

# Divine Calculus Religious Rhetoric and the Territories Occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War

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Israel experienced a period of profound anxiety during the crisis in the spring of 1967 which preceded the Six-Day War. This was evident in the press, while the radio broadcasts by General Chaim Herzog (later to become president of the state) were intended to raise public morale and enhance the sense of security (Herzog, 1967). The state of fear affecting the Israeli population was exacerbated by effective Arab propaganda depicting Israel as a weak nation with no chance of surviving the impending battle. The fact that the results of the war bore no similarity to these threats led to a type of excitement that had religious characteristics and was rapidly transformed into an active messianic consciousness (Naor, 2000). From this point, an ideology would develop with the purpose of legitimizing continued occupation of the territories held by Israel, and offering an objective rationalization of this situation. This ideology had secular as well as religious manifestations. This article addresses the use of religious rhetoric, Biblical symbolism, and the exegesis of canonical texts with the objective of establishing strategic policy on the basis of political theology.

## A. Prophets and Paratroopers

Shortly after the implosion of the Israeli paratroopers into the old city of Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War, military Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, decorated with a two-star general rank, rushed into the holy city, a Torah scroll in his right hand and a ram's horn in his left. The streets were still smudged with smoke pillars, silent witnesses to the battle that had been waged there a short time before the rabbi came. He found the warriors at the Wailing Wall and blew the horn several times as is done in the Jewish New Year service. Then he stood in front of the Wall, the only remnant of the Jewish Temple, and made a

speech to the excited soldiers, which was broadcast live on Israeli radio (Israel did not yet have television). "Comfort my people, comfort them, says your God," he said in the words of Isaiah, his voice trembling. Cognizant of the historical hour, he spoke like a prophet. Most of his words were taken from holy sources – in 20 sentences he mentioned God 10 times, used 11 Biblical verses, 3 variations of sayings of the Sages and two blessings taken from Jewish prayers. One of them is a blessing of redemption, included in the service of the Ninth of Av, the day, according to the Hebrew calendar, when the Temple was set on fire by Roman soldiers in the year 70 CE. During 2000 years of Diaspora and persecutions, Jews prayed to God for the promised redemption, which they were certain would come one day. Now a rabbi of the rank of general was saying that this was the time of redemption, that the promised day had come and the dream of generations was coming true. "Comfort my people, comfort them" – as if the military victory and the "redemption of Jerusalem, God's City" is consolation for 2000 years of persecution and slaughter. Indeed, this was the message of the speech. The territories occupied in the war, Old Jerusalem in particular, were conceived as God's gift to the people of Israel, as He had promised to the Patriarchs. Thus the historical circle was completed, and it would be nothing but a heinous sin to relinquish this sacred gift to others. Moreover, this Divine gift was a "messianic redemption," as the rabbi put it:

The vision of all the generations has come true before our eyes. The city of God, the place of the Temple, the Temple Mount, and the Western Wall, the emblem of the messianic redemption of the people, have been redeemed today by you, the heroes of the Israel Defense Forces... Your right hand, the hand of the Lord, has performed this historic redemption (Goren, 1967).

The messianism of which Goren speaks is not personified; he did not presume to identify any particular person as the messiah, but rather to characterize the period as the "days of the messiah." For Goren, the era is a messianic one, and the historical process is messianic, since the principal political function of the messiah in rabbinical Judaism is to redeem the People of Israel, and this function was being executed by the IDF forces. In Goren's messianic rhetoric, the IDF was not only the armed forces of the State of Israel, but also the army of God: its soldiers are His soldiers. Beyond the understandable pathos caused by the tremendous excitement at the moment of victory, Goren's comments also entailed the adoption of a theological position that was far from automatic. The religious function of the State of Israel is a controversial theological issue among Orthodox rabbis, many of whom do not accept Zionism as a legitimate ideology from a religious perspective. The State of Israel, with its secular legal

system and governmental institutions reflecting the principle of the sovereignty of the people, is not considered to have a positive religious value, which gives rise to a difficult dilemma. According to these rabbis, the current era is still one of exile; redemption will come only when God so decides, and sends his messiah to implement the true Divine plan (Friedman, 1991; Aran, 1991; Ravitzky, 1993; Heilman and Schwartz, 1999).

Goren was not alone in interpreting Israel's military victory in the war and the euphoria that accompanied this achievement as proof of his position in the theological debate about Zionism. The Six-Day War produced a profound spiritual upheaval in religious Zionism. The renewed encounter with the Samaritan mountains, with Nablus, Hebron, and Bethlehem, with Beit El and Shiloh – in effect, with the land of the Bible – evoked for many an excitement that had a religious and messianic quality. Drawing on one of the methods employed in the Talmud, Maimonides (the great codifier of the *halacha* or Jewish religious law) determined in the 12<sup>th</sup> century that “the only thing distinguishing this world from the days of the Messiah is the return of the kingdom” (Maimonides, *The Laws of Kings*). Now, as the paratroopers stood in awe around Rabbi Goren in the square before the Western Wall, listening to his speech and to the sound of the *shofar*, theological and normative definitions suddenly acquired an existential meaning. “Dear soldiers,” said the rabbi, “you have received the greatest right of our people. The prayer of the generations and the vision of the prophets is coming true ... Fortunate are we to have been privileged to see this supreme hour in the history of the people” (Goren, 1967).

