

TRADITION SYMPOSIUM: Reflections on the Six-Day War After a Quarter Century

The Six Day War evoked a sense of religious euphoria. Many people spoke of revelatory miracles and the hastening of the Messianic Era with the recapturing of Jerusalem. Soon after the war, Shortly after the Six Day War, Tradition invited a number of Orthodox Israeli and American intellectuals to respond to a series of questions. That symposium was published as “The Religious Meaning of the Six Day War” (Tradition, Vol. 10, No. 1, Summer 1968). The original questions were:

- 1.** *It has been said that the Six Day War represents a unique demonstration of God’s acting in history. Do you believe that the Six Day War revealed God’s operation in history to a far greater extent than other events since the establishment of the State? (For instance, the War of Liberation or the Sinai Campaign).*
- 2.** *Do the events in Israel reveal God’s acting in history in a different way from other major events of our time which may also be said to reveal God’s judgment in history—for example, the Cold War, Vietnam, race riots, etc.?*
- 3.** *Do you look upon the events in Israel as a miracle that cannot be accounted for in terms of social, political, military or economic factors?*
- 4.** *How would you compare the “miracles” of the Six Day War with the miracles of Chanukah and Purim?*
- 5.** *If you attribute theological significance to the events in Israel, what are the practical repercussions for our religious life today?*
- 6.** *Do you believe that the rebirth of Israel culminating now with the recapture of Jerusalem indicates that we are on the verge of a Messianic Era?*

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of that war, we deem it appropriate to reconsider those issues and see if perspectives have changed. Accordingly, we turned to a select group of serious Jewish thinkers, and asked them to consider those same questions and, perhaps more importantly, to reflect on how their perspectives on the issues might have

changed since 1967. Not all of those to whom we turned responded. We are grateful to those who did for providing us with their thoughtful observations and challenging insights.

DAVID BERGER

As important and challenging as the issues in this symposium are, they require a preliminary confrontation with questions that are even more fundamental. What do we mean by a miracle? What is our theory of providence? How regularly and under what circumstances does God intervene in the natural order? Is any providential act by definition miraculous?

The relationship between providence and the natural order is complex and elusive. On the one hand, we often speak of God's exercising providence through nature; on the other, the Ramban has forcefully argued that no one has ever prayed without implicitly affirming the belief in miracles since any divine response requires that God intervene in the causal chain in order to alter its outcome. While thoroughly naturalistic theories of providence have been constructed, it is difficult to accommodate fundamental religious instincts without an appeal to the belief in subtle divine intervention, which the Ramban labels "hidden miracles."¹

The frequency of such miracles and our ability to discern them remain problematic. Moreover, the borderline between hidden and manifest miracles is fuzzy and often indeterminate. If a manifest miracle is defined as an event whose miraculous character cannot be denied by any rational witness, then the Rambam has informed us that only the revelation at Sinai qualifies (*Hilkhoh Yesodei HaTorah* 8:1-2). Although we would probably seek a broader definition, it remains true that after Sinai, the framework provided by the observer's faith plays a crucial role in evaluating the miraculous character of any event.

The implausibility of the event is certainly an important consideration in any such evaluation, but it is far from decisive. Many surprising developments, some of them even less predictable than the Israeli victory in 1967, not only fail to strike us as miraculous but appear so trivial that the serious assertion that they are miracles seems almost blasphemous. The sports pages, for example, are replete with references to "miraculous" results of individual games and entire seasons. Sometimes the players on those teams prayed fervently for the unlikely result. I do not think that a believing Jew could regard such prayers as less appropriate than any other prayer for enhancing the supplicant's livelihood, and yet the notion that we are witnessing a miracle, whether hidden or manifest, makes us squirm. In determining whether a particular historical process is a miracle, context is almost everything.

For the non-believer, the context of faith is entirely absent, and for such a person, the Israeli capture of Jerusalem, the unraveling of Communism, and the events of the Gulf War can reasonably be attributed to "social, political, military or economic factors." Where faith is present, context takes on a broader meaning encompassing both theology and historical evaluation. Do I believe that God intervenes frequently even in everyday affairs of relatively little moment? Do I think that this is a period of *hester panim* in which natural processes almost invariably prevail? Do I consider divine intervention more likely in Jewish history than in the affairs of the nations of the world? Do I assign a positive, negative or neutral evaluation to the event under consideration? Do I regard it as a passing episode or as a critical development in human history?

Although God's knowledge is unlimited and the possibility of His intervention is always present, many major authorities have maintained that miraculous intervention in the daily lives of ordinary Jews is relatively infrequent,² and some degree of uncertainty extends to larger matters as well. I am inclined to believe, for example, that God had something to do with the low casualty rate following the launching of Scud missiles toward Israel, but I do not feel that my faith requires the categorical affirmation that He changed the flight path of a particular missile or caused its warhead to malfunction. Nonetheless, there are events that are so earthshaking within the context of Jewish belief that the failure to attribute them to divine intervention leaves Judaism bereft of meaningful faith in the God of *Haza* and of the prophets.

The establishment of the State of Israel and the capture of Jerusalem are such events. Given the most fundamental assumptions about providence, the goodness of God and His concern for the Jewish people, the position that developments of such magnitude came about wholly through the working of an impersonal historical process is inadmissible. It banishes God from history and declares in effect that "the Lord has forsaken the earth" (Ezek. 8:12; 9:9). If the hand of God is not to be found in these events, where is it to be found?

One of the great ironies in contemporary Jewish piety is that many deeply religious Jews have inverted the hierarchy of providential events. For many non-Zionist Orthodox Jews, the operation of micro-providence is taken for granted to the point where innumerable events in the lives of prominent Rabbis are confidently regarded as miracles. At the same time, the return of the land of Israel to the Jewish people is assigned no religious value whatever. It is true that God intervenes to protect the land: He guides Scud missiles to targets of brick and stone in large measure because of the merit generated by students studying in Israeli *yeshivot*. Nonetheless, He appears to have played no role in the establishment of the State.

