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RELIGIOUS ZIONISM AND THE JEWISH STATE

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Ideology and Soul-Searching

The religious Zionists represent a very important camp in Israeli society. In an election year, the religious vote may once again hold the deciding balance between the two major parties. It is especially difficult for those in English-speaking countries to accept the notion of religious parties, yet the mere fact that the Jewish state was established in the Land of Israel presupposes a religious component in its making. Furthermore, Israel is similar to those continental European societies where religious issues antedated modern statehood and found expression politically through the party system from the very beginning, in Israel's case dating back to the beginning of the century even before there was a state.

By the time the Jewish state was established, almost all the major parties existing today were in existence already. Mizrahi, today the core of the National Religious Party (NRP), was established in 1902; Agudat Israel, the original ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) party, was formed in 1912. It would not

be constructive to suggest that these parties should be abolished; religious parties represent clear segments of Israeli society, have interests to defend and ideas to promote, and as such constitute an integral part of Israel's political life.

In the wake of Prime Minister Rabin's assassination, the Orthodox camp was accused of somehow being linked to this trauma because of the religious education the assassin received. Receiving his elementary and secondary education in the ultra-Orthodox stream, Yigal Amir was educated in his post-high school years at a *yeshivat hesder*, the official IDF program that combines IDF service with rabbinical studies. After army service he attended Bar-Ilan University Law School, as well as the university's Institute for Advanced Torah Studies.

After the assassination, Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, a controversial leader of the settlement movement, publicly accused certain religious Zionist rabbis of issuing religious rulings which branded the prime minister guilty of crimes according to Jewish law

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and thereby opening the way for someone to attempt to act against him. The religious concept mentioned was that of *Rodef* (pursuer), which implies that a person who pursues (threatens) the life of another person may be stopped and even killed by someone else, thus preventing the original act of murder.

Immediately after the assassination, calls were heard for sanctions against the religious institutions of higher learning identified with the religious Zionist camp, such as state religious schools, the *yeshivot hesder*, and even Bar-Ilan University.

It is also true that this camp took the impact of the assassination very seriously and went through a period of profound soul-searching, holding a number of major ideologically-oriented public meetings. One such gathering involved a dialogue between the heads of the settlement movement in Judea and Samaria and the leaders of Peace Now.

Unfortunately, the only camp that really participated in the process of soul-searching was the religious Zionist camp. Despite the traumatic event, hardly any ideological debate was initiated in any of the other political camps. Even on the left, some commentators have begun lamenting the apparent disappearance of Zionist ideology from the Israeli scene. Whether one agrees or not with giving up parts of the historic land of Judea and Samaria, for a nation that yearned to return to its homeland for two thousand years, some outcry of sadness or regret should have taken place when the IDF evacuated the Arab cities in the territories in November and December 1995.

Religious Zionism and the State

Religious Zionism as a movement has been involved in state-building since its inception. Moreover, several of the major ideologues of Zionism came from this camp. Rabbis Yehuda Alkalai and Hirsh Kalisher are considered the forerunners of Zionism. Mizrahi participated in the major debates within the Zionist movement such as the Uganda controversy and the 1937 partition debate. Similarly, the religious Zionists played a central role in the world Zionist congresses, in the Jewish Agency since its inception, and in all the other national institutions. The state has always been at the core of the national religious ideology.

There are three basic questions involved in appraising the relation of religious Zionism to the state. First, how should a religious Zionist relate to a Jewish state or to a government when that government is headed by non-observant Jews? Second, what should be the relationship between religious and secular people in

general? Third, what should a religious person do with regard to Jewish destiny? The answers to these questions are particularly pertinent as they distinguish religious Zionists from ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews. It is this active element which differentiates a modern movement from a traditional one. Religious Zionism as a modern movement has always included activism in its ideology, unlike the Haredim who have a more passive approach to Jewish redemption and the Land of Israel.