In rhetorical terms, this sentence includes two strata of considerable significance – the semantic and the theological. Goren's speech was charged with Talmudic and Kabbalistic associations that build new collocations and create normative meaning. “You have received the greatest right of our people,” said the rabbi. The latent significance of this comment is, however, not evident to everyone. The concept of “receiving” rights comes from the Talmud: “A right is received from a person holding a right” (*Sanhedrin*, 8:1, *Bava Batra*, 119:1; *Shabbat*, 32:1). In its original context, this is an exegetical comment noting that certain rights are defined in the Torah in a casuistic manner in order to give the party holding the right some additional compensation, just as the Torah defines certain obligations casuistically in order to impose on a party bearing an obligation some symbolic punishment in addition to the material punishment imposed by law. This led to the collocation “a right is received from a person holding a right, and an obligation from a person bearing an obligation.” This hermeneutics is interpreted not only in normative content, but also in its historical context, and herein lies the manipulative use of this expression by the rabbi. Ostensibly, he is doing no more than praising the soldiers when he tells them that they have received a right. However, it is a general truth that whenever there is a right, there is also an obligation to

respect the right – since otherwise the right would have no positivist meaning. When a right is transferred by a person holding a right, this also imposes an obligation on others to maintain that right. Not to mention the fact that the right in this case is “the greatest right of our people.” Here, the rabbi presents a hierarchy of rights that also determines levels of obligation: if the right we have seen realized is “the greatest right of our people,” then there is, of necessity, an extremely high degree of obligation to maintain this right.

These comments have additional significance. For Rabbi Goren and those who share his opinion, the right to hold the lands occupied by the IDF in the Six-Day War, and particularly in Jerusalem, is greater even than the right of existence of the State of Israel. As his comments show, it is not independent political existence that is the greatest right, but rather, physical control of the Land, of the inheritance that God gave to Abraham and his legitimate descendants, the Jews. Accordingly, the status of the Land takes preference over that of the state. The messianic function of the state lies in its conquest of the Land. From the moment the Jewish people begin to hold the Land, the Land must not be relinquished, not even a single clod of its soil. This is also implicit in the phrase “this supreme hour in the history of the people”. Goren uses the feminine form of the Aramaic adjective *l'la'i*, which appears several times in the Book of Daniel in the masculine, where it is attributed to God (Daniel, 3:26, 32; 4:14, 21, 22; 5:18, 21). Herein lies the theological dimension of his comments. The conquest of the territories is a “supreme hour” – a historical time with the same characteristics as those attributed to God Himself. Goren's political theology reaches its essence here; the maintenance of the territories has a Divine function, and this explains the sanctification of the *status quo post bellum*. Rabbi Goren would later elaborate his position, presenting these comments on the level of academic abstraction (Goren, 1995). As he blew the *shofar* by the Western Wall, he was carried on the wings of theological association, and his messianic rhetoric also attributed a Divine function to the war. The IDF paratroopers were not alone when they stormed the walls of the Old City, as Goren told them: their right hand was “the right hand of the Lord,” and it was this providence that went before the armies in battle. “The *Shechina* (Divine Providence, also the feminine aspect in divinity according to Jewish mysticism), which never left the Western Wall, now goes before the armies of Israel in a pillar of fire, lighting the path of victory for us.” Thus Goren evokes associations with the exodus from Egypt, when God Himself went before the people in a pillar of smoke during the day, and a pillar of fire at night (Exodus, 13:21-22). Goren required this association in order to create the historical analogy between the “first redemption” and the “latter redemption” (i.e. the Six-Day War) and thus to reinforce the messianic dimension of this war.

## B. The sanctification of politics and the sanctification of time

Rabbi Goren's comments at the Western Wall contained the foundations of an approach that would later lead him to publish his *halachic* ruling calling for the "execution" of Yasser Arafat, and calling on IDF soldiers to refuse an order to vacate the settlements if such an order were given (Goren, 1995). The course of messianic redemption embodied in the victories of the Six-Day War is conceived as a linear and irreversible one; willingness to abandon this course is an unpardonable sin. This perception leads to the sanctification of politics, since politics is the instrument by which we must maintain what God gave the people through the army. As Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook, spiritual leader of the Gush Emunim movement and the head of the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva would later state: "The politics of the Israeli commonwealth is Torah, it is sacred" (Kook, 1987:1).

The members of the Merkaz Harav school of thought viewed the Six-Day War in the context of the process of breaking the yoke of the Gentiles from around their necks. This process was reflected on Independence Day, when the events began that were to lead to the war. The war relates to this process both as part of objective reality and as a founding component in the national conscience, as Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen commented a year later when discussing the events of the year that included the Six-Day War. "This holy year, the year of foundation, and the roof for the years and generations that will yet come upon us for good" (Kook, 1987:26). The sanctification of time – the year of the war – is a direct result of the sanctification of God's Name that occurred during the war, when His word comes true before the eyes of the entire world. Accordingly, the sanctification of the Land *per se* is now augmented by the sanctification of the new *status quo*, the emergence of which during the war reflects the "power of Messiah" – to use a phrase used by Kook's father, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, the most important theologian of the Zionist camp, during the First World War. The legal status of the territory now embodies the messianic dimension, and maintaining this dimension lest any deterioration should occur therein, now becomes one of the essential principles of Judaism. On the first anniversary of the war, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda described the events as "the wonderful process of the action of the Sovereign of the Universe and the Generations," and drew decisive political conclusions from his theological analysis:

This word of the Master of the Universe, which is repeated in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, in our prayer books and in the annals of our history, is irreversible, immutable, and incorruptible once its existence appears. When this end of our exile comes, as the Torah, Prophets, and Sages inform us, the yoke of the Gentiles

gradually broke from around our necks ... [and thus] all of us ... observe the great *halacha* ... of restoring the land of our fathers' inheritance to the possession of our governmental ownership (Kook, 1987:26).

The linear trend in the process of redemption derives from the interpretation of the prophecies and homilies referring to this process. Thus the *status quo post bellum* is irreversible. The word of the Master of the Universe shall not be nullified, and certainly shall not be nullified once the time has come for it to be realized. This is the foundation of the "emuni" (faithful) approach that would subsequently develop from the perception of the territorial achievements of the Six-Day War as irreversible. Drawing on the Talmudic comment that God does not perform miracles in vain, these "emuni" ideologues concluded that the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, in accordance with which Israel was required to return to the international border and dismantle the settlements it established in Sinai, would not be maintained. This was the strategic perception behind the Movement to Stop the Withdrawal (from Sinai), which in 1982 sought to thwart the implementation of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt through demonstrations, the establishment of settlements, and prayers, based on political and strategic conclusions reached through the application of hermeneutic tools. They view the rhetoric of the prophets and of the Sages as replete with positivist content, and in no sense view this as empty rhetoric intended only to arouse emotions in the process of argumentation. Accordingly, they view the Six-Day War as the realization of the prophecies of redemption and consolation within the sphere of historical action. Accordingly, it may be understood that even those secular Jews who are partners in this historical action play a part in the sanctification of God's name during the process of redemption and of restoring the promised inheritance of the fathers to the possession of governmental ownership – viz. to the possession of the State of Israel. Thus even the ostensibly secular state is in fact a participant in the Divine process, and even it contains sanctity (Ravitzky, 1993:115-119).

