

Eliezer Berkovits, Theologian of Zionism

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Many Jews are active, even vocal advocates of a Jewish state. Yet their support for Israel is rarely identified as deriving from their Judaism. Zionism is often considered to follow not from any specific religious belief, but from a concern for the well-being of one's fellow Jews. The Jews were persecuted for centuries, it is said, and the State of Israel is the remedy. But whether such a Zionism is an aspect of one's Judaism, understood as a faith, remains unclear.

This ambiguous relationship between Judaism and political Zionism is most in evidence when one considers the attitude of the great Jewish theologians writing after the emergence of the Zionist movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Most Reform thinkers, for example, opposed the idea of a Jewish nation state, its theologians arguing for decades that Zionism contradicted Judaism's universalist ethic.¹ For leading Orthodox thinkers as well, Zionism was taken to be an affront to the messianic ideal, according to which it is God—and not secular Zionists—who will redeem the Jews in the end of days. While there were noteworthy exceptions, it is fair to say that the energies Jews brought to the Zionist enterprise in the

pre-state period were largely despite, rather than because of, Jewish theological reflection.

A great deal changed, of course, with the rise of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the establishment of the State of Israel. The Reform movement abandoned its opposition to Zionism, as did the great majority of Orthodox Jews. Jewish theologians of virtually all persuasions began to speak of the Jewish state mainly in positive terms. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that the idea of sovereignty came to play in Jewish thought anything like the central role that it assumed in Jewish communal life. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the leading interpreter of Judaism within modern Orthodoxy in North America, endorsed the Jewish state in 1956 as a divine “knock on the door,” a wake-up call for Jews to the possibility of redemption and repentance;² yet Soloveitchik himself chose to remain in the diaspora, and the thrust of his philosophical efforts continued to be the ethos of the individual living under Jewish law, or halacha. Similarly, the Reform theologian Eugene B. Borowitz, whose enthusiasm for Israel is reflected in his hope that the Jewish state will help Jews “sanctify social existence” in a manner impossible under conditions of exile, nonetheless continues to place the pursuit of the ethical and the development of the “Jewish self” at the center of his theology—a challenge that in his view is best met in the diaspora.³ In his landmark work *Renewing the Covenant* (1991), Borowitz distanced himself from the biblical ideal of Jewish sovereignty, emphasizing the failure of ancient Israelite rulers to meet the ethical standards established at Sinai:

Being human, the [Israelite] kings demonstrate the will-to-do-evil; being rulers, they do so on a grand scale.... The incongruity of Israel’s political behavior in the light of its covenant ideals prompts the theological wonder that God did not choose another social form for them rather than subject them to the awesome risks of collective power.... God makes Abraham’s family a nation in history in order to show that collective

power can be sanctified through subordination to God's rule. This does not, however, require Israel to fulfill its covenantal responsibilities through political autonomy or any other given social structure.⁴

What emerges from all this is a remarkable disjuncture between Jewish philosophy and Jewish communal life. While the Jewish people has collectively placed Israel at the center of its public agenda, to the point that it has become one of the few causes that unite the great majority of Jews, Orthodox and liberal Jewish thinkers alike have remained occupied principally with the faith and works of the individual. Jews continue to love Israel, but when asked whether Judaism *needs* Zionism, most will simply shrug their shoulders or speak of the needs and history of the Jewish people.

In this light we may attach special significance to the understanding of Jewish nationhood put forward by the theologian Eliezer Berkovits (1908-1992), who wrote extensively on the meaning of sovereignty and nationhood in Judaism. According to Berkovits, modern philosophers of Judaism have misunderstood the importance of nationhood—and in particular its expression in the form of an independent state—in interpreting the biblical faith and its talmudic expansion. While most Jewish thinkers, under the influence of Kant, tended to view the classic Jewish affirmation of nationhood and sovereignty as at best secondary to Judaism's ethical or legal core, Berkovits offered an approach to morality and nationhood that understood the creation and maintenance of a sovereign Jewish polity to be essential to the fulfillment of Judaism.

In Berkovits' view, the exile of the Jewish people at the dawn of the Christian era represented more than a physical and political tragedy for Jews. It was a calamity for Judaism itself, which would henceforth be incapable of fulfilling its central mission, that of creating an exemplary people in its own sovereign state. Following the eradication of Jewish national life in the second century C.E., Judaism entered a period of preservation, during which its wellsprings of creativity grew dry and its adaptive capacity withered, until the modern era arrived, offering Jews an

alternative vision for which the keepers of the tradition were largely unprepared. The opportunity to re-establish the Jewish state in our own era, therefore, signified for Berkovits not only the protection of Jewish lives from the arbitrariness of nations—a tremendous achievement in its own right—but also the reconstitution of Judaism under sovereign conditions. “The creation of an autonomous Jewish body corporate,” Berkovits wrote in 1943, five years before Israel’s independence, “is the *sine qua non* for the regeneration of Jewish religion and culture. Without it, further development of Judaism is impossible; without it Judaism can hardly be saved in the present circumstances.”⁵

According to Berkovits, therefore, Judaism *does* need Zionism, and emphatically so. This fact places him among a handful of major Jewish theologians of the past century for whom Judaism and Zionism are effectively inseparable, forming a unified whole. Of these, however, Berkovits’ exposition is probably the most developed philosophically, and the most compelling in its refutation of competing approaches in both general and Jewish thought.

In what follows, I will explore Berkovits’ philosophical Zionism, with particular attention to three of his claims: First, that the Jewish collective identity is not merely a fact of history, but a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the Jewish moral vision; second, that the centrality of the collective translates into a demand for national sovereignty, not only today but as a permanent requirement of Judaism; and finally, that the resultant understanding of Jewish history, the predicament of exile, and the problem of enlightenment makes the Jewish state a precondition for the success and even survival of Judaism in the modern era. Together, these arguments offer a coherent and powerful account of the Jewish state as an integral aspect of Jewish faith.

II

There are good reasons why Jewish philosophy has tended to view morality and collective identity as subjects that are better off addressed under separate cover. The realm of ethics, which has been perceived in Western thought as a product of reason and therefore universal, has always seemed at odds with the needs and aspirations of human collectives. The latter have often been seen as reflecting particular interests and sustained by irrational sentiments. For Berkovits, however, morality and community are philosophically linked. Not only is there a moral demand placed on human communities and not just individuals; but morality itself is dependent on the concept of the collective. According to this view, the Jewish people is a central component of Jewish morality.

