

## Israeli Identity – between East and West, Universalism and Cosmopolitanism

*My heart is in the East, and I am at the far end of the West,*

*How can I taste what I eat, and how could I savor it?*

*How may I fulfill my vows and oaths,*

*When Zion is the lot of Edom, and I am caught in the bonds of the Arabs?*

*It will be as petty to me to leave all the bounty of Spain,*

*As it will be precious to me, to see with my eyes the earth of our ruined Temple.*

*(Libi BaMizrah, Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, poet, philosopher and mystic, 12<sup>th</sup> Century, Al-Andalus, translated from original Hebrew)*

The poem “Libi Bamizrah”, by Yehudah HaLevi, the greatest Hebrew poet of the Spanish Golden Age, is taught today in Israeli high schools. This classical love poem for Zion and Jerusalem captures a counterintuitive moment in history. The Holyland is in Christendom (*Edom*) ruled by the Crusaders, and the lands of Islam (Arabs) are in the far-flung West, Andalusia. It may be interesting to note here that Halevi makes multiples mentions of “The Wise Men of India” in his classic philosophical dialogues, “The Kuzari”, but they are merely a literary device. He had probably never met an Indian.

By the time the Jewish national movement, Zionism, was founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by journalist Theodor Herzl, in Vienna, geography had reverted to norm. Over 90 per cent of the Jews lived in a Christian Europe, and less than 10 per cent in Islamic North Africa and West

Asia.<sup>[1]</sup>

In Herzl's utopian novel, *Altneuland* (Old-New Land), the Holyland of Israel is portrayed as the barren wasteland that she was those days, waiting for the Jews to return and redeem her from misery. The Arab character, Rashid Bey, explains why the Arabs are jubilantly joining hands with the Zionist pioneers:

"Those who had nothing, had nothing to lose, only to gain. And gain they did... In the entire world there was no place as impoverished and pathetic as an Arab village in Palestine. The farmers lived in clay houses not fit for animals. The children laid naked, neglected, and unattended in the streets. Today their lives have changed!... These paupers are happier than ever. They eat well, their children are now healthy and schooled. They have not lost their beliefs and traditions and have only been granted a comfortable, good life... The Jews have made us rich. Why should we be angry at them? They live among us as brothers.[2]

Naivete aside, the sophisticated Viennese Herzl is unambiguous about the East. It is a backward ruin, inhabited by helpless Arabs waiting for the westernized Jews to return and build their ancient homeland and bring with them the blessings of European civilization.

Herzl was the quintessential Westernized Jew of his day, son of Enlightenment and Emancipation. He had an elite European education and was the star writer at the most important newspaper of his day. But he had no Jewish education and could not even read the Hebrew alphabet. The character of the Rabbi Dr. Geyer is even less sympathetic than the Arabs. To Herzl, traditional Judaism was as backward as the East.

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In this essay we will attempt to paint a portrait of the civilizational alignment of Jewish identity in Israel on the axis of East-West. We will show that at its foundation Israel was aligned exclusively with the West, even as Christendom had historically been the Jews' mortal enemy for over 1000 years. In this framework Israel was a frontline of Western civilization battling Arab and Soviet aggression. The climactic battle on this front was the Six Day War of 1967.

But this war returned Israel not only to Jerusalem and Temple Mount, but to the East. This process was spearheaded by the Religious Zionists of the *Gush Emunim* settlement movement, who built their homes among the Arabs in the newly liberated territories. The settlement movement and its bitter opponents in the peace movement together opened a Pandora's box of questions of Jewish identity that the founders of Israel had done their best to keep shut. The culture wars that began then have morphed numerous times since, but in essence, rage on till this day.

### **From Enlightenment to Reform**

The modern era in European Jewish history begins<sup>[1]</sup> with the Emancipation movement. Set in motion by the French Revolution, and then Napoleon, the ethos of liberty, equality and brotherhood gave rise to the conclusion that the Jews should be declared equal citizens of France. They were no longer to be outside the normative legal framework, nor subject to arbitrary taxation, restrictions on property ownership or on residence outside walled *ghettos*. And of course, in enlightened France, Jews would never again be expelled or massacred.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 1806, Napoleon convened the *Sanhedrin of Paris*, a group of French rabbis and lay leaders he branded with the name of the Jewish high court of elders that that tradition tells us led the Jewish people from the time of Moses (Cira 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE) until the Roman rule of Judea (Cira 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE). Napoleon posed them a list of questions. Among them:

- Does Judaism permit intermarriage between Jews and Christians?
- Is France the motherland of French Jews? Are the Jews loyal to its laws and willing to bear arms to defend it?
- Do Jews feel a brotherhood with the French?
- Who is to appoint rabbis, and what is their legal authority?<sup>[4]</sup>

The Jewish delegates were in a tricky situation indeed. Most of them were quite religious and completely aware that Napoleon was probing some of the core tenets of Jewish identity in search of favorable answers. Intermarriage was - and remains - a fierce taboo to traditional Jews, tantamount to or worse than baptizing. Granted, *Halakhah* (Jewish Law) mandates that Jews be law-abiding and loyal to any government under which they live if it does not engage in religious persecution<sup>[5]</sup>. But in the same breath, a simple reading of the *Torah*, the five books of Moses that Jews complete in a yearly cycle in synagogue, will inform one that Jews are a nation of their own<sup>[6]</sup>, not a religious sect of the French nation or any other nation. Their motherland is Israel<sup>[7]</sup>, and their capital Jerusalem<sup>[8]</sup>, a city they had prayed for the rebuilding of in three daily prayers and in blessings after every meal for roughly 2000 years, even before the Romans destroyed the Second Temple (70 CE) and Second Commonwealth (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE)<sup>[9]</sup>.

