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*Seminar on World Jewry and the Yom
Kippur War*

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

Israel and the Jewish People

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The events of the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath are so traumatic, that we do not yet have the mental equanimity to assess the situation in the psychological calm requisite for such judgments. Perhaps an halakhic analogy is apt: the *avel* (mourner after the deceased has been buried) is expected to grieve over a situation which he then begins to perceive and perhaps even understand. But the *onen* (mourner before interment) is released from all religious obligations to mourn because he is assumed to be so stunned that he has not absorbed the gravity of his predicament and its implications. Nevertheless, certain moods have already made themselves felt.

Reactions of Intellectuals

Among the intellectuals, in which group I include the more thoughtful American journalists, the moral issue appears to have three aspects. Some have been beguiled by Arab arguments, and build their case around earlier insults to Arab manhood and dignity, the need to acknowledge the national aspiration of the Palestinians, and the imperative to return territories won by military action. Underlying this is the question of the legitimacy of the Jewish claim to a national homeland in the Middle East. A second group is amoralistic, preferring to deal with the political issues purely on a pragmatic basis, with the major consideration being America's national interest, however that interest may be defined. A third group dismisses the amoralist position as untenable and as inconsistent with American foreign policy over the years, and sees Israel as mostly or altogether in the right.

I suspect that a good part of the uncharacteristic silence of the intellectuals derives from their acute dilemma

regarding the Third World. In their own way, intellectuals can be more conformist than *hoi polloi*. They are waiting to see how their colleagues will react to the astounding conduct of the non-aligned nations who have solidly joined forces with the Arabs. Third World nations became the *cause celebre* of liberal intellectuals because they were poor and weak. Now they suddenly act out of motives that are as cynical as those of any of the great powers.

Among intellectuals with a positive attitude toward Judaism, the deliberations in the United Nations and the fading away of West European support have proved a blow to conventional (or "traditional") American Jewish liberalism. This liberalism formerly looked askance at nationalisms as such, and assumed rather romantically that collectivity somehow does not possess the faults of its constituent parts: the United Nations, as the "Family of Man," will be the secular analogue of the prophet Elijah as the harbinger of the Messiah. But the ugly scenes in this vindictive and loveless "Family" have dealt a severe blow to political optimism. A sense of loneliness, deep and penetrating, has set in.

The same facts seem to have a different effect on American Jewish intellectuals less favorably predisposed to Israel in the past. The Yom Kippur War is seen as having made everything more uncertain than ever. Israel may not be viable and American Jews may no longer be as secure as they were. The ghost of American anti-Semitism has never really been laid to rest, despite the protestations of many native American Jews that they never experienced anti-Semitism. There is real concern that the energy crisis and inflation will result in a severe recession, bringing the anti-Semitic worms out of the woodwork and negating the accomplishments of American Jews since World War II. If this is indeed the case, such intellectuals will, I believe, abandon all support of Israel.

Israel's Image

For the intellectuals as well as for everyone else, however, there is another element to be considered that is more psychological and subtle than the issues adumbrated so far. The Yom Kippur War was for Jews a trauma of the order

that Vietnam was for most Americans. This psychological, and perhaps spiritual, issue revolves around the question of image and the values that feed it and flow from it. I do not believe that this is the only or even the most important issue, but it is so significant that to ignore it would be irresponsible.

Heretofore, many friends of Israel of all faiths have had a somewhat ambivalent attitude to the State. On a conscious level, there was delight in Jewish self-assertion and pride, and admiration for the tough Israel-born sabra. People took vicarious pleasure in his self-confidence, brashness, even his rudeness. The *galut* mentality with its timidity, self-abnegation, and passion for invisibility, had for so long been a burden and a shame, that the successful effort of Zionists deliberately to change that image and that reality was applauded.