To understand why this is so, it is important to consider Berkovits' approach to the nature of morality in Judaism. In a previous essay in *AZURE*, I argued that he developed an approach to Jewish morality that may be seen as an alternative to the main threads of Western reasoning.⁶ While many of the leading philosophers of that tradition emphasized adherence to abstract ethical rules and the purity of human intentions, Judaism is seen by Berkovits as emphasizing the effectiveness of one's actions in history. As he wrote in *God, Man and History*:

Judaism is not an "idealistic" or "spiritual" religion, but a human one. It is a religion for the whole of man. It aims at relating life in its entirety to God. It is not, therefore, so much a religion of creed as it is the religion of the deed on earth. The intellect or the soul may be satisfied with the creed; the whole man, however, may serve God only through the deed.... However, in order to be, the deed must be effective; and it must be so in the place where it belongs—in the external world, in history.⁷

Thus the yardstick of morality in Judaism, according to Berkovits, is not our adherence to a set of ideas or beliefs, but the results of our actions—and, by extension, the kind of society we help create.

Two important consequences follow from this view. The first, which was discussed more thoroughly in the previous essay, has to do with our own moral education: If morality is fundamentally about results rather than rules, then the way we learn how to behave morally will more closely resemble the way other result-oriented skills are learned, through models of emulation rather than doctrine. Because morality is learned from the example of others, a significant part of transmitting morality to others consists in dedicating the totality of one's life to the creation and implementation of a higher moral order, and thereby making oneself into a moral example.⁸

The second, which will be our main concern here, is that if morality is principally about results rather than intentions or adherence to rules, then the radical individualism upon which most modern ethical thought is based must be reconsidered. Since Kant, the question of whether an act is considered to be ethical in the view of most modern philosophers has turned on the quality of the autonomous decision of the individual actor: Whether it is taken in purity of intention, and according to the appropriate abstract principles of right. But the moment results, rather than intentions and principles, are the focus, it becomes evident that *collectives* are also the cause of good or ill effects in history. While it is obviously true that any collective is made up of individuals, it is also the case that the conditions created by the character of communities, peoples, and nations have an impact on people that is far more real and powerful than can be accounted for by looking purely at the deeds of individuals acting alone.⁹ If morality has to do with the establishment of a good society, then our moral thinking must take into account human behavior at the level of communities, alongside our consideration of the individual.

These consequences led Berkovits to conclude that if we are to hope for the moral advancement of mankind, such hope will rest not on the

emergence of a new moral doctrine, but on a moral exemplar on the level of the human community. “For the deed to be effective,” he writes in *God, Man and History*, “it must not remain the act of an individual, but must become that of a community. The deed makes history if it is the materialization of the desire and will of a community of people joined together in a common cause.... Even the purely religious aspects of the Jewish deed are most intimately interwoven with community existence.”¹⁰ Man’s moral achievements are, more than anything else, the realities he creates on the interpersonal and collective level—that is, the quality of the community’s norms, and its success or failure in establishing a code of behavior, caring for the poor, and educating healthy and righteous individuals and families.

For this reason, Berkovits argues, Judaism has always understood its central mission to be the creation of an exemplary community, and not just exemplary individuals. Such a community dedicates its entire public existence, as well as the efforts of the individuals who live in it, towards a higher, divinely guided order. In the biblical view, the life of the Jews as a people is to play a central role in the establishment of human morality. Man’s improvement requires a living example. But “man” as we find him is not a detached individual, but part of a society, with its own distinct habits, values, and cultural dynamic. Not the education of holy individuals, but the existence of a holy people, constitutes Judaism’s central contribution to establishing morality in the world.

This understanding of Judaism finds expression throughout Berkovits’ writings. In his extensive works on Jewish law, for example, he argues that the law must be understood not just as a code for individual piety, but also as a system which seamlessly combines the devotional with the political, and is addressed to the life of the community no less than that of the individual. The Talmud is not merely an ethical code, but the constitutive document for a living people—“the most successful experiment in the history of national constitutions,” which alone “preserved a whole nation against the continuously stupid and wicked enmity of the entire world.”¹¹

Accordingly, Jewish law resembles far more closely the code of conduct governing a living community than the regimen for piety which is offered by most religions.

One example is Judaism's approach to economic affairs. While the idea of individual property rights is deeply embedded in Jewish law and tradition—perhaps even constituting a fundamental element of the Jewish concept of man in the world—the halacha considered the proper functioning of the economy *as a whole* to be of decisive importance, justifying the enactment of a “market regulation” (*takanat hashbuk*) which overrode the strict application of individual rights. Berkovits cites a ruling of the Mishna in a case in which goods are stolen and then sold to a third party. When the original owner confronts the purchaser, demanding that his belongings be returned, there emerges a clear conflict between individual rights and the economic good: If the concept of property rights were to be strictly applied, the original owner should be allowed to reclaim his property without having to compensate the buyer. The former had never given up his rights to the object, whereas the latter had incorrectly believed he was purchasing rights that the seller (i.e., the thief) never possessed in the first place. However, the rabbis ruled that while the original owner does have a right to the property, he may only exercise that right by compensating the buyer for the amount he paid for it. Berkovits cites a rabbinic explanation for this: “Since the buyer bought in the open market... if the original owner would not return to him the price he paid, no one would dare buy anything for fear that it was stolen. Thus, all business would come to a standstill.”¹² Such a regulation may seem perfectly ordinary when dealing with a system of laws intended for a living community. What is interesting, however, is the fact that Judaism is such a system: Not a faith alone, but a normative system which embraces the political and legal spheres—because one cannot understand the moral good without reference to a vision of a moral society.

