

# The End Point of Zionism

## • • • *Ethnocentrism and the Temple Mount*

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**ABSTRACT:** Zionism has always displayed a complicated relationship with the Temple Mount. While secular socialist Zionism wanted little to do with the site for pragmatic reasons, right-wing and guerilla Zionist groups considered it, before the founding of the state, as the embodiment of Jewish sovereignty over the Holy Land. And although Religious Zionism, until very recently, shied away from the site, over the past decade tremendous changes in this public's attitude have taken place, leading to intense interest and activity concerning it. This article surveys past and present attitudes toward the Temple Mount, studying its recent rise as a focal point for ethnonational yearnings, and analyzing these developments vis-à-vis the secularization process.

**KEYWORDS:** ethnic nationalism, fundamentalism, Judaism, secularization, Temple Mount, Zionism

Gershom Scholem opined in 1959 that one overriding question accompanies the Zionist project: "Whether or not Jewish history will be able to endure the entry into the concrete realm without perishing in the crisis of the messianic claim which has virtually been conjured up from its depth" (1971: 36). The entry into history to which Scholem refers is the establishment of the State of Israel and the ingathering of the Jews in the Diaspora, both echoing, and for some indeed realizing, the ancient Jewish messianic myth of the return to Zion. In 1967, Scholem's question became dramatically more significant with Israel's sweeping conquest of the West Bank and Jerusalem in the Six-Day War.

For Scholem, religion, myth, and even single Hebrew words were not simply agreed-on tools for the utilitarian use of humanity but rather principal entities with a life of their own. As his famous letter to Franz Rosenzweig



testifies, Scholem had no doubt that the Hebrew language would not lose its essential connection to the workings of the divine realms (Scholem [1926] 1992: 59–61). In writing about the conjured-up “messianic claim,”<sup>1</sup> Scholem alerts his readers to the force of the messianic Eros and Zionism’s susceptibility to its allure, particularly when the Jewish people are again in the Land of Israel. The sudden availability of Judea and Samaria after 1967 would position the secular Zionist movement in direct confrontation with its intrinsic logical end: the actual possibility of a complete return to Judaism’s mythical past.

From its inception, the Zionist movement has spoken in two voices—one pragmatic, seeking a haven for millions of persecuted Jews, and the other prophetic, attributing redemptive significance to the establishment of a sovereign state. The shapers of Western culture, from Kant to Marx, perceived individual liberation in an egalitarian regime as the proper secularization of religious salvation. For the Jewish collectivity, however, this turned out to be a false hope, and with the rise of anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century, the Zionist movement took up the project of establishing a national home for the Jewish people (Shimoni 1995). However, while most Zionists were secular, their plan for an independent state bore religious, indeed messianic, implications.

This is a salient point. One of the fundamental adjustments that the Christian tradition made while outgrowing its Jewish progenitor concerned the concept of redemption. While in the Jewish tradition redemption was always a communal, indeed national, project (e.g., freedom from slavery in Egypt, return from exile to the Land of Israel), for Christianity redemption was primarily an individual deliverance from sin won through faith in Jesus Christ and by membership in the true church. The Protestant Reformation accentuated this orientation, emphasizing faith alone (*sola fide*) as the key to redemption, while interpreting the scriptures (*sola scriptura*) became the responsibility of the individual. A religiosity of intense personal commitment became a major force in European society, underscoring the autonomy of the individual and their ability to constitute a personal relationship with the divine, and as such with truth (Taylor 2007: 90–145).

With the progression of this vector of individual autonomy and subjective connection to the source of ‘truth’, the Christian messianic message became a gospel of universal enlightenment based on principles of rationalism.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Kant can proclaim the evolution of Christianity into universal rational enlightenment: “We have good reason to say ... that ‘the kingdom of God is come unto us’ once the principle of the gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith to the universal religion of reason, and so to a (divine) ethical state on earth, has become general” (Kant [1793] 2003: 128;

Schmidt 2009). Not only is the divine here reduced to the ethic, as such it is also founded upon the strict autonomy of the individual. Redemption becomes the private project of the modern subject.

Not so for the Zionist movement, which desired a collective solution to ‘the Jewish problem’—that is, an independent national Jewish state. This solution, however, bore messianic implications, for it is precisely the founding of an independent Jewish kingdom that is the essential sign of Jewish redemption (Ravitzky 1996; Schmidt 2009). Indeed, one of the most famous and authoritative injunctions in the Talmud concerning the days of the messiah decrees, “There is no difference between this world and the days of the Messiah except bondage of foreign powers” (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakoth: 34b), which Maimonides, in his *Introduction to Perek Helek*, interprets (and codifies as an official ruling) as the liberation from foreign rule, that is, political independence. Christians, therefore, will receive their deliverance, and the Jews—including those who would rather leave their religion in the museum of history—will receive theirs (Raz-Krakotzkin 2009).