In the diaspora, deprived of the trappings of a homeland and sovereign state, Jews had been reduced to a religious minority, whose heroes were not warriors or kings, but rabbis. "Our nation is only a nation in its *Torah*"<sup>[10]</sup>, declared Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, leader of 10<sup>th</sup> century Jewry. But even to a national leader like him, this was not an ideal. Ideally, Jews believed in the Biblical prophecies that foretold the ingathering of the exiles back home to Israel, where a third Temple was to be rebuilt in Jerusalem under renewed Jewish sovereignty<sup>[11]</sup>.

Napoleon was demanding that Jews abandon all that defined them, such as Rabbis, Israel, the prophets, historical identity, and endogamy, to become French. The notion of bearing arms for France must have sounded surreal. Jews were a powerless minority in Europe. The last Jewish army had waged fierce guerrilla warfare in rebellion against the Roman Empire under Shimon Bar-Kokhbah, in 135 CE.

The Sanhedrin of Paris was a declarative assembly, so it did not matter that they offered diplomatic answers that did not fully satisfy anyone. They were not about to affront Napoleon, but wholesale sellout of tradition was not something Jews considered. Yet.

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The Reform Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany was to precisely prescribe that.<sup>[12]</sup> While its name may suggest minor modernizing reforms to Jewish religion, in practice it promulgated a radical abandonment of tradition from an early stage. Judaism is a religion centered upon *Halakhah*, laws of conduct that dictate proper behavior in all realms of human activity. Reform leaders declared Halakhah null and void.

They amended the core tenets of Jewish faith, precisely in the direction Napoleon had desired: They removed all mentions of Israel and Jerusalem from prayers and declared Germany to be their Motherland. To them, Jews were not a nation, but a religious sect of Germans, “Germans of Mosaic Faith.” Pipe-organs were introduced to Reform synagogues. Reformers felt deep inferiority towards German culture of the day, both Christian and Enlightenment. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, around 200,000 Jews were baptized to Christianity<sup>[13]</sup>, and for many, Reform Judaism was merely a pitstop.[2]

The paragon of the day was Moses Mendelssohn<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[14]</sup> (1729-1786), the first Enlightened Jew. As a brilliant young man Mendelssohn received a traditional Talmudic education. He remained Orthodox but did not go on to become a pulpit rabbi[4]. He migrated to Berlin, and despite severe discrimination, studied philosophy in university.

In 1763, an essay competition was held at the Berlin Academy. Mendelssohn won first prize, while in second place came a young philosopher named Emmanuel Kant. Mendelssohn, the Jew who could defeat Kant at Enlightenment, went on to translate the Torah into High-German, and author *Jerusalem*, an influential volume in which he envisioned a revival of Judaism via Enlightenment. Mendelssohn remained a fully observant Jew until death, even after most rabbis

of his day angrily reject his life's project as heresy. His Orthodox middle-ground option did not win the hearts of Jewish masses who gravitated to the extremes, Ultra-Orthodoxy or Enlightenment.

Mid-19th century, Jews in Western and Central Europe faced three options:

They could remain in the Orthodox world which became less and less tolerant towards any deviation from Halakhic tradition. The Bible and mysticism were given less and less importance.

From this rigid intolerance rose the Ultra-Orthodox world.<sup>[15]</sup>

The second option was assimilation into Christian society, with or without baptism. The intermediate option was Reform Judaism. Reformers and Ultra-Orthodox shared contempt for Jewish nationalism. [5]

Of Mendelssohn's six children only two did not convert to Christianity. His grandson was Felix Mendelssohn, the famed classical composer. His great-grandson, Alexander, was the last in the family to practice Judaism<sup>[16]</sup>.

### **From Assimilation to Zionism**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century tsunami of wholesale Jewish assimilation into Western European culture was the backdrop for the founding of the Zionist movement.[6]

Theodor Herzl was the star writer at the *Neue Freie Presse*, the leading newspaper of his day. Completely assimilated – but not intermarried – he was living the Enlightenment dream. His wakeup call, so the story goes, was the Dreyfuss Affair (1894-1906).<sup>[17]</sup>

Col. Alfred Dreyfuss was a completely assimilated French Jew, such a devoted French patriot that historians have quipped that had his Jewish neighbor been framed and scapegoated instead of him, he doubtlessly would have wholeheartedly believed the allegations.

