



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון  
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# The Israel We Imagine

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## The Israel of Messianic Universalist Utopianism

### 1. Martin Buber, *Begriffe und Wirklichkeit: Brief an Herrn Geh. Regierungsrat Prof. Dr. Hermann Cohen*

Zionism opposes not the messianic idea, but rather the misrepresentation and distortion of this idea found in a considerable part of Liberal-Jewish, anti-Zionist literature. This misrepresentation and distortion glorifies, in the name of Messianism, the dispersion, debasement, and homelessness of the Jewish people as something unconditionally valuable and fortunate, as something that must be preserved because it prepares humanity for the messianic age. Zionism too sees the goal of Judaism as "the redemption of the human spirit and the salvation of the world." But, we see as the means to the realization of this goal "the liberation of a tormented people and its gathering around God's sanctuary."... In the messianic age, let Jewry merge with mankind. But let us make sure that the Jewish people does not disappear *now* so that the messianic age may perhaps come into being *later*. The Jewish people must persevere in the midst of today's human order--not as a fixed, brittle fact of nature appended to an ever more diluted confessional religion, but as a people pursuing its ideal, freely and unhindered, for the sake of this human order ... The struggle for a "homeland" is a national struggle. The struggle for Jewish communal existence [*juedische Gemeinwesen*] in Palestine will be a supra-national one. We want Palestine not "for the Jews." We want it for mankind, because we want it for the realization of Judaism.

## The Israel of Messianic Particularism

### 2. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Voice of My Beloved Knocketh* (1956) [abridged]

First, politically, it is undeniable that the establishment of the State of Israel was an almost supernatural event.

Second, militarily, the victory of the small Israeli Defense Forces over the overwhelming Arab armies was a miracle of "the many in the hands of the few."

Third, theologically, the supersessionist claims of Christian theologians that God rescinded the rights of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, and that all the biblical promises regarding Zion

and Jerusalem refer in truth to Christianity and the Christian Church, have been proven false by the establishment of the State of Israel.

Fourth, in the hearts of our troubled and assimilated youths. The perceived Divine concealment (*hastarat panim*) during the Holocaust caused great confusion among our people, and, in particular, among our youth increased assimilation ensued. The rebirth of Israel has stemmed the flow of assimilation and many are reconnecting through the state of Israel and its achievements.

The fifth, that for the first time since our exile, Divine providence is teaching our enemies that Jewish blood is not free.

The sixth, that every Jew who yearns to escape from persecution in enemy lands knows that he can find a safe refuge in his ancestral land.

## **The Israel of Sovereignty and Survival**

### **3. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State**

My own answer to that non-Jew was that Zionism is the expression of our being fed up with being ruled by *Goyim*. I am aware that this "we" does not extend to all Jews. Still, it is the motive shared by Zionist Jews who differ widely in their human values and in their conception of Judaism. Zionism is best defined as the program for the attainment of political and national independence. Now that this has been attained in the form of a sovereign state, Zionism consists in the effort to maintain this independence. This is the function the state of Israel performs for the Jewish people, in addition to inspiring "the fear of authority" as does every system of government to maintain peace and tranquility. More than that should not be expected from any state. The values people wish to realize, whether general humanistic ones like the idea of a "model society," or specifically Jewish such as the "prophetic vision and the messianic promises," or, most authentically, a condition in which "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD," are not the affair of the state. Their realization is a proper object for the aspirations and striving of individuals and groups *within* the state. It is outside the sphere of action of the executive and administrative apparatus of state coercion, which can never be the suitable instrument for the implementation of these values.

## The Israel of Cultural Renewal

### 4. Ahad Ha'am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem" (1897)

It is not only Jews who have come out of the Ghetto: Judaism has come out, too. For Jews the exodus is confined to certain countries, and is due to toleration; but Judaism has come out (or is coming out) of its own accord wherever it has come into contact with modern culture. This contact with modern culture overturns the defenses of Judaism from within, so that Judaism can no longer remain isolated and live a life apart. The spirit of our people strives for development: it wants to absorb those elements of general culture which reach it from outside, to digest them and to make them a part of itself, as it has done before at different periods of its history. But the conditions of its life in exile are not suitable. In our time culture wears in each country the garb of the national spirit, and the stranger who would woo her must sink his individuality and become absorbed in the dominant spirit. For this reason, Judaism in exile cannot develop its individuality in its own way. When it leaves the Ghetto walls it is in danger of losing its essential being or -- at best -- its national unity: it is in danger of being split up into as many kinds of Judaism, each with a different character and life, as there are countries of the Jewish dispersion...