This recognition of the collective, societal realm extends in Berkovits' view even to the way Jews pray. In his 1962 monograph *Prayer*, Berkovits

emphasizes the significance Judaism always attached to communal prayer, above and beyond the free expression of the individual. The very fact that Jewish prayer has traditionally been centered on the recital of obligatory texts is, in his view, a direct consequence of this approach. “Free prayer is always individual prayer, even when practiced in a congregational assembly....” he writes. “Obligatory prayer, being independent of any contingent individual occasion, is based on the existential situation of the Jew in relationship to God. It is not the prayer of one Jew in one situation; it is the prayer for all Jews at all times. Therefore, even when prayed by an individual in solitude, it remains in its essence communal prayer.”¹³ For prayer to have meaning, it must be a true reflection of the Jewish community’s standing with respect to God. Individual prayer, though not without its place, is nonetheless “problematic because of the insufficiency of the subjective experience of the individual alone.”¹⁴ Though he does not deny the value of the words of an individual pouring out his heart to God, Berkovits argues that in focusing a person’s energies purely on self-expression, individual prayer “may amount to outright selfishness” and as such it can even become “unethical.” Berkovits cites numerous laws and principles from the Jewish tradition to support his claim—such as the idea that “the prayer of the community is never despised,” or the suggestion that if one has to pray alone, it is best to do so at the time when the community is praying.¹⁵ He concludes:

The concept [of communal prayer] derives directly from the specific nature of Judaism. Judaism is not a religion of individual souls but that of a people.... In Judaism it is not only the individual who confronts God; the people as a people is committed to living in such confrontation. As it lives as a people in the presence of God, so it turns to God in prayer as a people.¹⁶

In an age so conscious of the “self,” Berkovits’ words strike an unusual note. Prayer is first a representation of the community’s relationship with

God, and only secondarily a means of addressing the spiritual needs of the individual. Thus even the most intimate moment of contact between man and God is framed in the context of the larger community; it is the community that prays to God for redemption, just as it is the community that is ultimately redeemed. “Judaism’s concern,” he wrote in *Unity in Judaism* (1986), “is not primarily the salvation of individual souls but the comprehensive spiritual, socio-ethical, economic, and political reality of human existence. Thus Judaism is best characterized not as a religion, but as the covenantal civilization of a people.”¹⁷

This approach, while well grounded in the biblical and rabbinic texts, nonetheless represents a striking rejoinder to the major streams of Jewish philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century. While thinkers like Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig did not reject the biblical vision of the moral improvement of all peoples, they nonetheless followed the Kantian tradition in pinning their hopes on the thoughts, intentions, or emotions of the individual as the starting point for serious moral discussion. In their view, this emphasis was the natural outcome of Judaism’s universal spirit. If the world is to be redeemed through a universal morality, then we must begin with that which unites mankind, namely, the capacity of individuals for reason or compassion. It was through the individual—at the expense of communities, peoples, or nations—that mankind as a whole would find redemption.

This sentiment is found most vividly in the writings of Hermann Cohen. “What, after all, is social morality, if it is not founded upon the individual?” he wrote in his great work, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*. “Is not individual morality the precondition for social morality, without which the latter remains an abstraction, from which it cannot be freed even through the relation of man to the state?”¹⁸ In Cohen’s view, morality begins with the individual’s recognition that he is part of a single mankind, united under the rubric of ethics guided by reason—a recognition which must ultimately result in the dissolution of peoples into a collective, universal ideal:

Finally it is a consequence of the ethical rigor that *national* limitations are abandoned for the sake of messianism.... If one disregards the fundamental historical meaning, that through the election the national consciousness was to be substituted for the religious calling, then the election of Israel has only a symbolic significance. From the very outset this higher symbolism presaged Israel's messianic call, its *elevation into one mankind*.¹⁹

Cohen's vision of the unification of humanity through the individual's "ethical rigor," leading to the dissolution of distinct communities, had a profound impact on the way Jewish philosophy developed in the twentieth century. This effect has been described by Eugene Borowitz, who writes in *Renewing the Covenant*, "All modernist theories of Judaism uphold the principle of autonomy, that authority ultimately is vested in the individual mind and will." This view, according to Borowitz, was even more pronounced among existentialist thinkers, such as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, for whom the individual experience was the starting point for all religious or ethical experience. "Buber and Rosenzweig both considered the [individual's] relationship with God to be the unchanging core of Judaism.... Like any love, it commanded one only when the self willingly responded to it...." According to Borowitz, for all that thinkers such as these may have disagreed with the rationalism of Cohen, "the existentialists nonetheless shared an important precept of modernity: That all authority, whether exercised in terms of one's rationality, ethnicity, or relationships, finally resides in the individual self."²⁰

Such a view, Berkovits countered, misunderstands the nature of human morals. For if the goal of morality is not just to fashion righteous teachings but to bring into being a better human reality, morality must begin with man as he really is: Both an individual and part of a larger collective. And any reasonable evaluation of history will show that for most people most of the time, it is the collective which establishes and reinforces the norms that govern the ethical behavior of individuals. Therefore, if Jewish morality contains within it a vision for mankind—a position Berkovits embraces

wholeheartedly—then its realization will depend not on the hope that people will abandon their particular allegiances, but rather on the emergence of a living people that may be “history-making” in its representation of a moral ideal. “The goal of Judaism is accomplished when it is reached by all mankind,” he wrote. “Since, however, the goal is not essentially the teaching of noble ideals—which would indeed be rather easy, and ineffective—but rather their realization in history, one has to start with the smallest unit of living reality within which the deed of Judaism may become history-making; and such a unit is the nation. Individuals may teach; a people is needed in order to *do* effectively.”²¹

III

How would such a holy community be constituted? In Berkovits’ view, the limited autonomy granted Jewish communities in foreign lands cannot meet the fundamental demands that the Bible places on the Jews. The effectiveness of the model community requires not simply congregations, or an international association joined by a common religion, but rather the creation of a “holy nation.”

Basing himself on the verse in Exodus, “And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,”²² Berkovits articulates a philosophy of Judaism according to which only on the national level does man possess sufficient independence of spirit and action to have the possibility of representing the divine on earth in the fullest way possible. This idea is expressed by the very term “holy nation.” Holiness (*kedusha*) means, literally, *dedication*; Judaism’s concern cannot be restricted to the home, synagogue, house of study, or community center. Holiness means dedicating the whole of our lives to God. But if this is the case, then any Jewish community which is dependent on others in crucial areas of life is forever

prevented from fulfilling its task. An exemplary people must first be an independent, fully responsible people. It must have that which distinguishes independent nations from other forms of community. That is, it must be sovereign.

At this stage a crucial distinction must be drawn. While Berkovits insisted on sovereignty as a minimal condition for the fulfillment of Judaism, he did not advocate any sort of totalist ideal, in which every aspect of life is given over to the authority of human rulers. “This kingdom of priests is not a society in which a priestly caste rules over an unpriestly populace in the name of some god,” Berkovits writes. “A holy nation is a realm in which all are priests. But where all are priests, all are servants—and God alone rules.” The point of sovereignty is not to fashion a state that will become the principal conduit of sanctity, but to give the nation sufficient responsibility for its own affairs as to allow it to constitute a viable example for other nations. “A ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation,’” he writes, “is thus not a theocracy, but a God-centered republic.”²³

Berkovits expands on the question of sovereignty in a variety of contexts. In *Faith After the Holocaust* (1973), he concludes his major statement on the destruction of European Jewry with a discussion of Jewish statehood. While most Zionist writers based their arguments for statehood on a plea for justice or for the necessity of self-defense after centuries of persecution, Berkovits depicts sovereignty as a permanent need, inherent in Judaism’s moral outlook:

While by faith alone a soul may be saved, perhaps, the deed’s *raison d’être* is to be effective in the world. For the sake of its effectiveness, the deed will seek for its realization a group that is motivated by a common faith and united by a common cause. The extent of the group depends on the area within which the deed is to be enacted....

