

Tora of Israel, Tora of Exile

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A child born into the Jewish people in this generation constitutes another link in the long chain of those who bore the torch of Jewish identity by choice. But this torch, when it reaches today's child, no longer attracts or excites him. We still treat Judaism with respect, for to do otherwise would be to shame our forefathers by declaring that their labors were in vain, their battles meaningless. But in Israel today, the relevance of the Jewish faith, its ability to illuminate life and give it direction, is understood to be the exclusive province of the "religious," a subculture bound to a world-view which appears obsolete.

Among other things, the belief in the inapplicability of Tora comes from the ignorance, prejudices and fears of the secular cultural elite, which projects its views of tradition through the media, academia and other cultural institutions. But this is not the whole picture: A number of the basic features of "religious" Jewish life as we know it today only reinforce this conception of tradition as an irrelevance.

The most conspicuous characteristic of today's traditional Jews is that their world contains an added dimension, one that is completely alien to the general culture. Religious Jews share the mundane world with the

secular population, and the deeper their involvement with secular society, the more concepts and values they share. Yet alongside this mundane world lies the world of the sacred—a system of obligations and prohibitions to which the religious Jew is likewise committed.

The mutual alienation of these two worlds is particularly evident when they come into contact with each other—or, more accurately, when they collide. The workings of El Al, Israel’s national airline, are seen as a purely secular matter, both by Jews who identify themselves as religious and by those who call themselves secular. A scheduled flight on the Sabbath, however, is an intrusion of the secular world into the realm of the holy. Even if many religious Jews believe El Al would increase its profits by cutting Sabbath flights, and bring arguments from Jewish tradition to support their claim, they do not see this issue as a way for tradition to contribute to El Al’s profitability. Instead, they see it as a head-on collision between two worlds, a collision that in turn underscores an almost universal assumption: The Tora has nothing to *contribute* to the success and well-being of Israeli society.

The second conspicuous aspect of religious life in Israel is the nature of the commandments themselves—the “living space” of traditional values, which in many respects is a world of technicalities. It often seems that the more “religious” a person is, the more he sees halacha—a term that translates more accurately as “path” than “law”—as a purely technical matter. This technical approach to life finds expression in a phrase common in religious circles, “meeting the demands of the law”—as if Jewish tradition were a regulatory agency demanding adherence to a detailed set of rules.

This technical aspect of halacha is often related to the kabalistic idea that the point of observing Jewish law is to restore the “higher worlds” to their original state of perfection. Since these worlds offer no clear feedback, common sense cannot guide us in repairing them. Therefore, the only way to ensure proper behavior is through a careful, precise and usually stringent adherence to a crystalline halachic system.

This idea also contributes to a third feature of “religious” life as we know it: The assumption, explicit or implicit, that the commandments are not intended to influence the world we live in. The secular realm is a world unto itself, and the commandments to some extent contend with it for living space. As a result, the yardstick for adherence to tradition becomes the resources and time one dedicates to “religious” activities—at the *expense* of “secular” ones.

Religious education today, in all its forms, seeks to reinforce a pupil’s predilection for “religious” activity. When asked whether the goal of observing Jewish law is to improve our lives and the world in which we live, or whether this world is merely a (slightly neglected) way station en route to the “world to come,” a religious instructor will almost always give a vague and indecisive answer. For even those who view the commandments as tools for *tikun olam* (improving the world)—a concept mentioned thrice daily in the traditional liturgy—do not mean “improvement” in the same sense in which discovery of a new medicine alleviates the suffering of the ill. Rather, the connection between Jewish law and reality is an indirect, mystical one: God blesses us because we observe his commandments. For whatever reason, the Creator has a special interest in the commandments, just as we have an interest in the happenings of this world, and he rewards their observance—sometimes in this world, sometimes not.

From this follows a fourth aspect of contemporary religious life in Israel: The emphasis placed on obedience, on the commitment to act in accordance with the Creator’s instructions. The old system of dividing the world between the *adukim*, or “rigorous adherents,” and “freethinkers” is still regarded as legitimate and used regularly by many in the religious community. In contrast with popular haredi rhetoric, the religious individual does not regard himself as a free man, but as a bound one—bound not only to his Creator, but also to tradition and the rabbis. Religious education devotes much energy to the question of how best to instill loyalty and obedience, and far less to openness and creativity. For many, the main problem with religious education is not the demand that a Jew be committed to the

will of the Creator, but the institutionalized quality these commitments assume in practice: One must be committed not only to a principle, but also to a precise pattern of behavior. Even in a case where common sense revolts because a certain value cannot be upheld within the accepted framework, this commitment is expected to persist.

The fifth feature of contemporary religious life is the relationship it engenders between individual and community. A shift in focal point from this world to the next also moves the focus from the Jewish people and humanity as a whole to the individual. Even halacha, the focus of life for the religious Jew, concentrates on the individual and his behavior. However, it does not follow that the religious community values *individuality*. On the contrary: The cult of the individual in Western society has scarcely penetrated the Orthodox world, which remains in principle a fortress of communal responsibility.

This sense of community, however, has not been fully integrated into the religious ethos—even among religious Zionists, who have placed the well-being of the state at the center of their worldview. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way Orthodoxy expresses itself in public life. For most ailments, the religious prescription is usually defensive, negative and localized: “Take care not to damage value X.” It offers no comprehensive conception of public life in a Jewish state. And because of this, religious individuals make no attempt to occupy key positions in the national leadership—positions that deal with foreign policy, defense, the economy or law.

All these aspects of religious life turn Jewish tradition into a teaching that is irrelevant to the major issues facing the contemporary Israeli. A Tora that has nothing to say about the mundane, secular world, and whose alternate realm—the world of the sacred—does not presume to influence this world directly, cannot be relevant. If we add to this a commitment to rigid frameworks and authorities, and a law whose essence is the fulfillment of technical demands, we can easily understand why tradition has become so unappealing in the Jewish state—the very place where it should carry the most influence.

II

The historian can easily pinpoint the momentous changes of recent centuries that drove Jewish tradition into the sanctuary of irrelevance: Enlightenment and emancipation, modern technology and its social repercussions, and the success of secular Zionism. The challenge, however, lies not in identifying the forces that influenced the tradition in this manner, but rather in identifying those factors that prevented a powerful and diverse tradition from responding *differently*—in a manner that would have succeeded in projecting the fundamental principles of the Jewish faith upon the new reality, as had happened previously in the face of great challenges (such as after the destruction of the Temple).

