabbi concludes that since the beginning of the Return to Zion (Amital uses this religious term, which has a messianic meaning, in order to describe Zionist activity), there has been no retreat from the course leading to

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 21–4.

complete redemption. There may indeed be temporary concealments, but there is no retreat. All paths, paved or unpaved, lead to the redemption of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

Amital's belief in historical determinism led him to urge secular Zionism to make way for a "Zionism of redemption." He claimed that the confusion and distress caused by the war had revealed a deeper crisis in the central perception of Herzlean Zionism, with its vision of normalizing the Jewish people through its territorial concentration. He argued that the dream of eliminating anti-semitism by establishing a Jewish state had proved to be an illusion. The State of Israel is the only country in the world that faces the threat of annihilation.

A different kind of Zionism also exists, however; one that does not seek to solve the Jewish question by establishing a Jewish state, but serves as an instrument for divine providence to advance Israel toward its redemption. "Its inner thrust is not the normalization of the Jewish people – to be like all the other nations, but rather to be a holy nation, the people of the living God, with its center in Jerusalem and the King's Temple within it."<sup>7</sup>

Amital sees the intensive nature of the events that have marked Jewish history as part of the laws of redemption. It is important to emphasize that at the time, talking to combat soldiers while the fighting rages, Amital stressed that historical laws are operating in the history of the nation in this period. "Firstly Jews are led to the gas chambers like lambs to the slaughterhouse, and immediately after – a people rises like a lioness." During the Second World War, the world ignores the existence of the Jews, yet within just a few years Israel is the focus of global attention. "The conclusion we must reach is that the ordinary laws of history that apply to the nations as a whole do not apply to Israel. Although it is an integral part of the family of nations, its historical laws are different from the historical laws of every other nation and tongue," Amital stated. The believing Jew has an explanation for this unique past and certain future. God has promised that the Jewish people will exist for eternity in order to fulfill its destiny: to manifest the divine ideal with the demand for practices of morality, justice, and law – a demand that applies to the entire people, and which can be met only in the Land of Israel.

An analysis of Amital's positions as published in 1974 already reflects a key distinction between himself, on the one hand, and Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and the Mercaz Harav school of thought on the other. Both Amital and Kook (Junior) saw themselves as continuing the course of Rabbi Avraham Itzhak Kook (Senior). Both viewed Israeli reality and history through the prism of messianic exegesis. However, while Zvi Yehuda Kook sought to realize the messianic visions by clinging on to the soil, thereby supporting the settlement movement founded in 1974 as a tool for the realization of this approach,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>8</sup> Dov Schwartz, "The Theological Justification for the National-Messianic Philosophy: The Life Works of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook," *Zionism*, Collection 22, 2000, 61–81 (in Hebrew).

Amital's messianic vision focuses more on a state that aspires to justice and morality as a manifestation of the Kingdom of Priests and the Holy People. The activism Amital espoused was that of repentance – the traditional approach that saw repentance and redemption as intertwined. The traditional perceptions of redemption view it as the outcome of repentance; accordingly, the purpose of exile is to prepare the people for the ultimate redemption, which will end when all repent. Redemption, therefore, is the product of the religious action of the people, in which all that needs to be done to enter its gates is to observe the commandments. Complete redemption is preceded by complete repentance, when the entire people believes in its God and keeps all His commandments as written in the Torah and interpreted in the Halacha.

These differences, which were already apparent when Amital published his book and during the establishment of Gush Emunim, were to become more pronounced as the years passed. Zvi Yehuda Kook and his students supported the settler movement and established settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These activities became a central feature of religious Zionism. By contrast, Amital's vision of the yearning for a moral and just society was marginalized on the agenda of the national religious camp. As religious Zionism was drawn toward right-wing politics, Amital was exceptional in terms of his left-leaning political views and his willingness to consider territorial compromise in order to avoid the loss of Jewish lives in wars and terrorist attacks, as he argued during the Lebanon War.

Eventually, after a gradual process, Amital would completely abandon his messianic perspectives. According to Rabbi Moshe Maya, a graduate of Har Etzion Yeshiva and the author of *A World Built, Destroyed, and Rebuilt*, an essay published in 2004 analyzing Amital's theoretical approach to the Holocaust, Amital stopped using messianic rhetoric in 1993 in the context of describing Zionist reality.<sup>9</sup> From this point on, I identify a new period in his religious approach.

In 1993, Amital published an article in the settlers' journal *Nekuda* expressing public, open, and unequivocal support for the political peace process. Entitled "There is Hope for the Zionist Settlement in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip," Amital declared that his support for the political process was due not to his support for the vision of peace embodied in the Oslo Accords, but rather to his grave concern at the possibility of war.

Out of his concern for the Jewish people, and in an effort to predict the future course of events, Amital argued that the growing strength of Arab fundamentalism raised the fear of a new war. Although he believed that Israel could overcome its enemies, the war would nevertheless have a disastrous effect on the country and on Israeli society.

Amital argued that any political agreement must include painful compromise. He believed that the formula of "peace for peace," without compromise,

<sup>9</sup> Moshe Maya, *A World Built, Destroyed, and Rebuilt*, 56–66.

was completely unrealistic. At best, it reflected an approach that peace is impossible until the messiah comes. Otherwise, it was no more than an empty platitude.

Time is not working in Israel's favor, he continued. Opportunities had been missed in the past to reach a peace agreement in better conditions. If no agreement was reached now, Israel would be required in the future to negotiate with Hamas.

Amital's support for the agreement was based on the fact that the Jewish settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip were not included in the autonomy and were subject to exclusive and full Israeli control. He argued this meant that the natural growth of the settlements would continue and there would be no freeze on construction.

After completing his political arguments, Amital turned to a discussion of theological questions. He began by attacking the centrality of the commandment of settling the Land of Israel among religious Zionist circles. He criticized the assumption that it is forbidden to relinquish Israeli sovereignty over even part of the Land, and placed the value of the supremacy of human life in opposition to the value of the Land of Israel.

Amital also opposed the use of the liturgical phrase "first shoots of our redemption" to describe contemporary reality. He claims that there are those who argue that because this is a process of redemption, the outcomes are predetermined, not only in terms of the end result of the process but also in terms of the certainty of success at every stage. "On the basis of this perspective, there is no need to pay any attention to actual reality, potential dangers, the political, social, and economic situation, or delays that may occur in the course of this process." Amital sought to offer an alternative approach based on the assumption that only the final outcome of the process is assured – the course of the process depends on human actions and behavior.

In his article, Amital noted that the political process may lead to a profound spiritual crisis. He warned against declining support for Zionism, which might come to be identified with "Hellenism," a negative term used in Jewish culture to describe Jews who adopt the culture, and sometimes even the religion, of their non-Jewish surroundings.<sup>10</sup>

Around the same time in 1994, Amital went still further in a conversation with his students, admitting that he had previously been mistaken and that Israeli reality does not reflect messianic reality. The rabbi used a parable to illustrate his error. He told his students about the author of the *Tanya*, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman of Liadi (the "Tanya"), the founder of the Chabad Hassidic movement. Zalman of Liadi studied Torah with his grandson (the "Tzemach Tzedek") in a three-room apartment ordered in such a way that the third, innermost room could be reached only through the middle room. The Tanya

<sup>10</sup> Yehuda Amital, "There is Hope for the Zionist Settlement in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip," *Nekuda* 172, Marcheshvan 5754 [October 1993], 42–5 (in Hebrew).

and the Tzemach Tzedek studied in two separate rooms, while in the third room a baby lay in a cradle. Suddenly, the baby began to cry. The Tzemach Tzedek was so absorbed in his studies that he failed to hear the cries. The Tanya, who was in the furthest room, stopped his studies and went to soothe the baby. After he finished doing so, he passed through the room in which the Tzemach Tzedek was studying and told him: “When someone is learning Torah and fails to hear the crying of a Jewish baby, something is wrong with his studies.”

This parable, which is often quoted with reference to Rabbi Amital, is interpreted as a criticism of religious Zionism, which he feels was so preoccupied with the settlement enterprise that it failed to pay sufficient attention to the needs of Israeli society and with the struggle to build a state founded on morality and justice. In his talk with his students, however, Amital used the parable to make a further point. “I believe,” he told them, “that whenever a yeshiva head only teaches Torah to others, and does not study it himself, something is wrong with his studies.” Here he was suggesting that something had been defective in his own approach. He continued:

I have made an error, just as many have made errors. At the time I participated in the demonstrations against the [territorial] concessions when Kissinger came to Israel. Later I regretted this. After the Six Day War, Kissinger wanted us to make concessions to the Egyptians and retreat as far as Bir Jafjafa. If we had taken his advice, maybe the Yom Kippur War would not have erupted. I’m not saying that I had not made mistakes. But a Jew who has lived through the Holocaust; a Jew who has lived through five wars – the War of Liberation (1948), the Sinai Campaign (1956), the Six Day War (1967), the Yom Kippur War (1973), and the Lebanon War (1982), not to mention the War of Attrition (1967–1970) – I am allowed to be concerned about a further war.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to his pragmatic argument, which supports the political process on the basis of the sanctity of life, Amital continued to address the messianic question, explicitly stating that it is wrong to examine Israeli reality through the prism of messianism. He explained:

Friends, it is possible that all those who spoke of “the first shoots of our redemption” were mistaken. It is possible that the students of the Gaon of Vilna were mistaken; it is possible that the students of the Ba’al Shem Tov were mistaken; it is possible that the students of Rabbi Akiva Eger were mistaken, when they spoke of the “first shoots of our redemption” as the books state. It is possible that Rabbi Kook was mistaken; it is possible that Rabbi Harlap was mistaken. Even Rabbi Akiva, the great Tannaite, made mistakes.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Yehuda Amital, “To Hear a Baby’s Cry,” from comments made in a conversation at the yeshiva, Hanukkah 5754–1993. See: *Alonei Etzion – Collection of Newsletters of Har Etzion Yeshiva*, CD, Har Etzion Yeshiva, 5766–2006 (in Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



By making these comments, Amital's goal was to deconstruct the entire historiography of the messianic strand within religious Zionism,<sup>13</sup> a single historical thread beginning in the dawn of the modern era with the messianic expectations among the students of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Hassidic movement;<sup>14</sup> continuing with the messianically-inspired emigration to Palestine of some disciples of the Gaon of Vilna, one of the greatest Jewish scholars of the eighteenth century;<sup>15</sup> and, growing stronger with the activity of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, considered one of the "harbingers of Zionism" and a student of Rabbi Akiva Eger.<sup>16</sup> He proceeds to argue that the entire stream that developed on the basis of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook's thoughts may have been based on an erroneous foundation. Amital's mention of Rabbi Akiva is an extreme example, for in his book *Mishneh Torah* (in the section Laws of Kings and their Wars, chapter 11), Maimonides relates that Rabbi Akiva, the greatest of the Mishnaic sages, falsely crowned Bar Kochva as the messiah-king.<sup>17</sup> (Bar Kochva, or Ben Kuziva, was the military commander who led the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian [132–135 AD]; the rebellion was violently suppressed and hundreds of thousands were killed, including Bar Kochva himself.) Rabbi Akiva declared Bar Kochva messiah in recognition of his intention to establish independent Jewish life; the establishment of a Jewish kingdom is part of the process of the resurrection of Israel, and this led to Rabbi Akiva's error.<sup>18</sup> Amital's point is that if Maimonides can argue that Rabbi Akiva made an error, it is possible that Rabbi Kook (Senior) made an error; and at this juncture Amital says that he himself is unsure and may have made an error. Therefore, Amital described the current period as one of "partial redemption:"

Complete redemption has not yet been realized in our times. We have not yet been privileged to see a state that is "the foundation of the throne of the Eternal Lord." But we have been privileged to see with our own eyes the ingathering of a large part of the dispersed Jews in their Land, and this phenomenon in itself may be considered tantamount to "the first shoots of redemption." Some of the characteristics of the period of redemption are already being revealed in our

<sup>13</sup> An example of the messianic philosophy may be found in a work by Rabbi Menachem Kasher, *The Great Period: Chapters of Reflection on the State of the Nation and Our Land*, Jerusalem: Torah Shleimah Institute, 5722–1962 (in Hebrew).

<sup>14</sup> Mor Altshuler, *The Messianic Secret of Hassidism*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Arie Morgenstern, *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Judy Meyers, *Seeking Zion: Modernity and Messianic Activism in the Writings of Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer*, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> David Hartman, "Maimonides' Approach to Messianism and its Contemporary Implications," *Daat* 2–3 (1978/1979) 5–33; Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides and the Idea of a Deflationary Messiah," *Jewish Messianic Thoughts in an Age of Despair*, Cambridge University Press (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> Yehuda Amital, "Sing unto Him, Sing Praises unto Him, Speak of All His Marvelous Works," comments made in a conversation on the eve of Independence Day 5756–1995, *Alonei Etzion* (CD) (in Hebrew).

times. Even for a partial redemption that does not include all the components of complete redemption, let us say our thanks and praises to He who chooses His people Israel.<sup>19</sup>

In order to expedite complete redemption and the establishment of the idyllic Kingdom of Israel, Amital concludes that Israel must do everything possible to establish a more just society based on worthy public values. “We must pay strict attention to moral values in our private and collective lives. Narrowing social gaps, attending to the weak in society, fighting poverty, and also treating the strangers who live among us fairly – all these will draw us closer to the day for which we long.”<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Analyzing the path taken by Rabbi Yehuda Amital highlights the profound transformation in his religious beliefs that led him to reject the messianic identification of Zionist action. This reversal occurred during the early stages of the Oslo process. As a result, the rabbi became a prominent advocate of the agreement, in order to prevent bloodshed against the changing reality of the Middle East.

The collapse of the Oslo process did not change his opinion regarding Israel’s need for pragmatic policies that would bring calm and peace to the region. In this regard, Amital opposed the Disengagement Plan, because it was a unilateral act, which he understood to be a measure that would only bring rise to terrorism, because of the lack of an accompanying peace agreement.<sup>21</sup>

Amital’s approach in coping with messianic failure was to offer a pragmatic interpretation of reality. This enabled him to defuse messianic tension, admit that he had made a mistake, and retreat from messianic mysticism. Amital argued that the process is not a messianic one; therefore, the Israelis should act in accordance with standards based on political considerations, as incumbent on the elected leadership of the nation. In order to aspire to an ideal society, Israel must act in a socially-responsible manner toward the weaker members of society, including the Arab population that lives in the Land of Israel.

<sup>19</sup> Yehuda Amital, “The Religious Significance of the State of Israel,” edited on the basis of a conversation at the yeshiva on Hanukkah 5757–1997, *Alonei Etzion*, also published in *Alon Shvut Alumni* 11 (in Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Elyashiv Raikhner, *In His Faith*, 254.

## Post-Zionism in the Religious-Zionist Camp

### *The “Jewish Leadership” Movement*

The “Jewish Leadership” movement came about as a result of the public struggle to circumvent the Oslo Accords. The founders and leaders of this movement were galvanized by the complex feelings generated by the reality unfolding before their very eyes. They believed it was necessary to defeat this agreement. To avoid the harsh decree of returning territories to the Palestinian Authority, they demanded a radical course of action. Facing the moral dilemma of choosing allegiance and obedience to God-given law (as they interpreted it) against the national law of the land, the answer was clear: it is necessary to follow God’s law and not capitulate to those attempting to operate differently.

Beginning with the peace agreements with Egypt (1978), and more forcefully from the period of the Oslo process (1993), parts of messianic religious Zionism have increasingly called for an abandonment of allegiance and loyalty to the Zionist enterprise and to the State of Israel, and aspired to religious perfection by means of establishing a religious theocracy. The “Jewish Leadership” movement is the organizing and political group consolidating all those who share this standpoint.

This alliance, stemming from the circumstances surrounding the Oslo process, attempts within its political platform to embody extreme religious and nationalistic ideas, and to openly challenge the democratic system of government. The “Jewish Leadership” movement is dynamic and developing, with an active and vigorous volunteer base that works toward implanting itself in the Israeli political arena. The natural inclination is to categorize this movement as yet another movement on the extreme right margin of the political map. However, what clearly distinguishes this movement from most other right-wing movements is its professed revolutionary character and theocratic ideology. The movement’s platform is the Torah of Israel, not as an abstract but, rather, as an actively guiding codex. Its leadership is attempting to develop an alternative policy that relates to all aspects of public life. In tracking the establishment, political platform, and activities of this movement, it is possible to learn about

the phenomenon of post-Zionism from the members of the messianic religious Zionist camp.

Supporters of this line of reasoning believed that it was not enough to simply respond to the changing political facts-on-the-ground, but that a more active adversarial stance should be adopted. Their vision encompassed a change of government and the creation of a theocratic solution for the inferior Zionist enterprise, which did not understand its historic goal in the process of redemption and was bringing a catastrophe on the nation as a result of its retreat from portions of the Land of Israel. They felt that only by separating from the Zionist commitment and abandoning “naïve” faith in the sanctity of the state, could the goals of a final redemptive process be achieved.

### Founding the “Jewish Leadership” Movement

As soon as word of the Labor party’s success in the 1992 elections was made known, Hillel Weiss felt that “something bad” was about to take place. He cut short an academic sabbatical leave in Canada, returned to Israel, and began an acrimonious public opinion campaign against the new government.

Weiss was a founder and one of the first settlers of Elkana. He was born in 1945, and graduated from the Zeitlin High School in Tel Aviv. He performed his army service in *Nahal Mutznach* (Airborne *Nahal* of the Paratroopers Brigade). He was drawn to literature at a young age, and sought to turn his hobby into his primary profession. His academic achievements were in the fields of literature and law. Although he completed his law degree, he was not drawn to the profession and chose to focus on literature. At Bar-Ilan University, he studied with Baruch Kurzweil, the head of the Hebrew Literature department and one of the premier scholars of Hebrew literature.<sup>1</sup> Over time, Weiss too achieved a senior position at Bar-Ilan University, as an outstanding literary scholar.

Even though he was part of the original group that had helped to establish the settlement movement, Weiss was involved with ideological disputes within that camp from the outset, and always preserved a position of independence. While active in many of the movement’s more right-wing activities, he was not beholden to any particular institutional approach, but solely to the link of ideas. He preferred to be in the position of an “outsider,” which enabled him to be flexible in his various activities, to belong to parallel organizations and, through them, to advance his operative ideas. Therefore, he attempted to unify all the movements established for the purpose of founding the Temple

<sup>1</sup> Kurzweil often warned against the Canaanite ideas that were seeping into Israeli culture in place of Jewish sources. Weiss, therefore, is continuing in the path of his teacher. While his fundamentalist worldview is quite different from that of his teacher, whose opinions were more moderate and who negated the identification of the Zionist enterprise with messianism, Weiss offers similar criticisms of the current literature. For Kurzweil’s outlook on the question of messianism, see David Ohana, *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and its critics*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 135–40.

under one umbrella organization<sup>2</sup> and was actively involved in renewing the institution of the Sanhedrin.<sup>3</sup>

The Labor party victory under Rabin's leadership in the 1992 elections resulted, in part, from the fragmentation into small parties of right-wing voters. This result pushed Weiss to immediately and indefatigably start working toward unifying the forces of the right. In 1993, together with MK Moshe Peled (*Tzomet*), he initiated an extra-parliamentary organization intended to unite all the right-wing political parties under the banner *Tnuat HaTikvah* (The Movement of Hope), but this attempt was unsuccessful. Another attempt at extra-parliamentary organization took place during the intermediate days of the *Sukkot* holiday in 1995; this attempt also failed.<sup>4</sup>

The sense of devastation wrought in the right-wing camp by the Labor party's victory in the 1992 elections was too much for Weiss to bear. It drove him to use ever more strident rhetoric against the new government. For example, under the heading "Evil Spirit: Out!" (September 1992), Weiss described the roaring of his heart, which refused to believe that Rabin had won the election and that a threatening political process was poised at the threshold. In an article he wrote for the newspaper *Hadashot*, which was given the banner headline, Weiss employed images from the world of witchcraft to portray the new government and its intentions. He labeled it an evil spirit, and a hostile takeover by demons of the soul, which would bring about the obliteration of the Jewish nation in its land:

I have already ceased to look at the lips of the prime minister. In the days before the Yom Kippur War I learned in the IDF, when there still was an IDF: Once a liar, always a liar. Now I watch his feet. I do not believe that he is the leader. Perhaps Ashmedai is seated on his chair. Ashmedai is dressed in his clothing, as in the legend of King Solomon and Ashmedai, the King of Demons ascended the throne without the people realizing the switch that had taken place. Only one aspect differentiated Solomon from Ashmedai – Ashmedai's clawed, webbed chicken feet. However, since Rabin has lately been wearing new German boots, I could not see his feet.<sup>5</sup>

Weiss went on to describe the government in demonizing terms, with Shulamit Aloni, leader of the *Meretz* political party and a member of Rabin's government, referred to as "Lilith" – the queen of demons in Jewish mythological tradition, who is identified with the cosmic forces of evil.<sup>6</sup> "There is no need to wait until Rabin takes off his boots. Lilith is at his side, and she does not have

<sup>2</sup> This attempt can be reviewed in Sarina Chen's research, *Central Themes in the Rhetoric and Praxis of the Temple Admirers*, Masters Thesis in Humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 2001 (in Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> See Yuval Yoaz, "The Renewed Sanhedrin," *Haaretz*, 3 November 2005, 33 (in Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> See Hillel Weiss, *King's Way*, Tel Aviv: Ariel Institute, 2003, 409–16 (in Hebrew).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> For an elaboration of this image, see Joseph Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in the Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 5(1980) 17–40.

to take off her shoes or anything else. She is as she always was.” Weiss ends the article with the sentence: “The government of Al-Ardad (initials for Aloni-Rabin-Deri-Darawshe), go in peace, in honor, of your own free will, before the nation shows you the door. Evil spirit – out!”<sup>7</sup>

Weiss identified the peace process as a weakness stemming from the infiltration of ideological, postmodernist ideas into the Zionist discourse. These elements aimed to sterilize the symbols of their historic significance, erasing identity and privatizing consciousness. Adopting a post-Zionist worldview leads its proponents to an understanding of Judaism as universal, with no attendant claims to the Land of Israel. Weiss claimed that postmodernism, by means of the democratic mechanism, erases communal and national rights in favor of individual rights. Therefore, the political process is not just a process of bringing about peace between enemies, but rather a spiritual process for Jews whose “Jewishness is a nuisance and they do not understand its meaning, alongside Arabs anticipating the end of Jewish Zionism.” The process is possible as long as the sense of alienation from Judaism and hostility toward the world of the religious and *haredi* Jews strengthens.<sup>8</sup>

These processes must come to an end. The solution to the crisis can be found in strengthening the momentum for redemption – wherein Zionism began, but took a wrong turn because of the postmodern distortion.

As long as Zionism makes no correcting effort to see in itself a continuing movement and legal heir to meta-historical Judaism, a Judaism that believes in the original mission of the return to Zion, the ingathering of the exiles as a prophetic process, a commitment to preserve the commandments of the Torah and the many traditional concepts of Judaism and its expressions in history as revealing God’s work in the world – the break will not heal, but will only become worse.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, in February 1995, Weiss demanded that a religious candidate be presented to head the government. He called on *haredim* and religious Zionists to support such a candidacy. With this demand, he presented his claim that the era of “the first step of our deliverance,” with its attendant, passive anticipation of redemption, was over, and that now was the time to actively undermine the status quo and work toward a life based on the laws of the Torah.<sup>10</sup>

The “changing of the guard” concept, and the sense of an urgent need to enter the political party system in order to create a revolution, was also taking place at this time in the minds of Moshe Feiglin and Motti Karpel, each in their own way. The Oslo process affected Moshe Feiglin deeply and dramatically, and he found himself becoming more and more involved in the public protests against the Oslo Accords. Feiglin lives in the settlement of Ganei Shomron.

<sup>7</sup> Weiss, *King’s Way*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Hillel Weiss, “A Betrayal of Judaism as an Ideological Principle,” *Netiv* 1(1995) 11–5 (in Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *HaTzofeh*, 10 February 1995 (in Hebrew).

With Rabin as head of the government, Feiglin felt that the settler community was being demonized by the government, and that the Israeli media was not helping the public to see its pain or its protest. These feelings impelled him toward public action, even as he neglected his day-to-day occupation as the owner of a company that maintained high-rise buildings. He initiated a plan for the overnight establishment of dozens of new settlements, in order to embarrass the Israeli government in the eyes of the world. He formulated his plans, and established a committee in his own neighborhood. Feiglin, along with his neighbor Shmuel Sackett, a new immigrant from the United States, prepared a plan of action and turned to the Yesha Council – the umbrella organization of the settlements – with an operative plan, ready for implementation. In hindsight, it became clear to Feiglin and his friends that Aharon Domb, the spokesperson of the Yesha Council, opposed the idea because it was repeatedly deferred. The group became embroiled in a public confrontation with Domb and the council, yet decided to put the plan into action by themselves, without the support of the settlers' establishment. On January 26, 1994, *Mivtza Machpil* was inaugurated. After their break from the Yesha Council, they were left with few supporters. Therefore, they decided to establish one new settlement every night, each time in a different location. People living in Kiryat Arba participated in establishing the first settlement; on the second night the members of Bat-Ayin participated, and so on. Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) arrived at the location of every outpost and evacuated them. The media followed the story and there was a substantial amount of press coverage, which intensified its impact. The participants were arrested, the spirit of enthusiasm waned, and the “Zo Artzeinu” movement was launched.<sup>11</sup>

After their campaign ended, Feiglin and Sackett decided to continue their protest activities, with an underlying premise of nonviolent citizen revolt, but without coordinating their campaign with the established institutions. They chose to focus on road intersections throughout the country, within the Green Line, and to generate nonviolent protests. They began on August 8, 1995, when they simultaneously blocked eighty intersections throughout the country, leading to a complete shutdown of highway traffic in the state. Hundreds of participants were arrested. Moshe Feiglin was brought to trial the following day, and sentenced to a six-month suspended sentence with a fine of NIS 10,000 (about \$2,000). The success of the initial operation brought about a string of similar actions, shutting down roads and highways. These demonstrations continued for about a month and a half. The operations brought thousands of people into the streets, and there were angry mass demonstrations against the Oslo process. After about a month and a half, in light of the harsh government response, the leaders of the movement sensed the exhaustion of those supporting their protests, and the protests stopped.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In his autobiography, Feiglin describes at length the activities of Zo Artzeinu. See Moshe Feiglin, *Where There Are No Men*, Jerusalem: Masada, 1998 (in Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–65.

With a limited budget and staff, Feiglin succeeded in bringing masses of protesters into the streets; people who were upset by the Oslo Accords and were seeking a way to express their frustration. After Rabin's assassination on November 4, 1995, a police inquiry began against Moshe Feiglin. He was indicted, found guilty, and charged with sedition.<sup>13</sup> Shmuel Sackett and Benny Elon were also found guilty. Feiglin was sentenced to six months of community service and an eighteen-month suspended sentence. Benny Elon avoided conviction by virtue of his having been elected to the Knesset as a member of the Moledet party. Feiglin's conviction prevented him from entering the Knesset as a member of the Likud in the Knesset elections of 2003, due to a clause requiring a cooling-off period of seven years.

The mass protest movement, *Zo Artzeinu*, moved onto a trajectory outside the political-parliamentary framework as a result of Motti Karpel and Moshe Feiglin's membership in the movement. Karpel was the ideologue of "Jewish Leadership." His biography includes a process of *chazara biteshuva* (returning to a religiously observant lifestyle) that began, in his opinion,<sup>14</sup> after the Yom Kippur War (1973), when he served as an officer in the *Egoz* reconnaissance unit. Philosophy studies at the University of Haifa after the war motivated him to delve more deeply into Jewish thought. The process of becoming a *chozer biteshuva* led him to study the doctrine of Rav Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva and also of the Chabad movement. In Haifa, Karpel was active in establishing institutions for *chozrim biteshuva*. He then left Haifa and moved to Jerusalem, where he immersed himself in religious studies. Some time later, he moved from Jerusalem to the settlement of Bat Ayin. For five years (1991–1996), he was the administrator of the Machon HaMikdash<sup>15</sup> in Jerusalem, and, since the establishment of "Jewish Leadership" (1995), has run a modest public relations office in the settlement where he now lives.<sup>16</sup>

On *Motzei Shabbat* (the conclusion on Saturday night of the Sabbath), November 4, 1995, the idea of establishing the "Jewish Leadership" movement began to materialize. Members of Bat Ayin, under the leadership of Motti Karpel, traveled to Moshe Feiglin's home in the settlement of Ganei Shomron and presented him with the idea of establishing a political body that would offer an alternative to the Israeli political system. Feiglin accepted the idea, because

<sup>13</sup> The sedition charges were protested by leading jurists, with Mordechai Kremnitzer calling for their abolition and replacement by broadening the legislation against incitement. See: Mordechai Kremnitzer and Khalid Ghanayim, *Incitement, Not Sedition*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 1997 (in Hebrew).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the author, at his home in the settlement of Bat Ayin, 4 November 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Machon HaMikdash is an educational institution that operates a training college for high school curriculums, a museum, a publishing house, a yeshiva for young men, a yeshiva for teenagers, and an enterprise for creating and reconstructing Temple instruments. The Institute is located in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Its founder is Israel Ariel, who was discussed earlier, and is an important ideologue in the post-Zionist trend in religious nationalism.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with the author.



he was interested in taking the tremendous energies that he had managed to corral from his past protest movements and channeling them into a “movement for building and creating.”<sup>17</sup> That very same evening, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. This coincidence made a strong impression on the activists.

Karpel’s ideology, together with Feiglin’s organizational and leadership skills, as well as the public support of Hillel Weiss, brought about the establishment of the “Jewish Leadership” movement. While Feiglin was the recognized and prominent public figure, the movement is collectively administered by Karpel, Feiglin, and Michael Puah, serving as the director general of the movement.

Before addressing the movement’s establishment and activities, I would like to present the worldview of its founder, Motti Karpel. I will do this by analyzing his book, *The Faith Revolution – the Eclipse of Zionism and the Rise of the Alternative of Faith*<sup>18</sup> wherein his activist post-Zionist opinions are articulated, and which serves as a political platform for the movement.

### The Faith Revolution: Ideology of the “Jewish Leadership” Movement

Karpel acknowledges that his ideological world is a synthesis of three philosophers: Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, the followers of Chabad, and Shabtai Ben-Dov.<sup>19</sup> The Chabad-like approach in his writings is influenced by the opinions of Yitzhak Ginzburg, head of the Od Yosef Chai yeshiva, where Karpel was a keen follower.

The book opens with the basic assumption that there is a continuing breakdown in Zionism.<sup>20</sup> The army’s power has weakened, Israel’s international status has been undermined, the political leadership is deteriorating, the social gaps are growing wider, relations between the religious and secular populations are getting worse, and so on. The process of returning to Zion is stuck at a dead-end.

Zionism constituted a revolt against traditional society. Karpel claimed, however, that Zionism did not possess a sufficiently positive aspect or aspire toward possessing meaningful content,<sup>21</sup> as it was not founded on the concept of a return to Zion, an essentially traditional concept. Its sources were rooted in a different background – the ideas of an alienated secular enlightenment.

<sup>17</sup> Moshe Feiglin, *Where There Are No Men*, 248.

<sup>18</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution – The Eclipse of Zionism and the Rise of the Alternative of Faith*, Alon Shvut: Hotza’at Lechatchila, 2003 (in Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> Shabtai Ben-Dov is a backstage Lechi member who prepared an operative plan for bringing about a religious theocracy within the borders of the State of Israel. The parameters of this plan rely to a large extent on the ideas of Italian Fascism promulgated by Mussolini. My book devotes a broad discourse on the image and activities of this man. See: Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount*, Alabany: SUNY Press, 2009, 56–66.

<sup>20</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 11–2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Zionism's Western ideology brought with it a universal value system. This sum total of values is alien to traditional, historic sensibilities. Therefore, while this may have sufficed for a detail-oriented approach, it was insufficient to respond to the problems of the period when these problems were tested by their position in a system of values relative to the messianic goals of the nation in its land.<sup>22</sup>

Karpel is influenced by Hegel's concept of the "cunning of reason." According to this system, there is a transcendental force guiding history. The central idea is a dialectic: human advancement is the by-product of the struggle between the existing order and its contrast. Following this line of reasoning, Karpel claims that traditional Judaism is undergoing a dialectic process. It has abandoned its principle stance in favor of Zionism, becoming its antithesis. The next phase will be the synthesis of tradition with Zionism, which will once again restore tradition to its preeminent position, but in a new and improved form.<sup>23</sup>

Karpel's criticism of Zionism is a critique from both its right and the left. All the Zionist trends share the same "defect." The term "safe refuge" is a classic Zionist concept, whereby security concerns override the idea of the Whole Land of Israel. Zionism was not meant to liberate the land, but rather to grant the Jews a state, and not necessarily in every part of the country. In Zionist terms, the land is a means, and not a value, and Zionist ideology will always choose peace over territory. Therefore, every struggle over the wholeness of the land that stems from Zionist values is destined to fail. Consequently, there is another basis for discourse, wherein the wholeness of the land is an absolute value.<sup>24</sup> For example, the "Jewish Leadership" movement did not support Benjamin Netanyahu's candidacy to head the government in the 1996 elections, and warned that Netanyahu would follow in the wake of the Oslo Accords and continue to return territories to the Palestinian Authority. The movement explained that Netanyahu could not be trusted, because the sum total of his ideological essence was found in the name of his book, *A Place Under the Sun*,<sup>25</sup> which itself constitutes a play on words of the Zionist concept of "safe refuge."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>24</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 51–2. Lilly Weisbrod also believed that the Gush Emunim movement chose to use secular language to justify its religious claims, in order to increase public support for its cause; in so doing, it set a trap for itself. Weisbrod feels that this approach emphasized the values of pluralism, individuality, and human rights. In the wake of the Oslo Accords, it was precisely these values that posed a stumbling block in the attempt to garner support for the wholeness of the land. Lilly Weisbrod, "Gush Emunim and the Israel-Palestinian Peace Process: Modern Religious Fundamentalism in Crisis," *Israel Affairs* 3(1) (1996) 86–103.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Under the Sun*, Tel Aviv: Yediot Achronot, 1995 (in Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> *Lechatchila* 4 (1987) (in Hebrew).

