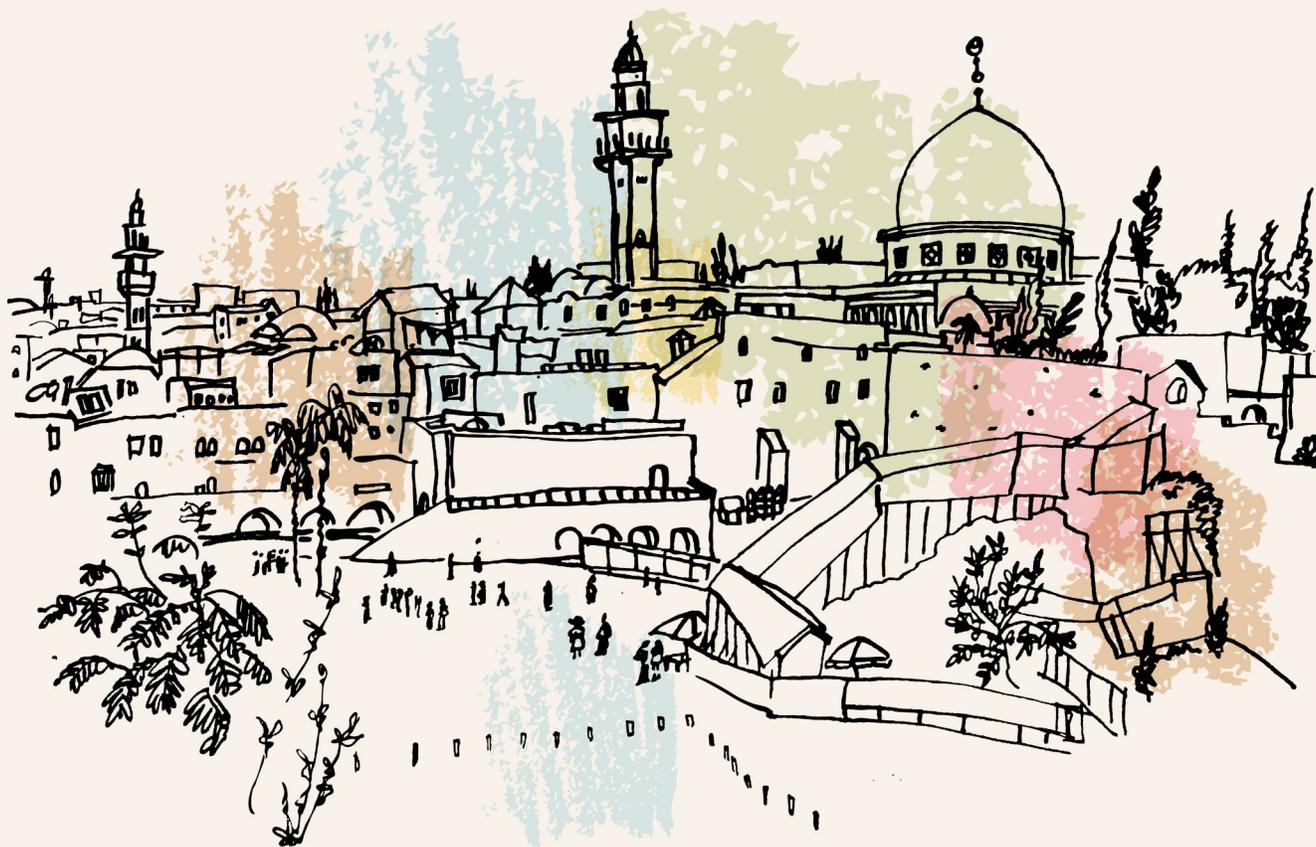


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Essays and Reflections on Religious Zionism

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Editor's Note

This past year saw two momentous anniversaries in the history of Zionism- fifty years since the Six Day War and one hundred years since Balfour Declaration. In that time much has changed for the Land of Israel and the State of Israel, however much also remains the same. The Jewish people continue to yearn to build a society that will live up to God's promises while navigating the many challenges before them. The articles in this journal cover a variety of topics, but what unites them is their embrace of the deep complexity of the Zionist enterprise. We hope that they will stimulate conversation about the meaning and purpose of Israel's future for the next fifty and hundred years.

Zachary Truboff and David Wolkenfeld

Contributors

Rabbi Irving Greenberg is an influential theologian and an activist who has been a seminal thinker on the Holocaust as a turning point in Jewish and Western culture and on the State of Israel as the Jewish assumption of power and the beginning of a new era in Jewish history. He has written extensively on the ethics of Jewish power. He served as Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council from 2000–2002. He is currently writing a comprehensive theology of Judaism as the religion of *tikkun olam* seeking to perfect the world.

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THE ETHICS OF JEWISH POWER¹

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

The assumption of power through the creation of the state of Israel is a turning point in the history of Jewish ethics. For almost two thousand years, Jews (and Christians) have glorified the renunciation of power. The original moral insight of Judaism was that might does not make right and that the exercise of power itself must be judged by its outcomes. Power must be used for covenantal goals such as *tikkun olam*, which means that its exercise must be morally controlled. However, this principle of limits was generalized into an ethic of powerlessness throughout the long period of statelessness; almost two millennia of exile. Living on sufferance and as an outsider population with no political rights, Jews had to accept the political order as given and seek to accommodate to it or to serve it. It would have been suicidal to ‘make trouble’. Not only did Jews pass on that prophetic call to take up the fight (or the moral obligation) to judge power and seek to create a just society; they also turned away from military activity and skills as un-Jewish. Jewish religious culture glorified passivity; it turned to Messianic hopes for redemption, and to mystical and theurgic action to affect the world.

The net result was that Jews strengthened their morale and inner cohesion by holding up an idealized ethical code of powerlessness as constituting their ethical ‘superiority’ over Gentiles who use force. Since all exercise of power inevitably involves excesses and moral compromises, it became easy for Jews to claim additional ethical superiority over the Gentiles. Gentiles hunt; Jews do not. Gentiles persecute; Jews are innocent, unresisting martyrs. Gentiles exploit Jewish powerlessness to impose discriminatory taxes, and occasionally, confiscatory policies; Jews do not. Nevertheless, one of the responses of the victimized Jews was to develop an in-group code of ethics which would permit taking advantage of Gentiles. This was predicated on the tacit or expressed principle that since Gentiles discriminated against Jews and treated them unjustly, there was no reciprocal obligation to treat them justly. The emergence of the State of Israel was a break with two millennia of Jewish living in powerlessness. In the past millennia, many moral standards were developed by people with little ability to act on them; many were built on utopian or absolute standards – standards relatively unchecked by reality. That presented no problem – because there often was no possibility – hence no responsibility – to make them work in the real world. Now there was a revolutionary 180-degree turn in the moral situation. It signified the end of *Galut* Judaism (although many in Israel and in the Diaspora did not grasp this fundamental change). Countless acts of religious grandeur became no longer acceptable. In the phase of exile, the great task of Judaism was to give dignity to the powerless, to show that one serves by only standing and waiting. Martyrdom was the highest form of sanctification of God’s name when there was no other capacity to resist Gentile oppression. However, now it became a fate to be rejected and prevented. It was a role model to be discouraged, and instead, replaced with that of the fighter. The dignity of suffering, the fixing of hope on the world to come, the devaluation of this world and the valorizing of asceticism and of penitential prayer – all had to be put behind in order to focus on developing the exercise of power. Thousands of religious values and practices had to be reoriented to guide the use of power to build a better world in the here and now.

One of the continuing problems in Israel is that the contemporary Rabbis – the successors of the moral leaders of *Galut* Judaism – are still operating on the Diaspora ethic of powerlessness. They have difficulty judging or guiding the use of power.

¹This article is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, “*Triumph of Life*”.

Some back away from involvement in the use or moral judgement of power. Others surrender all judgement or moral limits on the exercise of power. To further complicate the situation, most traditional Rabbis are raised or educated in a sheltered environment. Their philosophy of *halacha* is primarily based on being right according to Jewish legal precedents. There exists only a very weak sense that decision makers are responsible for a living society. The Talmud cites: “You shall keep My laws and rules; by doing them, a person will live by them” (Leviticus 18:5). Says the Talmud: “live by them – and not die by them.”¹ Most of Israel’s rabbis have not yet grasped that if Jewish laws are to be the rules of a functioning State, one must be able to live by them in an actual society. Ironically, many liberal rabbis in Diaspora also are infused with idealized norms of the ethic of powerlessness. They misapply the ethic by judging Israel’s exercise of power by standards of perfection that no living government can meet. Thus, the perfect becomes the enemy of the possible and leads to distorted judgements on the moral quality of the actual policies being pursued.

For the most part, the founders of modern Israel were the creators of the ethic of Jewish power. Using scraps of memory, they forged this emerging ethic in the crucible of the 20th century – the greatest age of Jewish powerlessness and power.

The principles of the Jewish ethic, developed thus far, can be summarized briefly:

1) For the sake of life, the assumption of power is mandatory. To practice *tikkun olam*, one must be alive. To choose powerlessness is a sin, an invitation for evil to triumph.

2) Power must be exercised in the world – a flawed reality in which vested interests, entrenched evil and human error all play a role. Power links ultimate ends – the triumph of life and *tikkun olam* – with proximate means in a continual process. An ethical use of power means maximizing possible good (and life) and minimizing possible evil (and death). Typically, the standard of moral use of power is achieved on balance. To work in a real power situation is to have to eschew merely prophetic stances. Prophets can rely on spiritual power and make absolute demands for righteousness. Governments have obligations to protect people. This involves calling upon the wisdom in the halachic process of the tradition – i.e., to judge specific situations, to reconcile conflicting claims and shifting facts. The ethic requires binding unlimited ends and limited means interactively, without one undermining the other.² This cannot be done without some involvement, guilt and partial failures. The Israeli Rabbinate’s behaviors – by-and-large exhibitions of moral indifference or jingoistic positions – serve as a warning of the unsuitability of older models for the new moral situation.

There is a dialectic here. The historical record shows that even subtle participation within the realm of the possible often leads to selling out to the status quo - unless there is some continual refreshment of judgement through exposure to prophetic norms. Religionists then will have to learn to represent and reconcile prophetic absolute demands with the compromising arts of functioning policies. This will go along with the conserving and healing role in defeat and tragedy, which is the inescapably real human situation. To accept guilt to achieve good ends - without morally accepting the validity of that guilt (so one will seek to reduce or end it) - is an extraordinarily difficult task. Meeting this challenge calls for rearing people of exceptional emotional range and strong orientation both to absolute norms and relative choices, to judgement and to mercy. For conscientious religionists or would be ethical influentials, it requires becoming one competing influence group in society while yet orienting thinking in terms of the total society and, indeed, the divine plan for all of history. To realize these principles will require a turning around of inherited ethical models.

¹Talmud Sanhedrin 74a.

²See on this Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Cook’s insightful essay “*Chacham Adif Minavi?*”.

3) Jewish power is never self-validating or absolute. That would be idolatry. Therefore, power must be limited, guided and judged.

4) Given what cannot be changed, given the evil that cannot be avoided, there is still some best possible (or least evil) way of exercising power. This is the ongoing covenantal way. Therefore, there can be no one-decision moral policy, only an endless series of judgements in specific situations, reconciling conflicting claims and shifting facts.