In order to understand these dilemmas, we must first recognize that it is not a simple matter for a Jewish religious movement rooted in *halakhah* (Jewish law) to cooperate with a Jewish secular political institution, especially when that institution is politically sovereign over the Land of Israel. From a normative religious perspective there are problems in cooperating with non-religious Jews. If the Jewish state had been set up outside of the Land of Israel, the *halakhic* issues might have been simpler, but there are *halakhic* positions that are pertinent only to a government in Eretz Israel.

A Jewish state in Eretz Israel provokes questions that secular people are simply not aware of. For example, if a secular person desecrates the Sabbath, that person often has no real understanding of why this should so disturb religious people. Similarly, the fact that a secular Jewish government decides the destiny of the Land of Israel causes theological difficulties for the religious of which most secular Israelis are not conscious.

Three Approaches within Religious Zionism

It is against this background that we may differentiate between three main approaches that have developed over the years within religious Zionism, with particular emphasis on relations between the Orthodox religious community and the secular state.

The Instrumental Approach

The first, the instrumental approach, overcame the problem of conflict between religion and state by focusing on the functional dimension of the state; the main function of Zionism was to take the Jews out of the diaspora, to end the diaspora situation in which the Jews had been faced with misery, and to provide them with security. Accordingly, religious Jews can cooperate with non-observant Jews, even though the religious would like the others to be observant. A Jewish state in Eretz Israel is preferable to any other place because there are *mitzvot* that only apply to life in Israel. In this way, relations between religious and secular Jews

are instrumental in advancing the aspirations and way of life of the religious.

It is always instructive to compare current attitudes with those of the formative years of Zionism at the turn of the century and realize how similar to the present situation the dilemmas were in those days. Rabbi Yaacov Reines, the founder of Mizrachi in 1902 and to whom this approach could be related, supported Theodor Herzl when the latter was ready to consider establishing a Jewish colony in East Africa (the Uganda controversy). In retrospect, we must appreciate the foresight of those living at the beginning of the century who saw that Jewry was facing an extremely deadly onslaught and recognized an urgent need to take the Jews out of the diaspora, even if it meant going to a temporary shelter in Africa. Sensing the growing hatred surrounding Jewry, religious leaders like Reines asserted that the Jewish people had no future in a Europe of rising anti-Semitism and nationalism. Under such adverse circumstances, religious Zionists supported a secular leader who had despaired, for the moment, of accomplishing the goal of reaching Zion. Hence, religious Jews were urged to cooperate with secular Jews with whom they shared the same goals and interests, even though they disagreed totally on religion and the destiny of the Jewish people.

Another issue of controversy for early Zionism was with regard to educational and cultural activities. While the religious were opposed to secular Zionist activity in this realm, the two sides found a compromise via the establishment of two separate streams in education. The current system of separate state (secular) and state religious educational streams in Israel in effect dates back to an agreement reached at the turn of the century. While the secular camp was ready for cooperation, the instrumental approach of the religious Zionists provided the ideological basis for such cooperation to take place. It was this instrumental approach that was exemplified by the National Religious Party (NRP) throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

Indeed, the political basis for this cooperation was the instrumental approach to the state and finding common ground with secular Jews for activism. At the same time, the secular side was ready for compromise which, in political terms, implied power-sharing. The Labor governments welcomed the participation of the NRP in the government. Areas in Jewish life important to the NRP were under religious control, and the NRP in effect enjoyed autonomy in education. Some of these elements persist until today and must be recognized as achievements of the instrumental approach.

The Redemptionist Approach

Another approach in religious Zionism that became prominent, especially after the Six-Day War, is the redemptionist approach, based on the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Israel. Rabbi Kook's teachings are very sophisticated and cannot really be summarized within the confines of a short essay. His most important contribution to religious Zionism was his conviction that the Jewish people was on a one-way track toward redemption. Redemption was like a train; there might be some detours, there may be some stops, the train may even break down on the way, but it will never go back, it will never stop, it has to move forward.

