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## A VIEW FROM THE FLESHPOTS

### Exploratory Remarks on Gilded Galut Existence

Redemption involves a movement by an individual or a community from the periphery of history to its center; or, to employ a term from physics, redemption is a centripetal movement. To be on the periphery means to be a non-history-making entity, while movement toward the center renders the same entity history-making and history-conscious.

—R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik<sup>1</sup>

It happens that moral awareness advances more than free moral capacity. Then adding knowledge adds many pains, for one sees with open eye, how his own moral rifts torment his soul, and he walks gloomily under the pressure of his own depressed will, because of the provocation of the moral capacity, that has not yet developed to the level of awareness. But these sufferings are sufferings of love; at last they bring complete light . . .

The entire environment, external and objective, also helps to actualize the capacity concealed in the power of awareness. For the movement to elevate being is not enclosed in any specific substance in itself; the movement expands and spreads through all the pertinent circumference.

—R. Abraham I. Kook<sup>2</sup>

The promised land guarantees nothing. It is only an opportunity, not a deliverance.

—Shelby Steele<sup>3</sup>

That there is, and must be, a qualitative difference between Jewish existence and religious experience in Israel and that of Galut is more obvious for most of us than the precise character of that difference. When we attempt to define the difference we tend to veer off in one of two directions. With soaring spirit, we sing the poetry of the Land of Israel, dreaming awake the eschatological word, seeking in the quotidian only its inverted root in the transcendent, waxing metaphysical in the wonderful Kookian world. A series of binary contrasts then yields the philosophical concept of Galut. The limitation of this vision, for our purposes, is twofold: it describes the world, not as we ordinarily experience it but as we should like to experience it; moreover, in turning its gaze upon Eretz Israel, it can only see Galut as a shadowy negative of Israel's reality.

The earth-bound alternative is to catalogue the differences as we discover them: the price, quality and availability of vegetables; the rates of burglary in Ramat Gan and Teaneck; the state of *yeshivot*; the headaches of *shemitta* (the Sabbatical year) vs. the burdens of *Yom Tov sheni* (the extra day observed in the Diaspora); soccer vs. baseball. Whether this work is prosecuted analytically and comprehensively by social scientists or, as most people prefer, with relaxed anecdotal particularity, the difficulty, for our purpose, is that such discussion fails to distinguish America as Galut from Israel as Eretz Israel; one might as well be sizing up the merits of Boston and Omaha. It is not surprising that this approach, combusted with the precipitate of cynicism that is the underside of the first, is sometimes compatible with a third position, namely, that contemporary religious life is essentially the same in Israel and in America.

In what follows I hope to steer clear of these alternatives. Instead I will try to focus on the way religious Jews (more specifically, religious Zionists), living in the United States, experience their life in Galut.<sup>4</sup> The characteristics on which my discussion will focus are not accidental attributes of American life but inherent properties of the Galut-situation in the West.

Let me also distinguish our inquiry from two distinct, though related, subjects. The question of halakhic obligations connected with life in Israel and America surely ought to affect our lives, but is not identical with that of how we experience our lives. By the same token, the theology of Galut, by which I mean all the religiously interesting propositions about Galut (e.g. why the present one has been prolonged, what we can infer from it about the workings of Providence), may have implications for the experience of contemporary American Jews, but does not uniquely define it. One need not live in Galut to have a correct theological perspective on it; leaving Galut may well be an advantage.

The first sections of our discussion deal with the manner in which the religious Zionist might account for his/her existence in Galut, first as an individual, then as a component of a significant part of the Jewish people. We will then engage the present situation confronting the Orthodox world. Finally we shall comment on the implications of our analysis and the problems it leaves outstanding.

## I

No discussion of the individual in Galut under contemporary (non-R. Hayyim HaKohen)<sup>5</sup> conditions can avoid confronting the halakhic desirability of *aliya*. All things being equal, it is better that a God-fearing Jew live in the Land of Israel than outside it. Ramban's opinion that there is a specific commandment to settle the Land is only one factor in this judgment. To

it one may add the opportunity to fulfill the commandments dependent upon the Land,<sup>6</sup> and the spiritual benefit that the Holy Land bestows upon its inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> It is posited that in Israel, when the Jewish people dwell in the Land, practical occupations have a religious value that is absent in Exile.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, if “[t]he Jew who identifies with his people [is one who] wishes to be at the cutting edge of its history—. . . that, today is in Israel.”<sup>9</sup>

From an experiential point of view the most clear-cut token of halakhic commitment to living in Israel is the petition we recite thrice daily: “May our eyes behold Your return to Zion with mercy.” Centuries ago the king of the Kuzari observed that, absent genuine intention to live in Israel, our gestures and protestations are either hypocrisy or rote.<sup>10</sup> Jewish belief and practice thus presuppose the desire to live in Israel, at the very least as a higher order desire.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, it is a fact that the vast majority of observant Jews, be they laymen, local leaders or even major rabbinic personalities, do not regard living in Israel as a perfect, ineluctable duty, like hearing the shofar, devoting minimal time to Torah, or even snacking in the sukkah. There are hard-liners who insist on the absolute obligation to dwell in Israel, and those who remain in America are presumably hard-pressed to explain the inconsistency. They must also, wherever they live, account for the failure of paradigmatic figures—R. Moshe Feinstein, *zt”l*, and *maran haRav* Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *shelit”a*, being two conspicuous examples, to promote vigorously the approved axiology. Most of us, at a practical level, endorse aliya, from a halakhic vantage point, while treating it as an optional value, the omission of which is no dereliction of religious duty. Some make of where to live a serious matter, a bit like the choice of profession or spouse, a significant, though not obligatory, life-shaping act. For the more hard-headed it is more like an exotic, honored-in-the-breach *humra*: encountered sporadically only to be straightaway dismissed from consciousness.

Not choosing aliya is thus sociologically valid for the bulk of the religious Zionist community of North America. In many cases it can also be defended halakhically, with varying degrees of justification. Available reasons range over a broad spectrum. A rabbi, for example, comes to consider the work on which he is engaged as so vital that it supersedes other commitments. And there are other exemptions. As R. Schachter puts it, expounding the view of the *Avnei Nezer*: “There is no mitzvah of *yishuv haAretz* . . . unless one will have a *klitah tova*—a successful absorption process.”<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging that one has not had, or is unlikely to have, a *klita tova*, is rather unflattering, whether one is a yuppie forced to confess himself too dependent on creature comforts to contemplate a change of place, a ne’er-do-well, unable to hold one’s own in the Israeli job market, or a hypertensive who can’t cope with the bureaucracy. Quite often, I suspect, the reasons for remaining in Galut are more muddled than ideologists assume.

My interest here is not in adjudicating the correctness of individual

justifications for failure to live in Israel. It is rather in the consequences of such attempts at self-justification for the spiritual life. The most direct consequence of the need to justify living in America is that one devotes attention to that justification; where Zionist consciousness is high, the justification often occurs in the presence of others.

How one judges such self-justification depends, to a large extent, on the evaluation of self-justification in general. *Heshbon ha-nefesh* (self-examination) is an integral part of ethical existence, universally extolled by *baalei musar* (moralists). Going to school to anxiety, standing at the cross-roads before the great choices of life, is thus an education toward the "examined life," the life that is worth living. Whatever precipitates self-examination is good, and if thought about where one lives leads to self-examination, then that is good, too. At the same time, chronic self-justification, especially when it takes place in public, is likely to harden into rehearsed complacency, on the one hand, or aimless guilt feelings, on the other hand. The public focus may skew our understanding of the reasons for our choices. We acknowledge the attraction of material goals and decry inertial forces, we emphasize the value of our contributions to American Jewish life, while tending to underestimate the pull of family obligations and comforts, of the small local and professional duties and pleasures that make up so much of the meaning and structure of our lives.

The depth of our soul-searching may also be open to question. Take, for example, a prominent scholar-thinker who digresses from his remarks on R. Levi Yitshak of Berditchev to articulate these feelings: "I regret my life in the exile . . . We must live there [in Israel], or at least yearn to live there and feel guilty and unfulfilled if we do not."<sup>13</sup> One may agree with the judgment without grasping its message to us as individuals. Guilt, like other categories of inwardness, corresponds to a range of slippery, shifting experiences. Are we dealing with what recent philosophers call "rational regret,"<sup>14</sup> that is, a regret that does not imply a change of mind on the part of the agent? If so, what makes the regret rational? Is it instead the guilt of the akratic (weak of will) individual, or that of wrong reasoners who would mend their ways? In any case, is feeling guilty a sufficient earnest of penitence; should not yearning to live in Israel make way for *planning* to live there?

Untempered suspicion towards those who feel guilty about their failure to live in Israel (or their failure to yearn and plan steadily for that eventuality) constitutes uncalled-for cynicism. Yet a constant self-conscious dwelling upon that failure suggests a measure of accommodation with moral haplessness. Such a preoccupation reverberates with a melancholy alienation from one's determinate identity and the wistful idealization of low-grade *schlemielkeit* as an acceptable relation to the world of action. This psychological (cultural, spiritual?) homelessness, in turn, is regarded as characteristic of a certain type of rootless Jewish sophisticate, memorably

enacted by the early persona of Woody Allen. Here the sense of guilt is stripped of its deontological qualities, as it were, and transformed into an ironic detachment from ethical existence, a guilt whose ultimate aim is to be troubled only by the confirmed habit of continuing to feel guilty.