5) In an imperfect world, there will be inescapable evil – or adverse side effects – in all use of power. The measure of morality is to limit wrong action and correct it. Therefore, a moral society must incorporate checks on power and forces of self-criticism.

In Israel, these exist in the form of multiple parties with free elections, free press and media, the rule of law and an independent judiciary, separation between civilian and military authority, and *tohar baneshek* (moral purity use-of-arms doctrine). Distinctive memories and Jewish traditions such as recollection of slavery and Exodus, of outsider status and suffering, of exile and Holocaust, also powerfully regulate Jewish behavior. One might add that since failure is inevitable, a moral society will need a deep capacity for repentance – and forgiveness.

6) To take on power is to take on guilt. Those who care, take on guilt. Those who refuse to act because they do not want to dirty their hands are morally irresponsible; in their hands, the ideal becomes the enemy of the good.

However, *caveat actor*. Those who do exercise power may be corrupted cumulatively, even totally. People on both sides of the issues must learn to articulate the nature and extent of the guilt. The joint goal is to check the inevitable coarsening of the moral fiber without ripping out the fabric of exercising power.

There is another danger that has shown up in the past six decades. There are those who use the inevitable failures/faults to distort the moral judgements and convict the whole system of being evil – instead of recognizing its strengths. Some of the delegitimation comes through one-sided deliberately distorted judgements by enemies of Israel. Some has come from well-meaning friends, judging the Jewish State by the ideal standards of the ethic of powerlessness.

7) Being Jewish is not a moral guarantee. However, by tradition and self-definition, Jews are committed to strive for a higher standard of behavior. Risk-taking to achieve the goal is worthy behavior – but excessive risks are reckless and immoral.

8) Perfection is impossible to attain, but a people that consistently achieves a higher moral living standard is being faithful to its Jewishness. Behaving five to ten percent more ethically than current norms of practice constitutes being “a light unto the nations.” But it is incredibly difficult to achieve this level over the long haul.

It may be that continuously engaging in the comparison misdirects Jews by subtly convincing them that they are intrinsically better. Instead, Jews need to build in a constantly challenging moral dynamic: how can we, as Jews, do 5% better in this situation than we did in the previous one? Israel has begun this process in the telescoped time of one generation. In the final analysis, no moral achievement in the exercise of power is permanent. Each situation brings with it moral costs and creates a new level of ethical risk. Here the emerging ethic of Jewish power closes the circle with the classic tradition. In the Bible, the meaning of the name, Israel, is: “the one who wrestles [continually] with God and humans [standards] and overcomes.” (Genesis 33:39).

The fundamental point of the shift is that one gives up purity [if you will, innocence] in order to be able to do good [or stop evil].³ This is not to be confused with the idea that power is self-validating and there are no ethics that can restrain it. The rock on which the covenantal ethic stands is that power must be controlled and critiqued by the redemption goals. The use of force must be limited by the requirements posed by the ideal – even if the needs of the real or the actual execution of policy include unethical elements. The definition of the covenantal act is the best possible action, under the circumstances. If one chooses to do the ideal act, and it leads to defeat of the good or to disaster, it is not proper. Thus any policy in the real world – as any exercise of power – inevitably will be flawed. The violations are due to people’s limitations, including their limited willingness to sacrifice advantages in order to do the right thing. There also are inevitable errors, misjudgments and misapplications in the course of actual policy execution. Not least, there is the inescapable compromise between what is ideal and what is possible at this moment. The morally immature will run wild when given power. At the other pole, the morally immature will withdraw and insist that they do not wish to stain their hands with the blood or pain of innocents. This last position is actually less moral because if universally adopted, it would allow evil to win and commit far greater crimes. Refusing to take charge preserves the innocence of a few at the expense of the greater good that could have been accomplished for all. In the aftermath of the Shoah, a choice to stay powerless and innocent would have been a gross dereliction of duty – or, if you will, a flight from reality that could have led to another catastrophe for Jews.

The true covenantal response, then, was to declare a Jewish State and to take up the unremitting daily task of exercising power morally – as morally as possible in the real world. The people, Israel, announced that it was ready to take on sovereignty and responsibility for Jewish fate in the post-modern world. This declaration was no less a decision to create a society that met the covenantal standard of “justice and law.”⁴ The *Yishuv*’s leaders were determined to do more than establish a homeland for survivors and a haven for all Jews after the Holocaust. Ben Gurion insisted that the Zionist state would be an expression of the “uniqueness and destiny” of the Jewish people.⁵ In other words, a Jewish State would take up the burden of Jewish history; it would strive to create a model society that would provide a good life for its citizens and serve as an inspiration for others.

The expectation of higher standards and the commitment to realize them remains a powerful force in Israel society. Despite the vast growth in the economy and state building, despite the routinization of politics, the sense of higher purpose and the willingness to take on the greater burden of Jewish history and peoplehood remains at the core of Israel’s experience. That is why – despite seven decades of unremitting war and struggle- Israel practices one of the most remarkable ethics of power ever exercised by a people under constant siege. The religious community has, too often, generated extremists who are hostile to ethical restraints in dealing with the enemies of Israel, especially Arabs. The religious Zionists sector needs to step up its contribution to the moral miracle of Israel’s exercise of power by increasing its self-criticism and by holding itself to the highest standards of ethical accountability.

³For an extended analysis, see Irving Greenberg, *The Ethics of Jewish Power* (New York, National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, 1988), pp. 1-4.

⁴See Genesis (18:19). Abraham and his seed are chosen to show how to carry out “the way of the Lord”, i.e. to do justice and law (*tzedekah u’mishpat*).

⁵See Shlomo Aronson, *Ben Gurion and Jewish Renaissance*, pp. 78-93.

The Whispers of *HaVaYaH*¹

Rav Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook

Translation and Explanation by Rabbi Daniel Landes

תלחש לי סוד ההויה כולה

חיים לי יש קח נא קח

אם יש לך לב ובלב דם

שרעל יאוש לא זהמהו

ואם לבתך ערלה

תלחש לי ההויה

ויפיי לא יקסימך

סורה מני סורה

הריני לך אסורה

אם כל צפצוף עדין

כל יופי חי, לא הדר שירת קדש

אך זרם אש זרה בך יעוררו

סורה מני סורה

הריני לך אסורה

ודור יקום וחי

ישיר ליופי וחיים

ועדנה בלי די

יניק מטל שמים

ומהדר כרמל ושרון שפעת רזי ההויה

קשיב אזן עם חי

ומעדן שירה ויפי חיים אור קדש ימלא

וההויה כלה לו תדובב: בחירי

הריני לך מותרת

HaVaYaH, all of her, whispers me a secret:

I have life – take me now; take me.

If you have a heart – and in that heart blood –

That the poison of despair has not contaminated.

But if your occluded heart stays uncircumcised,

HaVaYaH whispers to me,

So my beauty does not enchant you

Turn away from me; turn away.

Truly to you I am forbidden.

If every tender rustle,

Every living beauty excites you not to the splendor of holy song,

But to the rush of foreign fire,

Turn away from me; turn away.

Truly to you I am forbidden.

And a generation will arise and live,

Singing to beauty and to life,

And pleasure – never enough!

It suckles from the dew of heaven.

And from the majesty of the Carmel and the Sharon,

A people alive – all ears – listens to the effulgent mysteries of Being.

From the Eden of song and living beauty a holy light overflows.

Then *HaVaYaH* – all of her – gently murmurs: My chosen one –

Truly to you I am permitted.

¹*Being*; the Tetragrammaton (Y-H-V-H) in transposed order.

“*Whispers of HaVaYah*” is Rav Kook’s most personal, intimate and sexual exposition of his deepest Zionist feelings, fears, and hopes. The setup or genre, hopefully reflected in my translation, is beyond a love poem: it is pillow talk with all of its power, immediacy, shocking frankness and even comedic violence. The poem centers around *HaVaYah* who sizes up and rejects two lovers yet pines for a third.

It can be read as a French farce. The two successive lovers are in bed with her; hence the whispering in the ear. She makes her demand with the Hebrew emphatic *na* – “take me **now**; take me.” Each of them however are found sadly wanting, and in a farcical gesture, it is implied that they are kicked out of bed by an unfulfilled, exasperated mistress.

“*HaVaYah*, all of her” is Being, the tetragrammaton (Y-H-V-H) in transposed order. Rav Kook as a panentheist sees Nature not as God’s totality, but as totally reflecting that reality of Oneness. God speaks, as we can say, rabbinically *bilashon HaHaVaYaH*, through language of Being, Existence, and here Nature, as the crucial aspect of the Divine in this encounter.

But each lover is found lacking. The first desires, but can’t actually take Her. The lover may well love, but only in an abstract platonic fashion. His love doesn’t emerge from a heart beating passion but rather the heart is sealed off, uncovered, occluded, and distant. Such an “uncircumcised heart” is *areilah*, and thus we know, Biblically cannot enter the community and must stay outside. Since she is not truly, passionately desired by this lover, she commands that he “turn away from me; turn away.” This lover sadly is not man enough for Her.

The second lover has passion and is clearly, fully enchanted by Her beauty. But the passion is too overwhelming. Indeed, Her “every tender rustle” excites but in a nontranscendent way; it does not head “to the splendor of holy song.” The passion of the lover remains superficial and self-absorbed. Not true love, but lust; his love is ultimately masturbatory - “the rush of Foreign Fire.” He too must “turn away from me; turn away.” Both deficient lovers – one unable to perform, the other only able to feel his own pleasure – are given the same legal pronouncement, a death sentence to the relationship: “truly to you I am forbidden.”

Rav Kook’s radical theological Zionism is fully expressed here. The Land of Israel is more than a mitzvah in its demand to be settled: “take me now; take me.” And, it’s more than even a meta-mitzvah that goes beyond enumeration in schemes of counting the 613 that conditions and explains them all. Rav Kook, rather, in a novel theological turn, has the Land of Israel be the specific instantiation of *HaVaYaH*. Rav Kook has placed The Land within the Godhead, and It now calls out to be truly taken by the People Israel. By taking, marrying, building the Land one experiences in a real, physical, and spiritual way a cleaving to God Herself.

For Rav Kook the lovers represent tragically wanting Jewish groups living in Eretz Yisrael during his day. My grandfather the *Menachem Tzviyon* (Rabbi Menachem B. Sacks, 1896-1987, a trusted student and head of Rav Kook’s election committee for Chief Rabbi) told me of the many visits Rav Kook and he had urging rabbinic leaders of the Old *Yishuv* to join in the pioneering efforts to reclaim the Land. The answer was invariably that they expressed their love in studying *Zeraim* and *Kodshim* – the minute laws of agriculture and sacrifices. For Rav Kook, these were men with occluded and uncircumcised hearts who could not take the new/old source of life of the Jewish people. At the same time, Rav Kook confronted a passionate secularity who saw, as it were, the Land alone as its object of passion, transformation, and meaning. In not being able to connect the source of the Land in God and Torah, Rav Kook shuddered at secular passion cut off from its spiritual roots, and saw it as idolatrous.

Rav Kook has the Land pine for a third lover who can come in time. The fourth stanza differs from the others in its three word lines, short syllables (6/8/6/7-8) and alternate rhyming. It sounds like a nursery rhyme

and indeed speaks of a new lively generation that will “arise and live” full of song to “beauty and to life” and it “suckles from the dew of Heaven,” as it were God’s breast. A new generation that is fully sensual, with an open heart that connects the heart to its Divine Source. This is a stanza of infant sexuality. The People Israel needs a healing of body and soul, just as an infant needs and craves both the Mother’s milk along with the warmth and security of Her embrace.