In recent times, Jewish tradition has not responded fully to new challenges in an appropriate manner. The redaction of the Mishna and Talmud and the termination of the chain of rabbinic ordination¹—events that took place in the centuries following the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth at the hands of the Romans—solidified the Oral Law, subduing its dynamic character in favor of a Judaism more suitable for preservation in exile. Great vitality remained, however; the ensuing 1,500 years witnessed the creation of an extensive and diverse literature in the spheres of halacha and homiletics, albeit within well-defined bounds. The sweeping challenges of the modern age, on the other hand, created the need for a renewed dynamism and for the authority to innovate—in other words, for those aspects of the tradition that have not existed in practice since the closing of the Talmud.

The absence of such a response has been attributed to many factors—fear of the Enlightenment, assimilation, Reform and so on—but perhaps the most important factor is one that has been little discussed: The development by Jewish leadership, over the course of many centuries, of a religious idea particularly suited to life in the dispersion, yet which, whether consciously or inadvertently, ended up contradicting many older principles of

the Jewish faith. Over the ages, this worldview, which we may call the “Tora of Exile,” played a vital role in the fashioning of Jewish life, along with—and at times, in place of—the religious ideas prevalent when the people dwelled in their land. This exilic Tora succeeded in making Judaism relevant over the many generations during which an entire people had to be maintained outside the stream of historical life. This same Tora of Exile has become the primary obstacle to the relevance of Judaism in the current generation.

III

Although part of the Tora of Exile was formulated deliberately by the religious leadership in response to the destruction of Jewish life in the land of Israel, another significant element consists of Jewish practice in its popular conception, a set of ideas that have become mainstays of religious life despite being unsupported by the authoritative rabbinic literature. Therefore, an honest examination of the original character of the Jewish faith—the “Tora of the Land”—requires removing the filters that modernity imposes upon our view of Judaism.

Especially helpful in this task is Maimonides, whose definition of the Jewish faith focuses on pure monotheism as its core idea. When Maimonides spoke of idolatry as the antithesis of Judaism, however, he was thinking less of polytheism than of the belief in intermediary forces that stand between man and the one God:

Mankind in the time of Enosh made a great error, and discarded the counsel of the sages of that generation. Enosh himself was among the errant. This was their error: They said, “Since God created these stars and celestial spheres to direct the world, placed them in the firmament and honored them, and since they are the attendants who serve him, it is fitting to

praise them, glorify them and give them honor. This is the desire of God, may he be blessed, to exalt and honor whoever exalts and honors him, just as a king wishes to honor those who serve him, which thus gives honor to the king himself.”²

Once people saw the celestial bodies as servants of God, writes Maimonides, they began to build temples to the stars, offer them sacrifices, praise and glorify them, and eventually bow down to them—all with the intention of fulfilling the desire of the Creator as they misunderstood it. This is the basic idolatrous error of mankind³: The notion that various intermediary powers impart protection, fertility or success, powers that are not the source of life itself. It is of no consequence if one ascribes this power to a god made of silver and gold, or to silver and gold themselves. The idea that something has the power to grant blessings, that there is some entity besides God to which one should bow down and subjugate one’s soul in order to merit reward—this is idolatry.

Monotheism, properly understood, does not mean merely replacing the idols with the intolerant rule of a single God. The God of Israel is not just another God, nor is he really foreign to mankind at all, but is instead the very source from which man’s life springs.⁴ Life, therefore, plays a central role in Judaism. The faith of Israel does not spread through the world as a message or holy writ around which adherents gather; the proper beliefs of Judaism are revealed only through life itself, through human examples, and even more so in the life of an entire nation. A nation that worships only the God of life, without intermediaries, unifies all of life’s aspirations—expansion, growth and well-being joined with morality and the repair of the world. According to the faith of Israel, the revelation of God *in the world* stands as the axis around which all history revolves. The arena for this revelation is not a desert cave far from civilization, but the life of an entire people fixed at the center of history and culture. This new faith that sprang forth from among the great civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt presented itself as an alternative to them—indeed, as *the* alternative.

IV

According to the Jewish faith, the world has an inherent purpose: To be brought to a state of perfection. The hoped-for era of perfection will be marked not only by the rectification of moral injustice, but also by the disappearance of the world's ambiguities: The power of the infinite will be revealed within the finite, and all the deeds done under the sun will be understood in their proper light. Scripture offers numerous allegories depicting the unity of heaven and earth that will be attained in such a better world: In the Song of Songs, for example, Israel (the representative of a humanity longing for repair) and its God are described as a woman and a man whose separation brings terrible isolation, and whose unification is erotic and tempestuous.

The importance of the repair of this world as a religious tenet is obvious: As long as one believes that redemption can occur only on a different plane, in a different world, while this world has no intrinsic significance, faith can never bring life to fruition. Nor can it ever be relevant to the questions that most trouble mankind. Concentrating upon this world means assuming responsibility for it and attests to a faith appropriate for human life—an approach that constitutes a revolution in the history of world religion.

But this revolution never fully got off the ground: Judaism itself was exiled from its national home and could no longer continue the effort to realize its faith. Christianity, which retained only some of the character of ancient Judaism after detaching itself and going its own way, took pains to neuter the issue of repairing the world, and indeed the Jewish attitude towards action in general. The Tora of Exile followed a similar path, preserving the idea of *tikun olam* but severely limiting its place in the rubric of Jewish life.

It would be incorrect to view *tikun olam* as an intrusion of the profane into the realm of the holy. On the contrary, improving the world is, in the Jewish view, itself a holy task, the fulfillment of the demands God has placed on his people. No contradiction exists between human and heavenly values; Judaism presents the human values as originating in the heavens. Moreover, the proper contemplation of reality leads to a recognition of the values which the Creator imprinted on the world. The worldview of ancient Judaism respects reality and learns from it, whereas philosophies that regard worldly values and heavenly values as contradictory cannot derive anything of ethical value from this world.

The outward characteristics of the Tora of the Land express this idea, which is at its very heart. The Tora of the Land also consists primarily of the commandments, but these instructions differ in important ways from those in the Tora of Exile. For one, the laws as originally understood comprise a social constitution. They address the people in terms of a national covenant, and the punishment for non-observance is always meted out within a national context.⁵ It is clear from the Bible that the commandments are intended to be fulfilled by the people of Israel dwelling in its land; the observance of the commandments while in exile is not part of the covenant between the Creator and Israel, nor can it lead to the realization of the great social goals for which the commandments aim.