This position is so incongruous that it is rarely if ever formulated in

such stark terms; nevertheless, I believe that it is a fair extrapolation from the rhetoric and behavior of many religious Jews. When pressed, such Jews will dismiss Israel's theological significance by speaking of the anti-religious character of mainstream Zionist ideology or pointing to the secularism of the State and its impact on the religiosity of early Sephardic *olim*; when really pressed, they will recognize God's role by describing the State as a test (a *nissayon*), which is presumably as much a cause for concern as for celebration. But even the theology of *nissayon* would mean that God has given the Jewish people an unparalleled opportunity, and for the most part, one searches vainly in these circles for an expression of gratitude for such a gift.

The incongruity of this phenomenon is so great that it cries out for explanation, and several possibilities come to mind. Before the establishment of the State, rabbinic opposition to Zionism did not face the theological obstacle that now confronts it: there was no monumental providential event to explain away. Consequently, the secularism of the movement along with other considerations generated a rejection of Zionism by most major authorities. Given certain assumptions about the near-infallibility of *gedolei Yisrael*, even an overwhelmingly transparent act of divine providence could not produce a fundamental reassessment. Moreover, among Israeli *haredim*, such a reassessment might have necessitated a fresh look at the question of timely army service for the majority of yeshiva students or the religious obligation to establish an educational system geared to producing citizens with the skills required to serve the needs of a modern state.

Whatever the explanation, substantial segments of religious Jewry find themselves in an unacknowledged theological morass in which they commit the Jewish version of original sin: the failure to recognize the munificence of the Creator.³ The sharpest formulation of this anomaly—so sharp that I would probably have softened it had I thought of it myself—was reported to me by a rabbi standing to the right of Modern Orthodoxy who heard it from a distinguished *talmid hakham* in a private conversation. We are being told, he said, that God brought about the Holocaust but not the State of Israel.

Recognition that the establishment of Israel is an act of God undoubtedly has practical religious repercussions. It means that the refusal to celebrate *Yom Haatzmaut* and *Yom Yerushalayim* is a refusal to give thanks to God. It means that support of Israel is a religious imperative and that the obligation of *aliya* demands serious attention. It means that a host of questions ranging from the *hetter mekhirah* during *shemittah* to the Sabbath observance of Israeli soldiers must be seen through a prism which affirms the religious value of the State, without, of course, predetermining the conclusion of halakhic deliberations.

The step from affirming the providential character of Israel to identifying it as the inauguration of the Messianic process is tempting but dangerous.

I certainly hope that the State constitutes the beginning of that process and that the ingathering of exiles unfolding before our eyes means that we stand on the verge of redemption. But I do not know. When the Messianic age will come and what conditions will attend its coming are, as the Rambam stressed, unknown to us (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:2), and it is always dangerous to lay claim to knowledge that we do not possess.

We hear, of course, periodic affirmations of the imminence of redemption, and such affirmations do not have to emerge from Zionist premises. There are influential groups who believe that the Messiah will arrive in the immediate future but will presumably inform us that the proximity of his arrival to the establishment of Israel is pure coincidence. To put it mildly, this position is counter-intuitive and results from the reluctance to assign the State its proper religious significance. At the same time, the more plausible hope that the State itself is the harbinger of a Messianic age should not be turned into absolute assurance. God has declared us a kingdom of priests. Despite Moses' selfless wish, He has not yet transformed us into a nation of prophets.

NOTES

1. The widespread view that the Ramban denied the existence of a natural order misconstrues his position. See my "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations In his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. by Isadore Twersky, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 107-128.
2. See, for example, Ramban on Gen. 18:19 and Job 36:7.
3. See *Avodah Zarah* 5a-b; Rashi on Gen. 3:12. Among extreme anti-Zionists, the theological vacuum is filled by assigning the establishment of the State to the work of demonic forces, but this is not the view of the vast majority of non-Zionist Orthodox Jews.

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IMMANUEL JAKOBOVITS

During the convulsive years which have elapsed since the Six-Day War, not only have the answers recorded in the *Tradition* Symposium changed dramatically, the questions to be asked now, a quarter of a century later, are likewise completely different. These changes affect not only the State of Israel; they have also fundamentally altered the Jewish condition the world over.

In the light of subsequent events—from the Yom Kippur War to the Intifada and the Gulf War—the questions posed in the heady days of 1967 seem utterly dated, almost anachronistic. Whether the "miracles" of the Six-Day War were comparable with those of Chanukah and Purim is hardly relevant to Israel's contemporary condition. Nor can it make much difference whether the Six-Day War revealed a greater or lesser Divine intervention

in history than other milestones in the development of Israel before and after 1967, or whether these were different in kind from *God's judgment in History* as manifested in the Cold War or in race riots.

Least of all is there any present-day meaning to the question whether we are on the verge of the Messianic Era.

In fact, the past twenty-four years have shattered many illusions and exposed many false promises. The doctrine of Secular Zionism, promising that a Jewish State would eliminate anti-Semitism and "solve the Jewish problem" has been turned on its head. Today, anti-Zionism is the principal cause or form of anti-Semitism, and certainly its main expression. The survival of Israel against such heavy odds is wondrous enough. But the miracle of final Redemption is hardly at hand. The Holocaust apart, the outrages against Jews from Crusades to pogroms in medieval and modern times claimed victims within corresponding periods comparable with the thousands killed in Israel's wars and in anti-Jewish acts of terrorism inside and outside Israel.