### Principles of “Faith Consciousness”

Karpel claims that Zionism will be replaced by “faith consciousness,” which is, in essence, a Hegelian synthesis. The principles of this approach, as articulated by Karpel, are as follows:

**The first principle** rests on historical initiative and responsibility. Zionism restored the value of historical initiative and bears the responsibility for the return to Zion to the Jewish discourse. This in no way contradicts the foundations of Judaism. The Diaspora created the distortion that in turn generated Jewish passivity, and it is this that Zionism has come to correct. Therefore, “faith consciousness” will preserve this mental revolution that has permeated through Zionism. “Traditional consciousness must, in contrast, separate itself from the approach that redemption is only a waiting period and that historic initiative is forbidden.”<sup>27</sup>

**The second principle** determines that “faith consciousness” adopts the position that human initiative must receive divine blessing, so that an independent outlook is not necessarily heretical. The muting of Halakhah, as something cut off from modernity, necessitates reinvigoration by means of change and adaptation. Conservatism, according to Karpel, is a positive value, but it cannot be allowed to prevent any and all renewal. “Faith consciousness” must be a synthesis of traditional conservatism and renewing talent, without the concept of heresy.<sup>28</sup>

**The third principle** deals with building up the culture of the Third Temple. This culture is the result of the meeting between Jews and Judaism. Believing in historic determinism, Karpel claims that opening the dialogue to the essence of Judaism offers the possibility of bearing original, honest, and quality results. The divine spark hidden in every Jewish soul will know how to lead the soul to its destination. Karpel suggests no possibilities other than those previously outlined.<sup>29</sup> In the process of *chazara biteshuva*, he finds the proof he needs that this is an inevitable process and that its outcome is clear.<sup>30</sup>

**The fourth principle** determines that “faith consciousness” is a messianic consciousness. Identifying the Zionist enterprise as the beginning of the redemption’s process leads him to the conclusion that deliverance is already at hand, and is likely to be fully realized according to its traditional designs. “Faith consciousness” is the activism of redemption, of the true historic action placed on the individual, and not just prayer and longing: “Here we see the revolutionary side of faith consciousness. It adopts the basic Zionist element of a return to history from the point of a willingness to assume responsibility for historical acts and initiative on a national scale.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 55–61.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–72.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–97.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

According to Karpel, the messianic concept is a national redemptive one. His understanding is that the messiah does not necessarily arrive as a mortal, but can also be the expression of an era: "The messianic idea is a rational and historic idea, materializing according to the laws of nature, as determined by human consciousness." Miraculous redemption is rejected outright, and is portrayed as "a mystical approach that has seeped into folkloric Judaism under the influence of Christianity. The original Israeli messianic concept is not one of wonders and miracles that relieve us of the obligation to grapple with difficulties, doubts, finding our way and all the other human activities . . . this is the way of Maimonides and it is his path that we follow."<sup>32</sup>

The fifth principle determines that, in addition to commitment to the concept of redemption, there is also a commitment to attempt to actualize the concept. Following this line of reasoning, Zionism appeared as a result of "the awakening of the Israeli soul to return to itself and to its natural place." *Teshuva* (becoming observant), therefore, is also a reflection of the soul's yearning to return to the essence of Judaism. Consequently, there is no need to see in Zionism, as there is in *chazara biteshuva*, the end result of external processes. Their source is found, rather, in internal, metaphysical processes leading toward the redemption of Israel.

Karpel concludes that Israeli historic consciousness faces toward the future, toward deliverance, and here too the processes must be judged by their internal aspirations and intentions. This is the source of his criticism of religious Zionism, which views the concept *etchaltah degeula* (the beginning of redemption) as a type of "blank check," affording the possibility of sitting with arms crossed while awaiting the redemption that will materialize by itself or by other means.

Therefore, Karpel determines that whoever believes the nation is currently in the process of redemption must act to bring about its full realization. It is then incumbent upon the public to follow the *hilchot mashiach* (messianic laws), which are involved in the revival of the nation and its institutions, the Sanhedrin and Jewish law, the commandment of establishing kingship, and the building of the Temple. Ignoring these commandments is indicative of "the moral slackness of religious consciousness. Faith consciousness does not negate these commandments but rather the opposite; it seeks to examine what can be fully included."<sup>33</sup>

The sixth principle is organic nationalism. Karpel adopts an organic approach that unifies the individual with the public to achieve a perfect oneness.

The individual and the group are not separate one from the other. Just as the human body is the sum total of its parts, so is the nation. The Israeli nation is a

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 106–7. Karpel relies on the two final chapters of Maimonides' halakhic treatise, *Mishneh Torah*, wherein the messianic era is presented in human parameters. For a broader examination of Maimonides' study of the messianic era, see: David Hartman, "Maimonides' Approach to Messianism and its Contemporary Implications" *Daat* 2–3 (1978/9), 5–33.

<sup>33</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 121–31.

living organic creation, the sum total of one wholeness, which does not lose its elements but is revealed by them. All the elements have one common essence, and this essence is metaphysical, internal, the soul of the nation. If you wish it – the Knesset of Israel.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, this unity is not just for the present day, but it is the unity of all Jews throughout the generations, similar to Zvi Yehuda Kook's argument.

**The seventh principle** is the organic union between the nation and the land. Just as the individual and the group are joined in one organic entirety, so too are the nation and the Land of Israel joined in this union. Moreover, the Land of Israel is a living being:

The nation and its land are one. Immoral behavior on the part of the nation is likely to cause the land to reject and eject the nation from the land. The land is not an object to be traded, to slice it up, to hand it over to strangers. The land has a soul, and it feels, breathes and responds. The land is aware of the nation residing in it and responds accordingly. It refuses to accept any other nation and does not answer to them. . . . The relationship between the nation and the land is as one organic union. The nation cannot flourish outside of this unique Land of Israel . . . in order to express its life fully the nation needs its natural ecological habitat – all of the Land of Israel. The land needs the entire nation in order to blossom and the nation needs all of the land in order to flourish. This is the perfect union.<sup>35</sup>

**The eighth principle** demands an abandonment of Western culture. According to Karpel, Western culture is the source of ideas such as “a state like all the other nations.” Karpel suggests creating a different hierarchy of values, one where conquering the land is not only an historic right, but rather a divine commandment. This commandment also involves a commitment to territorial expansion and turning the state into a regional power. Karpel claims that divine protection has driven the State of Israel to widen its borders. As proof, he says, all the battles the state found itself involved in were fought reluctantly, against its will. The confrontations with its neighbors were always the result of the neighbors' aggression. Therefore, the process of a return to Zion and expanding the borders of the state is being done by a guiding hand, and it is necessary to listen to its instructions. The passage from Zionist consciousness to “faith consciousness” enables this to take place.<sup>36</sup>

**The ninth principle**, and the final one, concerns the universal significance of the return to Zion. Completing the national mission will prepare the nation for its universal mission. The significance of this mission is in correcting the

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 144–8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 144–9. The approach that seeks to repudiate Western culture for the purpose of creating a counter-culture based on traditional religion is one of the foundations of modern fundamentalism. This can be subject for a broader discussion, as for example Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby & Emanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion – The Rise of Fundamentalism around the World*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

distorted Christian morality that brings about the decline of humanity with its existential degeneracy and decadence. Accordingly, the entire world is waiting for the qualitative-moral message to be broadcast from Israel. Modern anti-semitism rests on this same basis: antisemitism, according to Karpel, is a result of the cosmic rage of the nations of the world because Zionism is not fulfilling its role, offering instead a pathetic, cheap imitation of gentile culture.<sup>37</sup>

### Changing of the Guard

After presenting the principles of faith, Karpel turns to an analysis of historic determinism and an identification of the process of a faith revolution. He believes that the Zionist elite is in a process of decline. In contrast, the community of believers, defined as those residing in the settlements, has captured the momentum of the atrophying Zionism, particularly with the establishment of Gush Emunim and the settlement enterprise.

While the efforts of the community of faith stemmed from Zionist motives, they were expressions of an internal Jewish-messianic momentum. Karpel feels that religious Zionism's sense of inferiority also impacted Gush Emunim. The settlement leadership was unable to regard itself as anomalous in the classic Zionist course of events. This weakness engendered a paralysis that took hold in light of the Oslo Accords.

The Israeli left sought to beat down anyone posing a challenge to them, and the ideology of peace was invented to eradicate the alternative presented by the settlement enterprise. The failure of the Oslo process brought about the elimination of the left and the transfer of government to the Likud party; the party poised to take the reins of the historic political leadership.<sup>38</sup>

Karpel believes that the new oligarchy and the alternative to the left will come from the settlements' members and immigrants from both the former Soviet Union and the United States. This community, he says, does not have the pliancy and subordination of the national religious public. Another more important factor is the fact that the new leadership comes from those who are *chozrim biteshuva*: "They have the self-assurance of the secular, the leftist and the working pioneer, and they have the ability to implant this mentality onto the authentic basis of the tradition of Israel."<sup>39</sup>

### Goals of Redemption

According to Karpel, there is a string of long-term and short-term goals in realizing redemption. Faithful to the approach of Maimonides in his "The Laws of Kings and Their Wars," Karpel lists five basic goals to aspire to:

<sup>37</sup> Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 178–80.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 199–232.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 237–8.

1. **The establishment of a Jewish state:** Maimonides' claim for kingship is understood not in the sense of a mortal leader, but rather in the leadership of the spirit of the Torah of Israel. Karpel then differentiates between state, regime, and government. The state represents the government and "the beginning of our redemption," and is, therefore, regarded in a positive light. The parliamentary regime, according to Karpel, is in conflict with the heritage of Israel. Israel's heritage promotes unity rather than separation, whereas parliamentarianism represents different voices competing in their representation of the public. The regime also represents a Western democratic hierarchy of values, and is, therefore, disqualified. Karpel notes that, in all honesty – at the present moment – he is unable to present a different form of government as an alternative to democracy. He acknowledges that Halakhah does not possess the tools for administering affairs of state. To achieve the goal of reinvigorating Halakhah and adapting it to today's world requires more generations of study and thought. There is nothing improper about opposing the government, Karpel says, because of its democratic parliamentary system that always includes the opposition.<sup>40</sup>
2. **The war to liberate the land:** instilling the concept of the consciousness of war and the sanctity of militarism. Zionist ideology justified wars on the basis of "there is no other option," but God's wars can be used for offensive action. In contrast to the Zionist concept, which views the army as "an army of defense," Karpel claims that God's wars have a religious mission that does not necessarily make do with self-defense.<sup>41</sup>
3. **Building the Temple:** According to Maimonides (*Sefer HaMitzvot* [the Book of Commandments], commandment #20), building the Temple is a *mitzvat aseh* (positive commandment), and should be a strategic goal for a faith-based leadership. Zionist consciousness chose not to deal with what is sacred. Consequently, traditional consciousness is also unable to deal with the issue, both because of its passive inclination and also due to the halakhic restrictions placed on entering the Temple Mount in light of the rabbinic injunction against it.<sup>42</sup> Karpel lists the problems of unity on this issue: a) halakhic difficulties: it is possible to find a halakhic solution for every halakhic difficulty; b) intellectual issues: halakhic literature can provide many justifications for inaction for the sake of the Temple. The mentality must be changed in order to assume responsibility for national action; c) cultural difficulties: the building of the Temple must

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 244–63. Karpel does not mention a limit to the opposition; however, the conduct of the movement suggests that it does not intend to use violence.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 265–8.

<sup>42</sup> For the halakhic discussion on the question of entering the Temple Mount, see: Yitzchak Refael (ed.) *Torah She B'al Peh*, Jerusalem, 1968 (in Hebrew), as well as Shaul Shefer, *Temple Mount – Our Glorious Crown*, Jerusalem: Yefay Nof, 1969, 61–8 (in Hebrew).

be linked to spiritual development. Therefore, progress on this issue can only come about as a result of existential need. When the generation will be prepared, the Temple will come too.<sup>43</sup> On this point, Karpel appears to retreat, and align himself with the ideas espoused by the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, characteristic of the stance of Zvi Yehuda Kook and his students, whereby progress on the issue of the Temple must be the result of the nation's spiritual elevation.<sup>44</sup>

4. **The ingathering of the exiles:** Historic Zionism changed the order in the scenario for redemption according to Maimonides, in that the ingathering of the exiles took place before building the Temple rather than after. According to Karpel, when a spiritual message is lacking and there is no religious rule, the nation sees no need to assemble in all of Israel. This is the correct order of events for the ingathering of the exiles.<sup>45</sup>
5. ***Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) in the kingdom of God:** After completing the operative goals of the national redemption, the Torah of miraculous redemption will arrive; a change in nature and its laws that will bring about a moral adjustment for all humanity.<sup>46</sup>

### Modes of Action

Karpel feels that while the democratic regime does not represent the spirit of Judaism, it is important to operate within its framework. The reasons for this, as he has already pointed out, are that there is no other Jewish administration available at this time. Moreover, the democratic regime is flexible and affords various modes of action, "However it is clear that we will have to switch governments." And yet, it must be noted that Karpel does not rule out a situation of refusing to follow government rule. On this, he states:

The spirit of our actions is revolutionary and messianic. Precisely because the internal energy meant to lead us is thus, we should (at least attempt) try to achieve it peacefully . . . the paths of peace require patience, to use the existing frameworks and not break them . . . let us not forget that we are talking about the dear State of Israel where we want to change the regime but not lose it ourselves.

. . . the obvious conclusion is that it is **worthwhile to attempt** to realize [the revolution] by means of the current regime. However, we must emphasize that we identify with the current regime and see ourselves as committed to it, **but only up to a certain point**.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 269–74.

<sup>44</sup> See Shlomo Aviner, *To Your Temple, Return*, Jerusalem: Sifriyat Chava, 2000 (in Hebrew).

<sup>45</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 278–9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 280–2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.



Karpel understands that he does not have the ability to enforce his views on the state and on society, and, therefore, sees himself as committed to educational efforts that will create the revolutionary development.

In conclusion, Karpel's worldview is a revolutionary ideology that seeks to lead to a Torah-based regime. He acknowledges its weakness, but this awareness does not create apathy in him, but instead compels him to actively attempt to find solutions. An essential component of his approach is the influence of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook's writings on the topic of dialectic historic determinism. Also, in line with this approach, the historical process cannot be judged by its subjective momentum, but only by the objective significance of the act itself.<sup>48</sup> Karpel, however, goes beyond the positions of Mercaz Harav's school of thought. While he does accept the dialectic, intellectual format, he injects a few other elements as well. He suggests a plan of action to establish a movement for redemption in accordance with the goals of national redemption. His approach entails a mystical vision of an organic union between the individual and the group, and an organic union between the nation and its land. The universal dimension of redemption, appearing at the end of his article, is considerably played down and undeveloped. His attitude toward this era employs the use of the messianic redemptive concepts of changing the laws of nature, and there is no way of knowing what these changes entail until they take place. The emphasis in his writings is on the unique Jewish messianic phenomenon from within a fundamentalist existence.

### Activities of the "Jewish Leadership" Movement

The new reorganization began "on a small flame." A year passed after the meeting between Karpel and Feiglin before they began a biweekly distribution of the movement's newsletter, *Lechatchila*. The movement's distribution network was started in November 1996, and its ideas began disseminating among the religious public, who met in synagogues that received copies of the newsletter. Approximately 140 issues have been published, creating a central platform for the expression of the movement's worldview. Karpel's significant involvement in articulating these worldviews led him to develop a business of design, advertising, and dissemination of materials to the religious public. After seven years of distributing the newsletter, its circulation reached approximately 70,000 issues. Moreover, the movement began operating an Internet site, packed with information and opinions, along with weekly email announcements to their subscribers. The group has managed to create for itself an alternative network for information and marketing.

The movement's first political venture took place in 1997, when the announcement of President Ezer Weizman's resignation signaled the start of a race for the presidency. The newsletter stated that "With Weizman's departure

<sup>48</sup> On the dialectic of the philosophy of Rav Kook, see Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 79–136.

from the institution of the presidency, the time has come for a president who will represent the Jewish character of the state and not its Israeli one... a president of faith.”<sup>49</sup> The movement began searching for an appropriate presidential candidate. Professor Yirmiyahu Branover, a follower of the Chabad movement, agreed to become the movement’s candidate, and the campaign to garner parliamentary support began. This effort ended in a resounding failure. In order to participate in the election for president, the candidate required the signatures of ten members of Knesset, announcing that they supported his candidacy. Branover failed to pass this minimal threshold.

With the approach of the general elections in 1999, the movement began to prepare to compete independently. It announced the beginning of a “faith campaign,” with a candidate for prime minister to be presented on behalf of all the right-wing movements.<sup>50</sup> In this election, the voting for the prime minister and the voting for the Knesset list were separate. The movement felt that the religious political parties could not deliver the message of a faith revolution. Therefore, it planned to circumvent these parties, and initiate a new leadership for the religious public by presenting its own candidate to head the government. The sudden announcement of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he was resigning, with the ensuing speedy timetable for new elections, drastically reduced the movement’s preparations for the campaign. Even though they anticipated that Netanyahu would win the election over Ehud Barak (the Labor party’s candidate),<sup>51</sup> they felt that it was right to continue with the campaign, because, with Netanyahu remaining faithful to the ideology of Zionism, Netanyahu was incapable of properly representing them. However, it then became clear that they had no candidates ready to compete for the position of prime minister from among their list:

The campaign was stopped as a result of the elections for the Knesset and also due to the lack of willingness of individuals to compete at all, claiming that their role is to guide people spiritually... no group and no individual will offer us leadership and if we wish to see Jewish leadership materialize in the State of Israel, we have to do it ourselves. We understood that a candidate to lead the government can only come from within the Jewish Leadership movement.<sup>52</sup>

The idea of a campaign was abandoned and it was decided not to present a candidate to lead the government. A political party was established instead by the name of *Lechatchila – Jewish Leadership*, which participated in the elections. The new political party announced at the outset that it could not present a candidate to lead the government in the coming elections, but that it would do so in subsequent elections. It further announced that, if it became apparent that the movement had no chance of attaining the minimum threshold for election to the Knesset, it would remove its candidates rather than waste the

<sup>49</sup> *Lechatchila* 15 (1998) (in Hebrew).

<sup>50</sup> *Lechatchila* 28 (1999) (in Hebrew).

<sup>51</sup> Clearly a mistaken assessment; Barak won over Netanyahu by a wide margin.

<sup>52</sup> *Lechatchila* 42 (1999) (in Hebrew).

votes of the right-wing public, which is what happened in the 1992 elections, leading to Rabin's victory.

The party presented six legislative principles:

1. The State of Israel is the state of the entire Jewish nation, and every Jew has the right to citizenship, with all that that entails.
2. The goals of the State of Israel are the realization of the complete redemption, as it is understood in the Torah of Israel and in historic sources.
3. Jewish law will replace the current system of law.
4. The State of Israel is first a Jewish state, and then a democratic one.
5. The borders of the State of Israel are the borders of the Land of Israel as determined by the Torah of Israel.
6. The State of Israel, as a Jewish state, will aspire to have all its citizens be only Jewish.<sup>53</sup>

As promised, the movement removed its candidates for office before the elections to avoid wasting votes.

In 2001, prior to Prime Minister Ehud Barak's departure to a summit meeting in Washington, DC, there were increased misgivings that he would sign a permanent agreement with the Palestinians that would include additional territorial compromise and the evacuation of settlements. The movement's threshold of expression was raised. In their newsletter, they wrote that the evacuation of settlements, and, in their language, "the expulsion of Jews from the Land of Israel," was not legitimate. Therefore, it was acceptable to rise up against it.

Whoever tries to expel Jews in the Land of Israel by means of the laws of the State of Israel, does not make this action legitimate, but undermines the moral validity of the legal system in the State of Israel and its commitments to its citizens based on this system. . . . if the government of Israel wanted to sharpen the discrepancy between Israeli law and the morality of Israel and the laws of the Torah of Israel, there should be no illusions as to who will be a loyal and knowledgeable Jew and who will see themselves as morally obligated. A knowledgeable Jew is obligated first and foremost to the commandments of the God of Israel and only then to the laws of the State of Israel.<sup>54</sup>

The movement called for nonviolent civil disobedience and for a populist rebellion along the lines of *Zo Artzeinu*. They believed that these were legitimate democratic tools: "Nonviolent civil disobedience is one of the foundations of every democracy and an inseparable part of the democratic tradition."<sup>55</sup> And yet, a national referendum that obligated Prime Minister Barak to a retreat from the Golan Heights, if a political agreement was reached with Syria, was viewed by them as an anti-democratic principle, because a state does not have

<sup>53</sup> *Lechatchila* 50 (1999) (in Hebrew).

<sup>54</sup> *Lechatchila* 58 (2000) (in Hebrew).

<sup>55</sup> *Lechatchila* 59 (2000) (in Hebrew).

the right to destroy an individual, his home, and his life's work: "For the most part, no one has the right to expel a man from his home."<sup>56</sup>

From the beginning, the "Jewish Leadership" movement emphasized an ideological development leading to the revolution of consciousness it sought to bring about. Hillel Weiss took upon himself the establishment of a concept-oriented group whose goal was the examination of, and discourse on, the questions of the day from within the prism of a faith-based fundamentalist approach. This is how the Mekimi Institute – the Center for the Advancement of Jewish Leadership was established. Hillel Weiss was chosen as chairman, and Ohad Kamin, an enthusiastic supporter of Meir Kahane and a self-defined artist and intellectual, was appointed secretary.

Moshe Feiglin described this arm of the movement as a merger between those who deal with Halakhah and academicians, and that, together, they would examine all the aspects of the state under religious leadership. The purpose of this group was "to bring the Torah of Israel out of its provincial, religious exile."<sup>57</sup> Hillel Weiss characterized this group as one that "includes philosophers, economists and jurists, sociologist and planners, anthropologists and of course Torah followers, who will give their opinions in an organized fashion on all the political questions of the day and not just as a committee of smart people quibbling on into the night, but as a committee that comes to challenge Israeli society."<sup>58</sup>

This group conducted meetings for about two years. One of the interesting discussions I attended was when Amotz Sarig, a teacher from the yeshiva high school in Gush Etzion, asked to meet with members of this forum pursuant to a notice published by the Zo Artzeinu movement in the press. This notice called for the murder of Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestinian Authority. The meeting took place in September 2001. Sarig was not one of the members of this forum, and he asked to meet with them based on his personal friendship with Moshe Feiglin.

Sarig attacked the notice, and said that he had decided to cancel his membership dues to the movement. What angered him was not the language of the notice itself, but the fact that it was not signed by any sanctioned rabbinic authority. He felt that the "Jewish Leadership" movement should base its decisions on the Rabbinat, which would guide it every step of the way. Therefore, he proposed that the movement establish a type of "Council of Torah Leaders." The panel's response sharpened the distinctiveness of the "Jewish Leadership" movement. Oded Kitov, a Chabad member close to Yitzchak Ginzburg, responded by saying that, according to Halakhah, establishing kingship precedes renewal of the Sanhedrin, and this is the appropriate relationship between the movement and rabbinic authority; Shaul Nir, an indicted member of the Jewish underground who was involved in the murder of students at the Islamic

<sup>56</sup> *Lechatchila* 62 (2000) (in Hebrew).

<sup>57</sup> *Lechatchila* 4 (1997) (in Hebrew).

<sup>58</sup> *Lechatchila* 11 (1997) (in Hebrew).

College of Hebron in the early 1980s, said that there is no *Shulchan Aruch* (code of Jewish law) for Jewish leadership, and that the Rabbinate is, therefore, not superior to ordinary people; Dan Be'eri, also a member of the Jewish underground, claimed that there are rabbis who are not all that knowledgeable about Halakhah, whereas there are religious scholars who are far superior to them, so that for him there is no significance to rabbinic sanction. He feels that the Zionist process reflects the will of the nation to step into history. The Rabbinate cannot be a party to this process because, since the destruction of the Temple, the Rabbinate constitutes an ahistoric body; Moshe Feiglin said that to understand and analyze reality, there is no need for a Chief Rabbi, and perhaps the Rabbinate itself is an obstacle and not an advantage; Mordechai Nissan, an academic active in the movement, said that the fact that Jewish leadership does not come from within the rabbinic world teaches us about the weakness of the Rabbinate.<sup>59</sup>

This discussion, the basic elements of which I have presented, teaches us about the nature of this movement and of the opinions discussed in this organization. While it is loyal to the Torah of Israel and seeks to establish the Torah as the law of the state, it lowers the status of the members of the Rabbinate and men of Halakhah. To this movement, they represent an impediment whose authority needs to be circumvented. The Rabbinate is symbolic of the degeneration of religion and its irrelevant status. This is also their view of the religious parties, which they tried to bypass, who have lost the authority to represent the religious public. In his book, Motti Karpel does not present his views as being in conflict with rabbinic authority, but his group understands that their revolution is only possible by means of skipping over the authority of the leaders of Halakhah, and by building a new and different religious essence wherein religion can be fully realized. Therefore, based on their understanding, the return of the status of the Torah must be accomplished without the Rabbinate. Thus, the movement attempts to impart the concept of a religious revolt that will take Judaism out of its Diaspora framework and lead it to a more activist approach, by abandoning the religious hegemony that isolates itself within the patterns of the Diaspora.

### Entry into the Likud

Barak's political failure and the collapse of his government led to general elections in 2001. Taking advantage of a loophole in the Likud constitution, which opened it up to all sectors of society, the group tried to use the Likud party apparatus to advance their own agenda. On August 4, 2000, Moshe Feiglin announced his candidacy to head the Likud in the internal party elections. His candidacy was an anomaly, but the entrance of "Jewish Leadership" into the Likud party turned out to be quite significant. After campaigning in the

<sup>59</sup> The meeting took place at the office headquarters of the "Jewish Leadership" movement in Jerusalem, 6 September 2001.

Likud, the movement garnered a significant amount of power in the party's institutions.

Before Feiglin's candidacy for prime minister, the movement initiated a mass polling in the Likud. While it was unable to get organized before the Likud primaries in 2001, the movement polled about ten thousand individuals as the internal Likud primaries approached in 2003. The polling did not signify commitment; an individual who presents himself as a Likud supporter does not necessarily have to vote for the Likud. This is how the religious public managed to garner political power within the ruling party and, at the same time, to vote traditionally for other parties. This is what the "Jewish Leadership" functionaries did. For example, the Yizhar settlement gave the Likud just two votes in the general election, whereas ninety-five individuals were polled as Likud supporters. In Bat Ayin, the movement's source of power, only 5 percent of the voters voted for the Likud (ten votes). Approximately 50 percent went to "Herut," with the candidacy of Baruch Marzel, identified with the Kach movement. In essence, the leaders of the movement encouraged a broad polling from the outset, while at the same time clearly stating that voting for the Likud was not obligatory.<sup>60</sup>

The intended goal of the polling was to accumulate power within the local party branches. In the local branches' internal elections for the Likud Central Committee, the movement garnered approximately 130 delegates out of a total of 2,000. This faction was thought to be the strongest and most monolithic within the Likud Central Committee. It is worth noting that not everyone they polled voted for them. In Feiglin's campaign to head the party in the open primaries in 2003, he won about 4,870 votes. In other words, assuming that most of those polled did indeed come out and vote, only about half of them supported Feiglin's candidacy to head the Likud.

Moshe Feiglin did not get onto the Likud list for the Knesset. He did, however, get onto the thirty-ninth spot of the Likud list, which was a realistic spot for entry into the Knesset. He was pushed to the bottom of the list, however, among other reasons, by "deals" made against him among the various groups in the Central Committee, apparently at the behest of the party leaders who feared that, were he to get into the Knesset, he would not faithfully follow the party line. Moreover, a petition by MK Naomi Chazan of Meretz to the Central Elections Committee led to a disqualification of his candidacy on the Likud list because of the conviction on sedition charges that had been successfully brought against him as a result of his activities on behalf of Zo Artzeinu.

It is possible to learn about the group's political power within the Likud from a conference at the Binyaney HaUma Convention Center in Jerusalem

<sup>60</sup> *Lechatchila* 78 (2000) (in Hebrew). In a press interview, Hillel Weiss said that in the 2003 elections he had voted for "Herut." This despite the fact that he was a "Jewish Leadership" candidate for the Likud in his settlement of Elkana; he was not elected. See Avi Garfinkel, "Redemption, Oh Redemption," *Haaretz* Weekend Edition, 30 January 2004 (in Hebrew).

that the movement held in early 2004. This was a show of power, and approximately 1,500 people attended. Among the respected invitees were Internal Security Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Natan Sharansky, members of Knesset, and members of the Likud Central Committee. The conference received the blessings of religious authorities (Shmuel Eliyahu, the Rabbi of Safed, and Dov Lior, the Rabbi of Kiryat Arba), and speeches were given by the movement's leaders – Motti Karpel, Moshe Feiglin, and Michael Puah. The conference was led by Adir Zik, a member of the Arutz Sheva radio station. Natan Sharansky, a notable former soviet dissident, gave the keynote address.

The participation of guests from the Likud leadership generated several anomalies. The minister of the interior, for example, listened from the stage, at length, to complaints by members of the movement against the police because of the administrative detention of Noam Federman, considered to be active in the Kach movement, and suspected of involvement in terrorist activities. The crowd called out angrily at Hanegbi, but the conference organizers did not give the minister the right to respond. Druze Knesset member Ayoo Kara heard calls from the stage for the expulsion of all non-Jews from the territory of the State of Israel. He was also not given the right to respond. It is worth noting that Hanegbi and Kara did not get up and leave the auditorium when these things were said. As mentioned, the keynote address at the conference was given by Natan Sharansky, who congratulated the participants on the opportunity that the “Jewish Leadership” movement created for an ideological discussion within the framework of the Likud. He spoke at length about how he as a minister had fought against Prime Minister Barak's proposal for territorial compromise, and demanded more democratization in the Arab world before the retreats continue. Sharansky's presence engendered a paradox. Sharansky had fought against the totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union. His communal activism was dedicated, among other things, to the advancement of democratization throughout the world. Yet, Sharansky gave the keynote address before a political body that sought to abolish Israeli democracy and replace it with a theocratic regime – a group that views individuals as subordinate to the overall well-being of the nation, similar to the totalitarian regimes he had fought against so strongly. It could be that he was unaware of the movement's worldview, but the fact is that he agreed to be the keynote speaker at the conference. This event is indicative of the success that this faction achieved within the political system.

The final paradox was highlighted toward the end of the conference. One of the movement's proposals is to abolish the national anthem, “Hatikvah,” and replace it with the words “I believe in the coming of the messiah.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, at the end of the conference, the national anthem was not sung and the closing of the conference was announced. A singer came up to perform Hasidic melodies for those wishing to remain and dance along to the melodies.

<sup>61</sup> *Lechatchila* 28 (1998) (in Hebrew).

A murmur passed through the crowd. Adir Zik took notice of this murmuring and saved the moment by directing the singer to first sing “Hatikvah.” After the national anthem had been sung, the singer immediately continued with “I believe in the coming of the messiah.” Apparently, even the committed public is not yet ready to relinquish the national anthem, and certainly not at a conference where government leaders – ministers and members of Knesset – are participating.

The movement’s struggle to fasten the party leaders to the Likud Central Committee’s decisions constitutes an additional paradox. While “Jewish Leadership” calls for “changing the disk” of the public (a term that Adir Zik used in defining his goals for “Jewish Leadership”) by various means within the Likud itself, the movement is also attempting to block all other internal developments within the Likud, or any other “changing of the disk.” They furiously attacked Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Minister of Trade and Industry Ehud Olmert on account of the political plan for unilateral action in building the separation fence and evacuating the settlements. “Jewish Leadership” claimed that, by so doing, they were representing the position of the “extreme left,” and not the position of the Likud. They then suggested imposing parliamentary discipline on Likud representatives in the government and in the Knesset.

### Is Deception a Worthy Jewish Act?

The political success of the movement engendered controversy within religious Zionist circles. A commentator in the journal *Nekuda* revealed a sense of internal unease and resistance within these circles to the movement’s chosen path. The attacks against the movement from right-wing political elements were to be expected. Effi Eitam, the leader of the Mafdal, and Uri Ariel of Tekuma called on the public to choose to remain with their own parties. The sharpest attacks, however, came from the religious authorities, who claimed that the movement’s actions are in conflict with Judaism. It is superfluous to point out that such an attack is a moral blow to a movement that purports to operate in the service of the religion of Israel.

