

THE SCOURGE OF JEWISH NATIONALISM

RABBI YOEL TEITELBAUM'S
ANTI-ZIONIST THOUGHT

SHAUL MAGID



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The Scourge of Jewish Nationalism

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Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum's Anti-Zionist Thought

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

The University of California Press gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies.

University of California Press
Oakland, California

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Suggested citation: Magid, S. *The Scourge of Jewish Nationalism: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum's Anti-Zionist Thought*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2026. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.277>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Magid, Shaul, author

Title: The scourge of Jewish nationalism : Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum's anti-Zionist thought / Shaul Magid.

Other titles: University of California series in Jewish history and cultures 6.

Description: Oakland, California : University of California Press, [2026] |

Series: University of California series in Jewish history and cultures; 6 |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2026003510 (print) | LCCN 2026003511 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780520427174 cloth | ISBN 9780520427181 paperback |

ISBN 9780520427204 ebook

Subjects: LCSH: Teitelbaum, Joel | Rabbinical literature—20th century—

History and criticism | Anti-Zionism | Jews—Restoration |

Satmar Hasidim—Theology | Palestine—In Judaism

Classification: LCC BM755.T38 M34 2026 (print) | LCC BM755.T38 (ebook)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026003510>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026003511>

GPSR Authorized Representative: Easy Access System Europe,

Mustamäe tee 50, 10621 Tallinn, Estonia, gpsr.requests@easproject.com

35 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

publication supported by a grant from
The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
as part of the *Urban Haven Project*

*To Zvi Ben Dor Benite,
whose wisdom and courage never cease to amaze me:
“Long may you run.”*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the fruit of my long-standing virtual relationship (*havruta*) with R. Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar. We never met, although I did live in Brooklyn when he died, and I am not sure we would have had much to say to one another if we had met. I have always had deep respect for his brilliance and knowledge, and I only hope that I have represented his positions as honestly and accurately as possible. He remains quite a controversial figure in the Jewish world, yet one whose views—often misunderstood because many of his detractors never read his writings—remain an important part of the ongoing conversation about Judaism in the twenty-first century. Agree with him or not, for those interested in Torah and the tradition, R. Yoelish remains a force to be dealt with.

My thanks to David Myers and Todd Presner, editors of the University of California Series in Jewish History and Cultures, who believed in this project from the beginning and gave me tremendous support throughout. Thanks also to Margo Irvin, Jyoti Arvey, and Richard Earles for shepherding this book to completion. Others who have been conversation partners on this project include Itamar Ben Ami, Menachem Butler, Aryeh Cohen, Nathaniel Deutsch, Noah Feldman, Jonathan Garb, Pinhas Giller, Simcha Gross, Susannah Heschel, Irwin Kula, Elad Lapidot, Daniel May, Zev Mishell, Paul Nahme, Annette Yoshiko Reed, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, Benjamin Sax, Naomi Seidman, Gilad Sharvit, Eugene Sheppard, Eliyahu Stern, Jacqueline Vayntrub, Elliot Wolfson, and my colleagues at Dartmouth College and Harvard Divinity School. Thanks also to Josh Kurtz for the bibliography; to Eliezer (Mendy) Schwimmer, who was always available for consultation; to Eric Jacobson, with whom I have been talking about

these materials for years and whose subtle understanding and perspective have really influenced me; and to the “Holy Roadies,” without whom Thursday nights would not be the same. This book is dedicated to Professor Zvi Ben Dor Benite, a passionate voice of moral rectitude and intellectual honesty the likes of which are too rare in our troubled times.

Introduction

In 2010, I was sitting in the office of a well-respected Modern Orthodox rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Jerusalem whom I have known since the 1980s. We were talking about various projects I was working on and what I was reading. When I mentioned a book project on R. Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar, his eyes lit up and he said, “In my opinion, R. Yoelish [as Teitelbaum was known] was one of the two greatest talmidei hakhamim [Torah sages] of the twentieth century. The other one was the Hazon Ish [R. Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, 1878–1953, the great sage of Bnei Brak].” I was a bit startled by his assertion, given that he was a lifelong Zionist and student of R. Joseph Soloveitchik. He knew that it would pique my curiosity, and yet he meant it quite sincerely.

This book is about modernity in general and, in particular, the relationship between Judaism, modernity, and the political. Studies that explore the complex nexus of Judaism and modernity often begin with figures such as Baruch Spinoza or Moses Mendelssohn as they represent initial points of contact between the philosophical and theological challenges of modernity and the tradition of Judaism.¹ The general assumption about the project of Judaism and modernity is that they are, at least in principle, under the right circumstances and interpretations, compatible.

This is one reason why these inquiries usually do not include Hasidic or other ultra-Orthodox thinkers. In the twentieth century, Martin Buber introduced Hasidism as an exemplar of an “existentialist” approach to Jewish devotional life. Hasidism served as a profound influence on Buber’s thinking. As he readily acknowledged, Hasidism was not a product of modernity in the intellectual or spiritual sense, but he believed that it could contribute to modernity.² In many studies of Judaism and modernity, Hasidism, when it is engaged at all, enters through the portals of Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, or other modern Jewish thinkers. But while the study of Hasidism often situates Hasidim *in* modernity,

certainly as a historical phenomenon, aside from Buber, Heschel, and a few others, it does not often present its subject as a serious critique of modernity itself, certainly not in the realm of the political.³

The broad question of the political, while central to the modern project, was less a subject of inquiry among scholars of Jewish thought until recently.⁴ Of course, at the center of the modern Jewish political project is Zionism, the Jewish national movement that resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Studies on Zionism occupy their own place in the modern Jewish library. But Zionism was not only a Jewish national movement; it was also a significant intervention into the nature of Judaism itself, not only in the body politic of the Jews, but in the tradition of Judaism as it confronted modernity.⁵

But what if Judaism and modernity are *not* compatible? What if modernity itself is a kind of heresy that requires a detailed and exhaustive critique? What if modernity should not be ignored or dismissed, but deeply engaged to reveal its fundamental flaws and challenges to Jewish covenantal history? This book will explore an extensive project of disclosing Jewish modernity's heresy, embodied in Zionism as part of a larger transformation of Judaism in modernity, by one of its most vociferous critics, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar (1887–1979). Teitelbaum was one of the most important Hasidic masters of the twentieth century, building the largest Hasidic sect in the world from the ravages of the Holocaust. Among many others in his circle, he viewed Zionism as an egregious rupture in the Jewish tradition whose theological consequences would be dire for the future of the Jews.⁶

At the center of his critique is a project of ideational inversion. That is, from one religious perspective (though not only from that perspective), Zionism viewed itself as an iteration of the long-promised redemption of the Jews from exile.⁷ It was, in some way, the quintessence of the progressive nature of covenantal history. Explaining how secular Jewish sovereignty could represent the messianic promise was the great challenge of religious Zionists such as Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) and his followers. Many of them reinterpreted traditional historical narratives of progress from exile to redemption with the arrival of the Messiah through a dialectical lens, whereby the arrival of the end-time comes through what appears as tradition's opposite: the impulse of the secular.⁸

Teitelbaum's inversion is to argue that Zionism as a modern secular intervention in Jewish history was not a sign of a dialectical messianic unfolding, but its opposite. It was, in fact, anti-messianic. That is the very core of its heresy as he understands it. It could be anti-messianic in one of two ways, both of which will be explored in this book. Either it proffers a false messianism, what Teitelbaum calls *geulah shel sheker*, or secular sovereignty obviates the need for messianism at all: Sovereignty thus becomes the replacement for messianism, what Yaacov Yadgar called "Zionism as supersessionism."⁹ In that case, it is not that Zionism fulfills the messianic promise but that it actually replaces that promise by erasing it, substituting the age-old promise of redemption with political sovereignty. This book will

offer a detailed analysis of both claims, not only as a critique of Zionism, but also as a prolegomenon on how Teitelbaum understood modernity more generally and how Jews should respond to it.

YOEL TEITELBAUM'S
"THEOLOGICO-POLITICAL PREDICAMENT"

The notion that Judaism and modernity are incompatible is not the sole provenance of ultra-Orthodox thinkers such as Teitelbaum. In fact, one of its most important advocates is the twentieth-century political philosopher Leo Strauss. In his English edition of Spinoza's *Critique of Religion*, Strauss introduced his readers to what he called the "theologico-political predicament."¹⁰ This phrase encapsulates much of his philosophical work on religion and politics in modernity, and more specifically on Judaism and modernity. This theologico-political predicament, for Strauss, points not to the more symbiotic notion of tradition and change, but to a more unreconcilable notion of tradition and heresy.¹¹ The term captures what was for Strauss the crux, and one might say the unresolvable crisis, of Jewish modernity for anyone who takes both Judaism and modernity seriously within the purview of their incompatibility. The "predicament" is thus a permanent state of tension through which Strauss navigates the dilemma of the impact of the Enlightenment on Judaism. Elsewhere, Strauss frames the predicament as one of "progress or return"—that is, how does one reconcile the post-Enlightenment world of reason with a commitment to the efficacy and significance of the premodern forms of tradition, which he sometimes substitutes with the term *revelation*.¹²

Teitelbaum never read Leo Strauss (nor do I think Strauss read Teitelbaum), and thus Teitelbaum never heard of the "theologico-political predicament." Yet I argue that his project, while focused primarily on a rejection of Zionism, is much broader than that and constitutes a particular response to modernity that can be seen as an instantiation of Strauss's theologico-political predicament. Strauss and Teitelbaum come from what one might call opposite sides of modernity: Strauss writes critically as an unabashed, yet also tortured, atheist (Hannah Arendt once referred to him as an "Orthodox atheist"), while Teitelbaum writes apologetically as a believing ultratraditionalist and defender of the faith.¹³ Yet the contours of Strauss's "predicament" appear in Teitelbaum's vision of the incompatibility of modernity and tradition in important ways. In different ways, both Strauss and Teitelbaum look not to the symbiosis of Judaism and modernity, arguably the very center of the modern Jewish project, but to its impossibility.

Another term that is more widely used to describe what I consider the frame of Teitelbaum's project is *political theology*, popularized by German legal theorist Carl Schmitt in the 1920s, though its origins are somewhat obscure.¹⁴ Schmitt's use of the category is multifaceted and focused on modernity itself and, thus, does not obviously fit Teitelbaum's project, as I will discuss below. Schmitt was engaged in

affirming the modern political project, whereas Teitelbaum was arguing against it, certainly as it applied to Jews, who he believed were theologically committed to an exilic and not a nationalist identity. Schmitt famously argued that modern politics is not a break from religious categories but rather a particular articulation of them, as “all significant concepts of the modern state are secularized theological concepts.”¹⁵ Teitelbaum did not believe that Jewish national state-politics had any legitimacy whatsoever before the end-time, largely because the theological precepts of the Jewish tradition as he understood them obviated such a possibility. Yet I maintain that political theology is still a legitimate term, albeit loosely defined, to describe the particular “predicament” that Teitelbaum, among others, viewed broadly as the challenge of Judaism in modernity.

Many readers of Teitelbaum assume that his anti-Zionism is based primarily on halakhic (Jewish legal) grounds. That is partly true, but this book argues that his contestation of Zionism is much broader than questions of deviance from tradition regarding a Jewish (secular) state before the end-time. I argue that part of the “predicament” from which Teitelbaum’s political theology emerges is based on the challenge Jews faced to *reject* politics at a time when nationalism seemed ubiquitous. And later, after the Holocaust and the theological rupture it created for many Jews, the ostensible *need* for Jewish sovereignty was viewed as a matter of survival.

This focus on “survival,” while understandable given the Jewish trauma of the twentieth century, is for Teitelbaum an ominous sign that the promise built into God’s covenant with Israel has been undone. For Teitelbaum, Jewish survival was a core tenet of the covenantal promise upon which Judaism rests. Therefore, to question that is to question the entire edifice of Judaism as understood through his reading of the tradition. Thus, limiting Teitelbaum’s opposition to Zionism to a matter of Jewish law misses his more sweeping critique of modernity, expressed as an iteration of political theology. Menachem Lorberbaum concludes his essay on Jewish political theology with this remark: “The modern European Enlightenment embarked on the dramatic and tragic effort to end Jewish *galut* by confronting Jews with the following question: Are Jews a religion or a (political) nation? . . . The question to the Jews determined the contours of Jewish existence in modernity, making identity a troubling and constantly elusive category for Jews. . . . The task of postmodern Jewish political thinking is to chart the possibilities for Jewish collective prospects. . . . Postmodern Jewish politics cannot embark on its critical path without renewing theological reflection.”¹⁶ Underlying Lorberbaum’s comment is the argument that “the Zionist revolution in Jewish life sought to relieve Jews of their theologico-political plight, hence of the burdens and vulnerability of exile, by making them spatial again, by returning to the land. Zionist rhetoric spoke of returning Jews to history.”¹⁷ There are existential, theological, and practical incentives for what might be called this “erasure of displacement.” The desire for “normalcy” amid the fatigue of exile (“to be like the other nations”), the belief in the impending messianic era, and the anxiety of survival all contribute to the

success of Zionism, certainly by the 1930s. But if one views exile not circumstantially but as a condition of Jewish existence, and in fact as a necessary component of the Messiah's arrival, these incentives all constitute divine tests to resist and not to embrace. Here we see the crux of Teitelbaum's critique and the kernel of his "predicament."

I claim that Teitelbaum is offering a political theology of exile as a sweeping critique of the invitation for Jewish normalcy, and as a theological challenge to resist the temptation to theologize redemption as a reaction to the challenges of displacement.¹⁸ The admixture of politics and theology, or politics contra theology, in Teitelbaum's writing leads me to label his project one of political theology, albeit not in a formal Schmittean sense.

