

Sh'ma

a journal of Jewish responsibility

4/61, NOVEMBER 16, 1973

The war: first thoughts

Here, written just before or just after *Sukkot* ended, are the initial thoughts of some of our Contributing Editors on the war.

J. david bleich

The somber call to war reminded us of what is perhaps the single, stark fact that Jews can accept as a reality in all of history: We have only the Almighty and each other. In victory or in gruelling conflict, with a chill, we are forced to recognize that we are "*am levadad yishkon u-va-zoyim lo yitchashayv*" (a people that dwells alone and is not reckoned among the nations).

Much could be written about the crucial stake we all have in Israel and about the imperative of its survival for world Jewry — no less than for its own citizens. Much could be written about our anguish at the terrible bloodshed inflicted upon us by yet another needless war. Much could be written about the heroism and endurance of the stalwart and uncomplaining Israelis. Much could, and indeed *must*, be said, written *and done* to assure our active involvement and assistance on behalf of our brethren at the time of their great need.

But there are two principles which we are apt to forget, yet of which we must not lose sight. Even while we realize that the very existence of the State of Israel depends upon military prowess, and while we are filled with thankfulness to its courageous defenders, we must recognize that "my strength and the might of my hand" never was, and dare not ever become, a Jewish stance or value. This point was, of course, valid before the fighting began; but now, in a more chastened atmosphere, it will perhaps meet with greater receptiveness.

It is even more important to underscore the fact that we must remember that no external factor dare alter our basic thinking about ourselves, about Israel or about our identity as Jews. The *blitz* victory of 1967 did much to change the way Jews think of themselves. It had the happy effect of strengthening the allegiance of many marginal Jews and infused all of us with a new measure of spiritual strength. Yet, for many, the Six-Day War created a commitment that was entirely a reaction to the events of the hour; and hence was, in and of itself, a cause for concern. Cataclysmic occurrences such as the Holocaust devastate us and shake us fundamentally; victories and successes nurture our faith, elate and encourage us. Drawn-out conflicts, whether political or military, tax our forbearance to the extreme and provoke doubt and cynicism; sustained periods of economic ease and social ascendancy foster spiritual softness, complacency and smugness. This is only natural. But it is essential that we be aware that Jewish perspectives are eternal and are not subject to modification by historical events no matter how great their magnitude.

Maintaining a proper self-image

Judaism transcends history. There is one factor which has priority even over our allegiance to Israel, from which our commitment to Israel derives and from which flows the promise and assurance that we *will* prevail. As Jews on the eve of *Simchat Torah*, even as we are filled with deep pain and heartache at the tragic toll of this war and with infinite faith in our ultimate victory, we must remind ourselves that "*Ayn lanu shi'ur ela ha-Torah ha-zot*" — it is the Torah alone which assures our existence.

Irving greenberg

For two thousand years, Jewish moral imperatives, and most Christian systems too, operated out of ideal norms and spiritual universes. Such moral systems are present when the people involved have little or no power over the facts of their fate. Judgments then are made by ideological criteria which need not or cannot reckon with the more complicated and morally more compromised, less easily arranged facts of actual life. Such moral universes are characterized by hostility and suspicion toward force and a tendency to call for renunciation and spiritual daring in pursuing moral perfection and peace. Failure or evil is often seen as a result of failure to live up to the individual or community's moral maxims (e.g., "if you repent, redemption will come!") rather than due to the recalcitrance of the

outside facts and forces operating in history. We were all raised and weaned on these images and they are still highly persuasive to us.

However, Judaism and Jewry entered a new universe of moral action with the events of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. The Holocaust revealed the unlimited nature of aggression against the powerless. The State created sovereignty and conditions of Jewish power. Thereby it placed the power of insuring Jewish survival and the problems of the morality of using this force in the hands of the Jewish people and the government of Israel.

The difficulty is that few people have entered the new situation into their moral calculations. The outbreak of this new war has revealed the bitter human cost and the moral distortion that has resulted.

The new morality that comes with having power
Specifically, for years, especially since the Six Day War, Israel has been subjected to constant criticism and calls to extend itself and make unilateral concessions for the sake of peace. Its perceived strength relative to the Arabs led even its friends to demand that it exercise great restraint in self-defense and take great risks in trying for peace. The result was an atmosphere in which an erroneous self-defense decision with tragic effects (the shooting down of a Libyan airliner) could be denounced, even by good Jews, as criminal and evil. Attempts to preempt guerilla attacks by striking first or by trying to hi-jack Habash were seen even by friends of Israel as evidence of moral deterioration or bellicose rigidity.

In an idealized, abstract universe of judgment, these were convincing judgments. Had Israel been judged in the reality context of the need to protect the lives of her citizens, one could disagree whether these were strategically correct actions. But, morally speaking, they would have been seen as flawed, compromising, but necessary exercises of power in the framework of the over-arching, legitimate right to exist. Valid moral judgments could at most criticize and ask for efforts to prevent a recurrence but could never have created the morally defensive and ugly mood around Israeli policy and existence. Similarly, in a world of pure ethics, no Palestinian refugee should ever suffer nor any Palestinian right be denied. Israel should not pursue its security at their expense. In a real world framework even the morally sensitive perspective would affirm: it is tragic and heartbreaking that refugees suffer and all efforts should be made to rehabilitate, resettle and increase their dignity. But their ideal fate must yield to the ultimate right to existence which they were being used to undermine. This is not to mention that Israel cannot

ignore its *quid pro quo* obligations to King Hussein who has stabilized one border, restricted terrorists and by limiting his intervention, helped save Israel in this war.

The treason of the Jewish intellectuals

What made Israel's situation worse was that most academic and intellectual circles also inhabit a world where thought forms and ideals take on their own reality and are often non-related to the world of affairs and power except as radical or ideal vantage points to criticize the seamy, grimy, actual order. The abstractions involved are probably strengthened by other inputs: residual anti-Semitism; double standards applied to Jews (who are expected to perform at "higher," i.e. more self-sacrificing, levels). The range of intellectual opinion tended to run on a skewed spectrum: from dovish sympathies on the "right," to Chomsky's formula for an end to Jewish sovereignty, to calls for Israel's destruction on

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the "left." All those judgments nourished by the ambience of opposition to the Vietnam War increased the public opinion pressures on Israel.

One example of the distorting perspectives that followed is that *Commentary* magazine – a strongly liberal, socially progressive publication, no fellow-traveller of Israel – could be pilloried as self-evidently right wing, racist or hawkish, even in committed Jewish circles, for defending Israel and other Jewish interests too vigorously. Again, I do not say *Commentary* was always right but that disagreements should have been differences of opinion, not cruel and defaming dismissals.