The question that should be asked is not what was the religious significance of the Six-Day War, or other events in Israel's turbulent history. Rather we should ask, what is the religious significance of returning to the Land of Israel, and having a Jewish State? How far must we, or can we, adjust the Zionist purpose in the light of the experience of Jewish statehood to date?

The religious ideal of Zionism has never been simply to find a haven for persecuted Jews or to ensure security for Jews everywhere, or to provide an answer to anti-Semitism. Religious Jews are not disillusioned if Israel does not serve as a safe refuge for homeless Jews. That was not the vision of the Hebrew Prophets, or the dream of Yehuda Halevi, or Nachmanides, or all other passionate Lovers of Zion over the ages.

Religious Jews have prayed constantly that "He shall lead us *upright* to our Land," that we shall go not as bowed refugees fleeing from oppression, but as dauntless Jews attracted to living a fully Jewish life in the only place on Earth where we can fashion our own national destiny.

And if in the process of gaining and protecting this Land of our past and our future we create extra antagonisms, become subjected to "double standards," are treated as pariahs in the United Nations, and lend a new and extra dimension to anti-Semitism, then so be it. It is a price religious Jews, at any rate, should be prepared to pay for being different. Having a State of our own is well worth the extra cost, provided it yields commensurate benefits of extra creativeness and extra permanence.

In 1967, many believed that Israel's special relationship with the Guardian of Israel imposed extra commitments only on the latter, a debt payable in the coinage of miracles. By now, we should have been weaned of this illusion, realizing that the Covenant imposes reciprocal obligations on each partner.

Which leaves the question on having reached “the verge of a Messianic Era” to be answered. In the expectant days of 1967, the question was indeed immediate and acute. The Jewish people had never experienced a military victory of such dimensions and such universal acclaim. Since then, countless dates of anticipated Messianic fulfillment have come and gone, and more sober calculations generally prevail.

Hope for the Messianic advent any day is now, of course, a fundamental article of our faith, as defined by Maimonides and accepted by religious Jews everywhere. But the *assumption*, or *certainty* of imminent Redemption can have catastrophic consequences, as grievously demonstrated in a whole series of pseudo-Messianic disasters from Bar Kochba to Shabbetai Zvi and beyond.

Today, there is an altogether new peril. The belief that the coming of the Messiah is definitely around the corner presupposes that the process of Redemption is now irreversible, and that risks can therefore be taken which would not otherwise be warranted. Jewish statehood for the first time in two thousand years provides opportunities for collective decisions affecting the fate of the entire Jewish people, inside and outside Israel, whereas formerly such decisions could affect only individual communities. The collective Jewish fate was unaffected.

The assumption of irreversibility sustained by Messianic certainties explains the pressure, in some quarters, for the Israeli occupation of Cairo towards the end of the Yom Kippur War, and of Damascus at the height of the Lebanon War. More rational calculations could have dispensed with the benefits of hindsight to realize the disastrous effects, not least in utterly alienating Arab opinion, such occupation of world capitals would have had.

Not without reason did Maimonides include the historical lessons to be drawn from the Messianic disillusionment of Bar Kochba in his authoritative code of Jewish Law.

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Hester Panim, the concealment of the Countenance, means at least in part that God withholds temporarily the implementation of His covenantal promise that He will intervene in history to ensure that the people of Israel will inherit the Holy Land. It is a fundamental Jewish belief that God will ultimately determine the outcome of both Jewish and human history. The *Brit bein Habetarim*, the Covenant among the Parts, is a divine undertaking that the Jewish people will at the end of days possess the Land of Israel.

The belief in the Messianic era is a conviction that the redemption of mankind, which is contingent upon the achievement by the people of Israel of its historic goal, is inevitable. There are, accordingly, significant periods of Jewish history, which may be termed redemptive in the sense that they expedite the realization of the divinely prescribed historical aims. There are other periods, however, in which God does nothing to advance the covenantally guaranteed historical destiny of the people of Israel. The latter are manifestations of *hester panim*, non-redemptive eras of Jewish history.

There are therefore two distinct and, to some extent, distinguishable, phases of Jewish history—the redemptive and the non-redemptive, those in which the Jewish people advances towards its historic destiny and those devoid of such movement. It is difficult to pinpoint those moments of time when a redemptive period ceases or to establish the criteria by which we can ascertain that God is indeed present in Jewish history in a manner that accelerates the Jewish people's progress towards its historic goals. In a general and non-rigorous way, however, it may be suggested that the redemptive phase of Jewish history involves, as an essential feature, though not necessarily in a continuous manner, movement towards the creation of a Jewish state, or progress, not necessarily consistent, in a state already established, towards the achievement of the spiritual ideal that should be embodied within it. Maimonides postulates, as a feature of the ultimate redemption, a time where the entire Jewish people, restored to its homeland, lives a life in accordance with the requirements of Torah.¹ The belief that God is shaping Jewish history is, accordingly, more credible at a time when a Jewish state exists than it is in an era when the Diaspora is absolute.

The birth of the contemporary state of Israel ought, therefore, to be perceived as a redemptive event. I take this to be the essential meaning of the phrase which occurs in the prayer on behalf of Israel introduced by the Chief Rabbinate which claims that Israel is "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption". This assertion, however, should be understood as a statement of faith, not as an interpretation of facts in accordance with a theological hypothesis. A theological statement with regard to the course of history is not in the same category as a scientific law. The latter claims to be applicable to individual facts in a verifiable manner. The former is applicable to processes rather than facts and is justifiable on the basis of belief rather than empirical confirmations.

