Rethinking Zion and Modernity

Allan Arkush

I recently read two seemingly dissimilar books: Jerold Auerbach's *Are We One? Jewish Identity in the United States and Israel,* and Adam Seligman's *Modernity's Wager.* The first of these volumes deals exclusively with the predicament in which the world's largest Jewish communities now find themselves, and the second consists of far-ranging ruminations on the destiny of humankind in modern times. After I had finished reading both books, however, I slowly began to perceive that they have more in common than I had initially realized.

The authors of both volumes are residents of the Boston area who trace the origins of their latest projects back to Jerusalem. Auerbach has spent a lot of time there. "Where, after all," he asks, "was there a better place . . . to excavate the buried layers of my own Jewish self?"[1] Seligman, for his part, describes his book as the closing of a chapter "that began eighteen years ago in Jerusalem," where his work as a sociologist commenced.[2]

Both Auerbach and Seligman distance themselves from the United States in other ways as well. Auerbach, a professor of American history at Wellesley College, appears to retain little fondness for his country. Not only is he disgusted by "the moral relativism that has infused American culture since the 1960s," but he does not seem to have any higher regard for an earlier, uncorrupted America either (13). Few things irk him more than the fact that Israelis in the 1990s became what "American Jewry had been in the 1950s" (181). Discussing Herman Wouk's best-selling novel of that decade, *Marjorie Morningstar,* Auerbach belittles the way in which its author validated his readers' "yearning to reconcile Jewish continuity, as they defined it, with American freedom" (99). No less than he despises their shallow Jewishness, it seems, he deplores their seduction by what he elsewhere calls "the modern siren song of freedom" (49).

Seligman's book is also concerned with the harmful effects of certain modern notions of freedom. Together with the rest of the people in the Western world, this Boston University professor complains, Americans "seek the core of the self in the image of the self-actualizing agent who realizes his or her autonomous will."[3] This view of the individual "makes for a certain politics . . . the politics of liberalism . . . of the public sphere as a more or less neutral arena where individual interests can be maximized without impinging on the rights (i.e., interests) of others."[4] Nowhere, says Seligman, is the politics of liberalism more advanced than in the United States.[5] And nowhere, it seems, is the ensuing moral bankruptcy more evident.[6]

Both of these men seem to be much more troubled by the moral inadequacies of the society in which they live than pleased by the bounties it provides. And both of these inhabitants of the American Athens look to Jerusalem for solutions. Auerbach, a religious Zionist, has his eyes on the earthly Jerusalem, the State of Israel. For Seligman, Jerusalem represents only one of the religious traditions with which Westerners must reconnect themselves if they are to emerge from a dehumanizing moral vacuum. He does not exactly affirm that Judaism is truer than any of these other religions, but he is quite certain of its relevance to our contemporary situation. And, to judge from some of the examples he brings, the earthly Jerusalem is very much on his mind.

It is on my mind a lot too. My right hand is in no greater danger of losing its cunning than either Auerbach's or Seligman's. I spend much of my time reading and writing about some of the same issues that concern them and about Israel in particular, and now I have a few things I want to say about their two new books.

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Are We One? is as much about Jews in the United States as it is about Israel. It is indeed, Auerbach tells us in his bibliographical essay, something of a "belated, and sorrowful, reply" to Hillel Halkin's 1977 *Letters to an American Jewish Friend,* which he characterizes as an "eloquent, impassioned argument for the ingathering of Diaspora Jews in Israel" (233). But if it is a reply to that book, it is not an entirely argumentative one. Auerbach does not quarrel with Halkin's claim that Diaspora Jewry is doomed to perish through assimilation. He is, if anything, much less tolerant than Halkin of the vast numbers of Jews who have chosen more or less to disaffiliate themselves from their people. And he is much more critical of American Jewish liberals who denounce Israel for behaving immorally.

Although I think that Auerbach is much too unforgiving in his analysis of American Jewish behavior, I do not wish to dwell on this aspect of his book. I want to focus almost exclusively on his attitude toward Israel. In this connection, the first thing one ought to note is his condemnation of the secular Zionism that laid the foundations of the Jewish state. His charges against Theodor Herzl and the Labor Zionists are, to be sure, quite unlike those recently leveled by Daniel Boyarin. He does not accuse them of sacrificing authentic Jewish values in order to enjoy the "goyim-nakhes" of power and independence.[7] There is nothing un-Jewish, from Auerbach's point of view, about strength. Yet he does concur with Boyarin that Herzl and those who followed in his footsteps are guilty of having derived their main inspiration not from Jewish tradition but from "the enlightened West, with its 'ideas which are the common stock of the whole civilized world'" (40). Their Zionism, as he sees it, was in essence a form of collective assimilation.

This is, of course, as Auerbach well knows, an accusation that has century-old roots. It received its most famous expression, as he observes, in the writings of Herzl's arch-critic, the cultural Zionist Ahad Ha-am. Auerbach quotes him appreciatively and at length, but he does not, at bottom, share his ideological outlook. It is not the secular Zionists' detachment from Jewish culture that he deplores but their repudiation of the Jewish religion.

Auerbach relates how many Reform as well as Orthodox rabbis voiced similar complaints about Herzl and his followers at the end of the nineteenth century. But he devotes merely a single page to the elucidation of their respective theological positions (41–42). More important, he never really explains where any of them went wrong. One might simply suppose that he himself is very much at odds with all of them, given his own strong support for religious Zionism. However, his book's peculiar conclusion suggests that Zionism's dismal prospects have left him wondering whether its original religious opponents were not right after all. In a fanciful takeoff on Herzl's own fanciful *Altneuland,* Auerbach depicts a visitor to what was formerly the State of Israel in the year 2023, exactly one hundred years after Herzl's fictional tourists visited his imaginary, flourishing new Jewish society. From a tour guide at the airport in Jaffa, he learns that what awaits him beyond the terminal is a predominantly Arab state named "Palisdan," among whose inhabitants there are many Hebrew-speaking gentiles but only a few thousand people who identify themselves as Jews. Rather than continue his visit, the visitor returns immediately to the Diaspora, asking himself whether Zionism had not been "fatally flawed from the outset" (219).