Covering the Dreyfus Affair was a shock to Herzl. The incited masses were not Russian peasants, but enlightened Frenchmen who were supposed to have long since abandoned the institutionalized Jew hatred of the Catholic Church. France had invented Enlightenment. If such ferocious Jew hatred could erupt there, it meant only one thing: the promise of Emancipation was a mirage. Jews could never assimilate into Europe. And if he was not European, reflected Herzl, what was he?

The answer slowly became clear, first to Herzl and then to the followers of his nascent Zionist movement. They were not traditional Jews. But they still belonged to the Jewish nation. Not just by nominal dint of birth, just because *Halakhah*, defines anyone born to a Jewish mother as Jewish from birth to afterlife, regardless of personal beliefs. They were convinced their identity was Jewish too.

They had seen the European Spring of Nations and concluded that becoming French, German, or Russian patriots was a pathetic fraud of an identity. None of these nations sincerely accepted Jews, and living among them would lead to death, either by brutal pogroms or by the gradual collective suicide of assimilation.

There was only one solution: Zion. The Jews were to build a state of their own with all the features of a state: an army, a parliament, universities, classical orchestras, Hebrew language poets. Briefly, the Zionist movement pondered locations such as Uganda,<sup>[18]</sup> as safe havens from the growing antisemitism in Europe. But very soon it concluded that the state could only be in Israel, the only homeland Jews had ever had. [7]

The critical mass of Zionist leaders grew up in traditional Eastern Europe and adopted Zionism after rebelling against tradition. This put them and the entire movement, in a unique position: they knew what traditional Judaism looked like, even if they were contemptuous toward it. To them, Zionism was not an abandonment of Jewish identity, but a refocusing of it. Zionism was steeped in Jewish symbols and messaging, even if many Zionists were anti-religious.

The movement's demands were coherent in the terms of European nationalism: territory, language, state building, national pride, militarism, reimagining a glorious past. But all of these were equally coherent in traditional terms: rebuilding the Holy Land of Israel, ingathering of the exiles, casting off the yoke of exile and servitude and walking upright as princes, servants of God alone and his chosen king, the scion of King David. Historically, these themes were not just Jewish, they were, in large part, what tradition defined as the Messianic culmination of Jewish history.<sup>[19]</sup> And here they were, the political program of young Socialists who had rebelled against tradition, rabbis, and God himself.

In his epic poem, 'The Dead [Generation] of the Desert' (*M'tei Midbar*) Israel's national poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik, brilliantly invoked the biblical generation of Israelites who had left Egypt under Moses only to perish in their sins in the Sinai Desert. After thousands of years, they had awakened from their slumber and were now destined to storm the Holyland by force, God willing, or not:

"We are warriors! We are the last generation of servitude and the first redeemed! Our might alone, our mighty hands, have released the weight of the yoke off our proud necks... And who is our master?!... To your swords! Spears! Unite! Turn Right! In spite of Heavens and their rath, here we are, and will we ascend [to our land] in a storm!"<sup>[20]</sup>

All this was too much for the rabbis. In all of Europe, very few of them supported Zionism. *Haredi* (Ultra-Orthodox) Jews, till this day, reject Zionism as a shade of heresy.

The most notable rabbinical supporter, one of the greatest Halakhic and mystical minds of his day, Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Kook<sup>[21]</sup>, was later to be the first Chief Rabbi of British mandatory Palestine. Much of his mystical writings have been dubbed "National Mysticism", a mystical reading of Zionism. These are the foundational writings of what was to be the *Religious Zionist* sector and their settlement movement.

Interestingly, the rabbis of the *Mizrahi* (Eastern) communities in Islamic lands supported Zionism almost to the last man. These countries had not experienced the full force of Enlightenment and secularization. They saw Zionism in traditional terms. To them, there was nothing anti-religious or rebellious about it. Zionism simply meant the Biblical prophecies coming to life, and they were believers.<sup>[22]</sup>

### **Zionism: A Break with the Past**

Jewish cosmopolitans were not looking only Westward. The question of the culture of the future Jewish state was a tricky one, and it plagued Zionist leaders almost from the inception of the movement.<sup>[23]</sup> Regardless of personal persuasion, the state of Israel was to be, by definition, a break with the immediate past in multiple ways. As we explained, most Zionists had broken with religious Orthodoxy, which had been the primary source for defining Jewish identity for as long as anyone remembered. Even if there were a minority of religious Zionists in Europe and the *Mizrahi* Jews in Arabia, they were not the core leadership.

Secondly, Zionism was a breakaway from Europe. Christianity was not the issue. It was not an inspiration at all. Jews had - and many still have - an instinctive reticence from the religion that had had raised Jew-Hatred to a theological doctrine and had been massacring them periodically ever since the Crusades. European Jews baptized almost exclusively for material benefit.

The European culture they were rebelling against was Enlightenment, to be specific, the assimilationists of the Reform movement. The Zionists keenly understood that the Kantian notion of a universal c Culture of Reason that was to supersede all ancient prejudices was an illusion that no nation in Europe was buying into except for the Jews, the eternal outsiders of Europe.<sup>[24]</sup> Nationalism was on the rise and Germans, French, Russians, and all other nations among which Jews resided were becoming less and less tolerant of them.<sup>[25]</sup> The

assimilationists' dedicated attempts to purge these societies of national identity was only angering the antisemites even more, dangerously alerting them to the fact that the Jews were not necessarily an integral part of these nations.