The attempt to hold up a solitary event as the proof positive of a theological dogma is essentially misguided and often dangerous. It results in the kind of absurd pronouncements as that which declared that a bus filled with school children met with an accident that resulted in many fatalities because the families to which these children belonged violated an explicitly identified biblical precept. It is one thing, on the basis of religious conviction, to assert the belief in reward and punishment. It is quite another to suggest, with misplaced confidence, that a specific event is an example

of the doctrine in question. Indeed, it is arrogant to do so. The assumption that a human being can penetrate into the mind of God and reveal what He thinks is incredibly presumptuous both intellectually and religiously. As the prophet Isaiah declared, “My thoughts are not your thoughts”² The same is true of any attempt to interpret the theological significance of events such as the Six Day War. We are charged with the task of interpreting historical processes according to religious beliefs, not individual historical facts.

We must distinguish between two processes—the redemptive and the historical. At times, they are parallel, even identical, that is to say, the very same events are parts of both processes. At times, they are at odds, even in conflict. There are historical episodes which one cannot, without strenuous intellectual effort, force into a redemptive mould. It is clear, however, that the task of bringing the historical and the redemptive into juxtaposition and indicating their relationship is beyond the capacity of the human mind.

A consideration of the redemptive process itself will lead to the same conclusion. To begin with, redemption is a lengthy process extending over periods of time measured in millenia. We ought, for example, to distinguish redemption from salvation. The latter occurs in a relatively brief period of time, sometimes even instantaneously. “The salvation of God comes with the blink of an eye.”³ Redemption moves forward at a snail’s pace. In the words of the Rabbis, “Redemption arrives a little bit at a time.”⁴ It is relatively easy to identify an act of salvation. When a person or a people emerges from a life-threatening state of affairs, that there is an element of salvation inherently at work is relatively obvious. The people of Israel, having successfully escaped its enemies upon crossing the Red Sea, immediately acknowledged the salvation with which it was blessed with a Song of thanksgiving. It may very well be that an act of salvation may simultaneously be a stage in the process of redemption, that is to say, it may indeed move forward the process leading to the attainment of Israel’s ultimate goals, but of this no one can be absolutely certain—notwithstanding the popular, though often erroneous, tendency to identify salvation with redemption.

Further, the forward movement of the redemptive process is not straight-lined, that is, the advance can be described as “two steps forward and one step backward”. The redemptive process is not cumulative, that is to say, it does not proceed in a straight line. The long and arduous trek of the people of Israel through the desert into the Holy Land was essentially redemptive, albeit there were many instances of backsliding with the consequent sacrifice of progress made. It may very well be the case that even a setback or, for that matter, an event perceived as a defeat, may be an essential part of the redemptive process.

In sum, it is consistent with Jewish belief to conclude, given the re-birth of the state of Israel in our day, that we live in an era of redemption. And while I say this with conviction, I feel helpless when asked to interpret

any individual success or failure, victory or defeat, in redemptive terms. It is beyond my capacity, indeed I believe it is beyond human capacity, to do so. The perception that we live in a redemptive epoch remains an article of faith.

NOTES

1. *Yad, Hilchot Melakhim*, XI,l.
2. *Isaiah LV*,8.
3. This is a translation of the statement “*Yeshuat haShem keheref ‘ayin*”. While not found in the Bible or the Talmud, it offers a judgment that is generally regarded as valid.
4. *Midrash Tehillim*, quoted in *Haggadah* of Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher (New York, 1955), p.288.

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MAYER SCHILLER

The key phrases in our symposium’s first question are “unique demonstration of God’s acting in history” and “revealed God’s operation in history, etc.” Both are somewhat vague. They beckon us towards that cloudy realm where theology, hypothesis and sentiment coalesce, allowing men to formulate theories concerning the Divine intent behind temporal events. This process is tricky enough when we apply it to our daily lives; it becomes extremely treacherous when pursued in relation to events of massive historical significance.

Before discussing the Six Day War or the assorted conflicts that have preceeded and followed it, we must first turn our attention to the Israeli State itself and the movement which spawned it, political Zionism. Torah Jewry has viewed the aspiration for and the eventual establishment of pre-Messianic sovereignty over *Eretz Yisrael* from a host of widely differing perspectives. These perspectives, variable as they were before the Second World War, underwent assorted radical metamorphoses after the destruction of European Jewry and the birth of the State. In fact, the vicissitudes of opinion did not only occur in Torah circles (for example, the Agudah’s de facto acceptance of the State), but even amongst heretical movements the loss of six million Jews and the fifth of Iyar played their part (for example, the post-1948 decline of the American Council for Judaism, culminating in its virtual abandonment in the post-1967 period of its entire doctrinal structure). Indeed, a case could be made that the sheer force of history has, even in Zionist circles, successfully silenced, or at least largely muted, alternative readings of the movement itself, namely, those associated originally with the likes of Ahad Ha-am and later with the Brit Shalom group (Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, et. al.), who saw the national rebirth

primarily in cultural, communal and humanistic terms and only secondarily, if at all, in its incarnation as a modern state, with all of the political and military structures that that implies.

History, or at the very least those versions of it that prevail, is invariably written by the victors. Those who emerge triumphant from the cauldron of human conflict are those whose tale remains the one most frequently told. Today we must search diligently to uncover traces of those individuals or communities who (to quote Whittaker Chambers in a different context) “stand on top of the on-rushing train of the age screaming ‘Stop!’ ” Neither Oz Ve-shalom nor the Edah Ha-Haredit features prominently in the *Jewish Press*. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed today to find any major *philosophical* difference between the *Ha-modiah* and its Religious Zionist counterparts. In fact, the Agudah and, by extension, the Degel Hatorah, position becomes increasingly blurred. Is it any longer the unequivocal conviction of R. Reuven Grozovsky in his *Ba’ayot ha-zman* that: we did not and do not want the State and under normal circumstances we would be prohibited from “joining with the wicked” to govern it, but *bedi’aved*, in order to save souls, we must grudgingly involve ourselves?¹ Perhaps, in the *Yated Ne-eman* one still hears echoes of the old slogan that “the state is a largely negative *fait accompli*,” but Menachem Porush and the forces of Ger and Bnai Brak Vizhnitz seem to have long since abandoned such rhetoric.² Certainly the notion that political Zionism is intrinsically evil, once a staple of a sizable percentage of anti-Zionist rhetoric, has been dropped, outside of the ranks of the “zealots” (*kanaim*) and their fellow-travellers.