Shlomo Aviner said that the movement was immoral and deceitful: “A man must be honest. If he identifies with a political party, he can participate in all its decisions. But if he does not identify with it but instead buys a spot in it with money, this is dishonest.” Yaakov Ariel, the Ashkenazi Rabbi of Ramat Gan, said that advance polling to choose a different party constitutes deceit. Zalman Melamed, the rabbi of the settlement of Bet El Aleph, commented that it is forbidden for someone to sign a commitment that he has no intention of fulfilling. Yuval Sherlo, the head of the Hesder yeshiva in Petach Tikva, and among the young leadership of religious Zionist rabbis went further, and claimed that this act constitutes a desecration of God’s name, and is perhaps even an example of “committing a foul deed in the name of the Torah.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See: *Nekuda* 271(2004), 38–43 (in Hebrew).



The members of “Jewish Leadership,” however, published notices of their own rabbinical support. Dov Lior, the Rabbi of the Kiryat Arba settlement, announced that he saw no problem, halakhic or otherwise, in polling for the Likud by “Jewish Leadership.” Shmuel Eliyahu, the Sephardic Rabbi of Safed, Eliezer Rabinovitz, the head of the Hesder yeshiva in Maale Adumim, and Yosef Sharabi agreed with him. It seems that each side managed to find supporters for their cause.<sup>63</sup>

### “Jewish Leadership” and the Disengagement Plan

The year 2005 was pivotal in the history of the movement. The Disengagement Plan was realized during that year, obligating its members to organize a struggle against it. Later in the year, the movement began its activities for the elections for the Likud Knesset list, and this also demanded energetic political activity.

In the struggle over the Disengagement Plan, wherein the state unilaterally evacuated the settlements in the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria during the summer of 2005, the “Jewish Leadership” movement was not prominent. This was in contrast to the period of struggle against the Oslo Accords, when Zo Artzeinu was one of the leaders of the protests. The reason for this, according to Moshe Feiglin, was embedded in the fact that “there is no point to struggling in the field, without creating an alternative.”<sup>64</sup> But the transition to an ideological stance was a political calculation, by which all anomalous action on the part of the movement in the struggle would lead to a political attempt to remove its members from the Likud, and perhaps even bring about the administrative imprisonment of its leaders. This would have compelled the Likud party’s institutions to reject Moshe Feiglin’s candidacy to lead the party. Therefore, Feiglin avoided all protest actions that were outside legal sanction.

However, the movement could not stand on the sidelines. The movement published a pamphlet called *Clarification of the Obligation of Disobedience*, and encouraged the refusal to obey evacuation orders.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it indirectly encouraged the most acrimonious militant activity against the plan. Two of its activists – Ariel Weingruber and Shai Malka – founded the “HaBayit HaLeumi” (National Home) movement as an independent organization not affiliated with “Jewish Leadership,” and they were the ones who blocked the roads throughout the country.<sup>66</sup> While this protest was easily checked by the police, and also did not receive sweeping public support,<sup>67</sup> there were only a few participants.

<sup>63</sup> See [www.manhigut.org](http://www.manhigut.org) (the movement’s website).

<sup>64</sup> Moshe Feiglin “If We Desire Life” [www.manhigut.org](http://www.manhigut.org), viewed on 31 August 2005.

<sup>65</sup> After the pamphlet’s publication, several Likud activists demanded of the party’s institutions that the leaders of “Jewish Leadership” be removed from the movement. See [www.nrg.co.il](http://www.nrg.co.il), viewed on 24 January 2005.

<sup>66</sup> For more on the activities of this movement, see its internal publication, *A Summarization and Assessment of the Situation 2005* (Jerusalem, 2005) (in Hebrew).

<sup>67</sup> The Yesha Council did not encourage action, and even believed that this type of activity would harm the struggle against the Disengagement. But, on the other hand, they also did not condemn it. See “The Yesha Council Acknowledges: The Hug Was a Mistake” [www.a7.org](http://www.a7.org) (the Internet site for Arutz Sheva), viewed on 14 November 2005.

This was in stark contrast to similar actions that had taken place during Zo Artzeinu's protest demonstrations against the Oslo Accords during 1995, which drew crowds of protestors.

Throughout the critical period before the implementation of the disengagement plan, the press often quoted Moshe Feiglin, who, on June 7, 2005, announced that the disengagement would not take place "simply because we will not let you."<sup>68</sup> In hindsight, Feiglin acknowledged that he had made a mistake when he made that pronouncement.<sup>69</sup>

The increasing centrality of the movement was tangibly evident in its success in the early elections to head the Likud, when Moshe Feiglin won approximately 12 percent of the votes cast. Feiglin's power had risen by about a third. In absolute numbers, Feiglin had gone up from 4,870 votes in the internal elections in 2003 to 6,734 votes in 2005. Feiglin announced that he would not compete for a spot on the Likud list for the Knesset in the coming elections, after he secured a promise that he would not be barred from competing for the election lists taking place later on because of his previous conviction. Michael Puah, who competed for an earmarked spot as the cooperative Israeli settlement representative, failed in the elections. In the early elections held in August 2007, Feiglin obtained 23 percent of the votes. However, honest observation reveals that he only received about 2,000 additional votes from 2005. The big rise in the voting percentage was due to the lack of general attendance in the election.

Another example of the increasing influence of the movement was revealed in the appointment of Motti Karpel, the movement's ideologue, as editor of the settlers' journal *Nekuda*. This appointment was announced in December 2005, and highlighted the sharpening of the ideological stance within the settler community.

However, internal processes had begun within the movement that undermined its foundations. As much as they were part of the political game, an attempt at deviating from the party line began among the more radical public that had always supported them. Opinions were raised within the founding group, claiming that the very act of participating in the parliamentary arena grants legitimacy in hindsight to the existing political path, and, therefore, disqualifies this course of action. Consequently, in their view, the only way to wrestle with the existing parliamentary system must be by complete dissociation, and not by working from within. This dilemma was described to me by one of the more prominent activists in the movement; he told me privately that he was debating whether to remain as a member of the organization. He felt that in order to be true to himself he might well have to leave the group.

## Conclusion

The "Jewish Leadership" movement is an active, dynamic force, increasingly influential among religious Zionist groups.

<sup>68</sup> See *Weekly Update 23rd of Sivan 5765*, [www.manhigut.org](http://www.manhigut.org), viewed on 30 June 2005 (in Hebrew).

<sup>69</sup> See Feiglin, *If We Desire Life*.

The movement began its political involvement as an independent group, but quickly found its way into the Likud party. This was a brilliant strategy, as the movement became a significant, all-important power; a central player in the current Israeli arena.

The movement inserted truly “heretical” ideas into the internal discourse of messianic religious Zionism. The first is the loss of faith in the determinism of redemption and the denial of the “the first step of our redemption,” by replacing it with active national messianism. The second is weakening the stance of halakhic leaders in favor of independent fundamentalist commentary. The movement actualizes the vision to establish a sweeping movement for redemption that will present a theocratic alternative to the secular political system, and thereby promote processes intended to hasten the end of days.

The “Jewish Leadership” movement began amassing real power only after 2000. The political context created at that time, with the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2001, also afforded a new phase of public activity wherein there was no need for restraining actions against additional concessions from Israeli governments. This difficult period, when more than two thousand Israelis were murdered in horrifying terrorist acts perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist organizations, permitted the entry of new theological ideas brought by the movement.

The “Jewish Leadership” movement also embodied core elements of “ideological religious nationalism,” as defined by Mark Juergensmeyer.<sup>70</sup> There is a dissatisfaction with modern Western culture, and a “loss of faith” in the ideology of secular nationalism; there is an outlook that says that politics is a religious affair, and not secular. It is different from Juergensmeyer’s definition, in that it does not employ all-inclusive tactics against those who oppose it and does not label them enemies of religion. Its position toward those who oppose them is “missionary” – they have not yet seen the light; have not yet uncovered the metahistoric truth. It is quite possible that the messianic concept in which they believe, which anticipates progressive and national processes, constitutes a moderating element, in that this theological approach does not identify those who oppose it as cosmic enemies. Therefore, “Jewish Leadership” is not inclined to violent confrontation with them on the basis of their identification with absolute cosmic evil. (A change in that line may be observed as a result of the Disengagement Plan. See Chapter 7.)

It is quite possible that it is precisely the relative success of their political activities that also serves to create a moderating factor. From the outset, Motti Karpel claimed that revolutionary activity must be accomplished from within the democratic platform and from within the educational arena. “Jewish Leadership” does indeed operate within these parameters. But, it is important to point out that this is an opportunistic tactic that distorts the principle of the right to oppose government, and is exploited by them in order to

<sup>70</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism,” *Journal of International Affairs* 50 (1) (1996) 1–20.

justify a general revolution. This is how Motti Karpel articulated the idea in his book:

Yehuda Etzion once made the following statement about Shabtai Ben Dov: “He debated whether to be loyal to the state in its current format or whether to generate a revolution, and after a philosophical discussion he concluded that **we must be loyal to the state based on our generating a revolution against it.**” We cannot improve on this dialectic version.<sup>71</sup>

This movement looks forward to many more challenges that will test its principles and cohesiveness. In any event, it operates in the internal political arena toward broadening its power by continued mass campaigning for the Likud. However, this activity could generate an internal counterreaction in the Likud, in order to weaken the power of those thought to be a fifth column. (This happened after internal elections in the Likud in December 2005, when there was an attempt to remove Feiglin from the party based on the principle that someone found guilty of a criminal act cannot campaign for a spot on the Likud Knesset list.) Then, the movement may be put to the test although this could also happen if the political arena changes.

This movement represents a hard response to cognitive dissonance: Their activities demonstrate the dynamics of messianic failure that pushes to radicalization. The attempt to change completely the political system and to transform it into a theocracy through political action is a manifestation of the fear of failure. Only time will tell how this movement will develop and what its influence will be.

<sup>71</sup> Motti Karpel, *The Faith Revolution*, 286–7.

## Fundamentalism in Crisis

### *Response of Messianic Religious Zionism to the Theological Dilemmas Raised by Israel's Disengagement Plan*

In August 2005, Israel vacated the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip – mainly in Gush Katif – as well as four settlements in northern Samaria. This action, known as the Disengagement, constituted a profound crisis for a significant section of the Israeli population that is most closely identified with religious Zionism and with the settlement movement in the Territories. The crisis was not only on the national level, as the state destroyed communities that it had established and nurtured for decades, but also on the community level, as thousands of people were removed from their homes. The Disengagement also caused a religious crisis, testing the very foundation of the beliefs that had guided the political and religious behavior of this particular population.

This chapter examines whether the political processes led to any change in attitudes among these circles regarding the status and religious significance of the State of Israel as a secular Zionist nation. Consideration is also given to the modalities by which the rabbis reconcile the discrepancy between their religious ideal and events on the ground. In this respect, this chapter constitutes a case study of the religious response to crises of faith.

The events that took place are raising a profound question: will the Disengagement make a change in the long-term attitude of the rabbinic leadership of messianic Religious Zionism toward the state of Israel, or is this a crisis that will be overcome?

Despite the militant calls from certain circles within this rabbinical elite to refuse to obey the order to evict settlements and to engage in physical opposition, in reality these calls were not heeded. In particular, and with very few exceptions, religious Zionist soldiers who were graduates of the yeshivot did not heed militant calls. The number of cases in which soldiers refused to obey army orders relating to the Disengagement itself did not exceed 130,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This figure was quoted in the religious weekly *Besheva*, September 15, 2005 (in Hebrew). The article disputes the claim by Chief-of-Staff Dan Halutz that only 63 soldiers were tried for disobeying orders. In either case, however, the numbers involved are relatively small.

so that the scale of this phenomenon can be considered negligible. The failure of the militant struggle may also be due to ambivalent and mixed messages, as I discuss in the following. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss the importance of this rabbinical group, if only because its members are the teachers and guides of many young religious Zionists. The education and values these young men receive in the “national yeshivot” will form the foundation for the next generation of leaders of religious Zionism as a whole. It can be assumed that the Disengagement will constitute a formative event for this generation.

### **Rabbinical Reactions to the Disengagement Plan before the Eviction**

The Disengagement Plan presented the rabbis with a religious dilemma. How could it be that, despite their devotion and intense efforts, a plan had emerged that was contrary to the divine promise for the Land of Israel? Accordingly, they almost unanimously opposed the Disengagement Plan and eviction of settlements, with the religious Zionist public also virtually united in its campaign against the plan.

However, attitudes were less monolithic in terms of the strength and nature of this opposition. Several distinct reactions can be seen in the rabbinical statements. By their nature, all the rabbinical reactions addressed the inherent religious dilemmas raised by the idea of the Disengagement and by crises of faith. They sought to provide activist responses to the question as to how the “evil hand” could prevail, while the divine plan, as they saw it, was not being realized.

The Disengagement Plan exacerbated and emphasized a profound fault line running through the school of the messianic religious Zionism. This line divides between those positions that argue that the State of Israel, in its current Zionist format, has completed its historical function, and an alternative political force must now be established to offer a “faith-based,” post-statist theocratic regime and, adherents of the “statist” approach, who seek to maintain the affinity and bond between the State of Israel and the religious Zionist public. They argue that the State of Israel as currently constituted reflects the will of the people, and, hence, also the will of God. While those who favor the post-statist approaches advocate the gradual elimination of the secular state’s influence over the religious public, those who support the “statist” positions oppose a break with the state, and urge their followers to obey civil laws and maintain their commitment to national sovereignty.

The dominant response to the Disengagement Plan among militant religious Zionist rabbis sought to encourage opposition to the act of eviction. Those who favored this position argued that, because the State of Israel was acting in a manner contrary to the divine promises in the Torah regarding the Land of Israel to the People of Israel, it was permissible to oppose the actions of the state. However, the opposition they advocated was limited to passive civil disobedience. This approach was particularly evident in the statements of two former chief rabbis, Mordechai Eliyahu (1929–2010) and Avraham Shapira

(1914–2007), as well as in the rulings of the Committee of Yesha Rabbis – the umbrella organization of rabbis of the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. These rabbis did not call at any stage for violent opposition or overt rebellion.

On October 15, 2004, Rabbi Avraham Shapira, who formerly served as a Chief Rabbi of Israel (1983–1993), and who, at the time of his declaration, headed the prestigious Mercaz Harav yeshiva, declared that he supported the idea of soldiers refusing to obey the eviction orders.

Approximately one year before the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Avraham Shapira declared that the expulsion of Jews from their homes was a religious offense, and, accordingly, soldiers must not obey the command to uproot settlements. In an interview for the weekly religious journal *Besheva*, Rabbi Shapira stated: “God-fearing soldiers and policemen should already make it clear now to their commanders that just as they would not desecrate the Sabbath or eat non-kosher food, so they will not uproot Jews from their homes.” When asked to respond to the comments by other rabbis to the effect that the offense of expulsion rests with the state, and not the soldiers who commit the acts, Shapira replied: “What??! Every offense is an offense. In heaven it is not wanted . . . , so it is forbidden for anyone.”<sup>2</sup> By claiming that the refusal to obey the order is a reflection of God’s will, and that it is forbidden to obey the order, Shapira placed the divine order, as he interprets it, above mundane laws, clearly stating that one must follow the divine command even at the price of confrontation with the authorities. In response to the question, “What if the prime minister has decided to evict Jews,” he replied, “He is not the master of the house.” Then, adding: “We know what is permitted and what is forbidden. Torah or not Torah, that is our function. It may be that a soldier is weak and does not want to refuse, but the truth is the truth. You don’t play around with the truth!”<sup>3</sup> Shapira reinforced the authority of his ruling, announcing that “those who evict will be punished in this world, and in the next world.”<sup>4</sup> Some seventy rabbis joined Shapira’s statement urging soldiers not to participate in the uprooting of Jews.<sup>5</sup>

Further, support for Shapira’s position came in the ruling of Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, who also formerly served as a chief rabbi of Israel (1983–1993). Eliyahu stated one month before the Disengagement that the government’s plan “will not happen.” The declaration was issued when the situation on the ground indicated that the destruction of the settlements would go ahead, in apparent contradiction to the Biblical commandment that the Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel. In fact, there were those who interpreted Eliyahu’s statement as a form of prophecy. After the publication of his

<sup>2</sup> *Besheva*, October 14, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Yediot Acharonot*, October 20, 2004 (in Hebrew).

<sup>5</sup> A list of all the signatories appeared on the website of *Arutz 7* on November 24, 2004 – [www.a7.org](http://www.a7.org) (in Hebrew). <http://www.inn.co.il/news.php?id=92045>.

comments, the Jewish residents of the settlements felt vindicated in their decision not to heed the government statements urging them to take steps to find alternative housing solutions outside the Gaza Strip. Accordingly, they refused to contact the Disengagement Administration, which was responsible for their rehabilitation, therefore, jeopardizing their economic future and their eligibility for compensation.

This difficult situation led to the emergence of the view, as presented by Eliyahu, that these events constituted a test of faith for the public, in which they were required to reach an ever-higher spiritual plane. This was the basis for the declaration, or perhaps even the prophecy, that the Disengagement would not materialize, so that the settlers should continue their routine – planting, building, and opposing any attempt to reach a compromise with the government. This declaration reflected a process of religious radicalization, a denial of objective reality, and led to the exacerbation of the tension with the state.

Thus, we see that the theological response of Mordechai Eliyahu to the dilemma of the eviction of the settlements was a counterreaction typified by cognitive dissonance. This well-known sociological theory in messianic movements argues that a crisis caused by prophetic failure may lead to the paradoxical phenomenon of the reinforcement of religious faith, rather than its erosion. The failure of the prophecy, which, in logical terms, should have led to a weakening of confidence in its accuracy. However, sometimes it creates the completely opposite phenomenon, with a strengthening of religious belief and practice, in an effort to set the messianic process back on course.<sup>6</sup> Eliyahu's call to continue the routine of life in Gush Katif, which was due to be evacuated in less than one month, could be interpreted as an attempt to ignore reality and to act with heightened determination to realize the religious ideal. Therefore, it is worth examining in greater depth Eliyahu's often quoted letter:

To our brothers, the settlers in Yesha [Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip], powerful heroes and performers of His will, who are working and settling the expanses of our ancestral homeland in Gush Katif – may your wellbeing ever prosper!

In this missal, I wish to strengthen your hands against the terrible moral evil of the intention to evict settlements and expel Jews from their homes – it shall not happen!

There is no act more moral than the enterprise of the revival of the people returning to its land after a long exile, whereby you are observing the positive commandment of settling the Land of Israel, and there is no greater moral wrong than

<sup>6</sup> Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riechen, & Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956.



the attempt to torture your souls with threats of expulsion and the abandonment of our ancestral land.

From that same clear, moral strength, we must not cause division in the public and among the heroes of our army; we are not ones to refuse orders for the sake of it. Soldiers who are required to commit the crime will reply, "I cannot." And if they are coerced, they will sit on the floor and cry with the family they wish to expel from its home.

We are obliged to protest against this terrible moral wrong.

And to those who block the roads – this should be only on the condition that there is an alternative route. We will not block a road to which there is no alternative, and we will not, God forbid, endanger human life.

**The Seer of the Generations in advance, who answered our Father Abraham on Mount Moriah, will answer us and bring our justice into the light, and no-one shall stop the Divine process of the national revival of the People of Israel that is returning to its Land.<sup>7</sup>**

In the response that accompanied the letter, he addressed the question as to whether his statement "It shall not happen" was a "prayer or reality," that is, a supplication or a prophecy. In his reply, the rabbi stated that it was both a prayer and a reality – the prayer would help God nullify the emerging reality. Accordingly, Eliyahu ruled that people should move to Gush Katif and live there. They should continue to work the land and to sow and plant, despite the fact that it was evident that the date of the harvest would be later than the date set by the government for the vacation of the area. Similarly, Eliyahu ordered the residents of Gush Katif to refrain from preparing alternative plots. Their refusal to do so, he argued, strengthened faith in God and in the promise of the Land made by God to Abraham.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the letter includes a relatively moderate call to opposition to the act of eviction, permitting only passive resistance, and not open rebellion. It is possible that this is the reason why the practical opposition to the Disengagement Plan and the destruction of the settlements was relatively muted.

Post factum, after the failure of the prediction, the rabbi claimed that his comment was to be considered as a "prayer" and prayers are not unheard. Accordingly, these prayers most likely saved many Jewish lives and would bring merits to the Jews. Eliyahu claimed that for sure God did not neglect His chosen people, and those prayers would join those of past generations.<sup>9</sup> In his response, he renounced any prophecy and gave a theodicy of participation in which the individuals are still practicing in God's plans.

<sup>7</sup> The letter appears in Modechai Eliyahu, "Respona of Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu," on the website: [www.moriya.org.il](http://www.moriya.org.il), dated July 18, 2005 (in Hebrew). <http://www.moriya.org.il/Art/print.asp?id=877>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Mordechai Eliyahu, "Where did the Prayers Go?," *Ma'ayanei Hayeshuah* 121, 29 Av 5765–2005, 1 (in Hebrew).

This activist school of militant rabbis was faced by a second school, also comprised of graduates of Mercaz Harav yeshiva: the “statist” school. This group of rabbis was led by Shlomo Aviner and Zvi Tau. The exponents of this school argued that the struggle against the Disengagement Plan must take place through public information and persuasion, and not through violence or irrational acts.

In this spirit, a discussion was published between Rabbi Zvi Tau and his students, in which he argued forcefully against the refusal to obey army orders and against civil disobedience. The principle behind his position was that, in order to prevent the Disengagement Plan, it was necessary to act to secure spiritual renewal and to undertake a profound campaign of “settling in the hearts.”<sup>10</sup> Tau argued that the Disengagement and the strong support for the plan among the public were a manifestation of the people’s spirit, which was still not ready for the spiritual message of redemption. The reason for this, he suggested, was the failure of the settlement movement to include dimensions of spiritual renewal in its mundane actions: “We engaged successfully in settlement, but we did not manage to advance a significant public spiritual transition in Israel. The People of Israel were left far behind us, and even deteriorated in spiritual and value-based terms, to the point that we find ourselves in the present conflict. This is a situation that we must change.”<sup>11</sup> According to Tau, the spiritual revolution was the only real action that could be taken before the implementation of the Disengagement, and it centered mainly on a broad-based campaign of information and education.

Tau stated that the struggle against the eviction of Gush Katif was intended as a message from heaven, in order to create a movement among the religious public in the necessary educational and informational direction. Moreover, only an insistent informational campaign could nullify the edict. Conversely, those who spoke of the disengagement of the religious public from the state or threatened civil war were actually strengthening the supporters of the Disengagement, because they legitimized the desire to undertake the eviction at any price. Tau emphasized that he was not negating the legitimate campaign of protest within the confines of the law.

Regarding the tactics to be adopted in the struggle, Tau emphasized that not all means were acceptable. Sometimes “it is impossible to coerce reality through improper and rash means.” Accordingly, he rejected the possibility that the Disengagement could be stopped through threats or acts of force: “Creating an atmosphere of rift and hatred among the people, or, God forbid,

<sup>10</sup> “Settling the hearts” has long been used in religious Zionist circles as a code referring to the need to engage in informational and outreach activities among the general public, alongside actual settlement activities.

<sup>11</sup> Zvi Tau, *Responsa of Faith on Face-To-Face Activities in Light of Current Events*, Iyar 5765–2005. Published on the website NRG Ma’ariv, June 21, 2005 (in Hebrew). <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/111/ART/947/891.html>.

even considering the idea that someone would raise a hand against his brother; referring to sections of the people as ‘rabble’;<sup>12</sup> or expressing absolute despair with the State of Israel – all of these are a terrible affront to the most important values in the name of saving the Land of Israel.”<sup>13</sup> According to Tau, civil disobedience would be necessary if the government were acting in a manner contrary to the will of the people, but this is not currently the case. Accordingly, those who have true knowledge must act to change public attitudes through aggressive informational activities, going from home to home to spread the spiritual word. If this happens, he claims, the government will also be forced to reconsider in the light of the people’s will, and will stop the Disengagement Plan.

An additional theological position within the “statist” camp that deserves mention was presented by Rabbi Yuval Sherlo, head of the Hesder (“Arrangement”) yeshiva in Petach Tikva, and one of the leading young rabbis of religious Zionism. Sherlo explained that “sometimes prayers are not answered.” He argued that humans cannot know what God wishes, and that God is not bound by human preferences. Sherlo indirectly criticized the statements by Shapira and Eliyahu to the effect that the Disengagement constituted a rebellion against God’s will. However, he continued, the individual should continue to try to act in accordance with his conscience, in the belief that God indeed listens to prayer; the mere fact that a prayer is not accepted does not imply any weakening or any error of faith. “We do not condition our bond to Him on His doing what we ask. We continue our faithful and confident path, on the basis of our profound bond to the Word of God, and act in this world with all our strength.”<sup>14</sup> This is virtually the only reaction I have found from within the central stream of the rabbis that implies even the slightest doubt as to the just nature of the struggle, and even suggests the possibility that the campaign against the Disengagement may not, in fact, reflect divine will.<sup>15</sup>

### Strengthening the Idea of a Torah State as the Conclusion from the Disengagement

Even after the implementation of the Disengagement, when the demolition of the settlements was an accomplished fact, the same fault line referred to previously could still be seen in the responses of statist and post-statist rabbis. However, the gulf between the two schools was now considerably narrower.

<sup>12</sup> Tau uses the Kabbalistic term *erev rav*, which refers to “fake Jews” who attempt to prevent the redemption of the Jews, and whose physical annihilation is the only way to remove the last obstacle to the End Days. For more detailed discussion of this issue, see the following chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Zvi Tau, *Responsa*.

<sup>14</sup> Appeared on the website NRG Ma’ariv, August 21, 2005: [http://www.nrg.co.il/cgi-bin/nrgprint.pl?channel=channel\\_judaism](http://www.nrg.co.il/cgi-bin/nrgprint.pl?channel=channel_judaism)

<sup>15</sup> Yuval Sherlo, *Sho”t Hitnatkut*, Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2010 (in Hebrew).

The responses of both schools suggest that they aspire to the creation of a Torah state, but differ mainly over the tactical approach employed to this end.

The statist rabbis, such as Shlomo Aviner, sought to argue that, despite the profound rift caused by the eviction of the settlements, the path of settling both the land and the hearts should continue unchanged. By contrast, the retroactive responses of the post-statist rabbis intensified the call to disengage from the state and from its sovereign authority, and to establish types of “counter-societies” intended solely for their own circles.

During the days following the completion of the withdrawal, a central thread can be found among most of the written and verbal reactions. Almost unanimously, the activist declaration was heard that now, following the results of the actions of the State of Israel, greater efforts must be made to establish a Torah state. This response embodies profound disappointment with the existing state, which failed to act in accordance with the divine plan as they perceive it, uprooting settlements and expelling Jews from their homes. Accordingly, activists emphasized the need to lead the people toward religious redemption, which was to be gauged through the mundane criterion of establishing a theocratic regime. These goals can be secured through long-term persuasion and through action in the political arena. The declarations were calling for a stronger political effort in the name of the theocratic vision, using the tools of the political system. Therefore, it can be considered more of an utopist agenda, rather than a revolutionary one.

By way of example, the weekly broadsheet *Ma'ayanei Hayeshuah*, distributed in religious Zionist synagogues, abandoned its usual format on the weekend following the completion of the withdrawal. In place of discussions on the weekly Torah portion and regular opinion columns, the broadsheet presented a manifesto in shades of black and white. The main content of this manifesto was as follows:

We shall not forget – We shall not forgive

The anger and offense within us,

The tremendous sense of frustration,

Must be channeled in one single direction: working among the masses.

We must seize control of the mechanisms of government, gradually seize control of the State of Israel. We must transform it from “the first step of our redemption” to our actual, real redemption;

From “the foundation of God’s throne in the world” to God’s actual, real throne in the world.

We will remember the adage “little by little,”<sup>16</sup> in order not to fall into “End calculating,”

<sup>16</sup> *Kim'ah-kim'ah*, referring to the need to move toward redemption through mundane, gradual steps.

Yet we will demand of ourselves a full effort to observe “in its time – I shall expedite.”<sup>17</sup>

With God’s help, we shall live to see the building of the Temple and the actual return of the Divine Presence to Zion.<sup>18</sup>

Rabbi Hanan Porat (1943–2011), one of the founders of Gush Emunim and, for many years, a Member of Knesset for right-wing parties, adopted a similar stance. He presented his thoughts on the failure of the struggle against the Disengagement Plan in the opening column in *Me’at Min Ha’or*, another weekly broadsheet distributed in religious Zionist synagogues. Porat’s conclusion was that the failure of the struggle against the Disengagement demanded the development of new horizons relating to government and power. Porat urged all the religious streams – ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, and “traditional” – to present an agreed leader who could compete for power.<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed, the rabbinical authority behind *Arutz 7* (the radio station and weekly newspaper of the settlers), and the rabbi of the settlement Beit El “B,” sought a theological answer to the question as to why the Disengagement happened, despite the tremendous devotion shown in the struggle against the plan, and despite the perception of this act as contrary to God’s will. How then could God permit such an act? Melamed found his answer in the hope that, from out of the depths of destruction, redemption would spring. In this interpretation, Melamed appears to be following the Talmudic saying “Ben David [The messiah] comes only in a generation that is either entirely worthy or entirely guilty” (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 98a). Thus, out of the profound crisis of secular society, a crisis which, according to Melamed, is characterized by rampant governmental corruption, a rotten legal system and media, rising violence among youth, and so on – a process of profound spiritual repair must emerge. Ultimately, this will lead to the return to the People of Israel of its Land, whose borders shall be “from the great River Euphrates to the Great Sea and to the River of Egypt, and God shall yet expand our borders, as stated in the Torah, beyond those promised to our fathers.” Therefore, the Disengagement is actually a crisis for those who have abandoned Torah, not for those who adhere to it – a crisis in the spiritual world of secular Zionism. For the religious public, the Disengagement is to be seen as a divine test they are required to pass. Success in the test means accepting difficulties and strengthening faith. “From the internal resilience, external resilience will also stem, and the Holy One will transform the curse into a blessing for His love for us.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This is a reference to a saying in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a): if the Jews have merits justifying their redemption then “I shall expedite” this, and redemption will come speedily; and if not – redemption will still come, but only “in its time” as appointed.

<sup>18</sup> *Ma’ayanei Hayeshu’ah* 211, 22 Av 5765–2005 (in Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> *Me’at Min Ha’or* 311, 5 Ellul 5765–2005 (in Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup> Appeared on the website of *Arutz 7* on September 7, 2005 – <http://www.a7.org/print.php3what=article&id=4834>.

This approach, which advocates action leading to the emergence of a new regime in Israel, was forcefully presented as “the Torah opinion” when the Committee of Yesha Rabbis, the umbrella organization of rabbis of the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, issued a press release stating resolutely:

The hand raised against the legacy of our fathers and the people of Gush Katif, in its monstrous and destructive form, the product of hatred of Israel and the Land of Israel, shall be cut off through a spiritual revolution with the collapse of secular Zionism.<sup>21</sup>

In an accompanying interview for the Internet news site *Ynet*, Rabbi Yishai Bavad, the secretary of the Committee of Yesha Rabbis, explained that the intention of the proclamation was to lead to “a religious prime minister, if not in the next round then in the one after. This is a need that did not exist before. Now we want someone who wears a skullcap, and has God above him – whatever the color of the skullcap.”<sup>22</sup>

In my opinion, these rabbinical declarations announcing the end of secular Zionism and the need to replace the leadership of the nation with faith-based leaders reflect an activist call to engage in ongoing political activity. These comments may also be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the religious Zionist camp following the trauma of the eviction of the settlements.

In the face of these positions, the adherents of the “statist” approach argued that, even after the Disengagement, their way must remain as before, and the settlement endeavors should continue. This counterposition was led by the positions of Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, whose basic argument was that a distinction must be made between the State of Israel, which has a sacred status as a manifestation of “the dominion of God’s throne,” and must not be injured, along with the army, which bears special sanctity and must not be harmed at any price. On the other side, Aviner argued that the struggle against the leaders who hold power is legitimate as long as it is waged within the parameters of a legitimate public campaign. Accordingly, religious practice and settlement activities should continue unchanged:

Redemption is a wonderful thing that will not be spoilt by fools. The state and the army are a wonderful thing that we will not allow fools to spoil. We will continue to mobilize for the state and the army, for redemption is such a wonderful thing – even if there are some darknesses within, nothing has changed! It has only got harder, and we shall continue to build our Land, to be built in it, through the wonders of the Lord God of Israel, Perfect of Knowledge, the Redeemer of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The quote appeared on the website of *Arutz 7* on September 11, 2005: <http://www.inn.co.il/news.php?id=124122>.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted from the website *ynet.co.il*, September 12, 2005. <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3140749,00.html>.

<sup>23</sup> *In Love and Faith* 526, 19 Av 5765–2005 (in Hebrew).

Aviner rejected the call to disobey orders and to resist the eviction of the settlements by physical means. He also opposed those who called on young people to refuse to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).<sup>24</sup> Although it was the army that dismantled the settlements, the army is involved not only in expulsion, but also in protecting the people and the Land. Accordingly, Aviner argued, the balance of its actions slant to the positive side. Although the PM used the army to desrtroy the settlements, an impure acte, the army still should be santified. Accordingly, military service is a commandment, and, despite the Disengagement, young religious Zionists must continue to serve in the army. This is also important for the sake of the future – if the religious soldiers left the army, “evil could run unchecked.” Aviner believes that it is an act of devotion to serve in the army, even when it is engaged in expelling Jews.<sup>25</sup> On the basis of the value of statism, and the perception of the nation as an expression of God’s will to redeem His people, Aviner urged his followers not to disengage from the society, and to continue to act within it in order to influence the mechanisms of government.