The commandments are intended to act upon life and to interact with it, rather than to create an independent realm of “holy life,” such as became familiar to Jews in the dispersion. The majority of the commandments relate to agriculture and commerce, domestic affairs, clothing, interpersonal relations and the legal system. There are also many ritual commandments surrounding the operation of the national Temple and its service—the Temple was not understood as an alternative to life, but as its complement, as the place where this world connects with the source of its vitality, the place from which divine blessings emanate to the mundane world of granary and vineyard, court and crown. The rabbis relate that the windows of the Temple were constructed so that they widened outwards toward the

world to teach us that this Temple did not draw resources away from life like a black hole, an idea commonly accepted in pagan cultures. Judaism taught the reverse: The Temple of the Jews imparted life to the world.⁶

The Hebrew Bible—all its aspirations, its rewards and its punishments—concerns itself with the world in which we live. The “world to come” is entirely absent from it; in fact, the Hebrew Bible devotes only marginal attention to the question of life after death. In a world in which cults of the dead were prevalent, in which preoccupation with the world of the dead was commonplace, the Tora introduced the lucid central notion of repairing this life, reforming this world and achieving worldly goals. For even if the fruit of life’s efforts are fleeting for the individual, they are eternal for the nation as a whole.⁷

Of even greater significance is the Bible’s decidedly *untechnical* nature. True, it offers a wealth of commandments demanding precision. One gets the impression, however, that these resemble more the refinement of the artist, expressing inspiration and responsibility, than the mechanical pedantry that comes from fixating on the technical dimension as the principle itself. The exemplary figures presented in the biblical literature are individuals who successfully applied the religious conception of life to great acts of heroism or benevolence, not to punctilious observance of halacha. There are two reasons for this: First, the value of the commandments resides primarily in their being *laws*, that is, a pathway intended for an entire public. They are not necessarily a means of spiritual elevation for any given individual. But individuals are lifted to new spiritual heights by the qualities developed by the nation as a whole. Second, since biblical commandments are not technical in nature, a person’s righteousness is not judged on technical performance. The system of commandments found in the Tora established governmental structures, from the monarchy to the judicial system, but nowhere does Scripture require subservience to formal systems when they contradict the values for which they were established. The prophetic rebukes urged the people to return to morality, which in most instances meant acting *against* the conventions of society and its ruling structures.

V

From this description, we can see how great are the spiritual forces required to realize the faith of Israel. Those who accept the covenant must be mature, free and strong, so as not to fall under the spell of idolatry and the existential comfort through which it rules its adherents. In fact, the Bible depicts the periodic abandonment of the Creator by Israel, a nation unable to muster and maintain such strength. In the words of the prophet: “They have forsaken me, the Fount of living waters, and carved out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns which cannot even hold water.”⁸

According to tradition, it was the collapse of the Israel-God covenant that brought about the destruction of the Temple and the ancient Jewish commonwealth. However, Judaism rejects the notion—popularized by anti-nationalists after the Emancipation—that the destruction of ancient Israel presented the Jewish people with a unique opportunity for cultural renaissance. Even though R. Yohanan ben Zakai, in an attempt to ensure that the Jewish faith survived in exile, begged the Romans to spare the academy at Yavneh and its scholars, tradition does not support the notion that the Tora and the Jewish faith emerged unscathed. The rabbis of the Talmud declared: “Since Israel was exiled from its place—there is no greater negation of the Tora than this.”⁹ To them, the exile of Israel meant the negation of the Tora, the destruction of their faith, the desecration of the name of God. The destruction of the physical does leave room for the development of the spiritual—but what a wretched spirit it is which seeks life in physical death. Such a spirit is one of decay, of contradiction between this world and the world to come and between the source of life and the source of truth.

In the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem, Judaism succeeded in preserving its spirit. However, the need to construct modes of life that would preserve the nation in exile led to the creation of concepts which differed in many ways from the original Jewish faith. This recasting of Judaism, based

on a constant effort to distinguish between the present reality and the distant ideal, formed the basis of the Tora of Exile. Throughout the religious literature, one began to encounter expressions such as “at this time”—as opposed to “when the Temple stood”—and “this world,” referring principally to the exilic period.¹⁰ This distinction assisted the Jews in preserving the fundamental idea of Judaism, while at the same time enabling them to live with the demands of a different lifestyle.

In our own generation, however, when the time has come to return to the Tora of the Land, most traditional Jews have become so attached to the exilic Tora that they overlook the partial and problematic aspects of its nature. This confusion contributes in no small measure to the difficulties faced by the Jewish people in its efforts to return to a full life in its land.

VI

The most tangible component of Judaism is its system of commandments. Exile, however, caused the system to lose its significance. The commandments were intended to be observed in the land, and their purpose was to create a civilization in which the Divine Presence would dwell. Once the people left its land and the Divine Presence accordingly receded heavenward, the system of commandments became irrelevant.

Nonetheless, Jewish tradition required that the commandments be observed in exile as well. Yet this observance differed radically from observance in the land of Israel. In exile, the commandments no longer constituted a vehicle for the realization of values and for the repair of the world. Rather, they aided in preserving the flame of national identity under the siege of exile. In a famous teaching of the rabbis, God himself gives voice to this idea:

“Although I exile you from the land, let the commandments remain current for you, so that when you return they will not be new to you.” This is comparable to a king of flesh and blood who became angry with his wife, and sent her back to her father’s house. [Her father] said to her, “Adorn yourself with your jewels, so that when you return they will not seem new to you.” Thus says the Holy One to Israel: My sons, let the commandments remain current for you, so that when you return they will not be new to you. Similarly, Jeremiah said [31:20]: “Keep in mind the highway, the road that you have traveled.” Said the Holy One to Israel: For if you see the ways on which you have traveled and you repent, you will immediately return to your cities, as it is said, “Return, Maiden Israel! Return to these towns of yours!”¹¹

This is the first important principle of the Tora of Exile: The commandments are the means of national preservation. Therefore, the purpose of human activity shifts away from its effect on concrete reality. The observance of the commandments, as described in this rabbinic parable, has no intrinsic worth. Rather, its value in the present devolves from its importance in a future era. Thus the dichotomy between “this world” and “the Messianic era” becomes fixed in the consciousness of the nation. The commandments may benefit society, but their goals cannot be achieved in the foreseeable future. This leaves no choice but to concentrate on the *effort* one puts into one’s actions rather than on their results. Thus the creation of the concept of “this world,” as distinct from the better times foreseen in the national future, inevitably gave birth to the notion of the “world to come”—the afterlife, in which payment is received for what was done in this life.¹²

The retooling of Jewish norms for exile thus culminated in a legal framework severed from the laws’ original content. Since the goal was preservation, the framework soon overpowered the content—even when the intent was to preserve the content as well as the forms. But even if the commandments were understood to be mere tools and not the main substance of life, there remained a need for some force that could mold Jewish spiritual and ethical life in the absence of a full national ethos. This void was filled by the rabbinic law, with its focus on the responsibilities of the individual Jew.

