



## **Engaging Israel: Foundations for a New Relationship**

The Shalom Hartman Institute Video Lecture Series

### Lecture 9: Background Reading 15

David Hartman, "The Third Jewish Commonwealth"

*A Living Covenant*, pp. 278-299

The rebirth of Israel and the ingathering of many Jews from the four corners of the globe has awakened new biblical religious passions within the Jewish community. Jerusalem is no longer a dream, an anticipation, a prayer for the future, but a living, vibrant reality. The Six-Day War further encouraged the belief that Israel is moving toward the fulfillment of the biblical promise. A deep sense of messianic grandeur fills the hearts of many young enthusiasts who feel called upon to settle in every corner of the biblical boundaries of the land of Israel in order to realize the prophetic promise of redemption.

It is not my concern in this chapter to deal with the moral and political difficulties that this messianic fervor generates. I wish rather to consider (1) how the rebirth of Israel can be given religious significance without having to make the bold theological claim that it is a manifestation of God's final redemptive action in history; (2) how the Maimonidean perspective on messianism can provide new normative directions for Israeli society; and (3) how the challenges that Israeli society must face create a new moral and spiritual agenda for Jews throughout the world.

Most Jewish religious responses to the rebirth of the state of Israel do see in it God's providential hand.<sup>1</sup> Two major halakhic thinkers who have taken such a view are Rabbis Kook and Soloveitchik. Kook, the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel in the Mandate period, viewed the Zionist revolution as part of God's redemptive scheme in history. He attributed profound religious significance to the Zionist revolution—despite its antireligious origins and manifestations—with the help of a dialectical perspective on history: Judaism's development in exile had caused the repression of vital spiritual forces in the Jewish people, and only by the overthrow of much of traditional Judaism would new, healthy forces and energies within the Jewish people be released. The Zionist activist concern for restoring the Jewish people to its homeland would unleash new messianic redemptive forces.<sup>2</sup> It was Kook's deepest conviction that ultimately the new energies brought forth by the revolution would be integrated with the covenantal Torah spirit in a higher religious synthesis. He looked forward to a new unity

between the larger prophetic passion for history found in the Bible and the sober concern for details that characterizes talmudic Judaism.<sup>3</sup> Most religious Zionist youths in Israel are taught to perceive the state from this messianic perspective.

Soloveitchik, too, embraces the state of Israel, but without a messianic dialectic. In *Reflections of the Rav*, Soloveitchik characterizes the period of the Holocaust as the state of *hester panim*, a "hiding of the divine face," a state when God turned His back, as it were, chaos ruled, and human beings had no sense of the divine presence in the world. Israel's rebirth represents *middat ha'din*, the "attribute of God's judgment," which gives human life a sense that there is some divine order, justice, and structure in the world that the world is not entirely under the sway of barbaric chaotic forces.

We cannot explain the Holocaust but we can, at least, classify it theologically, characterize it, even if we have no answer to the question, "why?" The unbounded horrors represented the *tohu vavohu* anarchy of the pre-*yetzirah* state. This is how the world appears when God's moderating surveillance is suspended. The State of Israel, however, reflects God's return to active providence, the termination of *Hester Panim*. That Israel is being subjected to severe trials in its formative years does not negate the miraculous manifestations of Divine favor which have been showered upon the State. Clearly, this is *Middat Hadin*, not *Hester Panim*. (p. 37)

In his essay "Kol dodi dofek" ("The voice of my beloved knocks"),<sup>4</sup> Soloveitchik utilizes the Purim story, in which natural events are appreciated as expressions of God's providential design, for understanding the theological significance of contemporary events. Just as the tradition understood that God worked His redemption for Israel through the actions of King Ahasuerus, so too we can sense God acting once again in history through the United Nations decision on the partition of Mandatory Palestine. Soloveitchik once again hears the voice of his beloved God in the events of contemporary Jewish history that have changed the social and political condition of the Jewish people. For Soloveitchik, the state of Israel has made Jews less vulnerable to physical persecution. It has also aroused a new sense of Jewish identity among Jews who were being carried along on a strong current of assimilation. The rebirth of the state of Israel has shattered the Christian theological claim of God's rejection of the Jewish people as witnessed by their endless suffering and wandering. These and other factors are strong indications for Soloveitchik of God's providential involvement in contemporary Jewish history. Soloveitchik pleads with the community to see in the rebirth of Israel an invitation by God to a new and deeper relationship of love. We must "open the door" to go out to meet our Beloved. We begin to demonstrate our responsiveness to God's invitation to renew the love affair between Israel and God by settling the land and by becoming responsible for the political and economic development of the Jewish state.

For Soloveitchik, the shared suffering and common historical fate of the Jewish people represent what he calls *brit goral*, a covenant of destiny, which is the foundation for the important halakhic category of collective responsibility (*kol Yisrael arevim zeh la'zeh*).<sup>5</sup> Care for others, feelings of empathy, and a sense of solidarity are not secular categories in Soloveitchik's

appreciation of halakhic Judaism. Indeed, the covenant of Sinai requires that the covenantal community have a deep sense of solidarity. Political action that seeks to achieve a secure home for the Jews, thereby giving dignity and new vitality to Jewish communal life and identity, thus acquires religious significance and can be understood as mirroring God's providential love for Israel. Soloveitchik's hope is that the community in Israel will find the way to move from a shared covenant of destiny to a shared covenant of meaning, *brit ye'ud*, based on the halakhic framework of Torah.

Soloveitchik and Kook have provided conceptual frameworks within which religious Jews can attribute religious significance to the rebirth of Israel initiated by people in revolt against their tradition. Soloveitchik's framework assumes the halakhic significance of a shared covenant of destiny and adopts the model of Purim in which God can manifest Himself through the natural unfolding of historical events. Kook's offers a dialectic messianic understanding of Jewish history and of Zionism.

As I have already stated, I do not interpret current events in nature and history as direct expressions of God's will or design. I look exclusively to the Torah and mitzvot as mediators of the personal God of the covenant. That, however, does not mean that I must adopt Leibowitz's position and ascribe no religious significance to the rebirth of Israel.<sup>6</sup> From my perspective, the religious meaning one gives to events relates not to their divine origin but to their possible influence on the life of Torah. If an event in history can be a catalyst for a new perception of the scope of Torah, if it widens the range of halakhic action and responsibility, if it provides greater opportunities for hearing God's mitzvot, then this already suffices to endow the event with religious significance, for it intensifies and widens the way God can be present in the daily life of the individual and the community. One can religiously embrace modern Israel not through a judgment about God's actions in history but through an understanding of the centrality of Israel for the fullest actualization of the world of *mitzvot*. This covenantal appreciation of history dispenses with the impossible task of reconciling God's loving redemptive actions in the rebirth of Israel with His total withdrawal from and indifference to our tragic suffering in Auschwitz. Soloveitchik's conceptual distinction between *hester panim* (hiding of the divine face) and *middat ha-din* (attribute of God's judgment) only underlines the impossibility of that task, since we are left paralyzed by the prospect that the loving personal God of *middat hadin* can withdraw into *hester panim* and allow the triumph of such demonic evil in the Holocaust.

