

Foreword

Quite a few people in nineteenth-century Europe practiced both secularism and religion. Others practiced secularism in lieu of religion. This is how nationalism became a secular religion, turning the state into a monster that caused the worst catastrophes of the twentieth century.

This work is bound to stimulate debate on nationalism in my country, Israel. The author raises questions about the myth that Israel protects the Jews around the world and constitutes their natural homeland. This book rightly shows that this myth is anti-Jewish. Most Israelis mistake this myth for Zionism and argue that we can only reach independence once all the Diaspora Jews gather here. The Jews must therefore decide whether the interests of the State of Israel coincide or conflict with their own interests. However this question is taboo in the context of today's Zionist ideology. Moreover, this ideology deems anti-Semitism unavoidable and Israel the only place where a Jew can be safe. This view is essentially anti-democratic: it denies *a priori* any value of the emancipation of Jews in the modern world.

On the other hand, this myth gave birth to an ideology that expects the Jews to support Israel, often at the expense of the national interests of the countries in which they live. Most Diaspora leaders have nothing better to offer than the rotten motto, "My country, right or wrong." Israeli governments behave as if they were community leaders still within the ghetto walls. They disregard the interests of Israel's non-Jews, which contributes to the perpetual state of war, since a ghetto equipped with a strong army constitutes a grave danger.

This book shows why it is so important to get rid of this myth, which prevents many people, including many Israeli Jews, from acknowledging the authenticity of Judaic anti-Zionism, in particular, its loyalty to the Jewish tradition. Recognizing the legitimacy of religious anti-Zionism is crucial for an honest debate about Israel and Zionism — which remains stifled since the Zionists, both Jewish and Christian, deny all legitimacy to anti-Zionism.

It is all too evident that Torah-based opposition to Zionism needs to be well known; otherwise, the cult of the sacred cow of Zionism is reinforced. This cult includes the concept of the centrality of Israel in Jewish life and the right of the Israeli government to speak on behalf of world Jewry. This cult also makes illegitimate any criticism of Israel on the part of Diaspora Jews, whatever the Israeli policy may be. Currently, the Zionists declare that all opposition to Zionism is anti-Semitic, and this declaration has grievous consequences for Jews all over the world, including Jews of Israel. It is scandalous to deny legitimacy to criticism of official Israeli positions, and this book makes this point very clear.

It is intellectually important to think clearly, to distinguish between concepts. Its practical importance may be less evident. This is where this book becomes particularly useful. It mobilizes little known historical data in order to make distinctions between the following concepts: Zionism and Judaism; Israel as a state, as a country, as a territory and as the Holy Land; Jews (Israelis and others), Israelis (Jews and non-Jews), Zionists (Jews and Christians) and anti-Zionists (again Jews and Christians). For example, when one calls Israel “the Jewish state” this creates a real and dangerous confusion between faith and nationality.

One need not be religious in order to protest the exploitation by Israel of religious concepts. I am not religious and am not part of the current fad to find fault with Zionism and its history. But as an Israeli patriot and a philosopher, I find it imperative to make Judaic anti-Zionism a part of the badly needed debate about Israel’s past, present and future.

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Prologue

Do not utterly take the truth away from my mouth, for I have put my hope in Your rules. (Psalms 119:43)

Jewish schools in France and Belgium are torched, synagogues in Turkey and Tunisia are bombed. These are only among the most recent consequences of the festering, century-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But why have these attacks been aimed at targets in the Jewish Diaspora? How can the Hasidic children of Antwerp or Cagny be held responsible for the actions of Israeli soldiers in Jenin or Ramallah?

But what, on the other hand, could be more normal than to associate Jews with the State of Israel? Are not the Jews of the Diaspora often seen as aliens, outsiders or perhaps even Israeli citizens taking a long holiday far from “home”? Such insinuations have always been dear to anti-Semites, for whom a world Jewish conspiracy is an incontrovertible fact. But the linkage of Jews with the State of Israel is also a theme popular with the Zionists, who, ever since the creation of their political movement more than a century ago, have claimed to be the vanguard of the entire Jewish people. Some of them even assert that any threat to the survival of the State of Israel is a threat to the survival of Jews throughout the world. For them, Israel has become not only the guarantor but also the standard-bearer of Judaism.