It is worth noting that Aviner and his colleagues were the object of fierce criticism within rabbinical circles because of their statements. The criticism even acquired a personal tone when Rabbi Avraham Shapira, head of Mercaz Harav yeshiva and an advocate of the militant approach, fiercely attacked the “statist” rabbis, urging them to accept the rule of Torah and his status as the most senior Halachic guide. Shapira adopted the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) concept of “the Torah opinion,” demanding obedience to the rabbinical hierarchy. Rabbis who declined to accept his rulings were dubbed “*rebbelikh*,”<sup>26</sup> an allusion to their alleged limited knowledge of Torah. In addition, Shapira’s supporters attempted to malign Aviner, claiming that his knowledge of the Halachic laws relating to the family were defective. They did this by presenting an alleged error in a Halachic ruling he had issued relating to the ritual impurity of women. By doing this, they sought to delegitimize his standing as a Halachic ruler, so that his positions could not be presented against those of the “Leader of the Generation.” An anonymous booklet was even published including numerous attacks on Aviner<sup>27</sup> (eventually it was realized that Rabbi Ido Elba was the author of the booklet).<sup>28</sup> For their part, Aviner’s supporters, led by Rabbi Zvi Tau, issued a statement defending the dignity of Aviner and opposing expressions of contempt for Torah sages.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Shmuel Eliyahu, “As Live As It Gets,” *Olam Katan* 56 (5766–2006), no page numbers (in Hebrew).

<sup>25</sup> *In Love and Faith* 526, 19 Av 5765–2005 (in Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> In Yiddish – “little rabbis,” with the diminutive used in a derogatory sense.

<sup>27</sup> *Insisting on the Truth – Distributed with the Consent of the Leading Sages of the Generation* (Marcheshvan 5766–2006), on the website: [www.aviner.net](http://www.aviner.net) viewed in June 22, 2011 (in Hebrew).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1171359.html> (viewed on September, 1, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> *Makor Rishon*, September 16, 2005 (in Hebrew).

### Retreat to a Fundamentalist Enclave by Marginal Elements Among the Settlers

Following our discussion of the central stream of settler rabbis, including the disagreements that emerged within this group, we are turning to more marginal elements among the population. The following descriptions of Rabbis Yitzhak Ginzburg and Shmuel Tal's characters highlight an approach based on a retreat into a fundamentalist enclave.

During the period leading up to the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg made a series of sermons in which he analyzed the political situation from the perspective of Kabbalistic theory. The sermons were published on the rabbi's website, and later appeared in book form, under the title *It Shall be Saved Therefrom* (Kfar Chabad 2006). The struggle against the Disengagement Plan evidently led Ginzburg to adopt increasingly extreme positions and reinforced his view that the only way to avoid contact with the Israeli state was to retreat into a religious enclave, while at the same time offering a course of action designed to present a political and social alternative.

Itzhak Ginzburg is the head of Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva in Yitzhar, the most extreme rabbinical institution in the West Bank. Officially Ginzburg is a Chabad rabbi, however, most of his followers are known as the "hill dwellers," young adults of a unique spiritual agenda that combines an ascetic and tough lifestyle with neo-Chassidic tendencies.<sup>30</sup>

Ginzburg used the image of a core and a shell, which is drawn from Lurianic Kabbalistic thought. The leitmotif in his book is that "the shell preceded the fruit." According to the Kabbala, the shell is a negative reality that conceals the Divine spark. Ginzburg likened the condition of Israel to a nut, which includes four shells surrounding the fruit itself: "We have found that the nut offers an appropriate allegory for the situation of the Return to Zion, a reality which, we believe, contains a sweet fruit, but which at present is visible to us mainly in its shells."<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, the objective of his essay is to provide a clear identification of the Zionist shells, in order to find the strength to break these. Ginzburg claims that the nut has three tough and inedible shells, while the fourth, thin shell is attached to the nut and eaten together with it. He views the reality of the State of Israel according to this metaphor.

The outer shell, furthest from the fruit, is secular Zionist consciousness. The characteristic of this shell is the "spirit of disassociation from Jewish tradition," or the abandonment of religious values. This shell also includes religious Zionism, because this movement has failed to change its secular counterpart, and its practical actions have fed secularization and provided it with devoted

<sup>30</sup> Shlomo Kanniel, "The Hill Settlers – A Biblical Israelite?" Asher Cohen and Israel Harel (eds.), *Religious Zionism: An Era of Change*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute; JNF; World Council for Torah Education, 5764–2004, 533–58 (in Hebrew).

<sup>31</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, "The Shell Preceded the Fruit," *It Shall Be Saved Therefrom*, Kfar Chabad: Gal Eini Institute Publishers, 5766–2006, 13–4 (in Hebrew).



support, without diverting secularism from its distancing from the religion through which it flows.

The shell of the spirit of Zionism is followed by the shell of the institutions established to manage public life. Ginzburg declares that virtually every institution in Israel is tainted and alienated from Jewish sanctity and the guidance of Torah. This is particularly true for the justice system, which has gradually come to control and direct every aspect of public life. The court promotes permissiveness, sanctifies the individual ego, mocks the sanctity of the family unit, and encourages equality between Jews and Gentiles – an unacceptable value from Ginzburg's perspective.

The third shell is that of the government. The government is the product of the choice made by the people, therefore, this shell is not a rigid one, but is subject to changes and influences. However, Ginzburg claims that whatever direction the voters take, it can be seen that the government ultimately chooses to act in accordance with the same policy of compromise and withdrawal, reflecting weakness both in the face of the Gentiles and in the face of the surrounding shells.

The function of the government is to protect the life of the people. In practice, however, the government is revealed in its weakness: "The greatest weakness is the unwillingness to attach a higher price to Jewish life, and acceptance of the mood that sees Jews and Gentiles, friend and foe, good and evil as equal."<sup>32</sup> Ginzburg utterly rejects an approach based on egalitarianism and pluralism. He claims that the government seeks power by promising to protect Jewish life and provide security, but ultimately fails in this task and declines. Ginzburg views Jewish blood as more worthy than that of Gentiles. In another of his essays, "Blessed is the Man," he advocates the murder of Gentiles, if there is reason to suspect that they will kill Jews: "Jewish blood is beloved of God, and it is preferable to die rather than shed such blood, but in the blood of one who is not Jewish, the inverse of this hypothesis applies: Jewish blood is beloved of God and, accordingly, it is redder and its life is to be preferred."<sup>33</sup>

The fourth shell, which is consumed together with the fruit, is the army. On the one hand, this shell gains its nourishment from the outer shells, absorbing their values. On the other, the army seeks to protect the honor and sanctity of Israel, and its function is to grant Israel a more powerful standing in the Land and in Exile. Accordingly, the reform of this shell lies in its subjugation to Torah, and not in its breaking. According to Ginzburg, this shell nourishes the outer shells more than it is nourished by them; for example, senior governmental positions are held by leaders who emerged through the military system. He claims that the distortion of values in the army, and, particularly, the concept

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>33</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, "Blessed is the Man," in: Michael Ben Horin (ed.), *Blessed is the Man – A Commemoration of the Holy Dr. Baruch Goldstein, May God Avenge His Blood*, Jerusalem: State of Judea Publishers, 5755–1995, 27–8 (in Hebrew).

of the “purity of the weapon” feeds the weakness that denies the public true protection.

The shell of the army has a deceptive quality because, Ginzburg argues it draws on the positive value of protecting Jewish life in order to realize negative goals. If the army is completely subordinate to the surrounding shells, it becomes the executor of the wicked policy of the impure shells. The way to reform the army and disconnect it from the other shells is by refusing to obey orders, “out of the clear recognition that the Lord’s Torah and commandments take precedence of human commands.” According to Ginzburg, the call for soldiers to disobey their orders must be accompanied by numerous mentions of God’s name, of the commitment to the Torah, and of the special bond with the Land.<sup>34</sup>

The image of the shell is important, Ginzburg claimed, because it is vital to look honestly at reality. While the statist view reality as a mixture of good and bad and seek to enhance and reinforce good, the actual situation is one of “a tangible evil that stands by itself, and which must be broken, and only thereafter can we reach the desired good.” The fruit itself does not have the strength to break its shells; accordingly, the “nutcracker” must be an external force aware of the character of the fruit, and with the capability to communicate by telepathy with the inner fruit, “lest it crush the fruit along with the shell.”<sup>35</sup> Ginzburg does not specify what force will be capable of performing this task, but in a footnote he implies that the reference is to the King Messiah, who is completely unknown (even to himself) prior to his revelation.

According to Ginzburg, the function of the shell is to protect the fruit until it has grown. The shell then becomes superfluous, and, in fact, its ongoing existence may choke the fruit. The function of the shell is to permit the fruit to grow in a hostile and dangerous world. Ginzburg likens the fruit to the “Assembly of Israel,” a rabbinical term describing the Jewish people as a whole. He explains that during exile, the vision emerged of redemption, whereby the people would live in accordance with Torah, with God’s messiah as its head. However, the world was unable to accept this innovation calmly and, therefore, redemption began to “enter by stealth.” This explains Zionism through which, Ginzburg claims, a process of redemption was consolidated around a secular frame of reference based on the return of Jewish dominion and the goal of normalcy and equality with the other nations. Ginzburg does not accept these Zionist goals as an end in their own right, and rhetorically asks, “Through two thousand years, did we really seek no more than to free ourselves of the tyrant?” He argues that the liberation of the fruit from the shell will come when the Assembly of Israel experiences the establishment of an ordinary state, but does not find joy and innovation in this, and, subsequently, recognizes that only full and true redemption will give meaning and hope.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, “We Shall Stand by the Name of Our God,” <http://he/galeinai.net/aktualya/tzmautday/nidgol.asp>, accessed February 11, 2011 (site no longer available).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–3.

<sup>36</sup> *Saved Therefrom*, 25.

On the basis of his analysis of reality, the rabbi offers his audience a plan of action. He emphasizes the need to break the three outer shells and to dismantle the fourth. The spirit of Zionism, which is manifested mainly in the media, must be neutralized; Ginzburg sees this spirit as the main element that castrates and chokes any expectation of true and complete redemption. The shell of the courts should be broken through an intellectual demolition of the arguments of the court, highlighting the ridiculous character of these arguments by contrast to the wise laws of Torah. The third shell, that of government, should be uprooted by overthrowing any government, whether of the right or the left, until a Torah-based regime is installed in Israel.

As for the direct struggle against the eviction of territories and settlements, the rabbi urges campaigners not to portray themselves as weak and misfortunate, and not to complain of “the injustice caused to me and the manner in which I have been betrayed, even if such complaints are accurate in themselves.”<sup>37</sup> The struggle should be based on concern for the sacred truth of Israel, which Ginzburg claims is being trampled on, and on a recognition that the people are being drawn into an alien and self-destructive culture.

Ginzburg argues that an insolent and audacious approach is needed in order to prove that the faithful are not weak and cannot be mocked. This insolence should take the form of a disassociation from the state and its institutions. Ginzburg likens the secular and religious publics to two individuals attached to each other by their back; neither speaks the other’s language. The back is the state. One side seeks to use the state as the foundation for securing the objectives of the Chosen People, while the other hopes that the state will enable the people to assimilate among the nations of the world. The former group sees the state as the basis for the development and realization of the unique prophecies of the Jewish people in the form of redemption. The other views the state as a tool for the normalization of the Jewish people. Ginzburg argues that this it is impossible to maintain this combination, and concludes that “the right thing to do is to saw the two sides apart and separate!”<sup>38</sup>

Rather than form a new political party, Ginzburg advocated a complete separation from the system by means of retreat into an enclave. He argued that because political parties follow the rules of the political game, they are subordinate to the system. This comment could be interpreted as criticism of the “Jewish Leadership” faction, which advocates the lofty goal of establishing a Jewish theocracy, but in practice operates within the body politic, and thus becomes part of the establishment. Ginzburg calls on such groups to stop accepting support from the system, and launches a savage attack on the religious Zionist establishment:

Those who “sleep” with the establishment no longer enjoy any influence when they speak. Through a spiritual “flirtation” with the “spirit of Zionism,” through a self-debasing pleasure at the slightest sign of recognition or honor on the part

<sup>37</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, “It is a Time of Trouble for Jacob, but He Shall Be Saved,” *Saved Therefrom*, 102–3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

of a regime that is alienated from Torah, and through material privileges and budgets (which serve as a bribe to remain silent in the face of the bloodshed in the Land) – through all these, we are losing our power of speech.<sup>39</sup>

The rejection of state support and the retreat into an enclave are seen by Ginzburg as the only way to offer a real alternative. He claims that the secular establishment cynically exploits the spirit of volunteering and self-sacrifice that characterizes the religious public. Accordingly, this public must detach itself from society at large and “act for its own sake – for the House of Israel that declares God’s name.”<sup>40</sup> Despite Ginzburg’s frequent demands to reject state support, however, it is interesting to note that the building of the Od Yosef Chai yeshiva was financed by budgets from the Ministry of Housing, as the yeshiva proudly declared in a press release: “This is a splendid permanent home of some 1,300 square meters, constructed with the assistance of the Ministry of Housing and approved by the various authorities for use as an educational institution.”<sup>41</sup> While demanding an end to official support, therefore, Ginzburg himself continued to request and receive state funds; apparently, the Yeshiva receives state’s funds from different governmental sources: the Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Welfare, and the Housing Ministry.<sup>42</sup>

The ideal of separatism is based on the central argument that the faithful must not collaborate with the establishment. According to Ginzburg, collaboration and partnership create the illusion of bringing together opposites, but in practice serve only to blur the distinction between good and evil and to destroy the unique character of the Jewish people. In particular, there can be no cooperation with “assimilationist culture, with the vision of the ‘New Middle East’ that denudes everything that has been done here of any declarative commitment to the unique character and destiny of the Jewish people.”<sup>43</sup>

Ginzburg advocates an abandonment of the establishment and the founding of alternative frameworks. He does not seek anarchy or destruction for its own sake, but the founding of new frameworks as a basis for reconstruction. Rather than hindering or confronting the old establishment, efforts should focus on the formation of these new frameworks. This will require outreach to new target populations such as Haredi Jews and Diaspora Jewish communities. This process of disconnection and reconstruction is expected to bring complete redemption.<sup>44</sup> The following are the details of this approach, as described by Ginzburg:

<sup>39</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, “Leaving the Mare!” <http://he.galeinai.net/aktualya/tzmautday/aton1.asp>, accessed February 11, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, *Saved Therefrom*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/204093>, accessed May 10, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/22/1849432>, accessed September 1, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> *Saved Therefrom*, 117.

<sup>44</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, “A Time to Break Forth and a Time to Build,” <http://he.galeinai.net/aktualya/tzmautday/etlifrotz.asp>, accessed February 11, 2010.

1. The prohibition against collaboration includes the rejection of the use of curricula that “inseminate a poison that is the opposite of the Torah and sanctity.” Accordingly, Ginzburg proposed the establishment of a separate educational establishment, with independent funding sources, to promote the aspiration to independence and separatism. Such an educational system would include a program of secular studies from a religious perspective, with the goal of corroborating the truths embodied in the Torah. Ginzburg even advocated the establishment of independent universities as part of the central goal of disconnection from the public education system.
2. A further principle of disconnection was the approach to Israeli sovereignty as reflected in celebrations of Israel’s Independence Day. According to Ginzburg, the refusal to collaborate should include a boycott of Independence Day celebrations. He emphasized that he was not suggesting that people wear sackcloth and ashes in a public display of mourning, as is the custom among some anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox circles. However, he proposed holding a conference to proclaim their independence from the establishment. I should note that on Independence Day in 2010, scuffles broke out between students from the Od Yosef Chai yeshiva and the army forces that protect the institution. This confrontation may have been the product of the ideas promoted by the head of the yeshiva.<sup>45</sup>
3. The Israeli welfare services treat Jews and Arabs equally. According to Ginzburg, Arabs are the enemy, thus there can be no cooperation with policies that provide them with assistance, even if this approach leads to dismissal. Ginzburg rejects the approach of the Israeli public health system, which strives to heal any person without distinction, and prides itself on this approach. Accordingly, he has advocated the establishment of a Jewish hospital, “in which our enemies will neither be cured by us nor cure us.”<sup>46</sup>
4. A further plan of action related to the refusal to collaborate with the secular system of justice. Ginzburg claimed that any legal system that is not rooted in Torah serves only to add prestige to the Other Side, the mystical term for the forces of evil; accordingly, the faithful should not appear before such courts. Ginzburg called for the establishment of a justice system based on the Torah that could cope with contemporary challenges and compete with the arbitration system that is already widely used among the religious public.
5. Ginzburg prohibited the use of the secular media or cooperation with the media. He claimed that merely listening to an apparently neutral newscast causes grave harm, because the pleasant and authoritative tone of the newsreader creates an atmosphere that leaves no room for God’s

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1164357.html>, accessed May 10, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, *Saved Therefrom*, 121.

presence as part of reality. He called for the establishment of independent media that would be both loyal and profound, and that would follow an editorial line based on a distinction between good and evil.

6. Ginzburg called for the rejection of Arab labor and an insistence that all work should be performed by Jews only. He feared that those who were involved in the building the Land would ultimately demand partnership in the fruit of their labors.
7. Ginzburg's position on the subject of the army was more nuanced than in other fields. He did not call on his followers to disconnect from the army or to establish an alternative militia. It is true that, in one source, he supports the establishment of the "Army of the Lord," and mentioned the Temple Guard as the first component of a messianic army.<sup>47</sup> For the present, however, his main concern was to encourage insubordination. Soldiers should actively declare their rejection of the IDF's moral code, which Ginzburg claimed increased the spilling of Jewish blood. If a soldier lacked the courage to oppose the army actively, he should at least engage in passive action, including the refusal to take part in uprooting Jews from their Land.

According to Ginzburg, the uprooting of Jews from their homes is prohibited for several reasons, but above all because it is unlawful, by which he means that it is contrary to Divine law. The soldier should refuse to carry out such actions and declare them unlawful; therefore, placing one legal system against the other. For Ginzburg, the law of Torah overrules destructive and arbitrary mundane law.

On the basis of this approach, Ginzburg urges his supporters to enter the army "in the spirit of a fifth column – a messianic column." They should do so while intending to disobey orders, and to declare openly and audaciously that, as soldiers, they are sent to serve messianic goals, and to form "part of the army of messiah, to realize the hopes of Israel, and to be faithful to their true Commander, the King of the universe."<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, Ginzburg appears to be advocating rebellion within the army, rather than merely passive resistance.

Elsewhere, however, he emphasizes that he is opposed to violent revolution and does not wish to use violence against members of the establishment. He rejects physical violence against Jews as appalling and forbidden. "God forbid that we 'kill' the establishment with a sword. We must thoroughly change the public perception, and thereby destabilize the current regime." Such a revolution can be achieved only through persuasion and propaganda.<sup>49</sup> This approach highlights the fact that Ginzburg's revolutionary zeal is based on a holistic perception that the desired rebellion must be rooted in education of

<sup>47</sup> Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 157–9.

<sup>48</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, *Saved Therefrom*, 121–3.

<sup>49</sup> Yitzhak Ginzburg, "Leaving the Mare!"

the masses and popular will, rather than the mere use of violence. This is in keeping with the opinion of the mainstream religious Zionist rabbis that the ideal future state, based on the Torah, must come as the product of general will, through mass education and without recourse to violence.

I wish to argue that Ginzburg is using a double language technique, in which he expresses his radical ideas, but then moderates them. Maybe he is afraid to be interrogated or even arrested for his statements; therefore, he tends to leave loopholes for his defense. In a similar fashion, his Chabad mentor, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, used a rhetorical argument that claimed he was truly the Jewish Messiah, without stating it clearly.<sup>50</sup>

In 2010, the teachers at Od Yosef Chai yeshiva published the book *The King's Torah*, which presented a detailed discussion of the religious laws regarding the killing of Gentiles.<sup>51</sup> The identification of political foes as a “shell,” and their exclusion from the definition of the Jewish people as a whole, is liable to lead to an approach that justifies the use of violence against them, on the grounds that they are merely masquerading as Jews. This is a dangerous trend for religious rulings to permit violence in such instances (a continuation of the discussion is presented in Chapter 7).

A further response reflecting messianic retreat and a disconnection from the ideology of religious Zionism, alongside a rapprochement with the Haredi world, can be found in the approach of Rabbi Shmuel Tal, leader of the Torat Chayim yeshiva. This yeshiva was originally situated in the Gaza Strip; following the Disengagement Plan, it relocated to Samaria. Of the figures discussed in this chapter, Rabbi Tal was, therefore, the only one who was affected in an immediate and personal way by the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, as was the institution he headed.

Shmuel Tal's background is typical of graduates of the religious Zionist education system. He studied at Netiv Meir yeshiva, the Western Wall yeshiva, and Mercaz Harav yeshiva. During the weeks preceding the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Tal's students distributed leaflets in Gush Katif and Neve Dekalim in which they declared: “We are here for the King . . . We have been His warriors since ancient times, and this is a great joy.” They also printed shirts bearing the legend: “Who dares rebel against the King?” Such slogans emphasize the perception as God as the sole source of authority, alongside a rejection of the sovereignty of the State of Israel and of secular culture in general. After the Disengagement, Tal gave an interview for the Haredi weekly *Hamishpacha* [The Family] in which he justified his conscious retreat; the analysis here of his position is based on this interview.

Tal claimed that he was offering a new approach for the adherents of religious Zionism, based on a rejection of the affinity to the state and the aspiration

<sup>50</sup> Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem M. Friedman, *The Rebbe: the life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Yitzhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur, *The King's Torah: Laws of Life and Death between Jews and Gentiles*, Yizhar: Torah Institute by Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva, 5770–2010 (in Hebrew).

to build a spiritual world based on the Torah and in accordance with the teachings of the leading rabbis of the Haredi community. As if to underscore this shift of allegiance, Tal's yeshiva decided not to celebrate Independence Day in order to emphasize its disconnection from Zionist culture.

Tal emphasizes that an undeniable process has taken place whereby Jews have returned to the Land of Israel and are engaging in Torah study on an unprecedented scale. Thanks must be given to God for this reality, which should not be negated. However, he refuses to celebrate Independence Day, since "dominion has become apostasy." Tal argues that religious Zionism sought to adopt the positive elements of the state while rejecting its negative aspects. However, he came to realize that the national leadership in the broadest sense of the term, including the media, academia, and culture, as well as the courts and government, are all challenging the dominion of God. Joy at the existence of the state is incompatible with the criminal leadership of that state. Accordingly, a decision must be made: "Is God the King, or, Heaven forbid, does dominion rest with the regime that denies Him and fights against all He holds sacred and dear?" The faithful cannot be partners in the establishment of a system that fights against God to its last breath. The state is effectively controlled by a "rabble."<sup>52</sup>

In this context, it is interesting to note that Shmuel Tal's brother, Nachum Langental, served as a Member of Knesset for the National Religious Party at the time of the Disengagement Plan and was part of the very leadership that his brother rejected. This is a microcosm of the rift experienced by this public, where the ideological divide can split families. Shmuel Tal emphasizes that his disconnection is from secular leadership and culture, but not from the Jewish people as a whole; his yeshiva continues to be active in efforts to encourage secular Jews to "return" to the fold of the faithful. He believes that the secular leadership is utterly incompatible with a commitment to the Kingdom of God, therefore, he prefers disengagement: "We must stop leaning on those who beat us; we must stop praying for their well-being and maintaining them," he declared in the interview.

Tal compared Israeli media outlets such as Channel Two television and the newspaper *Yediot Acharonot* to the Arab satellite station Al-Jazeera and the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Manar*, and claimed that the Israeli universities are identical to the Palestinian Bir Zeit University. He argued that those who consider themselves part of the state must use its newspaper and its university; it then becomes impossible to distinguish between different streams, all of which become part of a single entity: "Then they are influenced, and consume their culture and their worldview. They lack the tools to distinguish between good and evil. Confusion is rife, and this confusion wins many victims among the national-religious youth."

Tal rejects the possibility of working from within to change the secular system; those who do so merely become part of this very system. Accordingly,

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.yoel-ab.com/katava.asp?id=18>, accessed January 3, 2010.



he decided to affiliate to the Haredi camp. During the period preceding the Disengagement, Tal met with ultra-Orthodox leaders who advised him on how to act in order to highlight his disassociation from the religious-Zionist public. Rabbi Chaim Kanyevsky instructed him to continue to wear his usual clothes, and not to adopt the typical black suits of the Haredi community. Tal explained the rationale behind this instruction: "It is important that there should be a spiritual source of reference for a growing public that is undergoing the same process that my students and I have experienced." The Haredi leadership moved into the vacuum that followed the Disengagement and managed to co-opt Tal's yeshiva. In the interview, Tal heaped generous praise on the Haredi rabbis, describing the personal attention they had given him, and the financial support they had provided for the yeshiva. Accordingly, he urged his former comrades in the national-religious sector to follow suit and join the ultra-Orthodox camp in order to lead a religious and conceptual revolution. Tal's yeshiva has come to function as the vanguard of efforts to "convert" religious Zionists into a non-Zionist Jews with Haredi orientation.<sup>53</sup>

The two previous examples reflect a tendency to retreat into a religious enclave as well as a pattern of increasing religious extremism. For Ginzburg, this enclave is perceived as a place of growth and development in order to create an alternative infrastructure for the institutions of the State of Israel, which will ultimately be overthrown. For Tal, the retreat into the enclave is a withdrawal into mental passivity; the disconnection from Zionism is accompanied by a general disassociation from political activism.

### Events of Amona 2009

Following the eviction of the settlements and the failure of the campaign against the Disengagement, a pessimistic mood spread among messianic religious Zionist activists. Before his incapacitation, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon left the Likud party and established a new political framework. Sharon claimed that Kadima was formed in order to establish a party that would represent the Israeli consensus and support his political plan to delineate the permanent borders of the State of Israel. He felt that the Likud would not enable him to implement such ideas in practical terms.<sup>54</sup> Sharon was subsequently hospitalized following a cardiovascular accident, and Ehud Olmert replaced him as head of Kadima. Olmert continued the approach formulated by his predecessor, and presented the electorate with a detailed political program. This plan, known as the "ingathering" or "convergence" plan (*Hitkansut* in Hebrew), also included a proposal to evacuate a significant number of settlements in Judea and Samaria, although Olmert did not provide specific details on this matter. During the campaign, opinion polls suggested that Kadima

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.yoel-ab.com/katava.asp?id=118>, accessed January 3, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> See *Ha'aretz*, November 21, 2005.

would be by far the largest party, although it ultimately obtained thirty-two seats.

After Olmert's declarations, the followers of Messianic religious Zionism prepared to struggle for the very survival of the settlement enterprise. Following the failure of the struggle led by the Yesha Council, which advocated passive disobedience and rejected violence,<sup>55</sup> it was increasingly argued that a much firmer position should be adopted in any future campaign.

The first signs of such a change came some six months after the implementation of the Disengagement Plan. The government decided to evict settlers in Amona, after the High Court of Justice ruled in February 2006 that the settlement was established on privately-owned Palestinian land, and was, therefore, unlawful. The eviction of the settlers led to a fierce clash between police forces and the settlers; the impression was that advocates of a militant approach among the settlers had gained the upper hand. The violent events that accompanied the eviction of Amona contrasted with the passive struggle waged by the settlers during the Disengagement Plan. It remains to be seen whether this change will lead in the future to more extreme responses in the event of the eviction of permanent settlements in Judea and Samaria.

### **Refusal to Obey Orders and the Exclusion of Har Bracha Yeshiva from the "Arrangement"**

On December 13, 2009, newly-recruited soldiers from the Kfir Battalion displayed signs opposing the eviction of an illegal settlement in Chomesh. Minister of Defense Ehud Barak subsequently ordered the exclusion of Har Bracha yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, from the so-called "Arrangement" – a framework whereby young religious Zionists can combine higher Torah studies with truncated military service in a religious setting. Barak's action followed the announcement by Rabbi Melamed that he would not attend a hearing with the minister. Barak justified his decision by stating that "Rabbi Melamed's actions and comments threaten the foundations of Israeli democracy. His comments incited some of his students to refuse to obey orders, to participate in demonstrations and to attack the spirit of the IDF. Accordingly, they have no place in a properly-ordered state. We must make sure that the IDF is kept outside the political debate."<sup>56</sup>

Rabbi Melamed is well known for his support for soldiers who refuse to obey orders to evict settlements. As a result of the protest by the young soldiers, and the army's desire to nip such protests in the bud, it was decided to punish the yeshiva, and deny it the legitimacy enjoyed by institutions that cooperate with the IDF. This was the first occasion on which an entire religious institution

<sup>55</sup> The Yesha Council did not encourage active opposition to the Disengagement, such as blocking roads, and indeed argued that such actions damaged the campaign against the withdrawal. However, it also declined to condemn such actions. See: "The Yesha Council Admits: The Bear Hug Was a Mistake," [www.a7.org](http://www.a7.org) (the website of Arutz Sheva), November 14, 2005, <http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/126462>.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3819370,00.html>, accessed May 14, 2010.

was punished collectively due to manifestations of religious radicalism. The abolition of the “Arrangement” with this yeshiva remains one of the clearest examples of the growing rift between messianic religious Zionism and the institutions of the State of Israel.

This decision led to a fierce debate within religious Zionist circles concerning the approach that should be taken by the other “Arrangement” institutions regarding the defense minister’s decision, and regarding the question of the refusal to obey orders.

Rabbi Melamed ruled that the Halachic obligation to conquer the Land of Israel is binding; even more clearly, there is a prohibition against relinquishing parts of the Land that have come under Jewish control. An Israeli withdrawal from any part of the Land of Israel is a crime and constitutes the worst possible desecration of God’s name. Moreover, his ruling added that no respect should be given to orders that are contrary to the Halacha. Accordingly, soldiers must refuse to obey an order to evict a Jewish settlement in order to prevent themselves from becoming accessories to a crime.<sup>57</sup>

Following the exclusion of Har Bracha yeshiva from the “Arrangement,” Rabbi Melamed published his position on the issue. He emphasized that he had always supported the army and urged his students to obey their commanders. He noted that some 150 graduates of his yeshiva had fought in the military operation in Lebanon in 2006, and all had returned safely. He said, the army is the people’s army, and its function is to protect the people against the enemy. However, when the heads of the defense system abandon this principle and use the army in service of tasks that are opposed to the people, such as the expulsion of Jews from their homes anywhere in the Land of Israel, they damage the cohesion of the army and create a contradiction between the Halacha and the military order.

The consequence of such a situation is the distancing of religious Jews from the army. Melamed claims that the creation of a conflict between the state and Halacha is a plot by the secular political parties in order to ensure their control of the state. However, this plot causes grave damage.

Melamed claimed that the freedom to express the position of Torah is a fundamental one that must be protected, even at a high price. He places the Torah above any human regime. Melamed even chose to quote John Locke, the father of modern political liberal theory, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court case of *West Virginia vs. Barnette* (1942) in an effort to claim academic freedom and his intellectual obligation to speak his mind.

Melamed declared that the soldiers who took part in the protest did not consult with him; had they done so, he would have advised them to refrain from holding their protest. However, *post factum*, he could only respect them and identify with their action. I should note that the implication is that, from Melamed’s perspective, the soldiers took the path of “zealotry” by deciding to

<sup>57</sup> Eliezer Melamed, “A Clarification of the Halachic Foundations of the Ruling Concerning the Refusal to Obey Orders,” <http://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/shiur.asp?id=1979>, accessed May 14, 2010.

commit an autonomous action without consulting with their teachers, on the assumption that their actions reflected the will of the community. Accordingly, support for such actions can only be granted after the event, as was the case with Melamed.<sup>58</sup>

The compromise proposed by Rabbi Chaim Druckman, head of the board of the “Arrangement” yeshivot, was for the board to draft a letter to be signed by Melamed, opposing the refusal to obey orders and the division of the army; the yeshiva would then be permitted to remain in the “Arrangement.” However, Melamed refused to accept this compromise. He argued that, as a matter of principle, he was opposed to the idea of making statements under pressure from the authorities, and added that he would not submit to the tyranny of the defense minister. He added that even if the defense minister had demanded that he sign “Hear O Israel” (a prayer embodying the central tenets of Judaism) he would have refused to do so, because it is unfitting to sign a declaration of a Torah-based position in response to coercion and pressure. The yeshiva was duly excluded from the “Arrangement,” a step that is not only symbolic, but also led to the withdrawal of some NIS 800,000 (about \$200,000) a year in funding from the Ministry of Defense.<sup>59</sup>

Rabbi Yuval Sherlo opposed Melamed’s position and criticized the general support for his stance among the religious Zionist public. Sherlo is the head of the Arrangement yeshiva of Petach Tikva, and he was almost the only voice that came out against Melamed. Sherlo claimed that those who are eager to confront the State of Israel regarding the fate of the Land of Israel are leading the people to the edge of a precipice. He urged the silent majority to make its voice heard. Sherlo claimed that the “Arrangement” yeshivot, which should be a source of pride and identification, had come to be seen by many Israelis as a threat to the state. Sherlo firmly rejected the claim that the eviction of settlements in the Land of Israel is contrary to the Torah, and even more clearly opposed the idea of refusing to obey orders in this context. He urged rabbis issuing rulings on such matters to reconsider their position. Their rulings could have a boomerang effect, leading to the dismantlement of the army and “the entry of our enemies into the space created by our ideology of refusal.” According to Sherlo, the advocates’ refusal to obey orders were creating a major division in the people, based on the tacit assumption that it will be possible to stop this division before the descent into the abyss. Sherlo added that the rulings in favor of the refusal to obey orders will lead the other side of the political spectrum to launch demonstrations in the army, so that ideological refusals will become a two-sided phenomenon. Sherlo views this approach as contrary to the way of the Torah and contrary to the Sages’ emphasis on promoting unity.