On a more unconscious level, however, things were not always quite that clear. In an occasional article, in a snatch of intimate conversation, one could sense a pervasive uneasiness, particularly on the part of certain Jews. Was it merely that the *galut* mentality was causing mental pain as it was being extracted and replaced by the image of the new *Homo Israeli*? Perhaps, and perhaps something more than that. A number of factors seem to have contributed to this inner malaise. There was an unexpressed fear that the bubble would burst, and the inexorable numerical superiority of the Arabs and the underlying anti-Semitism of the Christian West would eventually join forces, rise, and take revenge. There was apprehension that Israeli braggadocio was too extravagant and would unnecessarily provoke resentment. There was an uncomfortable feeling that the Jews, who had always protested militarism in American politics, who had always been hypersensitive to the influence of the military in government, were now passively accepting a situation in Israel in which military officers were taking command in the highest levels of government and industry. This discomfort was not allayed by the knowledge that Israel's was largely a civilian army, that many of its most distinguished leaders were scholars, that, in Israel's awkward and ponderous bureaucracy, the army was perhaps the most efficient organization. There was, too, an annoyance at the inversion of

traditional Jewish values such as the abhorrence of bloodshed, the reluctance to rely on force alone, or at the very least, the aversion to glorifying the arms and weapons instead of the achievements of the mind, the heart, and the spirit.

It is these diverse and yet related feelings that emerged almost angrily when the Arab surprise attack "demythologized" the popular image of Israel. The later successful counterattack by the Israelis, no matter how brilliant, did not make up for the sudden feeling that we had all been "taken." Jews began to look back wistfully to their youth, ended just a month or two earlier, when it seemed that everything was so certain, so clear, so secure. Dying illusions are painful, and also enraging.

Suddenly on Yom Kippur more than one American Jew became sharply aware of these and related questions. What was all that rhetoric about relying on "our own strength"? Had independence for Israel become not merely a non-negotiable national value, worth every sacrifice, but an ideological fixation and a theological absolute, in an age when even great powers have to depend upon each other for survival, when mighty nations are often reduced to diplomatic sycophancy? This resentment—focused as much on oneself and one's own gullibility as on Israel—of course exaggerated matters, overlooked the pressure of historical circumstances, generalized too much, and lacked intellectual sophistication and analytic depth. But it was real—it still is—and may be a major psychological underpinning for the standoffishness of many intellectuals, and for the distress of even those who rallied to the flag and labored zealously with other Jews for Israel.

One can, of course, interpret these originally inchoate feelings less charitably and more cynically, and discover in American Jews, particularly intellectuals, an inner resentment of Israeli assertiveness and pride. This would attribute to American Jews, still entangled in the tentacles of their old *galut* complex, a sub-conscious jealousy of the martial components of the Israeli charisma. Such an assertion may have only a measure of validity; but it is no less a fact for being psychological and irrational.

This erroneous and unrealistic image projected by Israel represents not only a public-relations failure (which it is

because the one-sided view neglects so many of the human and constructive features of the State), but also an educational disaster of vast proportions. What is needed is a profound reordering of priorities in creating a new conception of what the Israeli would like to be, a model for his own future development. The answer, I believe, lies in the direction of a synthesis of the new Israeli dignity of regained nationhood with the pioneering spirit and moral commitment of early Zionism, and these, above all, integrated into the continuum of the historic spiritual values of the Jewish tradition.

We can afford nothing less, because the present image can only bring us grief—witness the ludicrous “imperialism” charge so seriously and solemnly hurled at us by otherwise intelligent people. Daniel Elazar has observed that many Diaspora Jews, having lost faith in God and Torah, have begun to apotheosize the State of Israel. I subscribe to his assertion of the existence of this “Israelolatry.” We have contributed to this dangerous attitude which has made the State an end in itself. In true religious fashion, its worshipers have attributed to their idol the qualities of power, wisdom, and benevolence to an absolute degree. Like all objects of faith, Israel has been exalted beyond criticism. The danger is that, ultimately, the idol will be found to have clay feet. And when that happens, the devotees will blame not their own gullibility but the limitations and inadequacy of the idol.