But it must be stated that the Zionists did not want a clean break with Judaism nor Enlightenment. They redefined traditional Jewish themes for nationalist usage. They angrily abandoned the Talmud, the quintessential corpus of Jewish law, but devoted themselves to a revival of Bible study.

The Bible was the classical literature upon which the new Israeli culture was to be founded upon. It poetically described the ancient landscape and cities of Israel, and its characters were warriors, kings, and prophets. These were virile and upright men, noble, larger than life, an exact antithesis to the Jews in exile. To Zionists, the real Jewish history ran, as the historical view of Israel's first Prime minister, David Ben Gurion, was later dubbed, "from the Tanakh (Bible) to the Palmakh", the latter being the Jewish militia that fought the Israeli War of Independence and formed the basis of the IDF. They wanted to be biblical Jews, even if they were not as God-intoxicated as their ancestors.

Simultaneously, they had not abandoned what they viewed as the finest of Enlightenment values. Nationalism was paramount, but they embraced Rationalism, Idealism, Socialism, science, and progressive social reform as well. Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland* is deeply steeped in all these. Even the Temple of Jerusalem, traditionally centered around animal sacrifice, was reconfigured in this utopia as an enlightened house of prayer, to be erected near a quasi-United Nations, "House of Peace", a shining beacon of Socialism and global brotherhood.<sup>[26]</sup> The rabbis weren't buying it.

### **Rav Kook: Religious Zionism**

The Zionists had one enthusiastic rabbinical genius on their side. *Rabbi* (in Hebrew: *Rav*) *Abraham Yitzkhak Kook* (1865-1935). Growing up in the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire he received a traditional education and was a brilliant young Talmudic scholar at the

renowned *Yeshiva of Volozhin* (in today's Belarus), the "Jewish Harvard" of its day. He was deeply pious and relished the mystical teachings and pietism of Kabbalah and the Hasidic movement<sup>[27]</sup>.

But this brilliant mind chose not to ignore the winds that were blowing gale-force right outside his study hall, sweeping away his study partners. He read European philosophy in Yiddish language digests, as he could not read the German original texts. He read digests of German Indology, leading him to comment briefly on Buddhism. He studiously read Zionist periodicals and their polemics. He founded his own journal, which did not last long, as he was an intellectual, lacking organizational skills.

He wrote voluminously all his life in many Jewish genres. The heart of his writings are ecstatic mystical musings on a broad range of themes, comprising eight large notebooks total. From these notebooks, his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook, edited a collection of essays to form his father's most well-read book, the slender ideological volume, *Orot* (Lights).

What was the genius of *Orot*? It was not just the notion that Nationalism was religiously legitimate and even divine, even if this was novel to many Orthodox Jews (and blasphemy to others). Contemporary rabbis and intellectuals can easily site many, more radical themes in this volume: the mystical value of physical exercise,<sup>[28]</sup> the deep yearning for the renewal of prophecy in the Holy Land,<sup>[29]</sup> and most notably, the bold positive assessment of secularism as a movement that descended to the world to purge traditional religion of its backwardness.<sup>[30]</sup>

Rav Kook keenly observed that Zionist energies had a powerful religious quality. These were not the usual heretics who lacked spiritual impetus.

To sum up his historiosophic view of the tragic crumbling of traditional society of his day: It was an intermediate phase. The complete trajectory was from a primitive traditional society to an Enlightened secular one, and finally, a return to an Enlightened Judaism, messianic and

prophetic, predicated upon Jewish mysticism, which had preserved the true, ancient prophetic tradition. Jews were “believers and sons of believers”<sup>[31]</sup> and could never remain secular forever. Tolerance and patience were needed. The final redemption would be glorious. Religious Jews must understand this and invest fully in the Zionist project. God will remember exactly who has done his work.

Here we finally reach the issue of Israeli civilizational alignment. In our opinion, this is a central reason why Rav Kook came to be dubbed by one of his best academic researchers as “the only philosopher Zionism had”<sup>[32]</sup> even if Zionism had dozens of theorists. Others understood as well that Zionism was a cultural realignment. But Rav Kook had the most profound notion of anyone what the “New Jew” and his civilization were in Israel were to be, and what they were not to be.<sup>[8]</sup>

To begin with the latter, they were not to be European. Although Rav Kook was influenced by Romantic thinkers, most notably in his critical attitude to Nietzsche,<sup>[33]</sup> *Orot* is a deeply anti-European book. Christianity is portrayed as a dark, almost demonic force. Note, that the most anti-Christian passages in *Orot* were written during the shocking carnage of WWI, when Rav Kook was stranded in Switzerland and England.