Among Jewish heretical movements the two critiques of political Zionism most popular prior to 1948, a) that its tribalism was an inherent contradiction to universalist liberal humanism and b) that it undermined the loyalty of Jews to their host countries, are largely left unstated today except perhaps by Elmer Berger, in the case of the former, and by virtually no one in the case of the latter.

The purpose of this recitation of triumphalism and its effects on the thinking of many has not been to draw any conclusions about the questions raised. If anything, my goal has been to show the complexity of these questions and to illustrate the degree to which our thinking is influenced by time, place and the particular identity of history’s victors. I do not mean to imply that victorious forces are always wrong, simply that they are not necessarily right. Torah leaders who have differed on the inherent and practical import of political Zionism have all generally marshalled ample sacred texts to bolster their positions. Without *nevuah*, prophecy, it seems, at least to me, difficult if not impossible to decide in any fashion other than the most tentative between them. Who would have the temerity to attempt to resolve the conflicting views of the Belzer Rav, z”l, and the Satmar Rav, z”l, on the issue of participation in Israeli elections?

We shall return shortly to the question of the response one should make to these doubts. In the meantime, the question before us is, how are we to understand the Six Day War. Obviously, one's understanding of that conflict will be colored by one's prejudices regarding Israel and the entire Zionist enterprise.

In Agudah circles, one would expect the 1967 reaction to have been something along the lines of: "We didn't ask for the State and we warned you that there would be trouble if you Zionists got it. Well, the troubles came, but thankfully, God has mercifully saved us." However, except in more rightist Agudah circles, the first part of the above was left unstated. This is owing to the Agudah's increasing unwillingness to address the fundamental questions raised by political Zionism, namely: Should the State have been created? Is its creation inherently bad, good or neutral? What about its practical effects? Should we support the State, through military service, emotional involvement, and so on? The Agudah position seems to have become essentially pragmatic. This State is here; it is not going away, so let's make the best of it. As for deciphering God's intent in allowing the State's establishment, we no longer discuss that question. When Israel is successful in its wars, we attribute that to God's mercy and the Torah and *mitzvot* of religious Jews. (Of course, as the *kanaim* never fail to point out, this position, by stating that Torah and *mitzvot* are factors in God's decision to maintain Israel, clearly implies that Israel's existence is a positive thing. Is that not a philosophic acceptance of Religious Zionism?) In sum, the Agudah position on the Six Day War would seem to be "it was an instance of God's mercy," and beyond that or into deeper matters we do not wish to venture. (Whether those who gathered at Katowicz would be pleased with this silence is a matter for further inquiry.)

Obviously, Religious Zionists see the Six Day War as an instance of God's intervention on the side of His people which is conceivably apocalyptic in significance. This interpretation has been put to the test during the past twenty-five years of wars, compromises and increasing economic decline. Moreover, the notion that whoever wins in history is inherently favored by God would seem a dubious proposition for anyone at all familiar with world or Jewish history. Probably the positive religious significance attributed to the Six Day War by Religious Zionists owes, not to its "miraculous nature" (was the Lebanese invasion equally miraculous?), but to their belief in the great practical and meta-historical good which they see Israel representing. This prior belief colors their explanation of all later developments.

Similarly does the *kanaim's* assumption of the State's intrinsic evil lead them to view its successes as pre-Messianic Divine tests to assess our faith in the Godly nature of *galut* (Diaspora) and *geulah* (Redemption). This position, unlike that of the current Agudah, does address ultimate questions and finds grounds for comparison between the Six Day War with its attendant fervor and the fervor engendered by Shabtai Zvi and other pseudo-Messianic

movements. It views political Zionism as an attempt to assimilate the essence of the Jewish People as a Divine Nation to that of other profane peoples.³

This symposium invites me to state my “beliefs” on all the above. However, it seems to me that in matters of such gravity, it is extremely difficult to offer personal opinions. Rather, I choose to subordinate my own thoughts to my personal loyalty to my Rebbe, the Skverer Rebbe, R. Jacob Joseph Twersky (1900-1968), z”l. The Rebbe was concerned with God’s service and, in keeping with Hasidic tradition, was a profound lover of all Jews as well as a master of *limud zekhut*. He found political Zionism extremely distasteful, but he never publicly discussed its intrinsic meaning.⁴ His agenda was Torah, *’avodah* (good works), and love of Israel, *ahavat Yisrael*, not a theology of geopolitics. It is an agenda that, as a teacher, keeps me busy enough with those who have been entrusted to my care while I humbly and diligently observe, from a distance, a fray into which assorted pious individuals have entered, hopefully, for the sake of Heaven. May God grant that all Jews properly fulfill their role in this world! (It is worth mentioning, though, that our intentions in all such matters must be in order to better serve God and in no way based upon our envy of or fascination with gentile concepts of nationhood.)

2) God’s involvement with the Jewish People is inherently different than His involvement with other peoples. Accordingly (and we are destined to remain forever unenlightened as to the precise workings of it) there is a unique *hashgaha pratit* over “*am Hashem*” the nation of God. Nonetheless, worldly events, such as the spread of Communism and the current racial-demographic transformation of America, are undoubtedly of great importance for the Jewish People as well as all mankind and, hence, part of “God’s revealed judgment.”