Sherlo continued by noting that it is unfair to ask a soldier who is personally opposed to the settlement enterprise to serve in the army and defend

<sup>58</sup> See the next chapter for a discussion of the phenomenon of zealotry.

<sup>59</sup> Eliezer Melamed, “Stand Bravely behind the Truth of Torah,” *Besheva*, December 17, 2009 (internet edition), <http://www.inn.co.il/Besheva/Article.aspx/8828>, accessed May 14, 2010.

the settlements, contrary to his conscience, while at the same time declaring that we will refuse to obey orders that are contrary to our own conscience. The “Arrangement” yeshivot formed an alliance with the army, according to which the army receives its best soldiers from the yeshivot, while in return waiving full military service on their part. The state benefits from a generation of young people educated in Torah, the path of religious Zionism, and committed to the state, while the yeshivot enjoy the possibility to educate such a generation. Sherlo declared that the claims by radical elements that the leaders of the “Arrangement” yeshivot are weak-willed and self-effacing is a gross insult and an offense to distinguished Torah scholars. Sherlo argued that Melamed, through his actions, was improperly endangering the future of the “Arrangement” yeshivot. The refusal to obey the laws of the state could lead to a situation where the public debate was pursued by means of violence on the streets, rather than through the authorized institutions of state. Finally, Sherlo argued that young people must not be educated to radical anarchism. He called for an end to slogans such as “the Torah before the state,” and rejected the claim that rabbis enjoy “academic freedom” to say what they please.<sup>60</sup> As can be seen, the gulf within religious Zionist circles is continuing to widen.

## Conclusion

This chapter reveals a rift within the messianic religious-Zionist rabbinical elite, as well as a shift to the religious “right,” to demand religious perfection as an immediate goal in the form of the Torah state. Post-statist and even post-Zionist ideas expounded over the last thirty years, which were then perceived as lying on the margins of the settlers camp, are now being advocated, in varying degrees, by the core establishment of this sector.

Several key trends may be identified on the basis of examining these statements. The first trend is typified by a sense of disillusionment with the State of Israel as currently constituted – leading to the adoption of an approach that advocates the replacement of the current regime by a theocracy – as a faithful manifestation of the era of complete redemption. The exponents of this approach called for passive opposition to the eviction of the settlements, and urged religious soldiers to disobey army orders. However, these calls did not advocate overt rebellion against the state. This may explain the relatively moderate reaction of soldiers who were graduates of the “Arrangement” yeshivot, the vast majority of whom did not act forcefully to oppose the Disengagement Plan. Nevertheless, those who represent this position exhibit a profound sense of disillusionment with the actions of the state – actions that are diametrically opposed to their worldview.

<sup>60</sup> Yuval Sherlo, “A letter to the Students, Graduates and Future students of the Yeshiva on the Issue of the ‘Arrangement’ Yeshivot at this Time,” <http://ypt.co.il/show.asp?id=36075>, accessed May 17, 2010.

A second trend sought to combat the Disengagement Plan by means of a profound educational campaign among the public; accordingly, it opposed any manifestation of violence, rebellion, or even passive resistance. The adherents of this approach viewed the Disengagement as a manifestation of spiritual weakness that could be corrected only through heightened spiritual elevation. Accordingly, those who adopted this approach called for a broad informational campaign to “settle in the hearts,” in order to correct the distortion embodied in the Disengagement Plan.

As can be seen, the differences between the two approaches are tactical. Both seek to establish a Torah state in place of the secular state; the argument is merely over which method: political activism as opposed to the activism of religious revivalism through the “settlement in the hearts.”

A third trend, though marginal within messianic Religious Zionism, nevertheless deserves mention. This position argued that if the Disengagement were indeed implemented, this reflected God’s will. Accordingly, the campaign against the plan lacked legitimacy. This trend, represented by Rabbi Yuval Sherlo, challenges the entire theological foundation of Gush Emunim, which views the integrity of the Land and the settlement drive as the manifestation of God’s will to redeem His people. It is worth mentioning that as years passed Sherlo seemed to distance himself from the radical stream, and he declared disagreement on several issues.

A fourth trend, also marginal but growing, seeks to retreat into the Haredi world and to remain passive toward the State of Israel and its policies.

Although the campaign against the Disengagement Plan didn’t cause a civil war, still it created a growing sense of disconnection from the state, and a revolutionary call for the replacement of it into a theocracy was raised. Truly, there is an opposition to those trends, but still those who oppose fall weak in front of the radicals. Therefore, we witness a process of radicalization that is pushing the rabbis to a stance of a world conqueror.

It is still too early to determine the trend that will become the most dominant. An objective examination of the behavior of the religious public during the period immediately prior to the Disengagement shows that only a minority participated in demonstrations against the plan. Of approximately 750,000 religious Zionists (about 15 percent of the population), and 300,000 residents of the settlements, only some 20,000 participated actively in the campaign, and only a tiny minority resorted to violence in opposition to the eviction. Thus, it emerged that the majority, while opposing the Disengagement Plan, did so passively.

Chapter 7 discusses the reactions of the rabbinical elite to political violence and incitement; this is another element that will enable better understanding of the movement’s future direction.

## Position of the Messianic Religious Zionist Rabbis to Political Violence and Incitement

During more than four decades of occupation, a number of settlers and their supporters have engaged in political violence. In this chapter, I examine the religious authorities' responses to these violent acts. The discussion focuses on two incidents: the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron and the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>1</sup> I also discuss the phenomenon of acts of zealous violence by individuals. Lastly, I examine the developing discourse on the concept of the "mixed multitude" (*erev rav*) – an issue that has been largely overlooked, but which I believe has the potential to prove highly dangerous.

The massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs was a shooting attack committed on February 25, 1994, on the Jewish festival of Purim. Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish physician from the settlement of Kiryat Arba (just outside Hebron), murdered twenty-nine Muslim worshippers in the Tomb of the Patriarch, a site sacred to both Muslims and Jews. The attack was the worst act of violence by a Jewish terrorist in Israel.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on November 4, 1995 in Tel Aviv, at the end of rally in support of the Oslo accords. His assailant, Yigal Amir, believed that the Oslo Accords threatened the existence of the State of Israel, and hoped that by murdering Rabin, he would prevent their implementation. The assassination had a profound impact on the political situation in Israel, and was perceived by many Israelis as a watershed in the relations between the left- and right-wing in the country.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ami Pedhazur & Arie Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination*, New York: Free Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Yoram Peri (ed.), *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

An examination of the attitude of religious leaders to these developments produces a complex picture. Though they generally refrained from supporting violence, they were sometimes reluctant to condemn it. In some cases, they showed a tendency to shift the blame to the victims, the Arab public, or those responsible for setting official Israeli policy.

### **Massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs**

The massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs was an unprecedented act of Jewish terrorism, both in terms of the number of fatalities and because of the fact that the perpetrator explicitly intended to die for his cause. As discussed, Baruch Goldstein was among those holed up in a bunker in Yamit who threatened to kill themselves during the Israeli withdrawal in 1982. Goldstein was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1956. He graduated in medicine from Yeshiva University and moved to Israel in 1983. Goldstein was an active member of Meir Kahane's Kach movement and lived in the settlement of Kiryat Arba, next to Hebron.

The response of Rabbi Shlomo Aviner to the massacre was characterized by ambivalence. Aviner began by rejecting the act, and emphasizing that if Goldstein had consulted with him, he would have told him not to undertake the attack under any circumstances. Goldstein was a physician who acted to save lives during his life, and who believed that he would save Jewish lives through this attack. Accordingly, Aviner added, even if we disagree with him, there is an obligation "to recognize and appreciate his courage and devotion."<sup>3</sup> Continuing this ambivalent perspective, Aviner found that Goldstein had positive virtues, and accordingly he awarded him the traditional epithet "may his memory be a blessing." He characterized Goldstein as a "gentle and wonderful man," who saved many lives in his work as a physician out of "devotion and caring."

Nevertheless, Aviner declared that an ideology based on "partisan Jewish terrorism" should be utterly rejected. It is immoral to open fire on a group of people who have not committed a grave crime, and it is prohibited to take the life of a Gentile without true cause. According to Aviner, Goldstein saw himself as the representative of the nation, and did not carry out his attack by way of personal revenge, but a nation cannot act in such a manner. Other solutions must be found to overcome evil. If the government is negligent in its duty to protect its citizens, action should focus on attempting to change its policy or to change the government, and not on harming Arabs who have committed no offense.

Aviner explained that the innovative dimension of Jewish life in the Land of Israel is epitomized in the principle of partnership and mutual liability. Accordingly, no individual should impose his views on others by force: "A

<sup>3</sup> Shlomo Aviner, "Of Faith and Revenge," *Its Land – Its People: The Struggle for the Land of Israel*, Beit El: Hava Library, 1994 (in Hebrew).



citizen who was given a weapon by the nation in order to defend himself cannot use this to wreak vengeance on Arabs on the basis of his own personal considerations.”<sup>4</sup> The nation has established an army and a police force in order to avoid the partisan use of force, Aviner emphasized, faithful to his statist approach, which negates the idea of individuals taking the law into their own hands and sees this as an offense to statism.

According to Aviner, Goldstein’s actions were the product of an erroneous perspective that fails to understand that the Israeli reality is one of gradual redemption, so that the state must be sanctified despite all its faults. He criticized the exponents of the Kahanist approach (including Goldstein himself), and claimed that their failure to absorb the statist approach was the reason why they were unsuccessful in winning substantial numbers of supporters and drawing people closer to the Torah.

Despite this trenchant criticism, Aviner emphasized that there was much to praise about Goldstein. He was not a wild maverick, but a man who had devoted his whole life to saving Jews. Aviner drew a parallel between Goldstein and the Prime Minister of Israel. Aviner said that people should also speak well of Rabin: he is not a traitor and does not mean to commit evil; rather, he believes that relinquishing territory is the way to save the state (these comments were made before the assassination of Rabin). Goldstein and Rabin both committed bad acts with good intentions. Aviner concluded that Goldstein “will be called to account for his action, but will also receive his reward for his good intention” – possibly suggesting that the accounting would come in this world, while the reward would be in the world to come. There could be no clearer summary of Aviner’s ambiguous response to the massacre.

According to Aviner, a Jew who is killed by Gentiles is called “sacred.” Goldstein should also be regarded in this manner, “having fallen in the heat of his intention for the freedom and dignity of Israel.” Goldstein committed a very bad act, as reflected in the security, political, and social ramifications of the massacre. However, according to Aviner, this was not the time for Jews to accuse or vilify one another. All should share in the blame from educators who left a vacuum filled by despair to the government that brought about the terrible situation that led to despair.<sup>5</sup>

Aviner’s response to the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs can be summarized by noting that he did not condemn the action in the strongest possible terms. He emphasized positive aspects of Goldstein, who worked to save Jewish lives, and even claimed that he deserved the epithet “sacred” after being killed by Muslim worshippers. However, Goldstein damaged the value of statism by taking the law into his own hands and committing a partisan act of revenge. According to Aviner, Goldstein’s intentions were pure, but his action was mistaken – just like the intentions and action of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Aviner blamed all sides – educators who failed to pay attention to

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>5</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “Strong of Face,” *Its Land – Its People*, 62–70.

educational gaps and the left-wing government, which was returning territory and causing despair among the people. My personal assessment is that this response is surprising; as a firm exponent of statism, Aviner could have been expected to condemn Goldstein's actions in more resolute terms.

Such a resolute response can be seen in the writings of Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun. After the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, Bin Nun launched a fierce attack on the settlers. He claimed that even if some part of the Land of Israel were lost for the present, because of the Oslo Accords, God would return them when He saw fit, as part of a process of redemption that was still only in its early stages. However, an internal rift within the Jewish people could endanger this entire process of redemption. Only the blind, Bin Nun argued, could imagine that violence could halt the political process; on the contrary, it would merely serve to accelerate it. Moreover, Jewish terrorism endangers and fragments the entire settlement enterprise. He argued that through acts of "insanity," Jewish terrorism could achieve something that the left had been unable to secure: the returning of territory and the dismantling of settlements.

Bin Nun defined Goldstein's actions as "desecration of God's name" (*chillul Hashem*), and launched a broad attack on Kahanist ideology, which advocates a war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. He warned that such an ideology will more readily demand the elimination of Jewish apostates than that of Gentiles or even idol worshippers: "Threats are already being made and the justifications have already been written." Bin Nun accurately predicted terror attacks by Jews against Jews, as would occur eighteen months after the publication of his article with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin:

Once words are spoken, they do not remain in the air. Others receive them and take action. Those who speak of the "crown of Pinchas" do not refer to the killing of Arabs, but to the murder of Jews, and not adulterers, but various types of 'traitors,' and I have already heard Pinchas' name mentioned in public in this context.<sup>6</sup>

According to Bin Nun, it is not difficult to understand the terrible frustration and foment caused by the plans of the "wicked left" to eliminate the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. However, those who seek to destroy the regime in the State of Israel, with all its weaknesses, in the name of a perfect and true messianic ideal are liable to lead all back to the days of foreign rule and intervention by international forces. "No promise of redemption and salvation can withstand the inner rift caused by the teachings of zealots."

Bin Nun argued that the decision that the Jewish people do not wish to rule over the Palestinian Arabs was taken during the period of Menachem Begin in the Camp David accords, which were supported by an overwhelming majority in the Knesset. In the Six Day War, Bin Nun claimed, God gave a wonderful enlightenment, and in the Camp David Accords He took this back. During the

<sup>6</sup> Yoel Bin Nun, untitled, *Nekuda* 176 (March 1994), 35 (in Hebrew).

fifteen years that had passed since the signing of the Camp David Accords, the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip had grown dramatically. An irreversible reality had been created similar to that regarding other key issues in the Oslo Accords, such as the status of Jerusalem. Bin Nun claimed that “placing the settlements in the same category as Jerusalem, as issues for discussion in the permanent agreements, may make the negotiations for the permanent agreements complicated and virtually intractable.”

Now, however, the entire enterprise faced questions and the tables had been turned, Bin Nun claimed. Immediately after the massacre, it was still possible to claim that it was the action of an individual man. However, the response of his supporters had shown the Jews and the world that this was actually an entire gang of fanatics armed with a consistent and systemic ideology who sought not merely to thwart the agreement, but to dismantle the entire State of Israel. In such a situation, did the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip have any chance of survival? Bin Nun argued that this was possible, if the settlement movement found a convincing way of maintaining itself without violence and terror.

To this end, he continued, the thugs and zealots should be isolated. Their approach should be condemned and their exegetical errors explained. Bin Nun also urged the readers to use their weapons solely for the purpose of self defense, and not for any other purpose. Attempts to create a private “balance of threat” were completely unacceptable. Bin Nun called the readers to ignore the propaganda of the zealots, who claimed that the army was doing nothing to protect them, and to refuse to accept the identification of the entire settlers’ movement with Kach, something that would only enable the left to take action against the settlers as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Bin Nun sought to combat the growing sense of despair among the settlers. He criticized the tendency to imagine that the left wing was not counted as Jews, Israelis, or Zionists. This approach led to a tendency to seek to destabilize the institutions of the state, challenge the government, and criticize the army, all of which would eventually encourage acts of despair and zealotry. He claimed that the approach he had adopted since the Camp David accords was that of “classical Zionism” – a partial and pragmatic perspective that aspires to achieve its full goals, but does so in small steps – another settlement, another home, and another road. Accordingly, Bin Nun supported the concept of “blocs of settlements” in order to secure international recognition while ending the occupation of the Palestinians.<sup>8</sup>

In conclusion, Bin Nun’s rage at Goldstein’s action was mainly in response to his concern that it would lead to an escalation in violence and encourage internal acts of terror against the nation’s leaders, as would indeed prove to be the case. His response focused less on a forthright condemnation of this specific act, and more on a criticism of the use of violence in general, which he

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 35–7.

<sup>8</sup> Yoel Bin Nun, “Anyone Who Leaves at Present is a Deserter,” *Nekudah* 178 (May 1994), 32–5 (in Hebrew).

feared could lead to civil war and obliterate all the achievements of the settler movement.

Unlike Aviner and Ben Nun, who condemned the massacre and feared its ramifications, Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg praised Goldstein's action. He was virtually the only religious authority who declared his support for the massacre.

In his writings, Ginzburg gives prominence to Halachic and Kabbalistic approaches that emphasize the distinction between Jew and non-Jew (Gentile), imposing a clear separation and hierarchy in this respect. He claims that while the Jews are the Chosen People and were created in God's image, the Gentiles do not have this status, and are effectively considered subhuman. For example, the commandment "You shall not murder," does not apply to the killing of a Gentile, because "you shall not murder" relates to the murder of a human, while for him the Gentiles do not constitute humans.<sup>9</sup>

In light of Ginzburg's determination that the Jews enjoy unchallenged substantive and ethereal superiority over the Gentiles, it is hardly surprising that he argues that if Gentiles attempt to harm or kill Jews, it is a commandment to stop them from doing so by all means. It is in this context that we examine the pamphlet "Baruch Is the Man," which justified the massacre. After this incident, radical right-wing circles justified the massacre by claiming that Goldstein's actions had been intended to prevent a major terror attack planned by Arabs against Jews.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult, however, to find any corroboration for this claim, which appears to have been invented post factum.<sup>11</sup> Ginzburg's pamphlet created a public fury; he was investigated by the police but not indicted. Further editions of the booklet were published in 1995 and 1996, and gained popularity in some circles; again, no legal action was taken against Ginzburg, although some sources in the State Prosecutor's Office believed that sections of the publication constituted a criminal offense under Israeli law.<sup>12</sup>

The article begins by praising and adulating Goldstein. Five justifications are presented for his actions: The sanctification of God's name, Saving life, Revenge, Eradicating the seed of Amalek, and War.<sup>13</sup> To summarize the message of the pamphlet, the arguments Ginzburg presents clearly reflect his strong admiration for the action of Baruch Goldstein. As he sees it, Goldstein not only saved Jewish lives, thus justifying his act of zealotry (the sanctification

<sup>9</sup> A fierce debate ensued after Ginzburg was quoted in the media as claiming that the commandment "You shall not murder" does not apply to the killing of Arabs. Yoel Bin Nun strongly attacked this statement. The journal *Nekudah* reported at length on the dispute between the two figures. See: *Nekudah* 131 (1989) 14–5. The following issue continues to examine the Halachic aspects of this debate.

<sup>10</sup> This claim was raised, for example, in Michael Ben Horin (ed.), *Baruch Is the Man: A Memorial Book for the Holy Dr. Baruch Goldstein, May God Avenge His Blood*, Jerusalem: Medinat Yehuda Publishers, 5755–1995 (in Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother*, 241–3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ha'aretz*, December 25, 2001 (in Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> I expend on this pamphlet in my book, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount*, 136–40.

of God's name); he also performed a kind of pure and purifying vengeance; a vengeance accompanied by a spiritual value that advances redemption. His mundane actions call out to the Heavens for their completion and for Divine intervention on the "great day of vengeance" at the End of Days.

### Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin

In November 1995, a further act of political violence occurred in Israel with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin was shot in the back at the end of a rally held in support of the Oslo Accords. His assassin Yigal Amir, who was arrested immediately after the murder, was a law student from Bar Ilan University who had a strong right-wing orientation. Amir believed that the Oslo Accords threatened the existence of the State of Israel, and hoped that the assassination would prevent their implementation. He justified his actions on the basis of the "law of informants" [*din moser*] and the "law of pursuers" [*din rodef*], two Jewish religious principles that stem from the principle that "if someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first." According to this view, the assassination of the prime minister was intended to prevent the death of Jews as the result of the peace process.<sup>14</sup>

The assassination was condemned by all official elements of the settler movement. The day after the assassination, the Council of Yesha Rabbis published an announcement mourning the tragic death of the prime minister. The announcement stated that: "The murderer's bullets which struck the prime minister's body gravely injured national unity, striking the body of the Land, and endangering the unity of the people and the future of the state." The Council of Yesha Rabbis urged the public to unite against violence and show restraint. The announcement went on to laud Rabin's merits as an Israeli patriot who had played a part in the establishment and survival of the state.<sup>15</sup>

The December 1995 issue of *Nekuda*, published approximately one month after the assassination, included extensive discussion of the act. Rabbi Yigal Ariel, from the settlement of Nov in the Golan Heights, fiercely attacked "those of little faith" who sought a short cut to redemption, thereby actually delaying its arrival. Ariel claimed that since the left-wing government took office, there had been a growing phenomenon of messianic impatience. While half the nation had joined the campaign against the government, a few individuals sought to thwart the process through an act of violence in order to force the nation and reality to bend to their will. Far from advancing their cause, they had damaged society and the nation and pushed redemption back.

Ariel recalled that the appalling actions of Goldstein in the Tomb of the Patriarchs had weakened the moral basis of the Jewish presence at the site and in the city of Hebron, and even threatened the settlement in the city. Similarly,

<sup>14</sup> See: *State of Israel v Yigal Amir*, Serious Crime Case 498/95.

<sup>15</sup> "Statement by the Council of Yesha Rabbis following the Assassination of the Prime Minister," *Nekuda* 189 (November 1995), 13 (in Hebrew).

the assassination of the prime minister had led the government to shift further left and accelerate its actions, while the right was paralyzed.

Messianic redemption does not progress in linear fashion, Ariel explained, and acts of violence would only delay it. This process cannot be imposed by force and the people cannot be coerced into accepting it. Ariel criticized those leaders who sought to emphasize the security dangers of the agreement, but went further and attempted to create a balance of threat in their rulings, hinting to the government that the entire fabric of society could unravel. Now, he continued, it was apparent that the public leaders and rabbis were not in control of developments, and no one could guarantee that other incidents would not follow.

There are those who have sifted and distilled from the Jewish sources every verse that speaks of hatred and force, creating a new Torah of the devil's verses, through which they educate to hatred, violence, and the clenched fist. There are those who have gone on to exclude tens of thousands of Jews from their definition of Judaism, turning them into a 'mixed multitude' against whom it is a commandment to fight to the finish.<sup>16</sup>

According to Ariel, the problem is not one of isolated individuals, but of an entire system that could lead to apostasy, as has been the case with other messianic movements in Jewish history, such as the Sabbateans. He warned that this approach could also eventually lead to the authorization of licentiousness, based on distortions of verses from the sources, eventually leading its followers beyond the confines of Judaism. The assassination of the prime minister, he argued, was evidence that there was no room for complacency or for religious Zionism to have a sense of superiority over other sections of the public. He concluded that the time had come to return to traditional religious Zionism, with its emphasis on love and positive action.<sup>17</sup>

Michael Ben Horin, an activist from the Kach movement who is also a resident of Moshav Nov in the Golan Heights, argued in response that the assassination had been exploited by the left in order to delegitimize the right-wing and its protests. He refused to shoulder the blame for the assassination, and claimed that if an entire public is shunned, pushed into the corner, and people are not allowed to hear its views, the public will eventually resort to violence: "Have you ever noticed how a dumb person speaks – with their hands!" Ben Horin claimed that the left was delegitimizing the entire right-wing, not merely the Kahanist circles, and that Yigal Amir had turned to violence after despairing about demonstrations and of the possibility to change the situation by appealing to the public. The boycott of Kahane's supporters and their inability to act legally pushed "Jews who care" to act independently, and prevented the possibility of identifying and restraining them and diverting their energies to more positive channels. Ben Horin argued that had the Kahanists

<sup>16</sup> Yigal Ariel, "The Deer, the Rhinoceros and the Snake," *Nekuda* 190 (December 1995), 44 (in Hebrew).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–5.

been allowed to run for the Knesset, Yigal Amir would not have been driven to such a desperate act. He called for the decriminalization of the Kach movement, and promised that he would act within the rules of democracy.<sup>18</sup> I should explain that Kach was prevented from running for the Knesset in 1988 because of its racist platform; after the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, the movement was outlawed as a terrorist group.

At a conference held four days after the assassination, rabbis and leaders from the religious Zionist community grappled with its ramifications. The media reported in depth on the conference, focusing in particular on the reaction of Yoel Bin Nun, with the result that the comments by the other speakers were largely overlooked. I begin by examining the remarks by two other speakers at the conference, before moving on to Bin Nun.

Rabbi Yehuda Amital emphasized that the prime minister was elected by the people; accordingly, the murder constitutes a grave affront to the principle of statism. Regrettably, he added, this act was committed by a person who considers himself religious, and who draws his justification from the commandments in the Torah. Amital noted that he had heard the assassin's explanations in court, and every word he uttered had been heard in religious Zionist circles over the preceding year, as well as in the printed and electronic media. He argued that in order to "cleanse the camp," six rules must be followed:

1. Halacha must not be used as a tool in political debate. For the general leadership, the people and the state, the Torah does not establish any unambiguous rule that will apply automatically in every generation or situation.
2. The religious Zionist community must abandon its tendency to delegitimize those of its number who express divergent opinions.
3. There must be an end to the delegitimization of the government, which was democratically elected.
4. There must be an end to the demonization of the government, which Amital described as an urgent educational issue. He warned that a profound spiritual crisis of religious failure could erupt if the government were reelected.
5. There must be no more cursing and insulting of members of the government.
6. The nonreligious public that supports the peace process must not be maligned as lacking values.<sup>19</sup>

Menachem Felix presented a very different approach. Felix was one of the founders of Gush Emunim and a central figure in the movement. Like so many in the movement, he is a graduate of Mercaz Harav yeshiva and a student

<sup>18</sup> Michael Ben Horin, "The Dumb Person Speaks with His Hands," *Nekuda* 190 (December 1995), 65 (in Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> "Document: A Soul-Searching Conference," *Nekuda* 190 (December 1995), 59–60 (in Hebrew).

of Zvi Yehuda Kook. Felix claimed that the need to engage in soul-searching following the assassination applied to all sides – not only religious Zionism, but also the left. “It is difficult to engage in soul-searching in a unilateral way, because this will produce a distorted picture.” Felix argued that the left had created an appalling reality in which a lunatic could fire three bullets into the prime minister’s back. Felix emphasized that any act of murder is reprehensible and must be firmly condemned. Secondly, after the nation united in grief for his death, Rabin had become the prime minister of the entire nation.

However, he continued, people must not retreat from the simple truth that the entire Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people, and that handing over parts of the Land to foreign rule will lead to disaster. Moreover, while after his death Rabin had become the prime minister of the whole nation, before his death the government was not one he (Felix) considered “Jewish dominion,” because its majority relied on the votes of Arab Members of Knesset. Accordingly, the government was illegitimate. It was true that some comments had been exaggerated, and there had been insufficient attention to fanatical extremists. However, Felix did not feel guilty and did not feel that his side of the political divide had been sullied.<sup>20</sup>

Yoel Bin Nun, whose comments sparked lively public debate, began his speech emotionally, claiming that if another political assassination occurred, the State of Israel would cease to exist. He agreed that the government was responsible for the security situation, and joined in the praises of the religious Zionist education system. However, he presented his colleagues with an ultimatum:

If all those who spoke of “pursuers” and “the law of pursuers” – and I know there have been such people over the past eighteen months – not isolated fanatics on the fringes, but Torah authorities. . . if they do not arise of their own accord and resign from all their rabbinical positions by the end of the *shivah* [the seven-day mourning period], this is an ultimatum: I shall fight against them in full sight of all Israel.

Bin Nun claimed that rabbis had issued rulings permitting Rabin to be killed. He urged them to resign, and threatened to expose them if they failed to do so. He urged the public not to shelter such rabbis, because were it not for them “no child would have dared to do anything.” Bin Nun argued that there are no religious laws dictating affairs of state, and the rabbis enjoy no more authority than any other politician in these matters. He expressed his concern that even worse things lay ahead. If another political assassination occurred, “it is doubtful whether there will be a Jewish state and whether we will survive; certainly there will be no religious Judaism.”<sup>21</sup> In an article published around the same time, Bin Nun condemned those who applied the “law of pursuers,” posing a rhetorical question:

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 62–3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 63.



Do we have an elected government or, Heaven protect, do we have revolutionary tribunals in the style of a Jewish Hizbullah that try people and issue rulings of what they call “pursuers” – in other words: despicable political murder? And then volunteers acting on their own behalf carry out these rulings in the style of the Sicarii zealots of the late Second Temple period. On this matter, our decision must be unequivocal: Such things will not happen in Israel! We support an independent and sovereign state and we oppose the “Jewish Hizbullah,” which would bring destruction on the people, on the Land, and – no less importantly – on the Torah.<sup>22</sup>

It is worth noting that because of his comments, Bin Nun’s life in the settlement of Ofra became socially unbearable, and he was forced to move to the Alon Shvut settlement in Gush Etzion.

Therefore, an examination of the attitude of the settler rabbis toward political violence reveals a complex reality. In most cases, the rabbis do not support such violence, but they are sometimes reluctant to condemn it, and show a tendency to place the blame for violence on its victims. This was particularly evident following the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, which a statist rabbi such as Shlomo Aviner was hesitant to condemn in forthright terms; even the condemnation of the act by Bin Nun was based mainly on the fear that such violence would later be directed internally (against Jews). A recurring theme is the attempt to shift the blame onto the Israeli government and authorities, claiming that violence is the result of the failure to provide security or efforts to silence the settlers. Alternatively, it is argued that violence was provoked by illegitimate political moves by the state. It is possible that the failure of the religious establishment to condemn the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in unequivocal terms led indirectly to a further deterioration, culminating in the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin. Rabin’s death did not mark the end of the phenomenon of political violence, which has accompanied the process of territorial compromise.

### Independent Zealous Violence

The past fifteen years or more have seen the emergence of a new trend of Jewish terrorism in Israeli society. The hallmark of this phenomenon are acts of violence committed by individual terrorists in an independent and spontaneous manner. In some cases, those involved show a willingness to sacrifice their own lives in suicidal operations. The perpetrators of these actions do not belong to any terrorist organization.

As previously mentioned, the first of a series of actions of this kind was committed in 1994 by Dr. Baruch Goldstein, who murdered twenty-nine Arab worshippers at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Goldstein, who was killed while engaged in his attack on the Arab worshippers, acted alone and without consulting anyone. His action was intended to halt the Oslo process and prevent areas of the West Bank being transferred to Palestinian control. A year later, in

<sup>22</sup> Yoel Bin Nun, “Cursed Be the Assassins,” *Nekuda* 189 (November 1995), 11 (in Hebrew).

November 1995, a further act of terror occurred when Yigal Amir assassinated the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Amir was also willing to sacrifice his life in order to assassinate the prime minister.<sup>23</sup> In August 2005, during the period preceding the implementation of Israel's Disengagement Plan, two acts of terror were committed by individual Jewish terrorists. In the first incident, Eden Natan-Zadeh murdered four passengers on a bus before he was lynched and killed by Arabs.<sup>24</sup> Two weeks later, on August 18, 2005, Asher Weissgan murdered four Palestinians he regularly drove home at the end of the working day in his job as a driver.<sup>25</sup> The perpetrators of both these actions hoped they would prevent the demolition of the settlements.

These acts reflect a profile of terrorist activity that differs from the actions of the best-known Jewish terrorist group that operated in the 1980s, the so-called "Jewish Underground." The members of the "Jewish Underground" planted incendiary devices in the cars of the heads of the Palestinian Committee for National Direction and attacked the Islamic College in Hebron, a center of anti-Israeli activities. Three Arabs were killed in the attack and some thirty injured. An attempt by the "Jewish Underground" to booby trap buses carrying Arab workers in East Jerusalem was foiled after the group was discovered by the GSS. The Underground also planned to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount in order to pave the way for the construction of the Third Temple.

The clearest difference between the "Jewish Underground" and the more recent terrorist actions relates to the approach to Jewish authority. The Jewish Underground saw itself as subject to the rabbinical leadership, and its terrorist actions received prior support and inspiration from several rabbis.<sup>26</sup> This explains why the group never implemented its plan to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount, because its members were unable to secure religious authorization for such action from the spiritual authorities they respected.<sup>27</sup> More recently, however, a different pattern of Jewish terrorism has emerged based on independent actions by individuals who do not seek the approval of any rabbinical authorities.

This changing pattern of Jewish terrorism is a result of a new religious ideology that is getting stronger among marginal groups within the messianic

<sup>23</sup> Michael Karpin & Ina Friedman, *Murder in the Name of God*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, August 5, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, August 19, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Following the exposure of the Jewish Underground, Menachem Livny, one of the founders of the group, stated that he had been inspired by three rabbis from Kiryat Arba – Moshe Levinger, Eliezer Waldman, and Dov Lior. The rabbis rejected Livny's interpretation of their support and claimed that their remarks could not be construed as support for violence. The Israel Police decided not to prosecute these rabbis. See: Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers*, Jerusalem: Keter 1998, 201–10 (in Hebrew).