The sense of determinate meaning inseparable from Orthodox belief and practice renders our community in America less indulgent of such an attitude to guilt than less committed Jews. Moreover, because we tend to identify this personality type with assimilation, we are, as a rule, critical of its manifestations. Nonetheless, it can be argued, the temptation to wallow ineffectually in the feeling of regret and guilt is inherent in our very situation: insisting, on the one hand, that it is wrong for us to remain in America, that our lives are radically unfulfilled, yet not doing very much to change things. Thus the concern with self-justification that accompanies the American Zionist, and especially the religious one, is a double-edged sword. What is gained in self-examination may be lost through indulgence in unproductive self-laceration and self-reification.

Religious Israeli Jews are presumably exempt from the need to justify their place of residence. They are, after all, where they are supposed to be, and must mine their quota of angst from other quarries. This triggers a complaint sometimes heard in non-Zionist Orthodox circles: that the Israeli Zionist considers himself superior to other Jews by virtue of being in Israel, and hence smugly deems himself beyond traditional soul-searching. Whatever the pertinence of this allegation to the lives of Jews in Israel, it deserves attention as an expression of the feelings of Jews in exile. Is it merely reflective of the attitudes of critics who would cut religious Zionism down to size, or does it also say something about American Zionists who hope that Eretz Israel will resolve for them inadequacies that seem intractable in their present surroundings?

## II

So far we have looked at American religious Zionists as individuals coming to terms with their abode. The individual may, however, interpret his or her existence as part of the historical fate and destiny of the Jewish people as a whole. Note, however, that in one salient respect the analysis of the collective is not analogous to that of the individual. When the individual justifies, on whatever grounds, his living in America, he has put to rest, at least temporarily, the question that required justification. To explain what functions the Jewish people (or a large segment of the Jewish people) must (or may) fulfill in Galut justifies the nation (or a large portion of the nation) remaining in Galut. Whether a particular individual ought to be one of the Galut-dwellers is an additional question, requiring further deliberation on the part of the individual. With this caveat in mind, we shall examine

several theories according to which the Jewish people in exile is to accomplish worthwhile, perhaps even necessary, tasks in the divine economy.

## LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

We are accustomed to dismiss the notion that Israel is dispersed among the nations in order to bring them the kerygma of Judaism as the dated relic of an age hungry for emancipation, drunk on the dogma of universal progress. A reminder is in order that R. Bahye b. Asher, a writer whose eclectic taste surely did not extend to the anticipatory appreciation of nineteenth century fashions, placed it first among the reasons for the Dispersion: "That Israel should spread among the unintelligent nations, that those nations learn from them belief in the existence of God and the flow of Providence regarding the particulars of men."<sup>15</sup> Its most powerful literary expression, the parable of the Jewish people as a seed buried in the earth, invisibly generating the spiritual movements that bring mankind closer to God, was written by R. Yehuda Halevi, in a book distinguished for its commendation of aliya.<sup>16</sup> The mission of Israel is not the brainchild of German Reform; it is an old and respectable conception for Jewish thought.

Nevertheless, in modern times, this idea speaks with a German accent. Within the Torah world it is stamped with the personality of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. Early in his career, Hirsch already envisioned the emancipated ideal Jew

dwelling in freedom in the midst of the nations, and striving to attain unto its ideal, every son of Israel a respected and influential exemplar priest of righteousness and love, disseminating among the nations not specific Judaism, for proselytism is interdicted, but pure humanity.<sup>17</sup>

Two assumptions underlie this passage:

1) The conditions of Galut permit, and even promote, a dignified and inspiring Jewish existence. Beneath the encrusted distortions and compulsions of the past, glimmer the opportunities of civility and free religious practice.

2) Fulfillment of the first assumption contributes to the substantial spiritual improvement of our gentile neighbors.

Both assumptions are open to question. They are often rejected because the brave new world of European Jewry turned ugly. From its inception, the Zionist outlook held that subjugation and persecution degraded the Jew's spirit, inevitably undercutting his ability to instruct the world.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, the degraded Job of the nineteenth century had not completely lost the capacity to teach, even to inspire, though he cannot offer himself as a "respected and influential exemplar" of dignified existence; the murdered Job of our century cannot do that either. In the absence of

minimal physical security the Jew cannot teach, and the gentile cannot benefit from his lesson. But this critique loses sight of the conviction that “America is different,” if not forever, at least for the time being.<sup>19</sup> And it is today in which we live.

The contemporary American neo-Hirschian is vulnerable to a different question: What precisely is the “pure humanity” that the Jew is to disseminate? Assuming that it is in our power to bring that message to others, how is it to be communicated? Hirsch seems to hold, quite reasonably, that the message is to be disseminated by personal example. Personal example of what? Human beings who exemplify virtue are scarce in any age, not least in our secular wasteland. Yet honesty, fidelity, modesty, conscience, courage, altruism, love are not unknown in the gentile world past and present. That these qualities have survived and sometimes even prospered is largely due to the insertion of the Jewish people into history; even more so has the story of God and the Jews testified to His concern for the destiny of man. But this does not entail that we Jews can best contribute to the flourishing of virtue by dwelling among the gentiles or by maximizing our intercourse with them.

If we Jews, in our time, are called upon to establish a model of human dignity and to make a place for God in history, it might well be presumed that our arena of striving and teaching should coincide with the area that is both essential to the modern world and that in which gentile resources have failed most spectacularly. “In our times,” wrote Thomas Mann of our age, long before its deepest horrors came to light, “the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms.”<sup>20</sup> Subsequent history has demonstrated only too patently man’s fallibility in the face of that destiny. Far from separating the Jewish people from its teaching vocation, the Zionist project, from this point of view, submits us to the exemplary challenge of contemporary existence.<sup>21</sup> An eminent Israeli scientist speaks for many when he writes:

In returning to Zion, we have put ourselves and Judaism irrevocably on the line . . . We lived the epoch of galut in self-knowledge of a very real question: are our brave value affirmations for real, or are they in the modern world largely a privilege of weakness?<sup>22</sup>

R. Kook articulates this mode of analysis when he claims that it is our destiny in exile that reflects the obscure, introverted, self-cultivating, *emet ve-emuna*, pole of Jewish existence, while our lives in Israel manifest the extroverted, daylight, *emet ve-yatsiv*, pole.<sup>23</sup> When we consider where the Jew can best serve as example and inspiration to the nations, the problem with Israel is not that it is an evasion of the challenge, but, on the contrary, that it is all too real. Besides, setting a moral example while living with Arabs in Israel is no less a task than inspiring an audience of Polish charwomen or black token clerks in Brooklyn.

The neo-Hirschian may counter this pro-aliya version of the "light unto the nations" position in two ways. He may concede that Israel offers greater opportunities for exemplary living, but insist that we are enjoined, for whatever reasons, from taking advantage of these opportunities by returning to Israel at this time. This view is, by definition, outside the pale of religious Zionism, and hence need not detain us here.

Alternatively, one might tolerate living in Galut, under certain circumstances, as a *be'di-avad*. The desire to instruct and inspire the nations is not, ordinarily, a sufficient reason for remaining in North America. Individual Jews, however, finding themselves in Galut for a variety of reasons, are to make the best of their fate by undertaking the Hirschian vocation. From this point of view, inspiring gentiles will not, by itself, all things being equal, serve to justify life in Galut; it can, however, make that life more worthwhile and purposeful.

#### VENTILATION VARIATION

There is another aspect of Hirsch's conception that we may best appreciate by catching a glimpse of him in a moment of exegesis. The problem is Abraham's seemingly unmotivated journey to Gerar shortly before the birth of Isaac. Hirsch ventures the following:

An Isaac should grow up again in isolation, away from every pernicious influence. But complete isolation where the youth never comes into contact with other people, other thoughts, people living different lives and aims, is an equally dangerous fault in education. A young man who has never seen any other way of life than that of his parents, who has never learnt to value, respect, and hold fast to that life by its moral contrast to others, surely falls readily under these strange influences as soon as he meets them, just as the anxious shutting out of all fresh air is the surest way of catching cold the first time one goes out. The son of Abraham, the future continuer of the heritage of Abraham is, from time to time, to go into the non-Abrahamitic world, there to learn to estimate what is in opposition to it, and to steel himself by practice, in the midst of a world opposed to the spirit and way of life of Abraham, to keep himself faithful and true to his mission. For that purpose Abraham chose the residential city of a Philistine prince. In the land of the Philistines the degeneration seems not to have reached the depth of their Amorite neighbours, and therefore they had not been included in the destruction.<sup>24</sup>

While Hirsch stresses here the "mission of Abraham," he is also concerned about the development of Isaac, who, unless immunized through exposure to the world, is in danger of falling under its sway. If confrontation with an alien world is inevitable, then education to the knowledge of the world



is desirable, quite apart from our ability to influence others; and if knowledge by acquaintance is superior to knowledge by description, then one must not only read Kant or Dreiser, but hear them speak in their authentic accents. Here are the ingredients of an argument for preferring cosmopolitan Galut over hothouse Israel.