Well aware of the messianic implications of their efforts, the shapers of the Zionist movement tried to neutralize them from the outset. In his book *Zion in Zionism*, Motti Golani discusses the ambivalent attitude toward Jerusalem harbored by Zionist leaders. Theodor Herzl himself was not convinced that the establishment of a Jewish political entity in Palestine would best be served by Jerusalem’s designation as its capital. During his visit to Jerusalem in 1898, he drafted a plan for the internationalization of the city, which would become a center for “faith, love and science” (Golani 1992: 11). It is according to this vision that Herzl (1902) conceives the Temple as a “House of Peace ... where international assemblies would convene.”

Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, wanted as late as 1937 to give up Jerusalem altogether and internationalize the city. Chaim Weizmann, who would become Israel’s first president, explicitly said he “would not accept the ancient city [of Jerusalem] even if it would be given as a gift” (Shragai 1995: 19). Ben-Gurion later conceded that a Jewish state without Jerusalem as its capital is close to an antinomy but was very happy to agree to divide the city in such a way that the holy sites would be left in Arab hands. He maintained that if the holy places were under Israeli sovereignty, Zionism would be colored by religion and would not be able to design its capital according to its progressive worldview: “A Jewish Jerusalem, free from ... the ancient city that has no use but by turning it into a cultural, spiritual and religious museum of all religions ... would galvanize our municipal creative talent” (Golani 1992: 25). Years later, during the Six-Day War, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan hesitated at length before ordering the capture of the Temple Mount.<sup>3</sup> “What do I need all this

Vatican for?" he famously said, expressing the classic Zionist approach to the subject (Shragai 1995: 18).

Nevertheless, there were also voices that demanded not only sovereignty over all of Jerusalem but also the completion of the redemptive process by force of arms. Before Israel's establishment, such calls emanated from the extreme right wing of the Zionist movement. In the 1930s, figures like the journalist Abba Ahimeir and the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, the founders of the Brit Habiryonim movement, staged demonstrations in which the shofar was blown at the Western Wall at the end of every Yom Kippur (as it is in the synagogue), a custom later picked up by the right-wing Irgun underground militia led by Menachem Begin (Falach 2010).

In *The Principles of Rebirth*, a concise manifesto that Avraham 'Yair' Stern wrote as a constitution for the Lehi, the far-right prestate underground organization he headed, Stern set forth eighteen points that in his view would be essential for the Jewish people's national revival. The eighteenth and final principle calls for "building the Third Temple as a symbol of the era of full redemption" (Falach 2010: 101–102).

## Mythical Zionism

A point worth noting is that these modern enthusiasts of the Temple were not themselves religiously observant, at least not in Orthodox terms. They aspired not for a religious revival but for a national one, and used Jewish mythical sources to fuel their passion for political independence. For them, the Temple was an axis and focal point around which 'the people' must unite.

In a crucial and fundamental sense, however, they simply took secular Zionism to its logical conclusion—and in so doing, turned it topsy-turvy. As noted above, Jewish redemption is classically founded on renewed Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land. According to tradition, one measure of this sovereignty is the establishment of a Temple and a monarchical government descended from the House of David. Zionism, at least of the national, secular sort, wanted to make do with political independence in Israel but to stop midpoint en route to a monarchy and the Temple is largely arbitrary, based as it is on pragmatic logic and liberal-humanist values. For those who don't believe in realpolitik and are not humanists, the push toward the 'end of times' is perfectly logical. That, though, is the point at which hyper-Zionism becomes post-Zionism.

As Baruch Falach shows, one ideological-messianic line connects Ahimeir, Greenberg, and Stern to Israel Eldad (a nationalist ideologue and writer who worked with Greenberg and published a seminal right-wing

periodical), and then to Shabbtai Ben-Dov and the Jewish underground organization of the early 1980s that, among other goals, wanted to blow up the Dome of the Rock (Falach 2010).

In the figure of Ben-Dov—a formerly secular Lehi underground man who became a highly original and radical religious Zionist thinker—the torch passes from secular nationalists with a fascist bent to religious nationalists with a messianic bent. It was Ben-Dov, turning from secularism to Jewish Orthodoxy himself, who ordered Yehuda Etzion, a member of the 1980s Jewish underground, to blow up the third-holiest site in Islam in order to force God to bring redemption (Inbari 2012: 53–54). “If you want to do something that will solve all the problems of the People of Israel,” he told him, “do this!” And Etzion duly set about planning the deed (H. Segal 1987: 51).