The secret of our people's persistence is -- as I have tried to show elsewhere -- that at a very early period the Prophets taught it to respect only spiritual power, and not to worship material power. For this reason, the clash with enemies stronger than itself never brought the Jewish nation, as it did the other nations of antiquity, to the point of self-effacement. So long as we are faithful to this principle, our existence has a secure basis: for in spiritual power we are not inferior to other nations, and we have no reason to efface ourselves. But a political ideal which does not rest on the national culture is apt to seduce us from our loyalty to spiritual greatness, and to beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political dominion, thus breaking the thread that unites us with the past, and undermining our historical basis. Needless to say, if the political ideal is not attained, it will have disastrous consequences, because we shall have lost the old basis without finding a new one. But even if it is attained under present conditions, when we are a scattered people not only in the physical but also in the spiritual sense -- even then Judaism will be in great danger. Almost all our great men, those, that is, whose education and social position fit

them to be at the head of a Jewish State, are spiritually far removed from Judaism, and have no true conception of its nature and its value. Such men, however loyal to their State and devoted to its interests, will necessarily regard those interests as bound up with the foreign culture which they themselves have imbibed and they will endeavour, by moral persuasion or even by force, to implant that culture in the Jewish State, so that in the end the Jewish State will be a State of Germans or Frenchmen of the Jewish race. We have even now a small example of this process in Palestine. And history teaches us that in the days of the Herodian house Palestine was indeed a Jewish State, but the national culture was despised and persecuted, and the ruling house did everything in its power to implant Roman culture in the country, and frittered away the national resources in the building of heathen temples and amphitheatres and so forth.

Such a Jewish State would spell death and utter degradation for our people. We should never achieve sufficient political power to deserve respect, while we should miss the living moral force within. The puny State, being "tossed about like a ball between its powerful neighbours, and maintaining its existence only by diplomatic shifts and continual truckling to the favoured of fortune," would not be able to give us a feeling of national glory; and the national culture, in which we might have sought and found our glory, would not have been implanted in our State and would not be the principle of its life. So we should really be then -- much more than we are now -- "a small and insignificant nation," enslaved in spirit to "the favoured of fortune," turning an envious and covetous eye on the armed force of our "powerful neighbours" and our existence as a sovereign State would not add a glorious chapter to our national history. Were it not better for "an ancient people which was once a beacon to the world" to disappear than to end by reaching such a goal as this?

## **The Israel of Aspiration**

### **5. David Hartman, "The Third Jewish Commonwealth" in *A Living Covenant***

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...

## **6. Ruth Calderon, Inaugural Speech in Knesset, February 12, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, honorable Knesset, the book I am holding changed my life, and to a large extent it is the reason that I have reached this day with the opportunity to speak to the Knesset of Israel as a new member. The copy in my hands belonged to David Giladi – a writer, journalist, editor, man of culture, and the grandfather of the head of our faction. He was mentioned here yesterday, too. I had the great honor of receiving it from his daughter, writer Shulamit Lapid.

I did not inherit a set of Talmud from my grandfather. I was born and raised in a quaint neighborhood in Tel Aviv. My father, Moshe Calderon, was born in Bulgaria and immigrated to this land as a young man. After the difficult war years, he began studying agriculture at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and was immediately conscripted to defend Gush Etzion during the War of Independence.

Eventually he specialized in entomology, the study of insects, and became a global expert in grain storage. My German-born mother, who had the combined misfortune (at that time) of being Jewish, left-handed, and red-haired, made aliyah as a teenager, and met my father courtesy of the British siege of Jerusalem. By the time the siege ended and they went to meet the families as a match that had already been made, the Bulgarian neighbors could not say anything but, “She’s really nice, Moshiko, but are there no Jewish girls left? You have to marry an Ashkenazi girl?”