Public opinion is a major line of Israel's defense

Were these judgments merely exercises in public opinion, we would be silent. However, Israel is not all powerful. It depends on America as a major supplier of defense weapons. (Just how dependent it is, became cruelly clear in this war.) Public opinion in the U.S. affects American policy and becomes a major military factor in Israel's policy. The net result was the American pressures on Israel to avoid even the color of being an aggressor and to refrain from preemptive strikes or even mobilization while the Arabs built up for the war. In short, due to the atmosphere of moral judgment (created more by the decent media services, the *New York Times*, by even good Jews publishing in *Sh'ma*, than by Israel's enemies) Israel had to take the first blow in this war. The cost of that fact in lives, security and money to Israel has been staggering. It is a shocking reminder that well intentioned moral judgments, made in the abstract, frequently have immoral and vicious effects when they operate in reality. The punishment for such moral judgments is partnership with evil – except that the punishment falls on the innocent, not the guilty. (I do not mean to imply that all the losses came from Israel's military restraint. Some must be attributed to over-confidence, some to Russian technology; some possibly serious mistakes were undoubtedly made; but the necessity to allow the Arabs first strike is a major factor in the Israeli losses. One guesses that the pressure not to hit first may have led Israeli intelligence to misjudge and underestimate the blow it was to take.)

When will we see the reality of Jewish life?

The war again flooded the blazing light of bitter reality on the world situation, dispelling the shadowy and distorting perspectives on Israel. It illuminated the basic fact that Israel – 25 years after its birth – is still the only nation in the world whose legitimacy and right to exist is not acknowledged by dangerous neighbors, backed militarily by a major superpower and tacitly or actively by most of the nations. It is therefore subject

to the possibility of extinction at any time. Even nations and peoples within the circle of recognized, legitimate existence are not exempt from this threat. But the successful placing of Israel outside the circle of valid existence raises this threat to intolerable potentiality and makes many of the moral positions taken on this issue almost warped connivance at potential genocide.

No amount of palaver about Arab pride, legitimate claims of Palestinians (there are such), expansionism – whatever grains of truth there are in them – can justify the reality of refusing to speak to Israel, or sit down with it, or the backing of terrorists by so called civilized nations, or the dehumanizing language used by spokesmen in the U.N. against it. In fact, if any of these tactics was exercised against any other nation and coupled with the demand that the recipient make peace, renounce land, etc., it would be universally condemned as moral mockery and even insane ravings.

At least Jews should understand

I have little hope of convincing the rest of the world of these facts but it is critical that at least Jews finally see this reality environment and draw the necessary conclusions. In turn, we will have to spread this understanding all over again to the American people which has again proven its decency and *menschlichkeit* in a morally stinking world, in its response to Israel's plight. We should beware of ever again allowing valid criticisms of America to be so blown up that they turn America to Amerika and threaten the stability and viability of this society because in so doing we threaten one of the few bastions of relative decency (and putting some loyalties ahead of trade and oil supply) left. We also need a moratorium on Jewish generalized denunciations of the whole world and insistence on our own isolation – because, in fact, a critical struggle for the understanding of the American public must be fought and won if the cease fire is to lead to a permanent and stable peace.

It will be argued that the Arabs have shown moderation and merely called in this war for restoration of the land captured in 1967. Such a claim of a basic change in policy is contradicted by the fact that negotiations to restore the land at any time were available. While the military achievements of this war may give them leverage for more land being returned, the gain is matched by the increased suspicion of their potential behavior which this attack generated in Israel and they surely know this. It also ignores the overwhelming force of the attack and its surprise component. Whether, in fact, this is stage one toward the elimination of Israel or stage one toward its legitimation can only be made clear in the same land of negotiations which were avail-

able earlier. However, it is critical that the correct moral assessments now be made. If they are not made, it will distort the negotiations, encouraging the Arabs to choose the most evil options available and weakening American support for Israel's legitimate security needs. (God knows that there are enough oil and other pressures that may weaken it anyhow.)

The real world makes its demands on us

The question of direct negotiation, direct recognition, allowing time and trust to justify the return of lands are not marginal questions, they are central. No morally responsible Israeli government operating in a real world of Jewish existence can waive these needs. (I can envisage a peace plan under which Israel returns the lands in stages of decades, as prolonged peace and open relations confirm that they are not necessary.) Israel will not be able to hold out for these necessary steps unless its sympathizers – starting with other Jews – see the true situation.

What I have written is not a call to Israeli bellicosity or to morally underwrite every decision or step taken or to be taken by the State. But reality judgments must be used from now on. The fragility of Israel's defense against non-existence is all too bitterly clear from this war. Whether any prospects of successful peace negotiations are alive is not clear. To have the nerve, nevertheless, to hold out for real security; to have the moral fiber to exercise partial judgments in an imperfect and guilt-causing reality; not to lose hope – this combination is the psychological heroism we now need. This is what the *halachic* system at its best is about. Unfortunately even Orthodox Jews continue to indulge in abstract and pietistic judgments on Israel both in its foreign policy and (more often) in its religious performance, which often endanger it. The time is now for a solemn confession of guilt for our self-flattering moralism and righteous abstractions of the past decade and a correction and reforming of our moral perspectives on Israel.

Benjamin halpern

The Yom Kippur War may change the political parameters of our concern with Israel, should diplomacy, especially Arab diplomacy, finally recognize the reality and real strength of the Jewish State. Even that is uncertain in spite of the likelihoods of another major Israeli victory. But in any case, what is and remains basic is the essential fact that none but Jews take the existence of Jews and of a Jewish state as among their primary ethical postulates. Our true way – and I mean both Jews

and Israelis – runs not from *de jure* to *de facto* but, if we persist, from *de facto* to *de jure* recognition. And I advisedly say “recognition,” which is a legal category, not “legitimation,” which is as much moral as political. Under the circumstances we need, as always, strength and resolution before all else.

Norman Iamm

The war prompts me to a confession. During the past several years I wavered on the issue of Israel sitting in the occupied territories. True, I was suspicious of the doctrinaire quality of the dove's line, but I was even more irritated at the stridency of the hawks. I could not quite be convinced of the cogency of the annexationists' argument that the defense of the Israeli heartland proper required extended borders. They sounded too nationalistic. Their jingoist rhetoric irked me.

Appropriate to the *Yom Kippur* War, I and many others like me will have to say *Al Chet*, and confess our errors. No longer may we judge vital positions by subjective reactions to style or taste. The hawks may sound reactionary, militaristic, and strident, but (without subscribing to their entire line) I now appreciate the simple point they have been trying to make all along. Not jingoism, not historical motives, not *halachic* pronouncements, but the simple doctrine of *pikuach nefesh* – survival – demands the margin of safety which, *had we not had it on Yom Kippur 1973, Tisha B'av 1974 would have come much, much earlier.*

A second confession that I urge upon those whose guilt is now exposed: *Al Chet* – for the sin of premature Messianism. This presumptuousness is common to two disparate groups – those whose Messianism is primarily nationalistic, and those to whom it is completely internationalist. In 1967 a large number of Israelis, and some Americans, were convinced that the Six Day War proved we were in a definite pre-redemptive Messianic era, and some even said so in the prayers we recite for Israel – *at'chalta di'geulah* (“the beginning of redemption”).