Reality, in the event, is far more complex.

The scene is downtown Montreal; the occasion, a massive demonstration in commemoration of Israeli Independence Day. On one side of the square, a compact group of *Haredim*¹ in frock-coats and wide-brimmed black hats brandish placards that proclaim: “Stop Zionism’s Bloody Adventure!” “The Zionist Dream has Become a Nightmare,” “Zionism is the Opposite of Judaism.” The leaflets they distribute read:

Worse than the toll of suffering, exploitation, death, and desecration of the Torah, has been the inner rot that Zionism has injected into the Jewish soul. It has dug deep into the essence of being a Jew. It has offered a secular formulation of Jewish identity, as a replacement for the unanimous belief of our people in Torah from Heaven. It has caused Jews to view *golus* [exile] as a result of military weakness. Thus, it has destroyed the Torah view of exile as a punishment for sin. It has wreaked havoc among Jews both in Israel and America, by casting us in the role of Goliath-like oppressors. It has made cruelty and corruption the norm for its followers.

Thus, this, the fifth day of the Jewish month of Iyar, is a day of extraordinary sadness for the Jewish people, and for all men. It will

be marked in many Orthodox circles with fasting and mourning and the donning of sackcloth, as a sign of mourning. May we all merit to see the peaceful dismantling of the state and the ushering in of peace, between Muslims and Jews around the world. (Neturei Karta 2001)

The pro-Israel demonstrators accuse them of treason, of not being “real Jews.” Still others attempt to rip the signs from their hands. The riot squad is called in to separate the two Jewish contingents. Similar scenes take place simultaneously in New York, London and Jerusalem.

Such events may be local, but they throw light on a widely spread phenomenon: the rejection of Zionism in the name of the Torah, in the name of Jewish tradition. Such rejection is all the more significant in that it can in no way be described as anti-Semitic, recent attempts to conflate any expression of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism notwithstanding.

At first glance this seems to be a paradox. After all, the public almost automatically associates Jews and Israel. The press continues to refer to “the Jewish State.” Israeli politicians often speak “in the name of the Jewish people.” Yet the Zionist movement and the creation of the State of Israel have caused one of the greatest schisms in Jewish history. An overwhelming majority of those who defend and interpret the traditions of Judaism have, from the beginning, opposed what was to become a vision for a new society, a new concept of being Jewish, a program of massive immigration to the Holy Land and the use of force to establish political hegemony there.

Curiously perhaps, both Zionist intellectuals and the Orthodox rabbis who often oppose them agree that Zionism represents a negation of Jewish tradition. Yosef Salmon, an Israeli authority on the history of Zionism, writes:

It was the Zionist threat that offered the gravest danger, for it sought to rob the traditional community of its very birthright, both in the Diaspora and in Eretz Israel, the object of its messianic hopes. Zionism challenged all the aspects of traditional Judaism: in its proposal of a modern, national Jewish identity; in the subordination of traditional society to new life-styles; and in its attitude to the religious concepts of Diaspora and redemption. The Zionist threat reached every Jewish community. It was unrelenting and comprehensive, and therefore it met with uncompromising opposition. (Salmon 1998, 25)

This book presents readers with a history of the resistance to the “unrelenting and comprehensive” threat of Zionism, resistance whose conceptual bases, as we shall see, have changed little in the last 120 years. It throws light on a vigorous, persistent attitude, which the adherents of Zionism

see, in turn, as a sacrilege. The detractors of Zionism whom we will meet in these pages are not all Jews in black frock coats. Their number includes all who base their opposition on arguments of a Judaic nature: *Hasidim* and *Mitnagdim*, Reform and Modern Orthodox Jews, Israelis and Diaspora Jews, even some National Religious Jews who have begun to question their own Zionist convictions. This work also explains how a commitment to the Torah forms the common denominator for religious opposition to Zionism. Most of the critics are rabbis who judge all aspects of Zionism according to Judaic criteria they consider eternal. What distinguishes those whose views are represented in this book from all other opponents of Zionism (Shatz) is the centrality of Torah commandments and values in their assessment of Zionism and Israel.