The figure of David has often been conjured up as the historical model or metaphor for the new Jew of Israel. It is a good symbol, provided it takes David in the fullness in which he appears both in the Bible and in the Jewish oral tradition. Little David confronting Goliath is not an incorrect image. But it is inadequate. David was the fighter and the king, but also the composer of psalms. David had not only a slingshot, but a harp. He was soldier and poet, fighter and musician, a sinner who was manly enough to accept criticism and change his ways, a brave warrior who was not ashamed to be afraid and trusted in a Higher Force, a general who prayed, a student of Torah and of political sophistication, and a man of firmness and moral magnanimity.

It is this traditional image which inspires Orthodox Jewry in all its sub-groupings. Their response to the crisis may

help illuminate the wider spectrum of American Jewish feelings.

Positions in American Orthodoxy

Orthodox circles in the United States experienced a remarkable identification with Israel no matter what disagreements individual religious groups or individuals may have had with Israeli policy or society, and no matter how bitter their previous frustrations. On Yom Kippur day, political and religious differences with regard to Israel faded and all religious Jews, whether Agudah, Mizrachi, or unaffiliated, showed genuinely deep concern, worry, and a desire to help in every way possible.

Yet, despite this feeling of solidarity with Israel in its time of crisis, almost all religious groups experienced a reaction similar to the disaffection of the intellectuals. It might be called an alliance of the religious right and the political left in decrying the excessive pride that has come to be associated with Israeli statehood. The attitude is one against which Moses warned at the threshold of Israel's entry into Canaan:

Then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. . . . And thou say in thy heart: "*My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.*" But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto thy fathers. . . .¹

It is this Biblical exhortation—and it is surely a fundamental of the whole religious *Weltanschauung* of Judaism—that makes the oft-repeated assertions that "we can rely only on our own strength" sound so abrasive and sacrilegious, even blasphemous. Traditional Judaism is by no means pacifist, but it rejects arrogance and self-assertion which ascribe power and success to arms alone.

Religious Jews were upset when the Declaration of Independence of Israel gave only begrudging acknowledgment to the Deity in veiled reference to Him as the "Rock of

1. *Deut.*, 8: 14, 17, 18.

Israel" (*Tzur Yisrael*), but it was forgiven, or at least accepted, in the turmoil of those difficult days. The Six Day War inspired the whole people, and religious Jews saw the hand of Providence at work. In those heady days, the issues were clear, the victory astounding, and the return to Jerusalem certainly lifted events out of the stream of ordinary, every-day history. Secularists who could not bring themselves to speak of "miracles," except metaphorically, at least testified to the uniqueness of the events of 1967.

Unfortunately, the sense of national joy and thanksgiving quickly evaporated. Maybe it is in the nature of things that such levels of religious exaltation or exquisite historic awareness must soon fade as the routines of life take over and clamor for attention. But even before the Yom Kippur War, some of the poetry and mystical charm began to vanish. Not all of it was the result of natural attrition. Humble gratitude gave way to a much less noble interpretation of the events of the war. Israeli military men who came to speak to American Jews reveled in "demythologizing" the victory and reserving full credit to *Zahal* for all the accomplishments of the 1967 war. Not Providence, not faith, not luck, not accident, but *Zahal's* superiority in power and generalship gained the victory. There was also the shameless public polemic of the generals, some of whom declared there never was a threat of massacre prior to June 1967, that all fears of another Holocaust by the Arab armies were propaganda, that the Army was in control of the situation all along. Not only the poetry and the magic, the miracle and the exaltation, but even the sense of relief (and perhaps even justice of our cause) were stolen from us retroactively. Israel's power and the might of its hand have begotten for us not wealth, but confusion and resentment—and an image as unattractive as it is unrealistic. It was unattractive both to intellectuals and to religious Jews, although no one really bothered to talk about it. But when the Yom Kippur War showed it to be unrealistic—as well as highly dangerous—these simmering sentiments came to the fore in both disparate circles. Perhaps a good lesson for the future, when with the help of God, peace and security return to Israel, is for Israel to keep its generals and colonels and majors at home or in service, and send other kinds of spokesmen for Israel to the communities of the Diaspora.