My position regarding the centrality of modern Israel for the full realization of the Torah as a way of life is in sharp opposition to those religious trends in Judaism which regard the Zionist quest for normalcy as a revolt against the Torah. For certain schools within Judaism, the paradigm of Jewish spirituality is God's miraculous providential guidance in the desert. Freedom from the normal burden of natural existence is perceived by them as a necessary condition for the full appreciation and realization of the Torah.<sup>7</sup> This view is reflected in the talmudic tradition by Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai,<sup>8</sup> for whom the Torah can be adequately studied only by those in a condition of total grace as symbolized by the manna in the desert or under messianic Utopian conditions where the Jewish community will not have to be responsible for its economic well-being.

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai used to say: "Only to those who have manna to eat is it given to study the Torah. For behold, how can a man be sitting and studying when he does not know where his food and drink will come from, nor where he can get his clothes and coverings? Hence, only to those who have manna to eat is it given to study the Torah." (*Mekhiita de-Rabbi Ishmael, va-yassa* 3)

Our rabbis taught: " 'And you shall gather in your corn' [Deut. 11-14]. What is to be learnt from these words? Since it says, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth' [Josh. 1:8], I might think that this injunction is to be taken literally. Therefore it says, 'And you shall gather in your corn,' which implies that you are to combine the study of Torah with a worldly occupation." This is the view of Rabbi Ishmael. But Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai says: "Is that possible? If a man plows in the plowing season, and sows in the sowing season, and reaps in the reaping season, and threshes in the threshing season, and winnows in the season of wind, what is to become of the Torah? No; but when Israel perform the will of the Omnipresent, their work is performed by others, as it says, 'And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, etc.' [Isa. 61:5], and when Israel do not perform the will of the Omnipresent their work is carried out by themselves, as it says, 'And you shall gather in your corn.' " (Berakhot 35b)

For Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, the political conditions under which the Torah can reach its fullness are met only when Jews do not have to participate in the normal functioning of everyday society. The passion for learning cannot be realized if the community is preoccupied with the normal, everyday problems of survival. God could not have demanded that the community be so wholly engaged in studying the Torah and yet burden us with those problems.

From this perspective, the covenant was made in the desert to teach that only under conditions of total supernatural grace can the Torah be fully actualized within the life of the community of Israel. For me, however, the separation of learning from the normal concerns of daily life is a distortion and abrogation of the covenantal spirit of Judaism. I give preference to *midrashim* that imply that the covenant was made in the desert to teach the community that Judaism as a way of life was not exclusively a function of political sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> We were born as a people within the desert in order to understand that the land must always be perceived as an instrumental and never as an absolute value. The memory that the covenant was made in the desert prevents us from falling victim to the idolatry of state power. The desert, however, was not meant to serve as a paradigm for the life of *mitzvot*. The desert is the founding moment of covenantal consciousness, but never the controlling feature of its development. It was a prelude pointing to the land, where the covenantal challenge received at Sinai was meant to be realized. The centrality of the land in Judaism teaches us that mitzvah must not remain an aspiration, a utopian hope to be realized in messianic conditions of history, but must be tested and concretized within the normal, everyday conditions of human existence. Whereas the desert is a moment of withdrawal and concentration, what is received in that moment has to be transformed into a way of life. The land exposes the Jewish people and the Torah to the test of reality.

The Jewish society that we build in Israel has to validate the claim made in the Jewish tradition regarding how a Torah way of life creates a holy community, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19-6). If the Torah is truly capable of sanctifying every aspect of human reality, if it is capable of giving new moral and spiritual dimensions to politics, if "its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17), if the Torah scholar is a paradigm of the builder of peace, this must be seen and confirmed through the way we live our daily lives and not only proclaimed in our prayers.

A community that defines itself by learning and prayer is liable to be deceived by the richness of its powers of linguistic expression when evaluating its own moral and religious integrity. The existence of the state of Israel prevents Judaism from being defined exclusively as a culture of learning and prayer. Here Judaism must draw its pathos also from the exigencies of the concrete needs of life. "Not the learning is essential but the doing" then becomes constitutive of Torah study. Learning that excuses one from responsibility for the physical well-being of a nation, that provides a conceptual framework with its own inner coherence but whose correspondence to what actually takes place in reality is never tested, may have compelling logical vigor and be intellectually fascinating, but it has lost the sanctity of Torah, since it has become irrelevant to life itself.

If the desert is an instrument, a preparation, but never a substitute for what living is all about, then the land of Israel represents the intrusion of the normal into the desert covenantal consciousness. When the nation enters the land of Israel, the manna ceases to be the source of their economic sustenance.<sup>10</sup> In the land of Israel, the community must face the challenge of planting trees and harvesting crops, of exposure to economic hardships, of building a national political reality in a world that does not necessarily share or appreciate God's "dream" that Israel become a holy nation. The Torah was not given at Sinai for a messianic society; it was meant to be implemented and developed within an unredeemed world.<sup>11</sup> The dangers and seductions of pagan culture did not disappear when the Israelites entered the land of Israel. The concrete concern with military security did not stop with the conquests of Joshua. The need to build institutional frameworks of power and yet retain the covenantal ideal of a holy nation accompanied the community throughout the building of the first Jewish commonwealth. The same unredeemed world was the context for the renewal of the covenant by Ezra and Nehemiah in the second commonwealth and must be faced with courage by Jews as we build the third commonwealth under similar nonmessianic historical conditions.<sup>12</sup>

The normalization of Jewish consciousness that comes from living in the land of Israel is therefore not antithetical to covenantal consciousness, but is a necessary condition for its full realization. The land of Israel is holy from the covenantal perspective because it invites greater responsibility and initiative on the part of the community. It is the framework in which ways must be found to make the Torah a viable way of life for a community.

A radically different view of the centrality of the land of Israel for Judaism is taken by Nachmanides, commenting on Leviticus 18:25ff. For Nachmanides the land of Israel is holy because of its unique onto logical relationship to God.

But the Land of Israel, which is in the middle of the inhabited earth, is the inheritance of the Lord, designated to His Name. He has placed none of the angels as chief, observer, or ruler over it, since He gave it as a heritage to His people who declare the unity of His Name.

The land of Israel vomits out its sinful inhabitants (Lev. 18-28), continued Nachmanides, because only in this land does one live under God's direct providence. Since there is this unique ontological relationship between God and the land, Jews in the diaspora live as if they have no direct relationship to God and perform *mitzvot* only in preparation for their return to the land of Israel.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to Nachmanides and in the spirit of Maimonides, I regard the land of Israel as central to the *mitzvot* because it invites greater initiative and gives the community a wider range to express its normative consciousness.<sup>14</sup> The land of Israel represents the freeing of Jews from the direct and total dependence on grace experienced in the desert and signifies the movement toward human initiative and responsibility as the defining feature of the covenantal community. Whereas Nachmanides believed that greater self-reliance undermines the full flowering of the covenant, my claim is that God is present in the land of Israel because there Jews are not frightened to be independent and responsible for a total society.

