

Great Controversies



**The Modern
State of Israel**

**Zionists, Anti-
Zionists: The
Theology of the
Return to Israel**

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**Monday
3/17/14**

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Zionists and Anti-Zionists

Rabbi Yechezkel Freundlich

A. Where do you fit?

Satanic act, anti-Jewish State, a regime which calls itself Israel, a state ruled by Jews, the state of the Jews, the state of the Jewish People, the pedestal of G-d's throne in this world, a Divine State

B. Are you a "Zionist"?

- a. Zionism was a political and national movement born in the late 1800s under the leadership of Theodor Herzl to establish a Jewish national homeland; the Jewish people's love of the Land of Israel as a national and religious homeland was born with G-d's promise to Avraham Avinu
- b. Ramban (1194-1270): It is a positive mitzvah to live in the Land of Israel
 - i. Loving the Land and believing all Jews should or will live there is intrinsically Jewish. Believing NOW is the time, or HOW it should be run or be set up is a matter of politics, theology, and practical debate

What are these three oaths? One, that Israel should not rise with (or like) a wall; another, that G-d had Israel swear not to rebel against the nations; another, that G-d had the nations swear not to subjugate Israel overmuch. (Talmud Ketubot 111a)

C. Pre-Zionist "Zionism"

- a. In 1700s the Land was barren, no economy, destitute, desolate
- b. Modest Sephardic Jewish population, several thousand at most, remnants of the Spanish Exiles
 - i. most came literally to die in the Holy Land
- c. In late 1700s, a trickle of Ashkenazic Jews began to immigrate from Russia, Poland and Austro-Hungarian Empire
 - i. Disciples of Goan of Vilna (1720-1797)
 1. He himself encountered great difficulty and turned back. Bases for Ashkenazic community of Jerusalem until today.
 - ii. Disciples of Baal Shem Tov (c. 1700-1760)
 1. Chassidim settled in Chevron and Jerusalem
 2. Left controversy in Exile mostly
 - iii. Disciples of Chassam Sofer of Pressburg (1762-1839) came in the 1830s
- d. By 1846 Jews were majority in Jerusalem
 - i. By 1860 over 50,000 Jews and continual Ashkenazic flow
 - ii. No economic base and were supported by "chalukah," which was illegal, never enough, and unfair
 - iii. Almost all in the Old City, and actually had numerous foreign supporters, who all wanted a stronghold in Palestine
 1. (Russian czar would persecute Jews in Russia, but protected them in Jerusalem)

- e. Sir Moses Montefiore purchased land around Jerusalem which was developed
- D. Early Theological Debate
 - a. Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai (1798-1878) wrote a book in 1834, urging Jews to return, prophesizing that they will be destroyed in Europe, it's not "by force" as Turks are willing to sell land, no discussion of State, just protection
 - b. Rav Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841), Ujhler Rav in Hungary, Yismach Moshe, wrote it is forbidden to leave the Exile before the Messiah (way before Zionism and secularists)
- E. Chovevai Tzion, founded by Netziv (head of Volusion Yeshiva) in 1860s with others
 - a. encouraged settlement on basis of creating a young, viable, economically strong community
 - i. had no State, political or messianic agenda - just get them out of Europe to a viable place
 - b. double program
 - i. people should move
 - ii. enhance fundraising capabilities
 - 1. Yiddish speaking, bearded Rabbi Shmuel Moelever, Rav of Biolistic, scholar and obsessed with settlement of Israel, spoke to French speaking, modern, Baron Rothschild, who made a life-long commitment
 - a. He died in 1930s, but his colonies allowed them to send more and more people.
 - b. Established Carmel winery. When first bottle sent to Netziv, he put on his Shabbos clothes to accept it.
 - c. Shmitta created a severe halachik problem
 - i. Netziv withdrew because was opposed to R Yitzchak Elchanan Spector's *heter*
 - ii. Fell to non-observant hands
- F. Zionism - founder in 1893 by Theodor Herzl
 - a. Assimilated Hungarian Jew whose son had no bris and no bar mitzvah (his first solution, written in his Vienna paper, to the "Jewish Problem" was to be baptized)
 - i. Dreyfus trial changed that
 - b. Problem is that Jews are abnormal: no government, no autonomy, no flag, no Olympic team...etc. and we just need to become like everyone else.
 - i. Founded Zionist movement to create a state of our own -
 - 1. did not need to be Palestine/Israel. In 1904 he proposed Uganda to be Land. (He died soon afterwards and proposal did as well.)
 - 2. But masses who followed him were moved by religious idea to return to Zion.
 - a. Nathan Birnbaum (an original follower of movement, who later became anti-Zionist and involved in founding Agudas Yisrael) is the one who named it Zionism. Colors taken from techellis.
 - c. Early Zionists were anti-religious socialists determined to create a new Jew. Torah, Mitzvos, Shabbos, Kashrus, and G-d himself were not part of the plan
 - a. Echad Ha'am (pen name for Asher Ginzburg, 1856-1927) created a cultural movement, glorifying chalutz, kibbutz, secularized Jew. As if exile was all negative and had no value.

