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The Six Day War has not only radically changed the political complexion of the Near East, but has wrought an upheaval in the consciousness of world Jewry. We witness considerable soul-searching among Jews all over the world who find themselves confronted with the challenge of re-examining their own personal relationship to the State of Israel. At the same time, there has developed, even in so-called secular circles, a new sensitivity and openness to questions pertaining to the religious significance of the establishment of an independent Jewish state.

To provide a forum for the discussion of some of these issues, involving the very roots of contemporary Jewish existence, the Editors of TRADITION brought together prominent Jewish thinkers from both Israel and America who were asked to respond to a series of questions previously submitted to them.

Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen is Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and Director of the Harry Fischel Institute. Professor Pinchas Peli, editor of the well known Israeli weekly, *Panim El Panim*, is a distinguished author and presently serves as Visiting Associate Professor of Hebrew Literature at Yeshiva University. The American participants in this symposium consisted of the following members of our Editorial Board: Rabbi Norman Lamm, rabbi of the Jewish Center in New York and Erna Michael Professor of Jewish Philosophy at Yeshiva University; Dr. Michael Wyschogrod, Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York; and Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger, Editor of *Tradition*, rabbi of Congregation Shaaray Tefila in Far Rockaway and Visiting Associate Professor of Philosophy at Yeshiva University.

THE RELIGIOUS MEANING OF THE SIX DAY WAR

A Symposium

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

WALTER S. WURZBURGER:

Orthodox Jewry is frequently accused of not facing up to the religious implications of the establishment of the State of Israel. As yet we have not formulated a proper response to the holocaust nor have we reacted in religious terms to the realities of Israel's independence. With only a few exceptions, both our religious consciousness and behavior have for all practical purposes ignored the historic dimensions that have been introduced by *Medinat Israel*. Although the panorama of Jewish existence has been completely overhauled, the area of religious life does not appreciably reflect the upheavals of our times.

Impatience with the religious community's reluctance to grapple with these issues has grown immeasurably as a result of the Six Day War. Many maintain that the spectacular victories culminating with the recapture of Jerusalem represent an extraordinary manifestation of divine purpose in history. They are convinced that the events leading from the holocaust to present-day Israel reveal in a unique and special way that God acts in history. Others disagree. We cannot, they argue, presume any of God's purposes nor are we equipped to apprehend a special divine intervention. As rational human beings we must interpret historical events in purely naturalistic categories. Historic phenomena must, therefore, be explained exclusively in the light of political and military realities. However, even if we were to assume that the events in Israel were due to the direct intervention

of the Almighty, we are still left with the formidable problem of establishing criteria by reference to which we can determine whether and to what extent a historic event or group of events should be directly attributed to the manifestation of Divine Providence. So far, apart from offering slogans, very little has been done to answer this question. But in the wake of developments since the Six Day War and the "miraculous" conquest of Jerusalem, it is imperative that we come to grips with the historic realities of our time and account for them in theological terms.

To crystalize our thinking on this issue and to provide a framework for discussion of these events, TRADITION has invited you as sensitive Jewish thinkers representing both the perspective of Israelis and Americans to direct your attention to the following questions:

1. It has been said that the Six Day War represents a unique demonstration of God's acting in history. Do you believe that the Six Day War revealed God's operation in history to a far greater extent than other events since the establishment of the State? (For instance, the War of Liberation or the Sinai Campaign.)
2. Do the events in Israel reveal God's acting in history in a different way from other major events of our time which may also be said to reveal God's judgment in history—for example, the Cold War, Vietnam, race riots, etc.?
3. Do you look upon the events in Israel as a miracle that can-

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not be accounted for in terms of social, political, military or economic factors?

4. How would you compare the "miracles" of the Six Day War with the miracles of Chanukah and Purim?
5. If you attribute theological significance to the events in Israel, what are the practical repercussions for our religious life today?
6. Do you believe that the rebirth of Israel culminating now with the recapture of Jerusalem indicates that we are on the verge of a Messianic Era?

NORMAN LAMM:

I am convinced that any attempt to explain the events in June 1967 as no more than a remarkable coincidence of natural factors reveals, on the part of the non-believer, an extraordinary act of naive faith in the dogmas of agnosticism, and, on the part of the believer, a defense-mechanism by which to protect himself against possible future disappointment.