## Two Strands of Romantic Activism

This apocalyptic underground messianism differs from the messianism of Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful, the progenitor of the religious Zionist settler movement). Loyal to the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) and to their interpretation by his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982), Gush Emunim developed a *mamlakhti* (statist) approach, according to which the state is the actualization of divine will and the will of the (Jewish) people is collectively directing it in the divinely ordained direction. As such, even though Kook and his followers alone understand the political reality and its reflection in the upper worlds, it is not for them to impose on the nation of Israel measures for which it is unready (Aran 2013; Fischer 2007). As settler/activist Ze’ev Hever put it, after the underground was exposed, “We are allowed to pull the nation of Israel after us as long as we are only two steps ahead of it, no more” (H. Segal 1987: 238).

Accordingly, in political terms the settlement project in Judea and Samaria can be considered pioneering but not revolutionary (Fischer 2007). Indeed, the settlement enterprise had at its inception the support of large sections of the Labor movement, as well as of such iconic cultural figures as the poet Natan Alterman and the composer/songwriter Naomi Shemer.

This was not the case with Temple matters, which are far more remote from the heart of the public. In addition, Kook-style messianism shunned the Temple Mount for halachic reasons. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, like his father, ruled it forbidden to visit the Mount. One of the leading figures of Gush Emunim, Hanan Porat, liked to tell and retell how he approached Rabbi Zvi Yehuda after the 1967 war and asked him whether it was time to study the tractate of Jewish law regarding the building of the Temple. “We will have

many more years of studying the laws concerning kings and wars,” said the rabbi famously, referring to the general laws for statecraft and war (Abramovitch 2012). Aviner (2008: 7) remembers the rabbi’s response on being asked whether the Israeli flag should fly on the Temple Mount:

The look in his eyes was full of pain and wonder for being humiliated by these sort of questions and replied firmly: “let us assemble in the name of our God!” (Psalms 20:6) ... the inquirer asked again: certainly “‘let us assemble in the name of our God,’ but shouldn’t we hold the Israeli flag while doing so?” The Rabbi patiently repeated: “I told you, let us assemble in the name of our God,” denouncing any comparison between the holiness of the Temple Mount and general issues concerning the Land of Israel.

The driving ethos at the base of the underground messianism is therefore different than that of Gush Emunim. As Shlomo Fischer shows, mainline religious Zionist Kookism founded its political ethos on two main ideological-political orientations, both particular interpretations of different European philosophical orientations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are “1) The notion of the General Will and the revolutionary (Rousseauvian) politics which devolves from that; 2) The Hegelian notion of the state as the realization of God” (Fischer 2007: 216). In contrast, for Eldad, Ben-Dov, and Etzion the messianic drive does not base itself on the will of the people but rather on the thrust of the Nietzschean *übermensch*. This is the avant-garde, charismatic activist who, in their eyes, is the modern equivalent of the biblical prophets, holding prophetic spirit and divine charge (328–340). This character—a role Etzion would have played had his plans to demolish the Dome of the Rock succeeded—does not wait for the ‘general will’ of the public to follow him but takes initiative and acts in ways that may be completely contrary to the will of the majority of the people but that will force them to ‘awaken’ and realize their true calling and destiny. The prophetic leader is, as it were, ahead of his time, and as such compresses the time left until full redemption.

Etzion himself was an anomaly in the world of Gush Emunim, and there was great astonishment among the settlers when his plot to destroy the Muslim holy sites was revealed. The ideas of the 1980s Jewish underground were extreme at the time not only in terms of the violence they manifested but also in their concrete interest in the Temple Mount. Such a relation with Judaism’s most holy site was virtually unheard of then, especially among the religiously observant.

When the members of the Jewish underground were arrested and their plans exposed, they were fiercely attacked by Rabbi Avraham Shapira, Israel’s Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi and successor to Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook

as head of the Merkaz HaRav yeshiva. Shapira called them “presumptive simpletons acting on matters of salvation and belief in accordance with ideas that will aggrieve all who hear them.” In a personal visit to the arrested members of the underground, Shapira tried to explain to them that “the settlement of the land is a divine commandment imposed on each and every one [of the Jews]. Not so the matter of the Temple Mount. This is of another order of calculations, with esoteric issues that we do not understand” (H. Segal 1987: 232). This approach was the simple consensus in the ranks of Religious Zionism regarding the Temple Mount until recently.