But it was not just that Europe was inundated in unprecedented rivers of blood. Rav Kook’s overarching goal was clear – to extract Jews from Europe. Jews were not European, and this dangerous delusion had to end ASAP. He did not witness WWII, but before his death in 1935 he witnessed Hitler’s rise. His close disciple Rabbi David Cohen supported Zionist efforts to evacuate Jews to Israel before the war.<sup>[34]</sup> His son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook, is noted for his blunt analysis of the Holocaust The surgical removal of the Jews from exile: “It was a cruel medical procedure of God. Time had come for the nation of Israel to leave exile, but many refused to leave, leaving no other option.”<sup>[35]</sup> The rabbis of Europe had moralized over Zionist

heresy and not relocated to Israel. They and their pious flocks had shockingly paid the fullest imaginable price. God worked in mysterious ways indeed.

### **Civilizational Alignment**

And if the Jews were not Europeans, what were they?

Rav Kook took the Zionist biblical theme to the full conclusion that secular Jews could not utter:

Jews, in essence, are Prophets.<sup>[36]</sup> In the return to Israel, Jewish history would come full circle.

The new prophets to arise would not be identical to the biblical ones but better than them. The biblical world was profoundly violent and undeveloped, an Afghanistan<sup>[37]</sup> with prophets and a Temple. Jewish redemption is both Restorative and Progressive. To quote Rav Kook, “the old will rejuvenate, and the new will become holy.”<sup>[38]</sup>

And what is the civilizational orientation of this mystical Israel to be?

The following quote from Orot is one the best known:

“The collective soul of Israel is the essence of all of reality... There is not a movement in any nation of the world who’s parallel will not be found in Israel.”<sup>[39]</sup>

Israel bears the torch of Monotheism. And if your God is universal, his chosen nation must affiliate with every nation he has created. Europe too is legitimate, if reduced to natural size and balanced with all other nations.

But in the immediate sense, Zionists were returning to the East.

Rav Kook’s ideas remained exotic and esoteric till his death. He had four close disciples and a few associates. His immediate circles in mandatory Palestine viewed him as a saint, but had no idea what he was saying<sup>[9]</sup> . Orthodox Jews arrived late to the Zionist party and had little

influence on the firebrand founders of the state of Israel. Only the aftermath of the Six Day War posthumously unleashed his ideas<sup>[10]</sup> , under the leadership of his son, to the public eye.

### **The Six Day War and Pandora's Box of Identity**

Both the leaders of the Israeli peace movement and the leaders of Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah's disciples' *Gush Emunim* settlement movement served in the same paratrooper units that unified Jerusalem and liberated Temple Mount in the Six Day War of 1967.<sup>[40]</sup>

To the former it was a confusing moment like none other. These ardently secular elites stood crying at the foot of Temple Mount, the holiest place on Earth, without believing in its holiness. <sup>[11]</sup> To the latter it was no less than a new chapter being written in the Biblical narrative. “Jerusalem built up, as a city knit together” (Psalms 122, 2). And as West Jerusalem united with East Jerusalem, Israel reentered the East.

Israel was no longer a besieged Cold-War outpost. The Soviets’ Arab proxies were resoundingly trounced. With this miracle beneath their wings, the settlers leveraged the moment of collective trauma after the 1973 Yom Kippur War and began moving into Judea and Samaria<sup>[12]</sup> ,aka The West Bank, the Biblical heartland. But as the Superpowers denounced the settlements, they were echoed loudly by Israelis in the peace movements, led by the *Peace Now* movement who built on the momentum of Anwar Saadat’s 1977 visit to Israel.

*Peace Now* was led by Humanities professors and artists. These men and women had studied in America and France and seen the Sixties and were influenced by the protest movements of the day, and were convinced that these ideas were relevant to Israel.

But if you have read this far, you must comprehend that the undercurrents were deeper than simply war and peace. At its core, *Peace Now* activists were rejecting Rav Kook’s civilizational vision. They wanted no part in a Biblical drama, no prophets, no Jewish Orthodoxy, and nothing Eastern. They were Enlightenment Rationalists and Progressives, and they wanted Universal Human Rights and a Western cultural orientation. This could not materialize if Israel annexed

the territories. Peace Now was orienting Westward and the settlers Eastward.[13] It is noteworthy that both were led by Europeans (Ashkenazi Jews). Roughly half of Israelis claim heritage from North Africa and Middle East Jewry (Mizrahi Jews), who vote largely Right, but were not engaged in the ideological debate.

*Peace Now* founders had served in elite combat units and could not be easily branded anti-national. But their children were a new generation. Less patriotic, capitalists, starry-eyed about America and Europe.[41] Settler street-wisdom ridiculed these new Leftists as sellouts to American liberal values a budding reappearance of Reform assimilationists.[42]

The drama over the territories consumed Israel from the late 70's till the first decade of the new millennium.[14]

### **Global Israel: The Talent Elite, Universalism and Cosmopolitanism**

By the late 90's something new was happening in Israel. The high-tech sector was booming as Israel's economy slowly awakened from the slumber of Socialist central planning[15]. The tech wizards were mostly young globalist Leftists, not diehard nationalists.<sup>[43]</sup> For the first time, Israelis were competing in a globally competitive talent pool and winning. But what did this new global dimension mean spiritually?

Rabbi Zvi Yehudah's disciple, Rabbi Yehudah Leon Ashkenazi, (commonly known as *Manitou*), had the answer. An Algerian born French rabbi, public intellectual and mystic, who immigrated to Israel, his fascinating biography led him to profound insights on identity politics.