Auerbach's shadowy dystopia is, of course, nothing but a depiction of what he fears will be the outcome of Israel's current cultural degeneration, its surrender to Americanization and its proneness to post-Zionism. By 1992, he complains, Israelis were "delighted to relinquish the burden of Jewish history for the blessings of McDonald's and malls" (181). The old commitment to settlement and state-building melted away. "A younger generation preferred to gyrate in Tel Aviv and explore cyberspace. Their heroes were not Herzl or Ben-Gurion, to say nothing of Jabotinsky or Rav Kook, but punk stars Aviv Geffen and Gidi Gov" (183). With citizens like these, Auerbach asks, how much of a future can there be for a Jewish state?

Things did not have to be this way. Israel, according to Auerbach, had one great chance to jump off the tracks that led from its origins in the essentially assimilatory ideology of secular Zionism to its absorption into the global village. There was a moment when it would have been possible to "infuse the Zionist revolution with Jewish content," when the Jews could have spread beyond the coastal plain and penetrated "the Samarian and Judean hills, where Jewish history in the Land of Israel began." After June 1967,

> Israel confronted an extraordinary opportunity to fulfill its destiny as a Jewish state. Not as a theocracy, a *halakhic* state ruled by rabbis. Rather, a state in which the convergence of Zionism and Judaism could finally repair the serious fissures in Jewish identity that had opened with emancipation and deepened, with Zionism, in the modern era. But the Six Day War, which gave Israelis the opportunity to become Jews, turned out to be a squandered opportunity that may never return. Nineteen sixty-seven was the turning point that did not turn, the historical moment when Zionists could have tapped the most ancient and enduring sources of Jewish—and Zionist—inspiration, but failed to seize the opportunity. (139)

Responsibility for this failure lies with those all-too-numerous Israelis who succumbed to the temptations of Western culture:

> Yet there actually were Jews, called "settlers"—a badge of Zionist honor back when kibbutzniks wore it—who seized the historical moment after 1967. Endlessly vilified ever since as fanatical zealots who would drag Israel into a holy war with Arabs or a civil war between Jews, they remained an uncomfortable reminder of lost Zionist opportunity.
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> These settlers were Zionists who rejected the fateful synthesis between Judaism and Western modernity for an older, deeper Jewish synthesis of religion and nationalism. They grasped the future settlement of Judea

> and Samaria as a defining moment for the Jewish people, the outcome of which might, finally and decisively, determine the character and fate of the Zionist experiment. (139–40)

Had Israel followed these people's lead, "[a] Jewish state that finally fused Zionism with Judaism, modern Israel with the biblical Land of Israel, might have truly enlarged and fulfilled the Zionist revolution" (139–40). Nothing besets Auerbach more than the fact that this did not happen.

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Auerbach obviously knows that he is taking up a cause which is not only, in all probability, a lost one but highly unpopular as well. He has presumably written his book with some intention of altering this situation, either by rendering the cause of "the settlers" a little less hopeless or, at the very least, by stirring some measure of remorse in the hearts of those responsible for its defeat. Neither of these goals, it seems to me, is within easy reach. Over the past quarter of a century, Auerbach's heroes have done a lot of very questionable things. Their beliefs and actions have made them the villains of many other people's books—those of Amos Oz, Ian Lustick, Ehud Sprinzak, and Robert Friedman, to name just a few. If Auerbach wanted to improve "the settlers'" reputation, he would have to enter into a serious debate with these rather formidable adversaries and win at least a few points. But this is something that he does not do.

If I thought that there were any considerable number of readers of *Jewish Social Studies* who were not already familiar with the case against "the settlers," I would at this point recapitulate it in some detail. But anyone concerned with the fate of the Jewish people must have read one or two of the aforementioned books or, at any rate, reviews of some of them or magazine articles based upon them. I think that it would therefore be best for me to presuppose a certain familiarity with this literature and to turn directly to an examination of what Auerbach, who has apparently read a lot of these books himself, has to say against them.[8]

Like most of the authors of these volumes, Auerbach identifies the two Kooks—Rabbi Abraham Isaac and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda—as people who played the central role in the development of the settlers' worldview. He has much less to say about them, however, than one would expect. The critics' books include extended discussions of the two men's mystical, messianic theologies and the circumstances under which they generated what must be, in the eyes of liberal-minded denizens of the West, a rather unattractive ultranationalistic, illiberal, expansionist political doctrine. Auerbach, for his part, does not analyze the Kooks' theologies in any detail, nor does he evince much interest in elucidating their disciples' apocalyptic approach to politics. Rather than do this, he simply belittles Lustick for claiming that the "Jews of Judea and Samaria were driven by an 'uncompromising, dogmatically based, and comprehensive' ideology of redemption that drove them to reject the natural, rational (and characteristically American) preference for pragmatism" (157). All that Auerbach himself has to say about Abraham Isaac Kook is that he "struggled valiantly to fuse Judaism and Zionism." His son's thinking he boils down to a few sentences. First he cites his famous questions, immediately prior to the Six Day War: "Where is our Hebron? Do we let it be forgotten?" (142). A little later he quotes his assertion that "[w]e are commanded both to possess and to settle. . . . We cannot evade this commandment" (163). His treatments of the ideas of such prominent and influential graduates of Merkaz ha-rav Kook as Yisrael Harel, Moshe Levinger, and Shlomo Aviner are similarly superficial.

