

to occupy. But what if the fruition of the idea as the deed encompasses the whole of human existence? What if the faith seeks realization in economics, morals, politics, in every manifestation of human life? In that case, the group ought to be all-encompassing. Such a group should be mankind.

But mankind is not a group; it is not a historical entity. Mankind itself is an idea, an ideal. The group to be created to suit the comprehensive deed as a historical reality is a people, in sovereign control of the major areas of its life. The faith of Judaism requires such a comprehensive deed. Realization in the largest collective, mankind, is the ideal; the instrument of its realization in history is the people. Since our concern is with the comprehensive deed of Judaism, the people is Israel. Of necessity, the covenant had to create the people with which the covenant was concluded.

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Israel =
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If, however, the people of Israel is the instrument of realization, there must be a land of Israel as the place of realization. There must be a place on earth in which the people are in command of their own destiny, where the comprehensive public deed of Judaism may be enacted. Individuals may live in two cultures; but no distinctive culture may grow and flourish authentically in an area already preempted by another one. The individual

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Jew may well find a home in any democratic society; Judaism must remain in exile anywhere outside the land of Israel. Outside the land of Israel, Judaism is capable of partial realization only. The decisive areas of human endeavor are controlled by the majority culture. The "raw material," the challenge of the fullness of human life, is lacking. The Jewish deed cannot be enacted in a comprehensive way. Broad areas of Jewish teaching must remain mere book learning for lack of applicability. Values and standards degenerate into pious intentions devoid of relevance because, in the circumstances of Judaism's exile, they cannot become principles of policy for the Jewish people.

According to the Bible, Moses was not granted the privilege of entering the Promised Land. Informed of the divine decree, he prayed: "Let me go over and see the good land...."¹⁰ One of the teachers in the Talmud, interpreting Moses' prayer in the midrashic manner, commented: "Why did our teacher Moses desire to enter the land of Israel? Was it so important for him to eat of its fruits and enjoy its good things? Rather, he thought: 'There are so many commandments that Israel was given by God which can be fulfilled only there. Let me go over, that they may be fulfilled through me.'"¹¹ This comment expresses the theological significance of the land.

The teachers of the Talmud assume that Moses' interest in the land could not have been of a secular nature. It could not have been due to a wish for an easy life, or to "patriotic" or nationalistic aspirations. The land was the opportunity for Judaic realization. The Tora is not fully applicable outside the land of Israel. The consequences of exile are most serious: The non-application leads to continuous frustration of the spirit. The book learning, which is never tested through the contesting claims of live issues, withers. Judaism loses its creativity and stagnates.

Those Jews who separate Judaism from Zion, Tora from the land of Israel, give up both Tora and the land. Judaism without the opportunity for its comprehensive fulfillment is a spiritual tragedy. For the longest period of its history, Jews have lived with it. But to embrace the tragedy as a desired form of Jewish existence is a falsification of the essence of Judaism. Those who sever Zion from the Tora have severed Judaism from its authentic realization. They have surrendered, as a matter of principle, Judaism's *raison d'être*, which is fulfillment in history. They have transformed its character by reducing it to the level of religion. They have reduced it to a credo, a regimen of worship, and some customs in the home. All this may well be accompanied by fine, humanitarian resolutions; but the unique significance of the Judaism of history will have been abandoned. What historically has been an obligation of the public conscience and a standard for the public deed is narrowed to the level of private creed and individual behavior. This is not the reformation of a classical heritage, but its planned decadence. What has essentially been a religious civilization is thus stripped down to a not very exciting creed, whose main function is to be a sedative in moments of trouble and visitation. The original way of life, derived from the challenge to build this world as a kingdom of God, becomes a device for securing peace of mind for the individual, a function which it fulfills less and less effectively as this kind of religion declines.

IV

Is this the Messiah already? It is enough to look out the window to realize that nothing could be further from the truth—unless he, too, came unexpectedly, “like a thief.” But it is a messianic moment, in which the unexpected fruits of human endeavor reveal themselves as the mysterious expression of a divine guidance which the heart always knew would come. Ever since the Holocaust, we have known that the great Jewries that perished will never be rebuilt. We have known that there is no way back to the past. But in what direction were we moving? Our steps were uncertain; reassurance was lacking; self-understanding was confused. But now we have seen a smile on the face of God. It is enough. It will be enough for a long time. We have been called to a new beginning.

In the past, after every destruction, we built something new and different. After every destruction, we were led to new unfoldings in the history of Judaism. After the first destruction, we created the synagogue, which represented a new phase of Judaism. After the second destruction, we created the Judaism of the Talmud. In our generation we experienced another *hurban*, the third destruction, that of the Judaism of exile. Having found our way back to Zion in a messianic moment, we know that God is doing “a new thing; now shall it spring forth,” in which—as in the past—the old will find home.¹⁶ What the nature of this “new thing” is going to be

no one can tell at this early juncture; but we can discern the theological significance of the circumstances in which it will have to grow and develop. Judaism in exile was lacking the completeness of life within which the deed of practical faith could flourish. In the long history of the exile, the range of application was shrinking continuously. In Babylon, for instance, there were large areas closely settled by Jews who were allowed to live under their own laws and were internally ruled by their own princes, whose authority was recognized by the state. During the Middle Ages there were many countries in which Jews enjoyed a high measure of internal autonomy, though the application of Judaism to real issues of the human condition had been greatly narrowed. This base of application narrowed further, although it was still available to some extent, in the modern ghettos. The less Jews involved themselves in the majority culture and economy, the greater the chances for the authentically Jewish deed of daily existence. As the walls of the ghettos fell, Judaism was, more and more, reduced to the status of a mere religion.