### The Holy as the Forbidden

Such an approach was unequivocal not only among religious Zionists. Both before and after 1967 all the leading *poskim* (rabbis who issue halachic rulings), both ultra-Orthodox and religious Zionist, decreed it forbidden to visit the Temple Mount. This was reiterated by all the great rabbinic figures of recent generations—Rabbis Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Ovadia Yosef, Mordechai Eliyahu, Eliyahu Bakshi Doron, Avraham Shapira, Zvi Tau, and others.

Indeed, as late as 1991 the religious Zionist Rabbi Menachem Froman (1991) wrote, in an effort to assure Palestinians that the settlement movement does not pose any threat to the Dome of the Rock, that “in the view of the National-Religious public [there is] an opposition to any entry to the Temple Mount ... We express our relationship to the holiness of the Temple Mount not by crossing over into it, but by withholding ourselves from it.”

Halachically the religious proscription against ascending the Temple Mount is related to matters of purity and impurity, but even without delving into them it should be clear that the sacred requires distance, not contact. What is sacred is often defined as that which is forbidden and banned (Durkheim 1915), and what can be more sacred in Judaism than the Temple Mount? The holy is fenced, marginalized. As Rabbi Froman writes, reverence calls for a halt, a veneration from afar. As written in the Torah, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for thou charged us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it” (Exodus 19:23). Moses makes a clear correlation between the sanctification of the mountain and the prohibition on all but him to ascend it.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the first movement struggling to change the status quo on the Temple Mount did not emerge from the ranks of Religious Zionism. Nemanai Har Habayit (Temple Mount Faithful), which had operated since the late 1960s, was led by Gershon Salomon, a secular



Jew who was supported by former Irgun and Lehi members (Inbari 2009). Only in the latter half of the 1980s did the first movement led by a religious Zionist rabbi appear (Temple Institute, headed by Rabbi Israel Ariel), and it was on its own until the 1990s.

## A Nationalist Substitute for Failed Messianic Hopes

Today, the tides have changed dramatically. If in the past yearning for the Temple Mount was the obsession of a marginal, ostracized, and sometimes violent minority within the religious Zionist public, today it has become one of the most significant voices within that community. In a survey conducted in May 2014 among the religious Zionist public, 75.4 percent said they favor “the ascent of Jews to the Temple Mount,” compared to only 24.6 percent against. In addition, 19.6 percent said they had already visited the site, and 35.7 percent said they had not yet gone there but intended to visit (Schnabel 2014).

These figures, along with the growing number of actual visits to the Mount by the religious Zionist public, signify not only a turning away from the state-oriented approach of Rabbi Kook but a veritable upheaval of the tradition of the halacha. We are witnessing a tremendous transformation among sections of this public becoming post-Kookist, and perhaps even post-Orthodox (Ettinger 2015), having come to adopt views that characterized the underground militia of preindependence Israel. It can be said that for them ethnic nationalism is now supplanting not only *mamlakhtiyut* (statist consciousness) but also faithfulness to the halacha. Their identity is now based more on mythic ethnocentrism than on Torah study, and the Temple Mount serves them, just as it served the secular Yair Stern and Uri Zvi Greenberg before them, as an exalted totem embodying the essence of sovereignty over the Land of Israel.

This can be seen in some additional findings from the same survey cited above. There, the group identifying with ‘classic religious Zionism’ was asked, “What are the reasons by which to justify oneself when it comes to Jews going up to the Temple Mount?” Of the respondents, 39.2 percent said the ascent is needed in order “to witness the special site,” 54.4 percent thought a visit should be made in order to carry out “a positive commandment [*mitzvat aseh*] and prayer at the site,” 58.2 percent asserted that the ascent “will raise awareness about the Temple and its meaning,” and fully 96.8 percent replied that visiting the site would constitute “a contribution to strengthening Israeli sovereignty in the holy place” (Schnabel 2014). Patently, for the religious Zionists who took part in the survey, the national rationale in ascending the Temple Mount was



far more important than the halachic grounds. Ethnocentric consciousness is replacing halachic sensibility.

How did the religious Zionist public undergo such a radical theological transformation? A hint is discernible at the point when the first significant halachic ruling was issued allowing visits to the Temple Mount. This occurred at the beginning of 1996, when the Yesha Rabbinical Council (“Yesha” is a Hebrew acronym for the Occupied Territories: Judea, Samaria, and Gaza) issued a ruling that visiting the Temple Mount was permissible for Jews, accompanied by a call to every rabbi “to ascend [the site] himself and guide his congregants how to do so in accordance with all the constrictions of the Halakha” (Inbari 2007).