3) Israel’s military endeavors need not, in my view, be regarded as a change in the natural order, this being the standard definition of a miracle. Given the relative levels of armaments of which the combatants could boast, their strategies and respective characters, one may incline to the view that the results of the six Israeli-Arab wars were well within the range of probability; or, one may be disposed to see them as startling in the extreme—startling, yes, but miraculous not, for they do not inhabit the plane of a change in the natural order. Rather let us say, to the extent that Jewish lives and those of other peoples were spared, they were good, and to the extent that those lives were consumed, they were bad.

4) Chanukah and Purim are festivals derived from *Tanakh* or *Hazal*. The events they celebrate are part of the workings of a cosmic scheme—miraculous, holy, transcendental. As such, they are of the realm of Torah, God’s revealed will, and can share only superficial features with later events.

5) Obviously, the way we view Israel theologically will define our practical agenda in relation to it. Should we leave America immediately to settle in Eretz Israel? Or to join a West Bank *moshav*? Should we volunteer

for the Israeli army? Or avoid service? Should we vote in elections? For whom? Should we accept government money? The list is endless. In America the list is a little shorter. To whom should we give our money and support? Should we march in the Israel Day parade and say *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'atzmaut* or join the Neturei Karta counter-demonstration and fast on the fifth of Iyar? Or, should we just stay home learning, davening and doing *mitzvot*?

May God grant that whatever choices we make be informed with the spirit of Torah and be *le-shem shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven. Personally, I neither march nor fast but cleave to my Rebbe's example.⁵

6) All Torah leaders feel that our era is close to the coming of the Messiah. Exactly how the "capture of Jerusalem" fits into that picture I do not pretend to know.

All Jews are united in the prayerful hope that *galut* should speedily end, that Jewish suffering, both physical and spiritual, should become a thing of the past and that "*Moshiach zol shoy'n kumen*," the Messiah should arrive shortly! May we serve God properly until that time.

NOTES

1. See Reb Reuven's essay, "On the Involvement of Agudah Members in the Israeli Government," in *Ba'ayot ha-zman* (Bnei Brak: Nezah, 1988 [5748]), pp. 52-72 (Hebrew).
2. An editorial in the *Yated Ne-eman* proclaims, "... those who favor participation in Knesset elections . . . are no less opposed to Zionism and what it stands for than those who are against it." (July 12, 1991, p. 17)
3. Even the *kanaim* generally fail to answer the question of the legitimacy of mass settlement (and even possibly some form of sovereignty) if the "three oaths" (*Ketubot* 111a) be not violated in the process and the endeavor be free of viewing *galut* as a physical as opposed to spiritual state. Indeed, we find R. Hillel Kolmeya exhibiting ambivalent feelings towards the *Lev ha-Ivri's* settlement plans. Could R. Akiva Yoseph have established a spiritual Zionism?
4. For a collection of some of his statements on the matter as well as those of another profound lover of Israel, the Skolener Rebbe, z"l (R. Eliezer Zusya Portugal), see *Mishkenot ha-Ro'im*, Vol. 3, ed. Aharon Rosenberg (New York: Nechmad, 1987 [5747]), pp. 858-861 and 1028-1053 (Hebrew).
5. It should be noted, lest the ecumenical implications of this sentence be misunderstood, that the response of the *kanaim* to Zionism is far more rooted in Torah tradition than is that of the movement's adherents. As for lifestyle in accordance with Torah, there is certainly no comparison!

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DAVID SINGER

The bad news since June 1967 is that the Messiah has not come. The good news is that the waiting, the expectation, have never been so pleasurable. I made the point in the pages of *Commentary* and I am glad to repeat it here: we are the luckiest generation in the last two thousand years of Jewish history. We live not only with the messianic promise, but with the beginning of the fulfillment as well. Think about it: the State of Israel exists,

Jerusalem is united under Jewish sovereignty, and the ingathering of the exiles proceeds apace. And we are privileged to witness all this.

What constitutes an adequate response to an event of this magnitude, to something as momentous as, in the words of the prayer for the State of Israel, the “first flowering of the promised redemption?” I will leave it to the Israelis to think through the political implications, since they alone carry the burden of the physical defense of the Jewish state. About the religious implications, however, I am not at all reluctant to speak. Clearly, a Judaism that is serious about the “first flowering”, that sees itself as part of the unfolding of the messianic process, will be, above all, future-oriented, that is, open, dynamic, and eager to take on the challenge of the new. How could it be otherwise when the thrust of the historical process, now moving into high gear, is in the direction of what lies ahead? Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook understood all this, and that is why he remains the model, the paradigm. It is not at all a matter of sources or prooftexts, but of a “first flowering” that Rav Kook felt in his bones.

Judged by these standards, the record of contemporary Orthodoxy, with a few honorable exceptions, is simply wretched. Instead of nurturing an Orthodox Judaism faced firmly toward the future, we have developed one fixated on the past, holding up as a model the never-never land of Eastern Europe. What this yields in practical terms is a “black hat” Orthodoxy that, in its Israeli incarnation, eschews military service, and, in its American manifestation, sneers at everything associated with the Zionist enterprise. Even more disastrously, it yields a “centrist” Orthodoxy characterized by a permanent failure of nerve. Thus, 43 years after the founding of the Jewish state, the “hot” issue in centrist circles remains whether or not to say *Hallel* on Israel Independence Day. In Israel, centrists busy themselves pushing narrow religious legislation and protecting petty party interests. In America, centrists reduce the noble ideal of “Torah and secular studies” to a pale shadow of its former self, keeping it alive on a respirator, but showing no real interest in its revival. As for a new idea, a new conceptualization, indeed anything that would meaningfully link up the expectant present with the anticipated future— nothing of the sort exists. Rav Kook’s poetic “I aspire for the heights, for lofty visions” has been transformed into contemporary Orthodoxy’s prison of the mind.