As this child, this people, matures, they can truly listen to the call of *HaVaYah* – Being. For Rav Kook, this hearing taking place not in the classic holiness of Jerusalem, but rather in the biblical homeland of paganism itself – the Carmel and the Sharon. That area is evocative of a woman’s prominent breasts and fertile lower area will be the “Eden of song and living beauty.”

In the tradition of the Song of Songs and the *Zohar*, this poem is strongly erotic and spiritual. It is evocative but not pornographic. “Then *HaVaYaH* – all of Her – gently murmurs,” as they lay together, “my Chosen one.” Countering conventional religious idioms in which the man chooses the woman, *bechirat leebo* (choice of his heart), it is rather the feminine aspect of God (Being – Nature – The Land) who chooses (Israel). The legal language is at once simple, plain, and even formulaic. But it is laden with promise: “Truly to you, I am permitted.” At that, the curtain closes.

Epilogue and Reflection

The strength of Rav Kook’s poem is thus a series of twofold punches. Its original intent is to criticize both the “do nothing” passive Old *Yishuv* and the hyper activist “know nothing” secular Zionists. Its latent contemporary critique shifts focus almost fully, inverting its targets. Now, the secular side can be characterized as being an intellectual Zionism without passion, cerebral but bodiless; therefore without a great love for the Land. The religious sector can be targeted for its hyper-active ideologized Zionism, which doesn’t want to be bothered by issues of morality and universalism.

This poem is a threat to both contemporary Israeli and Jewish tendencies. It especially stings the religious Zionist sector, which emerged out of an attempt – impressive and successful in many ways – to mediate the passivity of the old religion of the Old *Yishuv* with the atheistic and mitzvot rejectionism of the old socialist secularism. In this the Dati Leumi world takes great pride. But the logic of Rav Kook’s poem, indeed the Whispers of *HaVaYaH*, is to say that this pride itself hides a great idolatry, an isolating, obsessive lust for the Land alone. And, indeed, for that sin *HaVaYaH* may be ready to kick us out of Her bed. This dream is not a reverie, but rather a wakeup call for the new resolution of passion for a renewed Israel with a deep commitment to solving the ethical impossibility of ruling over a difficult and often dangerous, but subject people. Our hope? “And a generation will yet arise.”

Thoughts on Religious Zionist Education in America

Rabbi Tully Harcsztark

Ideals and Ideologies

How should we, Religious Zionists living in the U.S., understand our living in the Diaspora? While this is not a new question, it feels important that I consider the question anew as a Jewish educator in the United States - not on a broad theological level, but on the local level, at this time and for my own school. This is not an intellectual exercise, but rather the kind of practical question that derives from the daily experience of school. It comes up for me in two forms.

The first, as an exercise in self-understanding: Camp Moshava and Bnei Akiva of North America have, for many years, delivered a very clear message to their community members regarding the centrality of the State of Israel, and the responsibility of Jews in the Diaspora. Simply, the message is: make *aliya*! Israel is the homeland of all Jews and it is where all Jews should live. It is a message delivered with respect - for people and for the complexity of the circumstances in which they find themselves - and it is delivered with unwavering commitment. And yet, there are many Modern Orthodox schools and camps in the U.S. which clearly identify as Religious Zionist in orientation but do not deliver this clear message. Israel is central to the Jewish identity and spiritual and religious thriving of these communities, and yet they do not express the same singular commitment to *aliya*.

In our own school, Israel plays a very central role in the life of the students, families and faculty. We celebrate successes and triumphs, and we pray together when tragedy strikes. We study history and *Ivrit* and current events. We are so proud when students make *aliya* or join the IDF. But we do not promote *aliya* with the conviction of a *Bnei Akiva* institution. Why? Commonly, we interpret that as ‘a lack’, an absence, a conviction that is less than it could be. But I suspect otherwise. Communities of people express beliefs and thoughts through their behavior and the decisions they make. Too often, those behaviors are not theorized, they are not explained in the form of ideas. However, the ideas are there, hidden, waiting to be extracted and explained.

The second form it takes is a certain cognitive dissonance. I often feel it when speakers from Israel address our students. Sometimes it is more direct, other times more subtle. There is a certain condescension, a “you’re missing the boat” or “you can’t quite understand” quality to the talk. Students and faculty appreciate and identify with, but also feel alienated from the speaker, often feeling both at the same time. A different example is of two people living in the U.S. One declares, “I should be or I wish I were living in Israel.” The other says, “I am happy here in New York.” Neither is seriously considering a move to Israel. But one is indignant: how can you be complacent and accept living in *Galut*? I feel challenged by the mimicry of such a declaration. At the core of both of these examples is the challenge of balancing ideals and realities. I state unequivocally that *aliya* is an ideal, and we teach towards that in our school. At the same time, the reality is that the overwhelming majority of our students will remain in the Diaspora.

This dilemma presents itself as a classic educational challenge: do we acknowledge and teach toward that reality as well, or does acknowledging that reality reflect ideological compromise and thus, failure? I believe that we must strive for the ideal. But when idealism become a zero-sum game, it has become ideology. We need to hold onto and teach towards our ideals while also acknowledging and teaching towards the real lives of each of our students. All of this has pushed me to look again at the question of Diasporic Religious Zionism.

Views of Diaspora

I begin by presenting, side by side, two views of the Diaspora. On the evening of May 1, 2006, the American Jewish Committee opened its centennial celebration in Washington, DC. The first panel was held at the Library of Congress moderated by Ted Koppel, with discussants Cynthia Ozick, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Leon Wieseltier, and A.B. Yehoshua addressing the question, “What Will Become of the Jewish People?” A.B. Yehoshua’s comments caused a firestorm. Here is an excerpt:

“I...will not have and cannot keep my identity outside Israel...Being Israeli is my skin, it’s not my jacket. You are changing jackets - from Argentina you take your jacket to Brazil, from Brazil...to America...You are changing countries like the Jews have done all the time, changing countries like changing jackets. I have my skin, the territory, the smell of the territory, the smell of the language - all this is my identity, whatever religion is inside this, or is not inside...[T]o play all the time with the pathological interaction with the anti-Semite, what he thinks about you, what he speaks about you, this is not my game. ...I have to say to you, I very welcome your dual loyalty, but I don’t get it. I would like that you would have one loyalty in Israel, and participate. The fact that Israel is on your mind does not help me...You are living with all your loyal feelings to Israel but you are living myth about Israel and not the history of Israel.”¹

This is classic “negation of exile” ideology. Contrast this way of “reading the Diaspora” with the following description by Ruth Wisse:

“The Jewish Diaspora is one of history’s boldest political experiments, an experiment as novel as the idea of monotheism itself, and inconceivable without it...Jews did not consciously plan to continue their national life outside the Land of Israel; neither, until modern times, did any of them develop an ideology committed to stateless existence. Yet to live abroad meant to thrive as a nation without three staples of nationhood: land, a central government, and a means of self-defense.”²

It is a rather inspiring and powerful image to imagine the Diaspora as “one of history’s boldest experiments” and “as novel as monotheism itself.” It pushes us to consider the positive, even miraculous aspects of Jewish life in the Diaspora - and not simply the fact of Jewish survival, although that is perhaps miracle enough. The richness of Jewish practice and culture is a product of the Diaspora. The Babylonian Talmud, the Tosafists, Maimonidean philosophy, Iberian Kabbalah, Hasidism are just some of the sacred and cultural treasures of the Jewish Diaspora. Jews have created Torah and Jewish culture in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, French, German, Ladino, Yiddish, English and many other languages. It has broken the boundaries of territorial space and extended beyond specific eras. Jews have become a nation that has engaged and been enriched by the world which they have inhabited.

There is truth in both of these perspectives and we must resist the temptation to simplify them into competing ideologies, to force us to “pick a side”. The real lives of Jewish people are multifaceted and complex. Zionism and the centrality of *Eretz Yisrael* and the State of Israel stand uncontested as vital to Jewish life and living. But we must incorporate Jewish life in the Diaspora as part of our collective memory as Jews. Religious Zionism must consider the possibilities in appreciating the role of both the Israeli and Diaspora communities in shaping Jewish life.

¹Noam Marans, ed. *The A.B. Yehoshua Controversy: An Israel-Diaspora Dialogue on Jewishness, Israeliness, and Identity* (New York: Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on America Jewish-Israeli Relations, American Jewish Committee, 2006), p. 61.

²Ruth R. Wisse, *Jews and Power* (New York: Schocken, 2007), 11.

Nation/State/People

A fresh look at the ideas of nation, state and people - and the way that these concepts inform and shape each other - opens interesting pathways for our consideration. The past fifteen years has seen the resurgence of the idea of Jewish Peoplehood, a term initiated by Mordechai Kaplan in the 1950's and of significance for his vision of Zionism, as we will discuss below. The term itself raises the familiar question as to whether to view the Jews as a nation, a state or a religion, three categories that we often blend into each other but we would do well to distinguish.

The three terms reflect distinct ways of viewing the Jewish people and its relationship to territory. The state is a bounded space, its population contained inside of it. While loyalties might extend beyond those borders, those loyalties suggest a benevolence, a reaching out beyond the primary obligations of the state. If the state is primary, the Diaspora population is secondary.

As a religion, Judaism most certainly extends beyond its borders. Are Jews a nation within their territory or can one consider a Jewish nation that exists within as well as beyond territorial boundaries?

Noam Pianko summarizes two views regarding the relationship between nation and state:

“A nation, the historian Hugh Seton-Watson wrote in 1977, is a “community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness.” Seton-Watson explains the term state, in direct contrast, as “a legal and political organization, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens.” These definitions differentiate between collective ties based on historical, cultural, ethnic, or religious bond and connections forged by the political rights of the sovereign power over its citizens. Seton-Watson’s position on the importance of retaining an analytical distinction between nation and state, however, is a minority one among scholars of nationalism. Theories of nationalism that assume a congruence between the two terms overshadow efforts by scholars committed to disarticulating notions of nation and state. The historian, Ernst Gellner, has exemplified this tendency with his claim that nationalism “[is] primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”³

Following Seton-Watson, Jews can be viewed as both a nation that extends beyond specific borders and a sovereign state, two mutually reinforcing concepts. Despite the dispersion of the Jews, and their geographic fragmentation, Jews have remained a people, a nation. That “miracle of the Diaspora”, the idea of Jewish peoplehood, must be maintained alongside the idea of the Jewish state. Perhaps we should formulate it this way: rather than the idea of a Jewish nation-state, we need to proudly declare the Jewish nation as complement to, standing alongside, the Jewish State.

This issue informed a fascinating exchange of letters between Simon Rawidowicz, a Polish-born Hebraist who became the first chair of Judaic Studies at Brandeis University in the 1950's, and David Ben Gurion. Rawidowicz expresses his view this way:

“Regarding a “connection”, is there any means more suitable to maintain a connection between groups of a dispersed people, a State and a Diaspora, than a shared name?... Ben Gurion concludes his first letter as follows: “We are all Jews...But only the citizens of the Jewish state are Israel”. I do not accept this decision, which excludes the ten million souls of the Diasporas, and myself among them, from the totality of Israel. For the time being, it is incumbent upon us to preserve the common heart and tongue of Babylon and Jerusalem. The question of Babylon is also the question of Jerusalem.”