In his book *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount*, Motti Inbari draws a connection between the weakening of the Gush Emunim messianic paradigm, which was profoundly challenged by the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, and the surge of interest in the Mount (2009). Though Prime Minister Rabin had already been assassinated by 1996, peace negotiations were still very much alive, and control of the city of Hebron was being divided among the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Presumably the rabbis of the Yesha Rabbinical Council assumed that the fate of the Temple Mount might be discussed in the time ahead, and their decree was intended as a statement asserting Jewish sovereignty over the holy site. Indeed, they explicitly state, “It is a disgrace for us that the Arabs ... are ascending the mountain by their tens of thousands, while we are not even going up ‘one two from a family’” (Isaiah 3:14). Here again we can observe how political and nationalist motives drove the core of the awakening religious Zionist interest in the Temple Mount.

An intensification of this process came with the final, crushing blow to the Kook-based messianic model, delivered by the State of Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and the destruction of the Gush Katif settlements there. The Gush Emunim narrative, which posits an unbroken path to redemption and the impossibility of retreat (Ravitzky 1996), encountered an existential crisis, as did the perception of the secular state as the divinely guided “Messiah’s donkey”—a reference to the traditional symbol on which the Messiah will make his appearance. It is employed as a parable for how progress toward redemption can be made on the secular state’s uncomprehending back. What happens, however, when the donkey asserts a mind of its own and goes in the wrong direction?

Many religious Zionists are thus turning toward the Mount as a nationalistic substitute for the failed Kookist messianic paradigm.<sup>4</sup> Temple Mount advocates have replaced the focus on settlements in the Occupied Territories with demonstrations of national sovereignty on the Temple Mount, and by visiting the site and praying there they are deviating from

both halachic tradition and Israeli law. Statist consciousness is abandoned, and in its place appears an ethnocentric appeal to a unified Jewish people coalescing around its central holy site.

### **The End Point of Zionism**

Looking closely at this phenomenon, it must be clear that while this ethnocentric emphasis on the Temple Mount is devoted to strengthening Jewish nationalism, it is in fact Jewish nationalism that allows it to exist. First, in the simplest sense, the yearning for the Temple Mount is a result of the renewed possibility of reaching it. Technically, it is contingent on the State of Israel's establishment in the Land of Israel and on its military conquest of Jerusalem.

Second, and more important, the aspiration for the Temple Mount (and sometimes for the Temple itself) is related to the desire—which also became a realistic possibility only on the modern ingathering of the exiles and Israel's creation—to unite the whole Jewish people under one national-religious leadership. While during the ancient Temple's time and in the Diaspora the Jewish people were never united, never committed to the same place or form of worship, the 'imagined community' of the modern nation-state ironically makes this presumably possible.

As Benedict Anderson (2006) explains, only with the emergence of capitalism and the printing press were groups of people enabled to see themselves as one nation, sharing a mutual language, culture, and character ("horizontal comradeship," as Anderson puts it). With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and then mass communications, modern nationalism was consummated and the theoretical possibility of a unified people became not only conceivable, but also established itself as a popular ideal. The Temple Mount plays the role of a common central point of unification for the modern nation of Israel's imagined community.

Ultimately, however, yearning for the Temple Mount and the Temple is intertwined with Jewish nationalism because it is the end point of Zionism—the point at which Zionism self-destructs. Zionism, which proposed the secularization of Judaism and its conversion from religion to nationality, set itself on the ancient messianic rails, whose first station is the ingathering of the exiles and the next the rebuilding of the Israelite kingdom. The messianic course, however, also has as-yet unrealized depots: Temple, Sanhedrin, and monarchy. Arriving at these will immediately turn the secularizing rationale of the Jewish national movement on its head, and thereby position it as the realization of the tradition's most explicit religious and messianic yearnings.

As early as 1970, Baruch Kurzweil—an Israeli literary and cultural critic—discerned the danger of implosion created by the Zionist state’s sovereign rule over the Temple Mount:

The year 1967 confronted pragmatic Zionism, which can be only political and state-oriented, with its most critical decision ... Zionism and its offspring, the State of Israel, which reached the Western Wall by the route of military conquest, as the fulfillment of earthly messianism, will never be able to abandon the Wall and forsake the occupied sections of the Land of Israel, without denying their historiosophic conception of Judaism. Pragmatic Zionism is caught in the web of its achievements. Abandoning them would mean admitting its failure as the voice and executor of Judaism’s historical continuity ... It is inconceivable to halt the headlong rush of a messianic apocalypse in order to allow the passengers to get out and look at the spectacular views of the Day of the Lord. (Ohana 2003: 374–375)

Kurzweil is talking about both the conquest of Judea and Samaria as a whole and the jewel in the imperial crown, Jerusalem with the Temple Mount. Devoting much of his writing to expose what he saw as the fallacious appropriation of Jewish tradition by Zionism, Kurzweil now waxed triumphant, claiming Zionism was finally laid bare, stripped of the secular covering it had assumed, its naked theological core revealed. Standing at the foot of the Temple Mount, Zionism grasps that it was always only an outer shell for traditional Judaism; more precisely, for the Jewish messianic tradition. Under the force of this revelation, its self-image crumbles and is drained of content.