Another major contribution of Rabbi Kook to religious Zionism was his approach to cooperation with secular Jews. Observing the reality of Jews of all persuasions actively redeeming the Land of Israel, he developed the idea that every Jew has a holy or divine spark within, including even those who do not keep Shabbat but who build Eretz Israel, whether via the kibbutz, in moshav agriculture, or in the pre-state Haganah military force. Regardless of whether these Jews realize that they have this spark and that this is what really motivates them in their actions, they were holy. In retrospect, from a religious perspective, this doctrine should be regarded as a breakthrough since it legitimized cooperation with secular people.

Moreover, under such circumstances, adherents of this redemptionist perspective believe that the religious person should be at the head of the camp and lead the way. Under the stewardship of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the son of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the disciples of Rabbi Kook assumed the role of the vanguard of the Zionist movement after the Six-Day War.

According to a famous anecdote, in 1967, just before the Six-Day War, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and his disciples were celebrating Israel Independence Day at their center, the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which in itself was a kind of behavior almost unheard of for a practically ultra-Orthodox yeshiva. On this occasion, Rabbi Kook is said to have lamented Israel's situation and spoke of the need to return to Shechem, Hebron, and the Old City of Jerusalem. Three weeks later his wish became a reality. The graduates of this yeshiva included many of the figures who became well-known in the following years in national religious political circles, such as Haim Druckman, Moshe Levinger, and Hanan Porat.

The teachings of Rabbi Kook and his followers became very prominent and it is significant to consider

why. It was no coincidence that the Gush Emunim settlement movement was established after 1973 and not before. After the Yom Kippur War, when the prevailing atmosphere was one of despair after Israel had almost collapsed, at that point only one movement came forward and displayed confidence that it knew where the state was heading and what it wanted, and raised the flag of Zionism. The popularity of Gush Emunim was in part a response to the feelings of relative deprivation that had spread among Israelis. Arafat had been welcomed at the UN, which had decided that Zionism equalled racism. The Israelis had thought they were the nice guys because they had not attacked first in 1973, but here the whole world was breaking off relations. The most popular song was "The whole world is against us."

In turn, those associated with religious Zionism felt they were really the vanguard, assuming the role of the *Halutzim* (pioneers) of the previous generation. They asserted that Labor had forgotten its pioneering ideology and that in initiating the whole settlement drive in Judea and Samaria they were doing just what the Labor movement had done in other parts of the country in the 1920s and the 1930s. After Menachem Begin came to power in 1977, the movement became especially prominent in leading this effort.

However, over the years Israeli society changed and the religious pioneers became identified as a "hindrance" on the road to peace. Instead of the image of a vanguard, they were blamed for being an obstacle to a settlement with the Palestinians. Part of the problem with an idealistic approach is that when such people are accused of being egoistic, the reaction is much stronger. The people who live in settlements say, "We take Zionism seriously. We are out there in the forefront. We suffer, and we get blamed. We are surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people who want to kill us, and Professor Zimmerman (a prominent professor of German history at Hebrew University) says that we are like Hitler youth!" That is why the crisis of confidence in the state for these people is much stronger. The disappointment of those who pursue an instrumental approach is less severe. If one adopts a rationale that justifies one's behavior on the basis of interest, a utilitarian approach, one's expectations for recognition from others are less and hence there is less of a feeling of betrayal. The attitude of the Labor government under Prime Minister Rabin and even Israeli society in general toward the settlement movement left many with a feeling of betrayal by their countrymen. It is against this background that we may see a new approach developing within religious Zionism.

The Conditional Approach

The third approach in religious Zionism which may now gain momentum, and which may be a dangerous one as far as the state is concerned, may be called the conditional approach. As we saw, the instrumental approach did not have high expectations from the secular segment of the Jewish state. The redemptionist approach was the most optimistic and said we were on a one-way track to redemption. The conditional approach, in contrast, says that nothing is definite. We may be on the right track and, if we deserve it, we are going to gain redemption, but if we do not deserve it, then we are transgressors and hence we are not going to achieve what we are supposed to, and this whole Zionist story may become just a passing episode.