³Noam Pianko, *The Roads Not Taken* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 12-13.

For Rawidowicz, the existence of the Jewish state cannot cause the exclusion of large segments of the Jewish people. We must develop a conception of the Jewish people that will marshal all facets of our diverse population. Rawidowicz developed his view over the course of the 900+ pages of his Hebrew two volume work, *Babylon and Jerusalem*. He traces the life of the Jewish people as it flourished in two parallel centers, one in Israel and one in exile, originally in Babylon. These parallel centers complemented and enriched each other, developing their own independent and interdependent Jewish cultures.

Viewed from this perspective, we note that the Jewish people have, for almost all of its history, extended beyond the territorial borders of its homeland. Their Jewish life continues to thrive in and be enriched by the surrounding culture. This phenomenon continues while in exile from their homeland and even as a Jewish community thriving within the borders of Israel.

For Rawidowicz, this suggests an entirely different model of Israel-Diaspora relations, one where the Jewish people as a complete people are centered in two places each enriching the other.⁴

Political and Cultural Enrichment

Such mutual enrichment can take political and cultural form. Let's start with the political: Mordechai Kaplan, as a Zionist, thought carefully about Jews and American democracy. He was concerned that American democracy would have difficulty finding space for Jewish national expression. More broadly, could collective minorities express themselves as a people in a state that had an overarching national identity? Kaplan argued that it is a moral imperative to acknowledge such rights and create that space. His was an argument for cultural pluralism, following Horace Kallen, the coiner of that term and a kindred spirit in terms of their vision for America as well as their conception of Zionism.⁵ The nation-state should have a unifying identity but it must allow collective minorities the freedom to express themselves. In the United States, this argument transformed the Jewish experience, greatly expanding their freedoms to live as Jews, to observe their holy days to establish schools, *kashrut* laws and so much else. Kaplan was an ardent Zionist. His Zionism was deeply informed by the idea of Jewish peoplehood, his vision for democracy in America and the moral questions of statehood. To quote Noam Pianko:

“The intellectual origins of national civilization are integrally connected to Kaplan’s interest in formulating a counter-state variation of Zionism. Kaplan understood progress as the replacement of territorial, racial and statist nationalisms with collective cohesion tied to religious traditions, shared values and connections to a homeland. He endeavored to create an alternate, ethical ideal of nationhood that would affirm national partiality without undermining universal principles of individual rights, human equality and free choice.”⁶

Kaplan’s ideas open the possibility of complementary political structures, each reinforcing the ideals of the other (a political reconceptualization of Rawidowicz’s cultural centers). From a values perspective, Judaism has been the prototype of a diasporic community, seeking collective minority rights, and an atmosphere of respect, tolerance and freedom of expression. In its diasporic version, the Jewish community in America has challenged its government to live up to those ideals, to make the United States a beacon of both individual human rights and communal freedom of expression. In Pianko’s view, American Zionists in the first half of the twentieth century played some role in formulating and disseminating these ideas. And these are the ideas that have come to distinguish American freedom from European Enlightenment ideas.

⁴Pianko, pp. 70-93. See also David Myers, *Between Jew and Arab*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2008), pp. 55-87.

⁵Ibid., 103-116.

⁶Ibid., 127.

Following this train of thought, the State of Israel, then, should serve as the mirror image of the American diasporic community. As the latter has helped show its country the way to respect its minority collectives, the State of Israel is charged with realizing those values as Jews sovereign in their own land. Judaism has existed for centuries in Diaspora to highlight the rights and value of the minority; Israel has the opportunity to model what that might look like as a sovereign country. The State of Israel is, then, the historic opportunity to realize the Jewish values of respect, tolerance, human dignity and the welfare of the members of its society.

Culturally, as we mentioned earlier, through the hybridity of the Diasporic existence, Jews are a nation that has engaged and been enriched by the cultures within which they have lived. There is real power in the dialogue that takes place between the hybrid Diaspora communities and the community in Israel. It is striking that some of the strongest voices in Israel, Yeshivat Har Etzion and the Shalom Hartman Institute to name two examples, are expressions of just such hybridity enriching Israeli culture. Dialogue between the more particular national voice of the Jewish State and the more universal or hybridized voice of American Jewry has been mutually enriching for the Jewish people and, if pursued intentionally, could prove to be even more so.

Back to the School

How might this all impact life in school? First, we must develop language that expresses our deep commitment to Religious Zionism as a movement that is shaped and strengthened by the Jewish nation, in both Israel and the Diaspora. Leaders of each community, when presenting to the other, would acknowledge the contributions and validity of each community.

For teachers, we recently have hosted a number of educator delegations from Israel, each group exploring a different aspect of their educational program. We have experienced a slight uptick in such visits in the recent past. The collaborative possibilities are strong. We were struck by the realization that, despite a significant cultural difference between our respective populations, we were struggling with similar educational challenges such as motivating students in *tefilla*, strategies for teaching *Talmud* or even how to teach 'real and complex' Israel. We concluded with a shared sentiment that all would benefit from more sustained engagement with each other. Some examples: we discussed differences between private and public Jewish education and some of the benefits and challenges of each: state funded tuition vs. expensive private tuition, comparative standards regarding the physical plant, how budgets were set, class size, coeducation and many other educational issues, both curricular and programmatic. One could imagine how Jewish education overall would be strengthened by such a collaboration.

As for students: Israeli and Diaspora students simply do not know each other. On the one hand, their lives and life choices are vastly different from each other; and yet, as teenagers, there is much that is similar. As a parent of American children, I am struck by the difference in goal-setting of high school students in America in contrast to Israel. High school students in the U.S. are concerned about college and career, making the most of their personal opportunities. Israeli high school students are deciding in what capacity they will contribute to the future of their countries - to which division in the IDF do they hope to be admitted or what type of community service will they do. These are very different orienting questions, one geared to individual achievement, and the other contribution to the community. Jewish education values both. But different communities prioritize differently for reasons that might or might not be in their control. The Jewish people would be stronger if our students - and their teachers - learned from each other, knew each other, understood the lives of the other in a more profound way regarding this and many other issues.

A Religious Zionist school that values Diaspora life should develop curricula that reflect its commitment to both Israel and Diaspora communities. Imagine if Israeli schools would do the same! Currently, most Religious Zionist schools in the U.S. have some form of Zionist education; however, exploring and acknowledging the power of Diaspora is impolitic. And unfortunately, we find little if any interest in Diaspora culture in Israeli curricula. In addition to history, a discipline that clearly lends itself to this issue, Judaic Studies, offers rich possibilities as well. In *Tanakh*, texts of the destruction of the Temple, especially Jeremiah as well as those of the Persian period (Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel and Esther) raise interesting issues related to this topic - if one is inclined to find them. In the Talmud as well, the *sugya* in *Ketubot* (110b-111a) serves as a prime example of a number that can be found. The very existence of the Babylonian Talmud alongside the Jerusalem Talmud invites exploration of this issue - precisely the argument of Rawidowicz' tome.

Perhaps, most fundamentally the milieu. American Jews live as a collective minority in the United States; a proud and confident collective minority. The culture of this country breeds sensitivity to individual rights, respect for The Other and the acceptance of difference. The Jewish experience as a minority deepens and actualizes our appreciation for those values. In contrast, living in *Medinat Yisrael* infuses one with a collective pride, a spirit of nationalism, the strength and confidence that comes with sovereignty - and the responsibility, vigilance and even fear that comes with defending one's borders against the enemy. These differing experiences have the capacity to shape very different political mindsets. And both are important for us as a nation. That dual consciousness can help us **best** balance communitarian values with respect for individual freedoms. Living in one milieu, we will each be more naturally sensitive to that set of values; but we must absorb the other as well.

The difference between seeing these as mutually reinforcing rather than a zero-sum binary is profound. Too often, in my experience, political discussion between friends or family in Israel and the Diaspora are fraught - or we avoid them entirely - because we split. The Diaspora Jews take the more liberal side and the Israelis the more hawkish view. We probably intuit that there is truth in the middle. More importantly, we should embrace the values of the other community, precisely the values to which we are less exposed. Being open to and internalizing both sets of values will help bring Diaspora and Israeli communities together in a mutually reinforcing embrace.

This last point highlights the unique possibilities for the Modern Orthodox community, a group that is relatively nationalistic when compared to the broader Jewish community and, as Americans, relatively individualistic and liberal. Perhaps there is a role to play in bridging the gap between Israeli nationals and liberal American Jews.

Finally, as pragmatic Religious Zionists, part of our stated mission might be to work to bridge the perceived gap between Israel and Diaspora youth, between citizens of Israel and the Diaspora. I offer these remarks as an opening gambit in the hope of fostering purposeful dialogue on this issue that is of great importance to our community.

The Moral Dangers and Opportunities of Jewish Nationalism

Rabbi Zachary Truboff

In the fall of 2017, Richard Spencer, the most prominent white nationalist in America went on a speaking tour at several colleges across the country. As could be expected, he was met with opposition and protest wherever he lectured. At Texas A&M he was confronted by the local Hillel rabbi who publicly challenged him, “You come here with a message of radical exclusion. My tradition teaches a message of radical inclusion, as embodied by Torah.” Spencer’s response, however, caught everyone by surprise. Instead of taking the opportunity to express his anti-semitic beliefs, he went on to compare his ideology to Zionism, a philosophy that the rabbi must certainly agree with. “Do you really want radical inclusion in the State of Israel?” Spencer asked, “Jews exist precisely because you did not assimilate into the Gentiles... I respect that about you. I want my people to have that same sense of themselves.” According to reports, the Hillel rabbi was silent and offered no rebuttal to Spencer’s claims.¹ This incident should give us all pause and raises a number of thorny issues. Is there no difference between Zionism and the kind of supremacist nationalism espoused by a reprehensible figure like Richard Spencer? The Hillel rabbi’s lack of response is equally troubling. Does the concept of a Jewish state fundamentally contradict Jewish notions of “radical inclusion” and universalism? In many ways, this episode embodies the contradictions and tensions that have been latent within Zionism since its beginnings, and are still very much present today.

Nationalism has served as a powerful force in modern history, though not all of its forms should be viewed the same way. Some kind of liberal nationalism or patriotism is essential for all modern states.² It enables a shared identity and national cohesion that encourages citizens to make the sacrifices that are necessary for society to flourish. Furthermore, human beings have an instinctual need for a sense of home, and find great meaning in their identification with a larger collective. In the words of one political theorist, “Consciousness of belonging to a nation is one of the things which enable us as individuals in some way in this earthly existence to transcend the limitations of space, time, and mortality, and to participate in that which had meaning before us and will continue to have meaning beyond us.”³

However, history has also repeatedly demonstrated the many ways in which nationalism can devolve into chauvinism, and even outright racism. It is a form of thinking that often divides the world into “us” and “them,” and as a consequence, nations in the thrall of nationalism have not hesitated to use violence in order to achieve selfish and destructive ends. Nationalism is at its most dangerous when it is accompanied by moral blindness to the suffering that it imposes on others. As noted by George Orwell, “Nationalism is power-hunger tempered by self-deception... There is no crime, absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when ‘our’ side commits it.”⁴

¹The Forward, ‘Alt Right’ Leader Ties White Supremacy to Zionism — Leaves Rabbi Speechless, <http://forward.com/news/356336/alt-right-leader-ties-white-supremacy-to-zionism-leaves-rabbi-speechless>.