The secularized version of this theological hubris was a cockiness about Israel's power. After *Yom Kippur* 1973, I am more skeptical than ever. A Messianic war would have been on the Six-Day style. Let us talk no more of tagging current history with labels that are symptoms of nothing more than our superficiality and superciliousness. Messiah will come, and may be we can help him come faster. But let us have no more talk of his imminent arrival, and its concomitant: the invin-

cibility of Israel's army. Like every other premature Messianism, it leaves only bitterness and frustration in its wake.

Two "friends"

A much greater *Al Chet*, of course, is owed us by the liberal-humanist-universalist romantics who used to prate about the UN being the "Family of Nations." An Israeli diplomat shortly after the war began, referred to the "lynch mob" atmosphere in the Security Council. "Family of Nations," may be; but a Mafia Family of Nations!

I wish to make one other point. In an article prepared for the previous issue of *Sh'ma* (3/60), I argue against President Nixon on the Tapes problem. But I do not want this to be construed as a blanket condemnation of the man. I deplore Watergate, but I applaud Nixon's support of Israel. I shudder to think of the condition we would be in if George McGovern were President and, possibly, Senator Fulbright his Secretary of State. We have got to get away, once and for all, from this simplistic, almost Manichean, tendency to see people as all good or all bad. Bill Buckley was right when he recently complained about the habit of "anthropomorphizing our ideas." Remember another confession we all had to make: *Al Chet* – for the sin of so adoring the New Deal that we apotheosized FDR and thought he could do no wrong. He did wonderful things and he did terrible things.

So, I am unhappy with Nixon's Watergate record and I think him tragically wrong in his position on the tapes. But I am grateful to him for his decision to supply arms to Israel (although I am still waiting to see just how generous he will turn out to be), and I do not care what his motives are. I won't forget it, and I hope none of us will, in trying to form a balanced judgment.

Richard n. levy

Those who davened in a minyan during *Sukkot* know that the most powerful commentary on the *Yom Kippur* War was provided not by the media but by the *haftarot* for the *chagim* and *Shabbatot*. These Scriptural readings punctuated the two weeks of hostilities with such unnerving accuracy as almost to turn the holidays themselves into ritual observances of the progress of the war. Consider:

First day of *Sukkot*. Fortunes of Israel obscure. *Haftarah* (*Zechariah* 14): "I shall gather all the nations against Jerusalem for war . . ."

Shabbat Col Ha-Moed Sukkot. Israel marching into Syria on northern front. *Haftarah* (*Ezekiel* 39): "I will bring you (Gog) up from the uttermost parts of the north . . . and upon the mountains of Israel you shall fall, and all the peoples who are with you . . ."

Simchat Torah. Israel, marching through Syria and Egypt, destroying their armies' capacity to war against her. *Haftarah* (*Joshua* 1): "From the wilderness and this Lebanon and as far as the Euphrates . . . shall be your border, that no man might stand against you . . ."

The day after *Simchat Torah*, *Shabbat Bereshit*. Having crossed the Suez, Israel is marching undaunted toward Cairo. *Haftarah* (*Isaiah* 42-43): "When you cross the waters I am with you . . . if you walk through fire, you shall not be quenched . . . For I am bringing you victory, I have given Egypt as you ransom."

The day after *Shabbat Bereshit*. The Security Council approves a ceasefire in place.

There is a tendency when confronting such texts to believe that attacks by Israel's enemy neighbors are inevitable, (and inevitably leveled against her very existence), that wars will occur whatever Israel does, and that Israel's actions are a reflection of the will of God. For those American Jews who take this theological view of the Mideast situation, it might have been more appropriate to call this the *Sukkot* War rather than the *Yom Kippur* War.

Acknowledging israel's failures

But the *haftarah* for *Shabbat Bereshit* presents another theological perspective, suggesting that the latter name may still be appropriate:

Who gave Jacob for a spoil to the robbers?
Was it not Adonay, against whom we have sinned? . . .
Therefore He poured upon him the heat of his anger
and the strength of war,
And it set him on fire round about, but he did not know,
It consumed him, but he did not take it to heart . . .

To understand the war through such a text is to suggest that even given the fact of the Arab invasion, Israel is not without fault in the causes of this conflict, and that the consuming of so many lives has to teach a lesson that must be taken to heart.

Many of us know Israelis who were killed in this war. It has taken a heavy price, not the least of which must be our knowledge that a nation which has been involved in five wars in twenty-five years must have some flaws in its foreign policy. It takes two parties, after all, to bring a diplomatic situation to the point of warfare. Israel has insisted that the Arabs respect only force,

but twenty-five years of one military humiliation after another has done nothing to bring about a settlement, but only to exacerbate hostilities.

Many Israelis and American Jews claim that were it not for the '67 gain of territories, Egypt and Syria would have attacked Israel herself. Is it not possible that had Israel developed a more imaginative foreign policy in the past six years, seeking even indirect negotiation of territories in exchange for security, she might have prevented this latest war from taking place? In any event, is it not time to alter a policy that has been unable to prevent all these conflagrations?

Averting future tragedies

And what of us, the American Jewish community, deeply devoted to Israel and her political and moral survival? What shall we "take to heart" from this war that has consumed so many of our brothers and sisters? The belief that Israel was not doing all it could to bring about a peace settlement was beginning to grow among American Jews in the past few years, even as Israelis were becoming more and more committed to holding on to the territories.

Believing that more money should go to support the burgeoning interest in Jewish concerns among American Jews, some Jewish leaders were also beginning to voice the opinion that local communities had to work as hard for local needs – the poor, youth and education, the elderly – as for the Israel Emergency Fund. It would be a tragedy if these two developments were to be swallowed up by the *Yom Kippur* War, even in the light of the great cost of this war to Israel. Golda Meir's government needs more, not less, prodding by American Jews to make peace. At the same time Jews in America must continue to create, and fund, models for innovative, intensive, informed Jewish life from which Israel too might borrow once it can settle its diplomatic problems.

Shall the Israelis continue to pour out their blood, and we our treasure, decade after decade, not for building but for fighting? This *must* be the last war which Arabs and Israelis wage with each other. We should feel ourselves called to account next *Yom Kippur* if we do not do all we can to help Israel find a way to a permanent settlement. To recall the *haftarah* text for the first day of *Sukkot*, ours is the task to work for the day when "living waters shall go out from Jerusalem," when "there shall be no more extermination, that Jerusalem might dwell in safety."