The flaws in such an argument are fairly obvious. If proponents of *Torah veHokhma* regret that our Isaacs turn out overly narrow and prone to catching Hirschian colds, it is because we have put first things first and given precedence to their need for insulation. As Hirsch himself recognizes, the ventilation of Isaac is intermittent rather than continuous; his cheeks are invigorated by the fresh dry breezes of Gerar, not by the sulfuric blasts of Sodom. Furthermore the carriers of alien ideas whom we would influence and by whom we are liable to be affected are today, both in Israel and America, more likely to be other Jews than gentiles. Surely this makes a difference.

Overall, Israeli Orthodox societies are more polarized, hence more closed in on themselves, than is American Judaism. This may be the outcome of historical differences: American Jews, be they “right wing” or modern, were rewarded for participation, to a lesser or greater degree, in the civilization of their adopted country; meanwhile Israeli Haredim, descendants of the inveterate world-shunning *Yishuv haYashan*, were shunted to the periphery of the new Israeli society in the making. Perhaps polarization flows inexorably from the fact that the “neutral” secular Western culture buffers the sharp antagonisms of divergent commitments and beliefs that otherwise render common life intolerable.

Whatever the causes, and despite the occasional insinuation that the aggressively secular Zionist street, backed by the institutions of the State, poses the greater threat to one’s religious integrity, it appears to be the consensus of American Orthodoxy that Israel is, with respect to religious education, “safer” than the gilded ghettos of North America. Even those who celebrate the resurgence of Orthodoxy in America, and the success of Yeshivas in holding the allegiance of their graduates, are wary of overconfidence. Thus, an article that takes issue with religious Zionism asserts, as a matter of course, that “living in a free society is a direct threat to remaining within *Klal Yisroel*.”<sup>25</sup> And the confines of Israel better contain the menace of freedom than the disorderly expanses of North America. As for the committed centrist community, I should not be surprised to see our best representatives heading for Israel out of concern for their children’s social development, much as an earlier generation fled the “out of town” Rabbinate once the first child approached the watershed of school.

The other side of Israel’s sheltered religiosity is the curtailing of those virtues we associate with American-accented Orthodoxy. Generalizing about the Israeli scene, contemplating both the Haredi and the militantly Zionist brands of Orthodoxy, one recoils from the tendency to intellectual sclerosis,

of which the constriction of general education is as much a symptom as a cause; the scotomized morality that cannot but diminish the stature of the piety of which it is the ostensible expression; the sullen resentment that quickens a brooding ideological pugnacity. These deficiencies afflict contemporary Orthodoxy everywhere; indeed they are pandemic to the human condition. Yet the narrow focus, the polemic intensity and the colorful partisanship of the groups involved, raises the spiritual temperature to the point of fever. Hopes that the influx of American Haredim would temper the Israeli variety and build bridges between the communities, seem to have been exaggerated. *Kim'a kim'a batil* seems to be the applicable rule: the indigenous Haredim set the tone and exert the influence.<sup>26</sup> The looming prospect of cultural claustrophobia is more than merely a restriction of opportunity. Undoubtedly, it leads a significant number of thinking religious individuals to fear for their *klita tova* and stay put.

In the final analysis, though, such reservations belong to the realm of individual considerations discussed in the first section of this essay. To the extent that contact with non-Jewish culture and its carriers is, for whatever reason, important for the fulfillment of the Jewish vocation, this can, in principle, be accomplished in Israel. Thus the ventilation factor may play a role in the decision to tarry in Galut and add meaning to such an existence. It cannot, however, constitute a self-sustaining theory of Galut.

## SIN AND PUNISHMENT

R. Bahye's second reason for our dispersion among the nations is that we are punished for our sins: "Israel had sinned in the holy land . . . Therefore it was decreed that they be exiled . . . And with the exile and subjugation our iniquities are expurgated . . ." The theological underpinnings of this conception require no exposition; the textual supports are innumerable, their power augmented by each repetition of *musaf le-yom tov*. Hence the belief that one's life in Galut expurgates and expiates our sins would be expected to mold our experience. Why is this, by and large, not the case for American Orthodoxy?

I would distinguish three factors that undermine the position of *mipnei hatta'enu* ("because of our sins") in our community. The first is the general eclipse of the sense of sin in the modern world, with the concomitant decline of belief in the metaphysical reality of punishment. This spiritual and intellectual impoverishment is most evident outside Orthodox Judaism, and is even regarded as a mark of spiritual progress. It can hardly be denied, however, that this cultural fashion has swayed many in our community; I believe it has left its mark on the "right wing" world as well. Why this is so and how this tendency should be countered is, however, not directly relevant to our discussion.

The second factor is that religious freedom and material well-being don't quite feel like Galut. A rightist spokesman plaintively asks: "Is it enough that we sense *golus* from time to time? Does not the *Shulchan Aruch* demand that the *amah al amah* be located near the doorway, to serve as a constant reminder of our status?"<sup>27</sup> And when Galut no longer feels like Galut, it certainly, *a fortiori*, doesn't feel like punishment.

Lastly, can we truly think of Galut as punishment when we pass up the opportunity to reverse that failure to live rightly in the Land which is why we were expelled from it in the first place? Beneath the prosperous robes of success may beat the heart of a Daniel, wearing the afflictions of Galut like Thomas More's hair shirt, suffering in his or her unique way the agony of individual, national, cosmic alienation and reconciliation with God. Who can penetrate the "reasons of the heart," the mystery of the human individual standing before God? Yet who can deny that, in the ordinary course of events, one who is in pain acts to eradicate the pain, and one who repents seeks to undo the cause of the offense?

In a word, to structure the contemporary experience of privileged Galut around the gesture of expiation is rational only in conjunction with a theory, compatible with religious Zionism, explaining why the work of spiritual restoration cannot be better endeavored by renewing our habitation of Eretz Israel. Such a justification of working for redemption while living in Galut could be supplemented by the traditional *mipnei hatta'enu*, though it could presumably stand on its own. Let us consider what such an approach would look like.

## GALUT AS REMEDIAL JUDAISM

A possible function of Galut is to prepare the Jewish people as a whole, segments of the people or individuals, for the return to Israel. The generation submits to being "the last of subjugation," in the hope that its successor will be "the first of redemption."<sup>28</sup> Note that we do not predicate the argument on its applicability to the entire nation. One segment may be ready, while another is to remain behind, and others could justify their place in Galut by reference to the needs of the second. One premise of this position is that the nation is not yet completely ready to resume the destiny envisioned by the Torah; the second is that premature return will hinder rather than help the building up of Land and people.

The paradigm for this approach is Rambam's explanation of the children of Israel's initial detour in the desert. Having just emerged from slavery, they were psychologically unprepared for war. Immediate confrontation with the challenge of entering Canaan would be disastrous.<sup>29</sup> Hence God cunningly avoids guiding the newly liberated slaves "by way of the land of the Philistines." By analogy, one might argue, a sizable number of Jews

are not yet ready to make their contribution in Israel, and their going there would be more a bane than a boon, either for themselves or for the nation as a whole.

In Exodus it is God who decides, providentially, to defer the challenge; how does one make such a determination absent the explicit expression of the divine will? Even an anti-Zionist like R. Abraham Mordecai Alter of Gora, while castigating those who celebrate the Balfour Declaration, is unwilling to turn his back on the opportunities it opens up: "But if, by God's Providence, there will be a greater opportunity to settle the Land, then the obligation of settlement is also greater."<sup>30</sup> Of course the same problem arises whenever self-scrutiny becomes a factor in choosing one's destiny. Yet the difficulty is compounded by the material advantages of the fleshpots. Our fellow non-travellers conspire, by force of numbers alone, to make this place assume the permanence of home, while the inertia of a lifetime accumulates atop the inertia of millennia. "Better . . . to stay cowering like this in the early lessons."<sup>31</sup>

Eventually, the heart-stopping moment arrives when it is too late to elude the finality of loss. Not having prepared for the feast, one is, unlike the dying Moses, denied the last benediction and the mountain prospect. "Let what is broken so remain," resolve Tennyson's "Lotos Eaters": "Our sons inherit us, our looks are strange, And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy." A famous thesis of Ibn Ezra belies the optimism implied by Rambam's formulation: "Israel were derelict and unfit for war . . . And God caused all the males leaving Egypt to die . . . until the generation arose in the desert that had not seen exile."<sup>32</sup>

Adopting the "remedial reading" of our continued, now freely elected, American sojourn, is thus not without psychological cost. Our intuitive distaste towards this way of structuring our existence reflects the sense of personal despair in judging oneself unworthy, consigning oneself to the ranks of those "desert dead," those who do not resemble recumbent giants, who have never dared disturb the gold and silent sands of endless oblivion. But there is an additional motive for our repugnance. For the unrestricted application of this principle not only makes us locusts in our own eyes; it also seems to call into question our confidence in the Torah as a source of guidance in the face of forthcoming predicaments.