I view the Zionist revolution as a rejection of the view of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai regarding the utopian conditions required for Israel to fulfill its covenantal destiny in history. I understand Zionism as a rejection of the theological claim that a unique providential relationship to Israel frees the Jews from having to be concerned with the ways in which nations seek to ensure their survival. In its profoundest sense, Zionism is the total demythologization of that Jewish historical covenantal consciousness which is represented by the spirit of Nachmanides.<sup>15</sup> As my covenantal anthropology has sought to demonstrate, we can build a new Jewish society within the framework of a tradition that places *mitzvah* at the center of its perception of the meaning of Jewish existence. By infusing Torah with the original Zionist passion for Jewish responsibility, we can renew the Sinai covenant once again in the conditions of modern Israel.

Although one can understand the Zionist quest for normalcy within covenantal categories, it is nevertheless true that the major trend of secular Zionism sought to replace the covenantal identity of the Jew with a secular political national identity. Though distinctive elements of Zionism indicate its continuity with traditional Judaism, such as the centrality of peoplehood, identification with biblical history, and, most important, the significance of the land of Israel for the political rebirth of the Jewish people, nevertheless Zionism is generally regarded as a departure from the covenantal tradition. Not only did its adherents repudiate the traditional posture of waiting for the messianic redemption and of avoiding active intervention in the political arena of history, but Zionists often viewed traditional Judaism as an obstacle in the path of Jewish national political rebirth.

For many centuries before Zionism, Judaic religious consciousness had been characterized by the sense that the everyday world was a preparation for a future messianic reality. It was felt that the temporal world does not reflect the full power of God as Creator and Lord of History,

nor can it contain the reward promised to the community for allegiance to the covenant. Jewish teachings about the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead and Jewish Utopian messianism reflected this deep Judaic belief in a future world that would be in harmony with our most cherished aspirations.

For traditional religious Jews, the instruments for affecting history were prayer, observance of the *mitzvot*, and Torah study. The covenantal community was not to sully its hands with the uncertainties and political and moral ambiguities of modern nationalism. Judaism was secure if it was able to build healthy families, if it could have vibrant schools and synagogues. The Jewish covenantal community could leave responsibility for a total social and political order to the nations of the world, while it lived in anticipation of the ultimate triumph of Judaism in the messianic reality.

Scholem was correct in a certain sense in his observation that there is a conservative instinct within the halakhic temperament. Halakhic Jews were afraid to expose their dreams of history to the test of reality. The fate of the first and second commonwealths, Bar Kochba's abortive revolt against Rome, and the tragic failures of all messianic movements in Jewish history created in religious Jews a prudent, conservative instinct not to hope for too much in terms of their national political existence. The central significance attached to the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the ingathering of the exiles was expressed with passion daily in the life of prayer, but was to be realized only in a messianic kingdom. History had taught the Jews not to attempt to translate those prayers into a program of action.

Jewish hope was nurtured by the belief that the third Jewish commonwealth would not in any way share the vulnerabilities of the previous attempts to build a Jewish society in the Holy Land. Rabbinic midrashim taught that the third commonwealth would last forever.<sup>16</sup> It would be free of all the tragic features of human history. It would usher in a historical period in which humanity would be liberated from sin and suffering would be abolished from human life. In that time, the community would no longer be burdened by the haunting and problematic features of freedom, contingency, and the human propensity for evil.

As long as the Judaic hope for the third commonwealth reflected such a longing for certainty, Zionism could not emerge as an effective political movement. Zionism had therefore to define itself as a movement seeking to overthrow the traditional religious sensibility. If the community was to learn to act effectively in history, Jewish historical consciousness had to be radically transformed. And indeed, the quest for normalcy, initiative, and responsibility was in fact pursued through a revolt against Judaic covenantal faith. The house of learning and the synagogue were deemed enemies of the revolution. Prayer was perceived as escapism and as bad faith. Only by a complete overthrow of everything the tradition cherished could the revolution succeed. The pious student of Torah had to be derided, rejected, and replaced by the pioneer. Secular Zionism ushered in a passionate yearning for new anthropological models that celebrated the dignity of human physical power. Jewish historical figures who demonstrated heroism in battle were held in high esteem. The new leadership of the community were those whose eyes were anchored to the everyday and who sought pragmatic solutions to the pressing problems of the third commonwealth.

For many Jews, Israel has become the new substitute for traditional Judaism. Israel is possibly the last haven in the world for Jewish secularism. Israeli "normalcy" enables many to assimilate and be like all the nations of the world without feeling guilty for having abandoned their ancestors. With all the risks that Israel poses to the future of covenantal Judaism, I am nonetheless prepared to build my hopes for Judaism's future on this new reality. For, as the tradition teaches, where there is a potential for desecration, there is also a potential for sanctification.

I live with the guarded hope that out of this complex and vibrant new Jewish reality will emerge new spiritual directions for the way Judaism will be lived in the modern world. Israel expands the possible range of halakhic involvement in human affairs beyond the circumscribed borders of home and synagogue to the public domain. Jews in Israel are given the opportunity to bring economic, social, and political issues into the center of their religious consciousness. The moral quality of the army, social and economic disparities and deprivations, the exercise of power moderated by moral sensitivity—all these are realms that may engage halakhic responsibility. From this perspective, the fact that Israel enables us to make the whole of life the carrier of the covenant is in itself sufficient to ascribe profound religious significance to the secular revolt that led to Israel's rebirth. I celebrate Israel's Independence Day with the recitation of the Hallel psalms, thus expressing gratitude to God for having been given the opportunity to renew the full scope of the covenantal spirit of Judaism. My religious celebration is not a judgment on God's activity, but only on the opportunity that Israel makes possible. The opportunity may be missed. But that does not in any way detract from the religious possibilities created by the event. The recitation of psalms of thanksgiving on Independence Day does not entail any divine guarantee regarding the successful realization of those opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

### **A Messianic Appreciation of Israel**

Although, as I have shown, the vitality of Judaism does not depend on belief in the messianic resolution of history, and although I do not require the messianic notion to give religious significance to the rebirth of Israel, I am nonetheless prepared to consider how Israel's rebirth can be appreciated within messianic categories. For some time, I have had an ambivalent attitude toward the messianic vision of history. On the one hand, whenever Jews sought to act on the basis of their messianic hope, the result was invariably catastrophic. Furthermore, when messianism gains dominance, the community may find the gap between the imperfect present and their messianic vision so great that contemporary reality is considered an unsuitable arena for the larger normative vision contained in the Torah. When this happens, messianism may lead the Jew into a posture of passive anticipation.