Steven s. schwarzschild

This is being written on Oct. 21, 1973, and the *clausula rebus sic stantibus* is fully invoked.

One hopes and prays that the present war in the Near East will be stopped quickly. To stop it right now would be much better than nothing, and certainly better than continued blood-letting: some Arabs seem to feel that their "honor" has been recouped – the Egyptians are still sitting on the East-side of the Suez-canal, and thus perhaps they have the cards with which they feel they can come to the negotiation-table. President Sadat's speech earlier in the week, to judge from incomplete reports, sounds like a reasonable basis for negotiations: return of the territories occupied in the Six-Days War, settlement of the status of the Palestinians, mutual recognition, and free traffic through the Red Sea.

But of course, Mrs. Meir and General Dayan have turned down this offer out-of-hand (as they have effectively rejected many other "openings" over the years) and insist on military victory. The Jews in and out of Israel and the rest of the world are expected to pay, in various ways, for this continued *hybris* of the entrenched Jewish leadership. (The Zionist "solution to the Jewish problem" has by now cost us four wars in twenty-five years.)

Superpower pacifiers

To precisely the extent that the antagonists in the area will not settle the issues between them among themselves they have to be, and are, subject to the determinations of the superpowers. Up to now and at this moment the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have been standing on the side-lines – made more or less respectable noises – and send in always more heavy weapons (otherwise the war would have to end in two weeks, not because "nobody will come to it" but because there won't be any weapons left with which to fight) – and in effect sit back in the bleachers of the Roman circus sicking the combatants further on one another. The only *tertium datur* is what, in despite all the disingenuous Israeli rhetoric about "direct negotiations," well-meaning people should have pressed for long since – that the superpower granddaddies of world-politics take the two naughty, nasty, vicious adolescents of the Near East by the scruffs of their necks, bang their heads against one another, and tell them to behave themselves – or else.

This latter policy seems to be in the making as of this moment, in the form of the Kosygin-Kissinger conferences in Moscow. Its successful and effectual conclusion, too, is obviously preferable to the continuation of the

war. But the price that Israelis and Arabs increasingly have to pay for this way of calming the storm is that the geopolitical frontier between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. will be running along the Suez-canal and the Jews and the Arabs have in effect been absorbed by the two great neo-colonial powers.

The final bell

We cannot do much right now. Therefore, we ought to get ready to work, after this Round is over, for the prevention of the Fifth and subsequent Rounds and for the future independence of the Semitic world.

The forces that dominate the present Arab culture are easily pathological enough all by themselves to make for their own and others' disaster. Add to this the Jewish post-World War II pathology. Israel and Jewry have swaggered their way through the world for well over a decade. It has not been a pretty sight anyway, and, as usual, cockiness turns out, of course, to be a self-defeating if not weak-kneed posture. "Pride goeth before destruction . . ." (*Proverbs* 16:18ff). It has been all along and, despite pronouncements from professors at the Hebrew University, still is entirely obvious that no terrains provide protection under the conditions of late-20th-century technology. Nothing can come out of this, or any other Round, that could not have been achieved peaceably during the last six years. And, indeed, no Round will be the last unless either or both of the parties cease existing – which nobody even seriously contemplates – or unless they begin cooperating with one another irrespective of previous hostilities.

Governments and leadership are instituted for the purpose of, at least, preventing the worst of cataclysms, war foremost among them, from devolving upon their followers; when they fail of this purpose, willfully and despite almost universal warnings, they should not only be thrown out of office but put on trial for high malfeasance. (Though the outcome of the prospective, now delayed, Israeli elections is difficult to predict, it would seem very likely that the "hawks" will score massive victories. Compare the 1972-victory of Richard Nixon: "You have failed us miserably for four years. We'd love you to fail us four more.") This disease must be treated.

A necessary stand

Most of us "doves" and radical critics have long been committing our own sins. We did and said too little, and that very softly, largely because we wanted to avoid the "flak" of criticisms, condemnation, and excommunications that was sure to descend on us. "For the sin of . . . standing by the blood of our brothers . . . !" Now we must assume that burden: Jewish,

Arab, human lives are too precious to be exchanged for our personal comfort.

The Jews in the Holy Land have to live. In order to live there they have to live in the middle of and in creative interaction with the Arab-Moslem world. Therefore, a fundamental re-orientation must be brought about: send the Russians and Americans packing – get rid of the political and military *impedimenta* that have been bogging us down – find new, better Jewish leadership in politics, community-organization, and human values – no price is too high for peace and for socio-economic and religio-cultural coordination – all our efforts and wealth must henceforth be, as they should have been in the past, directed toward the Moslem-Jewish historical symbiosis.

Seymour siegel

The dreadful outbreak of a new war in Israel arouses a mixture of admiration, sobering realism, and despair.

Once again the people of Israel have shown their courage and resourcefulness in the face of a military threat. Again there were overwhelming odds, augmented now by the impact of surprise. The Israeli soldier and the Israeli citizen have come through.

The American President, so maligned and denigrated in so many of our pulpits and cocktail parties, has courageously rescued Israel from destruction. Does he not deserve our gratitude, understanding and support – especially now in his time of trouble?

The American Congress, under the leadership of such men as Senator Jackson (whose bid for the presidency was dismissed by many of our best and brightest), Senator Humphrey, Senator Buckley, and Senator Javits (to name a few), has proven itself to be a staunch friend of our people.

The American people, by and large, has shown its friendship to Israel and supported the President and the Congress.

Staunch friends such as Roy Eckhardt, Franklin Littell and Ursula Niebuhr have raised their voices for Israel in the face of the silence of the Christian Establishment.

And, certainly not least of all, the American Jew has shown that his Jewish soul is still alive. He has come through.

All this inspires admiration.

Realism without despair

Sober realism should make us realize who are our enemies.

Of course, they are the Arab countries and their callous leaders. But behind them stands the full might of communist resources. It makes no difference whether it be the USSR or China or Hanoi or North Korea — all were united in a move to destroy us. Therefore, as Jews, especially, we must vigorously oppose Communism wherever it appears and wherever it attempts to expand its power either in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, or Latin America.

We must realize that a United States drastically weakened militarily cannot indefinitely serve as an arsenal of freedom. Therefore, our support should go to those who wish to keep this country strong and armed. And the UN — a weak reed and a futile organization. All of these conclusions should be obvious from a stance of sober realism. The endless rounds of war and killing lead one to the abyss of despair. Peace is sacrificed to the recalcitrance of human evil which seems so much more powerful in human affairs than reason and compassion. Are men doomed to kill each other forever?