But what if the fruition of the idea as the deed encompasses the whole of human existence? If the faith seeks realization in economics, morals, politics, in every manifestation of human life? In that case, the group ought to be all-comprehensive. Such a group should be mankind. But

mankind is not a group; it is not a historical entity. Mankind itself is an idea, an ideal. The comprehensive group to be created to suit the comprehensive deed as a historical reality is a people *in sovereign control of the major areas of its life*. The faith of Judaism requires such a comprehensive deed. Realization through and within the all-comprehensive collective, mankind, is the ideal; the instrument of its realization in history is the people.²⁴

The fallacy of political universalism, according to Berkovits, is not its wish for the improvement of mankind, but its belief that mankind as such exists at all, as a human association capable of acting in history. Collectives can be real things, inasmuch as they are made up of individuals acting in concert and united in a common cause; “humanity” may be a useful mental construct, but it does not exist as an actual human collective, so long as all mankind has not united under a common identity or goal. Universal brotherhood is at best a dream; only extant human associations can actually move history, and the form of association most suited to the aims of Judaism is the sovereign nation, which alone contains within it the full contents of human life.

The centrality of sovereignty to Judaism according to Berkovits can thus be explained in two ways. First, it is a necessary product of Judaism’s insistence on reorienting the length and breadth of human life towards a divine order. If an exilic Jewish community is without control over such far-reaching, genuinely existential concerns as defense and economics, it has assuredly been rendered flatter, less representative of the human condition, and therefore less capable of fulfilling the central aims of a holy nation. It is, literally, less holy.

Many Jews, of course, may see this as a good thing, arguing that it is precisely by delegating to others the “lower” aspects of public life, filled with power and violence, that Jews have been able to offer a superior kind of community. And yet the problem is revealed the moment one takes the argument further. One may choose to live in a monastery, in which wide

areas of “profane” concern are removed from the monk’s immediate attention, and call this holiness. Yet by hiding wealth and war and procreation from the monk, one does not make them disappear. The viability of monastic life continues to depend on such questions as before—just that these areas are now left to others. Holiness is not achieved, in Berkovits’ view, by ignoring profanity and celebrating its absence, but by focusing all the areas of public and private life on that which is “right and good in the eyes of the Eternal.” And what holds for the monastery is no less true for exilic Judaism: It has not removed the need for righteousness in crucial areas such as security and economics; it has merely delegated them to others, and its own holiness is thereby made limited, even superficial.

Second, sovereignty is central to Judaism’s aspiration to create an exemplary community. For it seems clear that few nations will look to the Jews for moral wisdom so long as they are exempt from addressing the hardest questions that come with sovereignty—questions upon which all communal life ultimately depends. Sovereign peoples are certainly capable of learning a great deal from the successes and failures of other nations, for they often face similar challenges. But how is any nation, daily charged with the task of attending to its defense and prosperity, to learn about morality from a people in exile? Put another way, if moral dilemmas increase in proportion to the power wielded by the actor, why would the powerful ever have cause to learn from the powerless, who simply do not face the same kinds of questions? A weaker country will have little to teach stronger ones about how and when to use overwhelming force to achieve just ends, for example, for it has little comparable experience; how much more so for a people with no means of self-defense at all?

To understand just how unusual was Berkovits’ approach in modern Jewish thinking, it is instructive to contrast it with the ideas advanced by other major religious-Zionist thinkers. Among these, two themes are heard most frequently. On the one hand, redemptive determinists like Abraham Isaac Kook and his son, Tzvi Yehuda Kook, identified the rise of Zionism

with the messianic era, brought about by divine command through the instrumentality of the Zionist movement. For these thinkers, the end of days was everywhere in evidence, and the only question was whether the Jewish people understood and acted on its implications. As the elder Kook wrote in 1920:

From the lowliest level we are recreated as in days past.... We are invited to a new world full of supernal splendor, to a new era that will surpass in strength all the great eras that preceded it. The entire people believes that there will be no more exile after the redemption that is presently commencing, and this profound belief is itself the secret of its existence, the mystery of God revealed in its historical saga, and the ancient tradition attests to the light of its soul that recognizes itself and the entire genealogy of events until the last generation, a generation longing for imminent salvation.²⁵

Kook's son, who became the preeminent leader of the religious-Zionist community in Israel in the period following the Six Day War, put it more directly. "How is it that some religious spokesmen even withheld their support for Zionism and the movement for redemption?" he asked. "They failed to recognize that it was not that we mortals were forcing the end, but rather that the Master of the House, the Lord of the Universe, was forcing our hand...."²⁶

On the other hand, pragmatic nationalists like Isaac Jacob Reines, and the religious-Zionist Mizrahi movement he helped found in the early twentieth century, advocated statehood primarily as a remedy for the tragic conditions of exile. The greatest threats to the Jewish people, they argued, are assimilation and persecution, and only Jewish nationalism, and ultimately statehood, could save the Jews. According to this approach, redemption and the improvement of mankind were irrelevant to the Zionist enterprise, and any effort to connect it with eternal Jewish ideals, rather than simply the pragmatic improvement of the condition of the Jews, was

in error. “Zionist ideology is devoid of any trace of the idea of redemption...,” he wrote approvingly in 1899. “In none of the Zionists’ acts or aspirations is there the slightest allusion to future redemption. *Their sole intention is to improve Israel’s situation*, to raise their stature and accustom them to a life of happiness.... How can one compare this idea with the idea of redemption?”²⁷

Berkovits did not deny the philosophical legitimacy of these approaches.²⁸ In the wake of the Holocaust and the Israeli victories in 1948 and 1967, he joined many Jews in interpreting these events as revealing some kind of “messianic moment, in which the unexpected fruits of human endeavor reveal themselves as the mysterious expression of a divine guidance which the heart always knew would come.”²⁹ Nor could he gainsay the pragmatic value of the state in defending Jewish lives and stemming assimilation. At the same time, these approaches share the weakness of being constructed on what is effectively a historical contingency: Reluctant to take upon themselves the critique of centuries of traditional Judaism in exile which such a position implied, these thinkers depicted the need for sovereignty not as fundamental to the central aims of Judaism, but rather as reflecting a specific need in our time. Berkovits, by contrast, presents sovereignty as an inherent and unchanging need, a minimum condition for the fulfillment of Judaism itself.

