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THE MITZVOT, THE MESSIAH AND THE TERRITORIES

I

It is one of the fascinating and perplexing aspects of Israeli public life that the issues which agitate great controversy seem invariably to resolve around the destiny of the state, while people merely sigh about the critical day to day problems. Ultimately, the latter seem to stir little overt anxieties; indeed, one senses an almost stoic trust in the ability of those who must deal with them to do so successfully. Thus, observers have remarked on the almost uncanny calm that prevailed here before the Six Day War, on the atmosphere of somber confidence that the somehow magnificently efficient (and incredibly civilized) army would not fail to provide for the defense of the country.

On the other hand, and in blatant contradistinction to this curious calm, the post-war period has seen an unending and acrimonious furor over the at-the-moment theoretical question of the disposition of the held territories, a debate that features dogmatic and dramatic pronouncements on the nature of Zionism, the Biblical promises of redemption and the ideal shape of the peace that will, someday, descend upon this troubled region.

In short, Israelis tend to regard concrete political problems with the serenity that men usually reserve for philosophy, while they treat "philosophic" problems with the nervous intensity usually found in politics. The man on the street, when asked how he views the increasing Soviet penetration into the area,

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

the headaches occasioned by the economy, or the latest threatening speech by Nasser, is most likely to calmly respond: "*yihyeh be'seder*, it will turn out all right"; he is, however, likely to have fiery opinions on the sanctity of Jerusalem or the priority of peace — even while he knows full well that not a single Arab state has declared its willingness to make a meaningful peace under any rational conditions whatever.

To a large degree, this was always so in Israel. Controversy in this society has a peculiarly spiritual intensity; at the same time it is something of a pastime, almost (*l'havdil*) like archeology. It is both playful, yet terribly serious. It concerns itself with making the present situation meaningful via the search for historic roots and conjecture about future hopes. For the past twenty years, the basic issue in Israel has been physical survival in the face of Arab threats, but the most prominent *public question* during this period has been — "What is a Jew?" Survival is more or less serenely entrusted to the government and army; the people prefer to debate whether Judaism is a religion or a nationality. The most pressing problems are little discussed but are, amazingly, successfully resolved, while the issues of public debate, always somewhat Platonic in nature, never seem to really get anywhere. That they are nevertheless kept alive and debated with unflagging gusto, shows how playful they are — and how serious.

Public figures, too, are judged not "merely" by their concrete achievements but by their views of the Jewish past and future. The appreciation bestowed on Ben-Gurion for his feats of statesmanship is expressed almost academically, but his thesis that only six hundred families left Egypt at the Exodus is (in these matters, the only tense is the existential present) hotly defended or denounced. The brilliant strategy of former Chief of Staff Yitzchak Rabin is a source of calm pride, but his address on Mount Scopus in which he dealt on the nature of the Jewish people and its army almost evokes tears. And Moshe Dayan is not liked or disliked for his administration of the territories (which is considered, almost unanimously, brilliant) but for his alleged views on "the future of the territories." (He is, accordingly, liked and disliked most cordially.)

It makes little difference that the debate about the future of "the territories" is, politically speaking, a monologue, and that none of the Arab countries would today make a formal and secure peace with Israel on even the most "dovish" Israeli terms. The debate goes on, playfully, seriously. Not a week goes by without some public discussion of "the territories," without either the appearance of some large and much-signatured manifesto in the press demanding "not to give back an inch," or an interview with some prominent professor or novelist pronouncing his utter disinterest in "the territories," without lectures, symposia and demonstrations *ad nauseum*. The Arabs in the territories as well as to an outside observer, generally misunderstand these debates, which are couched in the language of politics. They fail to understand that the discussions are basically philosophical and deal with questions of almost abstract principle. The Arabs sometimes fail to grasp that the "hawks," in demanding "the realization of the historic dream of the Jewish people in its entire homeland" are not conscious of having any practical political designs upon them, and are, likely as not, more sensitive to Arab feelings in daily political intercourse than the "doves." (Recently, when members of the maximalist 'Land of Israel Movement' were accused of favoring the gradual expulsion of the Arabs, Natan Alterman, one of the most articulate members of the movement, expressed shock at the charge which had been levelled, he said, to libel and discredit his movement. He was not, he said, in principle opposed to the idea of an eventual "population transfer" for those who desired it, but that would obviously become possible only under conditions of a most sublime peace. Dr. Yisrael Eldad, the man who had been specifically charged with advocating an expulsion, did not, Alterman wrote, speak for his movement. Soon thereafter, Dr. Eldad, Israel's most extreme maximalist, granted an extensive interview to *Ha'Maariv* in which he stated that the imputation of such a idea to him was "a lie." It is, incidentally, no accident that the main spokesmen for both the minimalist and maximalist movements tend to be professors, novelists and rabbis, while those who wish "to wait and see" are, often as not, professional politicians.) As for the most "dovish" people who, it

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

would appear, can hardly wait to return the territories, it must not be thought that they mean to terminate the occupation in the foreseeable future.

The entire issue has, like former center-pieces of Israeli public life, taken on the features of a too-much-performed play. But this play, unlike some of the others, is definitely a hit. One knows all the lines in advance, but there is always something stirring about it. When the play is performed with a full cast, as for example, on the floor of the Knesset, the most polished lines are spoken by the actors hugging the right and left wings of the stage. In every discussion these deliver learned, routine, but still passionate expositions on the problems of Israeli security, Arab demography, Zionist history and Jewish redemption, in ascending spiritual order and descending order of concrete political significance. There is hardly a child in Israel who is not yet versed in the main arguments. The air is thick with self-contained, logical, but curiously windowless constructions pertaining to the sanctity (or utter insignificance) of holy places; the perversity of the "cosmopolitans" (or "chauvinists") and the birth-rates of Arabs on the West Bank (or future *aliyah* waves from the West and Russia).