I am recounting all of this in order to say that I grew up in a very Jewish, very Zionist, secular-traditional-religious home that combined Ashkenaz and Sepharad, [Revisionist] Betar and [Socialist] Hashomer Hatzair, in the Israeli mainstream of the 60s and 70s. I was educated like

everyone else my age – public education in the spirit of “from Tanach to Palmach”. I was not acquainted with the Mishna, the Talmud, Kabbala or Hasidism. By the time I was a teenager, I already sensed that something was missing. Something about the new, liberated Israeli identity of [Moshe Shamir’s] Elik who was “born of the sea”, of Naomi Shemer’s poems, was good and beautiful, but lacking. I missed depth; I lacked words for my vocabulary; a past, epics, heroes, places, drama, stories – were missing. The new Hebrew, created by educators from the country’s founding generation, realized their dream and became a courageous, practical, and suntanned soldier. But for me, this contained – I contained – a void. I did not know how to fill that void, but when I first encountered the Talmud and became completely enamored with it, its language, its humor, its profound thinking, its modes of discussion, and the practicality, humanity, and maturity that emerge from its lines, I sensed that I had found the love of my life, what I had been lacking.

Since then I have studied academically in batei midrash [Jewish study halls] and in the university, where I earned a doctorate in Talmudic Literature at the Hebrew University, and I have studied lishma, for the sake of the study itself. For many years I have studied daf yomi, the daily page of Talmud, and with a chavruta [study partner]; it has shaped who I am.

Motivated by my own needs, and together with others, I founded Alma – Home for Hebrew Culture in Tel Aviv, and Elul, Israel’s first joint beit midrash for men, women, religious, and secular. Since then, over the course of several decades, there a Jewish renaissance movement has begun to flourish, in which tens and hundreds of thousands of Israelis study within frameworks that do not dictate to them the proper way to be a Jew or the manner in which their Torah is to become a living Torah.

I am convinced that studying the great works of Hebrew and Jewish culture are crucial to construct a new Hebrew culture for Israel. It is impossible to stride toward the future without knowing where we came from and who we are, without knowing, intimately and in every particular, the sublime as well as the outrageous and the ridiculous. The Torah is not the property of one movement or another. It is a gift that every one of us received, and we have all been granted the opportunity to meditate upon it as we create the realities of our lives. Nobody took the Talmud and rabbinic literature from us. We gave it away, with our own hands, when it seemed that another task was more important and urgent: building a state, raising an army, developing agriculture and industry, etc. The time has come to reappropriate what is ours, to delight in the cultural riches that wait for us, for our eyes, our imaginations, our creativity.

Instead of telling you about this book's beauty, I wish to tell you a story from Talmud, one small story, the story of Rabbi Rechumei, which appears in Ketubot 62b, and through it to say some words about this moment and about the tasks I will set for myself in the Knesset.

I have brought the text. Anyone who wants, we can pass it out – but only to those who want it.

Page 62b – I will read it once in Aramaic, for the music, and then in Hebrew, so we can read it. [An English translation of the original text is followed by Dr. Calderon's interpretation.]

Rabbi Rechumei was constantly before Rava in Mechoza. He would habitually come home every Yom Kippur eve. One day the topic drew him in. His wife anticipated him: "Here he comes. Here he comes." He didn't come. She became upset. She shed a tear from her eye. He was sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him, and he died.

Rabbi Rechumei – a rabbi, a rav, a whole lot of man ["rav" can mean "rabbi" or "much"]. "Rechumei" in Aramaic means "love". Rechumei is derived from the word "rechem", womb, someone who knows how to include, how to completely accept, just as a woman's womb contains the baby. This choice of word for "love" is quite beautiful. We know that the Greek word for "womb" gives us the word "hysteria". The Aramaic choice to take the womb and turn it into love is a feminist gesture by the Sages.

He was constantly, he could be found before Rava, the head of the yeshiva at Mechoza...

Chairman Yitzhak Vaknin (Shas): Rechem also [has a numerologically significant value of] 248.

Calderon: Thank you. Yasher koach.

Calderon: Thank you for participating. I am happy...

Vaknin: I think the idea she is saying is wonderful...

Calderon: I am happy about this participation in words of Torah.

He could be found, that is, he studied, he was accepted for study, in the great yeshiva, one of the four yeshivot, the Ivy League, of Babylonia: Nehardea, Mechoza, Pumbedita, and Sura. He studied at Mechoza; he studied in the presence of Mechoza's rosh yeshiva, who was so well known that he was called Rava. In Aramaic, an aleph at the end of a word denoted the definite article. Rava was "the Rav", "the Rabbi".