- G. Difficult to imagine G-d redeeming his people thru anti-religious Jews who had no knowledge of His people and her history, customs, and values. A natural reaction rose against it.
- H. Opposition came in many forms
 - a. Reform Jewry
 - i. They had erased Zion from Prayer books, dual loyalty – Germans of Mosaic persuasion. Could not support another country, lacking in patriotism.
 - ii. 1960s still refused appeal for Israel Bonds
 - b. Jewish Left (The Bund and Communists)
 - i. Bitterly anti-religious (in 1930s still held banquet in Vienna on Kol Nidrei night)
 - ii. There is no “Jewish Problem,” only the world’s Capitalists problem
- I. 3 major streams of Orthodox Response
 - a. Radical Anti-Zionism
 - i. Violated the oaths prohibiting us from “Hastening the End”

Torah Jewry sees its exile from the Holy Land as a result of a Divine decree based upon the Talmudic oaths which prohibit the Jewish people to travel en masse to the holy land, to rebel against other nations, or in any way seek to hasten the messianic process by worldly means. The land was given to us according to G-d’s will, and when our sins accumulated we were exiled from it. This exile is, in essence, a spiritual state that cannot be remedied by any temporal means. Until G-d chooses to end history as we know it by redeeming us through miraculous acts, we are commanded by Him to live as cooperative, law-abiding and patriotic citizens in all the countries of our residence. Accordingly, the Jewish people have no claim to the holy land at present. They have no right to conquer it or to rule over it (NY Times ad, June 1994)

- ii. Invoked centuries old warnings from Maram MiRutenberg regarding the frightening holiness and dangerous uniqueness of the Land makes it unsuitable for average Jews, not to mention anti-religious Zionists

“Beware of every transgression, for if he sins there he will be punished most severely. For G-d supervises the land and watches over its inhabitants. He who rebels against the Kingdom from within the King’s palace is not the same as he who rebels outside of it”

- iii. Would secularize the Jewish people, make Zionism into its own religion, believing it sufficient to just build state
- iv. Rav Tzadok said wrong as it is, it will succeed, chutpazah even against G-d will succeed. Didn’t go himself lest he be viewed as supportive of movement.
- v. Until today, this group (Satmar and Muncatz Chassidim, Neturai Karta) refuse to recognize the State of Israel, to vote in its elections and actively support her enemies because it is inherently bad for the Jewish people to be in Israel

Bamidbar 14: 39. Moses related all these words to the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. 40. They arose early in the morning and ascended to the mountain top, saying, "We are ready to go up to the place of which the L-rd spoke, for we have sinned." 41. Moses said, "Why do you transgress the word of the L-rd? It will not succeed. 42. Do not go up, for the L-rd is not among you, [so that] you will not be beaten by your enemies. 43. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you will fall by the sword. For you have turned away from the L-rd, and the L-rd will not be with you. 44. They defiantly ascended to the mountain top, but the Ark of the Covenant of the L-rd and Moses did not move from the camp. 45. The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived on the mountain came down and smote them and crushed them [pursuing them] until Hormah.

b. Religious Zionist supporters - Mizrachi

i. Those who saw it in Messianic terms (Rav Avraham I. Kook)

1. great step in the redemptive process, Moshiach's arrival is imminent, even the irreligious elements are intrinsically holy

How is it that the movement for concrete redemption in our time, including the settlement and conquest of the Land [of Israel] and the abandonment and abolition of exilic existence, did not originate with the religious? How is it that some religious spokesmen even withheld their support for Zionism and the movement for redemption? . . . They failed to recognize that it was not that we mortals were forcing the End, but rather that the Master of the House, the L-rd of the Universe, was forcing our hand; that it was not human voices that broke down the wall separating us from our land, but the voice of the living G-d calling upon us to "Go up!" (Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, 1891-1981)

2. long standing religious concepts of holiness, redemption and repentance assume concrete forms in the Zionist endeavor itself
3. one needs only to look with Spiritual eyes at what is taking place to see the Hand of G-d and the redemptive process.

a. Philosophically speaking, living in a Redemptive Era

4. 3 Oaths explained in various interpretations

ii. Early Mizrachi leaders saw nothing but a practical plan unrelated messiah

c. Chareidi World

- i. The majority of the religious world rejected both extremes: the State and Zionism are neither good nor evil.
- ii. It should be viewed like any other historical phenomenon: according to its concrete relationship to the Torah and the precepts of halacha

The value of the Yishuv framework and its institutions is measured only by the degree to which they bring the people of the L-rd closer to the Torah, its commandments and the faith (Rabbi Shlomo Volbe)

iii. Philosophy: there is no state of existence of "quasi redemption" or "in the process of redemption"

1. Redemption is the return of the Divine Presence to the Jewish People, and even while living in Israel, a Jew is still in Exile
2. Indeed, it is the most difficult of exiles – exile under Jewish leadership
3. Exile is estrangement, from your true home and from surroundings in which you live

iv. Engage government, which is as valid as every government of our long exile, and secure best possible Torah observant life and support

J. Holocaust changed everything

- a. State created in 1948 – most Jews saw it as seminal event