Oedipus discovered he was of royal lineage at the very moment he realized he had killed his father and had had intercourse with his mother. Zionism discovers it is of religious lineage at the very moment it conquers Judea, Samaria, and the Temple Mount. Its underlying driving force of messianism is revealed, even as the Western liberalism it had imagined was its foundation is shaken. Unsurprisingly, the religious Zionist public, which since Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook had claimed just that—that Zionism in its essence was, in fact, not secular at all but the actual fulfillment of the prophecies for the Jewish End of Days—is happy to claim ownership and leadership of the journey up the Mount.<sup>5</sup>

### **Political Theology, Theological Politics**

With the religious Zionists having adopted the traditional secular underground militia conception of the Temple Mount, it may be no surprise that they are met halfway by the major Israeli political party that grew out of

those same militia organizations, the Likud Party. Over the past few years, support in the party for Israeli (Jewish) activity on the Mount has grown from virtually nil to almost half of Likud's members of the Knesset (MKs) active in promoting Jewish visits there.

Thus, in 2012 MK Yuli Edelstein, later to become Speaker of the Knesset, stated, "My job is to deal with the daily process, connecting and building the People of Israel, which leads to the Temple" (A. Segal 2012a). Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ze'ev Elkin went further: "It is important to remove [the Temple Mount] from the domain of the wild-eyed religious. We must explain to broad swaths of the people that without this place, our national liberty is incomplete" (A. Segal 2012d). That same year MK Tzipi Hotovely (later Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) said, "The building of the Temple in its place has to symbolize the renewed sovereignty of the People of Israel over their land" (A. Segal 2012b), and MK Gila Gamliel (later Minister of Social Equality) maintained, "The Temple is the ID card of the People of Israel ... it is our right over this land" (A. Segal 2012c).

As is clear from these quotes, the yearning for the Temple is not about untrammelled longing for the burning of sacrifices. It is neither the observance of the biblical commandments nor the upholding of halachic law that matter to these members of the Knesset, even the religious ones among them, but rather the pursuit of Israeli (read: Jewish) control of the Temple Mount and of the whole Land of Israel.

Likud Party members show their love with more than words. MK Miri Regev, who chaired the Knesset's Interior and Environment Committee from 2013 to 2015, convened no less than fifteen committee meetings on the subject (Rosner 2016)—more than all the meetings devoted to the subject from 1967 until that time. Other MKs (Tzipi Hotovely, Ze'ev Elkin, Danny Danon) are in constant communication with the Israel police, demanding an easing of conditions for the ascent of Jewish worshippers to the Mount; some MKs ascend the Mount themselves.

What we are witnessing here is not a religious revival but an ethn-national project, grasping the Temple as a symbol for Jewish sovereignty. While the Israeli government officially does not wish to change the status quo at the holy site, the Temple Mount serves MKs Regev, Edelstein, Elkin, and others as a national flag around which to rally. The location of the Temple to them is nothing more than a capstone in the national struggle against the Palestinians; sovereignty over the Mount becomes emblematic of sovereignty over the entire land. This is why Elkin speaks of "our national liberty" and Hotovely about "renewing the sovereignty."

We see here a unique amalgamation of religion and nationalism, thrusting the former not only into the public sphere but to the very epicenter of a religio-national conflict between Judaism and Islam, Israel and Palestine.

What is interesting is not only the cooperation between religious Zionist activists for the Temple and right-wing politicians seeking to enforce the state's sovereignty over more and more territory but the diffuse and intermixed character of each camp's ideological stance.

While from the ranks of the religious-national public emerges the demand to impose the secular state's rule over Judaism's most holy site, from the politicians comes religious language laden with romantic emotionalism. The believers' messianic vision hides within its final stages the transformation of the state into a theocracy ruled by a king and a Sanhedrin, located within the very Temple they theoretically want to build, thus making the current, democratic parliament redundant. Ironically, the members of that same parliament have no real interest in halacha, and are indifferent if their use of the holy site is in contradiction with its laws of purity and defilement. In the meantime, what guides both sides is a tenacious ethnocentric sentiment.