More broadly, perhaps even audaciously, I claim that his two major theopolitical works, *Vayoel Moshe* (1959/1960, 1961) and *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah* (1967), constitute one of the most comprehensive articulations of a Jewish political theology of exile in the twentieth century, and one of the most direct articulations of tradition and the political in modernity. One can think of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, Moses Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem*, Hermann Cohen's *Religion of Reason*, and Buber's *Kingship of God* as other examples, all of which use the tradition, though they are not as ensconced in it as Teitelbaum was.

Often couched in terse halakhic discourse but extending far beyond the internal machinations of the Jewish tradition, Teitelbaum's intervention offers a version of Strauss's "theologico-political predicament" thus far largely unexplored. Many readers know the basic contours of Teitelbaum's argument, as explicated in a variety of studies, but few have examined it in depth and in situ, which has led to polemical caricature and a flattening of the argument into a series of usable soundbites. This book seeks to counter such generalizations by examining his work closely, including putting him in conversation with others who share basic principles, although not always premises, regarding Judaism and modernity.

POLITICAL THEOLOGY, THEOPOLITICS, HERESIOLOGY, DEMONOLOGY

It is often thought that *Vayoel Moshe* and *'Al Ha-Geulah* are Hasidic texts.¹⁹ They are, of course, written by a Hasidic master. But not all texts from the teachings of Hasidic masters are Hasidic texts. In many cases, Hasidic masters wrote responsa literature, glosses on the Talmud, commentaries of kabbalistic texts, and commentaries on halakhic compendiums.²⁰ But *Vayoel Moshe* and *'Al Ha-Geulah* are none of those, even as *Vayoel Moshe* works deeply within the framework of halakhic discourse. If so, what genre of texts are they? They are, as I read them, a combination of political theology, theopolitics (a distinction I will examine below), and heresiology. That is, they are deep interventions into the Jewish political reality of Zionism, the great political project of Jewish modernity, from a theological perspective,

often expressed through the lens of halakhic discourse. In addition, and as importantly, both are works of heresiology. Heresiology, a much more common literary genre in Christianity than in Judaism, attempts to draw borders between legitimate forms of belief and those that exist outside the orbit and are thus heretical.²¹

As mentioned above, one of Schmitt's basic claims in his discussion of sovereignty is that secular politics is, for the most part, an extension of subterranean theological claims. This, of course, has no relevance to Teitelbaum, who had no interest in secular politics and rejected any notion of Jewish politics outside of its messianic iteration. Teitelbaum's project coheres only loosely with Schmitt's definition of political theology, in two subsidiary ways: (1) in holding that politics is always about a friend/enemy dichotomy (for Teitelbaum, true messianic/false messianic) and (2) in arguing that politics promotes a kind of decisionism, whereby the enemy must be rejected in total and the sovereign has overriding power, in Teitelbaum's case through divine mandate as Messiah.²² Thus, for Teitelbaum, the only legitimate politics is a true messianic politics whereby the Messiah becomes the sovereign, acting according to divine mandate as stipulated in tradition. Any other Jewish politics is false messianism and heretical and should be given no sanction.

There may be a better way to characterize Teitelbaum's (anti)politics: through theopolitics. Martin Buber coined the term *theopolitics* partially in response to Schmitt's political theology.²³ Theopolitics is Buber's attempt to undo reigning messianic political forms of Zionism, sometimes even deeming them idolatrous, and arguing that in the Jewish political tradition—and certainly in the true messianic one—the only sovereign is God, the Messiah being simply the vehicle of divine will. Buber's Zionism is thus not messianic; in fact, it is a protest *against* messianic politics (and thus against Schmitt's either/or definition of politics), but it is Zionism nonetheless. Buber's fear is that the apocalyptic logic of messianism embedded in the tradition, when applied to the political in real time, can have catastrophic consequences. He opposes the apocalyptic with what he calls the "prophetic."²⁴ Here he agrees with his erstwhile critic Gershom Scholem, who praised Buber's *Kingship of God* in a letter to him in 1932.²⁵

Unlike Teitelbaum, who would use theopolitics *against* Zionism itself, Buber viewed Zionism's *messianism* as a dangerous form of sovereignty that can have disastrous ends.²⁶ In this camp, one could also include Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who similarly claimed that any messianic claim in relation to Zionism—and, in fact, any *religious* claim in relation to Zionism—was anathema, even idolatrous.²⁷ Neither Buber nor Leibowitz would concede to Teitelbaum's zero-sum game when it came to Zionism (both Buber and Leibowitz considered themselves Zionists, albeit anti-messianic ones), yet each in different ways pointed to a crack in the façade of Zionism that for Teitelbaum became its mark of heresy.

Teitelbaum had a different solution to the problem that both Buber and Leibowitz faced, precisely because he refused to accept the legitimacy of the division

of religion and politics—that is, secularization, which both Buber and Leibowitz, for different reasons, accepted. He refused to see Jewish sovereignty simply as a custodian in exile. Even in the face of the significant challenges to the Jews in modernity, Teitelbaum remained committed to the exilic frame of Jewish history, not simply as circumstantial but also, and even more so, as existential. All attempts to end exile (theologically or politically) before the Messiah's arrival were an open rejection of the divine covenant. Thinking in a different but not unrelated register, Lorberbaum puts it this way: "The sacred calls into question all the vicissitudes of the political; it doesn't legitimate or justify them."²⁸ Teitelbaum wanted to sever the holy from the political entirely and delegitimize any secular (non-messianic) Jewish politics as either false messianism (religious Zionism) or the erasure of messianism (secular Zionism), thus making Zionism an impossibility.²⁹

In *Kingship of God*, Buber's theopolitics rests on a complex claim that ancient Israel ultimately rejected what Sam Brody calls the "anarcho-theocracy" thesis built into Israel's origins, whereby only God is sovereign over Israel, and thus in effect were asking for a king, "like all the other nations."³⁰ The subsequent development of the succession of human kingship in the books of Samuel was, for Buber, a secularizing process whereby religion became untethered from politics.³¹ One can trace this secularization from those kings to the present quasi-democratic regime of modern Israel, which makes no claim of kingship yet does not fully abandon some kind of theological premise (e.g., the end of exile or the erasure of the exile/redemption dichotomy) upon which the state is built. In fact, Buber accuses both Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion of "secularization," by which he means the flattening of sovereignty to state policy, as opposed to the prophetic ideal that, for Buber, was the foundation of what he called Hebrew humanism and the true telos of Zionism.³² As a Zionist, Buber could accept, albeit somewhat reluctantly, the process of secularization in the realm of the political—and, in doing so, reject any messianic pretensions of the Zionist project—because he accepted the premise of modern nationalist aspirations, which he called Hebrew humanism.³³ Buber adopted his reading of Hasidism's tempering of the messianic idea in response to the catastrophic messianism of Sabbatai Zevi as a model for an incrementalist approach to messianism. Teitelbaum, here closer to Gershom Scholem, rejected the notion that expunging the apocalyptic from the messianic was possible.³⁴ It should be noted that by advocating a non-messianic Zionist vision, Buber is not a "secular" Zionist but rather, in his own unconventional way, a religious one. As Brody suggests, Buber's Zionism is based on the Isaianic prophetic model "of a nonhierarchical and voluntary religious socialism in Israel [that] will provoke initiation and interest round the world," as opposed to a Deuteronomic "eschatological conviction that is akin to a kind of messianism that Buber rejects" in *Kingship of God*.³⁵

Teitelbaum, on the other hand, does not accept any notion of a Jewish politics that is not a messianic politics (here, perhaps, he and Kook would agree), and for him messianic politics must cohere with the original Israelite notion of only God

as sovereign (here Kook would likely not agree). The Messiah is anointed by God, through prophecy, closing the circle of Jewish exile and undoing earlier forms of Israelite kingship politics. So, while Buber's theopolitics attempts to circumvent Schmitt's notion of human sovereignty and absolute power ("only the [human] sovereign decides"), it is only because, in a sense, Buber agrees with some of the basic premises of Schmitt's thesis (e.g., the secularizing nature of political concepts) but rejects his conclusions by suggesting that the true politics of ancient Israel is a kind of anarcho-theocracy (he alternatively calls it "direct theocracy") that had long been abandoned, only to return in messianic times. While Buber could therefore be a Zionist through non-messianic politics and still maintain Jewish exile, Teitelbaum, like Kook, was unable or unwilling to accept a Jewish politics that was not messianic—and the activation of messianism without a divinely ordained King Messiah was heresy. Yet Kook maintained that redemption itself can become manifest without a Messiah first appearing and even through an outwardly secular project (Zionism). Teitelbaum rejected that possibility. For Teitelbaum, messianic politics that ensues before the coming of the Messiah is false by design and destructive by definition.

Heresiology in the Christian tradition is a genre of literature that defines what we might anachronistically call orthodoxy. As Daniel Boyarin has shown in *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, the ancient rabbis were deeply engaged in heresiology as well, albeit much of it occasional and embedded in rabbinic discourse about other matters.³⁶ In the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides was also concerned with heresiology in defining boundaries of legitimate belief, most cogently in his early work *Commentary to the Mishna*, as concretized in his Thirteen Principles of Faith liturgized in the Ani Ma'amin proclamation.³⁷ There is a robust debate about what Maimonides was attempting to accomplish in his heresiology, or whether it was heresiology at all. In any case, as Marc Shapiro in *Limits of Orthodox Theology* and Menachem Kellner in *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* have shown, Maimonides's project did not achieve much success among the elite even as it did achieve success among the masses. Many medieval thinkers disagreed with Maimonides's assessment of thirteen doctrinal principles, or any principles at all. While the liturgical composition of Ani Ma'amin, added to the siddur, enabled Maimonidean principles to filter into Jewish popular imagination, its status in the Jewish intellectual tradition remains ambiguous.

All these caveats aside, the question of heresy was far from a predominantly Christian enterprise (robust debates exist in Islam and Buddhism as well).³⁸ In modernity, though, we rarely see a Jewish heresiology; instead, modernity has presented new models of theological pluralism that have seeped even into Orthodox thought. I offer one possible exception that may prove the rule: David Berger's polemic against contemporary Chabad, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*, published in 2008.³⁹ In this work, Berger argues that those in the Lubavitch community who still believe that their rebbe, Menachem Mendel

Schneerson, who died in the summer of 1994, is the Messiah are guilty of heresy on a number of counts. As a scholar of medieval Jewish-Christian polemics, Berger structures his book according to a common medieval paradigm of heresiology, pointing out that a belief in a messiah who has died is contradictory to almost all traditional sources on this question. Several books have appeared in the Lubavitch orbit that challenge Berger's assessment.⁴⁰ In any case, what is so illustrative about Berger's heresiology is how little influence it had in the Orthodox world. Few in that world accepted Berger's assessment of Lubavitch as heretical or, if they did accept it, were willing to act on it in any way. Lubavitch remains as influential today as it was before Berger's book, perhaps even more so.⁴¹ Even in today's Orthodox world, certainly in Modern Orthodoxy, heresy seems like a dead letter.

As a heresiologist, Teitelbaum lived in a world not dominated by the modern fracturing of heretical claims. He attempted to revive the notion of heresy as a constitutive component of traditional legitimacy and viewed Zionism as its most full-blown expression, in part because it claimed to erase or end exile while also claiming to fulfill it and, in doing so, undermined the messianic idea so central to Judaism. For Teitelbaum, religious Zionism is guilty of "forcing the end," attempting to bring about redemption before its time. And secular Zionism, which largely abandons messianism as the premise for return of the Jews to the land, essentially erases the messianic idea altogether (which for Teitelbaum is just as bad). We will see how he articulates this idea in his reading of Bar Kokhba (second century CE) and Sabbatai Zevi (seventeenth century CE), two exemplars of Jewish messianic heresy; secular Zionism embodies Bar Kokhba, and religious Zionism embodies Sabbateanism. For Teitelbaum, to claim that heresy is no longer operational is to undermine any semblance of the Jewish tradition. In short, without heresy, any remnant of Orthodoxy collapses. Some argue that this was precisely Maimonides's program: to concretize the borders of Orthodoxy through principles of faith.

Yet, living on the precipice of the end-time, heresy is precisely that which will emerge as a test for the Jews to resist in order for the Messiah to arrive. In other words, heresy is a necessary precursor to the end-time, something the sages alluded to as well. In a striking passage toward the end of his "Introduction" to *Al Ha-Geulah ve'al Ha-Temurah*, immediately after mentioning Sabbatai Zevi, Teitelbaum writes: "A great cry goes out that has never existed before that says, 'And now the exchange' (*ha-temurah*), and this has continued for numerous generations until the coming of the Messiah, which will reveal the truth to the world."⁴² The "exchange," of course, is drawn from a verse in the Book of Ruth; Zionism appears as the redemption (*geulah*) but turns out to be its opposite (*temurah*). It seems that at the end of his life, Teitelbaum recognized that the false messianism of Zionism will continue its corrosive—even demonic—project until which time it will be swept away with the coming of the true Messiah. All the remnants can do is maintain fidelity to tradition in its exilic context and warn the world of the false messianism that pervades.