He would habitually – I suggest that the Sages do not like people who do things out of habit; in general, when someone in the Talmud does something regularly, someone dies within a few lines. He would habitually come home – in Aramaic, “home” also means “wife”. It is both wife and home. That is, a man who has no wife is homeless. A woman who has no man is not, but a man without a wife – no home. He would habitually come home every Yom Kippur eve. Notice that the Gemara says “he would habitually come home every Yom Kippur eve.” There is a certain rabbinic irony here. What does “every” mean? Once a year. Not very often.

You are probably thinking: what kind of date is that to choose to come home? Yom Kippur eve? It is not exactly a day of intimacy. It is generally a day of prayer, and not even at home.

One day, one time, one year, the topic drew him in. The study in the beit midrash so fascinated him that he forgot. He did not leave in time. He could not abandon his studies and he did not go home. His wife anticipated him: “Here he comes. Here he comes.” One can hear the aspirant tone of her words in Aramaic: “Hhhashta atei; hhere he comes.” This expectation, that every text message, every phone call, every footfall, every knock at the door, you are certain is him. Here he comes. Here he comes.

He didn’t come.

At some point, she realizes that he is not coming this year. Perhaps the shofar blast announcing the onset of Yom Kippur was sounded, after which nobody would arrive, due to the sanctity of the holiday. She becomes upset. This woman, who waited all year, who for many years has waited all year for one day, cannot stand it anymore. She becomes upset. She is disappointed; she is sorrowful; she loses control. She sheds a tear from her eye – this is an active verb, not a passive one. She allows one tear to leak out of her eye onto her cheek, after years of not crying.

Now we must imagine a split screen: on one side is a close-up of a female character, a woman with one tear running down her cheek. On the other side, sitting on a rooftop in Mechoza, is Rabbi Rechumei, dressed entirely in white and feeling holy. You know, after several hours without food we feel very exalted. He studies Torah on the roof, under the stars, and feels so close to the heavens. He sat on the roof, and as the tear falls from the woman’s eye, the roof caves in under him and he falls to the ground and dies.

What can I learn about this place and my work here from Rabbi Rechumei and his wife? First, I learn that one who forgets that he is sitting on another’s shoulders – will fall. I agree with what you said earlier, MK Bennett. I learn that righteousness is not adherence to the Torah at the

expense of sensitivity to human beings. I learn that often, in a dispute, both sides are right, and until I understand that both my disputant and I, both the woman and Rabbi Rechumei, feel that they are doing the right thing and are responsible for the home. Sometimes we feel like the woman, waiting, serving in the army, doing all the work while others sit on the roof and study Torah; sometimes those others feel that they bear the entire weight of tradition, Torah, and our culture while we go to the beach and have a blast. Both I and my disputant feel solely responsible for the home. Until I understand this, I will not perceive the problem properly and will not be able to find a solution. I invite all of us to years of action rooted in thought and dispute rooted in mutual respect and understanding.

I aspire to bring about a situation in which Torah study is the heritage of all Israel, in which the Torah is accessible to all who wish to study it, in which all young citizens of Israel take part in Torah study as well as military and civil service. Together we will build this home and avoid disappointment.

I long for the day when the state's resources are distributed fairly and equally to every Torah scholar, man or woman, based on the quality of their study, not their communal affiliation, when secular and pluralistic yeshivot, batei midrash, and organizations win fair and equal support in comparison to Orthodox and Haredi batei midrash. Through scholarly envy and healthy competition, the Torah will be magnified and glorified.

I want to mention my mentor, Rabbi David Hartman, who passed away this week, who opened up the doors of his beit midrash for me, and who built the language of a courageous and inclusive Judaism. May his memory be a blessing.

I want to conclude with a prayer composed by my colleague Chaim Hames, the prayer for entering the Knesset:

May it be Your will, Lord our God, God of our fathers and mothers, that I leave this house as I entered it – at peace with myself and with others. May my actions benefit all residents of the State of Israel. May I work to improve the society that sent me to this chamber and cause a just peace to dwell among us and with our neighbors. May I always remember that I am a messenger of the public and that I must take care to keep my integrity and innocence intact. May I, and we, succeed in all our endeavors.

I add a small prayer for my faction, Yesh Atid, that we maintain our unique culture of cooperation and brotherhood, that we remain united, that we remain in the plenum, and that we realize our dream to make things better. Thank you.