It should be emphasized that in developing this position, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook addressed and contended with the ultra-Orthodox position which rejects the secular state and Zionism. It is in the context of this debate with ultra-Orthodoxy that one should view the ultimate virtue he identifies in the Six-Day War, which is perceived both as a contest against the other monotheistic religions and as contest against atheistic Communism. The Six-Day War is the "sublimity of our Divine resurrection," nullifying the "now-crumbling foolish and wicked Christian theory regarding the Eternal of Israel," the Arab custom of settling on the Land of Israel, and the "continuing evil dominion of the Russian tyrant Czar through the government of its inheritors, the enemies of the Lord and of His people" (Kook, 1987:26-27). The theological function of

the war is to nullify all three theories; all are “as naught” in the face of the “truthful and faithful word of the Sovereign of the Universes and the Generations” – the word which is now being realized for all to see (Kook, 1987:26-27). Rabbi Kook’s interest was not confined to the ideological dimension, however. He viewed the political dimension as no less sacred. The perception of the Six-Day War as the historic manifestation of the victory of Judaism in the inter-faith struggle raises the messianic dimension of the war to the ultimate level, thus reinforcing the guarantee that the new *status quo* will be maintained, and thus imposing an obligation on every Jew to prevent and foil any thought of ceding any of the Land to Gentile control.

The messianic tension in the Merkaz Harav school was kindled immediately on the eruption of the crisis in mid-May 1967, when the Egyptian army entered Sinai in contravention of the political agreement reached at the end of the Sinai Campaign in 1956. Rabbi Yaakov Filber, a student and close confidanté of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda who later headed a *yeshiva* for young students, wrote of the messianic expectation that awoke immediately as the tension heightened between Israel and Egypt. Filber saw messianic value not only in the military victory itself, but also in the period of national anxiety that preceded the outbreak of fighting in June. The three weeks between the eruption of the crisis and the outbreak of fighting was a difficult period for Israelis; Arab propaganda raised fears of a second Holocaust. With hindsight, Filber interpreted this tension and anxiety as a dialogue between Israel and God, the latter saying, “My children, have no fear. All that I have done is only for you. Why do you fear? The time of your redemption has come” (Filber, 1991:231-235). Messianic dialectics views the development of the coalition against Israel as an essential stage in the process of redemption, if only because the State of Israel itself had no plan or intention of liberating the occupied Land. Rather, this was imposed on Israel by Divine intervention. “In the Heavens a different decision was made. God did Israel a favor by hardening Hussein’s heart ... and against our will we were obliged to strike out to the east, obliterating the disgrace of the partition of the Land of Israel.” Thus it was a Divine decision that led to the deletion of the armistice lines, the obliteration of the disgrace of partition, and the securing of an Israeli victory, the purpose of which was to maintain the achievements of war. After all, “If God has given us the Land through miracles, he will surely not remove it from our hands again” (Filber, 1991:235). Accordingly, “the Greater Land of Israel lies above the sphere of decisions of the Israeli government” (Filber, 1991:235). Thus, the course of history is perceived as linear determinism leading to the completion of redemption. No one can change the Creator’s decision, and accordingly no plan to cede parts of the Land to foreigners will be realized. However, while humans cannot thwart God’s moves, they can, on the basis of the principle of free will, attempt to disturb Him, so to speak, in implementing His plan. They will not be successful, of course, and

will be punished for failing to do His will:

Since 1967, the Sovereign of the Universes has opened an additional option to settle the Land, yet we stand aside in silence ... Who knows if it was not against the backdrop of this estrangement that the Yom Kippur War came upon us, as if to say: Inaction will not bring peace to the Land of Israel, and any attempt to secure peace by ceding parts of the Land of Israel resembles an attempt to extinguish a fire by pouring on oil. (Filber, 1991:236)

Someone who thinks in God's place, explaining in His name why wars erupt – one, in order to “obliterate disgrace” while another “came upon us” as punishment – also presents this Divine punishment as an educational tool. The analogy to extinguishing a fire with oil is intended to illustrate the pointlessness of seeking peace through partition – any partition, regardless of the location or territory involved. The negation of partition is absolute; it is not a function of security needs, but the product of the belief that “everything written in the Books of the Prophets shall come true.” Here too, we see a political theology that derives strategic policy from rhetorical means, against the backdrop of an activist messianic conscience. This theology employs rhetoric in order to delegitimize the government and negate the validity of any act of state liable to impair the supreme principle of maintaining Jewish dominion in all areas of the Land conquered by the IDF. For argumentative purposes, these theologians attempt to present their fundamentalist position in pseudo-instrumentalist and pseudo-logical terms. Someone who tries to extinguish a fire with oil is acting irrationally; thus, they develop a rhetoric of instrumentality: this is not an instrumentalist approach for setting policy, but rather the rhetorical use of instrumentality in order to present their position as if it were based on a rational choice.