Along these lines, I claim that Teitelbaum's political-theological works constitute a heresiology, devoted to defining, describing, and polemicizing against the pre-messianic heresy of Zionism that was, for him, the quintessence of the anti-messianic. He deploys thousands of sources, weaving them into a tapestry that renders Zionism a radical break with tradition (many Zionists would agree with that), to demonstrate that its messianic claims are false by definition. Like Kook, Teitelbaum seems obsessed with Zionism. Each viewed it as the final iteration of exilic history, but for Kook it was to be embraced, whereas for Teitelbaum it was to be resisted.⁴³

YOEL TEITELBAUM OF SATMAR

Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar, one of the most influential Hasidic masters of the twentieth century, was born in Sighet, Hungary/Romania, and raised in the Máramaros district, part of Transylvania. He was marked as a prodigy in childhood, became a popular and respected rabbinic figure at a young age, and served numerous communities in his environs before being elected to lead the ultra-Orthodox community in Satu Mare (Satmar) in 1927.⁴⁴ Teitelbaum was saved from the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944 by the Kastner transport, named after the journalist and lawyer Rudolf Kastner (1906–57), one of the leaders of the Budapest Aid and Rescue Committee. The transport was a deal made with the Nazis to allow a limited number of handpicked refugees safe passage into Switzerland after a few months' stay in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.⁴⁵

After safely crossing the border into Switzerland in December 1944, Teitelbaum was given the choice to immigrate to the United States or to Palestine. He chose Palestine. He was already a well-known figure among ultra-Orthodox Jerusalemites there, and his arrival was celebrated by the "Old Settlement" (Old Yishuv) community.⁴⁶ His virulent anti-Zionism, which would later become his trademark, after his major work *Vayoel Moshe* was first published in 1959/1960, was shared by almost all in that community (ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi Jews residing in Jerusalem before the advent of Zionism).⁴⁷ After a short time in Jerusalem and losing an election to become head of the Edah Haredit, the leading rabbinic arm of the Old Yishuv, in 1946 he traveled to America, arriving on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, September 27, to raise money for his fledgling yeshiva in Jerusalem. Teitelbaum's biographer, Menachem Keren-Kratz, notes that choosing to leave the land of Israel was one of the low points in Teitelbaum's career. But he simply could not attain the status he felt he deserved in the fractious and complex network of Old Yishuv Jerusalem. Although his arrival in America was met with little fanfare, he quickly met thousands of Holocaust survivors, many of whom flocked to him because he represented one of the best remnants of a certain prewar ultra-Orthodox rabbinic culture that was eradicated by the Nazi genocide.⁴⁸ Although the first years were rough financially, and

he sometimes had to reside temporarily in the homes of supporters, he came to realize that there was real potential to build something in the postwar ultra-Orthodox community in America.⁴⁹ Keren-Kratz notes that “these survivors assembled around him, encouraging him to establish his own congregation in America. This prompted Teitelbaum to decide against returning to Palestine and in 1948 he settled in Williamsburg, New York.”⁵⁰

In the ultra-Orthodox world, Teitelbaum’s prowess as a master of the classical tradition with an ingenious interpretive skill was unassailable. In addition to his textual mastery, he almost single-handedly built the largest Hasidic sect in the world today, comprised initially of traumatized surviving remnants of the Holocaust he experienced firsthand.⁵¹ And yet, because he devoted much of the final decades of his life to articulating, in exhaustive detail, a theological anti-Zionist position that, though quite common in prewar Europe, was becoming less compelling after the war, he became a lightning rod for adversity and ridicule among a Jewish world that had, by the 1960s, largely incorporated Zionism as the *sine qua non* of postwar Jewishness and Judaism. In the same way that Abraham Isaac Kook, the first chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, who articulated a Zionist vision from the sources of tradition earlier in the century, rose to become a hero of postwar religious Zionist Jewry, even among those who had barely read a word of Kook’s writings, so Teitelbaum became a villain, even for those unfamiliar with his massive literary output. One example is Haim Lieberman, a correspondent for the Yiddish daily *Forverts* (The Forward) who, in 1958, published a pamphlet entitled “The Rabbi and the Satan” roundly denouncing Teitelbaum and his growing following.⁵²

Again, as with Kook, many Jews who today recognize the basic contours of Teitelbaum’s ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist stance have never read his work. This is partly because his writing is enveloped in a dense and unforgiving prose, drawing from the large corpus of biblical, rabbinic, and often arcane post-rabbinic halakhic and homiletic literature, and in part because once one knows the gist of his anti-Zionist argument, an argument that has little traction in today’s world, it seems superfluous to trace it in exhaustive detail. In this sense, for much of the Jewish world, Teitelbaum’s position represents a “lost cause.”⁵³

This book argues that Teitelbaum’s anti-Zionism, as part of a broader contestation of modernity more generally, was one of the most significant Jewish theological interventions in the twentieth century. In addition to making Teitelbaum’s writings and worldview available to those unfamiliar with them, and to those lacking the inclination to work through them in the original, this book contextualizes and theorizes his theological position, expanding it beyond the closed orbit of its own insular presentation by discussing its theoretical parameters and broader implications. That is, this book engages his work—a sweeping traditional response to modernity in general and to Jewish modernity in particular—in comparison with others with whom he disagrees, and explores

the contours and implications of what I argue is one of the few true Jewish heresiologies of the modern era.

The Scourge of Jewish Nationalism explores the contours of Teitelbaum's anti-Zionist stance as part of a broader political theology of exile and a Jewish heresiology whereby Zionism is viewed as heretical in its attempt to erase exile before its apportioned time and undermine the messianic stance of exile, which Teitelbaum viewed as unassailable. As a frame for my larger thesis, I begin by discussing the relationship between heresiology, political theology, and theopolitics (Buber's response to Schmitt's political theology) and discuss the ways in which Teitelbaum's work exhibits aspects of all three.⁵⁴ The two works that constitute the subject of this study, *Vayael Moshe* and *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah*, are among the most mischaracterized and misunderstood works by a traditional Jewish writer of the past century. I do not say this as an apologist. My intention is not to defend Teitelbaum, nor to agree with his conclusions. Rather, I find his argument an important intervention in the ongoing struggle to make sense of Judaism, politics, and the question of messianism in our time. My claim is that his work's provocation and theological implications deflect from that intervention, which, I maintain, should be taken very seriously by those who value the tradition and its sources.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VAYOEL MOSHE AND 'AL HA-GEULAH VE 'AL HA-TEMURAH

This book is not a biography, but rather a philosophical, textual, and theological account of Teitelbaum's worldview and the ways in which he developed it through his exegetical and homiletical method. A biography of Teitelbaum by Menachem Keren-Kratz, entitled *Ha-Kana'i* (The Zealot), was published in Hebrew in 2020, and a more hagiographic synopsis of the nine-volume *Moshian shel Yisrael*, an almost daily account of Teitelbaum's public life, was published in English as *The Rebbe*, by his erstwhile disciple Dovid Meisels, in 2010.⁵⁵

Interestingly, Keren-Kratz's biography devotes no more than a few pages to *Vayael Moshe* and *'Al Ha-Geulah va 'al Ha-Temurah*, the works for which Teitelbaum is most well known.⁵⁶ It does provide an in-depth and nuanced account of Teitelbaum's life—especially his early life in Hungary and later in Mandatory Palestine, both his successes and his failures—as well as detailed analysis of the Hungarian ultra-Orthodox world that formed him. Its analysis of his American career, from the 1950s through his death in 1979, is less extensive. On Teitelbaum's influence in America, two recent studies—*American Shtetl*, by Nomi Stolzenberg and David Myers, and *A Fortress in Brooklyn*, by Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper—offer extensive analysis of the communities Teitelbaum built, first in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, from the 1950s to the present, and then in Kiryas Joel, in upstate New York, from the 1970s to the present.

Although a scion of Hungary and a major figure in the Jerusalem ultra-Orthodox community, even in absentia, it was in America that Teitelbaum arguably made his most significant mark, and it was in America that he wrote his two major works. In many ways, these works reflect his ultratraditional background, including the anti-Zionism of his Hungarian youth and of the “Old Yishuv” Jews in Jerusalem, but they also reflect on his new home in postwar America and the challenges his ravaged community faced as it began to reconstitute itself.⁵⁷ His ties with Neturei Karta, the main anti-Zionist group in Jerusalem, began to unravel in the 1960s, which initially put him at odds with that “Old Settlement” community in Jerusalem.⁵⁸ Eventually, he overcame much of that alienation and rose to become the titular head of the Jerusalem Edah Haredit, even though he lived in America.

The American context of *Vayoel Moshe* and *‘Al Ha-Geulah* is overtly apparent in Teitelbaum’s “Essay on the Holy Language,” which he ends by addressing his rationale for founding the Beis Rochel girls’ school in Brooklyn, the Satmar school system dedicated to educating Hasidic girls in Torah and the ways of the ultra-Orthodox life. Although Teitelbaum was highly critical (both earlier, while in Hungary, and in “Essay on the Holy Language”) of Bais Yaakov, a more well-known school for Orthodox girls that was founded by Sarah Schenirer in Poland before the war, he justified the creation of Beis Rochel, the first school specifically for Hungarian ultra-Orthodox girls, as a response to the changing contours of American life.⁵⁹ In fact, this essay on Hebrew was a long response to Pinchas Hirschprung of Montreal, who had asked Teitelbaum if it was permitted to teach girls Modern Hebrew in the school where he was headmaster.⁶⁰

In addition, in his essay on the obligation to reside in the land of Israel, Teitelbaum covertly addresses increased sympathy for the Zionist project among his constituents, especially Agudat Yisrael, the ultra-Orthodox movement that chose to join the Zionist cause, as increasing numbers began to exhibit some sympathy for the Zionist cause. And in *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*, Teitelbaum seems to address increased global sympathy for the state of Israel not only after the Six-Day War, but also after it emerged victorious in 1967.⁶¹

Vayoel Moshe is the first book Teitelbaum published, although he had written legal responsa and articles in the Yiddish press in Europe, Israel, and America. The present book offers extensive studies on each of the essays in *Vayoel Moshe*, delving into its argument, context, the larger issues at stake, and Teitelbaum’s hermeneutical method. It also includes an essay on the demonology of Zionism in Teitelbaum’s *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*, a much shorter, largely theological treatise responding to the Six-Day War, published in 1967, that deepens his anti-Zionist views by depicting Zionism, and Israel’s ostensibly “miraculous” victory in 1967, in strongly demonological language.

Teitelbaum’s reason for writing *Vayoel Moshe* in the 1950s is not clear. Of course, the establishment of the state of Israel was an obvious impetus to concretize his

anti-Zionist position. Keren-Kratz posits that the book's publication may also have helped establish Teitelbaum as the leader of anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodoxy, perhaps after a fallout with Neturei Karta, the established anti-Zionist movement there. In addition, some in Neturei Karta felt he was becoming a bit soft on Zionism. If those were his intentions, he certainly succeeded.⁶²

Vayael Moshe has received more attention than the much smaller and more theological *‘Al Ha-Geulah*. *Vayael Moshe*'s critical reception in the Orthodox world was, in large part, because its halakhically informed discourse is more easily engaged and challenged, certainly in Orthodox circles, than the more vituperative midrashic analysis in *‘Al Ha-Geulah*. I argue that the two books are different yet overlapping works of political theology, theopolitics, heresiology, and, in the case of *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, demonology, and do not constitute what one would expect from a Hasidic text. They are both polemical in tenor and substance, each drawing from the wells of classical Jewish literature to make its case against Jewish modernity in general and against Jewish political sovereignty in particular as a specifically egregious dimension of Jewish heresy. Reflecting on the term *azma'ut*, used to describe the founding of the state of Israel, which can mean both independence and sovereignty, Teitelbaum writes, "All notions of sovereignty (*azma'ut*) are heresy. There is no *azma'ut* in this world except God alone, and no other."⁶³

Teitelbaum's case against Zionism in general is widely known and has been analyzed in scholarly, traditional, and popular writings.⁶⁴ While all who analyze his position draw from *Vayael Moshe* and *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, the present work is different in numerous ways. First, I focus in some detail on the larger context of Teitelbaum's anti-Zionist project, suggesting that while Zionism is the focus, his work is really a sweeping case against Jewish modernity more generally. Second, while previous studies draw from the classical texts cited to build his argument, I also trace Teitelbaum's method, examine his engagement with interlocutors both contemporary and historical, and introduce other figures not mentioned in his work, suggesting that a comparative analysis is crucial to a deeper understanding of what is at stake in his political-theological project. In particular, I often return to Abraham Isaac Kook, without whom I do not think one can truly understand Teitelbaum's intervention, even though he may not have been responding to Kook directly. Although Teitelbaum never mentions him by name, I identify numerous places where he alludes to Kook, both in *Vayael Moshe* and *‘Al Ha-Geulah* and also in his collected homilies, *Divrei Yoel*.

But his possible covert references to Kook are less important than the shared assumptions and different responses each have to the moment in which they lived. Kook's theology would have been, for Teitelbaum, precisely the price of joining the Zionist cause. For him, making Torah out of heresy illustrates the quintessence of heresy. This is one way Teitelbaum might distinguish between heresy and deviance, if he was familiar with such nomenclature. *Deviance* is the abrogation of a norm, but the term itself implies the continued existence of the norm. *Heresy*

moves beyond deviance, because the norm itself is subverted and erased, such that the deviance becomes the norm. We see similar moves in some versions of Sabbateanism, when the act of sin itself becomes the mitzvah.