Moreover, Berkovits’ aim in writing is different from that of other religious-Zionist thinkers. The latter were directing their discourse primarily to the Orthodox rabbinic leadership, steeped in the idiom and assumptions of Tora learning; their principal ideological opponent was the anti-Zionist rabbinic establishment. Their hopes lay not in convincing a secular Zionist establishment to recognize the religious value of the moment, but in convincing Orthodox Jews to recognize the religious merits in a pre-existing, but hitherto secular, Zionist enterprise. Berkovits, on the other hand, lay aside the rabbinic rhetorical training of his youth and crafted a philosophical argument for a nationally based Judaism derived from his understanding of the unique Jewish approach to morality, thereby creating a coherent system which could serve as an alternative to the central ideas of

modern moral philosophy and of those philosophies of Judaism that drew upon European thought for their inspiration.

The importance of these differences becomes apparent when we consider the fact that the most powerful intellectual opposition to Jewish sovereignty in the first half of the twentieth century came from the world of philosophical argument, and in the name of eternal, not historically contingent, Jewish ideas. Thinkers like Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Buber insisted that the idea of sovereignty violated the true spirit of Judaism, which affirmed the powerlessness of exile. Cohen, for example, argued in 1916 that the exile of the Jews two thousand years ago was a major step forward in messianic history, enabling the Jews to represent an “entirely universal religion” among the nations:

We interpret our entire history as pointing to this messianic goal. Thus, we see the destruction of the Jewish state [i.e., of the ancient Jewish commonwealth] as an exemplification of the theodicy of history. The same Micah who said that God requires man to do justly also conceived of the providential metaphor: “And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, as dew from the Lord.”³⁰ We are proudly aware of the fact that we continue to live as divine dew among the nations; we wish to remain among them and be a creative force for them. All our prophets have us living among the nations, and all view “Israel’s remnant” from the perspective of its world mission.³¹

Jewish history, in Cohen’s view, represents the progress of the Jews from a provincial, national entity during its ancient, sovereign period to a higher state of exile and dispersion, in which they may serve as “divine dew among the nations.” This position, upon which Cohen based his opposition to the emerging Zionist movement, was developed further by Franz Rosenzweig. In *The Star of Redemption* (1919), Rosenzweig posits a role for the Jewish people in the redemption of mankind, a role that has emerged precisely because of the Jews’ rejection of sovereign power and their attainment of an ahistorical life in exile:

The Jewish people has already reached the goal toward which the nations are still moving.... Its soul, replete with the vistas afforded by hope, grows numb to the concerns, the doing, and the struggling of the world. The consecration poured over it as over a priestly people renders its life “unproductive.” Its holiness hinders it from devoting its soul to a still unhallowed world.... In order to keep unharmed the vision of the ultimate community it must deny itself the satisfaction the peoples of the world constantly enjoy in the functioning of their state. For the state is the ever-changing guise under which time moves step by step toward eternity. So far as God’s people is concerned, eternity has already come—even in the midst of time!³²

By rejecting statehood, and its attendant involvement in “the concerns, the doing, and the struggling of the world,” the Jews as an exilic people have succeeded in achieving the same eternal status which every nation seeks. The nations of the world, however, have sought eternity through the state, which employs law, coercion, and war to create an illusion of the eternal. “The state symbolizes the attempt to give nations eternity within the confines of time,” a fact which puts it forever at odds with the Jewish people, who have already discovered eternity through the exilic model. The state, in Rosenzweig’s view, is nothing less than “the imitator and rival of the people which is in itself eternal, a people which would cease to have a claim to its own eternity if the state were able to attain what it is striving for.”³³

The views of Cohen and Rosenzweig, it must be emphasized, had a powerful influence on Jewish intellectual life, including in Israel. While their arguments were well developed from a philosophical standpoint, it is fair to say that their success was no less the result of a fear that the Jewish people, who had witnessed centuries of racist persecution in Europe, would now themselves come under the influence of that romantic nationalism that had become popular in Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a fear which to this day continues to charge the debate over the application of sovereign power in the Jewish state. As a young rabbi in Berlin at the time of National Socialism’s ascendancy in Germany and until the eve of the war,

Berkovits understood Germany's radicalization to be the natural outcome of the state-worship which had swept central Europe, and was concerned about what the renewed affection for sovereign power could mean for the Zionist movement. "Woe unto us," he wrote in *Towards Historic Judaism* (1943), "if the degeneration of the exile should lead us to a Hebrew nationalism along the European pattern.... Not every form of *eretz yisrael* is worth the trouble, and many a form could be unworthy of Judaism."³⁴

At the same time, for the Jews to reject worldly, history-making power when the opportunity presented itself would mean shirking the responsibility they had taken upon themselves at Sinai. Sovereignty was central to Judaism, and could not be written out of it simply because romantic Europeans had put the state at the center of their worldview. How, then, was a Jewish state to avoid the perils of European nationalism? Berkovits' answer is clear. Sovereignty and nationhood are themselves preconditions, not the end goal, of Judaism. A Jewish state would avoid the dangers of idolizing the state by keeping before its eyes the higher moral purpose for which the Jewish people was founded; by preserving the state's dependence on Jewish tradition, through which the idea of the "holy nation" would be continuously reinforced and the risks which accompany empowerment kept in check. "The idea of a holy nation is not to be confused with that of nationalism," he wrote a decade after the establishment of Israel. "The goal of nationalism is to serve the nation; a holy nation serves God. The law of nationalism is national self-interest; the law of a kingdom of priests is the will of God. From the point of view of a nationalistic ideology, the nation is an end in itself; the holy nation is a means to an end."³⁵

Thus, whereas Cohen and Rosenzweig offered a defense of exile in the name of an ethical vision, Berkovits' emphasis on morality in Judaism led precisely to the opposite conclusion. The idea of the improvement of mankind, which lies at the heart of the prophetic vision, demands not exile but sovereign empowerment, for without it Judaism cannot offer a true example of how the entire life of man may be dedicated to a higher, divine order. That national sovereignty could avoid the pitfalls of state-worship

was acutely evident to Berkovits, who escaped totalitarian Germany and found in the English-speaking democracies a far more successful model. These nations understood sovereignty as the only means to vouchsafe the liberty necessary for human happiness, and their dedication to this higher ideal enabled them to write constitutions and laws which have succeeded in furthering that ideal over centuries. In Berkovits' view, the idea of the holy nation can serve as precisely such a higher vision for the Jewish state, and in fact must do so if Judaism is to establish itself as a moral force in history.