### **C. Internal legitimacy and external legitimacy**

From a religious standpoint, the source of the right to the Land of Israel is the Torah. A frequently-quoted opinion comes from Rashi's 11<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the first verse in the Book of Genesis, based on a second century Midrash:

The Torah should only have begun with “This month shall be to you ...” (Exodus 12:2), which is the first commandment given to Israel. Why, then, does it begin with “In the beginning ...”? Because “He showed His people the force



of His actions to give them a Gentile inheritance” (Psalms 111:6). If the nations of the world said to Israel, “You are thieves who conquered the lands of seven nations,” they say to them: “All the Earth is God’s, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to whom He saw fit; as He wished, He gave it to them, and as He wished He took it from them and gave it to us (Rashi, Commentary to Genesis. 1:1)

This comment might ostensibly seem to relate to external legitimacy, offering a basis for an apologetic argument to be used in international debate on the right to the Land of Israel. During the debate over partition in 1937, however, Rabbi Ya’akov Moshe Harlap, a confidanté of Rabbi Kook and his successor as head of the *yeshiva*, offered a different interpretation of this source. The quote from the Psalms, used as a source in exegesis does not say “He showed *the peoples* the force of His actions,” but rather, “*His people*”. In other words, internal legitimacy is a pre-condition for external legitimacy. As the rabbi stresses, “Since if even Israel alone knows and recognizes the force of His actions, this already blocks the arguments of the nations ... and whenever Israel cherishes the sanctity of the Land ... any accusation by the nations is automatically blocked” (Harlap, 1968). After the Six-Day War, voices were once again heard in the religious camp claiming that the success of the struggle for the future control of the Land of Israel depended on internal legitimacy, stemming from the acceptance of Providential involvement in history as well as obeying the Lord’s commandments. Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriya (the head of the *Bnai Akiva Yeshivot*, and a Member of Knesset for the National Religious Party) stated that “the only answer is not political, but *emuni*.” This answer arises “out of the act of Genesis,” as the foundation of faith in the existence and providence of the Creator of the world. The people of Israel are the people of He Who spoke, and the world came into being, and this relationship is the foundation of the obligations imposed on the chosen people. Choice imposes obligations, and in order to observe these obligations there is a need for territory and for independent political existence. The people “require a particular land, an independent state, for repose and inheritance, in which it can execute the Divine Plan in its full territorial and national scope” (Neriya, 1992:208-209).

Thus, everything depends on the interpretation of the exegetical text. In a postmodern context, the words of the medieval commentator function as independent text which must then be reinterpreted by applying the experiential charge of the individual to the original text. The Torah is intended not for external legitimacy and international debate, but primarily as a tool for educating the Jewish people – to whom the text is directly addressed – in order that it might recognize its role in the world. The gift of the Land of Israel is for the purpose of observing the commandments. The destiny is theocratic in character

– to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 15:6), and for this destiny to be realized, a land is required. The rabbi adds the need for an “independent state” – an expression that is not drawn from the language of the sages or rabbinical literature. This reflects the unique nature of religious Zionism within the world of Torah. It is the only stream that views the existence of an independent Jewish state as a positive religious value, and as the realization (or at least the beginning of the realization) of the concept of messianic redemption. Moreover, the state is an instrument by which the people may, according to the rabbi, execute the Divine Plan in its full scope. Thus it has religious import and value in the course of preparing for the “full scope” of redemption – a scope that naturally extends beyond the borders of the State of Israel, and has global and even cosmic significance. The state is the instrument by which control of the Land, of the repose and inheritance, is achieved. Without this, as Rabbi Neriya states, it is ostensibly impossible to execute the Divine Plan. The Land is an essential condition for realizing the Divinely-imposed task, and this explains the absolute and unconditional commitment to its integrity. Here we see the theological foundation for the *halachic* ruling Rabbi Neriya would issue in his old age, together with a number of other spiritual leaders of religious Zionism, with regard to the obligation to refuse an order to vacate settlements or IDF bases in the Territories. In protecting the Greater Land of Israel, which is the principal objective in order to execute the “Divine Plan in its full scope,” one may accept injury to the authority of the state, whose religious value lies in its being a tool for the securing of additional objectives.

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner<sup>1</sup> also drew political conclusions from Rashi’s above-mentioned exegesis: “There is no other way but for us to recognize clearly that all this Land is absolutely ours; from this basis, we may then also explain our right to the nations of the world and convince them” (Aviner, 1983:133). The theological explanation – “Rashi’s historical perception,” as Aviner puts it – is the only solution. If the Jewish people repeatedly declare their absolute right based on the Torah before the entire world, he held, the world would slowly accept the words of truth. Rabbi Goren shares this same approach, which presents internal legitimacy as a condition for any external legitimacy. The Torah begins with Genesis in order to emphasize that the Jews’ inheritance of the Land of Israel is on the basis of their forefathers, and is equal to all the commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. “Because of this commandment that came to us through our forefathers, the Torah begins with Genesis... for God’s promise of the Land of Israel was made to these forefathers, from whom we inherited the Land” (Goren, 1996:11-13).

The Lubavitch Hassidic movement, which is far removed from Zionism, also draws on the Midrash quoted by Rashi. The text of the Midrash itself appears on a map depicting the entire area under Israeli control at the end of the Six-Day War, on the cover of a book – by Rabbi Shalom Dov Wolpe – summarizing the