As a Jew we must unflinchingly face the reality of history as the arena where man's sinfulness is pitted against the Divine Command. So far, the *yetzer hara* ("evil inclination") seems triumphant. This fact is a source of anguish and despair. But one cannot be Jewish unless he believes that all is never lost and that beyond the smoke of battle and beyond the havoc wreaked by human evil, is the patient and weeping God pleading with us to listen to Him. To be a Jew is to hope in spite of despair.

Arnold j. wolf

We have had substantial support not only from silent Jews but also from Christian pacifists and black Marxists. They believe that Israel's survival and safety are indis-

pensable elements of a future peace which must be guaranteed by the international community. For us, more or less committed Jews, the lesson of the crisis is surely to make our covenant our life.

Our new (old?) agenda

Does the war demonstrate, once and for all, Israel's priority in our lives; or does it now lead us to the recognition that there must be limits to what Israel can ask of us?

- (a) Is it our political duty now to be resolutely anti-Soviet; or should we work for *detente*?
- (b) At this distance, must we accept Israeli assessments of the territory needed for security; or may we rely on our own judgment, including what we see as reasonable risks they should take?
- (c) In American elections, should our major concern be a candidate's position on Israel; or his general social philosophy and personal fitness?
- (d) Should Israel's needs take precedence over American Jewry's local programming; or must the shift to greater American Jewish educational expenditures grow?
- (e) Can anyone doubt that the State of Israel is the effective center of our Jewishness; or, despite our devotion to Israel, does our Jewishness transcend the State?
- (f) Can we, despite our passionate disagreement over these questions, continue to talk to one another?
(E.B.B.)

struggling to find her place in the secular society into which she has been thrust by education and opportunity, sees a need for a redefinition of role – *not* because the *mitzvot* no longer apply, but because she hopes to make them even more relevant to her lifestyle. She realizes that whereas traditionally women married early and were so busy with their families that they had to be exempted from some community-oriented *mitzvot* for which males were responsible, now with extra free time, the young woman can search for ways to be a better Jew. But the over-riding commitment to the *halakhic* process demands that change be worked out within that process. For Orthodox women, who recognize that G-d is the source of the *mitzvot*, change is meaningless unless it is accomplished through the means set by the rabbinic tradition.

Endangering one's freedom of choice

The most disturbing aspect of the Jewish Women's Movement is the feminists' disrespect for Orthodox women. In any endeavor, people with different philosophical *causes-d'etre* can only work together if they respect each other's freedom of choice. It does not disturb me that women read *torot*, preach sermons, or chant services – as long as they do this in their own temples. But it is indeed suspicious when non-Orthodox women are unsatisfied with all the available options in Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues. That they want to infiltrate the other branches of Judaism indicates a narrow fanaticism. How else can one explain the allegation that *no* woman can be totally free until *halakhah* is revamped so all women can be free? The irresponsible proposals that *no* man pray in a synagogue where there is separate seating, or that *no* person dance in separate circles, encroaches upon my freedom.

I began to suspect the feminists' sincerity when I heard Ms. Blu Greenberg being jeered at a National Jewish Women's Conference because she suggested that the holocaust experience might predispose a committed Jewish woman against Zero Population Growth; and when Rabbi Saul Berman was berated for his contention that *halakhic* change is a *slow* process. It was then that I realized that many women are looking for a meaningless figurehead who will give them blanket approval to remodel the *halakhah* according to their whim.

A decision of conscience

Clearly, much must be done to elevate the social standing of the Jewish woman. I will be watching to see what positive suggestions are raised at the Second National Jewish Women's Conference this spring. While I will laud their successes, however, my difference in

religious perspective makes it impossible for me to join with them. Instead I will continue working within my community to raise the consciences and consciousness of Jewish men and women.

We have already begun to improve the educational opportunities in Orthodox women's schools, and from this learning many women do acquire the need to become more involved in religious life. But as we Orthodox women follow our sisters out of the home and into society, the challenge before us is that we be *selective*. We must demand social equality, while rejecting religious dishonesty.

Lo chatanu – we have not sinned

Shubert Spero

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, many of us believed that we had entered an era of *at'chalta*

Sh'ma

a journal of Jewish responsibility

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di'geula – the beginning of Messianic redemption. Our conviction that we are now living in an era of incipient Messianic redemption was strengthened and confirmed by the wars of 1956 and especially 1967. And the recent *Yom Kippur War* did nothing to shake our belief.

Yet Norman Lamm, writing in the wake of the *Yom Kippur War* (Sh'ma 4/61), urges those of us who believe in Israeli Messianism to recite the confession of *Al Chet* – in this instance, “for the sin of premature Messianism.” Rabbi Lamm argues that the *Yom Kippur War* has proven us wrong; for he claims that it has shown that the Israeli Army is not invincible – one of the prerequisites of Israeli Messianism. In short, Rabbi Lamm is skeptical about our era being “the beginning of redemption” because the *Yom Kippur War* did not have Messianic overtones – for surely, he argues, “a Messianic war would have been in the *Six Day* style.”

The messianic doctrine is defined

My disagreement with Rabbi Lamm is over what, in fact, is implied by the Messianic doctrine. The meaning of the phrase, “The invincibility of the Israeli Army” is not clear. If we adopt the dictionary meaning of “invincible” – “incapable of being conquered, overcome or subdued” – then I would agree it is implied by our Messianic labeling, but deny that it has been controverted by fact. If the Israeli army’s “invincibility,” in this sense, had been disproven by the *Yom Kippur War*, then there would be no Israel today.

If on the other hand, Rabbi Lamm means that every war henceforth to take place in Israel must be won “on the *Six Day* style,” then I would deny that this is implied by our pre-redemption label. After all, the conquests of Joshua were certainly pre-redemptive and yet the spectacular victory at Jericho was followed by the initial failure to conquer Ai with its attendant casualties. This was not seen as upsetting to the children of Israel’s basic understanding of the overall redemptive thrust of events.

Now, as then, *mistakes* were made; *sins*, if you will, were committed; and *lessons* had to be learned. But let us be clear about this. A good deal of confused and muddled discussion has been generated by the failure to distinguish between the *mistakes*, the *sins* and the *lessons* of the *Yom Kippur War*.

A mistaken tactic

The mistake was the level of preparedness of the I.D.F. in reserve supplies, in deployment, in types of weaponry – consistent with an assumption deeply held by all strata of Israeli society prior to *Yom Kippur*, that the combination of the strength of I.D.F. plus the de-

fensive depth of the territories plus the military incompetence of the Arabs was an effective deterrent insuring Israel against Arab attack for years to come. The assumption was, of course, proven horribly wrong by the events of *Yom Kippur*.