If Auerbach tells us very little about what the Kooks and the Kookist leaders of Gush Emunim actually believed about the cosmological import of their deeds, he tells us enough about their thinking to enable us to understand why he, at least, finds them so appealing. "Gush Emunim," he writes,

> sharply challenged the Herzlian assumptions that had first inspired and then inhibited Labor Zionism. The idea of Zionist normalization was anathema to Gush settlers, who wanted Israel to fulfill its destiny as a holy people, not become a nation like other nations. (146)

For Auerbach, Gush Emunim represents above all an alternative to what Yisrael Harel, onetime editor of *Nekudah,* the settlers' newspaper, called a Zionism of "spiritual desiccation" (148).

One cannot help but observe, however, that there are some problems connected with the settlers' moister Zionism. Very large numbers of Arabs who want to have their own state, not to be part of Israel, inhabit the territories the settlers seek to possess. Annexation of the West Bank and Gaza has therefore always been a risky, morally questionable, and potentially self-destructive undertaking. It seems self-evident to many people that the settlers' expansionist plans threaten to deprive the Palestinian residents of these areas of their right to self-determination and increase the danger of war with Israel's Arab neighbors. And even if the settlers' goals were to be achieved, the successful absorption of great masses of Arabs into its population would force Israel to relinquish either its Jewish character or its democratic institutions.

With regard to these weighty objections to Israeli settlement policies, Auerbach has surprisingly little to say. He recalls Amos Oz's prescient warning two decades ago that Jewish settlement of Judea and Samaria would result in the land's loss of its biblical charm, the disappearance of harmony, and the spread of "capitulation and destruction." But he seems to think that he has invalidated the novelist's concerns by noting that he was restating "precisely the argument against the Zionist penetration of Palestine made by Arabs—and by anti-Zionist Jews—ever since the first Zionist settlers arrived a century earlier" (151). Auerbach is too sure of the unimpeachable character of the Jews' right to the entire Land of Israel to waste much time disputing Palestinian claims to any part of it. He is not oblivious, however, to the tension between settlement and annexation and the preservation of Israeli democracy.

The settlers, Auerbach sympathetically observes, have "never concealed their discomfort with democratic principles." In their opinion, in "a truly Jewish state," any "conflict between democratic and *halakhic* principles must be resolved according to Jewish law." According to a rabbi Auerbach approvingly cites, "[if] democracy means that authority is derived from the public . . . then Judaism, as is the case with most religions, is not democratic" (162). Auerbach himself believes that "[if] settling the land is commanded by Torah, or grounded in ancient history, then Western democratic norms present a problem, not a solution" (163). What, then, is the solution to the problem posed by the massive Arab presence in Judea and Samaria? Auerbach does not exactly answer this question, but he does make some rather suggestive remarks. "The question of democracy," he admits, always "nags at Zionist history." In fact,

> The only way to be a Zionist and a democrat during the pre-state years, when Arabs vastly outnumbered Jews in Palestine, was to assume that in the long run Zionist numbers would finally converge with democratic principles. Without the mass exodus of Arabs in 1947–48, that convergence would have been indefinitely postponed, perhaps forever. (164)

Auerbach himself demonstrates no perceptible attachment to democratic principles and can easily enough abide the idea of a subjugated Arab population devoid of equal rights. But if other Zionists are not similarly capable of discarding foreign notions of democracy, he seems to be telling us, they may have to consider the possibility of another large-scale transfer of Palestinian Arabs beyond the boundaries of the Jewish State.

In the bibliographical essay at the end of his book, Auerbach sourly complains that "Jewish settlers have been a favorite target of American and Israeli liberal Jews" (232). He then enumerates some of the authors and books that have displeased him. Whenever he refers to one of them, in the course of his argument, he does so disparagingly. Nonetheless, one can learn a great deal more about the settlers' ideas, actions, and impact from their books than one can from his. Whereas they elucidate the messianic political theology of Gush Emunim, he pretends that it does not exist. They explore the perils involved in the implementation of the Gush's expansionist policies, but he disregards them—even though he was still working on his book during the winter of 2000–2001, a time of unprecedented misery and demoralization in the beleaguered Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Auerbach is, in fact, so consistent in his evasion of the problematic dimensions of the settlers' movement that it is rather surprising to see how frankly he acknowledges its profoundly undemocratic character. Why doesn't he just keep quiet about this, too?

I suppose that Auerbach is simply not the least bit embarrassed by the settlers' hostility to democracy. It is, in his eyes, but one manifestation of their independence from the corrupting influence of the modern West. Nor does he appear to be afraid that acknowledgment of their anti-democratic outlook will undermine his efforts to render them more attractive to his American Jewish audience. For even if he might wish to paper over some of their more outlandish ideas, he does not try to persuade his readers that the settlers are any more like typical American Jews than they really are. He maintains, on the contrary, that it is precisely because they are so very different from the almost completely assimilated Jews of the West that they constitute their people's only hope.

Auerbach, it seems to me, expects *Are We One?* to bring at least some liberal Jews to their senses. He intends to teach them that there are really only two significant types of Jews in the world today. On the one hand, there are people like themselves, in the Diaspora and Israel, who have adopted the individualistic, hedonistic values of the modern West. They have thereby paved the way for their own or their descendants' more or less rapid departure from the Jewish people and their plunge into a meaningless existence. On the other hand, there are the settlers, who are paragons of genuine Jewishness.