Theological Responses

In the attempts at formulating an interpretation of these events and integrating them into a theological framework, several divergent tendencies in the Orthodox community are beginning to appear. It must be stressed that, as of this time, some six months after the outbreak of hostilities, the situation is still fluid and no crystallization of approaches has yet taken place. Our adumbration of theological responses must therefore be taken as tentative and provisional.

Three major reactions may be discerned: that of the non-Zionist Orthodox community, the one usually associated with the yeshivot; that of the religious Zionist community and its sympathizers; and that of Orthodox Jews who, despite associations with one or both of the above, take an independent approach. The writer belongs to this third group and will speak from that vantage.

The "right-wing" groups of the yeshiva and Hasidic worlds have never endowed the State with Messianic or pre-Messianic significance. The exception is the *Neturei Karta* group, whose major spokesman is Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the Satmarer Rebbe of Brooklyn. His demonological interpretation of Zionist and Israeli history paradoxically does invest the State with a perverse negative Messianic function: the State, as the creation of the Zionists, is an arrogant usurpation of the divine prerogative, for God alone can usher in the redemption; the State is thus a diabolical invention tempting the people of Israel away from true faith, hence impeding the coming of the Messiah. I elaborated on this in "The Ideology of the *Neturei Karta*—According to the Satmarer Version."² Nevertheless, the stunning events of both 1967 and 1973 have engendered a considerable amount of Messianic speculation, more evident in the general community than in official leadership.

There are groping efforts to explain the events of 1973—especially the superpower confrontation—as the beginning of the apocalyptic cataclysm that tradition predicts as the prelude to the coming of the Messiah. There was much talk abroad in these circles of "The War of Gog and Magog" being at hand, and not only *Ezekiel* and *Daniel* but a number of

2. *Tradition*, Fall 1971.

kabbalistic texts were found to contain prophetic hints of current events.

Several works elaborating these "signs" have recently been published in Israel and have had a rather wide currency. The two most notable are by Shabbatai Shilo and Chaim Shevili. In 1970, Shilo published a short book with a long title, *The Redemption and Eternity—Happy is He Who Waits for and Reaches the Days of 1973*. The outbreak of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 was considered little short of amazing, confirming his designation of 1973 as the decisive year in the Messianic drama centering around Israel's refusal to surrender Jerusalem, thus provoking an international military expedition against the Holy City. The invading army, composed of Russians and Arabs, was to conquer Jerusalem. Then the miracle, precipitated by an earthquake, was to have occurred—the divine intervention on behalf of Israel and the appearance of the Messiah. Shilo designated Hanukkah, December 1973, as the height of the war against Jerusalem. (In his defense one must cite the "tolerance of error" of one year that he reserves for himself.)

Chaim Shevili long ago predicted that 1948 would be a fateful year in the process of redemption. In 1935 he published his *Vision of Life*, in which he calculated that the Temple would be rebuilt in 1948-49. The founding of the State in 1948 was sufficient to establish his credentials. In 1964, his *Book of Calculations of the Redemption According to the Book of Daniel and the Writings of the Gaon of Vilna and Rabbi Isaac Luria and Chapters on the Dates of the Creation* pointed to 1967 as the pivotal date in the Messianic redemption. Naturally, the Six Day War lent his thesis considerable credibility.