While the ideological tones of this approach have taken root only at the margins of religious society and so far it has not gained great momentum, it should not be ignored. It may even develop into what Israel Harel, the chairperson of the Council of Judea and Samaria, calls "post-religious Zionism."

Despite its contemporary interpretation, the ideological origins of this approach may be found in the earlier teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak Breuer who is considered the ideologue of Poalei Agudat Israel, a movement positioned between the ultra-Orthodox and the religious Zionist camp. While supporting the settling of the Land of Israel because it is a *mitzvah*, Rabbi Breuer opposed cooperation with secular Zionism. He did not accept the doctrine of Rabbi Kook and regarded the Zionist enterprise as problematic from a religious perspective. It is possible to identify similar language in the speeches and writings of Rabbi Amiel of the Mizrahi movement, who served as Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv in the 1930s.

While this approach never had an impact on religious Zionism, today we may hear more and more of these voices. Members of this group are dubbed *hardal* — *haredim leumiim* (ultra-Orthodox nationalists). The Haredi argument found in Agudat Israel and other ultra-Orthodox circles says that a Jew who lives in Eretz Israel and desecrates the *mitzvot* holds back redemption and may cause destruction just like the sinners during the First Commonwealth who were punished for their idolatry. For Haredi Jews, the rebuilding of the Third Jewish Commonwealth is fully dependent on the repentance of the Jewish people and it cannot be rebuilt by secular Jews. One indication of the growing closeness between this trend and that of the redemptionists was seen when the followers of Rabbi Kook started objecting to the reciting of the "official" prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel (and its Labor government), which refers to Israel as "*reshith tzmichot*

geulateinu" (the beginning of the growth of our redemption).

Why is this trend troublesome for the State of Israel or religious Zionism? A conditional approach implies that a religious Zionist must choose between one of two ways. If the state can be destroyed because of the behavior of the secularists, it becomes imperative to try and stop this from occurring by being more militant in forcing secular people to become religious. Or one can become passive, become a Haredi, which means to separate oneself from the Zionist enterprise in Eretz Israel, and accept the notion which Avi Ravitsky, a leading religious Zionist professor of Jewish philosophy and leader of the religious Zionist peace camp, calls *galut* (exile) in Eretz Israel. Since both militancy and passivity have never been part of the essence of religious Zionism, this approach which combines activism with religious radicalism would imply a transformation in relations between this movement and the state.

These are the three main approaches that can be identified today in religious Zionism. Of course, they can appear in numerous different combinations, but they represent the main alternatives. Now let us look at how these approaches translate into strategies.

The Direction of Religious Zionism

The week after Prime Minister Rabin's assassination, this writer went to meet Rabbi Zalman Melamed, the ideological authority behind Arutz 7, a religious-oriented, independent (pirate) radio station. Rabbi Melamed lives in a modest apartment in the settlement of Beit El, with nothing in his room except books. We talked and argued for three hours as I cautioned him against allowing followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane to be heard on Arutz 7. I indicated to him that his station represented more than himself, that it represented a wider religious community.

After I left, I realized what we were really arguing about. He was saying that we have responsibility for the whole of Am Yisrael (the People of Israel), and by working to save Am Yisrael we also promote religious Zionism. I argued in response that first we must save religious Zionism and that by doing this we support Am Yisrael. I told him that religious Zionism is essential for the state, and thus if we want to save the state, we must take care of religious Zionism first.

Turning to practical contemporary politics, the question of the future of religious Zionism is whether it should continue to perceive its main role as the vanguard, the leader, or whether it should return to its traditional role as a bridge between different sections

of Am Yisrael.

The third alternative, based on the above analysis and the conditional approach, is seclusion, a road which may constitute a very realistic option in light of the current trend of withdrawal from traditional Zionist values and the spread of the permissive society in Israel. If the current political process continues and Israel withdraws to its pre-1967 lines or thereabout, religious Zionism will have to find itself a new role. I do not think that religious Zionism can lead anymore, under such circumstances. Hence, it must go back to being a bridge between the different groups; otherwise it will turn more toward seclusion, saying that a Jewish state is important but that the state we have now does not even come close to what we wanted. Some early signs of this trend may be seen in the concentration of religious Zionists in religious neighborhoods and the promotion of educational systems that are detached or semi-detached from the state educational system.