Auerbach, I suspect, hopes that his liberal readers will become so ashamed of being the former type of Jew that they will cease to judge the latter type in accordance with non-Jewish standards and begin to judge them in accordance with what ought to be their own standard, that of the Torah. Then the settlers' antipathy to democratic values will cease to offend them. If this is indeed his expectation, I believe that he is doomed to be very disappointed by the reaction to his book. For what he says falls far short of what is necessary to effect the spiritual and moral reorientation he deems desirable. He certainly does not demonstrate that the vital question facing the Jewish people in the twenty-first century is the one to which he points. There are viable alternatives for Jews today other than desertion of their people or following the lead of the settlers of Judea and Samaria.

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I have to admit that I have doubts almost as strong as those of Auerbach about the long-term durability of a secular or even a non-Orthodox yet religious Jewish identity, either in Boston or in Jerusalem. But it is not completely self-evident to me that all such forms of Jewishness are destined to disappear in the near future. Rather than try to make an argument for their continued viability, however, I want to focus on a more limited range of choices: those available to Orthodox Jews in Israel who pursue paths different from those marked out by "the settlers."

The settlers, one should know, are not the only people devoted to "the Land of Israel for the people of Israel according to the Torah of Israel." Auerbach associates this slogan exclusively with Gush Emunim, but they did not invent it (108). For the better part of a century it has been the motto of the religious Zionist movement of which the Gush is a relatively recent offshoot. This movement, Mizrachi, played a significantly larger part in the establishment of Israel than Auerbach is prepared to acknowledge. He virtually reads it out of Zionist history. In his brief review of Israel's formative years, he notes the founding of the anti-Zionist Agudat Israel in 1912 but makes no mention of the creation of Mizrachi a decade earlier (120). In fact, the only time he refers to the movement at all is in a paragraph concerning its youth chapters in the United States. He mocks these groups for providing instruction in the "striking similarity between the ideals and aspirations of the Jewish people and those of Abraham Lincoln" (67).

Auerbach does, to be sure, name a few of the rabbis who joined the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but he makes it sound as if they were merely isolated individuals. "Orthodox Jews in the *yishuv,*" he tells us, "were treated as rather unwelcome guests at an obligatory family gathering" (170). He completely overlooks the important part that these "unwelcome guests" played in running the Zionist movement's institutions, where their party was for many years the dominant Mapai Party's junior partner, and in the upbuilding of Palestine, where they created, among other things, their own kibbutz movement.[9]

When the leaders of Mizrachi sought "the Land of Israel for the people of Israel according to the Torah of Israel," they were concerned less with maximizing the amount of promised land under Jewish control than they were with building a society governed by Torah—a halakhic state. As long as their camp constituted a small minority within the Zionist movement, there was of course not very much that they could do to bring such an entity into existence. But they could at least carry the torch of traditional Judaism in their private and institutional lives and use their political influence to preserve a place for it in the public square, both in the Yishuv and, subsequently, in the State of Israel. They could also cherish the hope that ongoing exposure to the Land of Israel would have an increasingly salubrious effect on their wayward secular comrades, one that would eventually make possible the achievement of their ultimate goal.

Gush Emunim constituted in large measure a rebellion against this rather passive stance on the part of religious Zionism. Among the rebels' successes has been the capture—in the years since the Six Day War—of Mizrachi's heir, the National Religious Party. This does not mean, however, that all religious Zionists have adopted the orientation of "the settlers." Many such people have never endorsed their messianic politics. And many who once did so have recanted.

One should consider, for instance, the case of Yeshayahu Leibowitz. Auerbach mentions him only once, identifying him as a "maverick Hebrew University professor" and "a guru to the left (although not himself a secularist)" who wrote that "Jewish settlers were 'murderers'" and the soldiers who defended them were "Judeo-Nazis" (183). He obviously wishes to discredit Leibowitz and render him unworthy of serious consideration. Under the influence, perhaps, of Yoram Hazony, Auerbach seems to thinks that a connection with the Hebrew University is by itself enough to put anybody under suspicion. The sole statement that he quotes from Leibowitz is arguably the most odious thing that he ever uttered. Describing him as something other than a secularist is a way of being truthful but also stopping short of an acknowledgment of what Auerbach would have to consider one of his merits—that is, his Orthodoxy.

Leibowitz was, in reality, much more than a ferocious critic of the settlers. Among many other things, he was a man who devoted much of his life to reflection upon the relationship between Judaism and Zionism. One of the issues with which he was particularly concerned was the status of halakhah in the modern Jewish state. In the early

1950s he challenged the religious Zionist community to recognize the enormous significance of the new era of Jewish sovereignty and to develop “a concrete program for operating the existing state in accordance with the Torah.”[10] Later, when he realized that this was not going to happen, he shifted his position and became the religious community’s most vociferous proponent of the separation of synagogue and state. This, he came to believe, would be the best way to create auspicious conditions for regaining loyalty to Judaism on the part of secularists antagonized by what they perceived to be religious coercion. It did not signify that he had given up on the idea of “the Land of Israel for the people of Israel according to the Torah of Israel,” but only that he envisioned a different route toward that ultimate goal.[11]

For Judaism, as Leibowitz understood it, “the institutions of halakhic practice are constitutive. Apart from them, it does not exist.”[12] Nothing in Jewish law, in his opinion, required the State of Israel to maintain possession of every piece of the Land of Israel that ever came under its jurisdiction. “The ‘halakhic’ reasons for remaining in control of the territories,” he wrote, “are ridiculous, since the State of Israel does not acknowledge the authority of the Torah and the majority of its Jewish inhabitants reject the imperative demands of its Mitzvoth.” Nor did he accept the validity of any of the “‘religious’ arguments for annexation of the territories.” These, in his opinion, were “only an expression, subconsciously or perhaps even overtly hypocritical, of the transformation of the Jewish religion into camouflage for Israeli nationalism.”[13] There were, however, ample political and moral reasons for Israel not to annex territory inhabited by millions of Palestinian Arabs.[14]