This book draws extensively on the rich tradition of rabbinical thought. In Jewish life, the title of rabbi need not be a position or an occupation but is a sign of Judaic scholarship. The wealth and variety of views and interpretations that have come to typify Judaism over the last two centuries, as well as its much older institutional decentralization, make it imperative to present this very diversity, even at the risk of an occasional repetition.

Jewish tradition holds that the only way to influence someone else's behavior is through love and respect. However, the rejection of Zionism is often interpreted as an act of treachery toward the Jewish people. The rabbis of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (2001a), in London, clearly formulate the dilemma: "We seem to have to choose between loyalty to our people and loyalty to God. Did not the Prophets love their people? Yet they castigated its leadership. Did anybody ever love the Jewish people more passionately than Jeremiah? Yet he condemned their sins — and for that very reason — all the more passionately." Indeed, the detractors of Zionism are often passionate; some go as far as to diabolize both Zionism and the state that emerged from it.

The pious Jews who publicly criticize Zionism believe that they are obliged to do so for two imperious reasons spelled out in Jewish tradition. The first of these is to prevent desecration of the name of God. And since the State of Israel often claims to be acting on behalf of all the world's Jews, and even in the name of Judaism, these Jews feel they must explain to the public, and primarily to non-Jews, the falsehood of this pretension. The second commandment is to preserve human life. By exposing the Judaic rejection of Zionism, they hope to protect Jews from the outrage they believe the State of Israel has generated among the nations of the world. They work to prevent turning the world's Jews into hostages of Israeli policies and their consequences. They insist that the State of Israel be known as the "Zionist State" and not the "Jewish State."

This attempt to dissociate the destiny of the Jewish people from the fate of the State of Israel belongs to a much broader set of issues that extends well beyond the limits of Jewish history. Defining identity as distinct from state

institutions is a constant concern of millions of human beings. The Jews have demonstrated that a people can preserve its identity over the course of more than two millennia without a state of its own and in conditions often threatening its very physical survival. Has the emergence of Zionism and the State of Israel so transformed the Jewish people as to bring its unique history to an end? Could it be that Israel, in the light of Jewish tradition, is not at all Jewish?

After sketching out a brief history of Zionism (Chapter 1) and the way in which it has transformed the Jewish identity (Chapter 2), we compare how Jewish tradition and Zionist ideology view messianism and the Land of Israel (Chapter 3). The Judaic legitimacy of the use of force is compared with the ideas and the reality of the Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel for more than a century (Chapter 4). The political and economic hegemony established by the Zionists during the first half of the twentieth century and the proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948 created new challenges for practicing Jews. Is it licit for them to collaborate with Zionist organizations? Are they permitted to recognize the state and to contribute to maintaining the new political entity? Chapter 5 offers a broad overview and analysis of the different positions articulated around the question of collaboration.

The State of Israel was proclaimed in the long shadow of the Shoah,² which continues to be part of Israeli collective consciousness and political life. Chapter 6 compares the place of the Shoah in Zionist ideology with the lessons several eminent rabbis draw from the Shoah and its connections with Zionism. Chapter 7 presents several critical views of Israel's place in Jewish continuity, in the project of messianic redemption and in the emergence of a "new anti-Semitism."

The diversity of opinions and positions characteristic of Jewish life over the last two centuries — and which this book aspires to lay before readers — should help the reader distinguish between Judaism and Zionism, and thus undermine the myths and beliefs on which anti-Semitism continues to thrive.

Notes

1. For terms shown in italics (first usage), please consult the glossary.
2. A Hebrew term meaning "total annihilation," Shoah is more appropriate than the biblical term "holocaust," which has a positive connotation as a burnt offering to God.