<sup>27</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, "From Messianic Pioneering to Vigilante Terrorism: The Case of the Gush Emunim Underground," in David Rapoport (ed.), *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, New York, Routledge 1988, 213–4.

religious-Zionist movement. It glorifies independent terrorist acts as a manifestation of religious zeal. The license granted to commit violent acts of zealotry requires the adoption of a perspective that permits individuals to take the law into their own hands, based on the Biblical story of Pinchas (Numbers 25). The zealot challenges the Halachic framework; while the latter must respond to changing circumstances rationally and act in the interests of the public as a whole, the zealot acts only in the name of a Divine truth as he himself interprets this. A true zealot has no need for consultation – on the contrary, zealotry is a spontaneous and impulsive quality. A zealot claims to know best what is proper and just; he does not shy away from committing acts that violate formal religious law, and his violent mission stems from a burning faith. This zealous approach may encourage and lead individuals to commit acts of terror in the name of “Divine truth” on the basis of personal considerations.<sup>28</sup>

### Laws of the “Mixed Multitude”

Violence can be directed at those who are depicted in demonic terms or defined as traitors. In this section, I highlight a growing ideological phenomenon among extremist circles, whereby the domestic enemy (the Israeli left) is depicted as willing to abandon parts of the Biblical Land of Israel, and is castigated as the apocalyptic force of evil and as a “mixed multitude.” The use of the laws of the mixed multitude enables radical elements to remove the secular left from the confines of Judaism and, any physical attacks that may be justified on them. Accordingly, it is clearly important to understand this trend, despite the fact that for the present it is still largely concealed from the public eye. These laws are being studied and taught, and the phenomenon seems to be setting down roots in various circles. All the rabbis of the statist stream have mentioned this trend, condemning it and emphasizing its inherently destructive potential.

The “mixed multitude” is mentioned in the Book of Exodus (12:38): “A mixed multitude (*erev rav*) went up with them, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds.” The traditional Jewish literature defines the “mixed multitude” as non-Jewish Egyptians who joined the exodus from Egypt, and were later responsible for various problems, particularly the incitement against Moses and God. In the Kabbalistic literature (particularly the *Ra’aya Mehemana* and *Tikunei Hazohar*), this group receives particular attention, and the right-wing extremists base their teachings on these mystical sources.

Two leading scholars in the field of Jewish thought, Yitzhak Baer and Yeshayahu Tishbi, claimed that the epithet “mixed multitude” was attached to

<sup>28</sup> On the roots of zealotry, see: Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I Until 70 A.D.*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989; Louis Feldman, “Remember Amalek!”: *Vengeance, Zealotry, and Group Destruction in the Bible According to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004.

the leaders of the Spanish Jewish communities in the thirteenth century, after they were accused of offending Jewish morality and forming alliances with Gentiles in order to harm the Jewish people and distance the Divine presence. The Kabbalistic works claim that when the Messiah comes, the “mixed multitude” will be eliminated from the world. This formed part of their anticipation of the end Days as an imminent event in which God would reward the righteous and punish the wicked, including the “mixed multitude,” for their countless offenses.<sup>29</sup>

Rabbi Chaim Vital, who lived in the sixteenth century and was close to Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, sought to offer a different interpretation of the “mixed multitude,” which he defined as an intermediate group between Jews and Gentiles; in the End of Days, this group would be converted and brought fully into the Jewish fold. He viewed the *Conversos* – Jewish converts to Christianity who returned to Judaism in this period – as an example of this positive phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> However, the negative perception of this term based on the Zohar has since become accepted in all quarters. It is interesting to note the use of this term among the students of the Gaon of Vilna, that is to say around the time when the Enlightenment and Reform movements began to appear.<sup>31</sup>

The identification by ultra-Orthodox circles of modern Jewish trends as the “mixed multitude” is based on the writings of Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapira, the founder of the Monkacz Hassidic dynasty.<sup>32</sup> The members of HaEda HaChareidit, who broadly continue this Hassidic tradition, were among the first to identify Zionism with the “mixed multitude.” HaEda HaChareidit is a small group of Torah scholars in Jerusalem who consider themselves the guardians of the tradition of the “Old Yishuv” (the Jewish community that lived in Palestine before the advent of Zionism). Rabbi Yeshaya Asher Zelig Margaliot, one of the ideological leaders of this group, devoted several essays to a clarification and identification of Zionism with absolute evil.<sup>33</sup> According to his approach, a distinction should be made between “Israel” and the “mixed multitude.” “Israel” is synonymous with HaEda HaChareidit, small though it is, while all other circles do not deserve the label of the Jewish people. In the

<sup>29</sup> Yitzhak Baer, “The Historical Background of the *Ra’aya Mehemena*,” *Tzion* 5, 1 (1940) 1–44 (in Hebrew); Yeshayahu Tishbi, *The Teaching of the Zohar*, 2, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1949, 686–92 (in Hebrew).

<sup>30</sup> Shaul Magid, “The Politics of (un)Conversion: The ‘Mixed Multitude’ (*erev rav*) as *Conversos* in Rabbi Hayyim Vital’s *Ets ha-da’at Tov*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95(4) (2005) 625–66.

<sup>31</sup> See Hillel Mashkalov, “The Voice of the Turtle Dove,” in: Menachem Kasher, *The Great Period: Reflections on the State of the Nation and Our Holy Land at This Time*, Jerusalem: Torah Shlema Institute, 1968 (in Hebrew).

<sup>32</sup> David Sorotzkin, *The Supratemporal Community in an Era of Changes: Sketches on the Development of the Perception of Time and Collective as a Basis for the Definition of the Development of Jewish Orthodoxy in Modern Times*, Jerusalem: thesis toward a Ph.D. in philosophy, 2007, 193–203 (in Hebrew).

<sup>33</sup> Yeshaya Asher Zelig Margaliot, *Rise Up and Shine*, Jerusalem: 5731–1971 (in Hebrew); See also: *Happy is the Man*, Jerusalem: Breslav Press, 5686–1926 (in Hebrew).

messianic days, the Messiah Son of David will fight against the latter and annihilate them from the face of the earth. This group of Gentiles disguised as Jews hinder religious values, and there is an obligation to keep oneself separate from them. Even religious Jews, who are less militant in their opposition to Zionism, fall in the same category and must be kept at a distance; this comment refers not only to religious Zionist circles, but even to the Haredi political parties and their supporters.<sup>34</sup>

In his sermons, Rabbi Meir Kahane frequently referred to left-wing and secular Jews as “Hellenists,” which he considered a negative term for the supporters of assimilation. This perspective formed a central part of his philosophy.<sup>35</sup> While “Hellenism” was explained as a conscious decision to choose the path of evil, membership of the “mixed multitude” had the character of a genetic phenomenon beyond the control of the individual.

Rabbis Shlomo Aviner and Zvi Tau condemned and ostracized the use of the laws of the “mixed multitude” in the context of the political struggle for the Land of Israel. Their approach is that secular left-wing Israelis who support territorial compromise are a “wandering generation,” and they emphasize the moral obligation to help them mend their ways. However, to define such Israeli Jews as the “mixed multitude” is to exclude them from the Jewish people, and to place them in a category that is to be exterminated, rather than brought to repentance.

In 2002, I attended classes as an observer at the “Mekimi” circle, the ideological group of the Jewish Leadership movement. The session was devoted to a lecture by Shaul Nir, a member of the Jewish Underground who was convicted for murdering three students at the Islamic College in Hebron and served three years in prison for this offense. Nir’s lecture focused on the concept of the “mixed multitude,” on the basis of the book, *Voice of the Turtle Dove*. Nir discussed the Kabbalistic work and urged the movement to study this issue in greater depth. Though the members of the panel were polite in their responses, they were unsympathetic to the ideas Nir raised.<sup>36</sup> Four years later, therefore, it was surprising to see that the website of the Jewish Leadership movement published a comprehensive explanation of the laws of the “mixed multitude,” written by Yochanan Nakar, under the title “A Red Shell.” Over time, opposition to the use of these ideas seems to have dwindled in extreme right-wing circles.<sup>37</sup> This article was published before the implementation of the Disengagement Plan.

The article begins by paraphrasing the story of Little Red Riding Hood. The hero is likened to the religious Zionist public, while the State of Israel plays

<sup>34</sup> Yehuda Liebs, “The Haredi Community and the Judean Desert Sect,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (Adar-Teves 5742–1982).

<sup>35</sup> See: Meir Kahane, *The Light of the Idea*, Jerusalem: self-publication, 5753–1993 (in Hebrew).

<sup>36</sup> April 2002, Jerusalem.

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank Asaf Tamari for referring me to this article. For further details, see: Asaf Tamari, “The Mixed Multitude,” *Maftach* 2 (2010), 43–74 (in Hebrew).

the role of the big bad wolf. According to Nakar, the public should understand the “combat map” and identify its enemy. He claims that the manifestations of hatred for the settlers prior to the Disengagement, and acts of abject cruelty toward those evicted from their homes, heighten the sense that an alien force has penetrated the people. Accordingly, the author implies that those who hate the settlers are not true Jews; rather, their origins lie in the Jews’ mythological adversaries – the descendants of Amalek. He asks rhetorically how Jews could be so cruel to their fellows; how the Supreme Court could approve every abomination; and, how all the mechanisms of the state could support the prime minister’s plan for national suicide. Nakar then goes on to attack the religious Zionist yeshivas, which follow an approach of psychological servitude to the secular establishment, preach love for the wicked and sing their praises, claiming that they have good intentions. He emphasizes that in doing so they are ignoring the concept of the “mixed multitude,” according to which some people identify themselves as part of the Jewish nation, yet their true roots lie in spiritual evil. Such people have malicious intentions, an “Amelekite” power to hate Israel, and an inner desire to cause harm to Jews who are faithful to God and to the Land of Israel.

Nakar emphasizes that caution is called for in these matters. There might be a Jew who shows the characteristics of the “mixed multitude,” but who actually belongs to the soul of the nation and is a descendant of the holy patriarchs. However, this individual has acquired the outer shell of the “mixed multitude,” possibly due to the media. In any case, he continues, it is highly probable that the leaders of the nation – judges and media personalities – come from evil origins. The purpose of his study, he continues, is not to determine whether any specific individual is part of the “mixed multitude,” but to acknowledge the problem in order to combat it and avoid complicity with these “shells.” Nakar states: “The war is not a physical one, but a spiritual one.” The battle should be for the system itself – in other words, Nakar rejects the possibility of viewing one’s political opponent as part of the legitimate whole and as a scion of the Jewish race.

Nakar’s approach is based on his interpretation of the book, *Voice of the Turtle Dove* (1968), which is erroneously identified with the approach of the Gaon of Vilna (see Chapter 2). He argues that the shell of Esau is identified with the Christian world, and is responsible for delinquent Western culture. This shell is applying pressure on Israel to return parts of the homeland. The shell of Ishmael is represented by the Muslim world, which seeks Israel’s physical destruction. Both shells could not harm Israel were it not for the “mixed multitude” that assists them. He quotes the Gaon: “The coupling of Esau and Ishmael is through Armilus, the lord of the mixed multitude, and this may destroy Israel and the entire world.” Accordingly, Nakar forms the conclusion that the “mixed multitude” is the extreme left, which he claims has seized control of Israel and “is trying to turn it into ‘the state of all its citizens,’ eliminating any Jewish values and leading us to processes of physical and spiritual suicide.” The writer defines the nation’s leaders as “absolutely evil

men” acting through subterfuge and deception. Action must be taken against them, though Nakar again stresses that this must not include violent means.

Nakar argues that an excessive emphasis on statism and the tendency to ignore the problem of the “mixed multitude” has strengthened the establishment and is thwarting the campaign against the expulsion of Jews from Gush Katif. Such an approach empowers the wicked and amounts to collaboration with the “mixed multitude.” The approach toward the wicked leaders of the nation should not be one of forgiveness and love, but rather one based on “heroism, zealotry and even hatred.”

Nakar explains that the members of the “mixed multitude” were born to Jewish mothers, and have the appearance of pure Jews. However, their soul has its origins in the rabble that joined the People of Israel as they left Egypt. Since then, they have become part of the nation, and their souls are reincarnated in each generation. In the End of Days, when the world is redeemed, the matter will be clarified, and these souls will either become a genuine part of the nation or will be destroyed.

Therefore, Nakar’s assumption is that the “mixed multitude” will ultimately separate from the Jewish people and return to the Gentile peoples from whom it stemmed. His discussion of this issue, he explains, is intended to “overcome this group and combat it properly, and I emphasize without violence, so that we will be able to separate the People of Israel from this rotten core and awake a welcome inner rebellion against evil.” He advocates the disconnection of the people from its errant leadership, and its connection to the eternal values of the Torah, in order to reach redemption without the inciters who currently head the nation.

In support of his argument, Nakar presents a series of quotes from the Kabbalah and from letters written by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, in order to prove that it is not appropriate to show love for what he terms “the extreme left.” He concludes that a war must be waged against the wicked and against evil, and that action must be taken to expedite the establishment of a Jewish leadership for Israel to be a theocracy.<sup>38</sup>

Responding to the identification of the government of Israel as the “mixed multitude,” Rabbi Shlomo Aviner argued that those who quote Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook on this issue use isolated excerpts from his writings, ignoring other sources. He also claimed that they fail to understand the context in which Kook made his comments. Kook’s approach was one of the love of all Jews, and those who preach hate show a fundamental misunderstanding of his teachings. Aviner attacked the dichotomic picture such people seek to paint, and argued the hatred they preach may lead to disaster. He urged his audience not to listen to desperate hatemongers.<sup>39</sup> I should add that almost all

<sup>38</sup> Yochanan B. Nakar, “The Red Shell,” October 30, 2005, available at: <http://www.kehilaemunit.org/content/view/1965/19>, accessed May 11, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Shlomo Aviner, “On Those Who Cut Israel with a Knife and Say: Mixed Multitude,” *Its People – Its Land*, 12–6.

the rabbis from the statist stream discussed in this book criticized the approach represented by Nakar and condemned those who adhere to such views.

## Conclusion

This chapter described the attitude of the rabbis of the messianic stream of religious Zionism to the issues of violence and incitement. As we have seen, the picture is complex. When acts of serious violence against Arabs are condemned in mild terms, and when the victims are blamed for such acts, the conclusion can only be one of ambivalence.

Those who support zealous approaches, and whose supporters engage in spontaneous acts of violence, are gaining in strength, while those who oppose these phenomena are on the defensive and have seen a decline in their support. Yoel Bin Nun, for example, has been forced to leave Ofra because of social pressure, and Rabbi Shlomo Aviner also faces ongoing attacks from extremist circles interested in undermining his status as a legitimate religious authority.

The growth of an ideology that identifies political foes with absolute evil that must be eradicated, whether it is considered a “mixed multitude” or a “shell,” is also an alarming development. Yochanan Nakar’s previously discussed article secured the rabbinical approval of Dov Lior and Yaacov Yosef among the more extreme settler rabbis. Moshe Zuriel of Mercaz Harav yeshiva, who is also identified with the post-statist tendency, also approved the article.<sup>40</sup> Although Nakar repeatedly emphasized to his readers that his studies were not intended to promote violent revolution, it must be assumed that once the opponent is described in such negative terms, and the general atmosphere is perceived to be one of distress and siege, these studies may be interpreted in a more militant manner.

When violence passes without unequivocal condemnation; when encouragement is given for partisan violence; and, when radical ideologies enjoy support in the heart of the establishment, we should not be surprised if violence continues, and possibly even worsens.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.2all.co.il/Web/Sites1/hageula/PAGE1.asp>, accessed May 12, 2010.



## American Fundamentalist Response to “Land for Peace” Solutions

This chapter discusses American evangelical movement’s attitude toward Israeli territorial concessions, as a comparison case study. During the last century, many American evangelicals developed a very supportive attitude toward the State of Israel. For them, the success of Zionism, the territorial expansions of 1967, and, especially, the capture of the Temple Mount, were understood as a sign of the imminent return of Christ. Therefore, would Israeli withdrawals also produce a similar religious dilemma to that movement?

According to the National Association of Evangelicals, the biggest representative body of evangelical churches, there are four primary characteristics of evangelicalism:

- **Conversionism:** the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus.
- **Activism:** the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts.
- **Biblicism:** a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority.
- **Crucicentrism:** a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States in the mid-twentieth century, evangelism emerged from the fundamentalist controversy. Early in the century, an intense conflict developed between the modernists (liberals) and the fundamentalists (conservatives) in several large Protestant denominations. Some fundamentalists left their old churches and founded new ones when it became clear that they lost control over the governing boards of their denominations. The rift was ideological: the fundamentalists condemned the modernists for denying fundamental Christian beliefs and for rejecting the Christian faith. The debate was about the level

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nae.net/church-and-faith-partners/what-is-an-evangelical> accessed on June 22, 2011.

of acceptance of modern scientific discoveries and the level of acceptance of academic biblical criticism.<sup>2</sup>

The new Evangelicals (fundamentalists) prospered and they found a champion in a young Baptist evangelist, Billy Graham. As the movement grew, it was able to establish its own universities and training institutions, which gave them the appearance of intellectual sophistication.<sup>3</sup>

The movement made its way into American public life with the use of popular media. By 1960, the first Christian television network, the Christian Broadcasting Network, was established, and later other networks came along. Evangelicals learned to master the popular media. In the 1980s and 1990s, the evangelical movement greatly expanded when Holiness and Pentecostal churches joined the National Association of Evangelicals.<sup>4</sup>

In 1979, Evangelicals emerged as a considerable force in American political life with the formation of the Moral Majority. This coalition of conservative forces, led by Jerry Falwell, benefited from his television ministry. The Moral Majority was created in order to combat legislation, proposing increased rights to homosexuals and legalized abortions. They were also involved in promoting ideas for smaller government, a larger military, patriotism, and freedom for business. Another major issue was their unconditional support for the state of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, Evangelical Christianity is the largest of all religious movements in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

### **Historical Background of Fundamental Protestantism's Attitude to the Jews and Zionism**

The interest that fundamentalist and evangelist Protestants exhibit in Jews and in the concept of the return to Zion, as well as their support of modern-day Zionism, is deeply rooted in Christian millenarian beliefs regarding the second coming of Christ and the establishment of a thousand-year kingdom of God on earth.<sup>7</sup> Belief in the second coming was characteristic of early Christianity, though it was abandoned in the fourth and fifth centuries when Christianity became the dominant faith in the territories of the Roman empire.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wuthnow and Matthew Lawson, "Sources of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States," Martin E. Marty and Scott Appleby (eds.), *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 18–56.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Melton, "Evangelical Church." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2010. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. 03 Nov. 2010. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/196819/Evangelical-church>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> "Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity." *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd edition), 5, Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005, 2892.

<sup>6</sup> According to Religious and Landscape Survey, conducted by the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, based on interviews with more than 35,000 American adults, 26.3 percent of U.S. adults belong to an evangelical church. <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Leppäkari, *Apocalyptic Representations of Jerusalem*, Boston: Brill, 2006.

The revival of Christian millenarianism came in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Additional waves of messianism emerged in England during the revolutionary period in the mid-seventeenth century and again in nineteenth-century Britain and elsewhere in Europe. During the latter wave, there were those who called for the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland. Among them was Wilhelm Hechler, a German clergyman who developed friendly relations with Theodor Herzl, and helped him both to contact leading Christian individuals and to mobilize German support for Zionist aspirations.<sup>8</sup> In addition to their pro-Zionist activity, such people were often active in missionary efforts among the Jews.

From the mid-nineteenth century, messianic concepts began to penetrate Protestant denominations in the United States; by the end of the century, millenarianism had taken root among the more fundamentalist groupings of American Protestantism. For fundamentalist Christians, messianic beliefs lent an element of urgency to their call for a return to religiosity, spiritual rebirth, and acceptance of Jesus as a personal savior. The American fundamentalist movement became the largest and most dominant group among conservative Protestant movements throughout the world, which adopted the concepts and ideas put forward by its American counterpart.<sup>9</sup>

Two eschatological schools of thought in Protestantism influenced fundamentalist Christian thinking. The first, less widespread today, is the “historical school” that predominated in the nineteenth century, which maintains that End Times events have already begun and that it is possible to identify certain occurrences and developments fitting in with biblical prophecies that relate to the millennium. The other school of thought, known as dispensationalism, maintains that events connected with the End Times have not yet begun. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the dispensationalist school became more dominant among fundamentalists.<sup>10</sup>

The central concept of dispensationalism is that the second coming of Christ will take place in two stages. In the first, Jesus will reappear in heaven but will not descend to earth. In heaven, he will meet the true believers – those who were “born again” by adopting Christ as their personal savior. In an act known as “the rapture,” these believers will be miraculously drawn up to Jesus from the earth, while true believers who died prior to the appearance of the Messiah will be resurrected from the dead, also to be joined with Jesus. All of this is slated to happen in the near future, although no one knows exactly when.

The true believers will remain with Jesus for seven years (or three-and-half years, according to another interpretation), during which period the earth

<sup>8</sup> On the relationship between Hechler and Herzl, see Amos Elon, *Herzl*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975: 187–94; Vitoria Clark, *Allies to Armagedon*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, 98–109.

<sup>9</sup> Yaakov Ariel, “Doomsday in Jerusalem? Christian Messianic Groups and the Rebuilding of the Temple,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13(1) (2001) 1–14.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, 13–42.

will undergo “the great tribulation.” This will be manifested in natural disasters such as earthquakes, widespread floods, volcanic outbursts, hunger, and plagues, and also in wars, uprisings, revolutions, and a reign of terror in many parts of the globe. For the Jews, this will be “a time of trouble for Jacob” (Jeremiah. 30:7). Despite their return to their homeland, prior to or during this period, they will be considered “lacking in faith,” because they will not have accepted Christ as their Messiah. Therefore, their state will not be the hoped for kingdom of God, only a stage in the developments that will precede the coming of the Messiah. During the period of “the great tribulation” there will arise a ruler – the Antichrist<sup>11</sup> – who will pass himself off as the true Messiah and be accepted by the Jews as their redeemer. Taking over the rebuilt Temple, the Antichrist will institute a reign of terror. Jews who accept the kingdom of Christ during this period will be persecuted by the followers of the false messiah and some of them will even be killed. There will be a series of attempted invasions of the Holy Land from all corners of the world, and about two-thirds of the resettled Jewish people will be destroyed. The period of the great tribulation will end with the return of Christ to earth, together with his true believers, to establish his kingdom. He will defeat the Antichrist, establish a regime of justice throughout the world, and make Jerusalem his capital.

With the start of the thousand-year kingdom of God on earth, the surviving Jews will accept Jesus as their Messiah. Humankind will still be divided into nations, each with its own territory, and the Jews will live in their ancestral homeland, whose borders will be those of the historic kingdom of David. Their status will stem from being the chosen people, and they will assist Jesus in ruling the world. The thousand-year messianic regime will be an intermediary period leading to a utopian era, a period in which humankind will learn to know the Lord and serve him faithfully. As the intermediary period draws to an end, Satan will launch his final revolt and be everlastingly defeated. The earth will undergo cosmological, geological, and climatic changes; among other things, its physical area will be expanded. God the Father will join his son Jesus in ruling the earth; the day of the Last Judgment will be acted out; sin and death will be overcome; and, the world will finally be at peace – “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb” (Isaiah. 11:6).<sup>12</sup>

By the 1970s and 1980s, fundamentalist Christianity was on the rise in the United States. The Six Day War of 1967 was the catalyst that transformed

<sup>11</sup> Evangelicals have diverse approaches to the origin of the antichrist: According to Derby’s theology, he should be a Jew. However, according to the majority of contemporary views, this figure should be a European king who is not Jewish. Some would argue that the antichrist would be a Muslim. I want to thank Jason Olson for drawing my attention to this debate. See also: Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, 254–90.

<sup>12</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism 1865–1945*, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1991, 1–25; Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 1–22.

many American fundamentalists into avid supporters of Israel, because the war’s outcome was interpreted as a tangible omen of the End Times. Active involvement took the form of political lobbying of the U.S. Administration on behalf of Israel alongside philanthropic efforts within Israel. In addition, since Israel had captured the Temple Mount, some fundamentalists now broached the idea of rebuilding the Temple, a topic that became an increasingly central theme in fundamentalist discourse.<sup>13</sup>

American fundamentalists read the Bible literally. Therefore, they put major emphasis on Biblical prophecy analyses and the creation of the state of Israel plays a major role in their end-time scenario.<sup>14</sup> However, it would be interesting to examine their attitude to “Land for Peace” solutions. This chapter explains the theological base of “Christian Zionism” and the “Land for Peace” debate among these circles. It presents the religious grounds of Christian Zionism, as portrayed in the narrative of major evangelical thinkers. In addition, because “Land for Peace” solutions may be viewed as contradicting biblical promises for a greater Israel, the chapter examines whether their response would be similar to those of messianic religious Zionism. Would they oppose a political solution and would it be based on similar theological argument?

In order to answer this question, this chapter discusses the teachings of Hal Lindsey, John Hagee, and Bill Koenig. The first two are major evangelical pastors. They lead megachurches, and they are masters of the media with their own radio, internet, and television shows. They also have written numerous books that have sold millions of copies. In 2006, John Hagee established Christians United for Israel, a grassroots lobby organization in Washington, DC. Bill Koenig is an evangelical journalist who wrote two best-selling books on the “Land for Peace” effect on America. Examining these individuals will allow a better understanding of the movement’s attitude toward these theological, but also political questions.<sup>15</sup>

## Hal Lindsey

Hal Lindsey is an American evangelic and dispensationalist. Lindsey was born in 1929 in Houston, Texas, served in the Korea War, and acquired his religious education at the Theological Seminary in Dallas. In 1969, he wrote his best-known book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which sold over 15 million copies and transformed its author into an important and central figure. The failure of a few of Lindsey’s predictions in this book led some to regard him with

<sup>13</sup> Robert K. Whalen, “Israel,” in Richard A. Landes (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, New York: Routledge, 2000, 192–6.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 181–224.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Leppäkari had reviewed different approaches within the global evangelical movement regarding Christian Zionism. According to her, the World Council of Churches is more sensitive to the Jewish question than the mainline American attitude, in order to represent also evangelicals who are pro Palestinians. See: Maria Leppäkari, *Hungry for Heaven: The Dynamics of Apocalyptic Violence*, Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008, 123–5.

skepticism, portraying him as a marginal figure. Over the years, Lindsey wrote several more books which also sold well, with the result that he is one of the most popular authors of contemporary evangelical Christianity. Lindsey's books focus on Biblical prophecies regarding the End of Days, and on the search for signs testifying to the imminent realization of these prophecies. Lindsey has also become a fixture in religious broadcasting, hosting a weekly call-in radio program, Saturdays with Hal Lindsey, and interpreting current events in the light of Biblical prophecy on religious television shows.<sup>16</sup>

I have chosen to focus on Lindsey's thought because of the extensive attention he devotes in his works to the Jewish question and the role of the State of Israel for contemporary Christianity. Lindsey can certainly be considered one of the most prominent advocates of Christian Zionism.<sup>17</sup> An examination of his writings will provide a solid foundation for gauging the approach of the spiritual leaders of this movement toward the subject of Israeli territorial compromises.

Lindsey defines himself as a pre-millennialist. According to his belief system, which is discussed in the following, Christ's return is imminent and the End of Days will be preceded by a series of preliminary events as described in Scripture, the occurrence of which is close and even immediate. Although Lindsey's theology relates to diverse subjects, the chapter concentrates on his attitude toward the Jews and the State of Israel as well as his opinion concerning the level of involvement American Christians should show on these issues.

A review of Lindsey's writings sometimes leave a reader with the sense that the author has been strongly influenced by the science fiction genre of literature. Lindsey's exegesis of the Biblical prophecies is a pessimistic one of impending doom. His theology is marked by numerous paradoxes, which may also be reflected in the complex nature of his declared commitment to the Jewish people. My personal assessment is that a combination of the failure of prophetic exegesis and disillusionment with Israeli territorial compromises, particularly relating to Jerusalem, could cause Lindsey to shift his opinions in this sphere.

This chapter focuses on three essays written by Lindsey and analyzes the narrative they present regarding his attitude toward the Jews and the State of Israel. We begin with Lindsey's most famous book.

### *The Late Great Planet Earth*

Lindsey relates that *The Late Great Planet Earth* was written against the background of his experiences in the late 1960s, as a missionary active on American campuses as part of the Campus Crusade for Christ and the encounters with students this position offered him. These were the peak years of hippie culture among young Americans and the youth rebellion centered on a number of

<sup>16</sup> Gordon J. Melton, Phillip C. Lucas, and Jon R. Stone, "Hal Lindsey," *Prime-Time Religion: An Encyclopedia of Religious Broadcasting*, 1997, Oryx Press. Online source.

<sup>17</sup> For analysis of his early works, see Timothy Weber, *When Time*, 204–26.

college campuses in California where Lindsey was active, such as UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University. The counter-culture of the time included extensive drug use, the ideological promotion of sexual promiscuity, and the influence of new and Eastern religious philosophies. As a generalization, the hippie culture of the 1960s tended to be open to ideas and trends from outside the mainstream of American culture. Evangelical missionaries were also active on these campuses, and as the hippie age neared its end, they convinced significant numbers of students to adopt their approach.<sup>18</sup>

Lindsey later claimed that his book was intended not only for inquisitive young Americans, but also for the Jewish audience. His book begins with events described by the prophets Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, including a description of their prophecies and the forms in which these were realized. He then proceeded to describe two types of messiah presented in the Hebrew Bible – the humble servant, on the one hand, and the military leader and king on the other. How can these contradictory characteristics be represented in a single individual?

According to Lindsey, the Pharisaical Judaism of the late Second Temple period rejected the mission of Jesus of Nazareth because it anticipated a messiah who would be a military leader and could defeat the Roman legions and gain independence for the Kingdom of Judah. Accordingly, it saw the prophecies of the suffering messiah as mere allegory and was unwilling to accept Christ’s gospel. Moreover, rabbinical Judaism had deteriorated in this age to a point where the observance of religious law was considered sufficient, and it no longer felt the urgent need for a messiah.

Jesus showed that God examined the heart, not only actions, contrary to the rabbinical focus on observance of the commandments. According to Lindsey, religious law is a package deal – all or nothing. It is impossible to observe all the commandments perfectly; therefore, Jesus gave humanity the possibility of accepting God through the Holy Spirit and through purity of faith, a bridge for an imperfect man to perfection.

According to Lindsey, the Jewish leadership sought a messiah who would bring Israel out of slavery to the nations, but it was indifferent to the spiritual needs of the public. The Jewish leaders were skeptical about Jesus, demanding proof of his messianic quality. He showed them ample signs, healing the sick and bringing at least one person back from the dead, but they still refused to accept the evidence. According to Lindsey, the Bible is full of proof of Jesus’ status as the messiah, and all the earlier prophecies were fulfilled during his lifetime.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, he criticizes rabbinical Judaism for its refusal to accept Christ. Despite this, however, Lindsey believes that the Jews still have a function to play in the context of the End of Days.

Lindsey attaches unique importance to the establishment of the State of Israel and the conquest of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in the Six Day

<sup>18</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000, 200–19.

<sup>19</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970, 27–31.

War (1967). He views the survival of the Jewish people as an exceptional phenomenon, particularly given their history of persecution and distress. He believes that the renewal of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel is an event predicted in the Biblical prophecies, and forms part of the realization of the messianic vision of Christ's return and the end of history. The renewal of Jewish nationhood and the conquest of Jerusalem should lead to the building of the Temple on its historical site on the Temple Mount. These events must occur before Christ returns to establish his eternal kingdom and to convert the Jews.<sup>20</sup>

Lindsey draws on an image from the New Testament (Matthew 24:32–33) to explain that when the branches of the fig tree become tender and send forth leaves, we can know that the summer is coming: "So you, too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door." According to Lindsey, the growth of the fig leaves represent the establishment of the State of Israel, and the implication is that the redeemer is already prepared for his return. For Lindsey, there can be no clearer sign of the imminence of redemption than the Jewish restoration at the Land of Israel and the conquest of Jerusalem: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."<sup>21</sup>

Lindsey defines redemption within the confines of a "generation," thus the need arises to define what constitutes a generation. The Bible defines a generation as approximately forty years, and accordingly Lindsey calculates that if we add forty to 1948, the year when The State of Israel was established, the return of the redeemer can be anticipated in 1988.<sup>22</sup>

The establishment of Israel and the conquest of Jerusalem must be accompanied by a third stage, the foundation of the Temple. Lindsey is aware of the presence of the Muslim mosque on the site of the ancient Temple, and recognizes that this mosque is of great importance to Islam. His response is vague: "Obstacle or no obstacle, it is certain that the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it."<sup>23</sup>

According to Lindsey, the sacrifices must be reinstated in the Temple. At the same time, a prince will emerge in Rome and form a peaceful alliance with the Jews; he will become the leader of the Western world. This leader must then break the alliance and desecrate the Temple, an event that precedes the countdown of seven years of Great Tribulations preceding the return of the King Messiah. Interestingly, the role of the antichrist in Lindsey's description is not filled by the Jew, as is customary in early dispensationalist literature.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 55–7.