²For example, see Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³Neil MacCormick “Nation and Nationalism,” *Legal Right and Social Democracy: Essays in Legal and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 282.

⁴George Orwell, *Notes on Nationalism* http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat

From the beginning of the Jewish national project until today, Zionism's opponents have leveled many of these criticisms against it. But, they fail to account for the fundamental ways in which Zionism was intended to be different from other forms of nationalism. Though its origin shares much with many nationalist movements that arose in the 19th century,⁵ Zionism has also consistently articulated a moral vision that extends beyond the needs of the Jewish people. This aspiration of Zionism is rooted in the narratives of the Torah, what Biblical scholar Jon Levenson describes as "The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism." The God of the Jewish people is also the God of all of humanity. Though the Jewish people may be God's chosen nation, their election is to benefit all human beings. When God selects Avraham, He declares that "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you"⁶ and that Avraham "will educate his children to keep the way of God to do justice and righteousness."⁷ The universal mission of the Jewish people is further amplified by Isaiah who he repeatedly proclaims that they will be a "light unto the nations."⁸

Zionism, in both its secular and religious variants, attempts to retain this universal horizon, and therefore minimize the dangers of Jewish nationalism. Leading secular Zionist thinkers such as Moshe Hess, Achad HaAm, and David Ben Gurion all expressed views that the Jewish people's return to the land of Israel was to have universal implications in which justice and righteousness are brought to the world.⁹ The same is true for many religious Zionists leaders as well. Rabbis Ben Zion U'ziel, Avigdor Amiel, and Rav Kook all wrote extensively about how Zionism must be to the benefit of the entire world.¹⁰

Rav Kook: Critic of Jewish Nationalism?

Of all these thinkers, it is Rav Kook who best illustrates the dramatic tensions between particularism and universalism at the heart of the Zionist enterprise. Viewed as the spiritual father of the Religious Zionist community, he continues to be of great influence in Israel today though rarely is the full breadth of his complex thought truly appreciated. Rav Kook's writings are full of statements avowing the importance of ethics and morality at the heart of the Jewish nationalist endeavor, and therefore, Zionism's legitimacy is dependent on realizing its universal mission.¹¹

⁵See Arthur Hertzberg's Introduction in *The Zionist Idea* (Garden City:Doubleday, 1959).

⁶*Genesis* (12:3).

⁷*Genesis* (18:19).

⁸See *Isaiah* (49:6), (42:6), and (60:3).

⁹For a discussion of this idea within Moshe Hess' Rome and Jerusalem see *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 119-139. A classic example of Achad Haam's approach can be found in the essay "Priest and Prophet." This was also a recurring theme in Ben Gurion's writings, and is prominently highlighted in his farewell address.

¹⁰For a discussion of their views see Moshe Hellinger, "Individual and Society, Nationalism and Universalism in the Religious Zionist Thought of Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel and Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 15:1-2 (Spring 2003).

¹¹This section was deeply influenced by Rabbi Yehudah Amital's important essay "The Ethical Foundations of Rav Kook's Nationalist Views," *The World of Rav Kook's Thought* (Avi Chai, 1991), 423-435.

¹²*Ein Aya Berachot* 1:175. See also the following quote, "If the idea of our national revival were not so lofty and elevated to the point where it concludes the everlasting vision embracing the whole soul of mankind and all existence, we would not be able to be connected with so much of our inner soul." *Maamrei HaReiyah*, Vol. 2, p. 417.

“It must be deeply rooted that the purpose and goal of Jewish nationalism is not to strengthen ourselves, to conquer other nations, or do other things like this which are what the Gentile yearns for because of their excessive self-love. Rather our nationalism exists to bring blessing and wholeness to the entire world. Therefore, even at the beginning of its establishment... it is for the rectification and love of all humanity.”¹²

Despite Rav Kook’s well-known embrace of Zionism, his early writings on the topic reflect a deep ambivalence that is worth examining.¹³ In a series of essays written before he moved to Israel to serve as the Chief of Rabbi of Yaffo, Rav Kook praised Zionism as an authentic expression of the Jewish spirit. Its concern for the welfare of the Jewish people is a natural extension of the primary spiritual value of *ahavat yisrael*. However, he also repeatedly expresses concern about Zionism’s potential dangers. Without Judaism’s moral and spiritual dimensions, he cautions that Jewish nationalism will ultimately end in failure. It will degrade the Jewish national spirit by imitating the nationalistic movements of Europe in a feeble attempt to recover Jewish pride.¹⁴ Rav Kook directed his most scathing criticism at the potential for Jewish nationalism to turn into collective narcissism.

“Our nationalism in the spirit of the Torah is saved from the riot-causing idiocy of *Nationalismus* divorced from the righteous path, easily becoming self-love. Nationalism which has no feeling more exalted than itself from which to draw life and light can easily turn into self-love in a gross and ugly way.”¹⁵

The gross and ugly self-love, described by Rav Kook, accurately captures the dark undercurrents of nationalism that has been explored by scholars for centuries. At times, nationalism calls upon its adherents to identify with the nation to such a degree that they see it as an extension of themselves. Under these conditions, the selfishness at the heart of individual life increases exponentially within the context of the nation. Rav Kook’s perspective shares much in common with Christian theologian and political philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr. He explains that individuals may learn how to transcend their self-interest. However, “these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and, therefore, more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships.”¹⁶ As a consequence of this, he writes “The selfishness of nations is proverbial. It was a dictum of George Washington that nations were not to be trusted beyond their own self interest.”¹⁷ In its most dangerous form, nationalism can expand upon and intensify the selfishness of the individual by offering him or her new and even more powerful ways to pursue their self-interest. “The man in the street, with his lust for power and prestige, thwarted by his own limitations and the necessary social life, projects his ego upon his nation and indulges his anarchic lusts vicariously. So, the nation is at one and the same a check upon, and a final vent for, the expression of individual egoism.”¹⁸

Rav Kook’s views on the crude selfishness inherent to nationalism were shaped by his understanding of the radical individualism at the heart of modern life. Ever since John Locke, liberal thought has sought to base the construction of society around the individual. Governments are created when human beings enter into a social contract to protect their security and, even more importantly, their private property. On a fundamental level, the government does not exist to promote the general welfare, but rather to protect the rights of the individual.

¹³For a comprehensive and incisive analysis of Rav Kook’s early writings and his approach to Zionism see Yehudah Mirsky, “An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhaq Ha-Cohen Kook from 1865 to 1904” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 2007), 286-342.

¹⁴“*Afikim BaNegev*,” *Otzarot Ha-Reiyah*, Vol. 2, 116-117.

¹⁵“*Teudat Yisrael u-Leumiyyuto*,” *Otzarot Ha-Reiyah*, Vol. 2, 59. Translation by Mirsky.

¹⁶Reinhold Niebuhr, “Moral Man and Immoral Society,” *Major Works on Religion and Politics*, (New York: Library of America, 2015), 139.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 217.

According to Rav Kook, this focus on the individual can intensify a profound self-centeredness that runs throughout all of Western society. He explains that the prevailing attitude is that “another person is not to benefit from that which is mine, or to touch that which is mine, because the feelings of selfishness and ego are strong and unwieldy without limit... the legal system of the Gentiles is primarily drawn from this gross egoism, upon which is built the political society of humanity.” It is the selfish individualism at the heart of modern society that propels the constant conflict and competition that exists between both individuals and nations. Rav Kook later continues that “this foundation of human society causes those separated into nations to war with each other without compassion.”¹⁹

Rav Kook also understood that violence fueled by nationalism’s egoism is often accompanied by a kind of moral blindness. The tribalist instincts, that drive nationalism, tend only to be concerned with whether an action will be good or bad for members of their community. When this happens, nationalism often loses sight of any sense of its universal moral obligations.

Rav Kook writes, “Nationalistic feeling is a sentiment exalted in its honest naturalness, but when it is not properly directed and does not turn to the higher goal of absolute happiness of general perfection, it will eventually burst the bounds of morality when it oversteps its boundaries by raising a hand to capture castles that do not belong to it, without righteous judgement and with no holy goal or purpose.”²⁰

Love of Self, Love of All

Though clear-eyed about the dangers of self-love at the heart of nationalism, Rav Kook also understands that it was to play a vital role in the Jewish people’s universal mission. Self-love is a recurring theme throughout his writing, and he sees it as an essential part of the human soul and psyche. For example, he argues that a healthy sense of self-love is necessary for moral development and one who lacks proper self-love will constantly compare themselves to others causing powerfully damaging feelings of resentment.²¹

How though is self-love to be reconciled with Judaism’s universal horizon, and what might be the implications for Jewish nationalism? In a fascinating letter, Rav Kook attempts to resolve this contradiction. He argues that universal love is made possible through the recognition that all of creation is interconnected. Our ego may tell us that we are separate and distinct from all other creatures, but a deeper Divine reality unites all aspects of creation together as one- from the tallest mountains to the smallest microbe. In actuality, the entirety of existence is a manifestation of God, as it says in the Zohar, “There is no place devoid of Him”²² and “He fills all worlds.”²³ The better that one comes to understand this insight, the more one recognizes that other people, even those most different from us, can be seen as an extension of ourselves. In doing so, one gains the capacity to feel other’s pain and joy as if it was their own. At that moment, the love one has for oneself expands beyond the “I” to the “you.” Though he does not cite the verse, Rav Kook’s explanation offers a radical reinterpretation of the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” It is this expanded sense of self that transforms the love of self into a love of all. He writes:

“The highest consciousness of unity, alone in its loftiness, must pass judgment on the whole process of particulars being a false illusion, an inadequacy of the field of our vision. Our limbs are organically connected, so that when one is wounded they all feel pain. In the same fashion we have a self-love that is partially anarchic, branching out “skin over skin” (*Iyov* 2:4) by the same channels that transmit feeling from one to the other.”²⁴

¹⁹*Shemoneh Kevatzim* 2:267.

²⁰*Olat HaRe-Ayah*, Vol. 1, 234.

²¹*Shemoneh Kevatzim* 3:307.

²²*Tikkunei Zohar*, 91b, 122b.

²³*Tikkunei Zohar*, 5a, 6b, Ra’aya Mehemana, Pinhas 225a.

²⁴*Igerot HaReiyah* Vol. 1, letter 140. Translation based on Tzvi Feldman, Rav A.Y. Kook Selected Letters, (Maaleh Adumim:Ma’aliyot Publications, 1986), 129-130.

Though ultimately fueled by mystical awareness, this expanded consciousness appears in its most natural form in the context of the family. Love binds together a husband and a wife creating a new shared identity, a new collective “I.” The same is even more true for parents and children. Parents love their children and deeply identify with them, because on the most fundamental level, they come from them.

“Such relations are seen in a spiritual, experiential sense in the bonds of loving souls that form the foundation of the family so that, if it were not so difficult to free ourselves from habit, we would find that the difference between that feeling of pleasure or pain that spreads from one limb to another is not significantly different from the feeling that spreads from son to father and from lover to beloved.”

The central challenge is to expand this love beyond the family and nation to humanity as a whole. In such a framework, life is conceived as a series of concentric circles, each one subsumed within the other. With greater awareness of human interconnectedness, the sense of self expands, and love expands along with it.