While most leading rabbis and heads of yeshivot have refused to endorse such Messianic speculations, at least publicly, the sense of crisis and frustration has kept these issues alive, anxiety giving rise to anticipation. The eruption of the recent war on the holy day of Yom Kippur itself has understandably underscored the Messianic nature of the war to those predisposed to such interpretations. I do not know, however, if such a tendency will develop further, for the following reasons. First, there has always been an inclination

to identify the vicissitudes of contemporary Jewish life as the catastrophic fulfillment of prophecies of pre-Messianic agonies. In our own lifetime there have been several major confrontations that have evoked similar theological speculations—from World War I through World War II, to the Cold War between the nuclear powers. Second, the nuclear war that is part of the contemporary version of the Gog-and-Magog scenario, may, hopefully, not take place. Third, such an ascription of pre-Messianic cataclysm to events concerning the State paradoxically invests the State of Israel with at least some element of Messianic redemption which these groups themselves vehemently deny. Sooner or later the contradiction must become apparent.

The above approach and the one following have one thing in their favor, and that is the advantage of a ready-made pattern, exegetically elaborated, into which historic events can be integrated. The ability to relate the twists and turns of an impulsive and sometimes convulsive history to a foreordained process, by imposing a rational structure on otherwise reckless and chaotic events, decreases the anxiety of the unknown future.

The second response to Israel in Orthodox circles is that of the religious Zionists, who subscribe to the thesis that the State of Israel represents a definite and crucial stage in the Messianic process. This is identified as the *at'halta di'geulah*, the "Beginning of the Redemption."³

More accurately, the founding of the State is considered a key event *within* the *at'halta di'geulah*, the genesis of which is located in the first agricultural resettlement of the Yishuv.⁴ Rabbi Akiva Yosef Shlesinger had already expressed his consciousness of living in *at'halta di'geulah* in 1873;⁵ and thirteen years earlier Rabbi M.N. Kahanow, noticing prosperous Jewish orchards in the vicinity of Jaffa, declared this a sign

3. The term first appears in the Talmud, *Megillah* 17b, where, however, it clearly refers to personal salvation rather than to the collective political redemption of Israel; see Rashi, *ad loc.* The notion of the beginning of the Messianic redemption is more accurately called *ha-ketz hameguleh*, the "revealed end (of days)," referring to *Sanhedrin* 98a.

4. Rabbi A.I. Kook, *Iggerot Hareiyah*, Part III, in a letter dated 1918.

5. *Kollel Ha'ivrim*, ed. 1955, p. 19.

of the "Beginning of the Redemption."⁶ For those inclined to interpret the early Zionist movement in such redemptive terms, the establishment of the State was embraced as a political validation and vindication of the Messianism implicit in Zionism. The remarkable conjunction of the declaration of statehood and the Holocaust that immediately preceded it without doubt lent credence to such exuberance. The survival of the fledgling state and its growing prosperity was further confirmation of the new plateau that had been reached in *at'halta di'geulah*, and the events of the Six Day War were the miraculous revelation of what the believers had known all along: the State of Israel was the herald of the Messianic Kingdom.

The setbacks of 1973 now become quite problematical for those who persisted in ascribing a Messianic dimension to the State. It is clear that the traditional Jewish view insists upon empirical criteria by which Messianic claims may be tested. Maimonides codified these criteria in his *Yad, Hilkhot Melakhim*, and Nahmanides made ample use of these empirical standards in his polemics against Pablo Christiani. If, therefore, one affirms a Messianic role for the State, he must explain the reverses of the Yom Kippur War. It is reasonable to assume that if success proves the truth of a proposition—if 1948 and 1967 are the validations of the Messianic claims for the State of Israel—then failures prove the opposite.

Not many of the advocates of this school have responded to the challenge of the Yom Kippur War to clarify their thinking. In the United States there appear to be two contradictory assessments of the Israeli performance in the 1973 war. The first reaction is one that has an air of unreality about it: despite the setbacks, the military performance of *Zahal* was so brilliant as to keep intact its reputation for invincibility. The contemporary Messianic calculus has its own logic: losses become gains and reversals become triumphs. At a time when leaders of the military themselves rue the day they allowed the myth of Israeli military invincibility to gain currency, the Messianists will not allow "invincibility" to give up the ghost, fearing, as well they

6. *Sha'alu Shelom Yerushalayim*, Odessa, 1861.

might, that even a minor defeat invalidates, at the very least, the evidence they had previously adduced from earlier victories for the Messianic nature of the State.