The mistake, it should be noted, was not in overestimating the quality of I.D.F. as such. As a matter of fact, the I.D.F. again proved its resilience, ability to improvise and sheer capacity to slug it out, tread to tread, with a numerically superior force enjoying the element of surprise and the tactical advantage of new weaponry. But it is this mistake that was largely responsible for the initial Arab gains, the large numbers of Israeli casualties and given the usual time constraints of an Arab-Israeli war, the Egyptian presence today on the east bank of the canal.

A sin of the denial of the divine

The sin of *Kochi v'otzem yadi*, of seeing in one’s achievements (military, economic, intellectual or what ever) “my strength and the might of my hand” to the exclusion of anything Divine, is indeed one which infects many Israeli generals and secular-minded segments of the Israeli public. But it is not a sin of this or that year, or of this or that war.

It has *b'avonosainu Ha'rabim* been with us for a long time. *Kochi v'otzem yadi* was and is a fundamental orientation of Zionism understood as a secular nationalist movement. The legitimate objective of Zionism to provide the Jewish people with political power so that it can become master of its own fate rather than perennial victim, becomes demonic when “my strength” is seen to exclude not only other nations but God Himself. The realization that God is behind all events – in the ontological sense of ground of all being, in the mystical sense of soul of my soul, as well as in the teleological sense of shaping historical events toward some redemptive goal – is a function of one’s total religious or philosophical outlook. To arrive at such a realization involves a complete reorientation of one’s basic perceptions. It is unrealistic therefore, to expect to eliminate this sin except by a long process of education, which can however begin with “religious” battlefield experiences and the probing questions raised by the *Yom Kippur War*.

If, in spite of our shortcomings, including the sin of *Kochi V'otzem yadi*, Providence, over the years, has seen fit to make possible the events of 1948, 1956 and 1967 with its powerful redemptive elements, then it is to our *mistake* rather than to our sins that we must attribute the anomalous aspects of the *Yom Kippur War*. Nor does it seem that the sin has any necessary

connection with the mistake. On the contrary, I would imagine, that one who depended totally on his own strength would tend to be more cautious and more apprehensive of possible threats.

Lessons which demand significant study

Many of the lessons to be learned from the *Yom Kippur* War are quite clear. Chief among these is, of course, a perception of the new political and military realities which should lead to a correction of the pre-*Yom Kippur* mistakes. Less clear but probably more important, are considerations which touch upon the fundamentals of the Zionist enterprise. Is our political isolation a temporary aberration or an echo of the Biblical prophesy: "Behold, this is a people that shall live alone?"

How can we reconcile the fact that Jews living in a state of their own are at this moment probably less secure than those living in *Galut* with the old Zionist rationale and objectives? Do the events of *Yom Kippur* imply that the search of many Jews individually and collectively for "normalcy" is futile, and that they best seek their destiny in the direction of "chosenness" in a covenanted relationship to the Lord God of history?

What we Messianists *are* committed to, is the expectation that the Zionist gains to date will not be rolled back; that those developments which constitute prophetic fulfillment will not be erased; that the Jewish population of Israel will continue to grow; that Jerusalem in its entirety will remain in our hands; that Israeli control over Judea and Samaria will not be surrendered; that *Torah* life and values will continue to increase in Israel. The *at'chalta di'geula* hypothesis implies such an ongoing pattern of events. In line with my empirical posture, I must state that should God forbid, any of these expectations be falsified, I would have to say *Al Chet!*

But at such a time I would ask Rabbi Lamm and his fellow skeptics to join me in saying *Al Chet*. For then it may very well be that it was their lack of faith that aborted that which the birth pangs had so clearly heralded.

Aval ashemim anachnu – but we are guilty

Norman Lamm

I feel for my friend Rabbi Spero. I too, were I a "Messianist" (in the way he is using the term), would try valiantly to snatch my cherished theory from the snapping jaws of history. But I doubt if he will succeed.

Amazingly, Rabbi Spero denies that the I.D.F.'s invincibility has been controverted by the facts. It should not be necessary to have to reaffirm one's admiration, respect, and love for our Israeli brothers when making the common-sense observation that, with all its prowess and heroism, the I.D.F. would not have survived the Russian-sponsored Arab onslaught without massive American assistance. This is "invincibility?"

The exaggeration of the centrality of political self-determination is anachronistic in this age when even super powers cannot always do what they want. Yet *kochi v'otzem yadi* is more prevalent today (at least before the recent war) than ever before. Just reread the speeches by certain Israeli generals and other officers, especially when they came here for UJA or Bonds. And, contrary to what Rabbi Spero says, the "sin" was a contributing factor to the "mistake."

A statement of uncertainty, not disbelief

I must make clear that I do *not deny* that ours is an era of incipient Messianic redemption. What I am saying is that I do *not know* whether it is or not, and that I challenge the certainty of those who assert such superior knowledge. I consider it spiritually presumptuous to declare, without benefit of prophetic inspiration, that we are privy to divine secrets. God's plans are known to us only retrospectively. "Thou shalt see My back, but My face shall not be seen" (*Ex. 33:23*). The ways of God in history are too wonderous, too mysterious, for us either to deny or to assert that we are in a particular phase of a pre-ordained drama. One thing we can learn from current history is that we are unredeemed and need Messiah. One thing we can learn from past history is that it is dangerous to pretend to know when he is coming – or came.

Maimonides, in the censored chapter XI of his "laws of Kings," speaks of the King whom people will consider as the Messiah. If he does not meet full success, Maimonides writes, or if he is slain, it is obvious that he is not the Messiah promised in the *Torah*. Rather, he is to be regarded as all other whole-hearted and worthy (*ha-shelemim ve'ha-kesherim*) kings of the House of Israel who died.

The relevance of this passage to the *Yom Kippur* War and what it does to the *at'chalta di'geula* theory should be obvious. What is true of *melekh* (king) holds for *malkhut* (kingdom, state) as well. But it also reminds us that a national reawakening (including political sovereignty) need not necessarily be considered Messianic.

Even if it should transpire that the events of our time are not immediately pre-Messianic – so what? We Jews

had independence and sovereignty and kings without designating them as Messianic. The *Mashiach* will be a *melekh*, but not every *melekh* is a *mashiach*.

A deep commitment without messianism

My commitment to the State of Israel does not require Messianic presuppositions. That commitment was forged in the fires of the crematoria; in the hatred of and indifference to Jews by the "civilized" countries of the West; in a love of *Eretz* Israel and *Am* Israel which are the purpose of *Medinat* Israel; in the expectation that *Torah* has a better chance in Israel today than in the Diaspora. Therefore, especially because I can get along without a Messianic undergirding for my love of Israel, I will not risk a premature Messianism which, history has taught us, can lead to psychological and spiritual disasters.

Rabbi Spero's hopes are my hopes too. And my belief in Messiah is in no way diminished by my refusal to share his faith ("conviction" is a better word) that we are living through *at'chalta di'geula*. My skepticism ultimately issues not from faithlessness, but from timorousness in the face of the mystery of God's way in history, from an awareness of the grotesqueness of pretending to a divine perspective whilst we are caught in the confining nexus of human events.