IV

If sovereignty is central, however, the Jews' history of exile and return takes on new significance. Exile is a tragedy not only for Jews deprived of a homeland, but also for a Judaism deprived of the conditions for the fulfillment of its purpose. Exile for Berkovits represents not an improvement that should be balanced against the human suffering it entails, not an "exemplification of the theodicy of history," as Cohen put it. Rather, it represents nothing less than the derailment of Judaism itself, which no amount of congregational action or individual piety can make good. "The great spiritual tragedy of the exile," Berkovits wrote in 1943, "consists in the breach between Tora and life, for exile means the loss of a Jewish-controlled environment."³⁶ Without sovereignty, Judaism itself is deprived of its creative capacity, its original inner vitality, and is doomed to paralysis and, ultimately, decline.

Why must this be the case? The answer, according to Berkovits, stems from the essential difference between the life of the holy nation in its land and that of a people in exile. As a sovereign people, the holy nation is not a static thing, but a living, creating entity. Faced with new challenges and possessing the power to address them, such a nation constantly struggles to improve its

life and laws according to a higher vision. As such, it will of necessity be dynamic and evolving. Because it has the capacity for far greater moral effectiveness than a people in exile, it will dedicate its resources to the articulation, interpretation, and enforcement of just laws and right customs. And its best minds and spirits will be continually directed toward understanding just what it means for a sovereign nation to live in righteousness.

For many centuries, Berkovits writes, Israel enjoyed the conditions necessary for pursuing such a vision. While the Jewish kingdoms of antiquity did not always meet the standards of conduct they had set for themselves, sovereignty nonetheless meant that the idea of the holy nation was a possibility, a dream to pursue. This powerful sovereign dynamic enabled a small people to produce the most influential work of moral teaching in human history—the Hebrew Bible, which depicts, through a variety of genres, the successes and failures of a nation attempting to fulfill the purpose given to it by God. It also enabled the creation of a rich oral tradition, encompassing both law and legend. These great works, in Berkovits' mind, were produced by a living nation grappling with all the realities of human life, from warfare to public worship to education and economics, and struggling to imbue the fullness of life with sanctity. Even in the first few centuries after the Temple's destruction in 70 C.E. and the final loss of Jewish sovereignty in the second century, the intellectual habits which had been the product of sovereignty enabled the rabbinic leaders of Judaism to produce the monumental works of the Talmud and Midrash, which possessed such creativity and insight as to become the basis not only of Judaism for centuries on end, but of continued study and reverence throughout the Western world.³⁷

But this momentum could carry Judaism only so far. In the centuries following the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, the enormity of the exile began to make itself felt. Stripped of sovereignty, the Tora ceased to be "history-making." The Talmud itself gives voice to this understanding, when it asserts that "since the destruction of the Temple, God has nothing in this world other than the four cubits of halacha."³⁸ Judaism in exile,

Berkovits writes, became at once distracted and distorted, unable to apply the divine ideal to the totality of life, while at the same time forced to modify its laws and institutions to ensure Jewish religious survival against the double threat of assimilation and persecution. “With the loss of national sovereignty,” he wrote in *Crisis and Faith* (1976), “there were no more political problems with a bearing on national survival to confront the Tora.... Judaism was forced out of the public domain into the limitations of the private one. Broad layers of the Tora were thus pried away from the comprehensive life of a normal people, for which they were originally intended. The vital link between Tora and reality was severed in the exile of the people.”³⁹ If Judaism requires sovereignty for its fulfillment, then exile is not merely a historical disaster, but a cosmic one as well, for God’s teaching is deprived of its central field of application, and the presence of the divine in history becomes restricted to the “four cubits” of law in exile.

Exile meant that to survive, Judaism had to be transformed and retooled. Beginning with the decrees of R. Yohanan ben Zakai during the first century C.E. and continuing over a thousand years, the rabbis struggled to preserve the Jews’ basic commitments to Tora study and observance in increasingly difficult conditions. The elimination of broad areas of life from the Tora’s rubric meant the Jews’ mission as an exemplary people would have to be put on hold; and the extreme conditions of exile posed such a threat to the survival of the Tora that preservation became an overriding existential need. Pursuing the ancient dream was no longer an option, and Jewish leaders now turned their efforts to merely keeping the dream alive.

This meant, first and foremost, a palpable constriction in the freedom of rabbinic scholars to innovate or interpret the law creatively in light of its inner meaning. Most strikingly, this was expressed in the emergence of written codes of law as the preeminent source of Jewish authority, displacing the judgment of living individuals, who in Berkovits’ view were more capable of capturing the depth of the Tora’s meaning and applying it to ever-changing reality. “Living authority is always built upon tradition, but as it is alive it can exist only when there is a possibility of an organic

evolution in the application of tradition,” he wrote. “When, owing to the hard facts of Jewish history, owing to the insecurity of Jewish life, living authority was no longer practicable, and authority had to be transferred to the book, the Talmud, the records of a once-living authority, Judaism had to sacrifice the possibility of organic development; it renounced the great principle of the evolution of traditional teachings. The structure of Judaism became rigid, for it had lost its evolutionary strength.”⁴⁰

For the preservation of their national law in conditions of exile, the Jews paid in the hard currency of the Tora’s original vitality. Cut off from the hardest questions of public life, the Tora was relegated almost entirely to the purely theoretical or the purely individual. In *Crisis and Faith*, Berkovits put the problem in perhaps its harshest light:

With the people, the Tora, too, went into exile.... The living Tora needs the dialectical tension of the confrontation with a total reality that asks questions and presents problems. Tora is alive when it meets the challenge, struggles with the problems, seeks for solutions by a continuous deepening of its self-understanding, thus forever discovering new levels of meaningfulness in the depth of its inexhaustible eternity. Tora in exile lacks the life-sustaining challenge of the confrontation. It is stunted in its vitality and, for lack of possibilities of Tora-realization, it is greatly impaired in its wisdom of Tora-application.⁴¹