comments of the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the situation in the Holy Land. The Rebbe, it may be noted, never spoke of the State of Israel but rather, of the "Holy Land," using the same terminology as that employed by the Vatican. Wolpe draws *halachic* and political conclusions from the Rebbe's remarks. Newsletters and propaganda distributed in the synagogues also makes political use of the Midrash and of Rashi's interpretation. According to Lubavitch, the Midrash refers to external legitimacy: "God, blessed be He, tells the people of Israel and the nations of the world of the force of His actions as Creator of the world"; and, as Creator of the world, He also divided it as He saw fit among those He created: "For from the outset there was an intention and thought to give [the Land] to Israel, but He chose to give it to the nations of the world for a certain period, and He chose to take it from them and give it to us ... as an eternal inheritance" (Wolpe, 1980:51). Wolpe's theological rhetoric presents two thousand years of Jewish exile from the Land of Israel as proof of its exclusive ownership of that Land, since this is what God thought fit to do. Accordingly, and in the face of the challenge to the Jewish right to the Land, "we must immediately state the truth, and not give evasive answers, since Rashi's response was given not that it might be whispered furtively and secretly in the *Batei Midrash*, but that it might be given to the nations of the world." Wolpe complains bitterly that this instruction is not being followed. "At certain meetings between leaders in the United States and Jews from Israel, [the latter] do not explain why they believe that the Land in its full borders belongs to them; nor do they apply Israeli sovereignty to all parts thereof. On the other hand, they do not wish to return the territories, for all kinds of strange reasons" (Wolpe, 1980). This comment embodies the contradictory dialectics typical of the Lubavitch position. This Hassidic movement does not believe that the official representatives of the State of Israel, including the prime minister and other ministers, are worthy of the title "leaders," which is reserved for the leaders of the United States. The only Jewish leader is the "King Messiah," by which term they refer to the late Rebbe, who headed the Lubavitcher Hassidic movement until his death in 1993, and who, in a manner reminiscent of Christian theology, is attributed with special ontological status manifested, among other features, in a certain type of life after death. The belief that only the religious perspective has any value or significance also colors the manner in which Lubavitch views the "situation in the Holy Land" (the sub-title of Wolpe's book), and the debate regarding the control of all or parts thereof. The Lubavitcher Movement completely rejects the common claim of all the Zionist streams regarding the Jews' historical right to the Land of Israel. After all, they claim, other peoples lived in the Land of Israel for centuries. Claiming an historical right is tantamount to the American Indians' claim that Washington DC belongs to them (Wolpe, 1980:46). In fact, there is no right to the Land, only the Divine promise in the Torah, "and this is the basis of our eternal claim that the Greater Land of Israel, according to the borders detailed in the Bible, from

the Great River to the Euphrates, belongs to the people of Israel" (Wolpe, 1980). Thus, this movement which negates Zionism, shares the maximalist territorial stance of the radical Zionist right-wing despite the fact that this movement views the very basis of Zionism as invalid and worthless. The "Holy Land" that belongs to the Jews thus extends from the Nile to the Euphrates, since this was God's promise to Abraham at the "Covenant between the Straits" (Genesis 15:18-21). Lubavitcher Hassidim and radical nationalists interpret the "Covenant between the Straits" in fundamentalist terms, and hence consider the borders promised by God to be an operational program for present-day policy. They use the Biblical text as the basis for drawing conclusions for a political theology that claims to clarify the will of God – a will that is innately immutable. This explains why one could find the Lubavitcher Rebbe, an anti-Zionist who attributed no positive religious value to the State of Israel, among the opponents of the peace agreement reached between Israel and Egypt under the government headed by the Zionist right-winger Menachem Begin. In this agreement, Israel ceded control of Sinai, i.e. part of the area included in the geopolitics of the "Covenant between the Straits".

In religious terms, the promise given to the nation's forefathers by God is no less important than the Midrash and Rashi's exegesis of the first verse of Genesis. The Divine promise appears several times (the promise to Abraham: Genesis 12:7; 13:14-16; 15; the promise to Isaac: Genesis 26:3-4; the promise to Jacob: Genesis 25:13-15; 35:12), and is reiterated by Moses (Exodus 6:8; 32:13; 33:1; Numbers 33:53; Deuteronomy 34:4) and by Yehoshua Bin-Nun (Joshua 1:15). The borders of the Divine promise are not uniform, and exegetical disagreements arose over the centuries in interpreting their precise location. These disagreements also had ramifications for two forceful political and religious debates that emerged under the Begin government: Some rabbis believed that the vacation of "Pitchat Rafiah" (the Yamit area) and the demolition of the Israeli settlements in this area were contrary to *halacha*, while the IDF presence in Lebanon provoked a *halachic* debate on the question as to whether the government would be permitted to instruct the IDF to return to the international border with Lebanon, and to return the territories occupied during the Lebanon War to Lebanese sovereignty. This political debate is a function of the theological and exegetical debate on the normative significance of the borders of the promise which, at the maximum extent as mentioned in the "Covenant between the Straits," extended "from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates" – an area that was home to ten nations mentioned in the text. Among those participating in this debate, opinions were divided as to whether the entire territory of Sinai formed part of the Land of Israel, or only the northeastern section. The reason was that some of the leading medieval commentators identified the "River of Egypt" not with the Nile, but with Wadi El-Arish. In any case, the "Covenant between the Straits" was characterized as an

historical event, and viewed as a source for the Jewish right to the Land. The classical sages had already interpreted the phrase “I have given this Land to your seed” (Genesis 15:18), which is written in the masculine gender, as establishing a legal fact: “God’s word is action” (Jerusalem Talmud, *Hallah*, Chapter 2, Halacha 31). Accordingly, the Divine promise establishes the right to the Land, and this was already given to Abraham and his descendants. Since this promise was given by God Himself to Abraham and all his descendants throughout the generations, no one is entitled to cede either any or all of this gift. Thus the stylistic rhetoric that reverses the sequence of the grammatical tenses as part of the decorative grammar typical of the Bible (“I have given” = “I shall give”) is transformed into a supreme normative source negating the authority of the State of Israel to determine its own borders.

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook illustrates the transition from stylistic rhetorical exegesis to a supreme normative command. “The Covenant between the Straits” is “an absolute Divine truth that exists for all eternity ... it is a cosmological and global covenant” (Kook, 1993:132) ensuring the eternal relationship between the people and the Land. As an “absolute Divine truth” it is immutable, as Rabbi Goren also rules (Goren, 1964:627; 1996:122). In addition to the normative debate, the perception of the covenant with God as the source of the right to the Land also has experiential importance – an experience familiar, as Rabbi Neriya notes (Neriya, :208), to any Jew who opens the morning prayer with the verses relating to the covenant:

Be mindful always of His covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; which He made with Abraham, and of his oath to Isaac; and he confirmed the same to Ya’akov for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying” To thee I will give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance. (Chronicles I 16:15-18).

It is evident that anyone who considers and internalizes the meaning of the words they utter during their prayers may view these comments as relating to their own lives. Once again, the question is one of exegesis: Is this a unilateral promise for distant days, when God so chooses, or is it a commitment binding two parties, based on the perception of the legal covenant established with Abraham? If it is an obligation, what is the scope of its applicability to the people: Does the obligation relate to the observance and performance of the Torah and the commandments, or is there an obligation to realize the ownership of the Land? And, if there is an obligation to realize this ownership, does this also apply in current times?