As Auerbach has noted, Leibowitz was something of a maverick. He nevertheless exerted a considerable influence over Israeli intellectual circles, and not only on the secular left. One can see reflections of his teachings, among other places, in the positions taken by Meimad, the religious party that recently joined One Israel. This group shares Leibowitz’s distaste for a secular government’s imposition of religious law on a mostly secular population, and it likewise shares some of his aversion to the linkage of Judaism with territorial expansion:

> The best interests of the people of Israel and its state take precedence over our possession of all parts of the Land of Israel. The pursuit of peace is a Jewish value. It is the duty of every government in Israel to do everything to limit the shed of blood and to avoid war. The extreme position that places the Land of Israel above any other value is not the way of the Torah of Israel. Therefore we support, despite all the pain involved in concessions, the continuation of the political process in accordance with the Oslo Accords.[15]

Meimad admittedly represents only a very small percentage of the Orthodox voters in Israel. But it counts among its leaders and supporters a significant number of the country's religious intellectuals, including Aviezer Ravitzky and many of the thinkers and scholars associated with the Orthodox but pluralistic Shalom Hartman Institute. It is worth noting, too, that the founder of Meimad was not a Hebrew University professor but Rabbi Yehudah Amital, a former leader of Gush Emunim. And he is far from being the only refugee from the settler movement who belongs to Meimad.

Auerbach, for his part, tells the story of the settlers without ever hinting at the existence of any dissension among them. One would never guess from his account that developments in the 1980s and 1990s produced a great deal of confusion and turmoil in their movement's ranks. Reviling leftist intellectuals for issuing blanket accusations against the settlers after the discovery of the "Jewish underground" in 1984 and Yigal Amir's assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, he leaves the impression that only hostile outsiders ever detected any connection between the settlers' basic attitudes and these dreadful excesses. In fact, however, many leaders in the settlers' own camp considered themselves at least partly responsible for the violent deeds of their extremist followers.[16] Some decided to distance themselves, after much remorseful soul-searching, from the movement to which they had formerly belonged.

There are, then, quite a few religious Zionists in Israel who do not see things the way Auerbach does. They do not believe that the preservation of Judaism in Israel—much less the hastening of redemption—is contingent upon the Jews' repossession of all of Judea and Samaria. Jewish sovereignty over the entire Land of Israel is either not at the top of their agenda or it is not on their program at all.

The same is true of hundreds of thousands of Israeli ultra-Orthodox or *haredi* Jews, who are either non- or anti-Zionist, and for whom the Jewish State is at best a very dubious entity, one whose territorial dimensions are of no theological concern to them. In recent years, it is true, many of these haredim have undergone something of a transformation. Their antipathy to the Israeli left has turned them into what Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser have called a "non-Zionist right wing." Also, as Cohen and Susser have observed, "because of high birth rates the old Haredi enclaves in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak are no longer able to house the very numerous new generation, and an outflow to various Haredi settlements in the territories has begun."[17] Yet if the residents of such settlements oppose territorial concessions, it is not because they endanger their religion but mostly because they do not want to lose their homes. If the West Bank were someday to be closed to them, Ashdod or Beit Shemesh would presumably suit them well enough.

One of the most momentous developments in the haredi world in the past two decades has been the emergence of the Sephardi party, Shas. An ultra-Orthodox group whose voters are mostly "not ultra-Orthodox in their lifestyles" and not even rigorously observant, it has become in a very short period of time the third largest party in Israel, controlling nearly one-sixth of the Knesset.[18] Important as it is in the political life of the country, Shas is not only and not even primarily a political party. It is, more than anything, a vehicle designed "to restore the glory of yesteryear" (*leha-hzir atarah le-yoshnah*). Although this slogan connotes somewhat different things to different people, it clearly stands for a reversion to the days when the vast majority of Sephardi Jews still lived in obedience to the Torah.[19] Aiming to undo the evil effects of secularism, "Shas's explicit objective is to missionize and grow, to energetically expand into non-Haredi, even non-Orthodox, populations." Shas leaders seek above all to obtain government support for their burgeoning educational and social welfare networks and to extend their services to as many people as possible. They are battling for Judaism not in the occupied territories but within the Green Line.[20]

Shas's successes have evoked widespread "secular indignation and alarm." Its "communal services . . . are perceived not as the circumscribed, sectarian efforts of a distinct community but as proof of an aggressively imperialistic strategy. It is, in secular eyes, yet another attempt on the part of the religious community to control the essential character of the state." Viewing Shas's growth, Meyer Shitrit, a leading Likud parliamentarian, has "expressed the fear that unless something is done to stop these tendencies now, the students of today 'will wear *kapotot* [the haredi long black coat]' in twenty years." Beige Shochat, a leading figure in the Labor Party, "ventured even more dire predictions: 'In less than ten years there is liable to arise here a Khoumeni-like state.'" Shitrit and Shochat, Susser and Cohen observe, "are anything but secular militants in the style of Shulamit Aloni; both belong to the moderate, centrist wings of their respective parties—which is to say that their fears are not wildly eccentric or atypical."[21]

Jerold Auerbach, for his part, is not utterly oblivious of the haredim, but he mentions them only parenthetically (20, 150, 204). He has nothing at all to say about any of their leaders, not even Rabbis Ovadiah Yosef and Aryeh Deri, the most notable figures connected with Shas. Not once, in fact, in a book dealing largely with the religious state of affairs in today's Israel, does he even mention the Shas party. The closest he comes to acknowledging its existence is a fleeting reference to Sephardic Jews who "display their own blend of tolerant Orthodoxy and Israeli secularism" (21).