Both sides nonetheless have grounds to promote their pursuit because Judaism's messianic vision is indeed based on the formation of a state, a monarchy, and a special nation that inhabits it. Being an ethnic religion, or more precisely a unified sociocultural system based on a covenant of laws made exclusively between the Jewish people and a divine being that is considered to be the only God, Judaism challenges the primary dichotomy between the sacrificial-cum-cultic and the political spheres that is almost taken for granted within today's Christian world. The return of the Jewish people to their Promised Land and their successful—to date—bid for political autonomy thus fundamentally calls into question the principles on which the modern process of secularism is based.

### **An Attempt to Annul the Logic of Secularism**

Indeed, one of the most significant developments arising from the current infatuation with the Temple Mount is the challenge it poses for secularism, in its defiance of the very basic process of differentiation, which is the essential framework underlying the secularization process (Casanova 1994). The importance of the differentiation of the social spheres is an intrinsic and indispensable juncture on the path to modern society. From the ancient Roman world through the Christian medieval period to the modern West, religion has passed from being deeply intertwined with, indeed encompassing, all aspects and spheres of life, to sharing a split domination with the political, 'temporal' powers, and finally to becoming just another social sphere on par with many others. What Temple enthusiasts envision is a complete reversal of this process, joining in holy

matrimony the political and the religious, which for some religious Zionist Jews should never have been divided in the first place. As Stephen Sharot (1991: 257) writes:

The differentiation in the modern period of what are now termed 'ethnic' or 'national' components of Jewish identity from religious elements may itself be considered one aspect of the secularization of Jewish communities. In the traditional society, there had been no consciousness that Jewishness was made up of elements that could be distinguished in this way, and their differentiation in the post-emancipation period made possible a Jewish identity in which there was a self-conscious focus on either the religious or the ethnic component.

Emancipation, a process heteronomous to traditional Judaism, caused different Jewish communities to diverge by defining their Judaism for the first time as either just a religious identity (Reform Judaism, some of modern Orthodoxy) or just a national one (Zionism) (Batnitzky 2011). While Christianity always thought of itself as a religion only, for Judaism the bond between the religious and the ethnic dimensions was as robust as it was clear. Only over the past two hundred years was a 'separation of powers' conceivable. We must bear in mind, however, that such a separation is foreign to the internal logic of Judaism and that a renewed merging between the different wings expresses the natural bent of this specific civilization.

In a recently published book, Michael Walzer (2015) attempts to explain the renewed rise of the religious element in nation-states that were founded as secular. Walzer takes India, Algeria, and Israel as prime examples of this process, as all three were founded as secular democracies, and all three have experienced a significant awakening of religion that is undermining that democracy (at least in the liberal understanding of the term). Walzer maintains that this is because the secular-liberal frameworks are too weak and are unable to create stable identities, sources of inspiration, and, by the same token, continuity. They surrender in the face of religious revival. He blames the liberators for not acting to bolster ties with the religious elements. The premise is that were religion accorded a larger place from the outset, the emergence of a religious contrarian character could be avoided. "Traditionalist worldviews can't be negated, abolished, or banned; they have to be engaged," he writes (2015: 121). What's needed is a dialectical process in which the two poles are brought into contact and interact with each other to the point of creating a third entity.

No doubt, Walzer's thesis makes sense. But barring the option of full surrender to religious demands, tradition, at least in Israel, was indeed engaged. Specifically in Israel, the Chief Rabbinate, an Orthodox Jewish institution, was awarded immense power and financial resources by the

state. Since the founding of Israel it was given charge of all weddings (and divorces) between Jews, of Jewish graveyards, a monopoly over kashrut certification for businesses dealing with food, and a monopoly over conversion to Judaism (which in Israel is also the gateway to full citizenship for immigrants). Moreover, traditional Jewish holidays are the official days of celebration in Israel, the Sabbath the official day of rest (in which most commerce is not allowed by law), and laws forbid raising pigs and the selling of pork, as well as the selling of chametz during Passover. The Haredim were also given a special legal status that excused them from mandatory service in the military, and special funding was provided for yeshiva education. Thus, it is difficult to assert that tradition is not engaged or respected in Israel.

I suggest that the religious revival in the three countries Walzer considers is not caused by reaction to detachment nor to condescension but rather by a reaction to a foreign political and social superstructure. We should note that in each of these countries—Israel, India, and Algeria—the religion that returns to center stage is not Christianity. This is a significant point, because secular, democratic nationalism—of which, as noted, an essential element is the separation of religion from the state and the rendering of religion as a private matter for each citizen—is a phenomenon that derives from Protestantism and is shaped by its religious model. In Israel (and arguably also in the other two cases Walzer discusses), the reaction is based on a tradition that was forgotten, whether in a natural process or by force, and is now rising to the surface again. Yet it is also, crucially, a reaction by a collectivist religion that harbors extreme ambitions for the public space and that rises in contradistinction to a secularized, privatized political body that is structurally based on the lines of a foreign religious model.