Who is so blind as my servant?

Shubert Spero

Neither lexicographical evidence nor ordinary usage justify the novel conditions placed on the notion of "invincibility" by Norman Lamm. He claims that it is a "common sense observation . . . that the I.D.F. would not have survived the Arab onslaught without massive American assistance." We know that the "American assistance" took the form of arms and supplies. Is Rabbi Lamm suggesting as a necessary condition of "invincibility" that an army manufacture all of its own supplies? May it purchase arms before the battle or is it only during the battle that Rabbi Lamm blows the whistle? Will Rabbi Lamm require next that all the soldiers be native born? Furthermore, it is by no means a "common sense observation" that without the American assistance, the I.D.F. could not have survived. It is actually a rather complex counterfactual judgment which is probably wrong. Let's face it: I.D.F.'s "invincibility" has not been contraverted by the facts.

I am relieved and pleased to hear that Rabbi Lamm does not deny that ours is a pre-Messianic epoch but simply admits that he does not know. That makes it

two of us. For I too do not *know*. However, I *believe* that ours is a pre-Messianic period. Those of us who in our prayers for Israel included the phrase, *at'chalta di'geula* never claimed "superior knowledge" nor spoke of those things with any kind of "certainty," nor predicted the Messiah at any given moment. Thus Rabbi Lamm's evocations of the well known strictures against the *mechashvei Kaitz* (those who seek to determine when the "end of days" will come) are irrelevant to our issue.

Exposing an unnecessary blindness

Rabbi Lamm seems to think that judging our age to be Messianic is governed by a sort of two valued logic of an either-or nature in which the alternatives before us are two and only two: 1) Either we live in a period which is indubitably Messianic, overwhelmingly demonstrated by the fulfillment of all the prescribed conditions and the appearance and success of the Messiah himself, or 2) Messianic categories simply do not apply. What such a view overlooks is the temporal dimension which is an inevitable part of a Messianic concept which sees the redemption "rising like the dawn, bit by bit." How is a generation to react to events which seem very much like the beginning of something great and long awaited? Of course, "political sovereignty . . . need not necessarily be considered Messianic." It is indeed only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of the Messianic age. But since political sovereignty is a necessary condition, and one that has not occurred in close to 2,000 years, does it not invite the hope that this indeed may be the beginning of even greater things to come? Would Rabbi Lamm deprive us of the exhilarating religious experience of recognizing beginnings, sensing opportunities, responding to partial redemptions?

Can we, even if we wanted to, blind ourselves to the incredible resemblance of our events to those promised long ago by Prophets and Sages of Israel? Would not such blindness constitute the ultimate act of ingratitude by a people trained to "understand the years of each generation" and exhorted to listen for the "sounds of the feet of the messenger?"

It is important to take risks

The issue we are debating is not a mere verbal one. To recognize in the events of our day, *at'chalta di'geula*, is to accept the obligation to respond in a special way. It means that we must look upon *Aliyah* as a *Mitzvah* charged with historic urgency. It means that those already in Israel must look to G-d for the meaning of their lives and for the justification of the state they are building. It means that we may take courage and in-

spiration in the faith that G-d will not interrupt his promised work of redemption, once started.

It is precisely in the words of Rambam that we may find warrant for our position. For does not Rambam refer without disapproval to the fact that Rabbi Akiva and *Kol Chochmai Doro* believed that Bar Kochba was the Messiah and risked all on that supposition and made every effort to actualize it? Rambam pronounces them mistaken in their judgment but not wrong in taking the risk! Indeed can anyone take the position that Akiva ben Joseph and “all the Sages of his generation” did not quite understand how a Jew is to react to Messianic opportunities?

I have great understanding for Rabbi Lamm’s refusal to exchange his cool historic perspective for the impetuositous of Messianic ardor. He reminds me of the young man who having twice loved and lost, spurns the advances of even the most deserving of maidens lest he be hurt again. Such an attitude is quite understandable under the circumstances, but sick and pathetic, nevertheless.

Avoiding hezekiah’s mistake

Rabbi Lamm fears the psychological and spiritual disasters that can result from disillusioned Messianists, and hesitates to take the risk. My own nightmare is that ours just might turn out to be a genuine Messianic opportunity which might never develop because we decided to play it cool.

If I have to be wrong, I would rather be disappointed with Rabbi Akiva than that it should be written about us, as it was of Hezekiah, King of Judah, that his age might have been Messianic had he responded more warmly to the redemptive events of his day.

Come Norman, precisely because we fear and tremble, let us link hands, and together lead our congregations out of the *Galut* towards the vision which beckons in Jerusalem today!

I have surely seen the affliction of my people

Norman Lamm

Rabbi Spero has succeeded in frightening me. I am appalled at the tenacity with which he advocates this semi-mystical veneration of arms and armies. Such is the power of sacred illusion that, even in the face of the most brutal and public of facts that contradict it, it seizes otherwise rational people who simply cannot let it go.

Rabbi Spero continues to press “invincibility” – quite obviously a term of extravagance used by critics to expose and caricature the cockiness of many pre *Yom Kippur War* Israelis – as if it were a military and political truism, even when the leaders of IDF itself rue the day they allowed such myths to gain currency. We all along ridiculed the Arab psychology which bewitched the Arabs with their own rhetoric, and now we proceed to repeat the identical error. “Who is so blind” indeed!

One would have thought that a religiously sensitive and philosophically trained man – and my friend Rabbi Spero is surely both – would be too aware of the vulnerability that is our common lot, the marginality of existence as such, and the lessons of history about “unconquerable armies,” to allow himself this surrealistic flirtation with Israel’s “invincibility” – at the very time that as wise and seasoned a political scientist as Prof. Hans Morgenthau has publicly expressed his deepest fears about Israel’s future!

If I dwell on Rabbi Spero’s persistence in maintaining the clearly miscredited “invincibility” thesis with all the power of obfuscatory semantics, it is because it illustrates one of the dangers of the Messianic interpretations of current Jewish history. The “Messianists” (as we have agreed to call them) have got hold of a lion by the tail. The belief in and hope for Messiah is so powerful, so charged, that to release it prematurely is to run the risk of allowing centuries of emotion, dammed up in the collective unconscious of the race, to distort and submerge rational thinking precisely when such thinking is most crucial to survival.

Israel’s situation demands clear-headedness

Such careless speculation is, I submit, irresponsible even if it can be psychologically justified. Witness a man like Shubert Spero confusing a good and brave army with an invincible one, turning an embarrassment into a hang-up, and remythologizing what had best been left to the obscurity of discarded ideology.