It should be noted that at the time the essay was written, Dennis Rohan, a man from a Christian background similar to that of Lindsey, set fire to the Dome of the Rock, hoping that the removal of the mosque would pave the way for the realization of the End Days prophecies.<sup>25</sup> Lindsey quotes the far-right Israeli historian Israel Eldad, who has supported the idea of rebuilding the Temple and reinstating the sacrifices.<sup>26</sup> According to Eldad, as quoted by Lindsey, the question of the mosque on the Temple Mount is an open one; perhaps an earthquake will occur on the site. This reflects an assumption that the removal of the mosque should be the result of an event not demanding human activism. According to Lindsey, rebuilding the Temple is an idea harbored by pious Jews and key officials in the Israeli government; the realization of this vision would be the most important possible harbinger of Christ's return. The Biblical prophecies are interpreted in a manner akin to a jigsaw puzzle, in which all the pieces will soon fall into place.<sup>27</sup>

After the establishment of Israel, Lindsey continues, an impenetrable problem was created in the form of Jewish-Arab hostility. The Jews will never be convinced that they should leave the Land of Israel, their ancestral homeland usurped from them by the Romans. Generations of persecution have taught them that they do not have a safe haven anywhere in the world, and that remaining in Israel is a question of survival. This is their only hope in the face of Muslim hostility. For their part, the Arabs will never be willing to accept the Israeli occupation, and will always see it as a matter of racial honor and a sacred task to rid the land of the Israelis.<sup>28</sup>

Lindsey predicts the conflict in the Middle East will continue to deteriorate until it threatens the entire world. He claims that international forces are already beginning to prepare for a world war. After the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, a world war will erupt as prophesied by the Book of Revelation. Forces from across the world will attack the State of Israel: A Russian-Iranian alliance from the north, African and Arab forces from the south, two hundred million soldiers from China and Japan to the east, and the united forces of Europe, led by the antichrist, from the west. These forces will meet in Armageddon – the Valley of Megiddo – for a war that will reach the gates of Jerusalem. This is the final apocalyptic war, leading to the End of Days.<sup>29</sup>

While the forces prepare for war, the true believers will be drawn up into the heavens to join Christ's army (The Rapture). Back on Earth, 144,000 Jews will accept the belief in Christ and set out to evangelize the world. Therefore, the

<sup>25</sup> Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days – Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 107–10.

<sup>26</sup> On the idea of a Torah state and the rebuilding of the Temple as expounded by Eldad and the circle of writers from the journal *Sulam*, see my book *Jewish Fundamentalism*: 55–66.

<sup>27</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late*, 56.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 146–68.

Jews, or rather a remnant from among them, will take on the task of serving as disciples of Jesus, spreading his message through the world. When the Jews see the force of God, and Jesus of Nazareth, one-third of them will convert and thereby be saved.

Just as humanity realizes that it is facing extinction because of the war, Jesus will appear to save it from self-destruction. When he returns, he will rule the world, and a period of 1,000 years will ensue, after which a further rebellion against his leadership will be crushed. Thereafter, Lindsey concludes, human history will change and there will no longer be such a concept as humanity without faith (secularism).<sup>30</sup>

Thus, we see that this book reflects the function of the establishment of the State of Israel as a catalyst for messianic expectations. The most significant event in this respect is the outcome of the 1967 War and the return of Jerusalem to Jewish rule. Lindsey's literal interpretation of the Biblical prophecies regarding the End of Days led him to anticipate apocalyptic events in Jerusalem, including the rebuilding of the Temple on its original site.

The commercial success of this book, which as noted sold millions of copies, may reflect the popularity of these ideas at the time. The book marks an important milestone in the history of Christian Zionism, which was to reemerge with the rise of the Christian right-wing as an important political force in the United States from the 1970s.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Road to Holocaust*

The success of *The Late Great Planet Earth* ultimately damaged its author, whose reputation was severely tarnished after the dramatic events he anticipated failed to materialize – particularly, his claim that Christ would return ahead of 1988. A year later, in 1989, Lindsey published another book in which he examines in depth his position regarding the Jews. In some respects, this book reflects changes relative to his earlier views.

*The Road to Holocaust* was written as a challenge to Christian Reconstruction, an evangelist stream that was of growing importance at the time. Lindsey believed that this stream had fallen into a theological error that was leading it to antisemitism and distortion. He identified three dimensions to this error: The allegorical interpretation of Scripture; a view of the Church as replacing Israel in the Divine promise; and, the advocacy of theocracy as the ideal model for a Christian way of life.

Lindsey begins his case by identifying the origins of Christian antisemitism in the theology of Origen Adamantius (c. 185–254), one of the Fathers of the Church. Origen developed an allegorical approach to the interpretation of the Biblical prophecies, thus enabling the Church of Rome to claim that it had replaced Israel as the historical subject of the Divine promise.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 169–79.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Lindsey proposes a number of basic assumptions regarding the historical Church:

1. The apostles were individuals who had direct contact with Jesus and learned directly from him.
2. They believed that the Jewish people should secure its redemption through the establishment of a theocratic regime embodied in the return of Christ, who would rule for 1,000 years.
3. They believed that Christ could return at any moment, and anticipated that the believers would be raptured along by faith, although they did not define the nature of this process.
4. They anticipated the Great Tribulations preceding the return of the messiah.
5. They believed that an antichrist would appear during the tribulations and perform miracles.
6. They continued to hold these beliefs even after the destruction of the Temple (70 A.D.).

The apostles believed that the Jews were the chosen people, through whom God would realize His promises of redemption. They had a positive attitude toward the Jews, and believed that God would judge anyone who harmed them, on the basis of God's promise to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you” (Genesis 12:2–3). As Christianity developed into the official religion of the Roman Empire, its underlying theology changed and, according to Lindsey, it began to act in a manner contrary to the teachings of the Son of God.<sup>32</sup>

Lindsey rejects the claim that the covenant made between God, Abraham, and his seed – the Jewish people – was nullified, and that the Church replaced Israel as the recipient of the promise. One of God's promises is that the messiah will come from the House of David, and Lindsey argues that Jesus of Nazareth met this requirement, and will serve as the messiah for Israel and for all those who enter faith through him.<sup>33</sup>

The covenant with the Jews is still valid; but the question that arises is “Who is a Jew?” Lindsey rejects the Jewish responses to this question, such as ethnic identification on the basis of matrilineal descent, the observance of the commandments, or identification with the various streams of modern Judaism. He is particularly scornful of Orthodox Judaism, which he considers the descendent of the approach of the Pharisees with its emphasis on religious law. According to Lindsey, the Jew who will enjoy the realization of the Divine promises is he whose heart is open to accept Christ as messiah.<sup>34</sup>

Regarding Jewish religious law, also known as the Halacha, Lindsey argues that the crucifixion of Jesus eliminated the need to follow the law, because

<sup>32</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust*, New York: Bantam Book, 1989, 10–1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 127–8.

Jesus' penance on the cross created the possibility for humans to accept grace into their hearts and thereby secure salvation. Any attempt to maintain a way of life based on religious law is doomed to failure, and the attempt to live in accordance with the laws of Moses is contrary to the spirit of the law and the reasons for which it was given. Accepting grace and salvation through faith is the only way to bring the principles of the law into the human heart. The Pharisees refused to accept this principle and clung to the dry letter of the law, without realizing the added value of faith in Christ; therefore, they were rejected by God. Accordingly, any Christian stream that seeks to maintain a theocratic and legalistic way of life should learn the lesson of the Pharisees and of Judaism: humans must come to God through faith, not through works.

Faithful to his fundamentalist worldview, Lindsey emphasizes that Scripture must be read literally, rejecting the allegorical approach that characterized the Roman Catholic Church. A literal reading, he argues, validates an understanding of the significance of the covenant between Israel and God, whereas allegory leads to theological errors.<sup>35</sup>

Lindsey claims that the relationship between Israel and God includes three stages: election, rejection, and reacceptance. The idea of election led to the promise of an unbreakable covenant. However, the Jews were rejected by God because of their lack of understanding and their adhesion to commandments rather than faith. The rehabilitation of the covenant with Israel, which has its beginnings in the establishment of the State of Israel, demands the refinement of Judaism and the application of the principle of grace and faith. God must fulfill His promises; otherwise, who can guarantee that He will meet His promises to the Church?<sup>36</sup>

The failure of the Pharisees to understand the meaning of grace and their insistence on basing their faith on observance of the law led God to harden their heart. According to Lindsey, law and grace are mutually incompatible. When walking in God's path is based on law, it will inevitably lead to its violation. If religion is maintained through faith, on the other hand, it can realize the just components of the law. Accordingly, he concludes that God transferred His favor to the Gentiles after the Jews failed, in order to cause them to be jealous and mend their ways. Thus, there arises a need for an ultimate redemption intended for the Jewish people: the stage of rejection is only temporary, and once it is reached, it will be possible to achieve their spiritual reform.<sup>37</sup>

Lindsey views the vision of the dry bones, as described in the Book of Ezekiel, as a model for the current resurgence of Jewish nationhood – dry bones coming together without soul, after which spiritual realization will follow. In other

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 123–47.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 172–3.

words, the Jewish entity was established without faith, and its redemption must come through a Church.<sup>38</sup> From a comparative perspective, it is interesting to note that messianic religious Zionism developed a similar model, describing the emergence of secular Zionism as a body without a soul, while during the period of final redemption the masses will return to the faith.

Gentiles and Jews have been promised salvation, which they can achieve through a personal union with Christ. The Church is the body of Christ and baptism through the Holy Spirit is the way for both Jews and Gentiles to enter Christ. Jesus was born from the seed of Abraham, and this principle does not nullify the covenant made with the physical seed of Abraham. Therefore, the Gentiles enter and are supported by Israel through their union with Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Lindsey attacks the theocratic ideal as presented in the writings of the Reconstructionist Christian stream, based on the observance of religious law as religious fulfillment. The theocratic ideal leads to a political desire to change the nature of government in America, abolish the separation of religion and state, and impose religious law as the law of the state. Accordingly, this movement entails a strong element of political revolution. Lindsey argues that only through the return of Christ will the time come for the complete kingdom; this is not the case now. Therefore, he suggests that the current role of the Church is evangelization and conversion in preparation for the End of Days, while it is God's function to establish His kingdom on earth in the form of a religious theocracy in the End of Days.<sup>40</sup> As a consequence of this position, Lindsey advocates a clear separation of church and state and political passivity, while political matters are postponed until the messianic era: "This doesn't mean that Christians shouldn't run for government positions, but it does mean that the church is not to focus on these programs as its major focus."<sup>41</sup>

Lindsey argues that Jesus taught obedience to authority, unless this is contrary to God's law. Humans should live in harmony with civil law, which is intended to enable as many people as possible to come to Christ in salvation, by the experience of being born again. Only God can change the state of creation into the desired millennium in which He will cover the earth. In the meantime, Christians must spread the gospel.

Lindsey's conclusion is that mission work is the most important task facing the true Christian, rather than theocratic realization, which he believes is contrary to the spirit of Christianity in the current stage. Confidence in redemption enables the short-term postponement of gratification, because once the Redeemer returns the order of creation will change. This is a passive political

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–81.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

vision that advocates integration in the existing fabric of American life. The same approach evidently influences Lindsey's approach to American foreign policy in the Middle East, as the following section discusses.

### ***Will Mankind Survive?***

In 1994, Lindsey published a new book in which he discussed his predictions with his readers.<sup>42</sup> He continued to predict imminent redemption around the year 2000 as the target date and the beginning of the new millennium. He claimed that during the twenty-five years that had passed since he published his first book, the Holy Spirit gave him a more accurate perspective, and that this was the motivation for his latest work.

Lindsey rejected the proposition that the year 2000 itself bore any special significance. However, no one with an interest in the Biblical prophecies could deny the importance of the beginning of the third millennium. Though he could not predict whether the year 2000 would prove significant, he added: "I do know this: The final seven years countdown leading to the return of Jesus could occur even before the year 2000. It could literally begin today, tomorrow or next week . . . The long awaited Messiah of the Bible is coming soon."<sup>43</sup>

According to Lindsey, Jesus promised that the same generation that saw the resurgence of the Jewish people in its land would see his own return. The Jewish people declared its independence in 1948, and conquered Jerusalem in 1967. A Biblical generation is between forty and one hundred years, so that the time remaining cannot be long.

Lindsey presented a long list of events he had forecast successfully. He emphasized that he had not predicted the return of Christ in 1988, but merely noted that if a generation is forty years, and if the fig tree began to send forth its shoots in 1948, then the Messiah could arrive in 1988. He stressed that his forecast included many "ifs" and "maybes," because no one can enjoy complete certainty on such matters.<sup>44</sup>

Lindsey painted a highly pessimistic picture of the current generation. The American nation is in a state of decline, with a war of values that threatens to undermine America and the rule of law. He claimed that the radical left controls all the key cultural and media junctions, preaching relativism and socialism. Examples of this process, he claims, including the deterioration of public education, the granting of rights to gays and lesbians, and antireligious indoctrination in educational curricula.<sup>45</sup>

Lindsey identifies multiple signs of the impending End: Natural disasters such as earthquakes; the spread of diseases such as AIDS; the global depression;

<sup>42</sup> Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth – 2000 AD: Will Mankind Survive?*, California: Western Front, Ltd., 1994.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–26.

the new world order and the rise of global governments such as the European Union, which was emerging at the time; and, also visits to earth by creatures from outer space, whom he identifies as demons exiled from heaven. According to the statement in Scriptures, before the believers are raptured up to heaven, evil will be expelled.<sup>46</sup>

Lindsey further claimed that during his recent visit to the State of Israel, he had seen that the Israelis were expecting mass immigration from the Diaspora. He quoted Natan Sharansky, a leading activist for Aliyah (Jewish immigration to Israel), who claimed that up to a million people could come to the country. As noted, Lindsey's book was published in 1994, at the height of the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union, which Lindsey associates with Jeremiah's prophecy (23:7–8) regarding the return of the Jews from the northern lands in the End of Days. He relates the story of the Indian Shinling tribe, whose members converted to Judaism after a local farmer dreamed that they were one of the ten lost tribes. Although only thirty-six members of the tribe had immigrated to Israel, Lindsey claimed that they had the potential to bring a further one million newcomers. Tens of millions more people belong to the ten lost tribes, which the Bible prophesies will be revealed ahead of the End of Days. He rhetorically asks whether this constitutes a miracle, and answers himself in the negative: it is the realization of prophecy and further proof of imminent events. He concludes that nowhere else on earth can the realization of the prophecies be seen in such a spectacular manner as in Israel.

Lindsey is convinced that oil will be discovered within the boundaries of Israel because a Biblical source suggests that vast deposits lie under its soil. He is full of admiration for Israel's hi-tech industry, the leader in its field. His conclusion is that Israel forms the center of global interest, just as would be expected in view of the End of Day events.<sup>47</sup>

Lindsey proceeds to acknowledge that numerous Biblical scholars have stated that a generation is forty years, and that it has been widely noted that forty years have already passed since the establishment of the State of Israel, yet Jesus has not returned. His explanation is that we cannot be certain of the meaning of the term "generation" in the Bible; neither do we know when the countdown began. Should it begin in 1948 when Israel was founded or in 1967 when Jerusalem returned to Jewish hands? We cannot know God's calculations, and the Bible itself warned against these end calculations. Jesus stated that he did not know the precise time of his return. It is God's wish that the process be accompanied by an element of mystery.

Moreover, Lindsey's study of the Book of Daniel convinced him that the conquest of Jerusalem in 1967 may be of greater prophetic significance than the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem had now become eternal. The obvious conclusion according to this calculation is that the year of redemption would be 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 65–81.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 138.

From his eschatological forecasts, Lindsey moves on to the question of land for peace. He presents collected data describing the process of armament of the Arab states, and notes that despite the objective dangers, Israel agreed to forego territory in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and is discussing the return of additional territory: "This series of developments was enough to make the most confident warriors scared."<sup>48</sup> He proceeds to quote Ariel Sharon, at the time a retired army general and one of the leaders of the Likud opposition, who stated that he had faced difficult situations in his life and had never lost his self-confidence. Now, however, following the Oslo Accords, Sharon was concerned at the developments inside Israel and elsewhere.

Lindsey argues that although God protects Israel, the leaders of the country should still be concerned about the future. Apart from the fact that Israeli is a small island in a sea of hostility, a study of the Biblical prophecies shows that an apocalyptic war will soon erupt before the return of the redeemer. This is not merely the belief of American Christians. Muslims also anticipate that the return of Jesus will entail a Holocaust. Orthodox Jews form a similar conclusion from their reading of the Bible. He quotes Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the leader of a modern Orthodox community in Efrat, who claims that one of the liveliest discussions in the contemporary Jewish world revolves around the question as to whether we are already in the era of the "first shoots of our redemption," and, if so, how this should influence Israeli policy relating to the territories and peace.

After nuclear bombs were used against Japan, Lindsey claims it may be assumed that the mass annihilation described in the Scriptures was a prelude to the redemption of the world and will come in the form of a nuclear war. Unconventional weapons are now held by countries he describes as "insane," such as Libya, Iraq, and North Korea.

During the Yom Kippur (1973) War, Lindsey notes that Israel was caught unaware and almost defeated on the battlefield. At the time, Israel began to threaten "Operation Samson," which was the use of atomic weapons that would destroy the Arab nations, yet at the same time also destroy Israel. Lindsey concludes that a nuclear scenario is not unreasonable.

"Land for peace" is an international slogan that led Israel to relinquish territory to Yasser Arafat, its mortal enemy. According to Lindsey, however, Israel needs these territories as a buffer zone enhancing its security and enabling it to overcome its numerical inferiority. Accordingly, any return of territory constitutes an existential threat to the State of Israel if it is attacked by the Arab armies. In this case, the "Samson scenario" will become very real. Does the world want Israel to rely solely on its nuclear strength? This, Lindsey argues, is the apparent conclusion being drawn in the Middle East.<sup>49</sup> Lindsey opposes such a development and warns against it.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 146–51.



If, Lindsey argues, after making territorial concessions, Israel is subjected to an attack by the Arab armies with their numerical advantage in war – including the use of tanks, artillery, and surface-to-surface missiles – it will have only one option: a nuclear offensive. Accordingly, Israel faces a choice: to launch a preemptive strike and face global condemnation or to wait for the Arab attack and respond with nuclear weapons in order to survive.

According to Lindsey, the Biblical prophecies predict an apocalyptic war, and in the nuclear era annihilation by means of unconventional weapons is a real possibility. From this perspective, an imminent nuclear war in the Middle East is a rational scenario. Syria or Libya will not hesitate to use unconventional weapons to attack Israeli population centers, just as they attacked the residents of their own countries. In the case of Iran, the realization of apocalyptic prophecies seems even more plausible. Lindsey claims that there can be no doubt that the Iranians will employ nuclear weapons once they are ready to do so. No mortal can predict the precise place or time of such a dramatic scenario, but he believes it is certain that this will be within our generation. We are about to witness the realization of exceptional prophecies. His analysis leads to a demand to awake and take action to prevent this pessimistic scenario.<sup>50</sup>

As previously described, an analysis of Lindsey’s theological approach raises a paradox. On the one hand, he anticipates a nuclear holocaust as a prelude to the return of Christ, an event for which he longs. On the other hand, he believes that the weakening of Israel through political agreements will lead to a nuclear war, because he does not believe that the Arab side desires peace, and the entire process is merely a tactical move designed to weaken Israel and facilitate its downfall. Accordingly, he argues, “land for peace” is a certain recipe for a nuclear war in the Middle East – the very war he eagerly awaits. Yet rather than aspiring to such a scenario, he opposes further Israeli withdrawals in order to hamper its realization. His position entails an inherent contradiction; he might rather have been expected to encourage war and chaos in the Middle East, as a key interest of those who desire the immediate return of Jesus, or, at the very least, to adopt a passive position regarding such a possibility.

Therefore, a question arises as to why Lindsey advocates an approach that seems contrary to his own interests. The answer lies in the Divine promise that those who are concerned for the well-being of the Jews will be blessed. For Lindsey, the blessing he enjoys by promoting the well-being of the Jews is apparently more important than the theoretical possibility that his redeemer will return through a bloody war in the Middle East, a possibility he seeks to prevent.<sup>51</sup>

In his first book, Lindsey emphasized the importance of the Temple Mount in the realization of the Biblical prophecies. He returns to this theme in his

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> David Brug also points to this paradox, and for him this is the ultimate proof that this movement is a purely philosemitic one that does not seek to expedite an End of Days scenario. David Brug, *Standing with Israel*, Florida: Frontline, 2006: 84–7.

book from 1994, albeit with some nuanced changes. Now, however, he quotes more moderate elements, such as Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, who claim that the ascension of the Temple Mount should be the product of a process of popular spiritual uplifting, rather than the product of an act of violence such as blowing up the mosques on the site.<sup>52</sup>

According to Lindsey, the End of Days events include the interruption of the rituals on the Temple Mount by the antichrist. As such, these rituals must first be resumed and a functional priesthood reinstated. However, these comments do not constitute support for active steps by individuals, and certainly not in a violent manner. Lindsey claims that a way must be found to rebuild the Temple without destroying the mosques on the Temple Mount, and without fueling religious tensions and wars. He even uses the term “fanatics” to describe those who attempted to blow up the mosques, such as the members of the Jewish Underground. He argues that the problem can only be resolved in a miraculous manner through Divine intervention.

Lindsey sees the establishment of the Temple as the last part of the puzzle that must fall into place before the beginning of the events that will lead to Christ’s return:

This is the driving motivation behind an act that will serve as one of the most important fulfillments of Bible prophecy. Remember, rebuilding the temple is significant not only because of the firestorm it will create between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East and the significance of that conflict *spiritually*. But the Bible also makes it clear that in the last days the Antichrist will establish his reign in the Temple of Jerusalem. Therefore, the Temple must be rebuilt.<sup>53</sup> [emphasis mine]

He argues that the Jews need the Temple because the synagogue is merely a substitute for the ritual of the sacrifices. However, the primary function of the Temple from his perspective is to enable the fulfillment of the prophecies. He also claims that the construction of the Temple will help the Israeli tourism industry, because its presence will attract tourists from around the world and all the members of the Jewish people.<sup>54</sup>

The importance of Jerusalem to Lindsey is that he believes the city will be the arena for the events of the End of Days. Accordingly, in 1967, securing Jewish control of the city was a more important event than the establishment of the State of Israel in terms of the realization of the Biblical prophecies. This also explains why the city is the focus of international attention. Maria Leppakari argues that the establishment of the State of Israel, and especially capturing Jerusalem, made a paradigm shift in the apocalyptic thought, because the apocalyptic imagination can now be associated with a geographical place. Therefore, “new Jerusalem” is no longer considered a spiritual concept, but

<sup>52</sup> Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth*, 157.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

one that is built up as a physical place in the State of Israel.<sup>55</sup> Hal Lindsey is a major contributor to this transformation.

Once again, the issue of the Temple Mount illustrates Lindsey's desire to avoid encouraging active steps to expedite the End of Days. He realizes that any attack against the mosques on the Temple Mount could lead to war and danger, and he clearly seeks to avoid such a possibility. Once again, we see a paradox, whereby he warns against any exacerbation of relations between Jews and Arabs, despite the fact that he views this development as an integral part of the End of Days. The question of the Temple Mount is arguably the most volatile issue in the relations between Israel and the Arab states, and the only remaining sign of the imminent return of Christ yet to appear. However, Lindsey considers it vital that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount remain under Jewish sovereignty, so that any territorial compromise in this area can be expected to arouse hostility and anger on his part.

Lindsey sees radical Islam as the greatest enemy of world peace since the end of the Second World War, and as the greatest danger facing the State of Israel. For him, fundamentalist Islam seeks to unite all Muslims under Iranian leadership and to expel all the Western forces from the Middle East; this goal includes the liberation of Palestine. This will be followed by the long-desired objective of replacing Judeo-Christian civilization with an Islamic order.<sup>56</sup>

According to Lindsey, the "peace accords" are an Islamic ploy reflecting the mistaken assumption that the conflict in the Middle East is between Jews and Palestinians. This leads in turn to the erroneous assumption that if Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders, the Arabs will want peace, and this will be achievable through compromise. This approach has been held by various administrations in Washington DC, and has eventually permeated to the Israeli leadership. Lindsey poses a rhetorical question: If the assumption is that if Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders there will not be any more wars, why was Israel attacked three times before 1967? Why was no Palestinian state ever established when the territory involved was in Arab hands? Lindsey reiterates his concern that if Israel is pushed into borders it cannot defend, it will have no choice but to arm itself with unconventional weapons in order to protect its territory.

For Lindsey, the Israeli approach that seeks to reach a compromise with Arafat in order to weaken Islamic fundamentalism is a mistaken one. It entails grave danger to Israel and to the entire world, but it also embodies a misunderstanding of the threat of Islam, which it believes can be restrained. According to Lindsey, the problem is that even if this assumption is true (and he believes it is not), the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is too weak to stand up to the Islamists; moreover, the difference between the two groups is tactical rather than substantive. The PLO seeks to secure territory in order to destroy Israel from within, and establish a Muslim state in its place. The problem is that at

<sup>55</sup> Leppakari, *Apocalyptic*, 210–1.

<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that evangelical Christianity tends to identify Islam with absolute evil and to view it as the apocalyptic enemy. See: Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals*, 50–75.

the time he is writing, Israel has already begun to make territorial withdrawals and the PLO already has a foothold.

He concludes that peace is impossible in the Middle East as long as the Arabs seek to regain control of Jerusalem, and it should not be expected that they will abandon this aspiration for any reason other than Divine intervention. International pressure on Israel will increase as long as the Arabs succeed in convincing the world that the Palestinians are weak while the Israelis are strong. The outcome of this international pressure will be an abandonment by Israel of its security needs. Further peace agreements may follow in the Middle East, but these will not last long. Only God can heal the hatred between humans that boils under the surface. At the same time, the preparations for the building of the Temple continue to progress.<sup>57</sup>

Lindsey argues that the Islamic block is united in its hatred of Israel and undermines the existence of the state through its demand for Jerusalem. Russia has also continued to play a key role in global politics, even following the dismantling of the Soviet Union, and is a mighty military ally as predicted by Ezekiel (38–39). China is awakening and emerging as a new global power.

Lindsey then turns to a further phenomenon: “Christophobia” in the United States.<sup>58</sup> He argues that the United States censors Christianity and the Church is subjected to an assault by liberals and humanists who seek to promote tolerance and pluralism by means of censorship and the limitation of free speech. The persecuted minority in America are not homosexuals or pornographers, as the media claim. According to Lindsey, the real victim of persecution is the Church of Jesus Christ, together with its entire values system.<sup>59</sup>

All the signs suggest that the world is rapidly approaching its end. Lindsey’s immediate conclusion: “We should be on fire to evangelize in the short term we have left.”<sup>60</sup>

Lindsey is convinced that America will not play a central role in the End of Days events, because it does not appear in the Biblical prophecies. Accordingly, he concludes that America must fall from its leading status in the world. He anticipates that it will be replaced by the trend toward globalization: Europe and Russia will become increasingly powerful global powers and will strengthen their ties with Islam. The persecution of Christian believers will worsen, crime will flourish, and morality will decline. The next stage will be the disappearance of the institution of the family.<sup>61</sup>

Lindsey asks when Jesus will come, and immediately responds: “I do not know.” However, he adds, all the signs suggest that the time is drawing near. Should this lead to a passive withdrawal from society? Lindsey firmly rejects such a possibility, arguing that we should plan our lives as if we will be on earth

<sup>57</sup> Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth*, 246–52.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 269–80.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 171–84.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 305–12.

for our full life expectancy. We should not abandon the world, stop working, or take steps to expedite the end. Although we are already at a late stage, he concludes there is still time to bring many others into the faith.<sup>62</sup>

In summarizing Lindsey's theological approach, we can see that the Jewish resurgence in the Land of Israel is perceived as a tangible catalyst marking our period as that before the End of Days. The attempt to interpret the Biblical prophecies in a manner that suggests imminent redemption is the product of the Jewish success. Although Lindsey believes that these signs can be interpreted as the harbingers of imminent salvation, he does not believe this should lead to activism or to efforts to expedite the end. On political questions, Lindsey tends to prefer the passive approach.

Some substantial paradoxes may be seen in Lindsey's approach. On the one hand, he anticipates that the Savior will return as the result of a nuclear war in the Middle East, yet on the other he is alarmed by the possibility of deterioration and escalation. He argues that returning territory to Muslim ownership as part of the political process is dangerous for Israel, because it will be obliged to use atomic weapons when the Arab plot is revealed; therefore, he opposes such compromises. He claims that the establishment of the Temple is the final stage that has yet to occur in the events preceding redemption, yet he opposes any activist steps in this respect. He regrets the decline of America and attempts to fight against this trend, yet he is aware that the Biblical prophecies relating to the End of Days leave America out of the picture. He also shows a domestic form of political passivity in terms of his fierce opposition to any changes in the American way of life regarding relations between church and state.

Lindsey's opposition to "land for peace" is the product of a political calculation, not a theological attachment to the Whole Land of Israel. This is not an absolute precondition from his perspective. The exception to this is the question of the status of Jerusalem. On this matter, according to his desired scenario, a number of events must occur on the Temple Mount and in the Third Temple that is due to be established. Accordingly, the Temple Mount and Jerusalem must remain under Jewish control.

In his book *Evangelicals and Israel*, Stephen Spector notes that the evangelical stream does not usually show substantive opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state, provided this does not jeopardize the State of Israel. They show a flexible approach to the "land for peace" approach.<sup>63</sup> In principle, Lindsey is not opposed to giving up land. However, he does not believe the Palestinians and believes that their apparent moderation is merely tactical, rather than strategic. He is concerned that compromises will weaken Israel and enable its enemies to act from within. However, he does not have any theological opposition to compromise. The question of the final status of Jerusalem, on the other hand, is certainly a substantive one. As such, on this matter no

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 305–12.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals*, 158–85.

compromise seems possible, because key End of Days events must erupt on the Temple Mount and in Jerusalem under Jewish control.<sup>64</sup>

On the basis of this analysis of his writings, and the paradox they present, I raise a hypothesis in which Lindsey's commitment to the Jews and to the State of Israel could change, in a way that his theology could lead him to the opposite conclusions. Moreover, a situation of messianic disappointment could result both from the failure of the eschatological dates to materialize and from territorial compromises leading to withdrawals on the Temple Mount and in Jerusalem. As I have attempted to show, tension between Jews and Muslims leading to a war that might include the use of nuclear weapons forms the heart of Hal Lindsey's millenaral expectations. Although he warns of this scenario in his writings, is it unreasonable to suggest that, in other circumstances, it may become the preferable alternative? Might the reality of messianic failure lead the true believers to change their theology or, at least, to adopt an apathetic stance regarding the materialization of this scenario?

Yaakov Ariel has shown that the Protestant attitude toward the State of Israel has followed a pendulum-like course. Liberal evangelicals who once tended to support the State of Israel have, since the turn of the twenty-first century, become some of its fiercest critics. Conversely, conservatives who were once indifferent on this issue are now Israel's most fervent supporters.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, it might be concluded that this pendulum motion could continue to apply.

### **Christians United for Israel: John Hagee's Perception of the Blessing of Philosemitism**

In 2010, the Israeli public debated the question as to whether it is legitimate that foreign donors influence the agenda in Israel. The debate focused on the New Israel Fund (NIF), a philanthropic body with leftist tendencies that raises funds in the United States for social change organizations in Israel. The attack on the NIF was led by an organization called Im Tirtzu ("If you will," a reference to a famous comment by Herzl, "If you will, it is no dream,"), which claimed that the NIF seeks to delegitimize the State of Israel in world opinion. The organization prepared a report claiming that most of the incriminating information received by the international tribunal headed by Judge Richard Goldstone, which was established in order to examine the events of Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip (December 2009–January 2010) came from organizations that are supported by the NIF.<sup>66</sup> As part of the exchange of

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 173–5.

<sup>65</sup> Yaakov Ariel, "The One and the Many: Unity and Diversity in Protestant Attitudes toward the Jews," Jonathan Frankel and Ezra Mendelsohn (eds.) *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 24, *The Protestant-Jewish Conundrum*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 15–45.

<sup>66</sup> Ron Kampeas, "Breaking down the Im Tirtzu report on New Israel Fund," <http://jta.org/news/article/2010/02/09/1010548/breaking-down-the-im-tirtzu-report-on-new-israel-fund> (viewed on October 28, 2010).

incriminations between the supporters of the NIF and those of Im Tirtzu, it emerged that Im Tirtzu is also supported by American money, and their main donor is a NGO called the John Hagee Ministries. The Israeli media was full of reports attacking Hagee and accusing Im Tirtzu of taking donations from an antisemitic body.<sup>67</sup>

In my opinion, to accuse John Hagee of antisemitism is a harsh attack that misrepresents an individual who has worked diligently to uproot anti-Jewish attitudes in the Christian world. In this section, I review Hagee’s philosemitic views and his guiding principle: standing by Israel will bring a blessing on America.

Born on April 12, 1940 in Baytown, Texas, John Hagee was raised as a Pentecostal Christian. He attended Trinity University, in San Antonio, Texas, graduating in 1964 with a BSc degree in mechanical engineering. Two years later, he earned a Master’s degree in the same discipline from the University of North Texas. Concurrently, he was studying religion at the Southwestern Assemblies of God University, in Waxahachie, Texas, and in 1966, he also obtained a degree in theology.

Although Hagee initially ministered to only twenty-five members, his congregation, The Church of Castle Hills, grew to 1,600 within two years. In 1987, Hagee built a 5,000-seat sanctuary and adopted the name the Cornerstone Church. It currently has some 19,000 members.

Hagee is also the founder of Global Evangelism Television and John Hagee Ministries, which work together to broadcast his religious programming on 160 television stations and fifty radio stations around North America, Europe, Australia, and much of the developing world. Millions of homes watch Hagee’s programs each week. He has published more than twenty books, some in the religious self-help genre, some enumerating what he believes will happen during Armageddon. In 2006, he founded Christians United for Israel, to lobby for United States protection of Israel on Biblical grounds.<sup>68</sup>

### *In Defense of Israel*

John Hagee is driven by a sense of urgency. The dangers facing Israel are growing, as Iran advances toward its goal of securing nuclear weapons. He draws an analogy between the situation today and that of 1938, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. In both cases, the warning lights are flashing, but the United States does nothing to prevent the danger. When Israel seeks to protect itself against the threats that surround it, the world accuses it of acting improperly. As in 1938, there are those who seek to appease Israel’s enemies: “They tell us that if we want the Sunnis and Shiites to stop massacring each other in Iraq, then Israel must give up land. They tell us that if we want

<sup>67</sup> Danit Gottfried, “The Antisemite Who Funds Zionist Self-Righteousness,” <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=130501638516&m=1&mid=83123> (viewed on October 28, 2010) (in Hebrew).