As such, Judaism is incapable of fully digesting the process of Western secularization, which sprang from Protestantism. Even Catholicism had a hard time accepting secularization, not recognizing it in essence until Vatican II in the 1960s (Casanova 1994). It should be clear that any attempt to secularize Judaism according to that model will generate a fierce response. Indeed, if we examine Walzer's paradigm, we must note that the religious fundamentalist resurgence that occurred in Christian countries liberated from colonialism (the United States, Haiti, former USSR satellite states in Eastern Europe) was always minor compared to what we have seen in non-Christian countries and definitely did not come close to taking over the political system. I therefore suggest that the fundamental monolithic structure of Judaism, combining both religion and ethnicity, challenges the basic logic of differentiation, which is the first principle of the secularization process (as in India and Algeria, Walzer's other case studies).<sup>6</sup>



We must be aware, however, that the return of tradition in Israel is taking place in an untraditional way. In fact, it is wrapping itself like a robe over the national body and coming back in the form of national-religious ethnocentrism. As noted above, this religious revival has its roots planted in the nationalistic underground militias of prestate Israel, passed on through the ideas of Shabbtai Ben-Dov and the actions of the Jewish underground of the 1980s, leading up to the current infatuation with the Temple Mount of both the religious Zionists and the Likud Party. This revival has a pronounced ethnocentric character and is far more concerned with Jewish power and sovereignty than with ritual and halacha. Hence, religion has reentered the public arena in Israel in recent decades through the democratic political system, drawing a large following in its wake, as it made its appeal in the name of nationhood no less than in the name of God. It uses the Temple Mount as a centerpiece and point of convergence for national feelings and desires, and positions itself as part of the violent national struggle between the State of Israel and the Palestinians.

This wave of ethnonationalism centered on the Temple Mount that is now sweeping through Israeli society poses a great test for secular Israeli democracy. Mythical currents, translated through the prism of the national imagined community and fueled by violent political struggle, are ascending from the depths of history and the collective memory, carrying with them the demand to realize what for traditional Judaism was obvious: a political theology in its most unmetaphorical sense. The response to this summoning will determine the answer to Gershom Scholem's salient question—whether Jewish history will be able to endure its entry into the concrete realm without succumbing to the messianic claim that has been conjured up from its depths.

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## NOTES

1. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
2. Charles Taylor shows how the subversion of religious dogma and the designation of reason as the sole and autonomous agent toward human perfection

(i.e., secular redemption) began with the Deists, advocating a Christianity without 'mystery'. In order to transform it into 'natural religion', early eighteenth-century theologians like John Toland and Matthew would strip Christianity of anything miraculous or magical, and of all supernatural folklore and dogma. What was left was a private and rational ethos, requiring neither revelation nor a divine savior. From these ideas to Kant's 'universal religion of Reason' is but a short step. See Taylor (2007: 221–269; 1989: 234–284).

3. In this article, the sacred hill inside the Old City of Jerusalem, known in the Muslim world as Haram al-Sharif, is referred to by the English translation of its Hebrew name, the Temple Mount.
4. For these disappointed Religious Zionists the Temple Mount functions as a shortcut to salvation, replacing settlement on the soil of the Land of Israel as the key to redemption (Inbari 2007).
5. Hillel Weiss—a settler, a professor of Hebrew literature, and one of Kurzweil's students—has taken his teacher's warnings positively and literally. One of the most prominent Temple activists, he has established with others a 'New Sanhedrin' that issues formal decrees regarding political events. In mid-2016 he crowned a 'king' for Israel, none other than Meir Ettinger, grandson of the assassinated ultranationalist and racist Rabbi Meir Kahane, whom the Israeli security services believes to be the head of a Jewish 'hilltop youth' extremist group. With him, Kurzweil's words are wholly fulfilled. I thank the anonymous reviewer of this article for this addition.
6. In India the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which won the most recent general election, is regarded as the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist movement. The RSS aims to reconstitute the kingdom of Rama, a mythological entity and far removed from the multitudinous varieties of traditional Hinduism. Rather, the RSS seeks a country in which a uniform Hinduism enjoys its zenith under the earthly dominion of the god Rama. It is thus comparable to the nationalist Islam of the Islamic Salvation Front, which as a political party almost took power in Algeria in 1992 but was blocked by a military coup. That triggered a civil war in which about one hundred thousand Algerians died in the 1990s.

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