A bit of history is instructive. The idea that America is a better haven than Eretz Israel, at least for the time being, goes back to Y. L. Gordon, one of the most outspoken anti-Orthodox leaders of Eastern European Haskala. Going to the Holy Land, in his view, would only perpetuate, nay exacerbate, the collisions between modernity and Rabbinical Judaism which were, in his opinion, the root of many evils. Decades later, when the Mizrachi, under the leadership of R. Reines, supported Herzl's Uganda initiative, they were accused by their cultural adversaries (apparently without an atom of objective evidence), of forsaking Israel because they secretly conceded that

the difficulty of constructing a modern Jewish society in accordance with the Torah was too daunting, especially as regards the observance of *shemitta*.<sup>33</sup>

“In exile, Jews are in “spring training”; the “regular season” only begins officially when Jews return to their natural homeland.”<sup>34</sup> So writes an exponent of religious Zionism, explaining Ramban’s doctrine that the Torah is truly fulfilled only in Israel. Perpetuating the exhibition season, for Gordon and his contemporary heirs, is nothing less than an avoidance of championship competition, and casts Orthodoxy as the Washington Senators of the Jewish people, anxious to stay cowering like this in the basement of the early lessons, “since the promise of learning is a delusion.”

In all honesty, few of us are completely satisfied with the state of halakhic jurisprudence as it affects contemporary society in general, and as the “shadow constitution” of the Israeli polity in particular. It is perhaps just as well, at this stage, that *medinat halakha* (the halakhic state) belongs to the realm of *hilkheta l’meshiha* (utopian halakha); also that, in the absence of “most of her inhabitants,” we need not confront the economic revolution attendant upon the reinstitution of halakhic regulations governing real estate transactions and so forth. Perhaps the prolongation of our American settlement is in the best interests of ultimate redemption. No doubt some individuals are destined to make their contribution here. Yet it is far from clear how, by indefinitely deferring our unmediated participation in the Jewish people’s rendezvous with destiny, we expect to improve matters.

## BY SPIRIT ALONE

The previous approach acknowledges the inferiority of Galut. Another perspective favors the Galut situation, in spite of its manifest and undeniable evils, over any worldly alternative possible in Israel. The key to this surprising reversal is the contrast of Galut as spiritual with the corporeal nature of *avodat haShem* in the Land of Israel.

Long before the rise of Hibbat Zion it was common for Hasidic leaders, in the wake of their medieval forerunners, to deploy “Galut” as a metaphor for a variety of worldly and spiritual misfortunes. A disciple of the “Holy Jew” states that “whoever serves God has, in his home, an aspect of Eretz Israel.”<sup>35</sup> R. Shneur Zalman of Liady is typical of Hasidic writers who wrestled with this notion:

Therefore the root of the *mitsvot* is precisely in Eretz Israel, and the spies were then at a very high level and they did not wish to lower themselves to the practical *mitsvot* which is the aspect of drawing down the Infinite Light. And they said about Eretz Israel that it consumes its inhabitants, for it was their opinion that if the Infinite Light were revealed below as above, their being would be completely abrogated.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars have debated whether the early Hasidic appropriation of eschatological themes for spiritual purposes effectively “neutralized” messianic fervor among Hasidim.<sup>37</sup> The leading authority on later Polish Hasidut maintains that the internalizing, pro-Galut trend persisted into our century, at least in part, as a negation of Zionist pessimism about Jewish survival and authenticity outside of Israel.<sup>38</sup>

The philosophy of history, according to which the religious destiny of the Jewish people is properly fulfilled only in Galut, thus makes its appearance in the work of influential Torah thinkers. The attraction of this position also arises from acquaintance with European civilization. This may come about in two ways: On the one hand, a full awakening to the evils caused by excessive attachment to the nation and its terrestrial aspirations, may lead to a principled scorn for the historical arena. “History is a nightmare into which we are trying not to slip,” the sensitive Jew might pronounce, inverting the words of Stephen Daedalus.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, a Jewish thinker like Franz Rosenzweig struggles with the value of history, but precisely for that reason cannot regard as inessential the exclusion of the Jewish people from the historical stage. The resolution to this tension between Hegelian philosophy and Jewish eternity is Rosenzweig’s doctrine of the double covenant, whereby Christianity pursues the path of history while Judaism, impervious to change and above history, stands at the goal.<sup>40</sup>

The Zionist rejoinder to the spiritual devaluation of history is both practical and theological. At one level, involvement in the vicissitudes of history is unavoidable. We may not be interested in history, but, whether we like it or not, history (to paraphrase Trotsky’s remark about the dialectic) is very interested in us. In this line of reasoning, brilliantly advanced in Emil Fackenheim’s *To Mend the World*, the Holocaust refutes Rosenzweig, not as one would refute an assimilationist, by convicting him of unwarranted optimism, but by demonstrating the sheer unreality of the attempt to exist beyond historical space. To banish the historical from the existential Jewish horizon is simply impossible.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, the neutralization of the political-historical dimension is precisely that—a profound theological re-orientation that commandeers a substantial corpus of Torah, presumed to address the earthly destiny of the Jew, and projects it into the possession of an inner, spiritualized domain. With all due regard for the value and power of this allegorization, it cannot replace the original meaning. Halakha is hopelessly wed to terrestrial obligations and ideals. The original blueprint envisioned by the Torah, according to which Israel was to occupy its homeland and never undergo exile, was not a temporary detour from her religious vocation; on the contrary, it is Galut that marks a deviation from the Divine plan.

For these reasons it is difficult to quarrel with Professor Blidstein’s diagnosis:

I, for one, am not willing to take at face value the claim that the situation described is simply another instance of the classic tension between Torah (or spirituality) and nationalism. It is much more likely that we are witness to a (no less classic) skewering of Jewish spirituality itself, a communal accommodation to stability and ease.<sup>42</sup>

To grasp this point from a different angle we need look no farther than the passage from *Likkutei Torah* with which we introduced this section. R. Shneur Zalman exhibits remarkable sympathy for the spies who were on a very high level and feared that entering Israel would abrogate their being. It is his greatness, and that of much Hasidic homiletics at their best, to give voice to the powerful temptation the spies' spirituality represents, despite the clear rejection of their actions and attitudes by the Torah. For he knows very well that the position of the spies is rejected. This sense of complexity suggests a final, more satisfactory way of valorizing the Galut experience.

#### A VALE OF SOUL-MAKING

On the one hand, Galut is the negation of normal Jewish life. On the other hand, Galut is ordained by God, if not antecedently then consequently.<sup>43</sup> From the eschatological perspective nothing is accidental; the regressions and digressions of history, utterly transformed, are seen to be integral parts of the redemptive pattern. Thus Galut is a tragic but essential moment in the providential plan. The true, comprehensive account of Galut eschews easy evaluations. Recognizing in Galut a radical, ultimately intolerable dislocation of the Jewish people, we allow that Galut has, nonetheless, enriched our spirits as surely as it has vitiated our lives.

R. Kook exemplifies the search for such theological equilibrium, as illustrated by the following passage:

In the nation's great trouble itself, when the bustle of national life and its injurious commotion were removed from her midst, the spiritual light began to rise slowly in its midst up the steps it had descended. The spirit of the nation took wing to the degree that it retired from political life, which is the first thing to become impure in a corrupt community.<sup>44</sup>

Galut is neither to be deemed an ideal escape from the terrestrial aspect of human life, nor given up as an existential limbo in which Jews are to "graze until they become unfit" and can be released from their aimless succession of motions. Truly it is abnormal. But a temporal island of abnormality, a nation that has learned that its vocation depends neither on force of arms nor cohesion of territory, is better for the purgative experience.

This approach potentially incorporates, of course, the themes articulated by the other approaches we have listed. It thus brings to the end of this part of our discussion the virtue of comprehensiveness.

### III

To this point we have worked within the limits of the questions: Why do we find ourselves in Galut? What might our job in Galut possibly be? We have used this inquiry to shed light on our subject, namely, how we experience our lives in Galut. From these possibilities, it is time to pass to the present situation of the American Jew who is a card carrying member of the religious Zionist "foreign legion." Can we identify characteristics of our experience that cut across our individual peculiarities, beyond the bare bones of the categories examined above? Needless to say, any answer to this question inevitably entails prescriptive judgments as well.

As indicated at the outset, many differences between life in America and in Israel are not suitable candidates, however important they might be for individuals and groups, for our discussion. Two of them are important enough to deserve explicit dismissal. One is the general level of material status. Moving to Israel, for most Americans, given their advantageous financial and educational backgrounds, is not inviting the wolf to the door. The quality of material life for the vast majority of Israelis, too, is incomparably higher than it was three or four decades ago: automobiles, leisure appurtenances, foreign travel are taken for granted today, as telephones, central heating, refrigerators, and even indoor toilets, were not, then. To be sure, as noted, what one person is indifferent to, another desires and a third cannot live without; we are also, I presume, right in thinking that typical Israelis must hustle more than we to get the money to buy their things. But it seems to me that the contrast in quality of material life and possessions is not as stark as we are accustomed to imagine it, in any event one of degree rather than one of kind.

The second issue, that of security, is far more complex, for reasons that are significant for the further development of our inquiry. At first blush the debate cuts both ways. People who walk the streets of New York are easily made reluctant to visit Israel (or permit their children to study there) on account of the political situation. Meanwhile Mayor Lahat of Tel Aviv carries with him the memory of being mugged on Broadway. For Americans, Israel sounds like Dodge City; for Israelis, American Jews (for that matter other Americans too) are defenseless victims.