“When these channels are broadened, the feelings flow more strongly and are more tangible and evident. When the national body is in its wholeness and perfection, it too is constructed on the model of the family. Development requires only the widening of the channels; individual solidarity broadens into the nation. From nation to mankind is but one step. From humanity to all life is one more step. Concern for the inhabitants of one planet to a serious and profound interest in all of existence in its widest sense is only one move, indeed a far off one, but eternity is in no rush.”

Only through widening the channels of self-love, can the selfish nature of Jewish nationalism be transformed into a full fledged universalism concerned for the welfare of all. ²⁵

Easier Said Than Done

It is reasonable to question whether such an approach is realistic or just the imaginings of an elevated soul. Most Jews are not well versed in the intricacies of Kabbalah, and do not dedicate their time contemplating the unity of existence. However, perhaps one does not have to be a mystic to see the truth of Rav Kook’s insights. Ideas about the expanding nature of self-love have been a part of Western thought for millennia.²⁶ More than two thousand years before Rav Kook, the Stoics argued that human beings should identify, not only by their local affiliations but, with humanity as a whole. In language strikingly similar to Rav Kook, the Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius argued that the awareness of our interconnectedness expands our sense of self to include others. He noted that the Greek word for “part” (meros) is only one letter different from the word for “limb” (melos) and says, “If, changing the word, you call yourself merely a [detached] part rather than a limb, you do not yet love your fellow men from the heart, nor derive complete joy from doing good; you will do it merely as a duty, not as doing good to yourself.”²⁷

The expanding nature of self-love is also beautifully described by the 18th century poet, Alexander Pope in his most famous work, “An Essay on Man.” Though there is no evidence that Rav Kook was familiar with Pope’s poetry, one can easily see the similarities in their thought.

²⁵See also Shemoneh Kevatzim 8:46.

²⁶Much of this has been due to the influence of Neoplatonism on Christianity, Western culture, and Kabbalah.

²⁷ Translation by Marcia Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Comsmopolitanism,” *For Love of Country* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 10. This volume also an excellent selection of articles that expore that tension in nationalism between universalism and particularism.

God loves from Whole to Parts, but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spread,
Friend, parent, neighbor, first it will embrace

As was often the case, Rav Kook offers no prescriptions for how a political community is to undergo such a radical moral and spiritual transformation. However, the teachings of another twentieth-century Jewish thinker may be of assistance. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, one of the great Mussar teachers of the twentieth century, extensively explored the relationship between self love and loving others. He explains that we often assume that love precedes generosity towards others, and is the motivation that fuels it. Nevertheless, he counterintuitively notes that the opposite may, in fact, be right. Giving to others can also bring about our love for them. How is this possible? In his writings, he hits upon the same insight discussed by Rav Kook about the expanding nature of self-love.

“Giving may bring about love for the same reason that a person loves what he himself has created or nurtured: he recognizes in it part of himself. Whether it is a child he has brought into the world, an animal he has reared, a plant he has tended, or even a thing she has made or a house he has built- a person is bound in love to the work of his hands, for in it he finds himself.”²⁸

Rather than cultivating a sense of love through contemplating one’s interconnectedness with others, Rabbi Dessler argues that the feeling can be generated through giving to others. The act of giving enables us to identify with the other and see ourselves within them. As a consequence, a lack of love exists only in the case where we have not yet given.

“If one reflects that a person comes to love the one to whom he gives, he would realize that the only reason the other person seems a stranger to him is because he has not yet given to him; he has not taken the trouble to show him friendly concern. If I give to someone, I feel close to him; I have a share in his being. It follows that if I were to start bestowing good upon everyone I come into contact with, I would soon feel that they are all my relatives, all my loved ones. I now have a share in them; my being has extended into all of them.”²⁹

To prevent the dangers of nationalism and help achieve its universal mission, Zionism must learn to internalize the teachings of both Rav Kook and Rabbi Dessler. By giving to those who are not Jewish, both within and beyond its borders, the Jewish state comes to identify with the other and expands the radius of its love and care. Ensuring equal treatment of its non-Jewish citizens, providing medical treatment to Syrian refugees, and sending search and rescue teams to disaster zones around the world are just some of the key steps that must consistently be part of Israel’s goals.

²⁸Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav Me-Eliyahu*. Translation from Aryeh Carmell, *Strive for Truth*, (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1978), 126-127.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 130.

Conclusion

The critical dilemma of Zionism is to retain the universal horizon that has always been so central to God's vision for the Jewish people, while still being fully committed to the needs of Jewish particularism. Many today see the attempt to reconcile Zionism's inner contradictions as fanciful and perhaps even dangerous. They rightfully point to Rav Kook's disciples who interpret their teacher's messianic expectations to mean that the Jewish people are immune to the moral dangers of nationalism.³⁰ Furthermore, though some of his students have retained a language of universalism, they make it clear that it is only to be pursued through the narrow self-interests of the Jewish nation rather than Israel directing its energies towards humanity as a whole.³¹

Ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, and the broader Arab world has made it far harder to retain the universal horizon than the early Zionists had ever imagined. In some cases, it has even bred a cynicism that perceives Jewish nationalism and universalism as mutually exclusive. Reinhold Niebuhr, however, would have described Rav Kook's vision of universal love as a "impossible possible."³² We can neither give up Jewish particularism, nor stop judging it against such an ideal universal vision. Without such an aspiration, Zionism will become like other nationalisms. It will descend into a form of self-love that is violent to others, while at the same time blind to its moral failings. We must recognize that the Jewish state is not an island unto itself. It is part of a deeply interconnected world and must continually commit itself to do good for all of its citizens and for those beyond its borders. Only then can it demonstrate that the self-love at the heart of a nation-state can and must lead to a love of all humanity. It is a long and difficult road to travel, but as Rav Kook wrote, "eternity is in no rush."

³⁰Rav Kook's classic quote on the subject can be found in Orot HaMilchama 3, "We left world politics by force of circumstances that (nevertheless) contains an inner desire, until a fortunate time will come, when it will possible to conduct a nation without wickedness and barbarism- this is the time we hope for." Translation from Bezalel Naor, Orot (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993), 96.

³¹See Yitzchak Blau, "Ploughshares Into Swords: Contemporary Religious Zionists and Moral Constraints," Tradition, 34:4,2000.

³²Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press, 1935), 103-135.

How do we want to live?

The meanings of Jewish belonging in our time¹

Rabbi Dr. Yehudah Mirsky

Pre-modern Jewish life was structured around the organized community, the kehillah. Then, beginning in the late eighteenth century, and with growing speed and scale through the nineteenth, a variety of factors — the rise of the European nation-state and its difficulty integrating national and religious minorities, and the rise of modern philosophy and science and their undermining of religious tradition — together undid the frameworks of meaningful belief and belonging that had long been inescapable for Jew and gentile alike. With this steady collapse, fundamental questions of both organization and existence were blown wide open. Much of modern Jewish life has been an attempt to recreate the kehillah in which Jewish life was embedded and intuitively made sense.

Writing in 1897 and in response to the First Zionist Congress, Ahad Ha-Am put his finger on the problem with characteristic elegance (the Jewish question so preoccupying Europe was really two questions) — that of securing Jewish physical, social and economic survival and well-being, and of providing a new foundation for the meaning of Jewish existence; as he put it: the problem of the Jews, and the problem of Judaism. And, he pointedly asserted, while the new political Zionism put forth by Theodor Herzl was perhaps an answer to the first, it neglected the second.

Today we are all living different answers — political, religious, cultural — to the problem of the Jews and of Judaism and the new forms of belief and community that they called into being. The tensions within and among these answers and their proponents were reshaped and even radicalized by two once-unimaginable events: the Holocaust, and the creation of the State of Israel. Whatever one thinks of the State of Israel, it has taken many unexpected turns and stirred as many questions as answers. The debates surrounding it are not only arguments over politics and power, but also about how to live as Jews, as Israelis, as members of humanity.

Israel, by definition, figures prominently in the various permutations of Jewish belonging and in very different ways. For Diaspora Jews, Israel is one possible component of their Jewishness; for some it is central and even at times the core element of their Jewishness, while for others it can range from less central to irrelevant or even serve as a reference point for a Jewish identity defined by anti-Zionism. Similarly, while for Israeli Jews, Jewishness frames their lives overall, their relationships to Jewish religion or historical culture are often complex. (And Israel's Jewishness figures very differently for its non-Jewish citizens.) Like Israel for Diaspora Jews, Jewishness for Israeli Jews varies from central to not figuring at all, while others define themselves as avowedly un- or anti-Jewish (at least, staunchly unidentified with Judaism as a religion).

And one more thing: Diaspora Jews (at least the organized Jewish community) need Israel for their cultural — and, perhaps physical — survival in ways that Israeli Jews simply do not. Meanwhile, the meaning of Jewishness is as contested in Israel as it is anywhere, and the stakes are very high, for Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis, for Jews around the world, and for those on the receiving end of Israeli power.

It's all such a complicated and thorny thing, this sifting through of Jewish meaning and belonging in our time.

¹This article is one of seventeen important perspectives on the current state of the Israel-Diaspora relationship published in a special issue of Eretz Acheret magazine, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Why do we persist in it? Because in the end we all have to come from, and build our lives, somewhere, on the ground, and in our minds and hearts. The free-floating, unattached individual is a myth, dangerous and seductive. To deny that we are all born into experiences and language shaped by others is foolishness — although to deny the reality of our abilities to choose is a dangerous illusion. If we do not take hold of and choose how we navigate our belongings — of ethnicity and kin, of civic engagement, of transcendent belief, value and longing — others will be happy to deny them to us, or to manage them for profit or power.

If choosing an identity seems like a contradiction in terms, that is because in many ways it is.

Indeed, “Jewish identity” is in some ways a kind of ghost, a marker of things left behind — halakha, community, God. Or at least God encountered, experienced, revered, obeyed or denied through the inescapable framework of a community. Yet God, or at least theology, is inescapable, since we need some kind of grounding, some kind of ultimacy, to shape our choices and commitments over time. This is hard to say in the wake of the Holocaust — indeed it often seems as though one reason that the Holocaust looms so large in contemporary thought is precisely because its sheer immensity and incomprehensibility and loss, as terrifying as they are, make it the only thing large enough to take the place of God.

* * *

God is, of course, larger than us all, than our questions or our answers, or our theologies. To commit to a life lived in and with God is a choice everyone must make for him or herself. The meaning of that choice is not saying “yes” or “no” to abstract propositions, but of choosing to live in relation to Him and to communities, of the living and the dead, and to do all that living in communities entails.

* * *

What sort of community is a Jewish community? It is a curious mix of family, society and the cosmos. It is a large family, with all the familial reality of flesh and blood and birth and death, of hard love and hard obligation. It is a family that fosters its own kind of society. And it is a family living for universal truths – of ethics, of the fact of our created-ness, the creatureliness of our being – that aim to speak to, and heal, all of humankind.

This thinking of Jewishness as family has many implications. Families offer shelter and they confer responsibility. In the case of conversion, for example, one becomes part of a new family, and in so doing takes responsibility for the new family’s members, and they take responsibility for him or her.