Why, we must ask, does Auerbach virtually ignore the haredim, their growing numbers, and their increasing significance in Israeli life? Why are there no traces of them or their descendants in his imaginary Palisdan? Why is Auerbach not the least bit heartened by the developments that, as we have just seen, have so much alarmed people like Meyer Shitrit and Beige Shochat? Why do signs that a halakhic state might eventually be in the offing not please him as much as they frighten Shochat?

Auerbach seems to be of two minds about the desirability of a halakhic state. As we have already seen, he laments the fact that Israel has lost the opportunity "to fulfill its destiny as a Jewish state." By this he means not "a theocracy, a *halakhic* state ruled by rabbis" but "a state in which the convergence of Zionism and Judaism could finally repair the serious fissures in Jewish identity" (139). However, he applauds the settlers' goal of governing the Land of Israel "according to the Torah of Israel." It is also perfectly clear that he considers any relaxation of the religious restrictions already incorporated into Israel public law as tantamount to the transformation of "the Zionist dream" into a "Jewish nightmare" (209). Still, it is not at all clear to what degree the Jewish state of his own dreams would not only maintain the status quo established when Israel acquired its independence but also be a Torah-state.

Auerbach is, then, much more unambiguously committed to the maximum territorial goals of religious Zionism than to its traditional theocratic aims. His fear of the "permanent loss to the Jewish people of the ancient homeland, to which all Jews are connected by the umbilical cord of our history as a people" (205), is apparently greater than his yearning to see the ancient Law of Israel restored to its former glory. Perhaps the fact that the haredim in general have a very dissimilar set of priorities prevents him from seeing them as a potential part of the solution to the Zionist problem or, indeed, from paying much attention to them at all.

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Auerbach has written a passionate defense of "the settlers," but not an illuminating or a convincing one. Rather than shine a light on their true identity, he has cast a veil over it. One can learn a lot more about their ideology and deeds from the volumes that he disparages than from his own superficial, adulatory descriptions of them. His depiction of the settlement of Judea and Samaria as the sole hope for Judaism in

Israel simply flies in the face of reality. Even if all of the religious settlers living in the occupied territories were to be forced to abandon their homes and resettle within Israel proper, the struggle between secular Jews and Orthodox Jews would continue unabated. Some of the former settlers and their children might then join hundreds of thousands of haredim and other Orthodox Jews in a fight to defend threatened aspects of Jewish law, in an educational campaign, or even in an effort to tilt the status quo in a more theocratic direction. But some of them might not be available for such purposes. Despite Auerbach's representation of the West Bank settlements as a panacea for Judaism's problems, there is some evidence that the young people growing up there are not all as committed to Orthodoxy as he would like to believe.

In a new book about recent trends among observant Jews in Israel, *Ha-aretz* reporter Yair Sheleg has described some of the latest developments among the settlers in Judea and Samaria. "In some of the veteran settlements," he writes,

> in which members of the second generation have reached maturity—such as Ofra, Elkanah, and Alon Shvut—very many of the young people have taken off their *kipot* [skullcaps] altogether and have become secular. In May 1993, on Ofra's eighteenth anniversary, some of the local young people came together to discuss this process and to analyze the reasons for it. One of the striking things that emerged in the course of the discussion was the fact that even though a large proportion of the young people had left the religious world, a decided majority of them remained faithful to their parents' right-wing political positions.[22]

The most likely explanation for this phenomenon, in the participants' opinion, was that "their parents invested more time in transmitting the political line to their children than in transmitting the religious way of life."[23] This suggests that Leibowitz may not have been too far off base, after all, when he maintained that the "religious" arguments for annexation of the territories were "only an expression, subconsciously or perhaps even overtly hypocritical, of the transformation of the Jewish religion into camouflage for Israeli nationalism."[24]

* * *

Unlike Auerbach, Seligman is not haunted by fears of Judaism's decline. He has too much faith in the future of religion in general to fall victim to any such apprehensions. This confidence derives, it seems, less from his trust in God than from his understanding of the trajectory of Western civilization. The modern project is, in his opinion, visibly failing. Liberalism no longer offers a satisfactory moral foundation for personal and civil life, and people all over the world are consequently seeking alternatives to it. "The more successful modernity as a civilizational vision of individual rights and of the autonomous individual seems to be on the global scale, the more it appears to call forth its very negation."[25] One of the powerful forces called into being by secular modernity is religious fundamentalism, which is gaining strength throughout the world (53). In fact, it is "more than possible that historians in another hundred or hundred and fifty years' time will look back on the period from roughly 1750 to 2050 as a brief three-hundred-year secular parenthesis in a history of humanity that was always religious" (132).

If Seligman were to take it upon himself to rewrite Herzl's *Altneuland,* he would most probably depict Israel in 2023 not as a dejudaized Palisdan but as a much more Jewish place than it is at present. This is apparently what he both expects and desires. He is struck by the revival of Orthodoxy among American Jews and even more impressed, it seems, by its resurgence in Israel. But he is not entirely reassured by these trends. As convinced as he is of the moral bankruptcy of the modern, secular world, he does not welcome its total demise. He is worried by the fact that "the return to religion that we are witnessing today is often a return to religion in its most primitive, unsophisticated, blind, and ignorant versions" (131). The prospect of the revival of such unsavory forms of religion all over the world very much disturbs him, but he seems to be especially concerned with the way this phenomenon has begun to manifest itself in Israel.