Third, almost all the studies on Teitelbaum and his work exist within the sub-field of Jewish studies. While this book approaches his work from within Jewish studies as well, it also attempts to widen the lens of analysis to incorporate the study of religion more generally, viewing his project in ways that he might not quite understand and certainly would not agree with. I view Teitelbaum as a contentious, provocative, fascinating, and important twentieth-century religious figure, deeply rooted in tradition and fully committed to a premillennialist stance in regard to redemption.⁶⁵ In terms of his anti-Zionism, he seems to represent a “lost cause” that is overshadowed by the Zionization of contemporary Jewry, yet this lost cause, deeply rooted in traditional sources, never quite disappears. His enclavism is not simply a *rejection* of the modern world but a particular kind of *response* to it, even a modern response, that resonates with some figures in modernity.⁶⁶ Finally, his rejection of Zionism should be viewed from within a larger frame of his view of messianism, a frame I contrast with that of Rav Kook.

TEITELBAUM AND KOOK

In many ways, and understandably so, Teitelbaum and Abraham Isaac Kook are viewed as opposites.⁶⁷ Yet I think that the contrast between them is more complicated. Both come from the ultra-Orthodox world of Eastern Europe, and both have connections to Hasidic dynasties, Teitelbaum through his family lineage to Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhely (1759–1841), one of the founders of Hasidism in Hungary, and Kook to Habad through his mother’s family.⁶⁸ Both immigrated to Palestine, Kook in 1904 and Teitelbaum in 1945. And both spent most of their adult lives addressing Zionism—Kook in favor, though in a complicated way, and Teitelbaum opposed, in an absolutist way. My assumption throughout this book is that Teitelbaum and Kook were, to some degree, mirror images of one another, each beginning with similar assumptions and emerging on opposite sides. I maintain that both Kook and Teitelbaum were messianists, in the sense that both felt, for similar albeit not identical reasons, that they were living on the precipice of the end-time (*ikvata d’meshikha*), which required radical responses to push that time toward its summation.⁶⁹ For Kook, the encroaching end-time was largely produced by the possibility of repopulating the land of Israel, and then more specifically by the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and subsequent events that moved the Zionist project toward actualization in history. Kook died in 1935 and thus never saw the founding of the state, but the vision and structures of such a state were already in place at the end of his life. For Teitelbaum, the Holocaust and the destruction of European Jewry played a significant role in his understanding of the impending

end-time. We can readily see this in the fact that he begins his “Introduction” to *Vayoel Moshe* by briefly discussing the Holocaust.

Like Kook, Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as playing a decisive role in the messianic moment in which they lived. But for Kook the proper response was to embrace (even secular) Zionism, while for Teitelbaum it was to reject Zionism as the exemplar of pre-messianic heresy. Kook’s relationship to the secular Zionists of his time was complex, however, and he too, in some ways, viewed secular Zionism in heretical terms. He never joined any Zionist party, not even the religious Zionist Mizrahi party, instead founding a failed alternative called *Degel Yerushalayim*.⁷⁰ Yet Kook deployed a dialectical approach drawn from the kabbalistic (and one might even argue Sabbatean) tradition to make the radical claim that the holy can be born from transgression, and that the secular Zionists were not only transgressing the law but, in some cases, suggesting Zionism as a replacement for traditional Judaism. In Kook’s mind, though, they were inadvertently doing God’s work of preparing the soil for the end-time, an idea that many of them had already abandoned. Kook’s entire project is founded on the notion of *teshuvah* (repentance), not in the conventional sense of repenting from sin, but as a concept of cosmic return, the transvaluation of transgression whereby the transgressors come to see that they are, even unwittingly, returning to their holy roots. The intrinsic value of secular Zionism for Kook is complex, and irrelevant here except to say that he believed it was transitory and would yield an *aufheben*, an overcoming, a transvaluation yielding the true manifestation of redemption. For Kook, Zionism was the vehicle for redemption; for Teitelbaum, it was that which prevents it.⁷¹

Teitelbaum emerged from a similar milieu, though Kook’s time in the Volozhin yeshiva in Lithuania exposed him to Hovevei Tzion, a movement of ultra-Orthodox Jews sympathetic to Zionism that included one of the leaders of the Volozhin yeshiva at the time, Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816–93) (who would, however, later distance himself from the movement).⁷² Kook also read new Hebrew Zionist periodicals and had an interest in broader intellectual trends, even as a young yeshiva student.⁷³ In the region of Hungary where Teitelbaum was raised, there were certainly Zionists, even religious Zionists, but the atmosphere was much more absolutist in its rejection of Zionism and modernity more generally.⁷⁴ Moreover, while schooled in kabbalistic teaching, Teitelbaum was neither a dialectical thinker nor a mystical thinker in the way that Kook was. His world revolved largely around the binary of good and evil, permissible and prohibited, traditional and heretical. In many ways, his thinking adhered more closely to the rabbinic mindset transmitted by leaders of his world such as Moses Schreiber (1762–1839), known as the Hatam Sofer, one of the most vociferous opponents of Jewish modernity, and Zvi Hirsch Ashkenazi (1656–1718). Schreiber was vehemently opposed to all types of modern innovations in the tradition, and Ashkenazi was a staunch opponent of the Sabbatean movement. Teitelbaum viewed his

position on Zionism as being in the tradition of Schreiber's opposition to reform and Ashkenazi's opposition to the Sabbatean heresy, which also included Jacob Emden's anti-Sabbateanism. Teitelbaum's works are thus replete with the adage often cited in rabbinic literature that "good does not come from evil." And thus Kook's dialectical move, to whatever extent Teitelbaum knew about it (a matter of some debate), would never be considered.

Like Kook, Teitelbaum believed that Zionism had a central role to play in the impending end-time. For him, it was the seducer who comes before redemption as a final test to be resisted. We find resonances of this in the Book of Daniel, the Book of Job, and *Sefer Zerubavel* (a text Teitelbaum never mentions), and it becomes the root of the Antichrist tradition in Christianity from the Middle Ages to the present.⁷⁵ Toward the end of his "Introduction" to *Al Ha-Geulah*, we read: "There is more to say about the notion of 'redemption and exchange.' It is known from writers and books that every time there is an arousal from above, conceiving our redemption and salvation, Satan obtains wisdom to exchange it with a false redemption and brings travesty, pain, and darkness to the world."⁷⁶ This principle is not foreign to Judaism and has been adopted in myriad ways in apocalyptic forms of Christianity. Teitelbaum goes on to claim that "after the suffering of Jews from the Germans, there was a real potential for redemption that was stolen [lit. kidnapped] by means of the cunning ways of the demonic and transformed into a false redemption through his emissaries, the Zionists, who are defiled and who defile the entire world."⁷⁷

For Kook, Zionism is the transgression the secular Zionists are guilty of, which holds within it the seeds of the holy that need to be released and that can be released only through secular agency; whereas Teitelbaum views Zionism through an eschatological lens, as that which looks exactly like redemption but whose success only affirms its satanic roots.⁷⁸ And like the Antichrist more generally, Zionism will reveal itself as satanic and destructive, certainly to tradition, and thus destroy rather than redeem. For Kook, Zionism appears as the dialectical final phase before the end-time; for Teitelbaum, it appears as the final barrier to be resisted before the end-time.

Of course, for both Kook and Teitelbaum, these lines of thought emerged in the throes of the collapse of Jewish life in Europe and the unleashing of the pogroms of the 1880s, World War I, and the Holocaust (which Kook did not live to witness). Nonetheless, though they come from similar worlds, Teitelbaum and Kook are a study in contrasts, each carrying a redemptive vision with Zionism at its center. Of course, neither Teitelbaum's nor Kook's position is verifiable or falsifiable. Kook's views offered the Zionist project traditional, and even cosmic, affirmation that helped spread it to the religious communities in Israel and abroad, while Teitelbaum's views enabled the anti-Zionist traditionalists to maintain their prewar views after the establishment of the state in 1948 and the subsequent spread of Zionist legitimacy to the larger Jewish world and the world at large. Yet the

contrast remains fruitful, and thus I often return to Kook in my examination of Teitelbaum's worldview.

ON HERESY, THE SECULAR, AND *YISRAEL SABA*
AS ANCESTRAL NORMS

One way to view the contrast between these two highly influential Torah personalities is through their understanding of secularism, and secular culture more generally, as it relates to Jewish modernity. In an incisive essay on Kook, Yehudah Mirsky offers a detailed and complex analysis of Kook's "theology of culture" (a term borrowed from Protestant theologian Paul Tillich).⁷⁹ Mirsky argues that "here, as elsewhere, he [Kook] reshapes the meaning of sacred and secular; in his eyes, that dichotomy is less a fixity, and more an angle of vision."⁸⁰ Kook makes this case more forcefully in a well-known passage: "In every process in life the mundane/secular awakens first, and then the sacred must follow, to complete the renaissance of the mundane . . . [therefore,] woe unto the secular . . . that says, *there is none beside me* (Isa. 47:8), and woe unto the sacred that goes to war with the secular, which sucks, unconsciously, on the sacred."⁸¹ Here Kook offers a kind of critique of Ahad Ha'Am's view of culture as that which is born from a religious tradition it largely rejects.⁸² It encompasses the "spirit" of tradition without its externalities. For Kook, culture is not so much a rejection of tradition (although it may also be that) but, more importantly, an iteration of tradition that refines it to facilitate its completion. As Mirsky puts it, responding to Kook's belief that culture itself procures the unfolding messianic drama, "even the casting-off of tradition is part of this ultimately beneficent process, but—and this is a large 'but' that will, so to speak, get bigger very soon—it runs the risk of reaching too far before its time."⁸³ Kook believed that the secular would eventually be overcome by the sacred that lies within it, a realm of the sacred that is carried by transgression of the secular toward the ultimate redemptive goal.

This is not the place to enter a detailed analysis of Kook's views of the secular or of culture, but it is a good place to contrast Teitelbaum's views on the matter. Suffice it to say that Teitelbaum did not agree with Kook's dialectical hypothesis, not on halakhic grounds and not on theological grounds. For Teitelbaum, the path toward redemption was an ongoing battle *against* heresy, not an adaptation or sanctification of it. The heretical was not transformed by the holy, it was eradicated by resisting it to procure the final eradication of evil in the end-time via divine fiat. The job of the carriers of the tradition is to remain vigilant in adhering to religious norms to maximize the conditions for messianic unfolding. The antithesis of that approach is embodied in the mixing of the sacred and the secular in the Zionist state, which for Teitelbaum is the most egregious form of heresy. He writes, "And we find Jews who wear tefillin and say that this day [Yom Ha'atzmaut—Israeli Independence Day] is a holiday and they celebrate

together with those who anger God [secularists], woe to us before the Creator, as I need not elaborate.”⁸⁴

Not surprisingly, both Kook and Teitelbaum were deeply interested in heresy. Teitelbaum seemed to be interested in Sabbateanism, a mystical heresy that was no longer extant in his time. In fact, as I will develop further below, Teitelbaum’s entire project is a modern Jewish heresiology, with Zionism at its center. Kook, on the other hand, offers a kind of anti-heresiology or counter-heresiology in his attempt to deconstruct the boundaries of the holy, not by making it the enemy of the secular, but by positing it as the secular’s necessary antidote. In that regard, some of Kook’s musings on Sabbateanism (some of which were censored from printed editions of his work) are far less critical than Teitelbaum’s.⁸⁵ For Kook, the secular, when done for the sake of the Jewish people (i.e., rebuilding the land), enables the holy embedded within it to become reinvigorated and reactivated from its dormancy. The audacity of the secular pushes the holy where carriers of the holy would not go.

It was not only traditionalists like Teitelbaum who had problems with Kook’s dialectical approach to the secular and heresy. Here Teitelbaum could find unpredictable support for his tactical critique of Kook in the radical secular Zionist Yosef Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921), who did not buy Kook’s sacred/mundane project and felt that Kook really was a heretic (as Brenner proudly defined himself). Yet Kook tried to cover up his heretical views in flowery prose and mystical musings. To no avail, Brenner wanted Kook to recognize that his attempt to sweep the secular into the holy was a ruse, believing that if Kook was true to his own words he would admit it. One could imagine that had Teitelbaum known of Kook’s writings, he might have offered a similar critique from the opposite perspective. Brenner, raised in traditional environs, knew the tradition well and rejected the very rendering of tradition that Teitelbaum espoused.⁸⁶ For Brenner, tradition was something to be jettisoned; for Teitelbaum, it was something that needed to be preserved. Kook claimed to want the latter, but Brenner believed that Kook really held to the former. Following Mirsky, if culture is, for Kook, the secular vehicle whereby tradition gets refined into a final form of holiness, what is culture for Teitelbaum? What I mean by “culture” here is that which extends beyond fidelity to Torah and mitzvot, which both Kook and Teitelbaum agree is necessary.

Throughout his work, Teitelbaum periodically deploys the term *yisrael saba* as a description of what I would call culture. *Yisrael saba* is a kabbalistic term used by Lurianic kabbalists to define a specific component of *parzuf Abba* (a supernal Patriarchal cosmic cluster).⁸⁷ Teitelbaum, however, uses the term to refer to what I translate as fidelity to ancestral norms. That is, the job of the elite remnant of traditionalism, for Teitelbaum, is to maintain meta-halakhic norms of behavior, dress, aesthetics, and so on, not as obligatory in a halakhic sense, but as a protective layer against the infiltration of foreign ideas and practices. Why eighteenth-century Eastern European norms? It seems to me that for Teitelbaum, freezing this

moment in time before modernity seeped into traditional societies enables the progeny of those societies to maintain a cultural stance of separation that enables them to enact redemptive politics by means of resistance.