The second reaction is more compelling in its reasonableness by subjecting the theory to logical criticism. The Messiah will not come suddenly, the Talmud states, but *kimah kimah*, bit by bit, like the rising of dawn. So the State, as the political harbinger of the Messianic redemption, cannot be expected to score an unbroken string of triumphs without occasional slackening or discomfiture. There is a commendable modesty to this answer, and it allays somewhat the uneasy feeling that the *at'halta di'geulah* theory is a form of triumphalism. This may be one of the theologically salutary results of the Yom Kippur War. But while it may be acceptable to those who seek a more naturalistic and rationalistic interpretation of the belief in the Messiah, it does not any longer allow one to use successes, when they arise, as evidence of the imminence of the Messiah's arrival. To do so would be to make the whole theory of the "Beginning of Redemption" an unfalsifiable thesis and hence of questionable validity. We are then thrown back upon faith—in itself no tragedy—rather than history, in supporting our feeling of experiencing the "Beginning of the Redemption."

A third approach, with which this writer identifies, takes exception to the apocalyptic-salvific versions of current history as illustrated by the two theories described, especially the second. Some criticisms have already been mentioned and more can be added. Most important, while searching for Messianic clues has been a psychologically understandable and spiritually justifiable endeavor, the development of a formal ideology that asserts dogmatically that we are in a specific stage of the Messianic redemption may well be an act of presumption. Are those of us who are devoid of the gift of prophecy privy to divine secrets? Even to Moses, the greatest of all prophets, it was told, "Thou shalt see My back, but My face shall not be seen."⁷

God's plans may be known to man in all their magnificent detail and moral fullness only retrospectively. We

7. *Exodus*, 33:23.

may, at best, "see My back." But we have no clairvoyance into the future and even the present is concealed from us if it is considered as part of a continuum whose culmination lies in the future. The assertion that the State is *reshit tzemihat geulatenu*—another term for *at'alta di'geulah*—as so many Israelis and Diaspora Jews declare in their "Prayer for the Peace of the State of Israel," entails a certain spiritual arrogance, as if we have lifted the veil into the mysterious *eschaton* and wrested from the Messiah his deepest secret: the time of his arrival. To read the present as a historian of the future, instead of as a journalist, is the prerogative of the prophet, provided God has shared His secrets with him. Ordinary humans tread on dangerous ground when they purport to view events from a divine perspective.

I wish to make it clear that I do not *deny* the Messianic character of our times or of the State. To do so with any conviction would be to commit the same sin of presumption. What I am saying is that I *do not know*, and that I believe this form of skepticism or Messianic agnosticism is the only valid spiritual position under the present circumstances. Since the Messianic quality of present-day events is not empirically demonstrable or verifiable, the wisest way for one who is committed to the traditional belief (or, more accurately, anyone of the various traditional beliefs) in the Messiah is to "bracket" the question, as phenomenologists would say.

History bears eloquent testimony to the grief that comes in the wake of premature Messianic expectations and unchecked eschatological fervor. Professor Gershom Scholem makes the point that of all the cornerstones of traditional Jewish theology, only the belief in redemption continues in full force. All the more reason for treating the supposed Messianic dimension of the State with a great deal of caution, there being no guarantees that secular pseudo-messianism is any less dangerous than the religious kind.

It must be granted that the coming of the Messiah is, by its nature, the kind of event that raises doubts, especially in the light of the history of false Messiahs, and that such skepticism can congeal into an automatic denial of any and all Messianic claims even where they might be legitimate. There is a certain amount of risk-taking that cannot be avoided. But mistakes,

even honest ones, can be made—witness Rabbi Akiva and his sponsorship of Bar Kokhba as the Messiah.