On the other hand, if the messianic vision is abandoned, the resultant anchorage exclusively in the world of immediacy and everyday concerns may lead to cynicism or despair regarding the possibility of achieving anything radical in human history and may discourage responsible action by the halakhic community. A present that is not open to some larger vision of the future may turn sour and be drained of vitality. Wherever one turns, either toward or away from the messianic idea, there are dangerous risks, but presumably also new spiritual opportunities. I am



prepared to take the risks of messianism because of the influence messianism can possibly have on moving the community toward a different appreciation of Israel and Judaism.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, it seems to be the case that the majority of the religious Zionist community in Israel perceives Israel within a messianic redemptive scheme of history. To ignore or argue against messianism in this context would be to isolate oneself from effective discussion with this community regarding the spiritual and political direction of Israeli society. It is, I believe, politically essential to develop a shared language between Jews who look forward to the unfolding of a redemptive process in Jewish history and those whose religious response to Israel is grounded in the concern with the renewal of the covenant of Sinai.<sup>19</sup> I believe that Maimonides' portrayal of messianism can serve as the basis for such a shared language.

I have shown that one's religious interpretation of events does not presuppose knowledge of how God acts in history. Furthermore we have seen that messianic hope is fully compatible with the principle of *olam ke-minhago noheg*, "the world pursues its normal course." In light of Maimonides' understanding of messianism, I believe that it is possible to have a messianic appreciation of Israel without making factual claims that this or that event in the history of Israel is a providential redemptive divine act. Messianism can instead be understood as a *normative category* by which we evaluate the quality of life in the present reality of Israel. For religious Zionists who in their prayers refer to Israel as the beginning of redemption, *hathalta de'geulah*, messianism must make a difference in the way we conduct our economic, social, and political affairs. The commitment to Israel as initiating the process of redemption requires of Jews a significant reorientation in the way Judaism is understood and practiced. It would be short-sighted to manifest the messianic spirit only in the reclaiming and the rebuilding of the land. Any messianic appreciation of Israel worthy of the name must seek to discern the fulfillment of the biblical promise in the widening of the Jewish people's capacity for love. It is in a changed people and not only in a changed landscape that one must channel the messianic passion for the rebirth of Israel.

The longing for a messianic reality, in Maimonidean terms, expresses the community's love for and commitment to *mitzvah*. As I understand this, one who longs for the day when the full scope of the Torah can be reinstituted regards *mitzvah* as a joyful expression of living before God as a responsible normative agent in history. Messianism in this spirit reflects a triumph over any Pauline critique of halakhah. It regards *mitzvah* as a source not of guilt but of joy. A normative existence is not antithetical to human freedom, spontaneity, and passion, nor need the *mitzvot* and their materialization in halakhah be an oppressive force estranging us from our own individuality. Halakhah can be an expressive educational system, reflective of the richness of the individual's and the community's longing for God.<sup>20</sup>

Messianism not only expresses the love for and joy in *mitzvah* but equally gives us direction for the way halakhic jurists must apply *halakhah* to society. An essential feature of messianism is the ingathering of the exiles and the return of the entire community to its biblical homeland. The messianic emphasis upon the ingathering should direct contemporary halakhic jurists to develop Jewish law in ways that would reflect the spirit of the Kantian categorical imperative: shape Jewish law in a way that makes it a viable option for the *whole* Jewish community

gathered together as an independent polity in the present era. Such an orientation toward the halakhic system would be guided by the aspiration to allow all Jews to share in the appreciation of *mitzvah*. In that situation, one does not render halakhic decisions that require that there be nonobservant Jews in the community in order for the society to function. Given this perspective, it would be counter to the very spirit of the Torah to bring about legislation in the Knesset excusing religious women from army service out of a concern to protect their modesty and their loyalty to Judaism, while ignoring the needs of women who come from nonreligious families. Nor would Sabbath regulations be developed that rely on there being nonobservant Jews in the community. One has to envision what is needed for a police force, fire patrol, army, foreign service, and international communication network to function within a society loyal to the Torah.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary halakhic thinking needs to be infused with the messianic spirit of responsibility and love for the total community. If one thinks of halakhic norms in terms of the survival and advantage of a particular religious group, one's thinking is antimessianic and reflects the sectarianism of an exilic perspective on Judaism.<sup>22</sup>

The spirit of Judaism in exile reflects the concern of a community living in a hostile environment to survive and not be swallowed up by its alien surroundings. Not surprisingly, then, the religious consciousness of exilic Judaism puts great emphasis on the *mitzvot* that separate Jews from their alien environment. Under such circumstances, the holy often becomes defined by what separates Israel from the nations. For that reason, Sabbath observance in the home, *kashrut* laws, and similar *mitzvot* that set Jews apart from their environment became the focus of the covenantal passion. However, when Judaism becomes a total way of life of a reborn nation, the covenantal passion cannot be poured only into those *mitzvot* which separate Israel from the rest of humanity. When Jews live in their own environment and are responsible for the unfolding of the spirit of Judaism in a total society, they must also link their covenantal religious identity to the *mitzvot* through which they share in the universal struggle to uphold human dignity. The normalization of the Jewish people brought about by Zionism makes possible a new appreciation of the *mitzvot*, whereby the social, ethical, and political attain their full covenantal place.

In the messianic society, a total way of life and the society's entire social and economic structure have to mirror God's covenantal judgment. When that is so, the social, moral, and political status of the society becomes a religious issue. The Sabbath in a messianic society is not only the Sabbath of the seven-day week but also the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. The egalitarian spirit of the laws of those years should move the society and its political leaders to a concern with greater degrees of social and economic equality. How the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years can be expressed in a modern economic system is a serious halakhic question that many have tried to answer in different ways. One thing, however, is clear. Something radical will happen to Judaism when we are challenged to have our economic and social order mirror the Sabbath's celebration of the world as a creation and of human beings as creatures and not absolute masters over nature or other human beings.<sup>23</sup>

A Maimonidean messianic consciousness does not seek to build a Jewish state that compensates for past exilic powerlessness, deprivation, and abuse.

The sages and prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over the heathens, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of life in the world to come. (MT Hilkhot Melakhim 12:4)

Messianism for Maimonides is a liberation from and a complete victory over a triumphalist power-seeking nationalism. A messianic society's guiding principle is to seek to expand the powers of knowledge, wisdom, and love. Exilic religious consciousness has been dominated by fear, estrangement, and questions of communal survival. The psychology of religious persons in a pre-messianic reality is often the psychology of alienated persons who do not trust the world and therefore cannot open themselves fully to it. One whose self-identity is dominated by this sense of estrangement and fear cannot become a lover of God. Love becomes a potent possibility in our spiritual life when the problems of physical survival do not dominate our existence and when the political reality is not seen as oppressive or as harboring the dangers of aggression, war, and violence. The passion of love can begin to emerge when we derive from our polis the ability to feel at home in the universe. The more fear and estrangement are overcome, the more God and the Torah can be perceived in terms of love, and the more one can liberate oneself from seeing God in terms of reward and punishment or a nationalist triumphalist vision.