The religious school that supports the Greater Land of Israel answers both the latter questions with a resounding yes. The covenant is perceived as a law

establishing the obligation to maintain a right granted on the basis of that covenant: “The Land of Israel was delivered to the people of Israel that it might settle it, and perform there what was commanded in the Torah” (Goren, 1996:114-115), since “from the *halachic* perspective, the Land of Israel is in the possession of the people of Israel, and has been held by us since the days of the forefathers, as a property and inheritance for all purposes” (Goren, 1964:598). This comment was written before the Six-Day War. After the war, the rabbi wrote that “there is a prohibition from the Torah against ceding areas of the Land of Israel in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip.” According to Goren, Moses’ words to the people of Israel before they entered the Land regarding the approach to be taken to the previous inhabitants, place the State of Israel and its modern governmental authorities under an obligation. Moses called on the people of Israel not to confine themselves to the military occupation of the Land, but to displace its inhabitants:

You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it; for I have given you the land to possess it... But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those whom you allow to remain of them shall be as thorns in your eyes, and stings in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein you dwell. (Numbers 33:53-55)

Moses’ speech includes two elements. The first is that God once again declares that He has given the Land to the Children of Israel; accordingly, they must settle it and displace its local inhabitants. This argument has an overtly expressivistic character. Secondly, they should take into account the expected reaction of the local inhabitants to the conquest of the Land. “If you do not displace” them, constant opposition may be expected on their part, hatred will develop, and there will be acts of terrorism (“thorns in your eyes and stings in your side”) – in other words, harassment and constant physical injury that may reach a dangerous level. This argument has an overtly instrumentalist character. Thus, this short speech includes both the elements – the expressive and the instrumentalist – that appear repeatedly in the rhetoric of those opposed to the principle of “Land for Peace” as a means for resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute through compromise. One might argue that the instrumentalist element is superfluous; after all, Moses speaks in God’s name, and if God’s commandment is to conquer the Land and displace its ancient inhabitants, who could possibly require an instrumentalist justification for observing God’s commandment? However, for the purposes of conviction and motivation, rhetoric that emphasizes the instrumentalist aspect is beneficial. This rhetoric presents what has already been decided as a rational choice between alternative options. Those

convinced by the expressivist pathos have no need for this component in the process of persuasion. However, those who remain unconvinced may see in instrumentalism the component of the *logos* according to Aristotle's model for rhetorical persuasion. Rabbi Goren, who quotes Moses' comments without reference to the historical context in which they were made, draws no distinction between the two arguments. Neither does he interpret the operative implication of the expression "displace the inhabitants of the Land". He confines himself to quoting the speech, and leaves the work of exegesis to his readers and students.

#### D. "There will be an internal war"

On a different point, Rabbi Goren's comments were clear and unequivocal on an operative level: the delegitimization of any policy liable to lead to a reduction of the state's sovereign territory. In his opinion, any such decision lacks authority, is therefore null and void, and can have no positive results. The Land God gave to His people is held by them by way of a deposit, and they are obliged to protect this deposit (Goren, 1996:117). Since God Himself gave this deposit to the people, no terrestrial person or power has the authority or the ability to change the status of the Land. Goren's ruling is clear and explicit:

No national or international law has the power to change our status, rights, and bonds with our forefathers' inheritance in all the sacred parts of the Land of Israel. Even if the Israeli government has not officially annexed Judea and Samaria to the State of Israel, and has not imposed Israeli law on these areas, since the Gentiles do not actually control these areas, they are considered, according to Torah law, as the Land of Israel under Jewish rule for all purposes, and Jewish sovereignty, possession, and ownership apply to all this area. No law can deprive us of our forefathers' inheritance (Goren, 1986:334).

According to Goren's approach, the delegitimization is universal in character. Neither Israeli nor international law can alter Israel's status in the territories, since this is founded on a higher norm. The absence of formal annexation is of no consequence since, according to the *halacha*, the declaration of annexation is immaterial – it is *de facto* control that determines the status. Accordingly, Goren deduces that any decision to make territorial concessions is null and void. The perceived superiority of the *halacha* as a source of legitimacy, and the rejection of the validity of state laws and decisions of the government or the Knesset when these, in Goren's opinion, contradict the *halacha*, also formed the

foundation for his *halachic* ruling instructing IDF soldiers to refuse to obey any order entailing the vacating of settlements: “One must not obey a military order that is contrary to the commandment of Torah,” he wrote in an internal journal of the rabbis of the settlers in the Territories. Accordingly, “a soldier who receives an order contrary to the laws of the Torah must observe the *halacha* of the Torah, and not the secular order” (Goren, 1994).

This ruling was first given by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda shortly after the Six-Day War. He determined that any decision to cede territory, if such a decision were to be made, would be void, since it extends beyond the scope of authority of the Israeli government (Kook, 1967). He repeated this comment forcefully in letters he sent to several of the leaders of the state at critical points when decisions were about to be made on territorial changes. He even went so far as to threaten an “internal war” – a threat he included in a letter to the Minister of Defense and Chief-of-Staff in 1975, and which was published 19 years later by his faithful student Rabbi Shlomo Aviner (in *Yesha Rabbinical Bulletin* No. 11, 1994). Kook wrote as follows to Chief-of-Staff, Mordechai Gur:

I am obliged to reiterate that there will certainly be a war amongst us over our absolute rule of the full expanse of the Land of our life in Judea and Samaria, and we are obliged by the Torah to give our lives [for this] ... Let us hope that we do not have to reach the point where the people of Israel launch a war against its failing government.

Rabbi Kook's comments to Minister of Defense Shimon Peres were also unequivocal and harshly worded:

Any territorial concessions in Judea and Samaria are null and void; they shall not stand or last. There shall also be an internal war over Judea and Samaria, and when the entire people rises against this government, I shall naturally be with the entire people... The government is for the people, not the people for the government.