If this were the entire story, the estimation of comparative security could be consigned, for all practical purposes, to the calculations of insurance salesmen. Yet there is a sense in which the threat to Israeli Jews cuts deeper, and plays a more comprehensive role in our self-definition, than the parallel



fears that take up residence in the minds of Western Jews. It may be worth our while to explore the asymmetry at two distinct levels:

1) The American Jew, nervously scanning the crime statistics, rightly or wrongly fears violation of his or her person, family, fellow Jews, or fellow men, as individuals. Even if Jewishness heightens the likelihood of being attacked, even when anti-Semitism appears as a motive for crime, the menace is essentially private. When a series of incidents leads Jews to speak of a “neighborhood under siege,” we are using a metaphor, and we know it. Israeli Jews, by contrast, are imperilled collectively. This is both a reflection of the unique status of Eretz Israel for Judaism and for Jews, and an obvious consequence of the empirical situation. In any event, the Israeli experience is, I believe, different in quality from the former.<sup>45</sup>

2) More important is the difference in the experience of responsibility. In the final analysis, the Israeli must regard that which befalls the community as a challenge to the community’s action and initiative. Disputes about relative security, therefore, are more than a matter of actuarial tables or psychological projection. They are rather about the central attitudes underlying the existential character of Israeli life as distinguished from our experience of Galut.<sup>46</sup>

We must therefore focus on the deeper outlook that manifests itself in differing conceptions of responsibility for the Jewish people. Religious Zionists believe that living in Israel is not simply an opportunity to fulfill more mitzvot (though, as noted before, that is an incentive for all religious Jews). They are united, at a deeper level, by the conviction that Israel is where great things are in the making, that they are called upon to take part in the shaping of that history, and that the common life of Jews living in Israel has enormous significance for the destiny of *Klal Yisrael*.

Jews living in America, by contrast, may be profoundly committed to their own spiritual welfare, to the welfare, spiritual and material, of their community, even to that of non-Orthodox and assimilated Jews. Their sense of communal responsibility may extend to active concern for the welfare of American society. But the enterprise partakes, at a certain level, of classic American “voluntaryism.” As individuals, or as a community, we do not ordinarily conceive of our actions reverberating down the corridors of recorded time. We may wish to conceive of ourselves responding to the cosmic, eschatological challenge, but when we try, we often end up feeling more comical than heroic. The morally relevant distinction of the gilded Galut fleshpots, like those of Egypt, is the word *hinnam*, that is, free of *mitzvot*. This freedom, for Orthodox Jews, does not take the form of respite from the observance of the Torah. Instead it is reflected in a more relaxed attitude towards the challenge of national responsibility.

The second aspect of the security question, to which we alluded before, is best thought of in this context. The Herzlian hope that Israel would solve, once and for all, the “troubles of the Jews,” seems more illusory than ever,

in a country surrounded by, and infested by, mortal enemies. The physical threat has not been eliminated. It has, however, been transformed. The Israeli realizes that the commonwealth, meaning himself, is responsible for his security as a Jew. He is expected, nay required, to do his share in the army; government policy is presumed to reflect his direct participation as a Jew. It is thus difficult for him to pretend that what happens in his country has nothing to do with his actions. Quite patriotic American Orthodox Jews—as well as other Jews, as well as other Americans of our general socio-economic status—can live in a democracy that enters a military engagement, and express their opinion of government policy, without personally knowing anyone who will fight in that war. We read about racially motivated boycotts of Korean stores without feeling that we *must*, as citizens and as commemorators of our grandparents' blood, do more than shake our heads and avert our eyes.

It is remarkable that we do not feel more uncomfortable about this degree of detachment than we do. This may be due, as Charles Liebman has argued, to the profoundly apolitical, therapeutic nature of the American upper middle classes.<sup>47</sup> We may also feel relatively at home amid the widespread transience of American culture, hence unafraid that we will be singled out as an alien presence, squatters in someone else's fatherland.<sup>48</sup>

The roots of this difference between Israel and Exile are both theological and historical. The metaphysical divergence in self-conception goes back to *Tanakh*. While both individual and communal responsibility play a role throughout biblical theodicy, it is no accident that it is Ezekiel, educating the people for religious life in Galut, who preaches the emphasis on individual responsibility more explicitly than any other prophet.<sup>49</sup> Nor is it an accident that the fullness of communal responsibility comes into force only with the entry into Israel and, according to one view, is suspended with the destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>50</sup> A sense of communal destiny seems metaphysically appropriate to Israel, while spiritual individualism would reflect the realities of life in the Diaspora.

The historical factors can be divided into issues of ideology and matters of circumstance. If religious Zionism aspires to redemptive action to transform the state of the Jewish people materially and attain those spiritual achievements possible only through renewed communal life in the Land, then it is only understandable that those who are most committed will be the ones to make aliya. At the same time the situation in which these individuals find themselves continually provides them with occasions for renewed commitment. The Yishuv has indeed had to cope with large waves of *klita*, with constant military requirements, with the demand to formulate and act decisively on its understanding of the new State's identity and future, with the tensions of co-existence between religious and non-religious. Those who are not crushed by the burden can only be fortified in their resolution.

The distinctive circumstances of Israeli Jewry are not limited to the

extraordinary requirements of crisis situations. The conditions of ordinary life are also dissimilar in ways that make for a greater sense of responsibility. For one thing, all Jews are identifiable as Jews and receive an education that, however impoverished by our standards, creates something of a common language. No American institution provides a sense of collective fate comparable to that inculcated by service in Tsahal. The average American Jew is virtually incapable of imagining what it is like to refrain from work on Shabbat. His or her Israeli counterpart in Tel Aviv has seen Shabbat observed as a public day of rest.<sup>51</sup> There is no way to drop out of the Jewish people, short of emigration. All of these factors reinforce the sense that other Jews' spiritual destiny is very much a part of one's own.

This brief characterization of the Israeli spiritual horizon is open to question from both theological and historical perspectives. We shall not rehearse the many issues of conflict between religious Zionists and the non-Zionist Orthodox. Accepting the view that Jews are not obligated, are even enjoined from, returning to the Land, must necessarily affect how we experience our being in Galut. It is not clear how widely and strongly such a position is held. At any rate, it is less pervasive, and less debilitating, than the attempt to live in Israel while resisting this sense of responsibility. Such a position is maintained when one declines to recognize the majority of Israeli Jews as significant limbs in the body of Knesset Yisrael, or regards the Jews of Israel as either numerically or spiritually insignificant compared to the Jewish people outside of Israel.

Elements of such a view are expressed, to some degree, in the non-Zionist Orthodox world. One need not burn the Israeli flag to adopt such an approach. It is quite compatible with wishing Israel well, even beyond the minimal awareness that "in its peace is your peace." All it takes is the kind of detachment, critical or benign, which constitutes the prevalent spectator attitude toward social and political life in America. Because it is easy to slip into attitudes typical of Galut, and because we share many of the criticisms which fuel the gesture of detachment on the part of the *Haredi* world, this a temptation that religious Zionists must assiduously resist.

As noted above, the sense of responsibility characteristic of religious Zionism as lived in Israel, is reinforced by certain features of the contemporary culture. Were those circumstances to alter for the worse, the experience of responsibility would inevitably be affected. Such would be the case, in terms of relations between religious and secular Jews, were the educational gap to increase, or, as seems not impossible,<sup>52</sup> were the public profile of religious observance to shrink substantially. Abatement of the state of perpetual crisis might also diminish the sense of communal responsibility solidified by consciousness of real and urgent demands.

In addition, a weakening of *gemeinschaft* may be the result of certain seemingly value-neutral processes. In a relatively small society it is hard to remain oblivious to your fellow man's concerns. In a mass society it

is literally impossible to care deeply about all of one's neighbors. Commitment is inevitably rationed, and the most reasonable form of rationing is to pay attention to your own immediate proximity and to people who are most like yourself. Thus the attraction of the Zionist ideal may depend on the society's success in maintaining the external circumstances that enhance moral capacity.<sup>53</sup>

## IV

If my analysis is correct, cultivating the right kind of concern for *klal Yisrael* is both the key to motivating religious aliya and to making that aliya a boon to the community. The preceding discussion may help us sort out some of the outstanding problems facing us in Galut, both in our daily lives and inasmuch as we seek to create an environment helpful to aliya.

1. Should religious Zionism adopt the hard line and view attitudes toward aliya as the criterion dividing authentic from inauthentic Jews? If my analysis is correct, living in Israel is an important dimension of one's spiritual identity, but does not take the place of the "perennial" Jewish virtues cultivated throughout Galut. The living ideals of contemporary Orthodoxy, in Israel and in Galut, are those which have animated God-fearing Jews for millennia: commitment to Torah and concern for the Jewish people. An individual educated to this double ideal will naturally appreciate the value of dwelling in Israel, the *mitsvot* that can be fulfilled only upon its soil, the unique challenges of its edification in this our time. His commitment to Israel need not derive from indoctrination in the belief that spiritual excellence is inconceivable outside of Israel, that only the *oleh* eludes a shadowy, vicarious religious existence. To the contrary, his commitment is built on the same foundations that will sustain his spirit if he chooses, for whatever considerations, to make his life in Galut.