When pressed to the wall, both of the clearly defined groups (i.e., those who would return everything and those who would return nothing) begin to re-define their positions, in varying degrees of consciousness and self-consciousness. Almost all maximalists would agree to concessions in exchange for "a real peace" (including treaties, open borders, embassies, free trade, etc.); almost all minimalists agree that there can be no withdrawal without peace — "and, it must be granted, Jerusalem is a special case." The maximalists, in practical terms, wish for Israel to proceed as though peace had already been achieved on their terms, especially through settlement of the territories. As for the minimalists, their concern is that nothing be done to change the *de facto* situation in the territories, changes that, they fear, might create psychological or political impediments when the hoped-for day of negotiation dawns. But the former privately (though not always publicly) admit that the immediate task of controlling the territories requires tact and restraint. As for the latter, they

pretend not to notice the settlements on the Golan Heights and in the Jordan Valley that the immediate task of security requires.

The fact is that a calculated and too-drastic change of the present situation would jeopardize its relative stability by posing a direct provocation to the Arabs, while not changing it at all would be interpreted as timidity and would invite insurrection. *Hazman ose et shelo*, as the Israelis say; time makes demands and creates situations which an intelligent ideological vision can hope to channel but never to completely control. In this connection, the laying of telephone lines between Schechem and Haifa is more significant than abstract discussions on *Eretz Yisrael Hashhelemah*. The telephone lines were laid not primarily to make Israelis out of the West Bank Arabs, but rather for the sensible reason that people, forced to live together by circumstances, must be able to talk to one another. Obviously, no one who wishes to return the territories is *against* the laying of telephone lines to Schechem. Likewise, if a certain professional group of East Jerusalem joins an Israeli professional association, it is not because they are Israelis but because they are businessmen. Their protestations that they are and remain Jordanians and that the incorporation of Jerusalem into Israel is a scandal, are freely offered and casually accepted. But they are reminded that complaint is neither here nor there and that it is for statesmen to discuss, not for businessmen. Today, Israeli Jews and non-Israeli Arabs mix in the cities of Israel, but this reflects not ideological imperialism, but the demands of common sense and a distaste for apartheid. The maximalists and their opponents may be either pleased or disgruntled at this or that development and may, through various devices, encourage, discourage or occasionally manipulate a social or political situation, but they cannot ignore the complexities of society and politics. Thus, for example, the establishment of *kibbutzim* on the Golan Height furthers the interests of the maximalists, but the minimalists are not blind to the security requirements of Israel and can oppose such settlements only by advocating longer stretches of reserve duty for more men in order to patrol the Heights. Those who would oppose civilian settlements would, in our present situation, have to support Golan military camps. But, obviously, this is the last

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

thing that will arouse the enthusiasm of the minimalist.

What happens when ideological notions of religious goals are treated as simple questions of political ends is well illustrated by the much-discussed resettlement of Hebron. This settlement, designed to "redeem in practice" the city of the patriarchs has, to date, probably complicated the task of the military occupation. After having spent several months in Hebron's Park Hotel, the settlers were given quarters in the military compound overlooking the city where, as one reporter noted, their status was more that of wards of the military government than redeemers of what is, after all, an Arab city. This is not to say that Jews should not have the right to live in Hebron which is, no matter what its demographic composition, a holy city; one, furthermore, in which there has been no Jewish population since 1929 because of a cruel pogrom. If, as is likely, a Yeshiva is re-established there, it will perhaps serve to teach the local population that pogroms do not (or should not) create social and religious facts. (For that matter, even if Hebron should, in some future settlement, be returned to Jordan or given to a possible Arab Palestinian state, there is no reason why it should be, on that account, *Judenrein*.) But the highly ideological fashion in which the present settlement was undertaken is hardly likely to decrease the yearning of Arab Hebronites for a release from the Israeli occupation — indeed, it may even have aggravated the possibility of an eventual reconciliation.

II

To the extent that the entire dispute over the territories concerns itself with the immediate political problems of Israel and not only with its destiny, the argument is readily summed up, since it revolves around two concrete questions: security and demography. The maximalists claim, with justice, that it is far better to have the avowed enemies of Israel on the far side of the Suez Canal than in the Gaza Strip, and that the Jordan River is a better frontier than the ridges of Tulkarem, fifteen *kilometers* from Natanya and the sea. To this concrete political argument, the minimalists can answer only with the 'theoretical' (for the

moment, at least) vision of peace. In the event of this vision materializing, the latter maintain, the proximity of the Egyptians will no longer be threatening. But there is no peace, nor is there any immediate prospect of any agreement that will not be suicidal for Israel.

As for the minimalists, their objective "political" argument is the so-called demographic one. They point out the predictable inability of Israel to absorb the new Arab populations without losing its Jewish character. The million and a half Arabs now under Israeli jurisdiction enjoy an extraordinarily high birth rate while the Jewish birth rate is exceedingly low and can, even by the most strenuous educational efforts, be raised only slightly. It can therefore be foreseen, say the proponents of the "small Israel," that within two decades the Jews of Israel will be outnumbered in their own state. Against this "hard" (i.e., political) argumentation, the maximalists can only respond with the vision of large-scale *aliyah*. But this, unfortunately, is at the moment almost as remote as genuine peace. And so, looking at the argument from either side as a *political* issue, we are given one strong political point which can be countered only by a "visionary" one. And since security is the most important political consideration, the maximalists clearly have the upper hand. In the absence of peace, the argument remains playful.

III

But, if the casual observer, aware of the immediate political sterility of the debate, deduces that the argument, being somehow playful, is a mere game, he may be said to misunderstand the Jewish people, the nature of Jewish realism and idealism and the place of the State of Israel in that eternal Jewish quest for significance which made Zionism such a potent yet problematical expression of modern Jewish spirituality. It is, in short, to be doubted whether he comprehends the subtle relationship that obtains between the two poles of Jewish existence, Torah and the Messiah.

The Torah is both a yoke and a joy. *Shavuot* is the day of the giving, more than of the accepting of the Torah, and we

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

celebrate this festival with a wearying all-night vigil of study. Mount Sinai was raised over our heads and we were offered the choice of death or submission.¹ For the Jewish people there is thus no life without it, but our history records how difficult we found it to live *with* the Torah. From the days in the desert when our forefathers nostalgically recalled the fish that they ate *free* in Egypt — “free of *mitzvot*,” explains the *Sifre*² — until the various movements of assimilation of our day, we encounter, again and again, the desire of Jews to be freed from the burden of their Jewish tasks. For the Torah is an ever-present task; it makes immediate demands at every moment of our lives, never relaxing its hold — and we are often sorely tempted to seek meaning in nostalgic romanticisms of the past or in future utopias (such as those of our revolutionary assimilationists) rather than in the present situation which demands, first and foremost, not the dream but the halakhah.