I am fully aware of the extreme difficulty of bringing this messianic appreciation of the third Jewish commonwealth to the social and political reality of Israel. We are still very worried about national survival. The atmosphere of war is not conducive to the creation of conditions that encourage the expansion of powers of love. The Zionist revolution has been enacted in a vulnerable reality in which there is no telling when wars will end and suffering will cease. There is therefore an understandable fear of the stranger in the land. Nevertheless, in spite of the imperfect conditions of Israel, and in spite of the enormous energies that have to be expended on survival, I believe that there is a heroic spirit in this society that is capable of accepting messianism as a normative challenge. The courageous covenantal spirit of the new Israeli Jew, which was revealed to me with immense power and tenderness by my son-in-law, Aharon Katz, of blessed memory, has led me to believe that there may be tremendous spiritual forces within Israeli society that have not yet been fully tapped.

We have developed a new heroic type capable of enormous sacrifice and dedication to the security of our society. Given our long exilic history, it is truly remarkable that we have developed a new human type that has given up fear. Its heroism, which has been abundantly demonstrated on the field of battle and in the rebuilding of the land, can equally be channeled to give expression to other features of the heroic ideal in Judaism.

Maimonides taught that *kiddush ha-shem*, sanctification of the name of God, is manifested on three levels. The first is the courage to stand in opposition to religious oppression, the willingness to die to defend one's loyalty to Torah and *mitzvot*. That is the heroism of the martyr who is prepared to give up life for what is seen to be the essential spiritual vision of the

nation. However, Maimonides believes that Jewish spiritual heroism not only is the willingness to die, but also shows itself in a second form when one is able to overcome the motives of fear and reward as a ground for worship.

Whoever abstains from a transgression or fulfills a commandment not from any personal motive nor induced thereto by fear and apprehension or by the desire for honor but solely for the sake of the Creator, blessed be He, sanctifies the name of God. (MT Hilkhhot Yesodei ha-Torah 5:10)

Heroism is not only shown in the courage to transcend the normal instinct of self-preservation, but is also reflected in the ability to transcend the motives of self-interest in one's appreciation of Judaism. To be directed by the passion of love is for Maimonides to live a heroic existence.

But there is also a third heroic ideal. It is the actions of the *hasid*, of the pious individual whose behavior is a compelling example encouraging people to take the Torah and God seriously. The *hasid's* example makes God's name beloved and sought after; it opens the hearts and souls of others to the living waters of the Torah, This kind of heroism is not only heroism in opposition to an alien environment, but also a demonstration of the strength and integrity of Judaism as a total way of life.

And if a man has been scrupulous in his conduct, gentle in his conversation, pleasant toward his fellow creatures, affable in manner when receiving them, not retorting even when affronted, but showing courtesy to all, even to those who treat him with disdain, conducting his commercial affairs with integrity...and doing more than his duty in all things, such a man...has sanctified God and concerning him scripture says: "And he said to me, 'You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified' [Isa. 49:3]." (Ibid., 5:11)

The task of covenantal Jews now is to show that we can build a Judaic society not by resorting to dogmatism and legal coercion, but, like the *hasid*, by means of the compelling example of the way we live our daily lives. We must avail ourselves of the opportunities given to us through education and must not deceive ourselves that religious legislation can in any significant way alter the character structure of a people. If we learn to appreciate the power of love and personal example, we may be able to walk in the covenantal path of Abraham, who made God beloved through the compelling power of his own actions.<sup>24</sup>

### **Israel and the New Jewish Agenda**

So far I have described, from a covenantal perspective, the new opportunities provided by the rebirth of Israel. It is hardly less necessary, however, to be aware of the new risks that have arisen simultaneously. Opportunities and risks alike owe their origin to the fact that the creation of the third Jewish commonwealth confronts Judaism and the Jewish people with a new moral and political agenda, whose implications go beyond the strict geographical confines of the Jewish state. For a long time in history, we did not have to deal with questions that touch upon the relationship between *halakhah* and political power, since we were a powerless community. Especially from the emancipation period onward, Judaism was not involved with

the public domain of power and politics. Judaism gave meaning to the individual. It taught Jews how to conduct their family life. It provided frameworks for the celebration of the holy. It provided a structure that kept alive the major historical moments that shaped the community's spiritual self-understanding. Judaism, however, did not have to deal with those agonizing moral questions that confront a nation that has military and political power. In the political sphere, our activity was limited to the fight for minority rights, religious tolerance, and freedom of conscience in countries where we were an oppressed or vulnerable minority. As a result of the rebirth of Israel, our political situation has dramatically changed. In Israel, religious and non religious Jews have a new sense of power and belonging that they have rarely felt throughout their long sojourn in the diaspora.

Israel, however, not only allows us to give expression to what is most noble in the Jewish tradition, but it also readily exposes moral and spiritual inadequacies in that tradition. Israel therefore provides unique conditions for a serious critique of Judaism as it is practiced by committed halakhic Jews. In Israel there is no external non-Jewish world to inhibit the tradition's full self-expression. Moral attitudes that one never expected to characterize Jewish behavior can surface in this uninhibited, passionate, and complex Jewish reality. Triumphalist nationalism, lack of tolerance for other faith communities, indifference, and often an open disregard for the liberal values of freedom of the individual, human dignity, and freedom of conscience can be found articulated by would-be religious leaders in Israeli society. A mature appreciation of our liberation struggle requires that we recognize the mixed blessings that freedom and power bring to Jewish living.

Although Israel resulted from a profound revolt against the tradition, this revolution was materialized in a land that makes Jews aware of being attached to the three-thousand-year drama of their people. The Zionists did not leave their historical family when they undertook to revolt against the tradition. I would compare the Zionist revolt to a young person who loses patience with his parents, announces he is leaving home, goes to the door, slams it in great anger, but fails to leave the house.<sup>25</sup> The Zionists' radical revolution, after all, was realized in a land that forces a confrontation with different aspirations that have been part of the Jewish historical tradition. In deliberately choosing to materialize the Zionist revolution in the land of the covenant, secular Zionists make the claim that they have truly fulfilled the Jewish aspirations in history. Their claim invites severe criticism from other groups in the Jewish world who do not perceive the secular Zionist revolution as much of a fulfillment of the prophetic tradition. Mystics and sober halakhists who believe that the political task of the Jewish people is to wait patiently for God's final redemptive action in history, messianic religious activists who understand the Zionist revolution as the way God has utilized the secular forces in history for the sake of the realization of Torah – these people will never sit by idly and allow the secular Zionist dream of normalization to take root in the biblical land of Israel. Each one claims the whole field. The very fact that the revolution is realized in the land of Jewish historical aspiration forces a confrontation with all who claim to be the authentic carriers of Jewish tradition.