How is this to be explained? How is one to account for the astonishing failure of contemporary Orthodoxy to respond adequately to the religious implications of the “first flowering?” In the case of the “black hat” world, I think the key factor is the Holocaust, which thoroughly traumatized the traditional sector of the Orthodox community. Having been battered by history, this element cannot bring itself to trust the historical process, seeing in it only the realm of Satan (the Satmar version) or the realm of impurity (the Agudah version). For “black hat” Orthodoxy then, there is no alternative but to hunker down, to live in a permanent state of siege, defending the

fortress of faith against the demons of “outside” history. In short, for this portion of the Orthodox world, the “first flowering” comes too late.

If the “black hat” Orthodox are unable to trust in history, centrists find it difficult to believe in it at all. I refer here to the phenomenon of secularization, which, *frum* posturing notwithstanding, has taken a heavy toll in centrist circles. To be modern in any sense—and that, most certainly, is what centrists claim to be—is to find it difficult to credit the notion of meaning in history, let alone the working out of a messianic process through providential design. Of course, centrists continue to mouth the right words, talking bravely about a future messianic age. But that is the point: they have consigned the messianic fulfillment to some indefinite future, while allowing it no weight as a current religious reality. Centrists loudly proclaim “*Ani maamin*,” but in their heart of hearts many do not.

Candor requires mention of yet another factor here, and that is horror at the prospect of *aliya*. For Orthodox Jews living outside of the State of Israel, the “first flowering” is not only a promise but a threat, since it raises in an unavoidable way the matter of personal *aliya*. It is one thing to petition God in prayer to “bring us upright to Zion,” and quite another thing to pack one’s suitcases and actually move there. Most Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora are enthusiastic about the former, but positively recoil from the latter. Hence the great temptation to “tune out” the whole issue of the messianic coming, to make it a non-subject. By taking this tack, Orthodox Jews in the United States can go on cheering Russian and Ethiopian “immigration” to the Jewish state, even as they chain themselves ever more tightly to their American fleshpots.

Explanations are fine, but they in no way diminish the sickening feeling that comes with contemplating contemporary Orthodoxy’s feeble response to the “first flowering.” God’s grace has been matched by Orthodoxy’s business as usual—by a version of Orthodox Judaism that is tired, narrow, and utterly unwilling to project itself forward. Rav Kook associated the messianic process with light, but contemporary Orthodoxy is, with few exceptions, enveloped in darkness. Rather than taking present-day Jerusalem—both the old and the new cities—as their point of departure, the masses of Orthodox Jews continue to be held in thrall by Brisk, Belz, and—God help us—even Boro Park. If this is the best that Orthodoxy can muster for the “first flowering,” one shudders to think what will occur when the full, final flowering comes around.

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WALTER S. WURZBURGER

The “miraculous” victory over Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War gave rise to such euphoria that it is extremely difficult to reflect critically on the very questions I first raised twenty-three years ago in the *Tradition* symposium on the “Religious Significance of the Six Day War.” With charismatic and venerated religious leaders proclaiming in the media that “overt miracles” on the part of the “Guardian of Israel” were responsible for protecting Israel against casualties from Scud missiles, it is widely believed that there can be no doubt that the triumphs of the Six Day War, the development of Jerusalem into a truly metropolitan center of Jewish life, the retention of Judea and Samaria in the face of international pressures, the mass aliya from Soviet Russia, combined with the elimination of Iraq as a threat to Israel, reveal in a special and unique manner that God operates in history.

Can there be any explanation other than God’s providential design to account for Saddam Hussein’s blunder, to invade Kuwait and not to retreat even in the face of the overwhelming forces marshalled against him? Would not prudence have dictated that in order to realize his ambitions he first consolidate his position of leadership in the Arab world by launching an attack against Israel—with Syria and Saudi Arabia as allies rather than his enemies—before occupying another Arab country?

The notion that these “miraculous” events demonstrate that we are at the dawn of the Messianic era is gaining ever more adherents. While in the 1968 Symposium only the Israeli participants unequivocally asserted that the military and political achievements of the Six Day War possessed Messianic significance, at the present time, especially against the background of the Gulf War, large segments of religious Jewry are persuaded that they hear the “footsteps of the Messiah.”

Notwithstanding the popularity of this view, I am uncomfortable with all eschatological perspectives. I profess complete ignorance of what the *Gemara* calls “the highways of God.” Unless endowed with the gift of prophecy, human beings cannot fathom the meaning of the Divine design for history. As a believing Jew I am committed to the proposition that God acts in history and particularly in that of Israel. But I am unable to point to any concrete evidence which would convince a secularist that the establishment and development of the state of Israel does not make sense without reference to divine miraculous intervention.

Isaac Breuer, in a famous essay, discussed the difficulties we encounter when an event is to be apprehended as a miracle—not just as a puzzling phenomenon to be explained. How do we know that the event in question cannot be given an adequate causal explanation in naturalistic terms? In Breuer’s opinion, the perception of a miracle is possible only when in addition to performing a miracle God also grants us the faculty to recognize

it as such rather than as a phenomenon for which a causal explanation is feasible.

Significantly, the Purim miracle is described in our literature not as an overt but as a hidden miracle. To be sure, religiously sensitive individuals attribute every historic occurrence to God's acting in history. For that matter, every natural phenomenon should be perceived as a manifestation of Divine wisdom and benevolence. In the words of the Psalmist, "the Heavens proclaim the glory of God." Maimonides is most emphatic in denouncing those who fail to perceive calamities and suffering as a summons to Repentance, but treat various misfortunes as mere chance events or happenings that are unrelated to God's acting in history.

Obviously, not all events are equally suited to evoke a religious response. The hand of God can be more readily perceived in some events rather than others. While the Holocaust tended to undermine religious faith, the resurgence of Israel helps to buttress it.