At first blush, this approach appears to be unexceptional. Yet there has been a tendency among some modern Orthodox educators to put all their religious eggs in the Israel basket, assuming that only nationalism has a chance to secure the loyalties of their pupils for authentic Judaism. Furthermore, vigorous uncompromising religious Zionism can overcome feelings of religious inferiority vis-a-vis Agudah circles, by locating an area of religious observance in which we Mizrachists can put them to shame.<sup>54</sup>

The consequences of this putative religious "specialization" on the part of religious Zionists have been unfortunate. Those who subscribe to it are tempted to inappropriate disparagement of Orthodox segments on the right, both dismissing piety that is not committed to aliya and signifying that only Zionist motives for dwelling in Israel bear spiritual value, thus implying, it would seem, that Hazon Ish and the Brisker Rav lacked *ahavat ha-aretz*! By the same token, militant political positions become the equivalent of

the conspicuous *humra*. This is worse in the United States than in Israel, for Americans need not temper their maximalism with reality; to the contrary, the fact that their fervor is that of the spectator virtually compels them to prove through rhetoric and money what is not achieved by direct personal action. Whence the truth of R. Amital's observation that Kahane could claim more support in Queens than in Israel.<sup>56</sup> Among the consequences, of course, is the despair, the resigned acquiescence to a life of spiritual mediocrity, that lies in wait for those who, whether despite their ideological focus or because they balk at the hard sell, fail to make aliya, but who have neglected to build up their other spiritual resources.

Another phenomenon, distinct but not disjunct from the preceding factor, is a tendency to lay down a strict definition of religious Zionism. The fine points of *at'halta d'geulla*, the details of how to observe Yom Haatsmaut, the hypothetical circumstances under which one might be prepared to consider territorial compromise in Yesha (Judea, Samaria and Gaza), are sometimes treated as litmus tests of acceptability. Doing so engenders unnecessary divisiveness within Orthodoxy, on the one hand, while obscuring what ought to be the real distinction between us and the Haredi world, on the other hand, namely the question of responsibility based on a sense of relationship to the Jewish people as broadly defined.

2. Responsibility towards the Jewish people normally goes hand in hand with the ability to identify with its members. Not separating oneself from the *tsibbur* is more than a matter of actions, but includes emotional participation in the community's adversity as well.<sup>57</sup> Yet sometimes the true mark of solidarity is the ability to share in the community's life when trouble is no longer nigh. As Nietzsche shrewdly observes: "Fellowship in joy, and not sympathy in sorrow, makes people friends."<sup>58</sup> For this reason it would appear desirable that those who prepare to live in Israel, and otherwise be concerned with its inhabitants, school themselves in the culture of Israel, in all its variety, high and low, religious and secular.

Needless to say it is nonsense to dash frantically about, trying to master various cultural activities and avocations simply because they are of interest to other people. Any particular elective feature of culture can be dispensed with without damaging the fabric of the Jewish people. Must we commiserate with the Israeli public when a basketball star sprains his ankle or goes AWOL from the team? Are falafel and folk-dancing, once the prophylactic of choice against juvenile assimilation, essential ingredients of vicarious Israelihood?

A moment's reflection on ordinary human relations, however, reveals the hollowness of this objection. Friendship and love are rooted in sympathy regarding essential matters; yet the glue that solidifies adherence, on a day-to-day basis, is often a tie with little inherent significance: the memory of a tune, a joke, a hobby. The symbolic power of such a tie cannot always be predicted, let alone prescribed, but without it commitments often

become too fragile to serve their purpose. The same is true of the life of a community and a nation: a measure of overlapping cultural literacy can often, in times of crisis as in times of calm, provide the context in which great ideals are pursued.

How Israelis grapple with the great ideals in which their lives are enmeshed is a worthy subject for penetrating study. My impression is that we Americans lavish disproportionate attention on Israeli politicians as bearers of the national *geist*. We might consider looking at other cultural expressions as well: literature, for example. Much writing emanating from Orthodox circles resonates to the thrust and parry of the polemical marketplace; as a result, it tends to be hortatory or invective. Literature restores the subtle, living complexity that is often lost in the effort to be politically correct and to get in the last word. Thus, to take our own topic as an example, we are inclined to simplify motivations for *aliya*, to paper over ambivalence and to view everything from the perspective of the spiritual ideal. Nathan Shaham's *Rosendorf Quartet*, to take a recent novel, exhibits the very mixed feelings of German *olim* in the 1930's, whose spiritual allegiance belongs to the German artistic tradition, for whom Palestine is little more than a musically underdeveloped outpost at the edge of Europe, a (temporary?) haven in a time of trouble. Among those writing from an Orthodox vantage point, Agnon's haunting story *Ad Olam*, according to one plausible interpretation, reflects a profound nostalgia for the intellectually pure world of isolation and exile, the world in which sunset is always more beautiful than sunrise. We lose touch with these elements of our consciousness, and that of other Jews, to our own loss and theirs.

3. American Orthodoxy's inability to resolve fully the ambiguity of our relation to gentiles has consequences for our experience of *Galut* and of potential redemption. Clearly, as the Rav often put it, we are both strangers and residents (*ger ve-toshav*) in the United States. It is important that we do not feel at home in *Galut*. It is also difficult to maintain that feeling when "America's openness and the sociological changes of the past few decades have permitted even the fully observant Jew to enter the mainstream of American society, and still faithfully observe *mitzva kala k'chamura*."<sup>59</sup>

One way of keeping alive a sense of *Galut* in America is to inculcate an instinctive snideness toward "their" culture, from baseball to apple pie. Another is to limit, as a matter of principle, active concern for the affairs of American society, to cultivate a studied *schadenfroh* toward the moral adversities that rock it. This is, of course, easier for those segments of Orthodoxy that categorically reject Western culture, though here too, there may be much self-deception. For those of us more open to what the culture has to offer and more willing, in principle, to seek its welfare, the equilibrium between the estrangement of the sojourner and the civic face of the citizen remains elusive.

The most forceful way of nursing an awareness of Galut, however, is to dwell on anti-Semitism. For Dr. Glick, referring to a new crop of Yeshiva graduates *not* oriented to Zionism, “complacency about life in Galut is shattered only by Black-Jewish confrontation.”<sup>60</sup> In the waning years of the twentieth century, as other sources of authority have lost their power, victimhood has come into its own.<sup>61</sup> Members of groups with access to some significant grievance, find it convenient to be judged not by the color of their skin, nor by the content of their character, but by the size of the chip on their shoulder. Precisely for this reason Zionist propagandists are not averse to hammering away at the *Halakha l’Moshe miSinai* that “Esau hates Jacob.” I need not remind you that our mistrust of the gentile world is amply justified by history and present reality.

One cannot help sensing that a preoccupation with being hated benefits neither our self-knowledge nor our security. For the love and fear of God, it substitutes, as the foundation of Jewish identity, a culture of resentment. An obsession with “us vs. them” fuels extremism within the Jewish community. How this occurs has been brilliantly described by Shelby Steele, writing of contemporary black intellectuals:

To carry off inversion we must become self-conscious about the meaning of our race, we must redefine that meaning, invest it with an ideology and a politics, claim an essence for it, and look to it, as much as to ourselves, as a means of betterment. And, of course, this degree of racial preoccupation prepares the ground for intense factionalism within the race. Who has the best twist on blackness, the Black Muslims or the civil rights establishment, the cultural nationalists or the black Baptists, Malcolm X or Martin Luther King? And who is the most black, who the least? Within each faction is a racial orthodoxy that must be endlessly debated and defended, which rallies the faction against other factions while imposing a censorship of thought on its own members.<sup>62</sup>

Let us not dismiss the Jewish version of this ethnic inversion as a deformation of our characters due to Galut and readily remedied through aliya. “Israel against the world” is a powerful enough rallying cry to discourage a more nuanced analysis.<sup>63</sup>

One last problem facing the religious Zionist community in America is that of the brain drain. Many of America’s best Orthodox intellectual and social resources, in all age groups, now reside in Israel. Israel’s gain has been our loss. The inevitable effect has contributed to the weakening of centrist Orthodoxy in this country. In addition to the difficulties this raises for our continued identity as an Orthodox community with an outlook different from that of other Orthodox groups, it also calls into question our ability, in America, to confront those challenges of contemporary life to which we are best suited, for whatever reasons, to formulate a response. One illustration suffices: despite the influx of many exemplary individuals

of the first and second rank, Israel has not produced an educational institution combining the scope and depth of Yeshiva University. Israel is unlikely to do so in the near future. It is not in the interest of religious Judaism that the vigor of Yeshiva be sapped; yet it is unfair to expect individuals who desire to make their lives in Israel to linger any longer than they deem necessary in the country of their exile. I offer no solution to this dilemma.