This, then, is the second basic element of the exilic Tora: Its shaping force is not the original commandments themselves but the *halacha*—the tradition, primarily of rabbinic origin, which interpreted the commandments with a new focus on the individual and on the narrowed Jewish community. The particulars of this system have various sources, including scholarly commentaries on the commandments, the pietistic practices of sages and the time-honored customs of the diverse Jewish communities. As a whole, this system of law contrasts sharply with the original commandments. For, while the latter sought to act directly on life—to elicit all the constructive forces of the nation and the individual, all their potential for success and their love of life—the Tora of Exile is geared toward constructing a replacement for life.

In order to appreciate this move, one must understand that in exile, the Jewish people lived their lives in one place while dreaming of another, better one. In their minds, the Jewish people could do nothing but suffer until the Creator saw fit to renew the covenant and establish the promised society in the promised land. Therefore, the reasoning went, we should allow only our bodies to be present in this world; the soul must be left to purer, better, more optimistic spheres. Accordingly, study and prayer emerged as the two central pillars of the Tora of Exile—activities which vie for the time, resources and attention of the faithful Jew, and which built a comprehensive system for engaging in the biblical commandments, one which ultimately constitutes a *replacement* for the full national life in which such commandments were meant to exist.

The halacha also constitutes a replacement for real life in another sense, the third element of the exilic Tora: Those life forces which lost their meaning in the physical world live on in the observance of Jewish ritual, preserved as if in a nature reserve. As the rabbis taught: “Since the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One has nothing in his world except the four cubits of halacha.”¹³ These four cubits now encompass all that used to exist in the wider world: The light of the divine and the significance and worth of the world. The festival of Sukot serves as a fascinating example:

This holiday of the harvest, once the foremost expression of the Jewish celebration of life in the physical world, underwent a substantial “spiritualization” in exile, where it became the holiday of physical transience (booths) and spiritual redemption. Nonetheless, even in its present form, Sukot requires the observance of many laws which open the door to a diversity of experiences normally belonging to the mundane world. Thus the same Jew who during the rest of the year regards building as dirty work to be contracted out suddenly becomes an amateur builder, erecting a temporary home for himself and his family for the upcoming festival week, investing much effort in the project and talking expertly with his neighbors about the construction experience. The same Jew who regards nature as the silent witness to life lived according to the commandments, goes about selecting a citron—one of four species he is required to gather as part of the festival ritual—transformed into a botanist and esthete, his trained eye capable of passing judgment on its every yellowish-green bump.

These elements of the exilic Tora—a life devoted to an utterly distant purpose, the primacy of submission to a framework and the transformation of Jewish law into a substitute for “real life”—follow from the fundamental experience of exile: The inability of the Jewish people to actualize their covenant with their Creator, which was predicated on their existence as a nation in their own land.

One might say that all these characteristics of the exilic Tora could have been derived from the rabbinic parable of the king who sent away his wife. However, the exilic conception of the commandments is very rarely explicated in traditional literature. Although no one challenges such rabbinic statements nor their authority, it has clearly been preferable to downplay the true status of the commandments in exile, for fear of encouraging disrespect for the law.

The secret of the Tora of Exile’s power lies in the ignorance of its nature. Most Jews, like their opponents, are certain that by observing the halacha they are truly “observing the commandments.” Clinging to their legal framework enabled the Jewish people to maintain their existence, reinforcing Jewish

identity in exile while preserving the Tora of the Land in suspended animation for better times to come. This is identical to the parable of the woman alienated from her husband: By wearing her jewelry in her father's house, she strengthens her connection to her husband—and keeps the jewelry ready for the day of their reunification.¹⁴

VII

The Tora of Exile developed gradually over centuries, undergoing three main stages: The period of the Sages, that of the Rishonim (medieval scholars) and that of the Aharonim (later scholars).

The Period of the Sages. This era began early in the Second Temple period (fifth century B.C.E.) with the initial development of the Oral Law by the Men of the Great Assembly, and ended with the final editing of the Talmud and the decline of the intellectual center in Babylonia (ninth century C.E.).

The destruction of the First Temple in 587 B.C.E. at the hands of the Babylonians shattered the form of Jewish existence and the Israelite consciousness of the biblical period. This was, in fact, the turning point out of which the exilic Tora was born. The return to Zion and the establishment of the Second Temple never fully restored the previous circumstances, due to its limited nature: A sizable portion of the Jewish people did not return to the land of Israel, and, more significantly, the clear unity between life and faith which existed in the time of the First Temple was not restored.

The period of the Sages witnessed the early formation of the Tora of Exile; however, it was still relatively close to the Tora of the Land, as opposed to the fully exilic Tora of the periods that followed. During the first five hundred years of this period there was a functioning Jewish commonwealth, which necessitated a Tora that could govern the day-to-day life of a nation. Many of the rabbis who defined the character of this period's litera-

ture cherished memories of this Second Commonwealth, or took part in the efforts to restore it in what became known as the Bar Kochva rebellion in the second century C.E. As a result, the early teachings reflect a tension between the exilic and landed perspectives, between those who sensed the magnitude of the new era that had arrived, and those who saw the destruction as only a temporary setback in the national life. This was a transition period between the Tora of the Land and the Tora of Exile, characterized not by a clear distinction between the two, but by a blurring of the lines.

Where in the teachings of the rabbis do we see the creation of the exilic Tora? First, in the new concern with the “world to come.” While the Bible rarely refers to anything beyond the life of the individual or the nation in this world, the rabbis devoted much attention to man’s fate after death and to the compensation he receives in the next world. Especially well known is the dictum of R. Ya’akov: “This world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule, that you may enter the banquet hall.”¹⁵ The primary motivation for performing deeds is not the repair of this world and the establishment of a fitting abode for the Divine Presence in it, but preparation for the afterlife. One may argue that R. Ya’akov intended the “world to come” to refer to a future situation within the course of history. But regardless of the intent, he was clearly diverging from the worldview of biblical times, in which the goal and the means to achieving it were present within the same existential context.