He drew a distinction between Universalism and Cosmopolitanism.<sup>[44]</sup> The mystical culture Rav Kook foresaw was Universal. This meant it had a home port in Israel, from which it was to boldly engage all civilizations and cultures<sup>[45]</sup>. Manitou's *Equation of Brotherhood* meant that all nations were brothers and must engage congenially.

But in the biblical book of Genesis, we learn that the most ferocious feuds are between brothers. To Manitou, these were failures of the Brotherhood to be carefully studied. Each character was an archetype of a civilization. Just as in Halevi's poem we opened with; Esau/Edom was Christendom. Ishma'el, were our cousins the Arabs, and the Islamic world. India, China, and the Far East are the "Sons of the Concubines" that Abraham had sent Eastward.<sup>[46]</sup> The Israeli civilization was to be "a thread that bound the bouquet of all nations".<sup>[47]</sup> This was the Abrahamic legacy. The Messiah was to be a man of universal dialogue.<sup>[48]</sup> Interestingly, Manitou noted that Ishmael did not speak a single word in the Bible. Islam had to learn the culture of dialogue to be redeemed.<sup>[49]</sup>

For Manitou, Cosmopolitanism was the creed of the assimilationists/Anti-Zionists. They rejected the Jewish homeland and idealized exile<sup>[50]</sup>. Their Judaism meant remaining afloat midair, eternal outsiders in the West, intellectual provocateurs, and moral compass among nations. Manitou keenly noted that as Israel will rise and shine these Jews were to become its staunch enemies, since Israel's existence ensured that complete assimilation will never be possible.<sup>[51]</sup> He died in 1996.

### **Pivot to the East: New Age**

The *Natural Law Party* ran in Israel's 1992 elections, receiving 1,734 votes. Most Israelis had no idea who they were. In fact, they were Transcendental Meditation practitioners. This was the year India established diplomatic relations with Israel, and a slow cultural pivot eastward had begun. The flow of post-Army trekkers to the Himalayas gradually reached its full force. Today, Israel is a global powerhouse of New-Age culture. Whatever your opinion of them, Westernized Yoga or martial arts classes are nothing unusual here, and mix easily into pop-Kabbalah.<sup>[52]</sup>

Even as the peace process went up in the flames of buses exploding in Jerusalem in the Second Intifada (2000-2005), Israel was moving steadily eastward. In the new millennium, Israelis like their food spicy and their conversations loud. Our music has re-orientation eastward, to fusion, Eastern Classic styles<sup>[53]</sup>, and Arabesque pop. We are family oriented and have the highest birthrate in the developed world. Most Israelis are traditional, neither fully religious nor secular. If we are Western, we are most religious country in the West.<sup>[54]</sup> [16]

Money is a universal religion too, and business is booming in the East. The recent Abraham Accords (2020) were a very refreshing taste of the East. At last, Arabs were engaging Israel as equals. Much needs to be done to reach true brotherhood after years of enmity, and it will only come slowly, but UAE is currently a major trading partner, and fits perfectly into the I2U2 alliance.

#### Afterward

Although certain Zionist figures displayed an interest in India and its Eastern culture, it is evident that the overall focus of the Zionist movement on East and South Asian cultures remained limited. The cosmopolitan faction of Zionism primarily admired Western influences, while the more religious and conservative segments of the movement tended to disregard non-Abrahamic religions.

Fast forward to the present day, and the situation has undergone a significant transformation. Rabbi Kook's fascination with the East has granted religious circles the legitimacy to reassess the relationship between Judaism and Indic religions.<sup>[55]</sup> This, coupled with the resurgence of interest in Kabbalah, has sparked curiosity in Indian esoteric concepts within Hinduism and Islam.

Liberal circles have also drawn closer to India's soft power, embracing meditation, yoga, and the principles of peace and non-violence à la Mahatma Gandhi's teachings. This shift can also be attributed to post-colonial criticism.

The influence of India on Israeli society is undeniable. Numerous Israelis who have traveled to India after completing their military service have brought back elements of Indian culture, introducing words like "Shanti," "Chillum," "Rickshaw," and "Satsaṅg" into the Hebrew language. This cultural exchange has provided Israel with a more vivid and contemporary understanding of India. The deepening friendship and cooperation between India and Israel represent a relatively modern phenomenon unfolding over the past three decades. However, the seeds of this burgeoning relationship can be traced back to the visionary thinkers of early Zionism, among whom Rabbi Kook stands out prominently. These pioneers were among the first to grasp the immense possibilities stemming from the cultural and religious affinities shared between Judaism and the diverse cultures of the East. Their visionary understanding laid the foundation for the contemporary rapprochement between these two nations, fostering a bond that continues to grow stronger with time.

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[1] ירון צור, ההיסטוריוגרפיה הישראלית והבעיה העדתית, בתוך פעמים 94-5, הוצאת יד בן-צבי, ירושלים (2003)

Yaron Tzur, Israeli Historiography and the the Ethnic Problem, in Pe'amim 94-5, Yad Ben Zvi, Jerusalem, (2003)  
((Hebrew

[2] Translated from Hebrew in: עמוס אילון, הרצל, עם עובד, תל אביב, (1997), עמ' 385

Amos Elon, Herzl, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, (1997) p. 385.