And yet, even while it is a burden, the Torah is a joy and a light. Once we bind ourselves to it wholly, it brings the eternal and Divine into our everyday existence. Through the Torah, we find the spiritual stamina to perform prosaic tasks unprosaically. In the knowledge that God is to be found and obeyed in the everyday, the routine becomes sacred. When we live by the *mitzvot*, we realize that we have been blessed with a Torah of truth, through which everlasting life has been planted in our midst. This is the Torah that was given as though today, to give meaning and a redemptive quality to today's act. And then we recall that the Torah was not only imposed upon but also freely accepted by our forefathers and that the covenant was made not with our fathers alone but with each of us who is alive this day. And having realized this, we make God's Torah our own, never tiring of constant repetition, rejoicing on *Simkhat Torah* that we are privileged to begin it anew at the moment we have completed it.

The Torah is very serious and not at all playful; having a mountain held over one's head or freely entering into a solemn covenant with the Sovereign of the world is not a game. It is wearying with its incessant demands but, at the same time, the knowledge that the demands are God's and that it is fully within

our power to carry out His commandments makes it a source of courage and strength. Unlike the believer in Original Sin, whose social acts of righteousness are ridden with anxiety, for he knows that, actually, only God can do the right, the Jew rejoices and is tranquil in the knowledge that "It hath been *told unto thee*, O man, what is good . . ." (Micah 6:8)

But, while the Torah accords significance to the act, it is the waiting for the Messiah, the expectation of redemption, that gives meaning to history. Like the Torah, the vigil for the Messiah is very serious, since without redemption, the *mitzvah* might be ultimately absurd, a beautiful stitch in a non-existent tapestry. It is the promise that the entire world will some day see God's wonders just as we have "*seen the sounds*"³ of the Torah and witnessed His great deeds that assures us that the Word we have heard is not merely a delusion or an artful construction of our minds. Without the eventual coming of the Messiah, God's kingdom, which we accepted at the Red Sea, will always be foiled by Amalek. And we, the first subjects of the kingdom, will remain the citizens of an exotic principality, despised by "the Powers" for our seclusion and pretensions. Thus, as we make our way through history, from Titus to Auschwitz, armed only with the Torah that we have seen and that we hear, we wait to see, once again, God's clearly revealed Hand. And this time, all mankind, having seen His mighty deeds "will willingly receive the yoke of His sovereignty."

This vigil fills us with tension and anxiety. We must ask, in each epoch of darkness, How long, O Lord? In the ages of *Galut*, the song of redemption sung by our forefathers at the sea, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord," is transformed into the bitter plaint of Rabbi Yishmael's disciples: "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord — Who is *silent* as You are!"⁴ Our anxiety, our endless quest for the redemption, our futile calculations when the redeemer will come (in which we persist despite the fact that the Halakhah frowns on them) derives from the fact that the advent of the Messianic era, unlike the observance of the Torah, depends on the redeeming act of God. It is for us, through the Torah, to begin the work; we cannot, by our own powers, complete it.

Thus, though the festival on which we contemplate the future

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

redemption is "the season of our rejoicing," since we are certain that, as we read in the *Haftorah* of the first day, "God will be one and His name will be one," and all the nations will ascend, year by year, to prostrate themselves before the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of *Succot*,⁵ yet it is also the festival of sitting in huts, of wandering through the wilderness. "It is not without good cause that the book full of corroding doubt, Ecclesiastes, is assigned to be read at the Feast of Booths."⁶ For we realize that "everything having been heard," all that we can do is "to fear God and keep His commandments." But in the realm of the redemption for which we yearn, "God is in Heaven and you are on earth, therefore let your words be few."

But, because of this anxious waiting, the vision of the Messiah must also be somehow playful. Until he comes we, after all, have the Torah. And, in any case, we must remain sane. We must dream, but the Torah does not allow us to lose ourselves in dreams. In the words of Maimonides:

"No man knows how these events will occur until they have actually happened, for they are not clearly described by the prophets, and the sages have no tradition concerning them . . . One should not occupy oneself with the *aggadot* and *midrashim* dealing with these subjects and their like . . . for they lead neither to the fear of God nor to the love of Him. Neither should one calculate the dates . . . instead one should wait and believe in these matters generally as we have explained."⁷

We must wait for the Messiah with utmost seriousness, but we dare not sit idle while waiting. And we know that if we remove the element of playfulness, if we occupy ourselves with hypnotic seriousness in matters of Redemption, we may fall into a trance and awaken to the call of a false Messiah who will leave us naked, stripped bare of the Torah without which we cannot hope for the authentic redemption.

Thus it is that, while we celebrate the festival of the hope of redemption with a mingled joy and melancholy, the festival on which we were given a veiled inkling of God's redemptive power, when the king could not sleep and thus, Israel was spared, is both joyous — and comic. The joy of *Purim* has an element

of the absurd in it. True, it was a salvation but, after all, *Purim* is not *the* Redemption. Israel is still in *Galut*, its poor are still hungry, the ludicrous Ahashverosh, though he was an instrument of salvation, is still ludicrous, and he still sits on his throne. *Purim* is only a prelude and we, yearning for the full realization, to avoid crying, laugh. And, in the meanwhile, we continue to maintain our hold on the Torah, bestowing gifts upon the poor.

IV

It is in the intricate relationship between Torah and Redemption, and in the aspiration of the Jew to transform the Torah that is forced upon him into the Torah that he gladly accepts as his destiny,⁸ that both the nobility and the problematics of Zionism may be understood.