Although he alludes more than once to "the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing religious law student" (72, 131), Seligman does not rail against the dangerous atavism of the West Bank settlers. His attention is more directly fixed on the kind of phenomena that Auerbach overlooks. He expresses his concern about "violent, illegal and often repressive behavior" evoked by arguments over issues of religious practice, such as whether "coffee houses can be open in Jerusalem on the Sabbath" (134). He is likewise troubled by the polarization accompanying the struggle between "fundamentalist religiosity" and "fundamentalist reason":

> Mass demonstrations in Israel for and against the court system (seen as *the* institutional realm of modern liberal-democratic assumptions) following the conviction of the leader of Israel's fastest growing religious party [Aryeh Deri of Shas] on charges of bribery and corruption is a good case in point. Almost all the demonstrators in favor of the courts were secular Jews; almost all the demonstrators against the courts were religious. (132)

Seligman does not wish to see either side emerge from this struggle fully victorious. Israel, he believes, like the rest of the West, needs religion, but in a form tempered and mediated by reason. Not only rationalists need to grasp the limits of their understanding; so do men of faith. In this context, Seligman quotes three sentences from one of the works of Leo Strauss, a man who devoted a great deal of thought to the conflict between reason and revelation or, as he often put it, between Athens and Jerusalem:

> If orthodoxy claims to know the Bible is divinely revealed, that every word of the Bible is divinely inspired, that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch, that the miracles recorded in the Bible have happened and similar things, Spinoza has refuted orthodoxy. But the case is entirely different if orthodoxy limits itself to asserting that it believes the aforementioned things, i.e. that they cannot claim to possess the binding power peculiar to the known. (128)[26]

Seligman follows this quotation with some comments of his own: "Humility then in all directions—of both faith and reason. The absolute and univocal claims of both must thus be brought together in a dialogue that would, of necessity, question the very 'givenness' of each's certitudes" (128). What Seligman would like to see is the attainment of "a midpoint between nihilism and postmodern relativism, on the one hand, and absolute claims of both faith and reason, on the other" (129).

A better dialogue between faith and reason could contribute greatly to the lessening of tensions between believers and secularists today, during what Seligman seems inclined to regard as the last years of the interim period separating the religious epoch of the past from that of the future. And it could also help make the future religious epoch—if it is indeed coming—significantly better than the one that ended a quarter of a millennium ago.

> [T]he emergence of a self-reflective faith where reason is no longer alien, but integrated into its very domain assumptions, is a real possibility. Certainly, the recent papal encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* bears witness to a perceived need within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church to further this very integration, as do similar moves within the Jewish and Islamic worlds as well. (132)

Religions informed in this way by reason would "avoid a return to the worst excesses of the past," and could create the basis for a much richer sort of toleration than the one that developed during the era of secularist hegemony.

What movement in this direction does Seligman detect within the Jewish world? He does not focus, as one might expect, on the work of thinkers and scholars at places like the Hartman Institute. He is certainly familiar with some of their work, as one can see from his discussion of the writings of Moshe Halbertal and other individuals. But in this context he points instead to "[p]rograms such as *Yesodot* in contemporary Israel, which seek to teach democratic norms to the heads of state religious schools" (157 n. 24).

Seligman, I suspect, is less interested in analyzing what is being pondered in the Israeli ivory tower than what is occurring closer to street level. He wants to determine the direction in which Israeli society is actually moving. I myself am not very familiar with programs like Yesodot, but I can see that their leaders have their work cut out for them. Recent surveys reveal a rather minimal receptiveness to democracy among the students of state religious schools in Israel, and an even more antidemocratic consensus among their peers at independent haredi schools, where it is very hard to imagine anyone trying to introduce the study of democratic norms.[27] It seems to me that programs like Yesodot stand little chance in the foreseeable future of achieving even their very limited political goals, much less bringing about the sort of reorientation within Orthodox circles that Seligman has in mind.

Nevertheless, the doubtful character of his example does not vitiate Seligman's larger point. The dialogue for which he calls is not inconceivable. Indeed, among some secular sectors of the Israeli population there are recurrent signs of increasing openness to the message of traditional Judaism. Quite apart from the phenomenon of *baalei teshuvah,* who simply rejoin the Orthodox world, there are a host of different groups and organizations that seek to acquaint nonreligious Jews with the *aron ha-sfarim hayehudi,* "the Jewish bookshelf," extending from the Torah to the works of Maimonides to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. True, there is no comparable, organized effort to make a gentile bookshelf available to the Orthodox. But neither the national-religious nor the haredi world is as completely insulated from external cultural influences as one might be tempted to think.

In the course of his discussion of a new openness to secular culture in some of the national-religious yeshivahs, Sheleg describes one that contains a pedagogical institute where the names "of Piaget and others" are bandied about as freely as those of Maimonides and Nahmanides.[28] Later in the same volume, in one of the chapters devoted to the haredim, Sheleg has a subsection entitled "the new era of Haskalah." There he describes the way in which some haredim have recently demonstrated greater interest in providing their children with a supplementary, secular education and have even begun to come to terms with modern, critical study of rabbinic literature.[29]

These initial, guarded samplings of some of the potentially subversive dimensions of secular culture could eventually lead, perhaps, to the kind of self-exposure to doubt, to the questioning of "the very 'givenness' of one's own certitude" that Seligman wishes to see within the religious camp. And that might in turn lead, as Seligman would like, to "the emergence of a self-reflective faith where reason is no longer alien." But it might easily lead to other things as well, such as the kind of crisis of faith and loss of faith that previous eras of Haskalah invariably induced among relentlessly inquisitive Orthodox young people. Seligman, it seems, is too convinced of the modern world's terminal debility to fret about such an outcome. In my opinion, however, he has underestimated secularism's resiliency and overestimated the degree to which people will remain willing to bear the yoke of the Torah even if they lack real certainty that they ought to do so. In Israel, I believe, as in the Diaspora, Orthodoxy's survival rests on the suppression of doubts, not their cultivation.