The Six Day War was certainly a case of "revelation." But even more than a revelation of divine power and direction of history, it was a revelation in the sense that the author of the *Tanya* (R. Shneur Zalman Miladi) uses the term: a revealing to man's consciousness of the unsuspected reservoir of religious faith within him ("The hidden and natural love"). The sense of elation was universal amongst Jews, and it was authentically religious rather than nationalistic. It was the return to Mt. Moriah, not

the capture of Mt. Scopus, that aroused this unparalleled exaltation. And, the existence of this inner Jewish religiousness, for whatever the reason, was not "revealed" to this extent before—neither in 1948 nor in 1956.

In attempting to understand these events in theological terms, I would rather *not* speak the language of messianism and redemption. Overloaded with centuries of sentiment, and so abused by repetition these past twenty years, terms such as *at'chalta di'geulah* (beginning of the Redemption) and *ikvata de'mashichah* (Messianic Era) inspire but do not clarify.

I prefer to analyze our situation in terms of the Biblical concept of *hester panim* ("the hiding of the face," i.e., God's withdrawal from a direct relationship with Israel). This is a concept which has been insufficiently explored but has immediate relevance to contemporary Jewish history. The need for brevity forces me to condense my remarks, perhaps beyond the limits of comprehensibility, and to eliminate mention of my sources. Nevertheless, I consider it a more fruitful approach than the language of Messianism.

The Torah considers *hester panim* the ultimate punishment, in that it severs the dialogue between God and Israel which is the totality of Judaism. It implies that man is henceforth deprived of divine Providence and subject to chance and the accidents of nature and history. The opposite pole is *nesiat panim*, the resumption of the dialogue. Although individuals may be entirely cut off from this relation-

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ship, this is not true of the people of Israel as a whole. Between these two poles there are, according to the Sages of the Talmud, two intermediate states. In the lower state, there is no relationship. Nonetheless, God does preserve Israel; His "hand is stretched forth" to protect us from oblivion. Other than mere survival, there is no real redemptive meaning to the vicissitudes of our history. But the second state, penultimate to *nesiat panim*, is that of "in a dream do I address him." There is a sudden, dream-like, almost unreal and uncertain confrontation in which the two partners have caught a glimpse of each other's faces, and acknowledge each other's existence. There is no conversation — but the possibility exists. Israel must overcome its bashfulness, its cherished theories of divine absence, its rigid habits of despair, and face God directly. The "dream" must be interpreted and transformed into a reality. Then Israel must utter its first words to God and await His *nesiat panim*.

Purim represented such a dream state of transitional *hester panim*. (The Rabbis related the name *Ester* to *hester* [to hide].) The Purim events could also be viewed naturalistically. Yet, they were interpreted as miracles, such as a break in the silence between Israel and God and an opportunity for new dialogue. Tradition records a great religious revival as a result of the Purim story.

The Six Day War was the emergence from the dreadful *hester panim* of mere survival to that of the dream confrontation, the state of new spiritual possibilities and his-

toric meaningfulness. In three hours God turned to His people and for six days we looked at Him — and "when the Lord returned the captivity of Zion we were as dreamers."

What must we now do? We must undertake new and passionate campaigns to continue the dialogue. The "Yeshivah world" must break out of its stultifying withdrawal from Jewish society and embrace all Israel with love. The "Modern Orthodox" must abandon their self-consciousness, their apologetic stance, and their spiritual sterility and start advocating their ideals of a full Torah life within the context of Western culture without apprehension and superficiality together with a truly inspired commitment to Torah and *mitzvot*. Diaspora Jews, moreover, must take a fresh look at the question of *aliyah*. If we are, indeed, to understand contemporary events in terms of religious significance, we can no longer continue our ambivalent attitude, whereby we conceptually agree that we are to go on *aliyah*, but existentially live as though the *golah* were a permanent feature of Jewish history for all eternity. *Aliyah* for us must mean more than the fulfillment of an individual commandment, important as it is, and more than a sense of nationalistic identification. It must become an immediate personal imperative in consequence of a new relationship to which we have been privy, a new meaningfulness that has suddenly graced our history — perhaps for the first time since the destruction of the Temple. And above all, we must acknowledge — humbly and

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happily — that “they,” the non-observant Israelis, were right when they argued that Jews must forge their own destiny actively and not wait passively for heavenly miracles. Power, we must admit, is not necessarily antithetical to holiness. The “impulse from below,” as the *Zohar* calls it, is necessary in order to evoke the “impulse from above.”

A new awareness will come from our fellow-Jews that there did indeed occur this response to our efforts from Above, that we could never have done it alone, that “impulse” joined “impulse” and, as if in a dream, we saw the Lord God of Israel.

Before the dream vanishes and is “explained” in the trivial vocabulary of diplomacy and military strategy, we must all, together, build on it and reestablish the great *nesiat panim*, the prerequisite to true *shalom* (peace) in the Middle East and all the world.

MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD:

No believing Jew who lived through that harrowing Monday in June of 1967 when the fate of the two million Jews of Israel hung in balance will ever forget the overwhelming gratitude that filled Jewish hearts when the magnitude of the Israeli victory became apparent. When for the first time in almost two thousand years many of the holiest places in the Land of Israel were once again under Jewish jurisdiction, it became difficult not to see the redeeming presence of God in the momentous events of the day. At such moments it is not easy to contain the pent-up messianism that in spite of the tragic

disappointments of the past, is never far below the consciousness of the believing Jew. Nevertheless it is necessary to proceed with caution, listening obediently to the Divine Word, rather than human emotion, and the to the judgment of God on the affairs of men.

All events, as events, are equivocal. To the eyes of non-belief there is always the natural explanation that refuses to transpose the historic order into a theological event. Concerning the events of the Six-Day War, I hear the voice of unbelief pose the following dilemma: The government of Israel either had good military reasons to expect victory or it did not. If it did not and still embarked on the course it did it acted irresponsibly. And if it did have good reasons then the outcome was only as foreseen and no miraculous claims are justified. The voice of unbelief is difficult to still.

Jewish faith is therefore not based on events as such, be they events that appear redemptive or those, such as the holocaust, that seem to point to God’s powerful anger with the people He loves above all other. Jewish faith is based on events as they are transformed by the Word of God from the realm of ambiguity to that of clarity. The events of the Red Sea become a fulcrum of Jewish faith because they are memorialized in the Biblical text by “And God on that day saved Israel from the hand of the Egyptians” (Ex. 14:30).

Without these clear and simple words which speak to the man of the 20th century as they have to all those who preceded him, the

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events of the past would have their inherent ambiguity compounded by the further shadow-existence that envelopes events of the past, particularly the remote past. It is the Divine Word, not one of which "returns unfulfilled" (Isaiah 55:11), which thus becomes not a report of the saving event but its theological center, the very meaning that God bestows on that which transpires.

Because we in our day do not have such a Word concerning the Six Day War we remain in the realm of ambiguity. What we have witnessed may have been the opening of the redemption or it may have been merely one further chapter in a story that has many chapters. That God's solicitude never leaves his people is certain; as such we must be grateful for his acts again and again. But to make solid messianic claims and to tie the fate of Judaism to the fortunes of the State of Israel, for whose preservation and prosperity we all fervently pray, is simply unauthorized and therefore irresponsible. Along this path could lurk, God forbid, a catastrophe similar to those that was the fate of other messianic claims.

PINCHAS PELI:

The Six Day War is just another chapter revealing God's hand in directing the Jewish people throughout its history. It is no different in *quality* from other events in the history of the people which exists, according to Scriptures, as a living testimony of God's sovereignty over human destiny ("Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord." [Isaiah

43:10]). The Six Day War is perhaps extraordinary, albeit not unique, in its *volume*. It has all the ingredients of a Biblical miracle (the many in the hands of the few, etc.) and it therefore commands our attention to this truth which is clearly one of the basic tenets of the Jewish faith — God's role in shaping Jewish history. We also hold that God's hand is manifested as well in the Cold War, on the battlefields of Vietnam and in the race riots. There is, however, as far as we are concerned, a substantial difference between our understanding of what happens to the people of Israel and the events which transpire in the rest of the world. While the ancient prophets of Israel proclaimed their prophecies even unto the Gentiles, they did so only inasmuch as those prophecies had an impact on Israel. The belief that God is inseparably involved in shaping human destinies and that He is concerned with their triumphs and failures, does not, however, necessarily imply that we can, at all times, decipher and spell out correctly every single move in history. Here it should be added, that God's acting in history and the foretelling of events in prophecy does not interfere with the exercise of "free will" endowed to Man. We are confronted here with one of the many dilemmas and conflicts of the human situation which hangs between man's full freedom and his simultaneous total dependence on God.

The history of the entire world is in God's hand. Where does He move the world? This is one of the great mysteries. We find ourselves

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in a relatively clearer position, however, when dealing with Jewish history. Here we encounter a peculiar process which operates on unique principles set forth by the early Hebrew prophets and fortified by the teachings of the Rabbis. Moving along against this setting, our task is not to probe whether we can see God's hand in the events which take place and then search for a theological interpretation of these events. Our method in this case is rather the reverse: we have to see how and to what extent do the events fit into God's design of Jewish history as outlined and prescribed in such remarkable detail in the Torah and in the utterances of the prophets and sages. It is not God's intervention that we should take pains to seek, but rather examine our part in the events which we witness. The events themselves must be analyzed and verified vis-a-vis the prescription spelled out to us in Scriptures and tradition. When we have done this we may be shocked to discover that the word of God is being fulfilled in our own days not just in some general way, but to the most minute detail.