Zionism and the State of Israel represent, on the one hand, the response of the Jewish people to their fate. Deprived of security, of human dignity, often of their very lives in the lands of their dispersion, they have had, in our age as in ages past, no choice but to begin their perennial wanderings once again. The Jew was brought to *Eretz Yisrael*, as to America and Argentina, *al pi hadibbur* (following the Word of God), in the shadow of pogroms and Holocausts which threatened him with extinction. But for some of those who retraced their steps of *Eretz Yisrael*, there was the conscious decision to choose this particular refuge, because of the conscious hope that, in this land, their fate would be transfigured into a freely chosen and joyfully accepted destiny. They hoped, in Israel, to make the Torah, a light, a blueprint for a just society and a guiding pattern for an exhilarating Jewish experience, pointing the way towards ultimate redemption. They called upon their fellow Jews to escape the physical and spiritual fate that threatened in the *Galut*, believing that the demise of *Galut* existence would solve "the Jewish problem" of extermination and assimilation. And, whether articulately or not, they hoped that, with the change in the situation of the Jewish people, the world too would be "changed"⁹ — it would finally be enabled to transcend the tragedy of "la Condition humaine" and awaken to the Divine word: ". . . and He blessed them and called their

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

name Man . . ." (Genesis 5:2).

Yet, if Zionism is the great Messianic movement of our time, it is still not the Redemption; it is rather, whenever it remains loyal to the Jewish tradition, *an approach to the Torah for the sake of redemption*. And since, in our age of religious doubt and of the substitute enthusiasms of nationalism, it is often difficult (and *was* difficult, for some theoreticians) to maintain the distinction between a redemptive approach to Torah and a Torahless redemptiveness, Zionism must constantly struggle against the perverse pseudo-Messianism into which it can all too easily degenerate. Wishing to free itself from the *burden* of the Torah, it is tempted to reject the Torah itself. Wishing to lay the ground for redemption, and believing that the Messiah will only come to those who are spiritually free enough to receive him, it is tempted to free itself from the *mitzvot* which are no longer "necessary," since Zionism is the very redemption. The Torah is thus threatened to be replaced by a pseudo-Messiah whom we ourselves have brought. Man would, in this perversion, undertake to do God's work, and leave man's work, the *mitzvot*, to those benighted souls who refuse to extricate themselves from the bonds of an unnecessary fate. (On the popular level, this argument has it that "religion is good for Jews in *Galut* — we don't need it, for we have Israel.") And this Messiah, seemingly a liberator, enslaves the Jew and hold him fast in the grip of necessity. "The world" remains hopelessly and eternally unredeemed, since "we" are "the redeemer" and we happen to have neither the Divine power nor a Providential concern for the world's redemption. This unredeemed world will always be against us; therefore let us trust in our might. The nations are eternally anti-Semitic; therefore, let us be "proud" nationalists. Messianism becomes chauvinism; redemption becomes a real-estate affair. And ironically, the redemption moves further away, becomes more remote, because, without the Torah, man cannot realistically hope for salvation. A redemption brought by man alone, venturing forth without the Torah, simply heightens the tragedy of man's fate — he is repulsed by the sinister powers of the world and remains a wanderer in the desert of an unredeemed situation.

This lesson has already been taught to us by the father of

prophets:

“Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord, seeing it shall not prosper? . . . For there the Amalekite and the Canaanite are before you, and ye shall fall by the sword; forasmuch as ye turned back from following the Lord, and the Lord shall not be with you!’ But they presumed to go up to the top of the mountain; but the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. Then the Amalekite and the Canaanite . . . came down and smote them and beat them down, even unto Hormah.”¹⁰

Indeed, immediately after this tragic episode, God speaks to Moses, commanding the children of Israel to observe diverse commandments, *mitzvot hateluyot ba’aretz*, “when ye are come into the land of your habitations *which I will give unto you.*” The lesson to be derived from the dangers of self-redemption is not that the Jew should not observe those *mitzvot* that pave the way to God’s redeeming deed, as some of our theological polemicists would have it, but that, *in observing them*, we must guard against the corruption of Zionism that would betray the Torah in the name of a collective human redemption.

That the State of Israel has, on the whole, never been seriously tempted to commit itself or to succumb to this perversion of Zionism, may be attributed in part to the realization that, even in Israel, Jewishness has remained a fate and has required the performance of *mitzvot* that are “forced upon us.” The daily chores of defense and the absorption of immigrants under pressure constituted clearly halakhic tasks. The military situation in which we have found ourselves, and the circumstances from which our brethren in the ruins of Hitler’s Europe or in the ghettos of North Africa had to be extricated did not permit us to disband the army or to plan a slow and orderly *aliyah*; the mountain was held over our heads. Under these circumstances, soldiering has been a *mitzvah*, since suicide is forbidden; the ingathering, even under adverse conditions, is required, for Jewish fraternity is our fate.

But whatever the reason for the refusal of Israel to succumb to the disease to which it is most susceptible (and of which disturbing symptoms have appeared from time to time) the fact

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

is that, basically, Israeli Zionism has remained faithful to the principle (though not always, in our secular age, to the required detail or even to the formal theory) of Halakhah. And this is demonstrated by the phenomenon of "philosophically serene" politics which we noted at the beginning of our exploration. The Torah is still our burden, since we have no choice but to perform the daily deeds required by our situation, daily deeds such as building an army that will protect our existence, deeds that seem to have little in common with our Messianic dreams of peace and brotherhood, but which, we realize, are necessary to preserve us alive for the day of redemption. And because Zionism has had the conscious or unconscious goal of making the Torah a light, in its destined habitat, the Israeli did not merely build the army required by his fate — he made it a Jewish army, a civilized and humane one. Fated by his expulsion from other lands to set up a new society, he has attempted to build it with Jewish vision — to make it the kind of society in which, even before the coming of the Messiah, life can be an occasion of joy and self-realization.

The tasks that are forced upon us day by day, by the realities of our situation, have also illuminated, therefore, our way towards tomorrow. Even while the Torah remained a burden, it revealed its inner light. We have thus realized that, while waiting for the sight of God that will signal the redemption, we have His word — and that there is significance and reward in the prosaic day-by-day confrontation with the task. We have therefore been taught that the adage, *hazman oseh et shelo* is not quite accurate. It is not merely time, but we, armed with the halakhic discipline to live today as it must be lived, who are moving events, in a mysterious manner not quite within our ken of understanding, towards their fulfillment. Cultivating another *dunam* of the Negev, teaching illiterate women from Morocco in an *ulpan*, negotiating another international loan and playing host to another international convention may seem like trivial things in the account book of redemption; teaching group after group of eighteen-year-olds how to use weapons, and keeping watch in the skies and on the borders may seem like irrelevancies in the drama of redemption — but these are the *mitzvot* of our situation. And

tanks in Sinai, we could, like him, proclaim: "I had heard you with the hearing of my ears, but now my eyes have seen Thee."¹⁵ It was, for pious and skeptical Jews alike, a moment of salvation, a Divine vindication of Judaism and an historic affirmation of that redemptive path that constitutes Zionism at its best.