In Israel, intense ideological passions surface daily and confront one another in the public arena of our shared communal life. Major governmental decisions are influenced by the different

Jewish dreams that inspired our national rebirth. Messianic religious visions collide with a socialist secular understanding of the significance of the Jewish state. This is what results from Jews feeling at home. Each group believes this is its own home. This feeling is often translated into a paternalistic attempt to have everyone share one's appreciation of how a Jewish national home should look. In Israel, therefore, religious and secular Jews try to influence the public domain so that it might mirror their understanding of how Jews should live. Paradoxically, Israel, which unites Jews from the four corners of the world, is the most vivid demonstration of how divided and estranged from one another we are. We prayed to be reunited with our scattered brethren—without realizing how different we had become from one another. Our sense of unity currently results more from the enemies who seek to destroy us than from an internal consensus as to how we believe the Jewish people should live in the modern world.

How do you build a Jewish society when there is no significant consensus as to what is normative in Jewish history nor any agreement about the sources out of which to build new norms? Can *halakhah* accommodate itself to the modern values of tolerance and freedom of conscience? Is there a way of sustaining the intense passion for Judaism and monotheism and yet appreciating the important modern value of religious pluralism? Does liberalism, with its concern for freedom of conscience, undermine the *halakhah's* uncompromising rejection of idolatry? Should secular Zionism, which makes perpetuation of the nation the ultimate value of the Jewish people, be identified as a modern form of idolatry? The question of tolerance and pluralism refers not only to Judaism's relationship to other faith communities but above all to how Jews live among themselves. Halakhic thinkers must grapple with the fact that many Jews do not perceive *halakhah* and the talmudic tradition as normatively binding. There are many Israelis who are prepared to study Torah but will resist to the end the imposition of halakhic practices that clash with their own sense of personal freedom and conscience. What are the limits of tolerance for other Jews that could be acceptable to a halakhic community? What happens when religious Jews seek the legislative power of the state to impose halakhic practices on the community? Does this not invite the same corruption that has characterized the fate of other religions when they used political power to promote their vision of life? It is morally disastrous and religiously arrogant to claim that we have nothing to learn from the mistakes of other religions regarding the use of political power for the implementation of religious values.

It is not a simple task to translate a biblical perception of reality into the conditions of a modern democratic society. The way Joshua entered the land is hardly a paradigm for learning how to tolerate different faith communities and for allowing different groups the freedom to express their own particularity.<sup>26</sup> The separation of church and state and the American appreciation for pluralism are not yet firmly established in the Israeli political imagination. In contrast to the Western Jewish diaspora, Israel does not provide for a neutral or secular political public arena in which to orchestrate the different competing ideologies present in contemporary Jewish living. The diaspora allows different religious groupings to form their own synagogues. Each can have its own "four cubits of the law" in a way that does not impinge upon the life of the total Jewish community. In the diaspora, Jews live their public life under the protective umbrella of the larger non-Jewish political order and express their personal Jewish identity within their

respective schools, synagogues, and community centers. The diaspora, in contrast to Israel, does not force the confrontation between religious and secular Jews or between the different ideological branches of Judaism to develop into overt conflict. Pluralism, therefore, does not surface as an urgent issue in the diaspora.

A long and arduous path must be traveled before we can create a healthy bridge between the needs of a modern democratic liberal society and the biblical and talmudic understanding of Jewish politics. On the one hand, Judaism is a repudiation of any spiritual vision that is related exclusively to the private and intimate domains of the personal life. Yet, on the other hand, if Judaism seeks expression in the communal political domain, does it not expose itself to the very corruptions that have characterized theocratic states in history? It will not be easy, therefore, to bring John Stuart Mill's advocacy of civil liberty and Isaiah Berlin's appreciation of pluralism into a serious and fruitful discussion with Maimonides and the talmudic tradition's understanding of how a halakhic polity should conduct its daily life.<sup>27</sup> What makes for the spiritual vitality of our third Jewish commonwealth is the fact that we cannot ignore these new fundamental issues.

The Zionist quest for normalcy should free the Jewish people of any myth about the unique moral and spiritual powers of the Jewish soul. In taking upon ourselves responsibility for a total society, we must allow ourselves to be judged by the same standards as we have judged others.<sup>28</sup> The Torah challenges us to become a holy people. It does not tell us that we are immune from the moral weaknesses and failures that affect every human being. The Jewish nation is not free from the same potential corruptions that affect any human community that has taken upon itself the bold challenge of living with power. Our newly gained sense of belonging and power enables us to look critically and honestly both at ourselves and at the halakhic tradition without the apologetic stance so characteristic of a community that saw itself as a persecuted and vulnerable minority. A community that feels dignified and secure in its identity and place in the world can allow itself the mature activity of honest critical self-appraisal.

To the degree that we can look at ourselves in a non-apologetic light, to that degree will we demonstrate our liberation from an exilic consciousness that is fundamentally timid, frightened, and outer-directed. We are free now to ask what we think of ourselves without being overly concerned with the way others will listen and respond to our agonizing self-appraisal. Because of our "role" as the suffering stranger in history, many have perceived the Jew as the moral conscience and critic of social and political injustice.<sup>29</sup> In building the third Jewish commonwealth, our role must shift from moral criticism of others to self-judgment. In coming home, the task before us is to clean up our own house.

If a moral message will emanate from Jerusalem, it will result not from what we say but from what we do. For the covenant to be renewed in its full power and vitality, Jews must be willing to face the serious moral and religious problems that arise when they seek to participate fully in modern society. This challenge faces Jews in both Israel and the diaspora, but it arises in its most acute and total form in Israel. The quality of life that we build in Israel will accordingly be paradigmatic for and influence the manner in which Judaism develops everywhere in the

modern world. For wherever Jews live, they must bring the passion of their faith commitment to the moral and political concerns of their society. Torah is not, as Spinoza claimed, merely the political constitution of a nation with its own political sovereignty. Torah is a way of life not circumscribed by geographic boundaries. The rabbis taught in the Talmud that the *mitzvot* must be observed wherever a Jew is called upon to do battle against the false gods of history (Kiddushin 37a). It is the destiny of Jews wherever they may be to say no to all modern forms of idolatry.<sup>30</sup>

The significance of the rebirth of Israel cannot be circumscribed to those who live in Israel. The endless Zionist discussions regarding the relationship of Israel to the diaspora are usually futile. I reject the radical Zionist claim that a vibrant Jewish life is impossible in the diaspora. It is a total evasion of our larger responsibility to the Jewish people if we offer the diaspora only one message: "Come to Israel in order to safe-guard your grandchildren from assimilation." Israel should not be understood merely as a haven for the persecuted and the wandering Jew or as a guarantee against assimilation. It is short-sighted to use the Holocaust as a justification for the need for a Jewish national home. Israel from my perspective provides a new direction for Judaism's confrontation with modernity. It opens up the possibility of renewing the covenantal drama of Sinai in a vital new way. The rebirth of Israel marks the repudiation of the halakhic ghetto as the means for guarding Jewish survival in history. Israel not only argues against the ghettoization of Judaism, but is also a rejection of the mistaken universalism that characterized the assimilationist tendencies that affected many Jews as a result of the breakdown of the ghetto. The birth of the third Jewish commonwealth teaches all of Jewry that being rooted in a particular history and tradition need not be antithetical to involvement and concern with the larger issues affecting the human world.