Teitelbaum's worldview is certainly a product of Ashkenazic/European Jewish society. Yet he was distinctive among Hasidic masters of his time in his veneration of the traditionalism of Mizrahi societies as well, specifically Yemenite Jews who maintained their fidelity to their ancestral norms until they became subverted through Zionism propaganda.⁸⁸ He viewed much of Mizrahi/Yemenite Jewry as having maintained a cultural purity from modern influence. He spoke quite vociferously about what the state was doing to Yemenite immigrants, stripping them of their "ancestral norms" and traditional way of life. For Teitelbaum, then, culture as *yisrael saba* is an additional layer of his maximalist religious worldview in addition to halakhic norms that serves as part of his enclavist vision in preparation for the end-time. For Kook, culture extends outside tradition to refine it, whereas for Teitelbaum *yisrael saba* prevents the defilement of the secular that threatens to undermine the march toward redemption.

WHAT DID TEITELBAUM KNOW ABOUT ZIONISM?

Since *Vayoel Moshe* and *Al Ha-Geulah* are both polemics *against* Zionism, it is worth asking what Teitelbaum knew *about* Zionism. A definitive answer is not clear. He never cites specific Zionists. Zionism is mostly essentialized and referred to in general terms. It seems quite likely that he did not read very widely, although he did read the Yiddish press, where Zionist essays often appeared.⁸⁹ Teitelbaum likely did not read the Hebrew Zionist journals of his day, nor did he read the published writings of Zionist thinkers such as Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Ahad Ha'Am, or Micha Josef Berdichevsky. Yet as Keren-Kratz shows, neither Sighet nor Kroli nor Satu Mare, places where Teitelbaum served as a rabbi, were exclusively ultra-Orthodox or even Orthodox cities. Their Jewish population was mixed with various religious factions, including ultra-Orthodox Jews, Neologs (a party of Hungarian traditional but liberal Jews sympathetic to integration), Yiddishists, secularists, and Zionists.⁹⁰

Thus, Teitelbaum likely knew of Zionists and Zionism from the Zionist activity where he lived, which became increasingly robust with the advent of the Great War and the Third Aliyah (1919–23), and from the Yiddish press which he read. He was acutely aware of Agudat Yisrael, the newly founded Orthodox movement that, while not Zionist, was sympathetic to the Zionist project and worked with Zionists. In "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," he also refers to agricultural "colonies" of Orthodox Jews who immigrated to the land, a phenomenon common in the First Aliyah (1881–1903).⁹¹ Teitelbaum was supportive of these communities if they steered clear of the Zionist project, which, in time, he thought was increasingly difficult to do. But throughout his work, Agudat Yisrael was the

main target of his ire, as he had no real shared dialogue with secular Zionists or secular Jews more generally. I have not found in his writings any reference to religious Zionists—figures such as Isaac Jacob Reines, Isaac Breuer, Isaac Herzog, and others from prewar Europe. This is not to say he did not know about them; it is only to say that they did not seem to attract his interest. Teitelbaum's political theology does not get that granular.

Contemporary readers of Teitelbaum often fault him for demonizing Zionism as a radical movement that sought to subvert and undermine Judaism.⁹² But this observation is somewhat inaccurate. We must remember that the religious Zionism influenced by Rav Kook that has come to dominate the religious Zionist landscape today did not exist when Teitelbaum was in Europe, even as he would have contested it. Most other forms of religious Zionism were still quite small and, in the case of Agudat Yisrael (not Zionist), were viewed by him as accommodationist.⁹³ What did exist were radical forms of Zionism in the writings of people such as Berdichevsky, Brenner, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, A. D. Gordon, Ber Borochov, Berl Katznelson, Jakob Klatzkin, and others who were in fact presenting Zionism as a kind of substitute for traditional Judaism in one form or another. The religious Zionists were at fault, in Teitelbaum's reading, because they were colluding with the heretical radicals who posed a danger to Judaism as he understood it. Thus, while Teitelbaum's demonization of Zionism may have been theologically generated, and motivated, the radical nature of Zionism as he presented it was not a figment of his own imagination but a fully operational secular ideology—arguably the dominant Zionism of his early years—that essentially sought to undermine the traditional Judaism he sought to protect. As Eliezer Don-Yehiya put it, "The negation of the Galut is an attitude Rav Kook shares with secular Zionists. . . . Hence the liberation of the Jewish people from Diaspora life entailed the liberation of Jewish society from the dominating position of Jewish religion; liberation involved transforming religion into a private, voluntary, and individual matter."⁹⁴ In that sense, the zero-sum game Teitelbaum projected, at least for his purposes, had some historical validity.

But still, Teitelbaum's battle was not primarily against the radical secularists with whom he had little shared discourse, but rather against those in the Orthodox community who were sympathetic to the Zionist enterprise, particularly but not only Agudah. Later, in America, he also came out strongly against Chabad for a variety of reasons, one being their sympathy to Zionism even as Sholom DovBer Schneerson and Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the fifth and sixth Lubavitcher rebbes, were vehemently anti-Zionist. The seventh Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, was not a Zionist either but supported the state as a refuge for Jews and opposed any territorial compromise on halakhic grounds.⁹⁵ And many of his disciples decided to serve in the Israeli army. Schneerson thus tacitly acknowledged the legitimacy of the state, though he did not view the state in messianic terms.⁹⁶ Ironically, perhaps, Teitelbaum visited

Israel often whereas Schneerson never set foot there, a complex issue beyond the scope of our subject.

On the one hand, in Teitelbaum's mind, Zionism was reified to a state of demonic obsession, which in some way channeled the feelings of many in his world who believed that Zionism was far more dangerous than Reform Judaism. Zionism, or Jewish nationalism more generally, was viewed by some of its architects as a substitute for Judaism, even as religious Zionists, certainly later in the Kookian school, viewed it as Judaism's fulfillment. In fact, the very notion that Zionism was viewed as Judaism fulfilled was what made it so dangerous. The culmination of exile by human agency and not by divine fiat, expressed in the Talmud as "forcing the end," was viewed by Teitelbaum as the most egregious sin of all, even worse than the sin of the golden calf in Exodus. This is due not simply to its transgressive nature, but to its existential nature as well. This point is made clear by Menachem Lorberbaum: "In retrospect of exilic theology, the profound transgression of Zionism was in the movement from time to place. If exile is a condition in which one is never indigenous to one's place and where one measures one's self in terms of indigeneity to a place where one no longer is (the sovereign), return to place undercuts exile's essential displacement. In this respect Zionism is part of the Enlightenment project."⁹⁷

For Teitelbaum, Zionism was in part an imagined enemy and a fully operational theological travesty. The idea itself, while posed as either a push toward messianic finality (among some religious Zionists) or a rebellion against the very messianic idea (among some secular Zionists), was for Teitelbaum anti-messianism par excellence. Not only did it delay the end-time; it held the potential to unleash calamity for the Jews by rebelling against what he deemed the exilic covenant between God and Israel, forged in the Talmudic pericope of the "three oaths." I argue that critics of Teitelbaum err in viewing his opposition as situated primarily in his reading of those three oaths.⁹⁸ Rather, like others in his world, only with more vituperative force and urgency, Zionism represented more than a secular polity in the land of Israel. It was, in his view, a comprehensive rebellion *against* tradition, a modern deviance against fidelity to the exilic covenant and in opposition to ancestral norms (*yisrael saba*), all the while making the claims that it was saving Jews, that it was aligned with tradition, that it was the legitimate next step in the concatenation toward redemption. Perhaps this is best captured in the tension between *ikvata d'meshikha* (in the footsteps of redemption), a phrase used by both Teitelbaum and the Zionists, and *atkhalta d'geulah* (the beginning of redemption), a phrase used only by Zionists and Schneerson—albeit Schneerson does not imply that Zionism contributes to his redemptive vision or that it is the sign of imminent redemption. Certainly, for religious Zionists, the Zionist project was the linchpin connecting *ikvata d'meshikha* and *atkhalta d'geulah*. For Teitelbaum, however, Zionism subverted *ikvata d'meshikha* precisely by aligning it with *atkhalta d'geulah*. The final phase of exile is still exile and must remain so. By claiming

to erase exile, or end exile, or negate exile, Zionists step outside the umbrella of covenantal protection, thereby endangering not only Judaism, but Jews.⁹⁹

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 1, Heresiology and Zionist Anti-Messianism: On "Essay on the Three Oaths"

Chapter 1 situates Teitelbaum's argument in the broad spectrum of halakhic literature on the question of the messianic age. It centers on an analysis of Teitelbaum's view of the "three oaths" pericope at the end of Talmud Ketubot. This Talmudic passage delineates three oaths (in one variant six oaths) whereby God promises to protect Israel from annihilation if they abide by the covenantal mandate of exile. Teitelbaum's method consists first in exhaustively analyzing the rabbinic discussions and their medieval interpretations, often focusing on the major medieval debates on the issue. One of the ongoing debates about the "three oaths" is whether they were intended as a halakhic pronouncement or a homiletical flourish. Teitelbaum addresses this at length, and the chapter lays out the various options in halakhic literature. Another feature of this chapter is a lengthy discussion about repentance as a prerequisite for redemption codified in medieval responsa and code literature. The chapter spends considerable time mapping how repentance is understood by a variety of legal authorities (including Teitelbaum) in relation to redemption, as a way to further complicate how redemption, and the various phases preceding it, can be understood. Four major figures that occupy this chapter are MaHaRal of Prague, especially his opaque but important chapter on exile in *Nezah Yisrael*, Abraham Kook and his son Zvi Yehuda Kook on repentance and redemption, and the former anti-Zionist turned Zionist sympathizer Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal on the notion of repentance in the messianic schema.

Chapter 2, Land as Mitzvah? On "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel"

Chapter 2 addresses the question of whether there is a specific commandment to reside in the land of Israel and, if so, whether this mitzvah is operative in exilic history. This is a long-standing debate, usually framed by the three differing positions of Rashi (it is not a mitzvah but a promise), Maimonides (who does not mention residing in the land in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* at all), and Moses Nahmanides (it is an operative mitzvah). All three figures value residing in the land, but only Nahmanides makes the unequivocal claim that the obligation to reside in the land of Israel remains intact even in the period of exile. Maimonides's choice not to include residing in the land of Israel in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* opens the question as to whether one could make an argument from silence about Maimonides's position. Much has been written about this. The question of the obligation to reside in the land is crucial for Teitelbaum for several reasons. First and foremost, writing for

a Torah-observant audience, if the obligation to reside in the land remains intact, and if Zionism creates optimal conditions for residing there, the impetus to immigrate to the land, even to a secular state and even for those who do not support Zionism, would be enormous. To argue against such an obligation as being operative today requires him to articulate a position against the Nahmanidean one that has become normative for many in the Zionist camp. This chapter explores the general contours of the obligation to live in the land, how Zionism both accelerates yet also problematizes fulfilling that command for non- or anti-Zionist Jews, and how Teitelbaum is able to both value the sanctity of the land, even residing there, and maintain his anti-Zionist position—which argues that the heretical Jewish polity in the land complicates the ability to reside there in a way that circumvents participating in the Zionist project.

*Chapter 3, Lashon Ha-Kodesh and the New Hebrew Movement:
On “Essay on the Holy Language”*

Chapter 3 offers an extensive analysis of the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* (traditional Hebrew) and its relationship to the New Hebrew movement in the early twentieth century, something Teitelbaum spoke out strongly against. Teitelbaum’s position was that the secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh* was both blasphemous and potentially destructive. Interestingly, others who were Zionists, such as Scholem and Bialik among others, had similar misgivings about the New Hebrew in the early part of the twentieth century. To better understand Teitelbaum’s ultra-Orthodox position, I put him in conversation with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (the “founder” of Modern Hebrew), Scholem, Bialik, and others to argue that while ensconced in a traditional discourse, Teitelbaum does have a theory of language that emerges as he works through his sources to make his case. And, while Teitelbaum never read Scholem, Bialik, or Ben-Yehuda (though he makes a fleeting reference to him, calling him “the professor”), his views on the secularization of language are in fact in conversation with these modern thinkers.

As mentioned above, this essay is essentially a response to a letter Teitelbaum received from Pinchas Hirschprung, a rabbi in Montreal who was principal of a girls’ high school. Hirschprung asked Teitelbaum if it was permissible to teach young girls Hebrew in addition to the limited Torah curriculum they were offered. The halakhic frame of his inquiry thus addresses whether there is a separate commandment to learn Hebrew or whether Hebrew was simply needed to study Torah and, since women had no separate obligation to study Torah, there was no reason to teach them Hebrew. This frame leads Teitelbaum to an extensive analysis of women’s education, in part to justify founding the first Hungarian ultra-Orthodox girls’ school in the world, Beis Rochel in Brooklyn.

What I tease out from Teitelbaum’s broad analysis is the extent to which Zionism was, for him, far more than politics, representing a sweeping subversion of

tradition, and how the secularization of the holy tongue is a good example of this subversive project. In addition, Teitelbaum did indeed have a theory of language that can be assessed through a close reading of his halakhic discourse.

*Chapter 4, Zionism and the Demonic:
On 'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah*

With Israel's triumphant victory in the Six-Day War in June 1967, for most Jews, much of the ambivalence about Zionism was swept away, while in the religious sector, the belief that Zionism was aligned with divine will became more convincing than ever. Already in old age and weakened from a stroke, Teitelbaum felt that a response was in order and thus, against the will of many of his closest disciples (because of his weakened state), he sanctioned his response, published as *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah* (On Redemption and Exchange). The title is taken from a verse in the Book of Ruth that is deployed in Midrash Ruth Raba to make a case that what appears to be redemption may be its opposite. This work is more theological than *Vayael Moshe*, constructing what I characterize as a Jewish theology of the Antichrist. It claims that Zionism, though appearing to be a redemptive movement, especially after 1967, is in fact an Antichrist that exists to seduce the Jews into believing redemption has arrived. Included in this chapter is Teitelbaum's view of what he calls a "covenant of exile," the requisite act of resisting the temptation to end exile before its apportioned time.