And in this moment of its greatest triumph, Zionism as a Jewish road revealed its Achilles' heel; it threatened to degenerate into false Messianism. And some, repelled by this threat, over-reacted and declared themselves ready to relinquish the Zionist — and Jewish — vision of redemption.

VI

Certainly, something marvellous had transpired. But what had been clearly perceived by all on the day when the thick night was pierced with brilliant lightning, was quickly forgotten by some and reworked by others into an ideology which sought to capture the ash of light and reshape it into a facsimile of daylight. While some began to claim that nothing of religious significance had happened at all, there were others who shrilly hailed the advent of total redemption.

What had indeed happened was that *Eretz Yisrael*, parts of which had been more remote from us than the far side of the moon, was suddenly and wondrously in the palm of our hands. The Arab states that had risen against us in a rare display of unity, had fled before us in seven directions. No longer did the Jordan valley end mysteriously at Tirat Zvi; no longer was Jerusalem grotesquely carved up by asphalt walls astride Jaffa Road. The strong had been delivered into the hands of the weak; the many into the hands of the few. Few Israelis, perhaps, had really anticipated defeat, but none had expected such a victory. And when we made our way to the Western Wall on *Shavuot* of 1967, we were like those that dreamed.

All this was certainly true, and religiously experienced, but the interpretation of the events, though sometimes couched in religious terminology, was often secular and self-satisfied. The maximalists declared that what had happened in the course of these six days constituted the totality of the Jewish dream of the

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

ages. Sensing that Biblical verses had come to life in the six days of a new creation, they argued that the events not merely echoed the Bible — but fulfilled it. Now the Jewish people would speedily be ingathered in the land that awaited its sons. We could afford now, they said, to ignore the sanctimonious and cynical demands of the nations. In the day of distress, had they not left us to our fate? The God of Israel (or was it “the spirit of Israel?”) alone had guided us in the hour of battle. Indeed, it would be disobedience to God (or “the spirit of Israel”), ingratitude and rebelliousness, to return to our former frontiers. How many times would God give us Sinai and Gaza (this was the second time in eleven years!) before we would perversely stop returning them? Several rabbis, among them very prominent ones, declared it impermissible to return “a single inch” of holy soil. For was this not what we had prayed for? Could we honestly persist in our liturgical entreaties to be returned “to Jerusalem, Thy city,” and then act as though it belonged to Hussein? If God had scattered the nations before us, as in the days of David, if He had returned us to the Temple Mount and Rachel’s Tomb, and the resting place of the patriarchs, from which we had been illegally barred, could we even consider relinquishing them?

The “humanitarians,” scoffed the maximalists, demanded the return of Schechem and Hebron, of Jenin and Bethlehem. But if this was the way of morality and justice, by what right did the Jewish people demand their right to be in Haifa and Tel Aviv — which the Arabs considered stolen no less than Jenin and Bethlehem? Either Zionism was a Messianic movement that envisioned the return of the Jews to their land — in which case there was no difference between Jaffa and Jericho — or the Jewish people had no right to any portion of the homeland. If settling the lower Jordan Valley was an injustice in 1968, then the settlement of the Jezrael Valley had been no less just. This too had been an Arab area! And if “demography” posed problems today, how much greater had been the disproportion between Arabs and Jews at the beginning of *Shivat Tzion*. *Aliyah* had been the vision and task then; it remained the vision and task now. And if the Jewish people remained loyal to this vision now, there would eventually be peace. A betrayal of *Eretz Yisrael*

and the Zionist scheme of redemption could bring naught but successive wars, for without the vision, all nations (and the Arabs included) would conclude that Zionism was merely a kind of collective robbery. (And we too, bereft of the vision, would eventually come to the same conclusion.) However, once the world — and the Arabs too — understood our redemptive dream, they could come to terms with it, and be blessed through it. But one could hardly expect the Arabs to understand it until the Jews did so, and acted upon it. A return to the caricature state that was pre-war “Israel” would maintain the enmity between ourselves and our neighbors. Indeed, this unnatural “garrison state” had fostered suspicion and hatred for twenty years. For, as long as we did not demand the whole of our homeland, the Arabs could not understand on what basis we claimed the right to any of it.

The arguments of the maximalists has the virtue of consistency; it refuses to see Zionism other than as a movement leading to redemption. Moreover, to be fair to the maximalists, “the redemption” is not, ideologically at least, meant to deny civil or human rights to the Arabs. But, as already noted, events are always likely to overtake theoretical ideological formulas. If the Arabs “unreasonably” rebel against this “redemption,” will the liberalism and good will of the maximalists withstand this inevitable test? Can “the redemption” be permitted to be foiled by the “stubbornness” of the Arabs who have their own vision to pursue? It would seem that, when they are truly consistent (as most maximalists probably are not) they are either insensitive or naive. In either case, the course of events might, all too easily, lead them to brutality. For there is, in the position of the maximalists, an ominous blurring between the human realm of Torah and the Divine realm of redemption. The scorn heaped on the “noble-hearted (*y’fai nefesh*)” indicates how close the enthusiasts are to the abyss of false Messianism, how great the temptation might become to abandon the “humanitarian” Torah which leads to the redemption of all men for the all-to-human Messianism which sees only “the nation,” and may, if pursued to its logical conclusion, terribly distort the Halakhah and the dual vision that lies at the base of Jewish existence.

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

There is much truth also in the feeling of the minimalists that there is something ludicrous about this "redemption" that we have experienced in the wake of the Six Day War. For what kind of redemption is it, they ask, that increases the hatred of our enemies, brings us daily bereavement, adds the Russians to the ranks of our sworn enemies — and aggravates the tensions of the world at large? How ironic the "redemption" of a Jerusalem that greets our every entry with hostile stares, how disillusioning the Messiah who demands the lives of men for a wall or a tomb! Rabbi Goren may exult in the acquisition of Mount Sinai — but, in truth, Mount Sinai is not primarily a geographic location; it is a moral imperative.