It should be noted that Rabbi Zvi Yehuda *did not* adopt this style or content with regard to other territories (Sinai, the Golan Heights, or Lebanon), but only with regard to “Judea and Samaria” – i.e., the West Bank, the areas in which the Palestinians seek to establish a state. Following the agreement reached between Yitzhak Rabin's government and the PLO (headed by Yasser Arafat) in September 1993, rabbis from Gush Emunim turned to the writings of their rabbi, who passed away in 1982, in an effort to find answers to the difficult questions they had begun to face. From a theological standpoint, it was evident that their



approach completely invalidated the government's decisions regarding the partition of the Land. However, what conclusions should be drawn from this stance? Should they use force in opposing the government's decisions? Despite the harsh terms used by the rabbi in his letters to the Minister of Defense and the Chief-of-Staff from 1975, they were not found to constitute a clear call to action. "The gates of exegesis have not been closed," writes Rabbi Yitzhak Shilat, a teacher at the *yeshiva* in Ma'aleh Edumim, a city established in the 1980s to the east of Jerusalem, within the West Bank. "It is pointless attempting to elaborate the above comments of our rabbi, and to interpret precisely what he meant." Perhaps this was not a "normative statement," but rather "a statement by way of prediction," (Shilat, 1993). In other words, the comments of the founding rabbi of the settlement movement in the territories – comments repeated in two letters – need not be interpreted as normative guidance and an operative instruction, but might rather be viewed as an analytical forecast of the dangers facing society and the state. It should not be forgotten that Rabbi Zvi Yehuda, more than any other individual in the religious camp, valued the state and considered it sacred.

In addition to the question of exegesis, an evaluation of the situation is also required: Has the critical moment actually arrived at which this "internal war" may be expected, whatever its precise character? After the failure of the campaign to halt the withdrawal from Sinai shortly after Rabbi Zvi Yehuda's death, one of the questions his students considered was whether the time had not come to initiate a *Kulturkampf*. This struggle would include the combination and unification of the different elements of their worldview into a single fabric that could then be imparted to the general public, thus overcoming the policy Aviner refers to as "the destruction of petty Zionism" (Aviner, 1993). The concept of "the destruction of petty Zionism" is based on the conclusions drawn from the withdrawal from Sinai. This withdrawal marked the "breaking of intermediate Zionism," insofar as for the first time during the century-long history of Zionist settlement, the Jews agreed of their own free will to cede existing settlements in territory included within the borders of the Promised Land. With the collapse of the partial values system, reflecting incompleteness and hence inherently flawed, the possibility was created for the emergence of a complete *emuni* approach that understands the nature of the relationship to the Land and places eternity above the chains of isolated transience. Accordingly, this perspective views difficulties as a challenge and a great opportunity to overcome problems and secure even greater achievements. In January 1982, during the height of the campaign to halt the withdrawal from Sinai, Aviner sought to maintain a balance between those who viewed the peace treaty with Egypt as the beginning of the end of the State of Israel, and others who relied on the attachment of the Begin government to Judea and Samaria, concluding that "all was well between the people and its Land, and they will soon embark on a national honeymoon." He placed the blame on secularism, which impedes the

development of an adequate understanding of the unique nature of the people and the Land, and leads to national disease:

We are sick with a grave disease: We have come not to know what our Land is for us; we have come not to know who we are and what our lives are; we have come not to know who is our God ... It is not those who ignore crises or who are overcome by them who will bring redemption to the nation. In contrast to both these, we recognize crises, while at the same time struggling against them. A recognition of the profundity of the crisis need not imply despair. Indeed, the scent of war inspires heroism. We do not know how long the struggle will last, whether years or generations, but we shall fight and are confident of victory. (Aviner, 1982)

Those who “ignore crises” are the secular nationalist supporters of the Likud, while those who are overcome by them are the Ultra Orthodox, who lack an activist national conscience. Neither of these will be able to redeem the nation. Only *Gush Emunim* can achieve this, since it recognizes the crisis and fights it with a sense of utter confidence in its victory. Aviner expresses here the sense of messianic mission prevalent in the settler movement which embodies, through self-reflection, the unique character of the people of Israel as perceived by this movement – a character forged through constant struggle based on the confidence that it holds the recipe to redemption. Those who view their role in the world in this context will not be put off by difficulties; on the contrary, these are viewed as an opportunity to struggle against further obstacles, in order to overcome them and advance the realization of destiny. Partial and temporary setbacks also have their place within the general course of developments as part of a dialectical process that includes self-negation, in keeping with the concept of “a descent for the purpose of ascent” (Aviner, 1982). Aviner provides here the foundation for a theological approach not only to the withdrawal from Sinai, but also from Judea and Samaria, while the “inner war among us” is transformed into a type of *Kulturkampf* – a struggle that is forceful yet lawful, without physical violence and certainly without the assassination of the prime minister, and without engendering a crisis in faith, since the dialectical process may also absorb a regression as part of the progress toward the absolute objective presented to history since the Six Days of Creation. Yet it must be recalled that the prohibition against ceding even an inch of the Land is absolute, and cannot be justified in dialectical terms. As Aviner writes,

Persons in the government who are representatives of the

public in the matters of leadership and authority have no legal permission to cede parts of the Land of Israel, since this Land belongs not only to us, the people who reside in Zion, but also to the entire Jewish people. The millions of Russian Jews and the other exiles are owners of the Land of Israel just as we are, and we have no authority to speak in their name. Moreover, the Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel through to the end of all the generations; and by what right may we cede territories in which they, too, are partners? (Aviner, 1983:132)