In this chapter, I unpack the notion of a Jewish Antichrist (Teitelbaum obviously never uses such a term) as a way to understand the theological foundations of Teitelbaum's position, especially in a time (post-1967) when his views were becoming less and less compelling given the historical unfolding of Zionism's success. Here we see the most developed stage of Teitelbaum's heresiology, the demonization of Zionism as a heretical test brought about by God for the Jews to resist, not embrace. Here as elsewhere, Teitelbaum's major audience is not secular Zionists, who he thinks are the very architects of heresy, but a Torah-observant audience that he believes are on the precipice of being compelled to join the Zionist project (even if they remain anti-Zionist). He likens the secular Zionists to the *erev rav* (mixed multitude) in Exodus who, according to the rabbis, caused the Israelites to sin with the golden calf, while the Torah-observant Zionist sympathizers were those who did not commit idolatry with the calf but refused to stop the descent into idolatry.

It is here that Teitelbaum offers an extensive analysis of *miracle*, a term used ubiquitously after 1967 to describe Israel's victory. He suggests that there are two modes of miracle in the Torah: the miracle God performs for the Jews (i.e., the exodus from Egypt) and the miracle Satan performs with Job by afflicting him but keeping him alive. Teitelbaum seems to want to counter the Zionists with their own nomenclature, to suggest that the miraculous can stem from two sides, the

holy or the demonic, and that the criteria to determine a miracle's source is a complex matter. *Al Ha-Geulah* thus serves as the theological companion to the halakhic *Vayael Moshe*, yet critics of Teitelbaum within the traditional camp largely ignore it. This book argues that one cannot understand the fullness of Teitelbaum's intervention without considering both its halakhic and its theological components.

Heresiology and Zionist Anti-Messianism

On “Essay on the Three Oaths”

Yoel Teitelbaum’s *Vayael Moshe*, first published in its present form in 1961 (a truncated version without “Essay on the Holy Language” was published in 1959/1960), may be the most contentious, and contested, work by a Hasidic author in the twentieth century.¹ I specifically do not call it a *Hasidic work* because, as mentioned in the introduction, I do not consider *Vayael Moshe* (VM) a Hasidic text, for several reasons: It does not follow the biblical narrative, it offers no innovative observations about divine worship (*avodat ha-shem*) and prayer, and it exhibits almost no overt kabbalistic influence. I claim, rather, that VM is a work of ultra-Orthodox political theology, a halakhic/haggadic polemic making a three-pronged Jewish case against modernity, with the political and cultural project of Zionism as its nexus. It is refracted through an elaborate analysis of halakhic sources on three major issues: the Talmudic pericope of the “three oaths” discussed in b.T. Ketubot 111a, the obligation to reside in the land of Israel in our day (*yishuv ha-aretz*), and the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* (the holy tongue) and its secularized form in the New Hebrew movement.

In a sense, these three issues cover the broad scope of Zionism as both a political and a cultural phenomenon, from the establishment of a secular Jewish state in the land of Israel, to the question of the land’s religious significance, to the creation of the secular lingua franca of Modern Hebrew in the cultural Zionist revolution.² It is important to note at the outset that Teitelbaum’s opposition to Zionism is not solely opposition to the establishment of a pre-messianic nation-state in the land of Israel. Rather, it is opposition to the modern nationalization of Jewish identity more broadly and the usurpation of traditional categories for understanding history and messianism in a political register.

Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as a heretical and anti-messianic breach of the Jewish tradition writ large, and many early Zionists would have agreed. More euphemistically, Zionism is the destruction of what Teitelbaum called *yisrael saba*, which I read as fidelity to ancestral norms.³ Zionism was, for him, the destruction of those ancestral norms of belief, practice, and behavior.

While establishing a Jewish state before the coming of the Messiah was, for Teitelbaum as for many of his time, prohibitive, no less heretical were the New Hebrew movement's secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh* and the transformation of dwelling in the land from a non-obligatory mitzvah (*mitzvah m'kayemet*) or not a mitzvah at all. As many early Zionists also maintained, Zionism was for Teitelbaum nothing less than a revolution, albeit for him in the negative sense of destroying the past and putting heresy in its place. That secular Jews bought into this heresy was not a surprise for Teitelbaum, as they had already abandoned tradition to modernity and the notion of a holy people to that of a nation like all others. Like assimilation, it was to be expected. His concern, and surprise, was the acquiescence of the religious community to the Zionist vision, normalizing it and interpreting it through the lenses of tradition. His political theology was essentially written for them.⁴

While these issues, or at least the "three oaths" and the status of residing in the land, have been discussed at length in primary Jewish sources, Teitelbaum couples his vast knowledge of these sources with his creative interpretive skill to offer a deep critique of Zionism and its implications.⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, I think the best way to understand this critique is through political theology. This can perhaps be seen most readily in the third essay in VM, on the New Hebrew movement, which is often given less attention in the sources. Teitelbaum focuses primarily on rabbinic and medieval debates about whether teaching one's children *lashon ha-kodesh* is a mitzvah distinct from teaching them Torah. He broadens that discussion to address the New Hebrew movement more generally, which was taking root among Zionists, and the status of education, particularly for women, who are not obligated in Torah study. Here I put him in conversation with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, and Gershom Scholem and examine his observations considering the debate around girls' education in the *haredi* world, to unpack what is really at stake for him in secularizing *lashon ha-kodesh*. This essay has practical applications regarding the pedagogical necessities of accommodating tradition to the modern world.⁶ But it also speaks to the cultural project of Zionism, which had, by the 1950s, achieved tremendous success in reviving Hebrew as a spoken language outside the confines of traditional Jewish study (this is all discussed at length in chapter 3). We should remember that Teitelbaum did not think of Zionism as solely, or even exclusively, a political project, but as a cultural one too, and his anti-Zionism is thus not only anti-statist, but also in opposition to the cultural

and linguistic nature of the Zionist program. Teitelbaum understood Zionism as a Jewish revival movement that sought an alternative to Judaism.⁷

MESSIANISM AND THE HOLOCAUST:
VAYOEL MOSHE IN CONTEXT

While Teitelbaum's "Essay on the Three Oaths" has received the lion's share of attention in traditional Jewish communities, in large part because it has been treated most extensively in halakhic literature, Teitelbaum's detractors pay less attention to the frame of the book and its ultimate purpose. While the essays in *VM* are halakhic in nature, they are all informed by a theological premise—a theopolitical premise—that is often overlooked by his critics.⁸

There are two main aspects of *VM* that are often overlooked by those who write about it. First, Teitelbaum assumes that we are living on the cusp of the messianic era (*ikva d'meshikha*). That is, *VM* is a messianic text of sorts, and Teitelbaum is a messianist no less than his contemporaries Menachem Mendel Schneerson and Abraham Isaac Kook.⁹ Note, however, that there is a significant distinction between *ikva d'meshikha*, the term Teitelbaum prefers, and *atkhalta d'geulah* (the beginning of redemption), which others such as Kook and Schneerson prefer.¹⁰ In the latter case, the claim is that redemption has already begun—for Kook with the mass immigration of Jews to the land of Israel or with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, for Schneerson with his own messianic program (and, according to many of his disciples, his very existence as a messianic figure). In the cases of Kook and Schneerson, messianic activism became paramount, whereas for Teitelbaum, the more ambiguous phrase *ikva d'meshikha* suggests a more passive approach.

Each man saw his project as a different (sometimes opposite) way toward a similar end: creating the conditions for the end-time that was quickly approaching. For Kook, those conditions may have begun in earnest with the Great War and then the Balfour Declaration; for Schneerson and Teitelbaum, it may have been the collapse of Europe in the 1930s, culminating in the Holocaust.¹¹ I deal with Teitelbaum's theory of messianism through what I call a "piety of resistance" against the final test of heresy—in his view, Zionism—in chapter 4, my introduction to his later work *Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah*, written after the Six-Day War in 1967. Here, it is worth noting simply that the premise of *VM*, published seven years earlier, is that we are living on the cusp of the messianic era (the Holocaust being the final "birth pangs of the Messiah"), and thus the stakes are as high as they were for Schneerson and Kook. For Teitelbaum it was resistance, for Schneerson outreach, and for Kook a belief in the transformative nature of Jews resettling the land through secular Zionism that pushed the Jewish collective to its messianic telos. Thus, both Zionism and anti-Zionism (certainly the ultra-Orthodox version) are messianic, each believing that the other is preventing the end-time.

The second aspect of *VM* that requires attention is its relationship to the Holocaust.¹² More broadly, I claim that *VM* is a twentieth-century traditionalist response to catastrophe. It is thus structurally a post-Holocaust text. In fact, Teitelbaum begins his “Introduction” with this declaration:

Because of our many sins, in these past years we have suffered bitterly in ways that Israel has not suffered since it became a nation [goy]. *Had the Lord of Hosts not left us some survivors [we should be like Sodom, another Gemorrah].* But with the mercy of God, bless His Name, some of us have survived, albeit small in number. Not a few from a multitude but a few from a few, all because of an oath that the Holy One, blessed be He, made with our ancestors not to annihilate us completely, God forbid. We have survived even in our great many sins, embodying the verse *God will inflict extraordinary plagues [upon you and your offspring]. [Truly, I shall further baffle that people,] with bafflement upon bafflement; and the wisdom of its wise shall fail, and the prudence of its prudent shall vanish. We waited for a time of relief—instead there is terror!* And still today rest and comfort has not come. Our hearts are totally broken and there is nothing by which we can be comforted and strengthened. Rather, our weak eyes and our languishing souls turn heavenward until God will see all this from heaven. God will see our suffering and heal our wounded hearts with great mercy.¹³

Before Teitelbaum launches into his vociferous critique of Zionism, he offers the heartfelt rendering of a survivor who suffered at the hands of the Nazis and recognized the brokenness of the survivors, “small in number,” who had to rebuild their lives and also face the challenge of coming to terms with this senseless act of genocidal brutality. While it is true that Teitelbaum and other ultra-Orthodox leaders in Hungary advised their constituents to remain in Europe until at least 1940—and Teitelbaum escaped via the (Zionist) Kastner transport in 1944—by the early 1940s, and certainly by the time the Nazis invaded Hungary in March 1944, everyone was desperately trying to leave.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the ultra-Orthodox communities were among the hardest hit in terms of death in the final years of the war, and Teitelbaum spent time in Bergen-Belsen before reaching safety in Switzerland. As survivors began to rebuild their lives and communities after the war, Teitelbaum was among the leaders in trying to reconstitute the lost religiosity of his now decimated environs.

It is a fact, though not well known, that Teitelbaum was one of the most successful agents for the post-Holocaust reconstruction of ultra-Orthodoxy worldwide, primarily in America and Israel.¹⁵ Alan Mintz notes that one of the criteria of the literature of catastrophe is “the relationship of the writer to the event: survivor, bystander-witness, or descendant.”¹⁶ This survivor posture, whose theological assumptions remained as they were before the Holocaust, brings Teitelbaum to the question of theodicy, seeking out reasons, and Jewish culpability, for Jewish tragedy. For example, we read in the “Introduction” to *VM*:

Whereas previously among Israel, in every generation when a time of travail beset Jacob, we searched for reasons why this happened to us, what sin caused this to come about, in order to be able to rectify it and return to the Holy One blessed be He. We find many examples of this in the Torah and Talmud. This was the case after the Spanish exile, as the holy one Yosef Yavetz the Spaniard of blessed memory explained in his book *‘Or Ha-Hayyim*. That is, we searched after the sins that caused this anguish and exile. In the introduction to his commentary on Lamentations, the author of *Havat Da‘at*, may he merit life in the world to come, writes about this as well. That is, there is no purpose in telling of trials and tribulations without also talking about what caused them, to avoid the causes that bring the suffering about. Yavetz’s commentary on Lamentations is written in this way; every time he mentions suffering he mentions the sin that brought it about, so that we can return to God with all our hearts and not continue this suffering. This is the point of his entire treatise.