It would have been understandable if in response to the tragic suffering of the Jewish people in this century, and their profound disillusionment with Western values, Jews would have restricted their visibility in and concern for history. However, the covenant of Sinai teaches the Jew to trust and be open to the world again. The Sinai covenant does not allow Jews to adopt a spiritual orientation that gives up on history and emphasizes the inner life of the soul. To be a covenantal Jew is to share in Moses' understanding of God's dream for Israel and history. Moses is the paradigm of the way a Jew is to hear the significance of mitzvah in his or her life. Moses knew that he must leave the contemplative spiritual bliss that he discovered on the peak of Mount Sinai and enter into the struggle of history down below. Moses demonstrated that love of God must be found within the context of community. The heavy responsibility of implementing the Sinai covenant in the third Jewish commonwealth can be borne with dignity and joy because Judaism has always taught that in the eyes of God the doors of renewal are never closed.

Ben-Gurion and many Zionists believed that to build a healthy third commonwealth, it was necessary to leap back beyond the talmudic period, go back to the Bible, and reject much that exilic Jewish history gave to the Jewish world. I believe that they were mistaken. Estrangement from the postbiblical history of Judaism deprives the community of the important perspectives and values initiated by Ezra and Nehemiah and developed by rabbinic teachers in the talmudic tradition. Jeremiah and Ezekiel offered the community a Utopian vision, but Ezra and Nehemiah



rebuilt the community within imperfect historical conditions. They taught the Jewish people that the Sinai covenant could be renewed in spite of the gap between prophetic hope and reality. The rabbinic tradition has taught us to say grace over an incomplete meal. Rabbinic Jews can find spiritual meaning even though all their deepest hungers and longings are not fully gratified. It is to the rabbinic tradition that we must turn to learn how the prosaic details of daily life can be made the carriers of the larger covenantal prophetic vision of history. The third Jewish commonwealth can be enriched by the passionate sobriety of the covenantal tradition that places the hearing of mitzvah at the center of its conception of God and the world.

The Lord spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no shape—nothing but a voice. (Deut. 4:12)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Even anti-Zionist Satmar Hasidim and the Netorei Karta community of Meah Shearim view the state of Israel as God's providential act, though as a great and supreme trial rather than as a blessing. The rebirth of Israel, they claim, tests the community's loyalty to Torah and mitzvah by challenging it to await God's redemption despite the deceptive promises and successes of Zionism. Many more Jews, of course, see Israel's rebirth not as a trial but as a blessing bestowed by God upon the Jewish people. Belief in a personal God who acts in history can lead one to recite special prayers of joyful thanksgiving on Israel's Independence Day or to mourn the fact that the majority of Jews have succumbed to the seductions of a Zionist state that threatens the covenantal identity of the Jewish people. The attempt to understand the actions of a personal God in history is thus not an unambiguous enterprise.

See Aviezer Ravitzky, "Ha-zafui ve'ha-reshut ha-netunah," in Aluf Har-Even ed., *Yisrael li-kerat ha'me'ah ha'21* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Foundation, 1984), pp. 135-197, especially pp. 140-146, noting a strong necessitarian perception of history of religious Zionists and anti-Zionists alike.

<sup>2</sup> See A. I. Kook, *The Lights of Penitence* . . . (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 256-269, 282-302. Also S. Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981), chap. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Kook, *The Light of Penitence* . . . , pp. 196-199 and 253-255.

<sup>4</sup> "Kol dodi dofek," pp. 77-82.

<sup>5</sup> *Rosh ha'Shanah* 29a and *Shavuot* 39a.

<sup>6</sup> See Y. Leibowitz, "Jewish Identity and Jewish Silence," in Ehud Ben Ezer, ed., *Unease in Zion* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), pp. 177-200. Also his *Emunah, historyah va'arakhim*, pp. 112-134.

<sup>7</sup> Maimonides takes strong exception to this view: *Commentary to the Mishnah on Pirkei Avot* 4:7, MT *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 3:1-11. The view is adopted, by contrast, in *Tur, Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 246.

<sup>8</sup> See Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 603-614.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., *Mekhilta, ba'hodesh* 5:

Why was the Torah not given in the land of Israel? ... To avoid causing dissension among the tribes. Else one might have said: "In my territory the Torah was given." And the other might have said: "In my territory the Torah was given." Therefore, the Torah was given in the desert, publicly and openly, in a place belonging to no one. To three things the Torah is likened: to the desert, to fire, and to water. This is to tell you that just as these three things are free to all who come into the world, so also are the words of the Torah free to all who come into the world.

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See also S. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in A. Altmann, ed., *Biblical Motifs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 31-63

<sup>10</sup> Lev. Rab. .25:5.

<sup>11</sup> This is the basis of my serious disagreement with Steven Schwarzschild, who understands halakhah and the Jewish people only within messianic categories. Israeli normalcy is for him therefore a paganization of the Jewish people. But Israeli normalcy need not mean, as in A. B. Yehoshua, *Between Right and Right* (New York: Doubleday, 1981) that whatever Jews do in Israel is by definition Jewish. I hold that living in Israel is not a substitute for the normative Jewish tradition, but a framework for its implementation.

<sup>12</sup> See further my "Power and Responsibility," *Forum* 44 (Spring 1982), 53-58.

<sup>13</sup> See also *Sifre Deut.* 43, quoted by Nachmanides in this context. Also Henoch, *Nachmanides*, pp. 141-159; D. Rapel, "Ha-Ramban al ha-galut ve'ha'geulah," in Y. Ben Sasson, ed., *Geulah u'medinah* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1979), pp. 79-109.

<sup>14</sup> The holiness of the land of Israel consists in that certain *mitzvot* can be performed only there, according to *MT Hilkhhot Beit ha'Behirah* 10:12-13 (following *Kelim* 1:6). See also the distinction between the holiness of Jerusalem, which derives from the divine presence, and that of the land of Israel, *ibid.* 6:14-16. Further, *MT Hilkhhot Terumah* 1:2-6 (from 1:3 it would seem that the concept of the land is defined in juridical and political terms rather than in metaphysical or theological ones).

<sup>15</sup> See N. Rotenstreich, "Dimensions of the Jewish Experience of Modernity," in *Essays on Zionism and the Contemporary Jewish Condition* (New York: Herzl Press, 1980) pp. 4-18, which brings out the shifts in historical consciousness that accompanied the emergence of Zionism. On the connection between messianism and Zionism, see J. Katz, "The Jewish National Movement," *Journal of World History* 11 (1968), 267-283.

<sup>16</sup> Among many examples, see *Shevi'it* 6:1 and *Kiddushin* 1:8 in the Jerusalem Talmud; *Mekhilta shirta* 1.