I prefer to view the events of our time as providential and not (necessarily) Messianic. I accept that the rebirth of the national homeland, after the vicissitudes of our history, and especially on the heels of the Holocaust was a “miracle,” in that it defied all predictability and probability.

I accept the State as an act of redemption, but not every redemption is necessarily Messianic. The terms here associated—at’halta, Messianic, pre-Messianic—must be reserved for that specific period of history which will culminate in the fulfillment of all the visions of the past—political autonomy, economic welfare, intellectual advancement, spiritual flowering, religious renaissance—climaxed by the leadership of a unique individual who will create these conditions and possess the leadership capacity to enable them to be enjoyed by the people of Israel, ushering in an era of peace and justice in the world. I am not trying to summarize the traditional Messianic beliefs as much as to isolate such a period from the normal, run-of-the mill, historical epoch. If we understand this, then what is to prevent us from experiencing non-Messianic redemptions, of various extents and scopes, in the course of Jewish history?

Neither *aliyah* nor solidarity of the Diaspora with Israel requires the apocalyptic-salvific hypothesis of the *at’halta di’geulah* advocates. On the contrary, the attribution of Messianic importance to the State leads, paradoxically, to two opposite and unfortunate conclusions: one, that the State, as a Messianic instrument, is beyond criticism, and hence its leaders can do no wrong; and two, that the State of Israel is disastrously delinquent in not living up to the high moral and religious standards one would expect of a Messianic state.

The Jewish commitment to the State of Israel does not require Messianic presuppositions. That commitment was forged in the fires of the crematoria; in the hatred of and indifference to Jews by the civilized countries of both West and East; in the Covenant, which has paradoxically allowed us to live without Eretz Israel for 2000 years—and for 2000 years has not let us give up our longing for it; in the knowledge that the realization of the Torah and the fulfillment of the Word of

God are more likely to be found in Israel than anywhere else on this globe. The State of Israel is the guarantee of Jewish survival today, whether or not it is a Messianic state.

For the Future

The suggested "bracketing" of the Messianic element by no means implies an abandonment of the belief in the coming of the Messiah. It asserts that the role of Israel in history is not exclusively linked at every point with the Messianic element. The Covenant speaks of God's *hester panim*—His turning away of His face from us—and *he'arat panim*, His smiling upon us. These Biblical categories, while less emotionally charged, may ultimately be more fruitful than exclusively Messianic terms in interpreting the great events of our times. *Hester panim* and *he'arat panim* are relational ideas, implying mutuality and reciprocity between God and Israel, the two partners in the Covenant. While a fuller development of this theme cannot be given here, I do suggest that these concepts will serve better than *at'halta di'geulah* as the parameters for a contemporary theological evaluation of Jewish history.

The Messiah is only the messenger of God. It is He, and He alone, who redeems. If He has chosen to redeem us and to restore us to the Land promised in the Covenant, it is a divine redemption. And a divine redemption is not that far inferior to a Messianic redemption.

As I mentioned, the common religious reaction to Israel's national psychology, precipitated by the Yom Kippur War, does not end in the criticism of "my strength and the might of my hand." Religious groups, especially the religious right, so long critical of Israel's illusion of self-sufficiency and its rhetoric of national self-assertion, have already begun to articulate a constructive criticism of the prevailing mood of the country: its sadness, depression, and pessimism. They are consistent with their premises: just as national bluster was a symptom of lack of *emunah* (faith) when the news was good, so the despair and depression and sense of foreboding today are equally inconsistent with *emunah*. If our previous error was an unwarranted trust in our "power and might of our

hand," our present mistake is forgetting that "Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."⁸ Both arrogance and despair have the same provenance: a lack of faith.

What the religious groups are saying, then, is that it is time to get on with the people's business, to do what has to be done whether pleasant or not, but to do it in the humble confidence that, God willing, we will prevail.

It is a consoling and comforting summons, and one that makes good sense.

8. *Psalms*, 121:4.