The question of theodicy—or, as Teitelbaum puts it, “search[ing] after the sins that caused this anguish and exile”—certainly extends back to the Hebrew prophets and, by the Middle Ages, became an entire genre of Jewish writing. In the biblical paradigm, covenantal reciprocity, or covenantal theodicy, is a cornerstone of Israelite history.¹⁷ The Deuteronomist authors were resolute that Israel suffered because of their sins. Jewish culpability was woven into the biblical covenant.¹⁸ In many cases, the ambiguous notion of idolatry served as the main cause of tragedy, but this was also mixed with illicit and immoral behavior that was linked to idolatry. In early rabbinic literature, the specificity of sins was not the focus, but by the time of Midrash Lamentations Rabbah in the fifth century CE, specific sinful acts became prominent.¹⁹ Among some Ashkenazi pietists in the Middle Ages, known as Hasidei Ashkenaz, there was a resistance to this notion of covenantal theodicy (that “we suffer because of our sins”), replaced by a notion of “sufferings from love” (*‘issurin shel ahavah*), meaning that God brought catastrophe upon Israel as an act of love for his people, rather than as a punishment for sin.²⁰ Responding to the deaths brought on by the Crusades, these pietists viewed martyrdom as a necessary part of divine caring, what Mintz called a “spiritual compliment” rather than an act of divine punishment.²¹

While there is certainly a tension between theodic and anti-theodic thinking in rabbinic literature—that is, between a strong accusation of the complicity of Israel and a more ambiguous one—by the Middle Ages, theodic thinking seems to have dominated.²² This is the tradition that Teitelbaum adopted from his highly traditional Jewish environs in Transylvania. While Teitelbaum certainly viewed the Holocaust’s victims as martyrs, he kept close to the theodic framework that this disaster had to be a response to collective sin in some way. In some sense, then, Teitelbaum begins his treatise by continuing in the trajectory of these theodic examinations. *VM* is thus an anti-anti-theodic work. For him, there is no way to view the Holocaust outside of its theodic framework. To do so would break

the covenantal paradigm of traditional Jewish thinking, something that post-Holocaust theologians like Richard Rubenstein knew quite well. In this regard, the very notion of anti-theodicy, the notion that we cannot surmise Jewish culpability for a tragedy like the Holocaust, was blasphemous for Teitelbaum.²³ Most ultra-Orthodox leaders, certainly those in Europe, had to decide how to grapple with the reality that this horrific event could not easily fit into covenantal history.²⁴

One might expect a common Orthodox jeremiad against modernization and secularization in *VM*, something Teitelbaum engages in elsewhere in his writings. But here Teitelbaum turns the tables somewhat and suggests that a more obvious culprit of this contemporary Jewish suffering is not the assimilation of the Jews, something that had gone on for generations (at least since the Enlightenment and even before), but a reinvention of Jewish identity outside of, and in fact as a rebellion against, the traditional paradigm of exile in the ideology of Zionism. He is not totally wrong about early Zionism's own self-fashioning, and he certainly was not alone in his assessment. He writes in "Essay on the Three Oaths," reflecting on his reading of Maimonides, in regard to "anyone who holds that redemption is possible without collective teshuvah, this very thought contradicts scripture and is heresy."²⁵ As we will see below, teshuvah becomes a central tenet of religious Zionism, and thinkers such as Abraham Kook and Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal understand it outside of its more traditional context.

Many early Zionists understood Zionism as an open revolutionary rebellion against the theology, religion, and theopolitics of exile, and thus would have little problem with Teitelbaum's accusation of Zionism's revolutionary, and heretical, nature. Zionist writer Micha Josef Berdichevsky (1865–1921) called himself "the last Jew and the first Hebrew" and, with Yosef Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921), talked about Zionism in Nietzschean terms, as the "transvaluation of all values."²⁶ The question of finding classical sources to legitimate that rebellion becomes the bailiwick of certain forms of religious Zionism later on, certainly for those following the Zionist ideology of Abraham Isaac Kook.²⁷ Kook's project was defending what would be, for Teitelbaum, the indefensible: viewing heresy (secular Zionism) as a form of unwitting sanctity, although for Kook the secular is hardly a permanent state; rather, it is a temporary reality—albeit a necessary one—that would itself need to be transvalued.²⁸ Let us recall that Kook never joined any Zionist organization. For example, on the question of Messiah ben Joseph, Kook writes:

Messiah ben Joseph is revealed in the very emergence of the nationalism (*le'umiyut*) of Israel in and of itself. However, the ultimate purpose is not bound by the limits of nationalism itself but rather in its influence on the larger world (*kol bo'ey olam*), constituting one family calling out to God. Even though this requires a specific focus, nevertheless the intention is not one of internal concentration but rather the act that extends this to the general principle (*klal gadol*). And thus, in order for the world to transcend nationalism (*le'umiyut*) to the universal (*klalut*), there must be a destruction (*harissa*) of those things upon which the limited nationalism exists, that contain

within it the shortcomings of an overemphasis on the love of the particular (*ahava peratit yetara*). Therefore, Messiah ben Joseph must die.²⁹

In a variety of ways, Kook articulates the temporal nature of the physical revival of the people transforming into a more expansive spiritual revival that will expand beyond the particular. And once that happens, the physical catalyst must be trans-valued into his more expansive vision. The particularity that carries the universal must perish.

In the “Introduction” to *VM*, Teitelbaum offers a reading of the golden calf narrative in Exodus 32 that tacitly responds to the religious Zionist act of messianism through active participation within a heretical movement. The golden calf will appear more prominently in *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*, but appears here as part of the framing of *VM*. Using Nahmanides’s interpretation of the biblical narrative that few served the calf, and that the real sinners were those who “sinned in thought”—that is, stood by, enabled, or aided those who engaged in the idolatrous act—Teitelbaum writes:

In the Torah portion of “Ki Tisa,”³⁰ Nahmanides discusses [the sin of the golden calf] in a number of passages [and claims] that the number [of Israelites] that prostrated before and sacrificed to the calf was small, but most of the people sinned in thought, and that is why God was enraged to destroy them, heaven forbid. He explains further the verse *Then the Lord sent a plague [upon the people,] for what they did with the calf [that Aaron made]*³¹ that they were not the ones who were prostrating and sacrificing to it but the ones who “did it.” That is, they were the ones who gathered themselves around Aaron and who brought him the gold [for it]. [Ramban] cites Targum Onkelos on this [verse], which refers to “the ones who worshipped the calf.” We see from this that [God’s] anger over the calf was not because of the few who served the calf in action, with sacrifices and prostrations; but rather, because of the multitude who aided in its creation, whether by gathering with them or by giving their gold, and the like. For they thought this was a good thing, that [the calf] would be a leader and a guide in place of Moses, and [was done] in God’s Name. Nahmanides discusses this at length, as does R. Abraham ibn Ezra, Tosafot, and other medieval authorities [Rishonim] of blessed memory.³²

So too is the bitter calf of creating a polity [*melukha*; lit. kingdom] before the coming of the Messiah. This defiled idea was [proffered] for many years by the Zionists, who performed aggressive actions in many ways to transgress these oaths [of forcing the end and ascending to the land of Israel en masse]. But because of our great many sins, most of the people of all sects were instruments in helping [to create this polity]. Even those righteous among Israel [*mukhsharim be-Yisrael*], even from among those who greatly fought the Zionists because of their actions to undermine religion [*dat*], heresy, and blasphemy, heaven forbid, were captured by the essence of their defiled idea, that is, attaining political autonomy and creating a polity before the coming of the Messiah, which is a fundamental act of rebellion [*poreah rosh veleanah*; lit. a stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood].³³ For the strength

of the evil inclination is so strong that it blinds one's eyes in this matter, and [thus] one is not aware. [These righteous ones] then contributed to [participation in] this great evil by the multitude [of Israel], some in action and some in speech, in many different and strange ways, since they covered their eyes from seeing that it was their souls [that were in question].³⁴

Teitelbaum then suggests that this very act is a “blemish also in thought,” referring to Nahmanides's claim that the multitude sinned with the calf “in thought” and not in action. As I understand it, Teitelbaum's point here is to suggest that the “blemish in thought” includes the religious Zionist (perhaps Kookian) program, which seeks to justify this tragic behavior. The golden calf and Zionism are analogous precisely because both are exercises in the unwillingness to wait for the proper moment: in the case of the calf, for Moses to return, and in the case of Zionism, for the Messiah to arrive. And both sinned “in thought,” as many went along with the few in the case of the calf, as the religious sector aided and abetted the Zionist project, and as Kook offered a theological justification for it. This, for Teitelbaum, is the essence of false messianism, which is actually a form of anti-messianism. Zionist activism is thus an anti-messianic act falsely enveloped in messianism. True messianism, for Teitelbaum, is always an act of waiting and resisting the temptation to actively bring about the end prematurely. The only true messianism is thus resistance to “forcing the end,” even, or precisely, in times when the latter appears most reasonable.³⁵

Another oblique reference to Kook appears in Teitelbaum's rendering of Korah in his *Divrei Yoel*, Korah being the architect of a rebellion against Moshe in the desert. Teitelbaum writes: “And do not be like Korah and his community. Even regarding a unique individual (*m'yukhad be doro*) it is forbidden to learn from him if he joins those who are against the Torah. We only have the ways of our forebearers, and it is through their merit that we live.”³⁶

Throughout this homily, mention of Korah seems like an oblique reference to Kook. For example, “Korah wanted to hasten the redemption and thought that the tikkun would occur in his days . . . and he [Korah] thought that through them [his retinue] he could bring [redemption] from thought to action, even though he knew their evil ways. He thought that good could come from them, even though they were evil. He took this idea from the red heifer [that purifies the defiled and defiles the pure].”³⁷ Elsewhere he notes similarly, without reference to Korah: “A general principle is that defilement only brings about more defilement, as an ancient saying states that ‘from evil comes evil.’ And it is forbidden for Israel to grasp onto this evil, thinking that purification will result. And regarding the red heifer, the purification comes from defilement that is a specific textual inference (*gezeirat ha-katuv*) and we do not learn [a principle] from that because that is a [textual] innovation [*hidush*], and we don't learn from such a textual innovation. Rather the *hidush* remains applicable only to itself.”³⁸

For Teitelbaum, the true messianic act is nonaction. This comes through in another short excerpt from the “Introduction” to *VM*, commenting on a passage from Midrash Lamentations Rabbah 3:19 on the verse *But this I do call to mind* [lit. on my heart, ‘al libi], *therefore I have hope* (Lam. 3:21). The context of the passage is a reflection on the destruction of Jerusalem and the recognition that even such a grievous tragedy has not resulted in abandoning the possibility of a future. *God is my portion, therefore I have hope in God* (Lam. 3: 24). Teitelbaum will use this midrash to make a separate point. He writes:

Midrash Lamentations Rabbah (3:19) on the verse, *But this do I call to mind, therefore I have hope.*³⁹ At the end of that midrash it states, “When redemption comes, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to Israel, ‘My children, I am surprised how you waited for me all these years!’ They will say, ‘Master of the world, if not for the Torah that you gave us, we would have already been destroyed by the nations.’ Hence it says, ‘But this [zo’t] do I call to mind. . . .’ The word ‘this [zo’t]’ always refers to Torah, as we read, ‘This [zo’t] is the Torah.’⁴⁰ Similarly, David says, *were not Your Torah my delight I would have perished in my affliction.*⁴¹ Therefore, ‘. . . I have hope.’” See there, for [this discussion] extends from the beginning of the parable. We can see from this that to wait and to hope for redemption is a great test, so much so that God will say to Israel, “I am surprised how you withstood this test.” It is impossible to withstand this test without commitment to the holy Torah, and only the holy Torah protects and saves.⁴²

The midrash characterizes the central messianic act as one of waiting (“My children, I am surprised how you waited for me all these years!”), to which Israel responds that they were able to wait only because they had Torah, meaning that Torah contained the promise of an end to exile and the prohibition against ending it prematurely. This can be understood in a few ways. One is that Torah enabled Israel to persevere through the exile because the covenant allowed them to believe that, through Torah, hope resides, even in destruction. This seems to be the context of the verse in Lamentations once the word *zo’t* (“this”) in the verse is read as “Torah.” Another way that relates more directly to Zionism and that I think may be closer to Teitelbaum’s intention here is that Zionism, which for him is fundamentally the rejection of waiting, is the natural byproduct of abandoning Torah. Once one abandons Torah, it is not that one *will not* wait, but more strongly that one *cannot* wait. Waiting without hope is impossible.

Zionism is thus framed as the anti-messianic act of not waiting that is precipitated, or even made necessary, by the abandonment of Torah. If one has Torah, one can persevere through even the most egregious acts of destruction (here perhaps referring to the Holocaust). But without Torah, waiting itself would be an act of self-destruction. The rub here is that by not waiting, one may survive, but the price will be the undermining of redemption, for, as Teitelbaum begins the next paragraph, “The truth is that all manner of heresy prevents redemption (*m’akevet et ha-geulah*).” The heresy of which he speaks, basing his view on b.T. Rosh Ha-Shana

17a, is one whereby the heretic “abandons the [belief in the] Temple (*pashtu yadey-hem m’zevul*).” This means for him that the heretic abandons the belief in God’s intervention to rebuild the Temple. Once one abandons Torah, hope disappears. Thus, while Zionism purports to be messianic, it is the opposite. By abandoning waiting and activating human agency, one subverts redemption. One can suggest that for Teitelbaum, this is understandable for secular Jews, since by abandoning Torah the hope that enables waiting disappears. But for religious Jews—that is, for his constituency—succumbing to the Zionist project, even tacitly, is abandoning the hope of redemption that survives only through waiting.

Thus, while Kook suggests that transgressors can, against their will, fulfill the divine call to redemption, Teitelbaum suggests that, by abandoning Torah, what remains is the heresy of abandoning the hope of redemption by taking redemption into one’s own hands. However, for Teitelbaum the consequence of abandoning hope is far greater than the value in the rebuilding of the land of Israel. That is not a messianic act but a product of hopelessness, and thus an anti-messianic act. It is what he calls a heresy of faithlessness (*kefira b’emunha*).⁴³ In effect, he is reversing Kook’s equation. Kook claims that the transgressors can also be true messianists by building a state in the land, even after abandoning Torah. Teitelbaum claims that the transgressors are acting in an anti-messianic fashion and the real tragedy is that religious Jews, who should uphold the true messianic act of waiting, have been seduced by the illusion of “abandoning hope” in the Temple’s divine reconstruction, a symbol of true messianism. Here, heresy functions for Teitelbaum not so much as an error in belief, but more as the unwillingness to recognize the obligatory status of exile as a covenantal paradigm.⁴⁴

Kook and Teitelbaum really constitute and represent two parts of the same religious project: the interpretation of tradition to determine how and whether heresy can function as a vehicle of redemption. Earlier religious Zionists such as Isaac Jacob Reines (1839–1915), and even Agudat Yisrael, did not have that problem, because they did not view Zionism in such stark messianic terms (at least not in the same way), but rather saw it as a practical solution to a demographic problem, whereby they would fight for maximal rights of observance in the land of Israel.⁴⁵ While Teitelbaum attacked Agudat for its collaboration with Zionists, his real oppositional partner was Kook (even as he never mentions him), for both he and Kook viewed Zionism as messianism—as false messianism and true messianism, respectively.