In the near future, Israel will in all probability be faced with the need to decide on the fate of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). Israel’s leaders and population will have to think clearly and shrewdly before committing themselves to any position. They will have to weigh the military situation; assess Russian intentions; judge Nixon’s viability; make up their mind whether Kissinger is a diplomatic magician or a *Hof-Jude* who will be ready to sell us out in the name of his precious *détente*; and also consider historic Jewish associations. Such vital issues of war and peace are, for Israel, the stuff of survival. Surely, Israel will have to

summon all its wisdom and intelligence to formulate its policy. Cool heads and firm backbones will be absolutely necessary. My fear is that if this Messianic fervor in certain key circles gets out of hand, we may, Heaven forbid, complicate the decision process beyond repair.

Yet Rabbi Spero, who speaks condescendingly of “cool historic perspective” in favor of the “impetuosities of Messianic ardor,” may be responsible, along with others of his conviction, for misdirecting the whole inner debate that is to take place in Israel by substituting a kind of transcendental naivete for sound political reasoning. This is not Messianism; this is messy-ism!

Encouraging a “wait and see” attitude

I do not impose an either-or alternative on the Messianic claim. I wholeheartedly agree with the eminently reasonable assertion of the Sages that the Messianic redemption will come *kimah, kimah* – “bit by bit,” rising like the dawn. But not every “dawn” is a Messianic dawn, unless one wants to play the theoretical trick of categorizing *all* of Jewish history as the anticipation of Messiah, thus making this whole debate meaningless. Not every “bit” of good news implies Elijah’s trumpets.

Rabbi Spero fudges the issue when he asks, ever so innocently, if events like ours may not be “the beginning of even greater things to come.” Of course they *may* be. The question that separates us is whether they *are* – sufficiently to solemnly inform the Diety that we have conferred upon the State of Israel the status of *reshit tzemichat ge'ulatenu* (the beginning of our Messianic redemption). And not all “greater things to come” are Messianic things. We have had (despite the lugubrious dissertations of advocates of what has been called the “lachrymose” theory of Jewish history) instances of peace and prosperity and spiritual growth, experiences of divine concern, providential revelations of divine compassion and love. The Maccabean victory has been celebrated by Jews for over two thousand years. We acknowledge it as a miracle, and recite over it *al hanissim*. Yet no Messianic claim was ever made for it. Indeed, Simon was confirmed as leader of the Jews and High Priest “until a *true prophet (nevi emet)* should arise in Israel” (I *Maccabees* 14:41) – a clear sign of what I said in my previous rebuttal: not every *melekh* is *Mashiach*!

Essential evidence is lacking

Perhaps here is the place to ask some pointed, maybe embarrassing, questions. The Messianic theory has, after all, been pressed with greatest vigor in the religious-nationalist (*Mizrachi*) segment in Israel. These circles have developed a rather well-structured sequence, based

upon a variety of sources, to justify their interpretation of the State of Israel as a pre-Messianic State.

But in all these speculations, the element of public or collection *teshuvah* is prominent. The “Messianists” argue that this will follow rather than precede the “ingathering of the exiles.” But certainly it is an integral part of the process. I am willing to grant this version of the redemptive sequence. But can an objective appraisal of the religious situation in Israel today in any way justify this heady Messianic anticipation? If the Messiah himself will come *kimah kimah* “(little by little),” presumably the return to God and *Torah* will follow the same natural pattern.

With all the piety, fervor, *yeshivot*, and *halakhic* publication in contemporary Israel, surely the total scene does not encourage the conclusion that we are in the midst of an incipient religious renaissance which prefigures the full Messianic *teshuvah*. Why has this element been overlooked?

Neglecting the personal messiah

Furthermore – and here I turn specifically to religious intellectuals such as Shubert Spero – what of the *personal* Messiah of the Jewish tradition? Have we not, in our debate in these pages, unconsciously hypostatized him into an “age” – the Reform view, and reincarnated him into a geo-political entity called the State of Israel – the Zionist transformation of the personal Messiah? Have we, in all our talk about the Messianic age as precipitated in Israel, forgotten about Messiah as an individual? I remember an article in *Hadoar* several years ago in which Rabbi Soloveitchik (responding, I believe, to an article by Elie Wiesel) wrote that he is always careful not to speak of *Messianism* – because he believes in the coming of *the Messiah*!

Further, Maimonides (whose authority in this matter Rabbi Spero and I both seem to be accepting implicitly) insists that prophecy will reappear before the coming of *Mashiach*. Did the perspicuity of Israel’s leadership prior to the *Yom Kippur* War lend credence to the reemergence of prophecy? In the political and spiritual shambles of today, is there *any* Jewish leader whom we can guess may yet be graced with this pneumatic gift?

What I am asking, fundamentally, is whether our sophistication has not fed our myth-making tendencies instead of acting as a critical brake on them, making us suspicious of spurious claims.

No, my dear Shubert, I can no more accept the apocalyptic-salvific philosophy of current Jewish history, the prevailing Religious-Zionist thesis which you advo-

cate, any more than I accept the *Satmarer's* demonological interpretation of Zionist and Israeli history. I do not at all think it is fence-sitting, or the "sick and pathetic" apprehensiveness of the twice-jilted lover, that prevents me from subscribing to either certainty.

L'havdil

Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues "took risks" in declaring Bar Kochba the Messiah — and I join Rabbi Spero in admiring them for their courage. Yet they were wrong, and mistakes are worthwhile only if they are not repeated. And with all due respect to Rabbi Goren and General Dayan, they do not quite measure up to the historic stature, and share the Messianic credentials, of Rabbi Akiva and General Bar Kochba!

I joyously accept Rabbi Spero's invitation to link hands and lead our congregations out of the *Galut* (I have urged them on to it constantly, and have tried to do so myself — so far unfortunately unsuccessfully). The "vision which beckons in Jerusalem today" is noble, sacred, and inspiring — even if I do not yet know if it is the beginning of the ultimate redemption our prophets promised us. No matter. Israel is the guarantee of Jewish survival today whether or not it is the penultimate step to Messiah.

When I was a youngster I prayed in the *Chasidic Bet Midrash* of a saintly Rabbi, the Skolier Rebbe. I once heard him quote the *Talmudic* passage (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that Messiah will come in *hesech hadaat* — when every one will be distracted and hence when he will be least expected.

So, said the Rebbe (may he live and be well and witness soon the coming of the redeemer!), let us stop talking about the Messiah for a while and thus give him a chance to come.

Our letter and deficit reduction campaigns

Remember to send us your thoughts for our final issue of the academic year, our annual LETTERS-ISSUE. Comment on an article or theme presented in *Sh'ma* during the past nine months; or express your views on any matter of Jewish interest. Material for our LETTERS-ISSUE must be to us by Thursday, May 9.

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