Second, the rabbis assigned paramount importance to the study of Tora in the life of the individual Jew. This was expressly meant to supersede the centrality of deeds as expressed in the Bible. It was the Sages who first taught that the effort expended on the intellectual clarification of Temple sacrifices, for example, is equal in value to the offering of the sacrifice itself: “Whoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the sin offering, it is as though he had offered a sin offering himself.”¹⁶ According to the rabbis, the blessings promised in Leviticus as a reward for fulfilling the biblical commandments are dependent upon the *study* of the Tora. Thus, they interpreted the

Biblical statement, “If you follow my laws and faithfully observe my commandments” as follows: “If you follow my laws’—that you shall labor in [study of] the Tora.”¹⁷

This idea became so entrenched among the Jews of that era that by the time of the Talmud, the rabbis had begun to recast the figures of the Bible—whose greatness of character and courage had been painted in such glowing colors—as giants of Tora study, lest they be perceived as coarse and inferior individuals. Accounts of the bravery of biblical heroes were widely reinterpreted as manifestations of their scholarly prowess, as exemplified in the rabbinic portrait of Benaya ben Yehoyada—one of David’s warriors—who is described in the Bible as the one who “killed the two [sons] of Ariel of Moab and who went down into a pit and killed a lion one snowy day.”¹⁸ Although this verse is ambiguous, it clearly describes heroic exploits. The rabbis, however, present the smiting of the lion on a snowy day as a reference to Benaya’s breaking the winter ice in order to purify himself before engaging in Tora study.¹⁹ In the rabbinic teachings, both the heroes and villains familiar to us from David’s court were engaged not so much in warfare and acts of heroism as they were in Tora study—the heroes doing so properly, the villains distorting it. The mighty men surrounding Solomon’s couch, “sixty warriors of the warriors of Israel, all of them trained in warfare, skilled in battle,” likewise are depicted as scholars engaged in scholarly disputes.²⁰

Despite these emerging characteristics of the Tora of Exile, the basic melody of the Tora of the Land could still be heard clearly in the rabbinic teachings. The rabbis continued to possess a sympathetic understanding of reality, a sensitivity to the insights of the senses, and an understanding of the world of deeds as one in which one can find spiritual meaning. Although the Mishna and Talmud devoted much thought to abstract legal categories, in no way did the rabbis understand these as irrelevant or distinct from the universal discourse on various topics. For them, the Tora was no autonomous entity whose importance was wholly introspective; rather, it was a body of knowledge that spoke both about life and to it. The Tora of the Sages, the Oral Law, consistently took pains to be up-to-date and was

written entirely in the vernacular of the period—the Mishna in Hebrew, the Babylonian Talmud in Babylonian Aramaic and the Jerusalem Talmud in Palestinian Aramaic. The importance of this world to the rabbis is especially conspicuous in the blessings of the *amida* prayer, the silent devotion instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly, which is still the central prayer in the Jewish liturgy today. All of these blessings are directed at the correction of this world and the attainment of prosperity, justice, healing and wisdom in the earthly realm. Moreover, the rabbis maintained that a person's spiritual merit depends mainly on his deeds, and less on his faith, the intensity of his prayer or his diligence in study.

Through the Talmudic literature we come to know the rabbis as human beings capable of recognizing the esthetic and sensual values of the physical world, and who did not regard these values as alien or unimportant—whether they were describing the beauty of women depicted in the Bible, the personalities of Talmudic figures, the manners of the various non-Jewish nations, the grace inherent in the human or natural order or the clarity of a fine wine. These Jewish religious leaders possessed the ability to analyze foreign cultures and to contend with them, to speak with insight on matters of commerce and medicine, and were willing to enter into debates and dialogues with the greatest of Roman sages and rulers. In short, the rabbis were men of the world.

The Period of the Rishonim. The medieval period constitutes the second phase in the development of the exilic Tora. From the conclusion of the Talmud to the expulsion from Spain (eleventh to fifteenth centuries C.E.), the exilic Tora continued to develop and gradually came to dominate Jewish life. During this period, the congenial synthesis of cultures present in the Sages disappears, supplanted by an acute awareness of exile—complete exile. With this comes an awareness that the Tora possessed by the Jews differs from “life,” yet does not completely replace it. The dichotomy is total: The Jews find themselves in a state of constant tension between the world in which they live—their efforts to attain success in their ordinary pursuits—and their fulfillment of the Tora.

The cultural backdrop for this development, the medieval Christian and Muslim worlds, provided a suitable context for the sharpening of the split between body and soul, between the needs of this world and aspirations for the next. Here, there was no sharp division between Israel and the non-Jewish nations; instead, the normative divisions in all three societies rested in the alienation of religion from life. Both Jews and non-Jews built their religious worldviews on the principle that God had somehow become divorced from the world.

From this stage onward, the Oral Law no longer existed in its original sense: The now written and canonized Talmud, which directed the life of the Jewish people, had become divorced from continued creativity, growth and renewal—except within the confines of Talmudic scholarship itself. Of course, some rabbis of the period did score impressive achievements in realms beyond Tora study, such as poetry, astronomy, philosophy and affairs of state. Yet such wisdom did not enter the national canon as “Tora” per se, as essentially Jewish learning—in sharp contrast to the study of the Talmud, which became an integral part of the essence of Tora. The sources from which the Sages drew in their pursuit of arts and sciences were not found within the tradition, but in the surrounding culture.

The changed perception of the relationship between the Creator and his people in this period, which remains the norm to this day, is expressed in the liturgical poems (*piyutim*), lamentations (*kinot*) and penitential prayers (*slihot*) written during this epoch—writings that constitute one of the more important elements of the prayer book, especially on holidays. In the model depicted therein, the Jewish people adhere to the commandments despite the straits in which they find themselves, and the Creator protects his people, despite their sins. It is an implicit pact between two partners who have agreed to forgo the customary arrangements and act charitably toward each other. It is a covenant of unqualified devotion to God on Israel’s part and unqualified loyalty to Israel on the part of the Creator—a relationship very different from the covenantal system standing at the center of the Tora of the Land, a system based on communal reward and punishment, in which the loyalty

of the two parties depends upon the free choice of the nation from generation to generation. The heart of the old covenantal system did not consist of self-identification as a Jew per se, but of ethical acts and the rejection of idolatry. The new system contains no struggle against paganism and does not emphasize acts of this-worldly significance; its cardinal element is, rather, the very willingness of the nation to identify as Jews and to preserve the tradition as a sign of its continued dedication.