**Michael Graetz and Jane Marie Todd, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From the French [3]***  
**(*Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Ch. 1, Stanford University Press, Redwood City, (1996**

[4] תקנות הסנהדרין, פריז, מהדורת צילום מכת"י (1802). אתר היברובוקס, נדלה 8.2.2023

The Sanhedrin's Rulings, Facsimilia edition from 1802 manuscript, Paris. Available at Hebrewbooks.org, retrieved 8.2.2023

Synagogues in diaspora traditional all offer a brief prayer on Sabbath for the governments of their countries. [5]  
.Jews have done so under repressive regimes as well, from Czarist Russia to Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany

Deuteronomy 27, 9 [6]

The inheritance of the Holyland is one of the central themes of the Torah, from the stories of Abraham in the [7]  
.books of Joshua and the prophets

Jerusalem was conquered by King David who made it the capital. His son, King Solomon built the First Temple. [8]  
Samuel II 5, 6 Kings I 5, 19

David Flusser, in *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: The Jewish Sages and Their Literature*. Vol. 2. p. 25 [9]  
(Translated by Azzan Yadin. Grand Rapids (2009

[10] רס"ג, הנבחר באמונות והדעות, מאמר שלישי פרק ז.

Saadia Gaon, *the Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Treatise, Ch. 7

Ezekiel, Ch. 37, Ch. 40-48 [11]

For a full analysis of the Reform movement's Germany period see: W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform* [12]  
*Judaism: A Sourcebook of its European Origins*. University of Nebraska Press/ Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication  
.(Society, (2015

Estimates range from 100,000 to 250,000. Much of the research is localized and undisputed numbers are [13]  
.clearer in some places and denominations than in others

Dahlstrom, Daniel, *Moses Mendelssohn, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 [14]  
(.Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed

(Giti Bendelheim, *Jacob Katz on the Origins of Orthodoxy*, Shikey Press, Cambridge MA, (2022 [15]

Abrahams, Israel, *Mendelssohn, Moses* in Chisholm, Hugh (ed.). Encyclopedia Britannica. [16]  
.Vol. 18 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, p. 120–121

A brief English biography of Herzl appears on the website of the Israeli Knesset: [17]  
.https://knesset.gov.il/vip/herzl/eng/Herz\_Bio\_eng.html

.Full length English biographies have been written by Amos Elon, Derek Jonathan Penslar and others

.Ervin Birnbaum, *In the Shadow of the Struggle*. Gefen Publishing House Ltd., Jerusalem, (1990), p. 40 [18]

See: Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Kings and Their Wars*, Ch. 1, Ch 12, [19]  
English translation from original Hebrew by Eliyahu Touger, Maznaim Publishing Corporation, (1987). Full Hebrew  
.text and translation available online at *Sefaria* online database

[20] חיים נחמן ביאליק, מתי מדבר, פרוייקט בן יהודה, נדלה 9.2.2023

Chaim Nachman Bialik, Mtei Midbar, full Hebrew text at the Ben Yehuda Project, Benyehuda.org. Retrieved  
.9.2.2023. The English translation is our own

:The only intellectual biography of Rav Kook in English is [21]

(Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: A Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven, (2014

For a review of a Hebrew book that showcases these rabbinical stances see: Asael Abelman, *Those Who Heard* [22]  
(*the Voice of the Dove*, Tel Aviv Book Review, (Summer 2022

The culture debate is most associated with Zionist theorist Asher Ginsburg (1856-1927), known by his pen [23]  
.name, *Ahad Ha'am*

.An epitome of this mindset was the Esperanto language created by an assimilated Jew, L. L. Zamenoff in 1887 [24]

The first anti-Semitic political party was The Christian Socialist Party of Carl Lueger, mayor of Herzl's Vienna. [25]  
.The party's ideology was a forerunner to Nazism

[26] נתי גבאי, הרצל מתגייס לפתור את המשבר בהר הבית, בלוג הספרייה הלאומית, 19.7.2017, נדלה 9.2.2023

Nati Gabai, Herzl Recruited to Solve the Temple Mount Crisis, *Israel National Library Blog*, 19.7.2017, retrieved  
.9.2.2023

.For Hindus I would compare Hasidism to Bhakti, for Muslims, Sufism, which at times had a direct influence[27]

[28] אברהם יצחק קוק, אורות, אורות התחייה פרק לד, זמין בויקיטקסט

.Abraham I. Kook, Orot, Orot HaTekhiya, 34, available online in Hebrew at Wikisource database

Ibid. 66 [29]

Ibid, Zer'onim, 5 [30]

A famous rabbinical aphorism from Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 97A [31]

[32] יוסף בן שלמה, שירת החיים, משרד הבטחון - ההוצאה לאור, (1989), עמ' 10

.Yossef Ben Shlomo, Shirat Hachaim, Ministry of Defense Publications, (1989), pp.10

[33] סמדר שרלו, העוז והענווה; שיטת המוסר של הרב קוק מול מוסר העצמה של ניטשה, בתוך: י' גולומב (עורך), ניטשה בתרבות העברית, ירושלים תשס"ב, עמ' 347-374.