V

To the Torah Jew who is also heir to the traditions of Western culture, a knock on the door awakens, willy nilly, two lines of association. The first proceeds from the exegesis of *Song of Songs* 5: "The voice of my Beloved knocks." The speaker has retired for the night; having washed her feet, she delays long enough so that, when she finally turns the doorknob, the Beloved has withdrawn. This haunting image recurs in later Jewish thought. For R. Yehuda Halevi, it tells the story of sixth century BCE Babylonian Jewry, a community that could have returned to Israel but did not do so.<sup>64</sup> In our own day, this passage is the foundation of *maran haRav's* analysis of American Orthodoxy's responsibility in the first decade of Israel's existence.<sup>65</sup> In between, the reluctance of the speaker to soil cleansed feet has symbolized the purified spirit, loath to reinvest itself in worldly strivings.<sup>66</sup> The second association takes us back to Lady Macbeth. Appalled by the sound of knocking as they wash up after the murder of Duncan, she bids her husband: "Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us, and show us to be watchers."

The Macbeths must avoid being exposed as watchers when they would feign sleep. The Jew in exile must avoid, at all costs, being *merely* a spectator. Lest occasion call us, and show us to be watchers, we must move from the periphery of history to its center. Our awareness of the goal may outstrip our capacity to act and thus engender great pain and anxiety. How the individual or the community are to make of opportunity the work of redemption, within the limits of the concrete situation, is ultimately as enigmatic as the human will. It is the proper subject of study and prayer. Thus attempting to define the differences between religious life in Israel and America and the problems facing us in the West, cannot exempt us from the unavoidable meeting with the most familiar, yet most elusive, mystery, namely ourselves.<sup>67</sup>

NOTES

1. "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah" *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring), 1978, 55.
2. *Orot haKodesh* III, #62.



3. *The Content of Our Characters* (New York, 1990) 175.
4. Arnold Eisen, *Galut* (Bloomington, 1986), presents perspectives on the place of Exile in Jewish thought that are stimulating and often original. The absence of correlation between his treatment and mine is due to differences of theological orientation and normative commitment. Among studies that reached me too late to incorporate in the text, I must mention several of the essays in *Eretz Yisrael beHagut haYehudit beYemei haBenayim*, M. Hallamish and A. Ravitzky eds. (Jerusalem, 1991), and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, ed, *Israel and Diaspora Jewry: Ideological and Political Perspectives*, (Ramat Gan, 1991), particularly the articles by Immanuel Jakobovitz, Jonathan Sacks, Chaim I. Waxman, Daniel Gutenmacher and Eliezer Don-Yehiya. Also see Todd Endelman, "The Legitimation of the Diaspora Experience in Recent Jewish Historiography," *Modern Judaism* 11:2 (May), 1991, 195-210.
5. *Tosafot Ketubbot* 110b, s.v. *veHi omeret*
6. See *Sota* 14a.
7. For a halakhic survey see Hershel Schachter, "The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael" (in *Religious Zionism*, ed. Shubert Spero and Yitzchak Pessin [Jerusalem, 1989], 190-212). The issue of Special Providence is discussed in several of the contributions in M. Hallamish and A. Ravitzky, eds., *Eretz Yisrael beHagut haYehudit*.
8. *Hatam Sofer to Lulav haGazul* 36a, s.v. *Domeh*.
9. Gerald J. Blidstein, "American Jews and Israel," *Tradition* 18:1 (Summer), 1979, 11.
10. *Kuzari* II, 23-24.
11. For the distinction between orders of desire and its application to the akratic problem, see H. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of the Person" (*Journal of Philosophy* 68 (Jan.), 1971, 5-20), and often reprinted.
12. Hershel Schachter, "The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael," 210, n. 39.
13. David Blumenthal, *God at the Center* (Harper & Row, 1988) 138.
14. E.g., S.L. Hurley, *Natural Reasons* (Oxford, 1989), 171ff.
15. *Kad haKemah in Kitve Rabbenu Bahye* (ed. Chavel, Jerusalem 5730) 114f. (cf. Maharsha *Pesahim* 87b s.v. *lo hegla*). That this discussion of exile occurs in the section called *Geulla* illustrates the tendency of Jewish thinkers to treat *Galut* as a negative concept, the hiatus between normal stages of existence. See also Shalom Rosenberg, "Exile to Israel in 16th Century Jewish Thought," in *Eretz Yisrael beHagut haYehudit*, 174-181.
16. *Kuzari* IV:23.
17. *Nineteen Letters*, Tr. B. Drachman (New York, 1942), Letter 16, 163.
18. For a theological exposition of this critique, see Netziv, *Rinna shel Torah* (Warsaw, 5694) 96 (to *Shir haShirim* 7:1).
19. The subjugation of the Jew also carries with it an element of *hillul haShem* separate from any debasement of the Jewish character (see, for example, Ezekiel 36:20ff.)
20. Epigraph to William Butler Yeats, "Politics."
21. Isadore Twersky has suggested that R. Yehuda Halevi and Maimonides disagreed on this point, with the former maintaining that the "mission of Israel" can only be fulfilled through exile. See I. Twersky: "Maimonides on Eretz Yisrael: Halakhic, Philosophic and Historical Perspectives" (in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel Kraemer (Oxford, 1991), 257-290), 284 n. 40.
22. David W. Weiss "A Value Dependence on the Diaspora" *Tradition* 22:2 (Summer), 1986, 41.
23. *Ein Ayya to Berakhot*, #1 (Jerusalem, 5749). R. Kook is expounding on the difference between the phrases with which the benedictions immediately following the *Shm'a* commence in the morning and evening liturgy, with morning corresponding to life in Israel and evening symbolizing *Galut* existence.
24. On Genesis 20:1 (in *The Pentateuch*, tr. Isaac Levy, 2nd Ed. [Gateshead, 1982] I 341-342). Cf. Rashi *ad. loc.*
25. Yaakov Weinberg: "The Awareness Imperative," *Jewish Observer* (Kislev 5739) 4-5. Daniel Gutenmacher, "Agudat Israel of America and the State of Israel—The Case of the *Jewish Observer*," in Eliezer Don-Yehiya, ed., *Israel and Diaspora Jewry*, 109-126, collects many relevant texts, most of them from an earlier period than the one I examined. He presents, among others, the view of Rabbi Shelomoh Danziger, according to which the United States is a place "where the *Torah* community is respected and flourishing," while Israel is a place "in which the *Torah* is maligned

- and psychologically curbed." On Haredi attitudes to the State of Israel, see A. Ravitzky, "Exile in the Holy Land: The Dilemma of Haredi Jewry," in *Israel: State and Society*, Peter Y. Medding (Studies in Contemporary Jewry V; New York, 1989) 89-125.
26. See Amnon Levi, "Anglo-Saxon Haredim in Israel: Can They Serve as a Bridge Between Haredim and Secularists?" (in *LiHyot beYahad* (Jerusalem, 1990) ed. Charles Liebman) 15-29.
  27. Aaron Twerski: "The Stumbling Blocks," *Jewish Observer* (Kislev 5739) November 1979, 6-8. See *Bava Batra* 60b and *Orah Hayyim* 560:1.
  28. The quoted phrases alter the meaning of a well-known line in Bialik's *Metei Midbar*.
  29. *Guide* III, 32. Cf. *Meshekh Hokhma* beginning of *Beshallah* on the low immunity to Canaanite religion of the generation that left Egypt. Netziv (*Rinna shel Torah* 11, to *Shir haShirim* 1:5) states that the Jews were reluctant to return to Israel after the Babylonian exile because they feared that dwelling in the land would renew the temptation of idolatry. He bases himself on an idiosyncratic interpretation of *Shir haShirim* R. to 5:3, one that contradicts the standard commentators on *Midrash Rabba*, as well as *Torah Temima* to 5:3, and diverges from Netziv's own commentary to 5:3. An extreme formulation, according to which the settlement of Israel precipitated an inexorable decline into materialism ("as the land enlarged its cultivation, the intellect enlarged its derogation"), appears in *Hovot haLevavot* IX:7, alluding to Deut. 8:12ff.
  30. Cited by Mendel Piekarz, *Hasidut Polin* (Jerusalem, 1990) 233. Cf. Hirsch: "So long as God does not call us to the place He had destined for us, to take hold of the land and inheritance as in days immemorial and years of yore, then we are obligated in every place that God chooses for us to dwell in each town and shire in the dwellings of Israel in the exile, to inhabit and live there" (*Horev* 437; see also sections 607-609 and 145).
  31. John Ashbery, "Soonest Mended" (in *The Double Dream of Spring* [New York, 1970]).
  32. Commentary to Exodus 14:13 (cf. to Exodus 2:3).
  33. See Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Ideology and Policy: R. Reines's Conception of Zionism and the Position of Mizrahi on the Uganda Question" (in Anita Shapira, ed., *Sugyot beToledot haTsionut ve-haYishuv* 2: *HaZerem haDati baTsionut* [Tel-Aviv, 1983]), 57-58, and Ehud Luz: *Parallels Meet*, tr. L.J. Schramm (Philadelphia, 1988), 267-268.
  34. David Hartman, "Zionism and the Continuity of Judaism" (in *Joy and Responsibility* (Jerusalem, 1978) 271. The history of this idea is treated by Aviezer Ravitzky, *Hatzivi Lakh Tziunim—Gilgulo shel Ra'ayon*, in M. Hallamish and A. Ravitzky, eds., *Eretz Yisrael beHagut haYehudit*, 1-39; reprinted in Aviezer Ravitzky, *Al Da'at haMaqom* (Jerusalem, 1991), 34-73.
  35. Cited by Mendel Piekarz, *Hasidut Polin* (Jerusalem, 1990) 205; see also Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer *HaHasidut keMistika* (Jerusalem, 1968) 168-177. For medieval roots of this idea in Kabbalah and in the Meiri to *Ketubbot* 111a, see I. Twersky, "Maimonides on Eretz Yisrael," 288, n. 46. For the idea that return to Israel is worthwhile only under religiously ideal conditions, see A. Ravitzky, "Zionism and Messianism in Orthodox Judaism: A Historical and Conceptual Introduction," in *BeHavlei Masoret uTemura*, ed. Menahem Kahane (Rehovot, 1990), 211-244, esp. 212.
  36. *Likkutei Torah, Bemidbar Shelah* 36b-37a. Cf. *Sefat Emet, Shelah* 5639 (Tel Aviv, 1980) 92.
  37. Gershom Scholem, "Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hassidism (in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971) 176-203), criticized by I. Tishby, "The Messianic Idea and Messianic Tendencies in the Growth of Hassidut" (*Zion* 32, 1967, 1-45). Emanuel Etkes, in a recent state-of-the-field survey (*Heker haHasidut: Megamot veKivvunim*, in *Madda'ei haYahadut*, 1991), regards Scholem's position as the consensus.
  38. Mendel Piekarz, *Hasidut Polin* 206, and his documentation in chs. 8-9.
  39. The reference is to Joyce's *Ulysses*, end of the second episode.
  40. See Ehud Luz, "Zionism and Messianism in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig," *Mehkerei Yerushalayim beMahshevet Yisrael* 2:3 (1983), 472-489, and literature cited there; also S. Moses, "Franz Rosenzweig vis-à-vis Zionism," in *HaTsionut uMitnaggedeha baAm haYehudi*, ed. Haim Avni (Jerusalem, 1990) 321-328.
  41. For Orthodox critique of Rosenzweig, see Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1974) and my review essay on Berkovits, "Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?," *Tradition* 15:3 (Fall), 1975, 142-145.
  42. *Tradition* 18:1 (Summer), 1979, 12.
  43. A kindred view animates Maharal of Prague's theology of Galut, e.g. *Netzah Yisrael* ch. 30. Exile is bad for the Jews, but necessary for the dialectic of history.