Thinking of Jewishness as a universally-minded family also sets the terms for many of the crucial theological dilemmas arising from the complicated marriage of the universal and the particular. I can indeed care more in some ways about the immediate welfare of my own family than that of another — but nobody would imagine that I am thus relieved of my responsibility for the welfare of the members of other families. In Israel, the danger to Judaism is that the particular will overwhelm the universal, by virtue of Jewish majority, and through the military conflicts besetting the state, becoming bitterly or even proudly chauvinistic. In America, it’s the reverse: the universal overwhelming the particular, with Jewishness becoming synonymous with middle-class life, even to the vanishing point. The possibility of dissolution, of becoming just one more set of tiles in the great American mosaic, poses the danger of idolatry, of losing the possibility of judgments standing outside and beyond ourselves. And in Israel, the possibility of chauvinism is itself a temptation of idolatry, the absolutization of blood and ethnicity and kinship in their own terms instead of ethical values which of necessity point beyond all our affective ties and our lives.

* * *

How to think all this through in a fast-changing and bewildering present? To borrow a line from the rock group R.E.M.: “Talk about the passion.”

When we look back at the fierce ideological struggles that marked Jewry up until the Holocaust, one thing becomes clear: the protagonists who mattered most, whose words are still worth reading whatever the historical verdict — cared passionately about Jewish physical and cultural survival, and staked their lives on their visions of how to secure it.

That passion served to anchor the reflections of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoen Kook (1865-1935), founder of the modern Chief Rabbinate of Israel and one of the greatest Jewish leaders and thinkers of modern times, who, among many other things, thought through the meaning of Jewish argumentation to its foundations.

In a justly famous set of reflections written around 1912-13, Rav Kook points to three distinct dimensions of Jewish identity: nation (group, ethnicity or peoplehood), universal ethics, and the sacred. In pre-modern Jewish life, these all clustered together and reinforced each other. In modern times they split apart, each becoming the property of a specific party; in Kook's day, respectively, Zionists, Socialists, and Orthodoxy. These "camps" were not just different ways of addressing problems practically, they were vehicles of identity, of articulating and living different visions of Jewishness. But the one thing that they shared — to me, still the indispensable prerequisite to being part of the Jewish conversation today — was a passionate commitment to Jewish physical and cultural survival, each by its own lights.

For Rav Kook, the true meaning of the "sacred" is the ultimate unity of all three: Jewish peoplehood at once particular and universal and thus enacting God's being universal and particular, transcendent, and immanent.

The task in the meantime is to assert one's own vision of Jewishness, expressing the deepest stirrings of one's own soul, while recognizing the ultimate partiality of one's own perspective and the inescapable need for the strivings of other Jews — including those with whom we disagree.

Something additional emerges from Rav Kook's ideas here, a workable sketch of what we mean by Jewishness, this thing we know in our bones yet struggle so hard to understand. It is an amalgam of 1) our primal ties to one another as a large family that loves to argue, but stays committed to one another's physical and sociocultural survival and well-being; 2) our commitments to the realization of our ideals in practice, and to ethics and justice, within the Jewish world, and in our relations to human society as a whole. This includes enlightened self-interest with self-criticism of our own potential chauvinism, the bitter fruits of historical experience as a persecuted minority, and at the same time, recognition of our shared existence on the planet with other citizens of an evolving global society, and, for some, our beliefs in God as creator of humanity as a whole; and 3) our trying to live in the presence of the sacred, God, the spirit, that which ultimately vouchsafes the authenticity and meaning of our existence and our struggles — paradoxically, by pointing beyond it towards a distant horizon, never reachable, but nonetheless one whose silhouette gives us an orienting place to stand, a direction in which to move, and frames the rhythms of light and darkness in our world.

Moving to our day, Jewishness simultaneously affirms the global and the local, the universal and the particular, while lodging a permanent protest against the idea that any one particular identity, and any one — even universalist — ideology is the one-size-fits-all God-like answer to the human condition in all its diversity.

Jewish global responsibility in our time, then, means preserving and protecting Jewish collective and individual flourishing (physical and cultural) alongside a commitment to human flourishing overall, with humility, and the recognition that we are ultimately serving ends larger than ourselves. Crucially, it means finding some way to manage and, ideally, benefit from, inevitable and deeply felt disagreements within the Jewish world.

And it necessitates hope — not as a passive wistfulness, or aesthetic pose, but as an active motive force in human history. It is the conviction that the things that we work for are worth working for — and that our struggles themselves have meaning.

Religion is how we approach people, things, and being. The key feature of monotheism is that you turn to the universe in the second person singular and say, “You.”

That is a real leap of faith and one that does not suit everyone. But no matter what, there still abides the question of how best to live in a human world and face one another, and say, as fully and richly and as morally as we can, “You.” How do we live in common as full human beings and in light of our ultimate values? And how do we do so with the humility that saves us from fanaticism and its violence?

* * *

Faith or Fanaticism?

Abbba Kovner, the poet, leader of the partisans of the Vilna Ghetto, and Israeli cultural luminary, once pointed out in the torturous conversations following the 1973 Yom Kippur War that history is made not by intellectuals but by men of faith. There is, he said, but a footstep’s worth of difference between faith and fanaticism, but it is on that one step that the Jewish people built all that they have built in the Land of Israel (and, I would add, in the Diaspora, too). The problem today, he said, is that we are too intellectual (in the original Hebrew, *hakhamim*) to believe.

Are we? Perhaps it depends on the meaning of faith, which we can define as that on which one can build.

What is the difference between faith and fanaticism? Both the faithful and the fanatic ask themselves whether they are living up to their ideals. The difference is that the fanatic knows that his ideals are perfect as they are. The person of faith, by contrast, is willing to question his or her own ideals in light of other, competing, or even superior ideals, and to question the form of life to which he or she is committed – and never assumes that the fact of commitment makes him or her qualitatively better than all the rest.

Faith is indeed a narrow step, or, if you will, a very narrow bridge. Kovner pointed out that on one side of the gorge lies fanaticism; I would add that nihilism occupies the gorge’s other side. Nihilism and fanaticism are, each in its own way, equally capable of crushing life. What keeps the person of faith from fanaticism is questioning; what keeps him or her from nihilism is the willingness to commit oneself and to act, in the teeth of questioning and doubt.

Again, the fundamental question is, as always, how do we want to live? In trying to answer, we dig down to our deepest commitments — moral, social, political, communal — the commitments and the institutions without which we cannot live and for which we may indeed be willing to die. I believe that in this post-metaphysical age, where even if God is still with us, nobody can claim with a clear conscience to be His designated representative or spokesman — if indeed He could even have such a thing; it is by digging into those commitments that we can find the footing, the courage to look at one another and at the universe and say, “You.”

That is where our commitments, our willingness to take responsibility, will begin. That is where Judaism will begin, and that is where the dialogue of Judaisms between Israel and America and the rest of the Diaspora will begin, if it can begin at all. . . . But then again, if we want to endure, it must.

ON THE SHOULDERS OF A GIANT: LOOKING BACK, YET LOOKING FORWARD¹

Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot

Re-reading the Rav's magisterial essay / *derasha Kol Dodi Dofek* after a break of many years is a paradoxical experience characterized by mixed emotions. On the one hand it is an intellectual and emotional delight to reencounter the profound arguments, the exquisite weave of halakhic and aggadic/philosophic themes, the passionate advocacy, and the incomparable flights of rhetoric that are the hallmarks of the Rav's written presentations of his public *derashot*. It is a chance, once again, to be inspired and revived in one's devotion to religious-Zionism and the State of Israel, to explore with the Rav a meaningful religious response to evil, and to ruminate on the nature of the Jewish people and the ties that bind us as a people. Yet, at the same time, with the passage of years, some reflection, and the seismic shifts in the history of the Jewish people and the State of Israel in the last half century, aspects of the essay can arguably be questioned as problematic and in some ways incomplete.

The Rav's essay divides neatly into four major units:

1. An exploration of the meaning of evil in the world from a Judaic perspective. Its themes were later developed and expanded upon in a number of essays and letters, the bulk of which appeared in the recently published *Out of the Whirlwind*.
2. An excursus on the notion of the "six divine knocks" reflected in the wondrous events surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel and their religious message. This section concludes with sharp remarks calling on the Diaspora religious community for self-criticism and action in making aliya, as well as helping build up, defend, and shape the nature and character of the fledgling state.
3. An analysis of the concepts of the two covenants (covenant of fate and covenant of destiny or purpose) that form the basis of Jewish peoplehood and bind the Jewish people throughout history.
4. A fervent articulation of the role of the religious-Zionist camp in the national life of the contemporary (1950s) State of Israel. It sketches out the religious and spiritual lacunae of secular Zionism as understood by the Rav.

Given the nature and space constraints of this forum, my comments will only touch upon the middle two sections of the essay. They cannot relate to every point raised by the Rav, but do, hopefully, touch on some major themes and their resonance for us today in shaping a religious-Zionist world-view.

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The second section, the most celebrated portion of the essay (often excerpted as a separate unit and for decades taught in Israeli high schools), articulates the Rav's view of God's hand in history in the founding of the State of Israel, seeing those events as divine blessings and wake-up calls to us all after the long dark night of *hester panim* that was the Holocaust. The Rav's articulation of passionate religious-Zionism with its multifaceted aspects still resonates and stirs the soul. The notions of Israel as the safe haven for oppressed Jewry, the pride and connection to Judaism that its establishment has instilled in Jews often distant from their heritage, both here and throughout the world, the notion that Jews will defend themselves and "by their blood they shall live," the Jew as once more part of

¹This article originally appeared in *Tradition*, Vol. 39, no. 3—Fall 2006.

the historical drama and not some fossilized remnant all still carry great weight and truth. (I am sure that in light of the various weaknesses of the UN to prevent genocides and wars throughout the world in the last fifty years, many would still feel that the Rav's off-hand comment still rings true: "I am inclined to believe that the United Nations was brought into being by Divine providence for the purpose of fulfilling this mission [establishing the State of Israel]. It appears to me that one cannot point to any other real achievement of the UN.")

Moreover, the Rav's religious-Zionist thinking is extremely significant in that it assiduously ignores any messianic or redemptive themes in its advocacy of a positive religious view of the establishment of the State of Israel. This factor alone is significant enough to have the essay retain a central place in the education of religious-Zionist youth in Israel and the Diaspora. The redemptive and messianically inclined religious-Zionism that has so dominated the discourse and thinking of the *dati-le'umi* community and its educational and political ethos for the last four decades since the Six Day War has had some disastrous results. It has crowded out other perspectives, led to an excessive focus on Torah values (such as *ahavat erets Yisra'el*) to the exclusion of other significant ones, helped fuel a growing militancy and stridency within the *dati-le'umi* community (leading in some isolated cases to anti-halakhic, immoral, and illegal behavior; e.g., the Jewish underground, the murders of Arabs at *Me'arat ha-Makhpela*, the Rabin assassination, the calls for religious soldiers to refuse orders to evacuate settlers during the disengagement, and the recent clashes with Israeli policemen during evacuations of illegal outposts), and alienated much of the religious-Zionist community from a large portion of the Israeli body politic. The Rav's worldview—in line with the classical Mizrahi thought of leaders such as Rav Reiness and Rav Amiel—presents a more pragmatic, realistic, and even-keeled approach to the religious significance of the State in our historical context.