It is hard to find a more detailed description of the great holocaust visited on our people than the one which is rendered in the chapters of the Admonition (*Tokhechah*) in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. These chapters are a precise and concise summing up of the state of *Galut* as experienced by our people in the last two thousand years, reaching its bitter climax during the last, (alas, it was not the first) holocaust. Similarly, I can find no better

description of the return of the Jews to the land of Israel, the rehabilitation of the soil, the re-establishment of the state, the ingathering of the exiles and the regaining of Jerusalem — than in the prophecies recorded thousands of years ago by almost every prophet and psalmist of Israel.

Quotations from the Bible or sayings of the Rabbis to prove this are, I believe, not necessary. Open any book of the Bible or the *Midrash* and they are there, before you. All of these prophecies, if applied to recent events, or shall we better say, all the events which we have seen with our own eyes in recent years, if tested against these ancient-but-not-antiquated prophecies, point to one thing, namely the *kaytz*, the end of *galut*, and the beginning of *geulah* with all its implications.

The recent events in Israel can indeed, well be "accounted for in terms of social, political, military or economic factors." The miracle of the return of the Jewish people to its homeland (which, please mind, does not, as matter of fact, have any *equivalent* in world history) does not depend on the supernaturalness of these events, but in their very happening within nature. This, I believe, is the right concept of a miracle in Jewish thinking which emphasizes *nes* (miracle) within *teva* (nature). We do not require events which run contrary to nature as proof of God's role in this process of *geulah*. The greatest "miracle" of all is not that the victories of the Six Day War came despite the prevailing "social, political, military or

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economic factors," but, that the Jews, with the help of the Almighty, have again created, in the last few decades, the conditions which made it possible for Israel to win the war for its survival in such an astonishing fashion. For us, the question should not be whether God is now on our side, but, whether we are on God's side, to fulfill His will and blueprint. As Jews, this second question is more meaningful to us on our unique march from Sinai to Sinai. It is of more vital significance than the question if the events are miraculous.

For the last hundred years we have had hints telling us Jews that the time of our exile is over. That Israel is established, that the land is being cultivated are signs of the *kaytz*. Now the Six Day War has expressed this feeling more forcefully. Actually the first Jew who settled Rishon L'Zion or Zichron Yaakov evoked the same miracle, the same revelation of the hand of God as the Israeli Air Force which destroyed the Egyptian planes. It is all part of one story, one saga—the beginning of the re-establishment of Eretz Yisrael and the return of the exiles either out of their free will or of being forced to do so. It is the belief of many *gedolim* that the return of Jews to Eretz Yisrael will hasten the arrival of the Messiah. Everything in Jewish history so far points to this and we are witnessing its fulfillment. We already are on a very advanced stage of the arrival of the Messianic Era — not just on the verge of it. Our casting doubt on this is tantamount to questioning the val-

idity of Torah and prophecy. It is a serious flaw in our faith.

SHEAR YASHUV COHEN:

The entire course of events of the Six Day War is definitely more of a unique demonstration of *hash-gachah* (what you have termed God's acting in history) than the events that preceded it. Somehow we awaited the establishment of the State of Israel; it was the result of long-time planning. Not so with the Six Day War; it came as a surprise. Nobody in Israel had made plans for the quick course of events that took place. Rather I would say that every effort was made by Israel's leaders to delay any action leading to a war for survival. It all happened so suddenly. Nobody has logically explained what occurred: the blockade, the unusual pact between Hussein and Nasser which led to the eventual liberation of Jerusalem. Your eyes have to be blind, your ears have to be deaf, your mind has to be closed to claim that the events were anything but unusual. It was as if the hand of God was pushing us towards the second stage of *atchalta d'geulah* (beginning of redemption) and bringing us to *geulah* (redemption) Living through the danger of extermination and seeing the threat lifted miraculously through a stunning victory gives one the feeling that you are part of the historic divine planning, that you are only a tool in the hand of God. And the more you know about Israel's foreign policy and the struggles between different factions trying to delay war the more this feeling is reinforced. The miracles that

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happened during the war and the miracles that are occurring today — until this very moment — convince you that the Six Day War was another sphere of *hitgalut ha-shechinah* (revelation of the Divine Presence).