<sup>17</sup> This is my answer to Leibowitz's criticism in his review of my *Joy and Responsibility* in *Petahim*. He claims that by my ascription of religious significance to the renewal of Jewish national independence, "Judaism is brought down to the level of the faith of the magicians in Egypt who saw the finger of God in particular events in human reality." As I have just pointed out, I make no judgment on God's activity but only on the new opportunities that Israel provides for living our Judaism. Regarding particular events, such as the Six-Day War, I claim only that they may influence individual Jews to feel greater commitment to the community and sensitize them to the historic dimension of Judaic spirituality that is fundamental for halakhic commitment.

My position is also unaffected by Leibowitz's claim that "the mass movement of Jews away from Judaism has not been halted, nor has it even been slowed, under the influence of the national Jewish rebirth." I am not making an empirical statement about the actual return of Jews to the worship of God, but am merely speaking of opportunities. Israel can be a profound instrument serving the renewal of Jewish spirituality because it forces individual Jews to become responsible for a total way of life in a land that anchors them to their biblical and talmudic historical roots. That the covenantal community has not yet been renewed does not vitiate my argument. What I claim is only that in Israel there are unprecedented living conditions that may renew Jewish spiritual sensibilities. Apart from expanding the possible range of *mitzvah*, those conditions also highlight the notion of collectivity and act against the loss of historical memory. Israel as a political entity focuses attention on the inescapable fact that Jews share a common historical destiny. And Israel as a land acts against the propensity of modern technological society to create individuals who, in their concern for novelty and progress, tend to regard the ideas and visions of the past as backward and inapplicable to their own times and lives.

My disagreement with Leibowitz regarding the place of events generally—and of the rebirth of Israel in particular—in the building of one's religious consciousness thus reflects our respective anthropologies. I claim that Jews serve God with their total personality, which is embedded in historical and communal contexts. Leibowitz's man of faith, by contrast, is nurtured by an act of will irrespective of the sociopolitical conditions of history. Under any conditions, Leibowitz's halakhic individual is able to transcend his own human interest and the needs of the

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community in an Akedah-like act of unconditional surrender and affirm the dignity of religious worship. The absence in Leibowitz's philosophy of any relationship between mitzvah and the shaping of human character enables him to transcend the significance of historical contexts and events. Judaism as a total way of life for a whole society, however, cannot be built exclusively on an Akedah model of spirituality. The Zionist yearning for Jewish "normalcy" is a rejection of the Akedah consciousness as the definitive feature of Jewish spirituality.

<sup>18</sup> Here I part ways completely with Leibowitz, for whom messianism is a menacing religious category that should be eliminated as totally and as quickly as possible. See his manner of understanding Maimonides on messianism in *Emunah ,historiyah va'arakhim*, pp. 89-111.

<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to the leadership of the Netivot Shalom movement for their role in bringing me to this realization.

<sup>20</sup> It is a task for another work to spell out what it means to regard halakhah as both an educational and a legal system. Heschel's writings have made a beginning in this direction.

Compare Pesikta de'Rav Kahana 12:25:

"Moreover," said Rabbi Jose bar Rabbi Hanina, "the divine word spoke to each and every person according to his particular capacity. And do not wonder at this. For when manna came down for Israel, each and every person tasted it in keeping with his own capacity—infants in keeping with their capacity, young men in keeping with their capacity, and old men in keeping with their capacity. . . . Now if each and every person was enabled to taste the manna according to his particular capacity, how much more and more was each and every person enabled according to his particular capacity to hear the divine word. Thus David said: 'The voice of the Lord is in its strength' [Ps. 29:4] not 'The voice of the Lord in His strength' but 'The voice of the Lord in its strength' that is, in its strength to make itself heard and understood according to the capacity of each and every person who listens to the divine word."

This *midrash* indicates that *mitzvah* can be appropriated not merely as a formal duty but also as expressive of the particular individual's relationship to God. Accordingly, the statement that "He who is commanded and fulfills it is greater than he who fulfills it though not commanded" (*Kiddushin* 31a, etc.) does not oblige us to identify *halakhah* with acting out of a sense of duty. Compare, however, Rashi on *Rosh ha-Shanah* 28a: "They [the *mitzvot*] were not given to Israel for enjoyment, but as a yoke on their necks." Similarly, Rashi on *Berakhot* 33b.

<sup>21</sup> Leibowitz was the first halakhic philosopher to realize, already in the late 1940s, that the creation of the state of Israel demands that the religious community face this fundamental challenge. As he expected no initiatives in this respect from the established halakhic jurists, he addressed his call directly to the religious community. His theory of halakhic change, which eliminates the necessity of precedent, sought to provide a basis for the community to accept the challenge. See Leibowitz, "Rashei perakim le-va'ayat dat Yisrael bi-medinat Yisrael," pp.85-87; "Yemei Zikkaron," pp.95-97; "Dat u-medinah," pp. 105-107; also *Emunah,historiyah va-arakhim*, pp. 71-74.

<sup>22</sup> Soloveitchik has frequently deprecated self-righteous sectarian tendencies of this kind in modern orthodoxy.

<sup>23</sup> One of the forthcoming publications of the research fellows of the Shalom Hartman Institute will be a collection of essays devoted to this topic.

<sup>24</sup> See Yoma 86a and Maimonides, *Sefer ha'Mitzvot*, positive commandment 3.

<sup>25</sup> As Scholem remarked in Ehud ben Ezer, ed., *Unease in Zion*, p. 273: "Zionism has never really known itself completely whether it is a movement of continuation and continuity, or a movement of rebellion." Also Scholem, "Reflections on Jewish Theology," pp. 290-297. See H. Fisch, *The Zionist Revolution* (London: "Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978), for a discussion of the paradox (chap. 1-2) and for a very different covenantal understanding of Zionism.

<sup>26</sup> Neither are *MT Hilkhoh Avodah Zarah* 7:1, 10:1, and 5-6 or *MT Hilkhoh Melakhim* 5:1-6, 6:1-6, and 8:10.

<sup>27</sup> Contrast Maimonides' advocacy of coercion in *MT Hilkhoh Gerushin* 2:20 with Berlin's defense of negative liberty in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), chap. 3. The work of M. J. Sandel has an

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important bearing on how Judaism needs to deal with the question of liberalism; see, e.g., his *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>28</sup> According to *Sanhedrin* 21a, a king cannot be a member of a court because "if they may not be judged, how could they judge?"

<sup>29</sup> Hermann Cohen was a notable example who has been followed by various contemporary Jewish theologians who have serious difficulty in coming to terms with the power embodied in the state of Israel.

<sup>30</sup> "Why was he [Mordecai] called 'a Jew' [Esther 2:5]? Because he repudiated idolatry. For anyone who repudiates idolatry is called a Jew " . . . (Megillah 13a). See my *Joy and Responsibility*, pp. 145-149.