The Period of the Aharonim. The third phase in the development of the exilic Tora is the era extending from the publication of the *Shulhan Aruch* (c. 1550) to the present day.²¹ During this period, Jewish religious scholars all but ceased to engage in external disciplines; traditional Jews took almost no part in the general culture and showed no interest in it; and the Jewish identity, with all its difficulties, was perceived not only as a beloved identity, but as the only possible one. Jewish law became increasingly technical, detailed and marked by stringent embellishments and ascetic practices. Study became more abstract and complex and developed a strong tendency toward casuistry and inefficient methods of learning, over the objections of leading Tora scholars in each generation. The Tora of Exile dominated both religion and life; indeed, all aspects of life were enveloped by the Tora. More and more Jews revealed a sincere indifference to this world and matched this stance with a greatly increased interest in the practice of commandments and in future redemption.²² Thus began the springtime of the exilic Tora: A harmony developed between the Jewish people and its Tora in this new form—the harmony depicted so warmly in *Fiddler on the Roof*, for instance.

An example of the otherworldly tendencies of the Tora of Exile appears in the later rabbinic treatment of the Sabbath “third meal.” The rabbis of the Talmud obligated Jews to eat three meals on the Sabbath. By honoring the Sabbath with an additional festive meal (the ancients normally ate two meals per day), despite the difficulties which might be involved, they made the Sabbath a day of pleasure different from the rest of the week, as is suggested in Scripture. The later Jewish law, however, was incapable of regarding satiation and pleasure as the main purpose of this meal. The accent was

therefore shifted to the abstract value of conducting *three* meals, as opposed to any other number: The three meals were interpreted as corresponding to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or else to the three kabalistic aspects of the manifestation of the Divine Presence—attributes totally unconnected to the material or esthetic feelings of a person engaged in a repast. Consequently, the traditional view came to insist on the third meal as an absolute obligation. Even when partaking of this meal became unpleasurable, as a result of overeating or because short days brought the second and third meals too close together, the idea that such considerations might affect the obligation was rarely entertained—for the “third meal” had become a technical act which required a certain standard to be met, not an act of eating, with all its psychophysical meanings. Thus emphasis is still placed on the act—but the act is emptied of its true significance and linked instead to ethereal meanings and abstract definitions.

It should be emphasized that despite these developments, the Bible, Mishna and Talmud all retained their canonic standing in the Tora of Israel, joined by the writings of Maimonides and other medieval authorities. Moreover, a large portion of the material written in this period of exilic Tora does not contradict the important principles of the original Jewish faith, the Tora of the Land. The characteristics of the Tora of Exile came to dominate Jewish popular thought not through the rewriting or negation of the classical texts, but through a change in the attitudes most traditional Jews exhibited toward them. Laws were neither erased nor rewritten, but the new set of priorities, the degree of involvement in certain areas and the underlying assumptions governing these decisions transformed the later Jewish law into the Tora of Exile.

The modern picture of the exilic Tora was fashioned mainly in the centuries after the expulsion from Spain, when the cultural and physical trials in the lands of the dispersion almost completely overpowered the Jewish tradition. However, this was also the period in which the hardships and hopelessness of the exile built up expectations for a change of circumstances. This was the height of the crisis, the darkest moment of the night of exile, but it was also the moment in which the glimmering of redemption was perceived most pow-

erfully.²³ A well-known kabalistic depiction compares the end of the exile to the last hours of the night: The darkness deepens as the hour of sunrise draws closer. The intent of the metaphor is clear: At the apex of the development of the Tora of Exile, a change occurs—more and more Jews refuse to accept the exile and seek to bring it to an end. The spreading of kabalistic wisdom which characterized this period contributed to this, teaching many that it was their duty to bring redemption to the world—mainly through the force of their desire for it—and that they could use the power of special corrective prayers, or *tikunim*, to “correct” the exile of the Divine Presence. The widespread belief in the need to act in order to bring about the end of the dispersion, and the sense that the Jewish people possessed the ability to do so, eventually came to fruition in practical Zionism.

VIII

The Tora of Exile bore impressive fruit for many generations: It strengthened Jewish identity and gave the Jews a reason for their lives, even under the most difficult conditions. However, once the Jews returned to the land of Israel and the people of Israel rejoined world history, the Tora of Exile became deficient in ways with which we are all too familiar. The majority of the people of today’s Israel are, at best, connected to tradition only in a partial and troubled manner. On the other hand, despite many disappointments and no small number of problems, the State of Israel still stands as the most important feature on the Jewish landscape in the eyes of her supporters and opponents alike. The road back to an identity preserved only by the Tora no longer exists.

The aims of secular Zionism in many respects paralleled those dictated by the idea of returning to the Tora of the Land. In the minds of many Jews, Zionism restored honor to reality; it returned the Jewish people to the fundamental principle of *derech erez*—occupation with this world—as well as

to an awareness of the spiritual significance of the material world in the land of Israel. But this trend never developed to maturity. Zionism, as it evolved, lacked a sense of continuity with and commitment to the traditions of Israel, due to its inherent critique of traditional Jewish life in exile. Perhaps if it were not for the confusion of the exilic Tora with the Tora of the Land, secular Zionism would not have felt compelled to lash out at tradition: It would have sufficed to proclaim that the time had come to return to the Tora of the Land.

The Jews, as a people, have lost much in the transition from the Tora of Exile to secular Zionism. A state has been built which preserves but little of the most profound qualities of the Jewish people. Tradition and faith exist, for the most part, in a repressed manner. Meanwhile, the nobility of life, the cultural profundity, the Jewish genius—these have all but disappeared. No impressive spiritual or intellectual developments have taken the place of the abandoned exilic Tora. In the heady days of Zionist activism surrounding the birth of the Jewish state, the movement managed to produce poetry and philosophy. But today, the Israeli public lacks the intellectual vitality needed to face the challenges of the next century.

Where has the Jewish genius gone? Why does the State of Israel not have an excellent government, a flourishing economy or a society of high moral norms—in short, a great civilization?

The answer is that as members of the Jewish people, the nation that first raised the banner of life in world thought, we cannot make do with a simple, technical national life. We are incapable of establishing a tolerant and tranquil Western democracy in Israel. We are not good at copying, and we do not have the inclination for a “normal” national existence. For us, building a meaningful life can no longer be postponed to the future, to the “Messianic era” or the “world to come”; we have already returned to the world and are once again within it. The challenge facing us therefore is to encounter the essence of life once again. The search for meaning in the here and now does not discriminate between “secular” and “religious” Jews. Many among the “secular” are searching for values and meaning, despite the somewhat

ludicrous attempts by members of the secular Israeli elite to establish a Levantine-European *dolce vita*, a culture of wine connoisseurs and alternative theater, in the belief that one can always count on the masses to remain enthralled by mind-numbing television programs and the state lottery.