There is no doubt in my mind that we are living now in *yemot ha-mashiach*. I have no explanation for the *shoah* (holocaust). I have no explanation for the miracles of the War of Independence. I have no other explanation for the miracles of the Six Day War but the belief that we are part of the final *geulah*. Both Rav Kook zt'l and Rav Herzog zt'l had the same idea. It is tragic that the present leadership of the rabbinate in Israel and outside of Israel is afraid to rise to the moment by creating new means and methods. Our minds should be geared to making Israel the central abode of the Jewish people, to making it a *mamlchah kohanim v'goi kadosh* (a kingdom of priests and holy nation). It's not a theological question any more; it's admitting that what we see and hear is the hand of God acting in history.

I am sure that the Six Day War has started a new era of understanding between religions. The Jew will not be an *am golah* (a people in exile), that lives among others and has to clarify the dividing principles between Jew and Gentile. It is now becoming an *or l'goyim* (a light for the nations). This, I think, is the deep meaning of the happening of the Six Day War from a religious point of view.

WALTER S. WURZBURGER:

We have reached a stage where very sharp dichotomies come to the fore: On the one side you have the viewpoint that all of Jewish history should be conceived as the gradual unfolding of the Messianic Era; on the other side, you have the theory that without the Word we cannot possibly interpret any event as revealing God's acting in history. In between we have the view which placed the recent events somewhere between the absolute *hester panim* and, what Rabbi Lamm calls, *nesiat panim*.

My first question is to Professor Wyschogrod: Might one not be inclined to say that the Word of the Bible, as interpreted by Prof. Peli, is the Word which enables us to decipher the meaning of the event? Secondly, if you say that without the Word we cannot interpret the event, then how would it ever be possible for human beings to hear the Word unless they themselves are endowed with the gift of prophecy?

NORMAN LAMM:

May I amplify that question for Dr. Wyschogrod. If you're going to say that the event, by virtue of its being an event, is ambiguous, and, therefore, you await a word, then you remain with the question that a word, too, is ambiguous. People can hear a word and have doubts as to whether it is hallucinatory or real. The dichotomy that you make between word and event is not valid. I think you are taking the word "word" a bit too literally. Does the concept of *devar Hashem* (word of God) mean only a verbal or intellectual or prophetic com-

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munication, or can it be clothed in terms of an event so that an event becomes its own interpretation, as it were, or the event is the communication?

PINCHAS PELI:

Is this word that you expect different from the words that you accepted for other *mitzvot*? In the case of all other *mitzvot* you accept the written word as handed down in tradition and do not wait for a new Word. Is not there a Word, and a very clear and explicit one, in regard to exile and redemption — why then wait for another one?

SHEAR YASHUV COHEN:

The historical approach provides Yehuda Halevi with this proof of the existence of God. The miracles experienced by the Jewish people constitute his evidence. Why should we not view the events of the last thirty years — the holocaust, the birth of Israel, and the Six Day War — as events continuing to prove the existence of God and thus constituting *devar Hashem b'metsiut* (a manifestation of Divine Word in reality), if not *devar Hashem* literally?

MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD:

Basically there are two questions addressed to me. First, is not the Biblical word which we have sufficient for the events of today? Must I have a new Word? And, secondly, does not God also speak through events rather than through Words? My understanding of the Messianic event is that it involves, in a necessary way, the re-appear-

ance of prophecy. That, of course, does not mean that the Biblical word, as we have it now, is not a guide for Jewish history. The crucial difference, however, between Jewish history under the Divine word in the Bible and the Messianic period is the end of *hester panim* in its most profound sense, namely, through the speaking of God.

Now there is something comical, of course, for someone to observe events and to refuse to recognize them unless he has read them in a text. But here I think I am adopting a comical position that is Jewish—waiting for the text. At present no text has evolved even though such events as *Medinat Yisrael*, the holocaust, and the Six Day War have occurred. To me this is more than an unfortunate event, a shortcoming. But I must emphasize that I do not say *chas veshalom*, that I know that these events are not messianic. It is difficult for me to say this because everything that is Jewish and human in me pushes me to agree with you. But, at the same time, I cannot say what you say because I must hear the Word. One more observation and that will conclude my response. I observed that no one has referred to any of the catastrophes of false messianism in Jewish history. This is significant. In Shabtai Zvi there was the rousing of not one Jew or a hundred Jews but multitudes of Jews who heard the steps of the Messiah. And this event ended in one of the greatest tragedies in Jewish history. Can we, as we observe the events of Israel, simply forget about false messian-