As for the Biblical promises upon which the maximalists build their castles in the sky, they are, say the minimalists, either immoral (thus the anti-religious minimalist) or irrelevant (thus the religious one).¹⁶ And if they are the promises of the Jewish people to itself (for what else can agnostic enthusiasts about "Biblical promises" mean by declaring that "the Bible promises . . .") these promises have no moral claim upon or meaning for the Arabs; if they are God's promises, they are being misapplied. For neither are the Arabs "the seven nations," nor is Moshe Dayan — *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

The State of Israel, they say, arose to solve the problem of Jewish homelessness. It posited a justified claim which, tragically, conflicted with the also justified position of the Arabs living here. The partition plan, though absurd to pseudo-religious or clerical Messianists, was a reasonable compromise between equally just claims. As for the argument of the maximalists, that the Arabs have vast territories that are undisputably theirs, while the Jews have only *Eretz Yisrael*, this defies the fact of Palestinian nationalism (uncomfortable, perhaps, but existent) and it can be meant only to prepare public opinion for the transfer of the Arabs to other countries. For some, the halakhic responsa of rabbis forbidding the return of the territories, illustrate the subservience of religion to crass nationalism. The free-thinker is bound to see in this yet another indication of organized religion's insensitivity to human values; the sober religionist is required to summon the courage to repudiate his acknowledged

leaders' surrender to a romantic chauvinism.

It is, claim the "humanitarians," a false Messianism to see redemption in terms of material benefits accruing to the Messiah's favorites. Of such Messianism the world has had its fill; such Messianism, in fact, has been invariably burned into Jewish backs. The Six Day War was certainly not a redemptive occasion in the sense of the maximalists. And whether God "interfered" in this war is neither here nor there — this is a question for theologians or parlor conversations. What is relevant to the discussion of "the significance" of the war is merely that it was a legitimate exercise of the right to self-defense. To change the "war aims" after the war blemishes the good name of Israel and desecrates the memory of those who died. These latter, after all, gave their lives, not for *Eretz Yisrael Hash'lemah*, but for *Medinat Yisrael*; not for ancient shrines in Hebron, but for their families in the *shikunim* of Holon. Should we hold the territories on principle, we shall, within a generation, have created a garrison state far worse than that in which we previously lived. We shall have to learn to rule another people and we shall, in the process, become cruel and coarse. We shall no longer be a peace-loving people, forced against its will to a grim proficiency in the military arts; we shall become Spartans, militarists held in the iron grip of a clerical-nationalist ethos. We shall fall prey to a coalition of medieval dreamers and romantic non-believers. The former will make Israel into an unsavoury anachronism; the latter, armed with religious notions that have been secularized, will lead us into totalitarianism.¹⁷

Thus the minimalists. Their position, perhaps even more than that of their opponents, remains "theoretical," since they admit that there can be no withdrawal without peace and security.

If the minimalists are adept at revealing the moral blemishes in their opponents' position, their rhetoric does not conceal their own inconsistencies. For, if the maximalists stand in the precarious position where their fascination with redemption threatens to divorce them from the imperatives of Jewish morality, the minimalist argument, carried to its logical conclusion, would sacrifice the vision of redemption in order to protect morality. This may be, traditionally, a more just way to *live* since we,

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

after all, are responsible for the Torah more than for the redemption, but it is not quite honest as a vision. Besides, the Torah, to remain Jewish, must remain anchored to a Messianic hope.¹⁸ The fact is, of course, that the settlement of Holon, too, was part of the dream of restoring the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisrael*. Zionism, after all, rejected the Uganda project though that country might very well have been an adequate refuge. The vision was one in which *Eretz Yisrael* played a vital part. The minimalists are in the position of taking advantage of their fathers' dreams, while self-righteously repudiating their principle. Thus, they will consider settlement of new areas immoral, but they justify previous enactments of such immorality. They now consider the borders of May 1967 legitimate, but they must admit that these too were drawn by war. If they are not ready to go back to the borders of the partition plan of 1947 (and they are not!) because the areas taken over in the wake of the War of Independence have already been settled, on what basis do they denounce the settlement of new areas? If "just" facts are, by definition, those already established, one may suspect that their vision is not as idealistic as it seems at first glance. Indeed, it seems to be *overly realistic*, based on little more than the facts of a recently congealed past. It might uncharitably be said that their approach constitutes an invitation to the *Eretz Yisrael Hash'lemah* group to settle the new areas for, presumably the minimalists will, *ex post facto*, justify it.

In short, since the maximalist places a practical priority on redemption and sees Messianism as his *task* in an admittedly imperfect situation, he is likely to eventually negate the *mitzvot* of morality, destroying thereby the life of Judaism, replacing Judaism with a heretical Zionism. But the minimalist implicitly denies the claims of the historic Jewish vision of redemption and is left with a morality that, having no redemptive goal, threatens to become dishonest — and to destroy the Jewish dream of Zionism. For many of the maximalists, the Messiah came in June 1967; for many of the minimalists, nothing of religious significance happened then. Were the State of Israel to commit itself to either reading of our recent history, the delicate balance between Torah and Messianism would be upset. And without this

balance, Judaism cannot remain true to its God, and the State of Israel will not remain Jewishly significant. For, is it Jewish to preach apathy to the Temple Mount and to *Eretz Yisrael*? Conversely, may Jews set out on a course that will, for Zion's sake, perpetrate wrongs against human beings? May a moral Jew forget that Hebron is an Arab city — or that it is a holy city?

Zionism, to remain viable, must be no less realistic and no less moral than the Judaism for which it hopes to speak. It must remember that, realistically, every nation in the world today lives on territory that was once another group's — the "right" to which it secured either through settlement or through conquest with the intent to settle.¹⁹ And while Zionism, stemming from the Jewish tradition, cannot consider it unjust for the Jews to acquire through peaceful settlement or defensive war what, according to the Midrash, the Lord of creation set aside as Israel's inheritance,²⁰ neither can it abandon the moral law *for which alone* Israel was promised an inheritance. Without the Torah, Israel forfeits the right to its land; this is stated clearly by the same Bible that makes sundry "promises."²¹ Thus, it cannot, for the sake of territories, deny the Torah, since *Eretz Yisrael* was given to Israel only on condition that it observed the Torah. "God does not give any portion of the earth away, so that the owner may say, as God says in the Bible: 'For all the earth is Mine' (Exodus 10:5). The conquered land is, in my opinion, only lent to the conquerer who has settled on it — and God waits to see what he will make of it."²²

What we make of our situation constitutes our destiny. The maximalist may come to believe that he is fated "by God's will," to insensitize himself to moral imperatives. The minimalist, by appealing to the *de facto* situation created by the first Zionist settlers, would convince himself that it is his historic "situation" (i.e., over which he has no control) to live in Holon. Are these "philosophies of fate" true to the central vision of Zionism, which tries to transform the Torah into the freely accepted destiny of the Jew — paving the way for God's free act of redemption?