The “religious,” in contrast, tend to deride the emptiness of secular life, proposing in its stead the framework offered by Orthodoxy. But this life, too, is built on the assumption of an insignificant present: The here and now is still only a means of attaining a better life in the distant future. The fact that the majority of Jews in Israel call themselves secular enables the religious public to exempt itself from the attempt to rediscover the purpose of life in the present. The avowed goal of the religious public is for everyone to become Orthodox, after which, it is supposed, everything will be fine.

This habit of postponing the issue to a later date is conspicuous even in the national-religious school system²⁴: The task of building a child’s loyalty to the religious world, with all its inherent difficulties, is left by the elementary schools to the yeshiva high schools. The latter, in turn, concern themselves with what they understand to be the most important task of all—ensuring that their young men continue on to the ultimate institution, the “hesder” yeshiva (which combines religious studies with military service), or else to a non-military, higher-level yeshiva.

But what happens there? Nothing. The young Jew continues to be educated about the need to preserve the religious framework, but he is not given the tools for projecting his faith onto his life, in all its aspects, and thereby transforming his beliefs into a source of life for him and his surroundings. And the higher-level yeshiva, despite its pretensions, does nothing to shatter the dichotomy between Tora and life.

The situation in the religious-Zionist community at large is even more complex. The religious-Zionist public, which adheres to the Tora on one hand, but participates in the different lifestyles of the workplace, the army or the government on the other, has plunged into the confusion of internal contradiction. The community no longer declares that the world is unimportant, since Zionism has taken it upon itself to return the Jewish people

to the historical arena; however, the tradition to whose frameworks the religious public is committed continues to regard the present world as of marginal importance.

As a result, all values connected to this world—from the proper functioning of the government to the effectiveness of the army to the public's intellectual achievements—come to be regarded as part of the secular side of life, with religion restricted to those spheres which are its exclusive domain: The synagogue, the rituals, the prohibitions. It becomes easier to be observant if religion takes no substantial part in any value-oriented action in the “secular” realm. A scientist, political leader or army officer finds himself torn between two sources of moral authority, the secular and the religious, both vying for his loyalty.

But even someone uninvolved in value-laden pursuits in his secular life becomes accustomed to a life of inner contradiction. Since it is in the nature of the Tora of Exile to distance itself from life, the weights and measures employed in determining Jewish law sometimes fail the test of common sense. The juxtaposition of the overtly comprehensible reasoning that drives business or family decisions with the frequently unfathomable calculations that determine religious life only widens the split in the soul of the religious individual.

The issue of the territories captured by Israel in the Six Day War provides an example of this duality. While the religious Zionism of 1948 accepted the secular decisions of the state's leadership on every issue not clearly of a religious nature, the generation of religious Zionists who grew up after 1967 redefined the political sphere as a religious realm. The problem, however, is that instead of returning to the Tora of the Land—that is, to a conception of the Tora as relevant to mundane reality—the new religious Zionism adopted the opposite line of thought. It transferred the question of the land of Israel to the list of “religious” subjects—those topics dealt with in a legalistic, technical, almost ritual matter.²⁵

This move by elements in the religious community greatly strengthened the community's ability to fight for nationalist ideas, by mobilizing the force of tradition on behalf of the struggle for the land. However, it also

created a serious problem: Discussion of this issue in religious quarters has ceased to be realistic. To this day, no attempt has been made by the settlers, and certainly not by Tora scholars, to present a comprehensive strategic conception of the State of Israel in opposition to that offered by the left. An understanding of the forces at work in the Middle East, the ability to maneuver between the superpowers, the structure of the IDF and the conditions conducive to waging a military struggle—all these vital topics are considered unimportant precisely because land has become a “religious” issue—that is, one not pertaining to this world.

IX

We may summarize the current crisis of values by pointing to an unspoken symbiosis between religious and secular societies. Religious society draws all its worldly culture from secular society: Poetry, literature, public norms, patterns of thinking and a worldview built on science and Western thought. Traditional Judaism in Israel today plays on a secular field, on which it is understood to be the “religious” player. Notwithstanding all the complaints religious Jews raise against the content of secular culture, it has not until now presented a meaningful alternative; such an alternative could come into being only if the Tora were to extend its purview beyond the “four cubits” of the exilic Jewish legal system. Secular society, for its part, also benefits from the present division of labor. The question of who we are and the significance of our Jewish identity troubles many secular Jews, but for the most part, it is not an issue of burning personal relevance. Secular Israelis feel themselves free to lift high their various universalistic banners, since they know they can rely on the religious to carry the standard of national culture, a standard they realize must be borne by someone.

This symbiosis, however, cannot be maintained forever. Secular Israelis have begun to resent the religious for carrying the flag of Judaism, and themselves for ignoring it. Similarly, many among the religious are revolted by the manner in which the secular reserve the worldly sphere for themselves, in particular Zionism and the rules of the cultural-political game. And to an increasing degree, the religious understand that they have no alternative of their own.

The Tora of the Land can constitute the common ground between the religious and the secular, the point of encounter between Tora and life, between the ancient Jewish faith and man's creative ability in the postmodern era. The Oral Law, the vital force connecting heaven and earth, can be resurrected by the secular and the religious working as one. They can use it to bring truth to earth and nurture it, and together build a Jewish civilization in the land of their forefathers, reestablish the ancient covenant between Israel and God and restore the world's admiration to the worldly Jerusalem.

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Notes

1. The Babylonian Talmud was completed in the fifth century C.E. Maimonides writes: "Ravina and R. Ashi [the concluders of the Talmud] were the last of the great sages of Israel who transmitted the Oral Law, made decrees, issued regulations and introduced customs in all Israel, in all their habitations. After the court of R. Ashi, who composed the Talmud—which was completed in his son's time—Israel was widely dispersed throughout all the lands ... and Tora study diminished ... and every court which existed after the Gemara ... its jurisdiction did not extend through all Israel ... but all Israel is obligated to follow everything in the Babylonian Talmud...." Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Introduction.

The chain of *smicha* in the land of Israel was broken, most likely, in the early fourth century C.E. See Nahmanides' comments on Maimonides, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, commandment 153. The tradition of *smicha* existed in a limited way in Babylonia as well, though it most likely declined and ceased in this same period.

2. *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of Idolatry 1:1.