The very existence of Israel as a sovereign state serves to confirm the religious faith of a believer. With the return of such large numbers of Jews to Eretz Yisrael, the belief in the restoration of our national home and the "Ingathering of the Exiles"—a vital ingredient of the Messianic tenets—has become far more plausible than it was in the prestate era. We should not forget that when Herzl first proposed his "Jewish State," the idea struck many as so unrealistic that they questioned his sanity. Had there been only a Holocaust but no Jewish state, many of our fellow Jews would have found it impossible to believe in the possibility of an "Ingathering of the Exiles," let alone of an ultimate Redemption. Hence, for all its precariousness and deficiencies, the very existence of a Jewish state, irrespective of what the future may hold in store, in itself helps confirm our faith in the feasibility of the Messianic ideal.

It must be emphasized that my position is totally free of any traces of pseudo-Messianic elements. While I hope and pray that the State of Israel will eventually develop into a Messianic state, a prayer is not a prognosis. I was highly impressed by the suggestion of the late Rishon Lezion, Rabbi Nissim, that the State of Israel should not be characterized as "the beginning of the sprouting forth of our Redemption," but rather as "the test of our worthiness for Redemption."

I am prepared to attach Messianic significance to the State of Israel only in the same fashion as our Sages viewed Chanukah, when they chose as the Haftorah for Shabbath Chanukah a selection from the Prophet Zechariah with pronounced Messianic overtones. It is well-known that the Sages were not enamored of the Maccabees. The book of Maccabees was not admitted into the Holy Writ and there are very few references to Chanukah in the Talmud. Moreover, the accomplishments of the Maccabees were only temporary. Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael was short-lived and the Temple was later destroyed by the Romans. Yet, these shortcomings

did not prevent the Sages from endowing the historic achievements of the Hasmoneans with genuine Messianic significance.

It is in a similar fashion that we ought to react to the establishment of the State of Israel. While we have no guarantees about its future, we should hail it as a remarkable opportunity to advance our Messianic ideals—the establishment of the rule of God over our individual and collective lives. With the attainment of Jewish sovereignty we have the opportunity to conduct our socio-political as well as economic and military activities in accordance with the Divine Will as formulated in the Halakhah.

Our task is not to engage in speculations about the role of contemporary events in the unfolding of our eschatological destiny, but to operate in the here and now in accordance with the norms and ideals of Halakhah. As the Torah puts it, “The hidden things belong to God, but the revealed matters are for us and our children to do.”

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MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD

Almost a quarter century has passed since the 1968 symposium on the “The Religious Significance of the Six Day War” in which I argued that events, as such, are always ambiguous and that it is only the prophetic word that provides an authoritative interpretation of events. It seemed to me that messianic claims with respect to the Six Day War were premature and to be treated with great caution. If anything, my wariness about messianic claims has grown.

It is not that messianism plays a minor role in my Judaism. The opposite is the case. Most of Orthodox Judaism is rooted in sacred history, in the revelation at Sinai and the authority of the past. Messianism is the open future, that which lies ahead and cannot be fully envisaged in the present. Messianism points to God’s future intervention in history in the form of possibilities we cannot even imagine. It prevents us from sinking into the psychological rut of thinking that there is nothing new under the sun, that the future will be like the past, that repetition is human destiny and that God has done and said everything important that He will ever do and say. Messianism tells us that we haven’t seen anything yet because the God we worship is a living God who has a few tricks up His sleeve that will surprise us. Messianism is thus an essential complement to halakhic Judaism with its emphasis on the predictable and the established.

In recent years it has become clear to me that I stand for messianism without violence. I have deep sympathy for Gush Emunim but I have deep reservations about Gush Emunim’s lack of discomfort with violence. Now

I am not a pacifist. There are tragic situations in which violence cannot be avoided. But the shedding of human blood is a frightful enterprise and extreme measures have to be taken to prevent violence and injustice. I agree with Gush Emunim that the bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel is eternal because it is rooted in God's promise of the land to the seed of Abraham. Jews therefore have a God-given right to live everywhere in the land, on either side of the Green Line.

But not every right must be exercised, especially if the cost is the shedding of human blood. On biblical grounds, the Arabs are wrong in objecting to Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria. They should recognize the validity and cogency of the biblical word and welcome Jews as the rightful owners of the land. But they do not because their religion teaches them that the Hebrew bible is a corruption of the true word of God which is to be found only in the Koran. And Arabs are not averse to violence.

So we have a choice. We can enforce our rights to the hilt and get sucked into more and more violence and killing or we can leave the enforcement of our rights to God while we deal with our misguided Ishmaelite cousins with love. Wrong and unjustified as they are, they are created in the image of God and if the only way we can obtain residence rights in Hebron is to become accustomed to shedding Arab blood, then we ought to opt for a less obvious form of messianism: non-violence. Non-violence rather than residence in Hebron is the deepest layer of messianism. Apocalyptic stories about the wars of the end of days to the contrary notwithstanding, I cannot believe that the peaceable kingdom of the Messiah will be brought about by lethal strikes of the Israeli air force or the small arms fire of settlers in fear of their lives.

To repeat, I do not preach absolute non-violence under all circumstances. But I preach a high degree of non-violence, a hatred of violence, a love of the land combined with a high degree of non-violence, a largely non-violent Zionism, a messianic Judaism that keeps alive the living expectation of the Messiah but also the messianic repudiation of violence, a love of all human beings whether Jewish or non-Jewish, a willingness to wait and even temporarily yield territory if this will save us from bloodshed.

We may be on the verge of the messianic era but whether we are or not may depend on us. I simply cannot believe that the messianic era will be preceded by the reality of Jews becoming accustomed to killing. I find it much easier to believe that the messianic era will be preceded by the reality of Jews recognizing the image of God in all human beings, even those foolishly convinced that God did not promise the land to his people.

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