* * *

Auerbach and Seligman published the books that I have discussed here prior to September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, one can scarcely consider either of these volumes today without pausing for at least a moment to reflect on their authors' recommendations in light of the changes that have taken place since that date. In our newly transformed world, it is hard to see how any sensible person could share Auerbach's disgust with contemporary America. Whatever repugnance one might feel for American fast-food restaurants vanishes when one sees mobs of frenzied fundamentalists burning their Asian outposts to the ground. Even punk stars look like fine fellows when one compares them to the likes of Mohammed Atta. This just does not seem like the right time for Jews to spurn the West, whatever its flaws, in the name of a stern, antidemocratic, scriptural vision. One has to admit, however, that the Jewish fundamentalists with whom Seligman wishes secularists to engage more deeply in dialogue look somewhat less forbidding than Osama bin Laden and his associates. Maybe it would be wise to follow Seligman's advice and try a little harder to talk with them. But one should still be very wary of regarding them as constituting in any sense the wave of the future.

Notes

1 Jerold S. Auerbach, *Are We One? Jewish Identity in the United States and Israel* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2001), 9. Hereafter, the page numbers of quotes from this work are given in the text.

2 Adam B. Seligman, *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence* (Princeton, 2000), xi–xii.

3 Ibid., 39.

4 Ibid., 34.

5 Ibid., 50.

6 This aspect of Seligman's theory deserves, and I am sure will receive, much more attention that I can give it in the context of this article.

7 See Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, 1997). See also my "Antiheroic Mock Heroics: Daniel Boyarin Versus Theodor Herzl and His Legacy," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 1998): 65–92, together with Boyarin's evasive response to my criticisms.

8 Auerbach lists many of the most important ones in his bibliographical essay (232). They include Robert I. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion* (New York, 1992); Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord* (New York, 1988); and Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York, 1991).

9 A good source for the early history of Mizrachi is David Vital's *Zionism: The Formative Years* (New York, 1988), a book mistakenly referred to by Auerbach in his bibliographical essay as the beginning of his history of the Zionist movement (225). See also Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds., *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, N.H., 1998); Aryei Fishman, *Judaism and Modernization on the Religious Kibbutz* (Cambridge, Engl., 1992); and Yosef Katz, *The Religious Kibbutz Movement in the Land of Israel, 1930–48* (Jerusalem, 1999).

10 Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 169. The controversy generated by this challenge is insightfully described by Asher Cohen in *Ha-talit Veha-degel* (Jerusalem, 1998), 137–54.

11 The evolution of Leibowitz's thought is best explained by Aviezer Ravitzky, *Harut al ha-luhot* (Tel Aviv, 1999), 207–22.

12 Leibowitz, *Judaism,* 4.

13 Ibid., 226.

14 Ibid., 225–27.

15 See www.meimad.org.il/meimad1/prifle.html.

16 For an examination of tensions within the settler movement resulting from excesses during the 1980s, see Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord* (New York, 1988), 91–152. For a description of reactions in national-religious circles, see Yair Sheleg, *Ha-datiyim ha-hadashim: Mabat akhshavi al ha-hevrah ha-datit be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 2000), 108–12. Among the expressions of remorse Sheleg cites is a comment by Israel Harel, a man Auerbach

greatly admires. On the night of Rabin's murder, he remarked that his camp was now marked by a moral stain (*ketem musari*). For an account of Harel's subsequent efforts to bring about a rapprochement between religious and secular Israeli intellectuals, see Vered Levy-Barzilai, "Bi-Tveryah higdarnu et medinat ha-yehudim," *Musaf Ha-aretz,* Jan. 3, 2002.

17 Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity: The Secular-Religious Impasse* (Baltimore, 2000), 60–61.

18 Ibid., 63.

19 For an illuminating view of what it means to Shas's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, see Zvi Zohar, *Ha-iru pnei mizrah: Halakhah ve-hagut etsel khahmei Yisrael Ba-mizrah hatikhon* (Tel Aviv, 2001), 312–52.

20 This is reconfirmed even by scholars who question whether Shas truly deserves the dovish image that has been attached to it. See Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar and Tamar Hermann, "Shas: The Haredi-Dovish Image in a Changing Reality," *Israel Studies* (Fall 2000): 32–78.

21 Cohen and Susser, *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity,* 69–70.

22 Yair Sheleg, *Ha-datiyim ha-hadashim,* 96.

23 Ibid.

24 I am not saying that this proves that Leibowitz was altogether correct. My own knowledge of what is now happening in the settlements is derived almost entirely from what I read in newspapers and journals. Ephraim Tabory reports that the "phenomenon of not so religious young people from religious settlements, such as for example Gush Etzion, who gather and carry on a social life in Zion Square in Jerusalem was covered in the press in 2001" ("Merhak fizi ve-ahdut hevratit beyn kehilot datiot be-yisrael uve-artsot ha-brit," *Gesher* [Summer 2001]: 64 n. 3). I recall reading an article in *Ha-aretz* on this subject in the spring of 2001, but since I did not anticipate having occasion to cite it, I did not keep it.

25 Seligman, *Modernity's Wager,* 52. Hereafter, page numbers of quotes from this work are given in the text.

26 The quote is from Strauss's 1962 preface to a book he wrote decades earlier, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion.*

27 Shahar Ilan, *Ha-haredim be-a"m: Ha-taktsivim, ha-hishtamtut u-remisat ha-hok* (Jerusalem, 2000), 38–42.

28 Sheleg, *Ha-datiyim ha-hadashim,* 81.

29 Ibid., 151–53.