44. "Land and Spirit," from the introduction to *Shabbat haArets*, reprinted in *Hazon haGeulla* (Jerusalem, 1941) 53. Similar formulations abound in R. Kook's earlier (e.g. "The Way of Renaissance" in *Maamrei haReiyah*, [Jerusalem, 5740]) and later (e.g. "War" in *Orot*, [Jerusalem, 1961]) writings. See also *Orot*, 102-118. Cf. *supra* n.29. Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz has directed me to the earlier views of R. Yosef Yaavets and R. Raphael Berdugo, according to whom Exile enabled the Jewish people to avoid the temptations of material preoccupation and to cultivate the life of the spirit. See D. Manor, *Galut uGeulla beHagut Hakhmei Morocco baMeot ha17-18* (Lod, 1988) 106. But note as well Berdugo's more conventionally negative views of exile (*Ibid* 48).
45. A loose halakhic analogy may illustrate the qualitative distinction between collective danger and risk to individuals. See *Shabbat* 42a (and the ruling at *O.H.* 334:27) on extinguishing a live coal, or capturing a venomous snake, on the Sabbath. Rashba, treating the possibility that the distinction applies even *d'Oraita*, argues that danger to the community is to be met head on ("since its nature is to cause damage and the populace is harmed, Samuel considers it like danger to life, for the many cannot be sufficiently careful, for if one is careful, yet the other will not guard himself"), whereas in the case of risk to individuals the persons concerned are to remove themselves from harm's way rather than removing the source of the harm. (See also *Maggid Mishne* to *Hil. Shabbat* 10:17.)
46. My revision of this section is indebted to R. Lichtenstein's comments. It was also enriched by the Gulf War crisis, during which Israel, for the first time, was exposed to attack without being able to respond actively, thus underscoring the conceptual distinction between the two levels of asymmetry in the text.
47. "Changing Conceptions of Political Life and their Implications for American Judaism" (in *Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora*, ed. Sam Lehman-Wilzig and Bernard Susser (Ramat Gan, 1981), 91-100.
48. Could a leading American politician say of Henry Kissinger, for example, what Xavier Vallat said about the tragedy for France, that it should be led by a man (Premier Leon Blum) whose "race was condemned by divine malediction never to have a motherland"? (David Clay Lodge, *Between Two Fires: Europe's Path in the 1930's* [New York, 1990] 329). It is not so much the venom that is lacking as the very vocabulary.
49. See chs. 14, 18 and 33 and cf. Jeremiah 31. The Rabbis (*Makkot* 24a) already identified Ezekiel as the distinct spokesman for individual responsibility. I have dealt with this issue in detail in my lectures on Ezekiel.
50. *Sanhedrin* 43b and R. Levi in *J. Sota* 7:5; I am interpreting R. Levi against the *Korban haEda*, in agreement with R. Goren, *Torat haMoadim* (Tel Aviv, 5724) 69f.
51. Cf. "As for Tel Aviv, the 'town of speculators,' which most Zionists view as a questionable Zionist achievement—I cannot help being impressed by the fact that all stores there close from *kiddush* to *havdalah*, and that thus, at any rate, the mold into which the content of the Sabbath can flow is provided. Where could we find that here!," *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York, 1961) 357, (Letter to Benno Jacob).
52. See Naomi Cohen, "Israel as a Jewish State," in *Religious Zionism*, ed. Shubert Spero and Yitzchak Pessin, 234-253.
53. See, above, the epigraph from R. Kook.
54. The desire to measure up to the Agudah world in some area was presumably a factor in Mafdal's journey to the territorial right wing. See Shmuel Sandler, "The National Religious Party: Towards a New Role in Israel's Political System?," in *Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora*, ed. Sam Lehman-Wilzig and Bernard Susser (Ramat Gan, 1981), 164. On the question of effective education to Zionist realization, I am pleased to note the convergence of my outlook with the observations of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "Religious and National Identity—British Jewry and the State of Israel," in Eliezer Don-Yehiya, ed., *Israel and Diapora Jewry*, 53-60. The Chief Rabbi mentions the high aliya rate from British communities that are not "Israel-oriented to any significant degree," contrasting it with what he perceives as the bewilderment felt by South African educators "who constructed the most outstanding Israel-centred secondary school movement, and are currently witnessing the mass emigration of the products of those schools, not to Israel but to Australia and Canada." He goes on to characterize the most significant impetus to aliya as "a way of life in which one is prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of one's Jewishness, in which one lives in a state of tension between one's Jewishness and the environment, and in which that tension

- has a significantly negative value." (58-59)
55. For a hilariously sad example of a failed attempt to bridge unilaterally, through hard line nationalistic rhetoric, the gap between a Borsht Belt comedian and battle-weary Israeli soldiers, see Jackie Mason with Ken Gross, "Too Jewish," in *Jackie Oyl* (Boston, 1988), 187-198.
  56. Interestingly, Conor Cruise O'Brien, in "A Tale of Two Nations," *New York Review of Books* 37:12, (July 19) 1990, 35, also chose Queens as the locale where the IRA is more popular than in Ireland.
  57. Rambam, *Hil. Teshuva* 3:11.
  58. *Human, All Too Human* (ed. O. Levy, trans. H. Zimmern [New York, 1924]), 358. Cf. Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* #64. Of course, Johnson's conception of friendship assumes intensely shared personal interests, hence greater selectivity than is tolerable in any broad community.
  59. S. Glick, "Missing—A Feeling of Galut," *Jewish Observer*, (Tishre 5739) October 1979, 13-14.
  60. *Ibid.*
  61. See Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York, 1980).
  62. *The Content of Our Characters* (New York, 1990) 160. Steele objects to this preoccupation because he believes that it no longer corresponds to the situation of middle class blacks in the United States: "the American black, supported by a massive body of law and the not inconsiderable goodwill of his fellow citizens, is basically as free as he or she wants to be. For every white I have met who is a racist, I have met twenty more who have seen me as an equal. And of those twenty, ten have only wished me the best as an individual." Hence he opposes the "religion" of black separatism. Here our position vis-a-vis Judaism differs: for us, separation is literally part of our religion, not something to be dropped for the sake of admission to the middle class.
  63. So too the tendency of militant American *Olim* to think of Arabs as if they were American Blacks, with the difference that now we have the guns.
  64. *Kuzari* II, 24.
  65. *Kol Dodi Dofek* (in *Be-Sod haYahid ve-haYahad*, (Jerusalem, 5736), 354ff.
  66. E.g. *Toledot Yaakov Yosef to Vayera*.
  67. My thanks to Chaim I. Waxman who, as Chairman of the Third Orthodox Forum, solicited the paper. I am most grateful for the remarks of my teacher, R. Aharon Lichtenstein, on the first draft, which precipitated the revision of one section. Other helpful comments came from Judith Bleich, from Dov Fogel, Moshe Simon and from Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz, who showed me his notes for a lecture on "Exile and Redemption" delivered under the auspices of the Gruss Kollel of Yeshiva University, Spring 1991.