<sup>68</sup> “John Hagee.” Biography Reference Bank. November 4, 2010. Online source.

Syrians to stop murdering the leaders of Lebanon, then Israel must give up land.”<sup>69</sup>

Hagee argues that making Israel a scapegoat will not solve the real problem, which is the refusal to accept Israel’s right to exist. Appeasement and pressure on Israel to make concessions are not the answer. In particular, the United States must never pressure Israel to divide Jerusalem, its eternal capital.<sup>70</sup>

Hagee declares that the antisemitism that led to the Holocaust has its origins in Christianity. A thread connects the crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, Martin Luther’s attacks on the Jews, Adolf Hitler, and the Final Solution. All these acts were committed by baptized Christians; by thugs in the guise of religious leaders who acted while the world stood by. The sin of omission is as grave as that of commission.

The current Iranian threat to Israel is perceived by Hagee as a Divine test for the Christian world, and American evangelists have reached positions of influence specifically to address this development: “If we defend Israel, God will defend America. But if we remain silent at this very critical time, when the survival of Israel is at stake, I believe the judgment of God will fall on America.”<sup>71</sup> Christians must intervene on Israel’s behalf, despite the fact that the Jews do not regard Jesus in the manner Christianity mandates. They will do so in the future, however, and until then they must be helped and protected, he said.

Hagee claims that he was drawn to philosemitism following the events of his childhood. He was recalled several times that on the day the State of Israel was declared, he was sitting at home in the kitchen with his father listening to the radio. When the reporter announced the results of the vote in the United Nations, his father’s eyes filled with tears – the only time Hagee saw his father cry. Hagee Senior told his eight-year-old son that this was the most important day of the twentieth century: God’s promise to return the Jewish people to the Land of Israel was coming true before our eyes. Since then, Hagee professes, he has had a deep love for Israel.

In 1978, Hagee visited Israel for the first time, declaring: “We came tourists and returned Zionists.”<sup>72</sup> During his visit to Jerusalem, he felt as though he had reached his true home. His observation of Orthodox Jews praying by the Western Wall motivated a desire to learn more about the Jewish religion and the Jewish roots of Christianity.

According to Hagee, whenever we see an antisemitic Christian, this is a person who is spiritually dead and whose hatred has choked his faith. Jesus of Nazareth preached love, so what is the source of the doctrine of hatred? Hagee accurately identifies the origins of antisemitism in the early days of Christianity, and particularly during the period in which Christianity became

<sup>69</sup> John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel*, Florida: Frontline, 2007, 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Church Fathers blamed the Jews for “murdering Christ,” thereby sparking the chain reaction that would eventually lead to the Final Solution. Hagee surmises that if Jesus and his disciples had lived in Europe in 1940, they would have been sent to Auschwitz to be gassed to death.

In 1981, the Israeli attack on the atomic reactor in Iraq met with global disapproval. While watching the wave of condemnation on television, Hagee decided to take a stance and initiated a fundraising event for Israel in San Antonio, Texas. He contacted the Jewish federation in the city, and after some persuasion convinced them to join the event. Although the event was criticized by some evangelists, it proved to be a resounding success. Since then, Hagee has organized evening events supporting Israel on a regular basis. In 2006, he founded Christians United for Israel, which functions both as a grassroots organization and as a lobby in Washington, DC.<sup>73</sup>

Hagee explains that Christians should feel a sense of obligation toward the Jewish people. Christianity could not exist without the Jewish people, and it is impossible to separate Jesus from Judaism. From this perspective, it is no longer possible to hate. Over thousands of years of hatred, Hagee claims, Christians have forgotten Jesus’ roots and just how Jewish he was.<sup>74</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth was a scion of the Tribe of Judah, with a pedigree dating back to Moses, Abraham, and David. He was circumcised at the age of eight days and celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at age thirteen. He studied the Talmud and Mishna and at the age of thirty (the traditional Jewish age of maturity), he began to preach. Every word in the New Testament confirms that Jesus, his family, and his disciples observed the commandments of the Jewish religion during their lifetime. Moreover, the Bible was written by Jews and forms the basis of the entire Christian civilization. The Jewish people gave the Fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and the disciples. The Jewish people gave Paul, who wrote most of the books of the New Testament. Hagee concludes: “Without the Jewish contribution to Christianity, there would be no Christianity. Remember, the Jewish people do not need Christianity to explain their existence, but we cannot explain our existence without our Jewish roots.”<sup>75</sup>

Hagee quotes a long list of Jews who have made enormous contributions to science, literature, and music. The greatest contribution, however, is the belief in one God and the absolute value system of Western morality, which forms the basis of modern democracy. He claims that the Jews have blessed the world in the fields of science, medicine, and society, and that this contribution is the realization of the promise: “In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

Hagee’s conclusion is that a debt of gratitude to the Jewish people requires support for the State of Israel. The most important reason for honoring Israel,

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 35–46.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 102–3.

however, is that this brings God's blessing.<sup>76</sup> The Bible specifically states that those who bless Israel will themselves be blessed, while those who curse it will find themselves cursed. Scripture confirms this principle, showing God brought salvation on Gentiles who blessed Israel and the Jews. Hagee quotes various examples from the Bible and the New Testament in support of this principle.

Hagee regards the Christian claim that the Church replaced Israel as the object of God's promise as a grave theological error. He believes that this approach formed the background to the crimes committed by Christians against Jews in the name of Christianity over the past 1,900 years. The majority of Christians have been misled by this approach.

As Gentiles joined the new faith, Judaism's power waned and the struggle to preserve the Halacha was outweighed by recognition that it was not necessary to observe the Law in full. Constantine, who made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, stopped persecuting Christians, but at the same time began to persecute Jews. The growing weight of Christianity in the empire exacerbated the persecution of the Jews. The decision to declare Sunday the day of worship – part of the creed adopted by Constantine at the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) – led to a further rift between the two religions.<sup>77</sup>

Hagee attacks an approach that may also be encountered in evangelical circles that shows anger to the Jews because of their rejection of Jesus during his life, thereby preventing redemption from coming in this stage. He argues that God's original plan was that Jesus should die on the cross and because had he not done so, neither Jew nor Gentile could win grace.<sup>78</sup> According to the Bible, Jesus' role is to be a light unto the Gentiles, and the manner of his death and resurrection made him the Messiah King for the entire world: "It is my hope that by explaining the two roles of Jesus as the Suffering Servant and the future Reigning King, we can shift from condemning the Jews for what they missed to thanking them for what they gave."<sup>79</sup>

According to Hagee, the Jews recognized Jesus as a prophet, teacher, healer, and preacher. Why could they not see him as the suffering servant who would redeem them from sin? In order to answer this question, Hagee turns to the Epistle to the Romans, written by Paul (9–11), in which he discusses the Jewish issue. Hagee claims that Paul was referring to physical Israel, and not to the Church, rejecting the theory of supersession. According to Paul, the Jews suffer from a judicial blindness that prevents their acknowledging Jesus as the messiah, because their eyes are veiled. This veil will be removed in the future, "and so all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26).<sup>80</sup> Paul does not explain when or how this blindness will be cured. According to Hagee, this will happen when the Jews see with their own eyes Jesus walking through the streets of Jerusalem.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 113–4.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 125–30.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 144–50.

The Gentiles do not suffer from this blindness and are returning to Jesus in their thousands, responding immediately once they are exposed to the gospel. Yet even if Jews see and hear the gospel, they remain indifferent to it.

Hagee presents the story of Paul, who was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, when Jesus called him and blinded him. Three days later, the coverings fell from his eyes and his spiritual blindness came to an end. The lesson is that it is God who prevents the Jews from recognizing Jesus, and it is God's function to remove the veil from their eyes. Accordingly, it is pointless to raise arguments against the Jews because this is God's plan. For the present, Christians should be grateful to the Jews and support them as the Chosen People:

It is time that Christians remove that self-imposed scales from our eyes placed there by the sanctimonious teachings of the replacement theology. God never rejected the Jews or replaced them because they could not see Jesus as messiah. God still loves and cherishes the Jewish people and has a glorious future in store for them.<sup>81</sup>

Hagee fiercely attacks the claim that the Jews are "the murderers of Jesus" and claims that such accusations formed the background to the Holocaust and the murder of European Jews. He asserts that no justification can be found in the New Testament for this lie. The eyewitnesses quoted in the New Testament went to great lengths to persuade their readers that the Jews (and, of course, the eyewitnesses themselves were also Jews) did not bear collective responsibility for the death of the Son of God and, in most cases, were completely unaware of the events leading to his arrest, trial, and conviction.

Hagee blames the plot to kill Jesus on the high priest, the henchman of the Roman supported puppet Kings. The Jews in this period longed for a Messiah King who would redeem them from enslavement to the Romans; Jesus emerged against this background and quickly gained popularity; in result, he came to be seen as a threat to the regime and was sent to the cross.

Matthew, the New Testament book, states that the Jewish masses cried out the self-curse: "His blood be upon us and upon our children." Hagee argues that this was a crowd organized by the high priest that did not represent the Jews as a whole. He presents statistics claiming that only one out of every four Jews at the time lived in Palestine, and of these only one in ten lived in Jerusalem. Accordingly, no more than a few hundred people could have participated in the plot hatched by the high priest. Hagee concludes that Divine justice would never permit the sins of a few individuals to be transferred onto an entire civilization. In his last moments on the cross, Jesus forgave the Roman soldiers. If God can forgive, why the Christians cannot do so, Hagee wonders.<sup>82</sup>

Hagee finds further evidence in support of his thesis in the form of the establishment of the State of Israel. If God destroys something, He does not

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 159–65.

resurrect it. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah were never rebuilt. Yet on May 15, 1948, the Jewish people was reborn after almost two thousand years of wandering. They returned to their country from many lands and soon became a powerful nation. If God had broken His bond with Israel and the Jews, why would he permit this nation to enjoy physical rebirth? If Israel had been replaced, why did it reemerge?

The revival of the Jews in their land proves the error of the theory of replacement. Hagee concludes the covenant God made with the people of Israel is eternal and will never be broken.<sup>83</sup>

### *The Jerusalem Countdown*

Having examined the philosemitic background to Hagee's thought, now we move on to examine his political attitudes and his position on the question of territorial compromise. His 2005 book, *The Jerusalem Countdown*, is set against the background to the plan proposed by President George Bush for a "Road Map" leading to peace in the Middle East. Therefore, Hagee's book is used in the following discussions to explore his viewpoints.

According to Hagee, the Road Map had already led Israel to relinquish control of Gaza. The next stage would be to return the West Bank, while the final component of the plan would be the division of Jerusalem. Accordingly, the struggle for Jerusalem had already begun, and peace-loving Israel was being led to the greatest war it had ever seen – the apocalyptic war of the End of Days.

Hagee argued that when bad peace agreements are signed, they have a negative impact on the future. An example of this is the Treaty of Versailles, which led to the humiliation of Germany and the imposition of heavy compensation following the First World War, thereby sowing the seeds of the Second World War. The Road Map is a bad agreement that contradicts God's word because, according to the Prophet Joel (3:2), God will judge all those who divide His land. However, Hagee's chief concern is the possibility that Jerusalem could be divided. Accordingly, he declares that evangelical Christians must show solidarity with Israel and demand that the leaders in Washington, DC end the withdrawals:

Israel should not give another inch of land to the Palestinians until every terrorist organization operating under the Palestinian covering lays down their weapons of war and prove that they are willing to live in peace side by side with Israel... Jerusalem is not to be divided, again, for any reason with anyone regardless of the requirements of the roadmap for peace.<sup>84</sup>

This quote implies that Hagee does not oppose peace agreements including territorial compromise with the Palestinians, provided that these lead to real peace and the total cessation of violence. His principal objection is to the

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 181–95.

<sup>84</sup> John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown*, Florida: Frontline, 2006, 26.

division of Jerusalem and the transfer of sovereignty over the city to non-Jewish hands.

Hagee said, Jerusalem is the center of the world, and until there is peace in Jerusalem there cannot be peace in the world. Jerusalem is also the city of God, who chose it as His eternal seat. It is the city in which God is physically present and, thus, there can be no possibility of sharing the running of the city, now or in the future.<sup>85</sup>

The Roadmap will lead nowhere, Hagee claims. True and eternal peace will not come to Jerusalem before the messiah arrives. "The Bible says, 'When the Lord shall build up Zion [Jerusalem], He shall appear in his glory' (Psalms 102:16). Scripture makes it unmistakably clear that when the Lord returns, it will be to a sovereign Jerusalem controlled by the Jewish people."<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, God has chosen to judge the nations of the world according to their attitude toward Jerusalem. Those who follow God's path will receive His blessing, Hagee argues, while those who oppose it will be harshly judged.

For Hagee, the conquest of the Western Wall in 1967 was the most important event proving the veracity of the Biblical prophecies. He claims that the Western Wall "represents the Jewish people's most sacred connection to their sacred site."<sup>87</sup> He quotes the then Israeli Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, who stood by the Wall and spoke of its importance to Jewish history. It is interesting to note that Hagee relates to the Western Wall as the most sacred site, whereas Hal Lindsey attached this epithet to the Temple Mount itself. Lindsey quoted the famous comment "The Temple Mount is in our hands," declared by the Paratrooper commander Motte Gur, while Hagee quotes Rabin by the Western Wall. In my opinion, Hagee consciously avoided references to the Temple Mount because of the explosive political character of this issue, despite the fact that the Christian prophecies of redemption relate to the mount itself, and not to the Western Wall beneath it. Just as Lindsey moderated his rhetoric relating to the Temple Mount, Hagee also seems to prefer to avoid the issue entirely. This reflects the maturity of the Christian preachers, who are aware of the weight attached to their comments and careful to avoid extreme statements.

Like Lindsey, Hagee also believes that the End of Days is a future event that has not yet begun, although signs suggest that it is imminent. Hagee also likens the Jews to the dry bones, implying that the Jewish revival is that of a body without a soul.

I return now to the allegations in the Israeli press mentioned at the beginning of this section that accused Hagee of antisemitism. These accusations are based on Hagee's theological exegesis of the Holocaust. His remarks employ the parable of the fishers and hunters mentioned in Jeremiah (16:16). According to Hagee, Herzl was like a fisher, who sought to catch the Jewish people in his hook and lead them to the Land of Israel, albeit with limited success.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 48–50.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 89–90.

Accordingly, the hunter – Hitler – came, and it was dread the eventually led to the Jews to the land God intended for them: “the force and fear of Hitler’s Nazis drove the Jewish people back to the only home God ever intended for the Jews to have – Israel.”<sup>88</sup> The implication is that God brought the Holocaust on the Jews in order to end the exile and lead to the establishment of the Jewish national home, which would in turn lead to the salvation of the world.

This comment and others of a similar nature caused a political storm during the United States presidential elections in 2008. After Hagee’s comments appeared in the press, the Republican presidential candidate John McCain was forced to refuse Hagee’s public support.<sup>89</sup> However, an honest examination of his comments, and their comparison to the theological position of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, regarding the Holocaust (see Chapter 1) shows that the two positions are remarkably similar. Both Hagee and Kook view the Holocaust as part of a Divine plan for Jewish rebirth with the ultimate goal of redeeming the world.

Like Lindsey, Hagee also anticipates an imminent world war centering on Israel, with the antichrist emerging from the European block. These events will lead to the rapture of the Church and the return of Jesus. Hagee also anticipates that the Jews will accept Jesus in the End of Days through grace. He predicts that during the Great Tribulations, 144,000 Jews will rise up to preach Christ throughout the world.

From this perspective, Hagee believed that President Bush’s Roadmap, which sought to establish a peaceful Palestinian state alongside Israel, was an error, because the Palestinians actually seek to destroy Israel. God opposes the division of the Land. He has blessed all those who bless Israel and cursed those who curse it. This is the Divine foreign policy. America is at war with Islamic terror, and no end to the war is in sight. America is vulnerable to terror threats, and, therefore, this is no time to provoke God by dividing the Land of Israel. Christians must stand by Israel in its claim for the Land, because:

1. Israel is the only country in the world established by act of God. Israel belongs to God, and He will determine its borders.
2. Christians owe a debt of gratitude to the Jews for their contribution, which enabled the birth of the Christian faith.
3. Christians should support Israel because this will win them a personal blessing.
4. God will judge those Gentiles who abuse the Jews.<sup>90</sup>

In conclusion, while Hagee’s position is motivated by the eschatological expectation of imminent salvation, in which events like the establishment of

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>89</sup> [http://articles.cnn.com/2008-05-22/politics/mccain.hagee\\_1\\_hagee-apostate-church-john-mccain?\\_s=PM:POLITICS](http://articles.cnn.com/2008-05-22/politics/mccain.hagee_1_hagee-apostate-church-john-mccain?_s=PM:POLITICS).

<sup>90</sup> Hagee, *Jerusalem*, 196–204.

the State of Israel and the conquest of Jerusalem play a key role, he does not advocate the expedition of the end and refrains from encouraging the anticipated apocalyptic war. Motivated by a profound philosemitic emotion, he founded the Christian lobby in the United States in order to support Israel, particularly in light of the grave deterioration he anticipates and the serious threats facing Israel from the Arab nations and, in particular, from Iran. Like Lindsey, Hagee does not merely refrain from advocating messianic activism in his actions and sermons, but may actually manifest the opposite approach. The establishment of the Christian lobby for Israel is perceived as a mission intended to help Israel defend its borders and the well-being of its citizens.

Regarding the question of land for peace, Hagee adopts a restrained position and does not negate out of hand any possibility of compromise. His position is firmer, however, in the case of Jerusalem, rejecting the division of the city or the granting of a foothold in the holy places to non-Jewish elements. Indeed, this position seems to be common to the entire Christian right.

### Eye to Eye

Having examined the claim of the evangelist wing of Christianity regarding the blessing due to those who stand by Israel, I shall now briefly address the implicit claim that God will curse America if its acts against His will.

The journalist Bill Koenig, who founded a news agency that reports from the White House (Watch.org), prepared a study published in two books claiming that a statistical correlation can be seen between American pressure on Israel to make territorial compromises and natural disasters in the United States. Koenig claims that within twenty-four hours of an American president pressuring Israel, a natural disaster (such as floods, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, or earthquakes) or terror attack takes place. He claims that such disasters occurred under Presidents such as Bush Senior, Clinton, and Bush Junior after they made declarations urging Israel to relinquish land or supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Koenig believes that the United States is on a collision course with God. God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and promised a blessing and a curse for the nations of the world according to their attitude toward His seed, with whom He made an eternal and immutable covenant. America is now struggling to cope with the ramifications of its policy in the Middle East, which acts against the will of God and His promise for the Land. Since the Madrid Conference of 1991, American policy has influenced the fate of the State of Israel and acted against God's will.

Koenig argues that the events of September 11, 2001 constituted a clear warning, yet the Administration continued to support the Roadmap for peace in the Middle East, which reinforces the concept of land for peace. Koenig claims that Israel's existence is jeopardized by American pressure, and that this has led to war. According to the Prophet Zachariah, God will punish any

nation that opposes Israel. This implies a clear warning regarding God's future judgment.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

Like many others in the evangelical stream, the thinkers presented in this chapter negate the replacement theory that views the Church as the successor to the Jews as the recipient of God's blessing. Their theology regards the Jews per se as God's Chosen People, who are destined to enjoy salvation in the imminent End of Days when they accept Jesus as messiah. They believe that by extending their protection over the Jews, they themselves will receive a blessing. These circles anticipate the conversion of Jews in the End of Days, although John Hagee suggests that missionary activities should not target Jews, because their repentance is a Divine task. Hal Lindsey does not make this distinction, and in this respect their positions differ.<sup>92</sup>

On the question of land for peace, diverse views can be seen. While Lindsey does not reject the possibility of territorial compromise, Hagee adopts a firmer position, albeit one that falls short of total rejection. Some members of this camp completely reject American intervention in this issue, as seen in my review of the position of Bill Koenig. However, the fierce opposition here is not to the principle of compromise, but to American intervention.<sup>93</sup>

A recurring criticism of Christian Zionism claims that the movement actually embodies antisemitism in disguise: evangelists are interested not in the prosperity and success of the Jews, but in their clear desire to convert the Jews. Indeed, some have accused this stream of murderous antisemitism, because according to the messianic scenario, in the End of Days all those who refuse to accept Jesus as the messiah will be annihilated. A connected claim suggests that evangelists encourage hardline American policy in order to expedite the End of Days events.<sup>94</sup> Those who argue that Christian Zionism is necessarily antisemitic seem to miss the nuances of this movement and to adopt an extreme interpretation of its doctrine. It is worth emphasizing that alongside the expectation that the Jewish people will convert in the End of Days, there is also a belief that history rests with God, and that the Jews will return to Israel

<sup>91</sup> John McTernan & Bill Koenig, *Israel – the Blessing or the Curse*, Oklahoma: Hearthstone Publishing, 2002; William Koenig, *Eye to Eye – Facing the Consequences of Dividing Israel*, Virginia: About Him Publishing, 2004.

<sup>92</sup> Yaakov Ariel mentions that the mission to the Jews is the largest of all evangelical missionary efforts. Yaakov Ariel, *Philosemites or Antisemites?*, Jerusalem: The Vidal Sasson International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002, 27–9.

<sup>93</sup> I would like to mention Pastor Jerry Falwell's opinion: "If Israel desires to give part of the land to her neighbors, that is her business . . . It is a democratic society and the final decision will be a result of the democratic process within Israel." Quoted from David Brug, *Standing*, 196.

<sup>94</sup> See for example the pseudo-academic article: Ibrahim Abraham and Ronald Boer, "'God Doesn't Care': The Contradictions of Christian Zionism," *Religion & Theology* 16 (2009) 90–110.



“in a lack of faith.” Accordingly, Christians should present the gospel to Jews, but absolute conversion will come only with the messiah. As I have shown in this chapter, the evangelist movement certainly does not act to expedite the End of Days events; on the contrary, it seeks to postpone them as far as possible. Accordingly, in my personal opinion, the accusation of antisemitism is inappropriate.

A further criticism of Christian Zionism concerns its position on the question of the Temple Mount. For example, some critics have spoken of the “surrealist” phenomenon of evangelical extremists who support those Jews who aspire to establish the Third Temple.<sup>95</sup> An examination of the rhetoric of the individuals presented here identifies a genuine and imminent expectation of the End of Days events due to occur on the Temple Mount. Despite this, however, their rhetoric is moderate in tone and leaves these occurrences to God; it certainly does not encourage human activism. While there are extreme fringes in the evangelical movement that advocate a greater degree of activism regarding the construction of the Third Temple,<sup>96</sup> these are not representative of the central strand of the movement.

Finally, it is appropriate to take a moment to compare evangelical Christianity and messianic religious Zionism. Both movements anticipate complete redemption, and both share the belief that the Whole Land of Israel must be held by the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Both movements view secular Zionism as a body without soul, a political revival designed to lead to sanctity. However, the two movements have different views regarding the ultimate objective of Zionist redemption.

**Messianic time:** Although both movements preach an era of messiah, substantial differences may be seen in terms of their messianic perception. While messianic religious Zionism argues that redemption is a historical process that already began with the Zionist revival, and that God brings redemption to His people by natural means, evangelical Christianity views the current era as the last stage before the beginning of messianic time. Many events testify to the return of the Redeemer, but this event has not yet occurred.

This position also influences views on the question of land for peace. For messianic religious Zionism, messianic time has already begun, and accordingly no territorial compromises are possible. This is not the case with Christian Zionism, whose mainstream is willing to accept compromise if this is reasonable and grounded in a security approach acceptable to Israel.

**The quality of messianic fulfillment:** For messianic religious Zionism, messianic fulfillment is manifested in the success of Zionism; it is a mundane process that follows the laws of history and may last for centuries. According to

<sup>95</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *Philosemites*, 33–40.

<sup>96</sup> Motti Inbari, “‘A Universal Temple’? Jewish-Christian Collaboration in Plans to Reestablish the Holy Temple in Jerusalem,” Jonathan Frankel and Ezra Mendelsohn (eds.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 24; The Protestant-Jewish Conundrum, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 158–73.

Christian Zionists, however, this is a relatively short process lasting not more than seven years, the end of which will include supernatural occurrences such as the rapture of the true believers and the apocalyptic war of the End of Days – the war of Armageddon.

**Activism:** Evangelical Christianity anticipates supernatural events that will bring the End of Days, thus the faithful believer should passively await redemption. All he needs to do is maintain a pure way of life and act to convert the nonbelievers. This does not imply that the true believer should refuse to participate in American politics; rather, this stream has chosen to integrate in the American political system and act within it, rather than to seek to replace it. Messianic religious Zionism, by contrast, seeks to secure an active influence on reality, because it views the process itself as resting within historical time and subject to human actions. Accordingly, messianic religious Zionism is far more active in the political arena, and some sections even challenge the Israeli political system and refuse to accept the rules of the democratic game.

**The Land of Israel and Jerusalem:** The relative passivity that characterizes Christian Zionism is reflected in its position on the Whole Land of Israel, but ends at the gates to Jerusalem. This movement believes that Jerusalem must be held by the State of Israel as a precondition for the eruption of the End of Days events. Messianic religious Zionism does not confine itself to Jerusalem, but sees the entire territory of the Land of Israel as falling within the promised borders and as territory that must not be relinquished. Indeed, some circles in movement note that Transjordan has yet to come under Jewish control.

For Christian Zionism, Jerusalem constitutes a red line; on other issues, it is more flexible. Its interest in American foreign policy reflects a genuine concern for Israel's well-being, but in all probability the movement will not show strong opposition to a peace agreement that is acceptable to Israelis and ensures Israel's security. However, agreements that it finds unacceptable, and, particularly, granting control of the Temple Mount to Muslims, could lead the movement to engage in more aggressive political action in order to thwart such a proposal. As I have sought to show, such a situation might also lead to a theological shift in the movement's attitude toward the Jews and Israel.

Will evangelical Christianity play a more important role in the future in the Israeli-Arab conflict? Only time will tell.

## Epilogue

Of all the television crews that covered the eviction of the settlements in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli journalist Reno Zror managed to capture the most unique footage. His report shows the final moments before the evacuation of the synagogue in Neve Dekalim, as the girls who had come to struggle for Gush Katif prayed. The synagogue was their last refuge, after all the homes in the settlement had been evacuated. All of the young people left in Gush Katif gathered on the site.

Outside the synagogue, hundreds of police men and women were stationed, wearing protective clothing and carrying tools for dispersing demonstrations. The commander of the forces used a megaphone to announce that his soldiers were about to enter the site. Inside the synagogue, hundreds of girls dressed in orange – the color of the campaign against the settlement – broke into loud song:

Lord, hear our prayers  
May my supplication reach Your ears  
Hide not Your face from me  
In my time of sorrow

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner directed the ceremony to mark the removal of the Torah scrolls from the synagogue before it was abandoned. After the scrolls were removed, he tore his shirt in the traditional act of mourning and began to weep. In response, the girls also began to sob loudly, tearing their clothes. In the background, the voiceover asked: “Is this a prayer of defeat?”<sup>1</sup>

The situation the journalist managed to encapsulate was one of helplessness. At this moment, all that was left for these girls was divine intervention. Their prayers called out for justice, and beseeched God not to hide, but to appear and save them from their distress. Their expectations of a miracle went unmet.

<sup>1</sup> The video may be viewed at: <http://www.flix.co.il/tapuz/showVideo.asp?m=1070551>.

Even after repeated viewings, these are powerful images, creating associations from Jewish history with times when Jews were led to their fate and could do no more than pray for a miracle. The question that arises is why the girls agreed to be led from the site without a struggle. Were their tears a sign of defeat or did they reflect the strength that comes from restraint?

The pictures of these girls can be seen as a metaphor for messianic religious Zionism, which weeps at the shattering of its dream. The intermediate path the movement sought to follow, based on an unbreakable link with the Orthodox world and an unshakable bond with secular Zionism, is now perceived as having reached an impasse. The messianic utopia religious Zionism sought to create now seems far from realization. The girls' tears are also those of a messianic redemption that is vanishing into the distance.

As I watched the video, I found myself wondering what direction religious Zionism will take. The establishment of the settlements in Gush Katif symbolized the bond between Orthodoxy and secular Zionism: an act of Jewish activism that rebels against the tearful past of the Jewish people and seeks to shape its own world by itself, through involvement in the act of creation. Do the girls' tears mark the moment of return to passive Orthodoxy that refuses to take action when it is attacked and retreats into prayer?

Nahman Bialik, the Zionist national poet, wrote his poem "On the Slaughter" following the pogrom in Kishinev (Chişinău) in 1903, when the Russian authorities organized anti-Jewish riots. Following the pogrom, in which forty-nine Jews lost their lives, the Zionist movement began to gain strength, and Bialik's poems served as a clarion call for activism and for the abandonment of traditional political passivity. Bialik cries out: "If there is justice, let it appear immediately," and complains to God: "My heart is dead, and my lips have no more prayer." Bialik anticipated that after the bloodshed action would come, leading to cruelty and revenge, and accordingly he emphasizes that "Revenge for a small child – the devil has not yet devised." After the tears shed by the youngsters who struggled to save their vision in Gush Katif have dried; after the sense of injustice has been seared on their hearts; and, after their prayers have gone unanswered, will they develop a desire for fierce revenge?

This book discussed the response of the rabbis from the messianic stream of religious Zionism in the face of territorial compromises by Israel. We examined two central questions: How do the rabbis respond to their fear of prophetic failure and does religious failure lead them to political radicalism?

In order to answer these questions, the book began with Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, who has been a leader of messianic religious Zionism since its foundation and serves as the movement's moral compass. During the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Aviner functioned as a moderating and calming influence. As I have shown, his approach was based on the heroism of restraint. In moments of despair, siege, and helplessness, he cried, and his supporters followed suit; his tears expressed acceptance of divine will. Throughout the history of the movement, Aviner consistently adopted a position of crying and continuing as before. He viewed difficulties as a test of faith that could be met

only through perseverance. Accordingly, he argued that the faithful should not retreat or admit defeat, but neither should they seek revenge or rebel against the state that was destroying their world.

As discussed, Aviner's statist approach now faces enormous challenges. Forces are emerging that reject passivity and seek to wipe away the tears. The post-statist stream demands a forthright approach, presenting a combative ideal for youngsters. On the margins of this stream, calls for revenge may be heard. The statist response is hesitant, somewhat pessimistic, and offers solutions that do not seem to embody a new approach. By contrast, the radicals advocate a struggle to save messianic redemption by abandoning the old path in favor of forceful political activism. These circles are even willing to undermine the army, encouraging soldiers to disobey orders and fomenting division.

Throughout the history of the movement's struggle against political compromise, the statist approach has been dominant. Opposition to withdrawals has been based on a call for nonviolent and passive resistance. The reason for this is that the withdrawals were seen as an inherent part of the messianic process and as a test of faith. Accordingly, the bulk of this public showed a sense of national responsibility and acceptance of authority. Although a radical fringe has always been present, it has been a minority. An honest assessment today would have to admit that while this fringe has grown, it remains a minority.

It would be wrong to underestimate the significance of the radical tendency, in part because these circles may produce individuals who will seek to engage in violence that can have dramatic consequences, particularly in certain circumstances. A growing sense of despair can be seen in the radical stream, manifested in an ideology that delegitimizes political opponents and views them as an apocalyptic enemy, implicitly raising the possibility of violence.

All the streams of messianic religious Zionism aspire to the same goal: the establishment of a theocracy as the realization of a messianic ideal. However, the tactics used to secure this goal vary. The statist majority seeks to achieve its goal through action within the Israeli political and social system, while the post-statist stream seeks to detach itself from the state and promote a religious revolution that will overthrow Israeli democracy. Both streams include a tendency to withdrawal within a religious enclave.

The supporters of messianic religious Zionism are no strangers to failure. Will they continue to adhere to the restrained approach of statism after sustaining further blows? Will they remain loyal and passive in the face of further evacuations of settlements in Judea and Samaria? Only time will tell, but the trend is not encouraging.

This book ends with the words of the historian Gershom Scholem. Scholem argued about the price of messianism, the price which the Jewish people has had to pay out of its own substance for this idea and handed over to the world. For him, the messianic idea is not only consolation and hope. Every attempt to realize it tears open the abysses, which lead each of its manifestations ad absurdum. There is something grand about living in hope, but at the same time there is something profoundly unreal about it. This lesson serves as a warning

to Zionism: “Born out of the horror and destruction that was Jewish history in our generation, it is bound to history itself and not to meta-history; it has not given itself up totally to Messianism. Whether or not Jewish history will be able to endure this entry into the concrete realm without perishing in the crisis of the Messianic claim which has virtually been conjured up – that is the question which out of his great and dangerous past the Jew of this age poses to his present and to his future.”<sup>2</sup> Messianism is a wonderful ideal. It brings hope and it aspires for the ultimate. However, whenever people try to establish the kingdom of heaven on hearth, they are destined to go wrong. It is important to internalize the words of this great historian.

<sup>2</sup> Gershom Scholem, “Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism,” in: *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, 36.

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