This comment clearly expresses a rejection of the government's authority to act in a manner contrary to the *emuni* approach; such action is perceived as antinomism, and hence delegitimized, since an action contradicting the elements of the faith cannot be perceived, in terms of that faith, as a legitimate act. Aviner attempted to moderate the damage to the authority of the state, which *emuni* theology and rhetoric also view as a sacred and Divine matter, by attributing the unacceptable and inherently void decision to "persons in the government," rather than to the government itself, as an official organ of state operating on behalf of and binding the state. This rhetoric reinforces the normative statement that "persons in the government have no legal permission ... to cede parts of the Land of Israel" (Aviner, 1983). It is not the government that is committing the act of concession, but "people" – members of the government as private individuals who claim to act on behalf of the public; who are "its representatives in the matters of leadership and authority" (Aviner, 1983) and who are committing an act that the law and the *emuni* approach do not permit them to commit. In committing an act they have no permission to do, they deviate from their authority. Not only is the prohibited act inherently void, but it is also viewed as a private action, rather than one committed by the state. Thus Aviner frees himself from the dilemma that results from the contradiction between the injury to a sacred principle caused by the government, and the perception of the state and its authorities as embodying sanctity. The dilemma is resolved by determining that it is not the state or the government that has transgressed against God's word, but rather humans who, in transgressing against God's word, have also violated the legal obligation imposed on them as public representatives. Aviner seeks to overcome the contradiction between the acceptance of the authority of the government and the Knesset to reach decisions, and the delegitimization of policy by establishing a lack of authority to "cede parts of the Land of Israel." However, he offers no coherent solution in terms of the contradiction on the level of the individual who may be asked to perform actions he believes to lie outside official authority and to be contrary to the *halacha*.

### ***E. The elimination of the status quo ante bellum***

Immediately after the Six-Day War, *emuni* rhetoric developed an argument that a return to the *status quo ante bellum* was completely impossible, due to the Divine imminence in history that imbues the State of Israel with sanctity and might. It depicted Israel's victory as the victory of God over His enemies, thus deepening the messianic tension that had accompanied this war and indirectly depicting any territorial compromise or political agreement as rewarding the enemies of God. This rhetoric, highly reminiscent of Christian motifs, was ironically presented as the negation of Christianity and a victory over that religion. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook spoke of the sanctity of the armistice lines, preventing any changes thereto: "These borders and kilometers are ours, Divinely sanctified, and we have absolutely no possibility to make concessions therein" (Kook, 1974). From the idea of sanctity, Kook deduced that it was impossible to make any withdrawal without damaging the sanctity of the Land, which is an objective fact, according to his method. Thus, no person can change or impair Israel's might, which exceeds that of the United States or the Soviet Union:

The State of Israel is a Divine matter ... Not only can there be no withdrawal from the kilometers of the Land of Israel, God forbid, but on the contrary, we shall add further conquests and liberations ... "The Eternal One of Israel will not lie nor change his mind: for He is not a man, that He should change His mind" (Samuel I 15:28), and we are stronger than America, stronger than Russia (Kook, 1987:245)

Basing himself on the Prophet Samuel's emphasis on the stability and eternity of God's word, the rabbi deduces that the State of Israel is stronger than both superpowers, whose actions are not based on such a firm theological foundation. Accordingly, and despite political pressure from the superpowers, Israel shall add further "conquests and liberations" through to the full geopolitical realization of the promise. There can be no withdrawal from any area conquered and liberated, since redemption progresses in an unequivocal and linear manner. The *status quo post bellum* is thus an irreversible feature. Moreover, the results of the war are also the proof, in the historical realm, of the absolute theological truths of Judaism. The rabbi identified this proof in two senses: in the battle of monotheism against Communist atheism, and in the struggle between Judaism and Christianity and Islam, as he commented to his students in a sermon marking the first anniversary of the Six-Day War. The results of the war clearly show the realization of "the word of the Master of the Universe" that the time of redemption has come, and the entire Land shall be given to Israel. The

inheritance of the forefathers is “in our governmental possession,” and these objective historical developments contradict the Christian perception that God had nullified his Covenant with the Jews after they rejected Jesus’ message, transferring His mercy and covenant to the Church. The developments also contradict the behavior of the Arabs in the Land of Israel – who consider themselves the owners of the Land – and the position of the Soviet Union, which was continuing the anti-Semitic policy of the Czar. In Kook’s words:

Any unpleasantness involved in the sublimity of our Divine resurrection in the face of the now-crumbling foolish and wicked Christian theory regarding the Eternal of Israel, or in the Arab custom of settling and building on the Land of Israel, or in the continuing evil dominion of the Russian tyrant Czar through the government of its inheritors, the enemies of the Lord and of His people ... is as naught in the face of the truthful and faithful word of the Sovereign of the Universes and the Generations, which appears in the words of his Torah and Prophets, and in the history of His people, and which preserves and uplifts and sanctifies us in concrete clarity in the eyes of all... (Kook, 1987:26)

The “unpleasantness” mentioned at the head of this comment refers to the diplomatic difficulties that were anticipated in the context of the policy advocated by the rabbi. He believed that the roots of Israel’s diplomatic difficulties in the United Nations and in its bilateral relations with various superpowers and nations lay essentially in the “foolish and wicked theory,” i.e., in Christianity, and in the position taken by the Fathers of the Church toward the Jews. Thus the preservation of the *status quo post bellum* also has far-reaching theological importance, since it proves the victory of Judaism in the inter-faith struggle. The same applies to the Muslim Arabs, who act as if they were the owners of the Land of Israel, settling on its land and building on it. And the same applies to Communist atheism, which is also perceived as a religion in the rhetoric of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda. All these religions crumble in the face of the results of the Six-Day War, and this explains the absolute obligation to maintain fully the new *status quo*. Moreover, the essential point is that there is no possibility that the new *status quo* will be displaced, since the God who is victorious over His enemies will no longer cede to them, and will therefore not allow them to desecrate His covenant with Abraham, His vow to Isaac, and His law as presented to Jacob – the three fathers of the Jewish people to whom he promised the Land.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A thinker who combines an education in philosophy and in Torah, Aviner serves as a rabbi at the settlement of Beit El and heads the Ateret Haco Hanim Yeshiva in Jerusalem which specializes in studying the ritual laws relating to the Temple which the *emuni* believe will, in due course, be built in place of the mosques on the Temple Mount.

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