VI

Obviously, something happened in June 1967. But, considering the persistence of strife and evil in the world, we cannot believe that what we have witnessed is the redemption for which we wait; the Messiah of *Succot* has not come. The nations are not ascending to the mountain of the Lord and no one is turning swords into ploughshares.

But neither, recalling the wonders we have seen, can we believe this was merely the victory of one Middle Eastern state over others in a petty war. There was an authentic element of salvation in what happened — every Jew felt it then, though not all admit it now. That there were elements of the ludicrous in this redemption, that there was suffering and death, and that the world was not much improved by it, is undeniable. And certainly there is something comical (i.e., sad) in a redemption that requires of us an increase in military expenditures. But, though we realize that this redemption is far from complete, we cannot but be happy about it and “changed” by it. Though the goal of history, both for Israel and the world, is clearly not consummated and remains, until God wills it otherwise, “theoretical,” we cannot but gain a new lease on our faith in the ultimate vindication of our belief and our way in the world through what has transpired before our very eyes.

In other words, what we have experienced is a redemption of *Purim*. But it is a redemption of *Purim* that, through the partial return of our people to its homeland, points perhaps more clearly than the first one, our way to the redemption of *Succot*. It is, therefore, not merely “a moment of salvation,” but, we may hope, “the beginning of redemption.” Whether or not it will be so depends partly, I believe, on whether we understand the significance of the *Purim* miracle in the light of Jewish teaching.

For *Purim*, in our tradition, is the event that persuaded the Jewish people to transform the Torah that had been its fate and burden since Sinai, into their freely chosen destiny.

“‘And they stood under the mountain (Exodus 19:17).’ Said R. Avdimi b. Hama b. Hossa: From this we learn that the Holy One blessed be He suspended the mountain over their heads like a barrel and said to them: ‘If you accept the Torah, well and good; and if not, here will your graves be.’ . . . Said Rabba: Nevertheless, they accepted it (of their own free will) in the time of Ahashverous (*Rashi: Because of the miracle that had been performed for them*) since it is written: ‘The Jews ordained and took upon themselves . . .’ (Esther 9:27); they (themselves) ordained that which they had already taken upon themselves (against their will).”²³

It is this free commitment to the Jewish deed, performed not for its survival value and not because it is required by “the absurd Jewish condition,” by which the establishment of the State of Israel must ultimately vindicate itself as a redemptive event. It is the serenity with which it performs today’s task even while it dreams and debates tomorrow’s fulfillment which must remain its Jewish hallmark. And today’s Jewish task in Israel, for which we have gained new conviction and courage through God’s saving act — which, thanks to the miracle, we can now accept more joyfully, is the road by which we must travel towards the end of days. Not time alone, but we, with the Torah which can now be observed against the background of the “light and joy” of salvation, must bring electricity to Gaza and telephone lines to Schechem. In which sense and for which time Jericho “is promised” to us, is a Messianic question, serious insofar as we may not forget it, playful insofar as the decision is God’s. But talking to Arabs from Jericho on the bus and helping them to enroll at the Hebrew University, opening channels of communication, is our task. Whether Jenin will (or should) eventually be part of the State of Israel is not really a halakhic question since it may depend on the developments in international politics more than on us, and on the dictates of morality in this specific situation more than on our dreams. But we must make certain that the poor of Jenin are provided for together with the needy of Tel Aviv, as long as the former are our responsibility and within the scope of our halakhic obligations. We cannot legislate against Arab hatred, but we can — and do — keep the bridges across the Jordan open so that goods and tourists and students can pass freely from one side to the other, even while we may

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

not permit the return of malicious armies to the Golan Heights.

Whether Jenin or Jericho are to become a part of Israel depends on when there will be peace talks and what will be decided there. And these things, in turn, depend on diverse factors that are so complex that they quickly cut our "Messianic ideologies" down to size, leaving the question of how the world is to be redeemed to Him who "looks to the end of all generations." The maximalists may legitimately hope, but they may not forget the moral priorities in the Halakhah; the minimalists may, in the name of justice, legitimately warn, but they may not abandon the dream, or their trust that God, in the final act of redemption, will reconcile the paradoxes and teach us how to resolve that which now seems irreconcilable.

In the meantime, we must do what is required by our fate and we should do these things with the religious sense of purpose that derives from our free acceptance of the Torah. Our fated proximity to a people that bitterly hates us — *mainly for historical and social reasons that have nothing to do with us, and for whose resentments we are merely a convenient focus*, forces us, if only for political expediency, to patiently build bridges towards understanding. But when we see the Torah as our free choice, we comprehend the commandment to demonstrate that it is possible, because of our common human dignity and despite years of strife and bitterness, to genuinely reconcile, to whole-heartedly forgo revenge, to love one's neighbor. This is not an easy task; the daily acts of savagery, of mine-laying in crowded markets and in the fields of peaceful settlements continue.

But we may not forget the Torah of destiny, even though, as we have always known, the Torah is very difficult. And so, even while we bring terrorists to trial and continue to train ourselves in the use of weapons, we shall, strengthened by the miracle, continue the endless negotiations with the elders of Hebron on the apportionment of Moslem and Jewish visiting hours in the Cave of Machpelah, send futile but meaningful notes to Dr. Jarring, and teach Hebrew to East Jerusalemites even while we learn Arabic on Kol Yisrael.

It is the classic Jewish belief that if we occupy ourselves with the Torah, interpreted, as it always has been, on the basis of our

profoundest insight into both the commandment and the specific situation of the moment, we shall be shown the pattern of redemption. We do not know what that pattern is because "no one knows how these events will occur until they have actually happened, for they are not clearly described by the prophets" (no matter how loudly the maximalists claim the opposite). Perhaps, in occupying ourselves with *Torah lishmah*, we shall reach a peace settlement in exchange for territories and perhaps, in living together with the Arabs as we are obliged to do, we shall establish the dialogue that will ultimately lead to a different solution.