With the destruction of the great Jewries, the basis for Jewish realization in history has practically disappeared. Neither is it to be found in the communist world, where the only history permitted the Jew is one that divests him of his Jewish identity. On the other hand, in the democratic countries, where freedom of conscience is the rule, the extent of the freedom is the source of the problem. Now involved in all areas of human endeavor, the Jew is nonetheless engaged in a world to which the comprehensive deed of Judaism cannot be applied. Judaism has never been as orphaned of living reality as in our days. Even among the pious, Judaism can only be a matter of private concern. Lacking the partnership of history, it withers. However, at this moment of its greatest impoverishment of reality, destiny has blessed it with the opportunity for its fullest application in the land of the fathers, in Jerusalem. For the first time, after nineteen centuries of a continuously shrinking base of applicability, the challenge of a human condition that requires the Judaic deed has been granted the Jew. Today, outside the land of Israel the challenges to Judaism arise mainly from the Jew's involvement in a society that is non-Jewish. Those problems are insoluble. Judaism was never meant to be realized in the midst of a Christian or Marxist civilization. If the diaspora were left to itself, the future of a meaningful form of Judaism would be dim. This "new thing" that God is preparing in Zion, we do not yet know. But the unsolved problems, the

be the fulfilment of Biblical promises and millennial prayers. But it is only fair to stress again that their hostility to Zionism in no way compromises the love of the Land of Israel and often the intense encouragement they give their followers to settle there.

The second important religious response to the national idea takes the exactly opposite line. It is represented by those who believe, with equal conviction, that the cataclysmic events culminating in the establishment of the Jewish State, followed by the reunification of Jerusalem and the Jewish reconquest of the bulk of the historic Land of Israel in the Six Day War, are indeed happenings of the most momentous religious significance in fulfilment of Biblical promises. Consequently, they hail these events as an essential and irreversible part of the final Messianic process – ‘the beginning of the Redemption’.¹⁸

This school of thought finds its main exponents in the Mizrachi movement,¹⁹ though its supporters include many beyond the confines of party lines. Its principal protagonists were spiritual and scholarly giants of the calibre of Rabbi A.I. Kook and Rabbi J.L. Maimon, succeeded by Rabbi I.H. Herzog and other rabbinic immortals of our age. Rejecting the literary and historic evidence produced by their opponents as misleading or irrelevant, they regard the experiences of our times as being without precedent, and they point to the miracle of Israel’s rise from the catastrophe of the Holocaust, accompanied by the Ingathering of Exiles, as unmistakable signs that the first acts in the drama of the Final Redemption are at hand.

Naturally, the devotees of this philosophy, too, do not lack literary and historical material to sustain their religious Zionism. Statements in the Talmud and rabbinic literature extolling life in the Land of Israel, and its unity with the Jewish people and faith, are legion. The line of leading sages advocating a mass return to Zion stretches all the way, certainly from Nachmanides to the present time. They also find ample halachic support for the claim that it is a religious duty to engage in war to liberate the Land,²⁰ to bring it under Jewish control and to promote the corporate expression of full Jewish life through the exercise of Jewish sovereignty. Since the highest aspirations of the Jewish people cannot be achieved without national independence, they regard life in the Jewish State even under non-religious rule as preferable to Jewish exilic existence,²¹ however intensive its Jewish vibrancy may be.

All religious nationalists would subscribe to these fundamental tenets. Yet there is today a major difference among them on the extent to which these beliefs must govern or override political considerations. Part of the argument also concerns the applicability of patently Messianic calculations to the contemporary situation and its dilemmas. A considerable and still

influential section of the Mizrachi movement, while not questioning the supreme religious significance of Jewish statehood as a forerunner to the promised Redemption, nevertheless acknowledges the reality of factors beyond Israel's control – such as external political pressures, the impact of an ever-increasing Arab minority on the Jewish character of the State, and the claims of Palestinians to some territorial concessions for the sake of peace provided they do not constitute a security risk.²² Ranking religious leaders inclining to this stance are Rabbi J.B.Soloveitchik²³ and Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.²⁴

Leading the fierce opposition to these moderates is the Gush Emunim movement,²⁵ which has gathered formidable strength since the Yom Kippur War, and which, despite its purely religious motivation, now enjoys widespread support among other ultra-nationalists as well. The late Rabbi A.I.Kook's passionate commitment to Jewish self-redemption in the Land of Israel is frequently cited as a vindication of the Gush Emunim platform today. But careful students of his prolific and inspired writings are inclined to challenge this posthumous invocation of support for a contrived eschatology of confrontation and militancy as alien to his pacific teachings and mellow character.²⁶

For others, the battlecry 'not an inch', with its 'all-or-nothing' overtones, evokes ominous echoes of the Masada experience – an episode quite unique in Jewish history. Unique not because of its heroic martyrdom (for which there are ample parallels), but because of the declared preference by an extreme religious sect for a national euthanasia or death with dignity over life under foreign subjection, for which Jewish history has no parallel.²⁷

Even more disturbing to the religious and historical sensitivities of many are the Messianic undercurrents of this religious radicalism. The pages of Jewish history are littered with the debris, sometimes the lethal shrapnel, left behind by the explosion of pseudo-Messianic movements, as grim reality dashed with shattering force the high expectations of imminent deliverance they had raised. The bitter wounds inflicted by devastating disillusionment stretch from the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion²⁸ to the fearful aftermath of the Shabbetai Zvi débâcle.

As will be explained in the next part, there is all the difference between Messianic *hopes*, which constitute the very stuff of faith serving our people to prevail over our tribulations, and Messianic *expectations* of impending salvation. Basing national policies or religious guidance on such *assumptions* can lead to catastrophic consequences against which we are forewarned by ample danger signals flashed from the shipwrecks of Messianic disasters spread along the course of our annals for the past 2,000 years.

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.⁶ 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 hadin* (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.

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.