Semadar Cherlow, Strength and Humility; The Ethical Theory of Rabbi Kook vs. Nietzsche's Ethics of Power, in *Nietzsche in Hebrew Culture*, Y. Golumb ed., Jerusalem, (2002) p. 347-374

[34] יואל יעקובי, ערוץ 7, מראה כהן, 17.8.2006, נדלה 9.2.2023

.Yoel Yaakovi, *Sight of a Cohen*, Arutz 7, 17.8.2006, retrieved 9.2.2023

[35] צבי יהודה קוק, שיחות הרצי"ה, בתוך א. בזק מדבר בצדקה: שיעורים על שיחות הרצי"ה בנושא השואה, אילת, עמ' ב-יג

Tzvi Yehudah Kook, *Sikhot HaRatziah*, in A. Bazak, *Medaber Bitzdakah: Lessons on Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah's Talks on the Holocaust*, Eilat, (no date of print), p. 13-14

The term "prophet" would require a long explanation to convey the proper Jewish context. For us it will suffice [36] to say that a prophet here is not defined as a man with a divine message for the public, but as a man with a direct personal channel to God. See Moshe Haim Luzzato, Da'at Tvunot, paragraphs 177-189 in the Hebrew-English edition at Sefaria online Library, Retrieved 27.7.23

I must note that I do not mention Afghanistan lightly. Pashtuns are Bani Israel, the Lost Tribes of Israel, blood [37] brothers to Jews. Rav Kook wrote about the Lost Tribes who are like ancient Israelites, "the most ferocious of nations". I will elaborate on this theme in the future, God willing

A.I. Kook, *Letters*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem, (1962), p. 214 [38]

[39] קוק, אורות, אורות ישראל, א, א

Kook, *Orot*, Orot Israel, 1, 1

Yossi Klein-Halevi, *Like Dreamers: The Story of the Israeli Paratroopers Who Reunited* [40] (*Jerusalem and Divided a Nation*, Harper, New York, (2013)

[41] ראה עוז אלמוג, פרידה משרוליק: שינוי ערכים בחברה הישראלית, הוצאת חיל החינוך והנוער, רמת גן (2005).

See Oz Almog, *Farewell to Srulik: Changing Values among the Israeli Elite*, Education Corp. Press, Ramat Gan (2005).

[42] While the comparison to assimilationists was originally not mainstream, it was popularized in circles such those of Rabbi Tzvi Tau, and gradually became mainstreamed. I vividly remember it being voiced in the 90's.

[43] The most famous profile of this pioneering high-tech scene is Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*, Twelve Books, New York, (2009)

[44] יהודה ליאון אשכנזי, סוד מדרש התולדות, כרך ו, ירושלים (2015), עמ' 179

Yehudah Leon Ashkenazi, *Sod Midrash Hatoladot*, Vol 6, Jerusalem, (2015), p. 179

Judaism accepts converts, but we do not proselytize. Conversion is a difficult process meant to deter [45] half-hearted applicants

Genesis 24, 6. Although he studied Buddhism and met the Dalai Lama, Manitou did not fully develop the Far [46] Eastern archetypes

[47] אשכנזי, סוד מדרש התולדות, כרך ה', ירושלים (2015), עמ' 234

Ashkenazi, *Sod Midrash Hatoladot*, Vol 6, Jerusalem, (2015), p. 234

This was a central theme of the teachings of another student of Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah, the religious peacemaker, [48] Rabbi Menachem Froman

Y. Charvit, "The Moral Problem in Islam and its Resolution According to the Philosophy of Rabbi Yéhouda . [49] Léon Askénazi (Manitou)" in Bernard Dov Cooperman & Zvi Zohar (Eds), *Jews and Muslims in the Islamic World*, Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture 21, University Press of Maryland, 2013, pp. 145-158

.He leveled the same criticism far more fiercely against the Ultra-Orthodox [50]

:Recorded lecture and transcript available online (Hebrew) at [51]

מכון מניטו, מניטו בוידיאו בעברית: סיפורה של הזהות העברית, המפתח להבנת ההיסטוריה. נדלה 13.2.2023

Machon Manitou, *Manitou in Video in Hebrew: The Story of Hebrew Identity, the Key to Understanding History*. Retrieved 13.2.2023

See: Rachel Werczberger and Boaz Huss, *Israel Studies Review*, Winter 2014, Vol. 29, No. 2, Special Issue: New [52]  
Age Culture in Israel (Winter 2014), Berghahn Books, p. 1-16

.I learned Hindustani, among others, in the *Center for Middle Eastern Classic Music* in Jerusalem [53]

For detailed analysis of Israeli religiosity see the research on the website of the *Israel Democracy Center*, a [54]  
.leading Left-of Center think-tank

A leading figure in this trend is Rabbi Elhanan Nir, editor of a volume of essays of religious [55]  
(figures on their Indian experiences, *Mehodu Ve'ad Kan*, Rubin Maas, Jerusalem (2006

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