Exile necessitates taking extreme measures just to preserve Jewish identity and to maintain the Jews’ fidelity to the original dream of the holy nation. For this reason, even as the application of the law became increasingly constricted, the ideal of Tora study continued to include those areas of the law which were devoid of practical application—such as the sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem, the governance of the Sanhedrin, or agricultural restrictions in the Sabbatical year, which apply only in the land of Israel.⁴² For this reason, moreover, Judaism throughout the centuries maintained a powerful dedication to the messianic idea, based on the hope that the Jews would re-establish sovereignty and regain their former glory—an idea

which attained the status of cardinal belief in the writings of Maimonides, and which even found practical expression throughout the medieval period in efforts to return to the land of Israel and re-establish Jewish sovereignty.⁴³

But these measures, while helpful for preservation, could not correct the immense “breach between Tora and life” that had resulted from exile. Over time, Judaism turned increasingly inward and attended primarily to its spiritual self-defense. It erected firm walls of law and custom, in the process becoming progressively less flexible. Judaism and Jewish life were able to continue this way for many centuries, preserving the integrity of the Jewish nation and its dedication to the Tora as a theological framework and a source of political authority. But the same rigidity and insularity which helped Judaism survive through the medieval period left it unprepared for the modern era.

The modern period in Europe presented so powerful an assault on the traditional exilic model of Judaism as to leave the Jewish people in a state of crisis from which it has yet to emerge. Politically, the emancipation of European Jewry meant that the individual Jew was suddenly offered a national affiliation that could compete openly with that of the Jewish polity-in-exile. Philosophically, enlightenment meant that reason, which always had a special appeal for Jews raised on talmudic discourse, was now turned against the foundations of biblical faith. As Berkovits writes in *Towards Historic Judaism*:

When, through Jewish emancipation, European Jews entered the circle of modern civilization and experienced the conflict between that new world and their own Jewish world of old, the rigidity which they had taken upon themselves resulted in an inability to adapt, rendering all the important problems arising out of that conflict insoluble. Jews began to share more and more in a life that was rapidly changing, while at the same time they remained in a spiritual and religious world that had lost its capacity to develop. In such a situation, all attempts at reconciliation were doomed to failure.⁴⁴

The result was that the majority of Jews broke with the traditional framework, abandoning the political component of Judaism as well as the four cubits of law—and in the process abandoning the ancient dream of creating a holy nation. Judaism became a realm of private belief which every Jew was supposed to interpret on his own. But in the realm of human history, where the Tora had originally sought to have its most important effect, the Jew was now a proud Frenchman, American, or German. “We German adherents of Jewish monotheism,” Hermann Cohen wrote typically in 1917, “place our trust in history, confident that our innermost kinship to the German ethos will be acknowledged ever more willingly and frankly. Sustained by this confidence, we shall thus go on as German men and German citizens and at the same time remain unshakably loyal to our Jewish religion.”⁴⁵

In Berkovits’ view, therefore, the central crisis facing the Jew in modern times is not his physical survival but the collapse of the system that had preserved the idea of the holy nation. The liberal forms of Judaism, which looked to a universalizing Jewish “ethics” and Jewish “religion” to replace the law and the political commitment it implied, were to him not a modernization of the ancient faith, but its material abandonment. “The biblical conception of the Jewish state is the kingdom of God on earth,” he wrote. “The basic demands of Judaism compel this outlook.... Whoever breaks with it breaks with Judaism.”⁴⁶ At the same time, Orthodoxy, which for a thousand years had managed to fight off every major challenge to Jewish nationhood, stood now like a castle of sand against the incoming waves—powerless to stop the erosion, yet oblivious to the failure of its own material.

The only solution to the crisis would be a radical move, one that would reconnect Jews with the creative, sovereign spirit which had earlier defined their national experience. Preservation was no longer an option, since the methods of preserving no longer worked for the great majority of Jews. Instead, Judaism must forgo the exilic model, in which evolution and creativity are all but precluded, and reconstitute itself as a national state. “Any further development of Judaism is possible only by the creation,

somewhere on this earth, of a complete Jewish environment, one wide enough to embrace the whole existence of a Jewish national entity,” Berkovits wrote half a decade before the advent of Israel. “Only by the creation of such a Jewish environment can we give back to Tora the great partnership of life which alone is capable of freeing Judaism from its present exilic rigidity, and create the circumstances in which evolution will again be possible.”⁴⁷ Thus the Jewish state, which played so central a role in Berkovits’ understanding of the ideal Jewish community, becomes the centerpiece of his approach to Jewish life in the modern era.

Berkovits, it should be stressed, was under no illusions about the realities of Jewish and Israeli history. He did not advocate “liquidating” the diaspora, and dedicated an entire chapter of *Towards Historic Judaism* to diaspora life and his prescription for its success. Nor did he believe that the State of Israel, as it developed over nearly half a century, had lived up to its potential as a source of creative Jewish thinking; indeed, his *Crisis of Judaism in the Jewish State* (1987), which was written following his immigration to Israel in 1975, catalogues the failure of his adoptive countrymen to recognize the potential inherent in a Jewish state, and offers a warning that without a more significant reconnection to the ancient Jewish ideal, Zionism itself may not survive.

Despite these criticisms, however, Eliezer Berkovits never abandoned his belief that in the absence of statehood, Judaism is doomed to search for ever-newer stratagems for survival, pushing the ancient dream ever further into the people’s collective memory. Only with a Jewish state might the breach between the divine teaching and human history again be healed, and might Judaism reclaim its role in history as a powerful, creative, and developing source of human wisdom, a living example of holiness in national existence.

V

Religious Zionism in the twentieth century offered the Jewish people two competing images of statehood, which gained a dedicated following among a small number of adherents, but did not succeed in capturing the imagination of Jews on a broad scale. On the one hand, followers of the Mizrahi movement advocated statehood for the Jews principally as a means of protecting Jewish lives and material interests. A traditionalist offshoot of Theodor Herzl's Zionist Organization, Mizrahi built institutions along the lines of the other Zionist movements, establishing youth groups, sports clubs, kibutzim, and a political party. Its aim was to translate modern Zionism into religious terms and to provide an environment in which Jews committed to a life according to halacha could take part in the Zionist enterprise. Although it certainly did not shun religious symbolism and terminology, the Mizrahi movement emphasized pragmatism over theology, and did not offer a coherent philosophy of Judaism in which sovereignty played the central role.⁴⁸

By mid-century a second movement had emerged as well, around the teachings of Abraham Isaac Kook, and amplified by his son, Tzvi Yehuda Kook. This movement read the events of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries through a messianic lens. The success of Zionism and the emergence of the State of Israel (and, after 1967, the return of the Jews to the holy places of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria) were interpreted as *at'halta digeula*, the beginning of the redemption, and Jews were enjoined to build and settle the land of Israel in order to hasten the messianic process. While this movement offered a more profound theoretical basis than did the Mizrahi, its overt messianism, eschatological vocabulary, and intensive settlement activism at a time when the majority of Jews and Israelis had

already ceased to find in settlement a central source of Zionist fulfillment, all served to prevent it from reaching the great majority of Jews.