Another indication of this potential is the emergence of rabbinical institutions identified with religious Zionism such as Rabbanei Yesha — Rabbis of Judea and Samaria, or the rabbis who ruled that soldiers must refuse an order to evacuate settlements. The religious Zionist camp did not establish a *Moetzet Gedolei haTorah* (Council of Torah Greats) because it supported a statist approach and hence saw the Chief Rabbinate of the state as a source of religious authority. (Paradoxically, as Avi Ravitsky once commented, the left-wing secular Meretz party favored a dominant Supreme Court because they aspired to establish their own *Moetzet Gedolei haTorah*.) Religious Zionism in this sense was less "religious." It provided the Chief Rabbinate with full respect, but never supported it to rule on political issues.

The Fusion of Fundamentalism and Activism

In sum, Haredim by themselves do not constitute a threat to the state, nor do nationalist Zionists. The instruction by religious Zionist rabbis to religious soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate Jewish settlements constitutes a breach from the traditional NRP way. The followers of Rabbi Kook from Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva who went to live in the settlements do not constitute a movement that threatens the state. They would never hurt the army, and if it came to a confrontation they would yield because for real Mercaz HaRav graduates the state has a sacred value and connotation. Mercaz HaRav's approach since its inception continues to perceive the state and its army as holy, hence it would be difficult to imagine that a genuine follower of Rabbi

Kook would raise a hand against an Israeli soldier.

In contrast, a mixture or fusion between ultra-Orthodoxy and nationalism could constitute a threat. Prime Minister Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, may represent the product of this trend. First of all, he was from a Yemenite Jewish family and we are just beginning to understand what the state did to the Yemenite immigrants when they first arrived. We now hear that some Yemenite children were taken away from their parents after their arrival in Israel in the late 1940s, and Amir may have internalized some of the frustrations retained within that community. While this factor may have had an impact, Amir may represent this approach even more because he studied in ultra-Orthodox institutions until he was 18. He then went to the most Haredi yeshiva among the army *yeshivot* — Kerem d'Yavne. The combination of all these experiences contributed to the skewing of a personality with a very different outlook from that found in a regular *hesder yeshiva* that grew out of Mercaz HaRav and was associated with Gush Emunim.

The Coming Elections

What will be the effect of the next elections? If the NRP returns to join in the government, then there is some hope for the revival of the instrumental approach because those in power must be more responsible. Should Shimon Peres be the prime minister, he would behave very differently than Yitzhak Rabin. Peres has said for years that Labor had to find a bridge with the religious community and parties, and his strong supporter, Minister Yossi Beilin, definitely understands the importance of cooperation with the NRP. Immediately after the assassination, Peres and Beilin initiated a dialogue with the NRP. For example, after this author sent out invitations recently to each Knesset member for a conference on religious Zionism, the prime

minister's office phoned me at home saying, "The prime minister apologizes, he would like to attend but he cannot." At the same time, the current leadership of Labor is more distant from Judaism than the party's previous generation. David Ben-Gurion was definitely more anti-religious than Yitzhak Rabin, but Ben-Gurion was from Europe and he was familiar with Jewish tradition. Rabin was not an anti-religious man and never made anti-religious remarks, but he was not aware of the sensitivities of the religious community and the hatred that his political remarks generated among religious Israelis.

If the Likud wins, then the situation may be expected to return to what it was before 1992. But if Labor wins, undoubtedly the National Religious Party will not be able to afford to stay out of power again. The NRP, as a movement with important educational institutions to defend, cannot stay out of power for long periods of time. At the same time, a large portion of the religious Zionist camp may not accept any such realignment or power-sharing, and may pursue an independent rejectionist approach. In the long run, however, the return of the NRP to the government would slow down and perhaps even terminate the rejectionist trend in the religious Zionist camp.

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