And, perhaps, there will be neither peace nor redemption until all Jews accept, in gratitude for the miracle, what they have already received at Sinai, meaning: for the Land of Israel Movement, under no circumstances to do to others what they would not have done unto them; for their ideological opponents, "not to forget the things thine eyes saw" (Deut. 4:19); for Ben-Gurion, *tefillin*, and for American rabbis, *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*. None of these things seem, at the moment to be forced upon us. But now, after Purim 1967 more than ever, these are the commandments in which we may rejoice.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Shabbat* 82a.
2. Numbers 11:5 — and commentary of Rashi.
3. Exodus 20:15. For an illuminating discussion of the significance of "hearing" and "seeing" in religious life, with the former representing valuative understanding and the latter, the direct experience, see Dr. Issachar Jacobsohn's essay: "על נאומי ה' בספר איוב," in his book: *לבעיית הגמול במקרא* — Tel Aviv (Sinai), 5719.
4. *Gittin* 56b. This is based on a play on the word אֱלִים (the gods) which is read as though it were אֱלִמִים (the silent).
5. Zechariah 14:17.
6. Franz Rosensweig: "The Feast of Booths" in Nahum Glatzer: *Franz Rosensweig: His Life and Thought*, Schocken, 1961, p. 325.
7. Maimonides: *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhhot Melachim*, XII:2.
8. In his "קול דודי דופק," (which appeared in *הדרת והמדינה*, Tel Aviv, 5724) Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discusses the problems and issues involved

The Mitzvot, The Messiah and The Territories

in contemporary Israel and Zionism and posits a halakhic philosophy of free choice as it applies to these problems. Central concepts in his discussion are "fate" and "destiny," as they apply to the Torah and Jewish history, and I gladly admit my debt to Rabbi Soloveitchik in my use of these concepts here. The use that I make of them — and the responsibility — are, of course, my own.

9. The idea that, with end of *Galut*, the world too will begin to "change," is very obvious in the writings of such thinkers as Moses Hess. But it also appears clearly in the writings of 'political' Zionists such as Herzl, who believed that anti-Semitism is the major impediment holding the world back from the realization of its liberal ideals (i.e., the ideals of the 'Messianic Enlightenment'). Since anti-Semitism will disappear when the Jews return to their homeland, Herzl feels justified in writing, in *The Jewish State*, that "The world will be liberated by our freedom . . ."

10. Numbers 14: 41-45. Ibn Ezra explains *Chormah* to mean "until they destroyed them."

11. My use of the word 'Torah' may strike many readers as overly latitudinarian. Indeed, at times, I would agree with them. But I should like to remind them (and myself) of the words of Rav Kook upon his visit, during a tour of the settlements, to the Halutzim of Poriah. There he found a flagrant desecration of the Sabbath and, of course, a total disregard of kashrut; needless to say, this saddened him profoundly. However, it happened that, while he was visiting, the settlers apprehended an Arab thief during the night and detained him until the next morning — for transfer to the police. In the words of Rav Kook: 'It was wonderful to see the fine courteous behaviour of the workers (i.e., the settlers) vis-a-vis this lowly thief while he was in their hands. They gave him a decent place to sleep, they gave him food and drink. Here we saw a ray of that light that shines out of the uprightness of the natural Jewish heart, how it sparkles when it is revealed.' (Quotation from Zvi Zinger: "Tolerance in the Teachings of Rav Kook," *Niv Hamidrashia*, Winter 1969.) That there is still much such Torah in Israel, even when it is hidden behind the veils of agnostic ideologies, was clearly demonstrated during the Six Day War, and was beautifully articulated in such books as *Siach Lochamim*.

12. Job 13:16.

13. My literary allusion is to Exodus 16: 6-7. "In the evening and ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out of the Land of Egypt; and in the morning, and ye shall see the glory of the Lord . . ."

14. See Midrash R., *Esther* X.

15. Job 42:5.

16. It must be noted that the religious and irreligious minimalists, while willing to sign the same declarations, do not really proceed from the same assumptions. It is my impression that the religious "minimalist" is repelled by the false Messianism of the maximalist, while his irreligious counterpart is bewildered by Messianism as such. (My criticisms of the minimalist "distortion of vision" refer, therefore, to the avowedly secular exponents of this stand — See pp. 17-18.) To my regret, the distinction between religious and non-religious

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

maximalists is more difficult to draw. It appears to me that the religious maximalists are scarcely less Sadducean than the irreligious ones. To me the regrettable fact that religious Jewry is more heavily represented in the latter group is symptomatic, I fear, of a deep spiritual crisis in the ranks of organized religious Jewry.

17. There is, of course, a measure of polemic exaggeration in such arguments, but only a measure. The maximalists, hearing such dire threats of "totalitarianism," are likely to respond that "these people don't understand the Jewish people; we would never do such things" — and to consider themselves confirmed in their view that the minimalists, as a group, are alienated men. The maximalists are sincere in their belief that "Jews are not like that" — but the minimalists may know more about the realities that govern the relationships between men — even when some of them are good men.

18. He may, of course, claim that his Jewish Messianic hope is peace, and surely, this is part and parcel of the Jewish vision. But peace in itself is not necessarily a vision at all. Neville Chamberlain, after all, also had this "vision" — unfortunately his "vision" of Hitler was faulty. Indeed, we could have peace in Palestine immediately — by leaving, just as we could have "solved" the problem of anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages — by baptism. But this, and rightly so, is not what the minimalists suggest.

19. Martin Buber elucidates this idea in "An Open Letter to Mahatma Gandhi," parts of which appear in A. Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, New York, 1959.

20. See Rashi, on Genesis 1:1. But obviously this "promise," by itself, is no more a total Jewish vision than "peace," which is also promised. If treating relative values as absolute ones is idolatry, then it may be said that taking partial visions as total ones is pseudo-Messianism.

21. See, for example, Leviticus 18:24-28.

22. Buber, *ibid.*, pp. 464-65.

23. *Shabbat* 82a.