Eliezer Berkovits offered a very different vision, which grants Jewish nationhood and Jewish sovereignty a vital role in Judaism while avoiding the determinism and exaggerated expectations that come with messianism. According to his vision, Judaism offers an understanding of morality which takes cognizance of the importance of nations in determining man's moral fate, and which insists on the necessity of a moral exemplar in the form of a living, sovereign nation. The Jewish people was created with the singular aim of serving this vision—to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This is the challenge put forth in the biblical writings, and its centrality to Judaism is in evidence throughout the length and breadth of traditional Jewish teaching, even after two thousand years of exile. In our own era, the promise of Zion, in Berkovits' view, is the hope of rediscovering the Tora's own creative essence after centuries of suspended animation—a hope which requires the security and continuous creative exploration which only sovereignty can offer.

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Notes

1. A striking example of this appears in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which delineated the core beliefs of the Reform movement at the time: “We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine... nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.”

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2. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny: From the Holocaust to the State of Israel* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 2000).
 3. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), pp. 216, 290.
 4. Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*, p. 231.
 5. Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism*, ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2002), p. 164.
 6. David Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits and the Revival of Jewish Moral Thought," *AZURE* 11 (Summer 2001), pp. 23-65.
 7. Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2004), pp. 137-138.
 8. Cf. Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits," pp. 45-52.
 9. In a sermon he delivered in Leeds in September 1942, Berkovits put the point as follows: "A man may be a perfect *tzadik* with nothing but good deeds to his credit, yet he cannot but share in the fate of the nation to which he belongs. And if the nation as such lives foolishly and is unable to manage its affairs competently and well, all will suffer within the nation, even the innocent; as all will benefit—even those whom you may think that they do not deserve it—from a just and honorable administration of the group or the state." Eliezer Berkovits, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Oxford: East and West Library, 1945), p. 142.
 10. Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, p. 137.
 11. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, p. 157.
 12. Eliezer Berkovits, *Not in Heaven: The Nature and Function of Halacha* (New York: Ktav, 1983), p. 16.
 13. Eliezer Berkovits, *Prayer* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1962), p. 51.
 14. Berkovits, *Prayer*, p. 59.
 15. Berkovits, *Prayer*, pp. 53-54.
 16. Berkovits, *Prayer*, p. 55.
 17. Eliezer Berkovits, *Unity in Judaism* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1986), p. 2.
 18. Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), p. 179.
 19. Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, pp. 259-260, emphasis in original.
 20. Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*, pp. 16-17.
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21. Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, p. 142, emphasis added.
22. Exodus 19:6.
23. Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, pp. 140-141.
24. Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973), p. 149, emphasis added.
25. Abraham I. Kook, *Orot*, trans. Bezalel Naor (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1993), p. 185.
26. Quoted in Yosef Bramson, ed., *The Public Campaign* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 24-25 [Hebrew]; cited in Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), p. 79.
27. Isaac Jacob Reines, *Gates of Light and Happiness* (Vilna, 1899), pp. 12-13 [Hebrew], emphasis added; cited in Ravitzky, *Messianism*, pp. 33-34. Ravitzky also cites a letter published in 1900 by a number of rabbis under Reines' leadership, in support of the Zionist movement. They write:

Anyone who thinks the Zionist idea is somehow associated with future redemption and the coming of the Messiah and who therefore regards it as undermining our holy faith is clearly in error. [Zionism] has nothing whatsoever to do with the question of redemption. The entire point of this idea is merely the improvement of the condition of our wretched brethren. In recent years our situation has deteriorated disastrously, and many of our brethren are scattered in every direction, to the seven seas, in places where the fear of assimilation is hardly remote. [The Zionists] saw that the only fitting place for our brethren to settle would be in the Holy Land.... And if some preachers, while speaking of Zion, also mention redemption and the coming of the Messiah and thus let the abominable thought enter people's minds that this idea encroaches upon the territory of true redemption, only they themselves are to blame, for it is their own wrong opinion they express.

Letter in *Hamelitz* 78 (1900); cited in Ravitzky, *Messianism*, p. 34.

28. It is important to note that the thinkers of religious Zionism tended to offer a range of justifications for their support of the movement, of which the above-mentioned themes are merely the central thrust of their arguments. For example, both Kook and the more pragmatic Rabbi Hayyim Hirschensohn declared "nationalism" to be central to the Jewish idea, in which that term is meant to denote the centrality of political sovereignty to the Tora's application. Cf. David Zohar, *Jewish Commitment in a Modern World: R. Hayyim Hirschensohn and His Attitude Towards the Modern Era* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2003), p. 93.

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29. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, p. 188.
 30. Micah 5:6.
 31. Eva Jospe, ed. and trans., *Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1971), p. 168.
 32. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (London: University of Notre Dame, 1985), pp. 331-332.
 33. Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, p. 332.
 34. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, p. 171.
 35. Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, p. 141.
 36. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, pp. 161-162.
 37. For an important example of the influence of rabbinic thought on modern philosophical discourse, cf. Fania Oz-Salzberger, "The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom," *AZURE* 13 (Summer 2002), pp. 88-132.
 38. Brachot 8a.
 39. Eliezer Berkovits, *Crisis and Faith* (New York: Sanhedrin, 1976), pp. 142-143.
 40. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, pp. 157-158.
 41. Berkovits, *Crisis and Faith*, pp. 141-143.
 42. This was felt acutely, for example, in the curriculum of study in the leading European yeshivot in the nineteenth century. Cf. Norman Lamm, *Tora Lishmah: Tora for Tora's Sake in the Works of Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1989), p. 240.
 43. Cf. Arie Morgenstern, "Dispersion and the Longing for Zion, 1240-1840," *AZURE* 12 (Winter 2002), pp. 71-132.
 44. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, p. 158.
 45. Jospe, *Reason and Hope*, p. 220.
 46. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, p. 168.
 47. Berkovits, *Essential Essays*, p. 163.
 48. See note 27 above.