At the same time, in rereading this portion one is struck as much by what is not said as by what is articulated. The essay contains no mention of the significance of Jewish sovereignty—*malkhut Yisra'el* (with all its spiritual flaws)—as a major religious concept embodied in the establishment of the State of Israel. (Nor, in my reading, is this theme developed in any significant way in subsequent published lectures on Zionism such as *Hamesh Derashot*.) This notion of recognition of the value of Jewish sovereignty, in and of itself, rooted in various Gemara, Maimonides' comments at the outset of *Hilkhot Hanukka*, and other sources is a powerful model in analyzing the events of 1948 and onward. Indeed, it is a staple in the thought of leading religious-Zionist thinkers as diverse as Rav Shlomo Goren ז"ל, and *le-havdil ben hayyim le-hayyim*, Rav Yehuda Amital and *mori ve-rabbi* Rav Aharon Lichtenstein. It is one which resonates strongly within the thinking of many Modern Orthodox Jews and connects us with a central biblical and rabbinic concept. This concept has, in recent years, taken quite a beating in a number of religious-Zionist circles with the constant drumbeat of setting up conflicts between fidelity to the presumed values of *erets Yisra'el* and those of *Medinat Yisra'el*, challenging the legitimacy of the decisions of the Knesset, and a general onslaught on elected leaders, democracy, and the institutions of the State. The Rav, I believe, would have been fiercely opposed to many of these phenomena on practical and moral grounds. However, it must be admitted that a full-throated affirmation of the religious significance of the State in terms of *malkhut Yisra'el* is not one of the categories the Rav deploys. One can speculate that this absence bespeaks the Rav's ambivalence to the whole notion of the political entity of the State in Jewish thought, to his general inclination to highlight the significance of the individual and his religious experience over and above any communal or national dimension, or even to some hidden sympathy with his uncle's reservations as to finding a place in the halakhic universe for a secular Jewish state. But the fact remains.

Moreover, other central concepts that are part of the woof and warp of a robust religious-Zionist worldview (again, I emphasize, without any recourse to messianic overtones) are either wholly absent or highly muted in *Kol Dodi Dofek* or many of the Rav's subsequent lectures on the significance of the Jewish State.

The role of Israel in allowing us to experience Judaism not only on the individual terms of the *yahid* or the communal terms of the synagogue or *bet ha-midrash*, staples of the Diaspora, but on the national level of a full-

bodied living nation in its own land, of an *am* with a government, army, and economic infrastructure is not developed beyond the notion of the *mabaneb* which the Rav sees as an existence forced upon individuals looking for mutual protection rather than some existentially *le-khabhila* model. While the Rav clearly speaks in terms of the Jewish people bonded together in multiple covenants, majestically spanning the course of time and continents, bonding Jews all over, what is, however, missing is the unique notion that the sovereign Jewish polity in the land of Israel has the status of either representing or playing the role of the central manifestation of the *am* as a national entity (*hani hu de-ikrei kahal; aval hanakb lo ikrei kahal* [Horayot 3a]) in sharp contrast to the existence of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. This notion (of our ability and responsibility in our own homeland to develop the national aspects of our existence and not simply the *dalet amot* of our individual existence) is one of the central pillars of classical religious-Zionist thought. Moreover, notions of being in the land which “God watches from the beginning of the year to the end of the year” or of experiencing a more organic and whole Jewish existence in the areas of *shemirat ha-mitsvot* (either in light of Ramban’s theology or on a less mystical level) do not make their way into the essay either. Central lines of argument such as the blessing of opportunity to be in the place where Jewish history and destiny will ultimately be forged, or the potential that halakha will experience a renaissance as it now must creatively address or blaze new paths in confronting the multi-faceted challenges it faces in the modern world (as evidenced in some of the writings of Rav Kook, the sharp and robust formulations of the early period [1930- 40s] in the writings of Yeshayahu Leibowitz and the circles of the religious Kibbutz movement, the efforts of Rav Maimon, the work of some of the scholars associated with the *Ha-Torah ve-haMedina* project in the first decade of the state’s existence, and the later writings of Eliezer Berkovits) are absent from this essay and almost entirely absent from the Rav’s later writings. Furthermore, the potential of the State of Israel to influence the entire world, a world dominated by nation states, in the spirit of *or la-goyyim* is not an idea that the Rav takes up here or in subsequent writings.

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The third section focuses on the two covenants that bind Jews as a people throughout Jewish history. At one pole stands *berit goral* (the covenant of fate, the shared history and experience of the Jewish collective from time immemorial). This covenant binds all Jews, whether observant or non-observant of the *mitsvot*, in a shared collective of memory, suffering, triumph, and survival. This covenant, forged in the crucible of Egyptian bondage and the subsequent miraculous Exodus, precedes the revelation at Sinai chronologically. Beyond that, however, lies the ultimate covenant, *berit ye’ud* (covenant of destiny or faith), that binds Jews in a shared community of values, ideals, and faith commitments expressed in a unique way of life (*shemirat ha-mitsvot*) and a commitment to a particular set of beliefs (*emunot ve-de’ot*).

In the Rav’s scheme, all Jews, irrespective of religious outlook, must work together to ensure the physical and economic well-being of the nation and the national home that is the State of Israel. The covenant of fate binds the irreligious *Mapam kibbutznik* and the religious *moshavnik* in Kfar ha-Ro’eh, even if they share nothing in common in their vision as to the covenant of faith and purpose of the Jewish mission. Thus, religious Jews can fully work within the Zionist framework—and show allegiance to the State—as long as they are focused on Israel as a national homeland, defending Israel’s security, building up the state, and ensuring its material growth. No compromise, however, and no cooperation can be brooked in areas that touch on our definition of what it means to be a Jew (i.e., the notion of the New Jew, unfettered by the exilic experience), nor can a historical, cultural Judaism in any way replace our time-honored vision of a religio-political entity committed to *Torah u-mitsvot* and the messianic *denouement* of history.

This stark dichotomy echoes similar dichotomies that the Rav developed in parallel areas that confronted Orthodoxy in the mid- and late-1950s. For example, in similar terms, that very same year, the Rav articulated his position as to the proper bounds of interaction by Orthodox rabbis and organizations with their Reform and Con-

servative counterparts. In his famous formulation, in areas *kelapei buts* (touching on external Jewish concerns) such as the security of the State of Israel, anti-Semitism, economic needs, and the general welfare of the Jewish community in its representation to the outside world, the Jewish collective should work together and ideally speak in one voice. However, in matters *kelapei penim* (internal religious issues) such as definitions of conversion standards, joint publications of Torah literature, etc., Orthodoxy should tread its own separate path. (Except, the Rav added, in subsequent oral remarks and written correspondence, if the Orthodox representatives have veto power to ensure that the traditional viewpoint will be protected and carry the day.) In these areas, Orthodoxy and its heterodox or secular co-religionists cannot work together under joint umbrellas that artificially harmonize irreconcilable differences on matters that touch on the very essence of Judaism.

These comments of the Rav generally have been read as indicating that in the realms of the covenant of faith, we share nothing in common with our secular or heterodox brethren. Our connection, a powerful one though it is, is exclusively in the realm of the covenant of fate, in our physical and historical bond to every Jew throughout the world as a member of the extended family. And it is this bond which impels us to work together shoulder to shoulder with the secularists in Israel and the Diaspora.

Upon reflection, though, this formulation strikes me as excessively narrow. Is it really true that we share nothing in common with our secular Zionist or Reform and Conservative co-religionists in central areas of our religious, spiritual, and moral existence? Even if we do differ on cardinal areas, and these should not be minimized, are there not other areas where the differences reflect shared goals but differing means? Indeed, no less a towering figure than R. Aharon Lichtenstein has intimated such an approach in numerous published writings in the last two decades:

“Orthodoxy cannot accord secularists or dissenters the *hechsher* they so incessantly demand. We can, however, place greater emphasis upon the factors that, which without denying difference, transcend it, upon confraternity, upon historical and existential ties, *upon essential components of a shared moral and spiritual vision, upon elements of both a common fate and a common destiny* (*Jewish Action* [Fall 1986], 39).”

It is in this spirit, and not only as vehicles of political and social compromise, that recent attempts to create “mutual covenants of understanding” by leading religious and secular figures such as Rav Yaakov Medan and Prof. Ruth Gavison should be encouraged. A more mature, developed, economically powerful, and robust State of Israel, hopefully less threatened by existential survival and looking for meaning and definition as a Jewish-democratic state confronts us today. Together with that, the challenges of post-Zionist elites who seek to neuter the Jewish nature of the State requires the partnership—in an engaged and robust coalition—of the forces of religious-Zionism and the silent majority of committed secular Zionists who continue to share the vision of nurturing and ensuring the continuity of a democratic Jewish state.

Finally, finding common ground and mutual lines of communication with an important small slice—but one with great potential growth—of younger Israelis who are flocking to programs such as Elul or Alma, secular *batei midrash* where non-observant Israelis seek to find meaning and values in the texts of our tradition, is certainly an avenue that needs to be pursued.

Midrash for Yom Ha'atzmaut 2017

Dr. Elana Stein Hain

עצמות

אל תקרי עצמות אלא עצמות, כמו שכתוב
הַעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה הֵנָּה אֲמָרִים יִבָּשׁוּ עֲצָמוֹתֵינוּ וְאַבְדָּה תִּקְוַתֵּנוּ נִגְזְרֵנוּ לָנוּ (יחזקאל לז:יא)
אבל עוד לא אבדה תקותינו, ועוד נמצא ונמצא תקוה חדשה

עצמות

אל תקרי עצמות אלא מאות "עצמ"ות כמו שכתוב
זאת הפעם עֲצָם מֵעֲצָמֵי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי (בראשית ב:כג)
שכל ישראל כגוף אחד עם לבבות מתווכחים ודעות רבות

עצמות

אל תקרי עצמות אלא צמאות
כמו שכתוב
צָמְאָה נַפְשִׁי לֹא-לֵהִים לֹא-לֵהִים אֲבֹא וְאַרְאֶה פָּנֵי א-לֵהִים. (תהילים מב:ג)

עצמות: שכל אלו ועוד נמצאים בה

Independence (*atzma'ut*)

Do not read this as *atzma'ut* – independence, but as *atzamot* – bones, as is written:

“These bones are all of the House of Israel. Behold they say, Our bones have dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off.” (Ezekiel 37:11)

But our hope is not yet lost, and more and more we will find and we will devise new hope

Independence (*atzma'ut*)

Do not read this as *atzma'ut* – independence, but as *atzamot me'ot* – hundred of bones, as is written:

“This time, you are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” (Genesis 2:23)

That all of Israel is as one body with dueling hearts and many opinions.

Independence (*atzma'ut*)

Do not read this as *atzma'ut* – independence, but as *tseme'ot* – thirsty, as is written

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalms 42:3)

Independence (*atzma'ut*): All of this and more are contained (*nimtsa'im*) within her.

International Rabbinic Fellowship

The International Rabbinic Fellowship (IRF) brings together Orthodox rabbis and scholars for serious, open, and respectful study of Torah and Halacha and to advocate policies and implement actions out of a sense of responsibility for Klal Yisrael and humanity. The IRF promotes a vision of Orthodox Judaism that is endowed with yirat shamayim, spirituality, and intellectual rigor. We are committed to developing and nurturing Jewish communities which can be resources for modern Jews seeking lives of dignity and meaning. The IRF affirms the bond that connects Jews to one another, and to the State of Israel.