3. This resembles the “basic conceptual error” of Adlerian psychology. There the term refers to the concretizing of a person's outlook during the first years of life which makes his sense of self dependent on specific situations—success, parental support, integrity, usefulness, etc. The “fixated” person directs all his resources to the attainment of that situation in which he feels self-worth; as long as he is trapped within his basic error, he can never realize his capabilities in other ways.

4. The phrase “other gods” (*elohim aberim*), which frequently appears in the Bible in reference to idolatry, was interpreted by the Jewish sages in the following alternative manner: “Other gods”—in that they are ‘other’ to those who worship them. Similarly, it says [Isaiah 46:7], ‘If they cry out to [the idol], it does not answer; it cannot save them from their distress.’” *Sifrei* Deuteronomy, 43; *Mechilta*, Yitro 6.

This idea has been developed at length in relation to the accepted notion of the divine in Western civilization according to both Christianity and Spinoza. See R. A.Y. Kook, “The Knowledge of God” (*Da'at Elohim*), in *Eder Hayakar Vikevei Hatzon* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1967).

5. Deuteronomy 13:15 and 17:4; Deuteronomy 17:13 and 21:21.

6. This is based on the rabbinic teachings on I Kings 6:4 in Menahot 86b (according to the emended version therein) and Rashi *ad locum*, s.v. “Shkufim.”

7. For the “world to come” in the Bible, see the excellent essay of Yisrael Rosenson, “On the Question of Scriptural Mention of the ‘World to Come,’” in *Derech Efrata* 2 (1992), pp. 13-30.

8. Jeremiah 2:13.

9. Hagiga 5b.

10. “This era” (*hazman hazeh*) and “this world” (*ha'olam hazeh*) are common phrases in the written and spoken languages of the tradition. The latter is extremely prevalent throughout the homiletic and ethical literature (and has been adopted with the same meaning in modern Hebrew), in contrast with the “world to come.” Only rarely does it appear in contrast to the redemption. The phrase “this era” is accepted in all types of halachic literature and expresses the rabbinic attitude toward the fact that in contradistinction to the basic axioms upon which the commandment system is based, we no longer live in the land of Israel, nor do we have a Sanhedrin, a Temple, the opportunity to apply the laws of sacrifices and ritual purity, judicial authority in capital cases or pilgrimages to the Temple. The works of applied halacha always concern themselves with “this world.”

11. *Sifrei* Deuteronomy, 43.

12. It should be noted that the use of the phrase “the world to come” to denote life after death is not considered self-evident in Jewish religious literature. The early Sages understood the phrase in at least three ways: The world as it will be after the resurrection of the dead; the world as it will be after the conclusion of the exile (prior to the resurrection of the dead); and the world in which the individual arrives after he dies. The debate also relates to the meaning of the rabbinic dictum: “All Israel has a share in the world to come.” This and similar teachings present the world to come as the place in which recompense for actions in this world will be received. It is not coincidental that the further we distance ourselves from our national life and the more profound the exile becomes, the more firmly the meaning of the “world to come” becomes entrenched in popular consciousness as the “world of souls.” From a certain perspective the “world of souls” is more easily attainable, as it is available to man on the basis of his personal actions and good intentions, rather than being dependent upon the society in which he lives.

It should also be noted that this personal “world of souls” is perceived, in most instances, as a tangible location where all the righteous meet on one side and all the wicked meet on the other.

13. R. Hiya bar Ami in the name of Ula, Brachot 8a.

14. *Sifrei* Deuteronomy, 43.

15. Mishna Avot 4:16.

16. R. Yitzhak, Menahot 110a. In the same passage, Rava adopts a more extreme position, declaring that “whoever occupies himself with Tora [study] does not need” the sacrifices. See also the dictum of Resh Lakish there.

17. Leviticus 26:3; *Sifra, ad locum*; Rashi, *ad locum*.

18. II Samuel 23:20.

19. Regarding Benaya ben Yehoyada, see Brachot 18a-b.

20. R. Shmuel bar Nahmani in the name of R. Yonatan, Yevamot 109b; Sanhedrin 7b. The passage quoted is Song of Songs 3:7-8.

21. The *Shulhan Aruch* is believed to be the first composition in the Jewish tradition never to have been transcribed by hand: It was sent directly to the printer. To many, this fact marks the beginning of the period of the Aharonim.

22. The expulsion from Spain was perceived by the Jews of the exile as a cataclysmic upheaval of their world, and consequently as a call for redemption. An important result of this shock was the spiritual center established in Safed in the wake of the expulsion. The center regarded itself as the first generation of the period of the redemption, and for a time even renewed the institution of *smicha* (an innovation which proved transitory). The contemporaneous activity of R. Isaac

Luria in Safed also fits into this context. His activity was to be of tremendous importance in Jewish history due to the influence of his teachings and personality. His lifetime marked the start of an accelerated spread of the study of Kabala through the Jewish diaspora, which gave birth to all succeeding Jewish movements of importance, both positive and negative: Sabbateanism, Hasidism, the disciples of the Vilna Gaon and, indirectly, Zionism.

The rise of the influence of Kabala and its study may illustrate, more than anything else, the paradoxical connection in the period of the Aharonim between the withdrawal from the world, on one hand, and the increased interest in bringing about the redemption, on the other. This is pronounced in the practice of *tikun hatzot*, which is described extensively in the Zohar and is common in both the East and the West. This custom involves rising in the middle of the night to recite supplicatory prayers and lamentations over the destruction of the Temple and then studying Tora until daybreak. In contrast with the regular prayers, this midnight practice was intended to effect a concrete historical change—to bring forth the Divine Presence from exile and thereby awaken the redemption. Arising at an unusual hour in the night symbolizes the initiative taken by the Jew in order to bring about the redemption on the one hand, and on the other, the negation of the importance of ordinary life, which requires uninterrupted rest at night.

23. Cf. R. Yermia, Sanhedrin 24a.

24. This refers to that part of the religious (*dati*) public which is not haredi (“ultra-Orthodox”). The community is known in Israel as “national-religious” because it contends with the confrontation between the sacred and modern life. The majority of the haredi public attempts to avoid any encounter with “secular life,” and even more so to avoid legitimization of the current reality and the idea that we are no longer in the exile. For example, the expression “Since the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One has nothing in his world except the four cubits of halacha” is better known among the haredi public as “The Holy One has nothing in his world except the four cubits of halacha.” It is understood by the haredim as a positive statement. A more extensive discussion of this matter would, however, exceed the scope of the present essay.

25. See the commentary of Vered Noam in *Nekuda* 198 (Tishrei 5757 [1996]), pp. 69-71.