Teitelbaum thus frames Zionism as an open rebellion against the “three oaths” delineated in the Babylonian Talmud (111a), to which he dedicates his first and most widely read essay in *VM*. For now, suffice it to say that whatever one thinks of Teitelbaum’s accusation against Zionism, the practice of “search[ing] after the sins that caused this anguish and exile” was very much within the theological frame of reference common among Jews for centuries, and certainly where Teitelbaum grew up in Transylvania. I will argue that the critique of Teitelbaum among many

modern Jews was not *only* about Teitelbaum's view of Zionism, but was also about the very exercise of covenantal theodicy itself in regard to the Holocaust.⁴⁶

Interestingly, some Modern Hebrew writers returned to this theodic frame in understanding the Holocaust, albeit from the position of Zionism. Alan Mintz, whom I cited above, writes, "By evoking the covenantal paradigm, [Hayyim Nahman] Bialik returns to the conception of destruction as punishment for sin; however, through a great arrogation, he transposed the definition of sin from the failure to be faithful to Torah piety to the failure to undertake political action, even to rebel against God."⁴⁷ This exercise in "arrogation" is illustrated in stark, and dark, beauty in Bialik's poem "In the City of Slaughter," written as a response to the Kishinev pogrom in October 1905. The poem laments the death of the Diaspora, a death whose darkness descended, unalterably, decades later in the Holocaust. For rebels against covenantal theodicy such as Bialik, the correct response to such death was not repentance from sin, but Zionist ideology—that is, Jewish political agency, a rebellion against the centuries-long quiescence of traditional Judaism. As Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal (1885–1945), an ultra-Orthodox figure from Slovakia—a former staunch anti-Zionist who had become a proponent of Zionism—wrote in the war years from a more traditional vantage point, the real teshuvah-as-response-to-catastrophe was abandoning Europe for the land of Israel. This became, for Teichtal, the required repentance necessary before mass immigration to the land of Israel.⁴⁸ Teitelbaum's *VM* resists such an audacious rupture with tradition, even given Teichtal's attempt to couch it in traditional nomenclature.

Part of the audacity of *VM* is explained by the way in which the Holocaust had broken the practice of traditional theodic examination. Scholars such as Gershon Greenberg, Eliezer Schweid, Steven T. Katz, Isaac Hershkowitz, Barbara Krawcowicz, and others have examined ultra-Orthodox responses to the Holocaust and illuminated the inner struggle implicit in, on the one hand, applying classical theodicy to the events of 1939–45 while, on the other, recognizing that somehow this tragedy did not easily fit the paradigm of covenantal theodicy that earlier figures had viewed as both necessary and obvious. Thus, a source of the animus against *VM*, aside from its demonization of Zionism—which, by the late 1950s, had become dissonant for most Jews—is that Teitelbaum was engaging in an age-old project of covenantal theodicy that had tacitly become illegitimate after the Holocaust. Even among secular Modern Hebrew writers who gestured toward a revolutionized theodicy in which the culprits were those who remained in a body (European Jewry) not knowing that it was dying, it was really only Zvi Yehuda Kook, decades later, who dared to suggest that the Holocaust was caused by Jews' refusal to leave Europe, requiring God to "cut them out" from a dying body in an act of "divine surgery" (*nituah elohi*) for the purposes of redemption.⁴⁹ Zvi Yehuda Kook and Teitelbaum thus share a basic structural understanding of theodicy in regard to the Holocaust and differ only in who is responsible.

The details of this theodic, or theological, revolution had not been fully articulated in the 1950s when *VM* was written. Only with Richard Rubenstein's 1966 book *After Auschwitz* and the myriad responses to its challenges did post-Holocaust theology really begin to grapple with the theological implications of the Holocaust, both in terms of *applying* covenantal reciprocity and in the *rejection* of applying covenantal reciprocity to the Holocaust. For Teitelbaum, this debate (of which he was certainly unaware) would itself be blasphemous. How can the Jewish people be susceptible to such evil without divine cause? How can a covenantal God survive the belief that the Holocaust was not divinely orchestrated? This, of course, is not an unconventional question; rather, it is *the* question of Holocaust and post-Holocaust theology, certainly for Jews who pledge fidelity to traditional categories of thought. If Teitelbaum had known of the radical reversal of some Modern Hebrew (Zionist) writers on this question—that is, the right response was a rebellion against covenantal theodicy—this would only have strengthened his resolve.

One could, as many ultra-Orthodox writers did, remain agnostic on the cause of the Holocaust, but for Teitelbaum, who was predisposed to polemical interventions against modernity more generally, the very notion that Jews are not in some way implicated in this tragedy is unimaginable.⁵⁰ And not only for him. As mentioned above, Zionist thinkers such as Zvi Yehuda Kook blamed the Jews who remained in Europe after the Balfour Declaration in 1917.⁵¹ Fellow Hungarian figure Teichtal, in his wartime *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, is gentler than Kook but no less radical. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Teichtal began to view the events that would eventually take his life as unprecedented, and his previous messianic view—that the rise of Jewish secularism and Zionism were the signs of the impending eschaton—began to wane. Not unlike predecessors such as Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), Teichtal viewed the very possibility of immigration to the land of Israel as a wake-up call for Jews to enact collective teshuvah by returning to the land.⁵² In an earlier work, *Tov Yigal* (1926), Teichtal predicted the impending messianic era. He argued that such upheaval was necessary to arouse Jews from their complacency: “Now, should redemption take place in a setting of goodness, tranquility, and calm among the nations, many Jews would never consider leaving.”⁵³

Barbara Krawcowicz, reflecting on Teichtal's approach, notes: “According to Teichtal's interpretation of Jewish history, the time allotted by God for this punishment has already run its course. The Jews, however, instead of responding to repeated divine calls for return, decided to settle in exile and in this way added to their initial offense.”⁵⁴ This does not blame the events on the complacent; Teichtal, like many others, understood the events as a necessary part of the “birth pangs” of the Messiah. But those who failed to listen were making a tragic error. Teichtal did not become a Zionist per se (although some claim he did, and he certainly supported the Zionist movement), but argued that human action, in this case immigration to the land, was the correct response to the messianic birth pangs.⁵⁵ Teitelbaum did not, as is often thought, simply suggest that his constituency do nothing. He

was against his constituents immigrating to Palestine because he thought that their religious convictions would erode in the secular Zionist space. He was not wrong in that regard, and many did abandon Orthodoxy after immigrating to Palestine. But he also raised money for those who decided to emigrate, certainly after 1940.⁵⁶

Rather, for Teitelbaum, the proper response to Zionism was resistance to what he deemed an *Antichrist-like* (my locution) Jewish heresy.⁵⁷ Teitelbaum was not, by definition, opposed to immigration to the land; he immigrated himself to Palestine. When he reached safety in Zurich with other members of the Kastner transport, he was asked whether he wanted to go to Palestine or to America and immediately chose Palestine.⁵⁸ Rather, he was against participation in a Zionist project that he deemed anti-messianic. Ironically, perhaps, Teitelbaum was saved by the (Zionist) Kastner transport and made his way to Palestine and then Brooklyn to (re)build the largest postwar Hasidic community in the world, whereas Teichtal did not heed his own warning to leave Europe, even returning from hiding in Budapest to Slovakia in the spring of 1944, where he was arrested and eventually murdered on the way to Auschwitz.⁵⁹

My point here is only to suggest that the covenantal frame of *VM*, that Jews are complicit in their own tragedy and that it is not only legitimate but even obligatory to consider the details of that complicity, is not as provocative, or dissonant, as it may sound today, and was quite common fare in the world Teitelbaum inhabited.⁶⁰ Understanding Jewish sin as a response to tragedy was often viewed as an opportunity for Jews to repent from their sinful ways to avoid its repetition. Thus, Teichtal argued that the collapse of Europe provided an opportunity for collective teshuvah in returning to the land of Israel: "We must vow to return to the holy land and reestablish its glory."⁶¹ The sages of the Talmud certainly engaged in that exercise, reflecting on Jewish complicity centuries after the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and the reciprocal framework of such investigations was concertized in the prophetic rebuke of Israel in their time. Returning to the land was not one of the ways the rabbinic sages chose to enact such repentance, a point Teitelbaum stresses in his essay on the mitzvah of residing in the land of Israel. While one could argue that rabbinic theological reflection on destruction took place only many years after the events, we have earlier reflections on the destruction, mostly from Christian sources, that argue similarly.⁶²

In exercising covenantal reciprocity, or covenantal theodicy, Teitelbaum was not innovative at all—although doing so in regard to the Holocaust was dissonant for many outside the ultra-Orthodox camp.⁶³ However, his attempt to wed the evils of the Holocaust to what he viewed as the sinfulness of Zionism, while itself not new, attained a high-pitched crescendo in *VM*. Predecessors such as Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz (d. 1937), a one-time mentor of Teitelbaum and a leader of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy, had already written extensively against Zionism, at times even more vociferously than Teitelbaum before the war.⁶⁴ And Orthodox leaders such as Elchanan Wasserman, who returned to Europe from America

in 1939 and was murdered in Kovno by Lithuanian collaborators in 1941, Sholom DovBer Schneersohn of Lubavitch (the fifth Lubavitcher rebbe) and Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch (the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe), and Michael Dov Weissmandel, among many others, were vociferously anti-Zionist.⁶⁵ What makes *VM* distinctive is its extensive treatment of the subject, that it was written after the war and after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (in fact, in some way at least, it was a response to 1948), and that Teitelbaum singles out Zionism, as opposed to secularization more generally, as the true cause of the Jewish disaster not only because Zionism is, in his view, transgressive in nature, but because it exhibits the quintessence of Jewish rebellion against God.⁶⁶ What is this rebellion? In short, it is twofold: first, “normalization,” making the Jews and Jewish destiny subject to history; and second, giving up on the Messiah and calling it messianism. In other words, giving up on waiting—which, for Teitelbaum, was the great trap of exile.⁶⁷

As David Sorotzkin puts it, “Normalization is impossible from the perspective of the rebbe of Satmar. He claims that the Jew must continue to live among the other nations. This itself constitutes the Jew’s identity.” Here is where the Talmudic “three oaths” become the crux of Teitelbaum’s argument and the target of its most robust critique. To break the oath and immigrate to the land of Israel before the apportioned time is to undermine the covenantal identity bequeathed to the Jew through tradition.⁶⁸ Normalization is nothing less for him than an act of idolatry. I will explore the three oaths in more detail below. In this sense, Teitelbaum inverts the very notion of normalization. As he reads tradition, normalization is the life of Jews in exile. For the Zionists, normalization was defined through the lens of the gentiles, as sovereignty, language, and politics. This, for him, is the Zionist inversion that defines heresy. As Aharon Shmuel Tamares (1869–1931) argues in his 1921 book *Knesset Yisrael and the Wars of the Gentiles*, Zionists became “hypnotized” by the gentile concept of nationalism as an expression of normalization.⁶⁹

Before that, however, another aspect of understanding the frame of Teitelbaum’s reflections on the Holocaust and Zionism is to address the question of the Holocaust’s uniqueness, both historically and theologically. For Teitelbaum, what mattered was the theological implications of the Holocaust and not its historical implications, if only because, for him, history and theology are not distinct. In line with his contemporaries, he considered Jewish history to be Jewish theophany. Thus, Emil Fackenheim’s view of the Holocaust as a theological *novum* offers a more serious challenge to Teitelbaum than Steven T. Katz’s view of the Holocaust as a historical *novum*.⁷⁰

The question of the Holocaust’s uniqueness is central in contemporary discussions about it and informed everything from the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to the establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah), which was made formal law by the Knesset in 1959.⁷¹ While never fully addressed in the *haredi* world—even as certain figures such as Teichtal,

Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, Shlomo Zalman Unsdrofer, and others seemed to gesture in the direction of uniqueness—few viewed the Holocaust openly as an unprecedented event.⁷² Some held that silence was the only theological response.⁷³ But some viewed the very concept of uniqueness, or *novum*, as a secularizing orientation. Jewish historian Ismar Schorsch notes: “Unfortunately, our obsession with the uniqueness of the Holocaust smacks of a distasteful secular version of chosenness. We are still special—but only by virtue of Hitler’s paranoia.”⁷⁴ Theological chosenness requires covenantal theodicy; if Jews are somehow subject to divine protection, they are also subject to divine punishment. But if the Holocaust transcends divine punishment—that is, if it is “unique”—what is left of chosenness remains somewhat ambiguous.

Jacob Neusner’s view of rabbinic concepts of time as an illustration of “paradigmatic thinking” left no room in the minds of the rabbinic sages for anything meaningful to occupy the category of a *novum*. For Neusner, “What is remarkable conforms to the conventions of the paradigm.” He argues that “paradigmatic thinking replaced historical when history as an account of one-time, irreversible, unique events, arranged in linear sequence and pointing toward a teleological conclusion, lost all plausibility. . . . That mode of thought—of interpreting events by appeal to a paradigm or model of explanation, rather than to unique, linear, and one-time events yielding a singular truth—endured in Rabbinic Judaism until the advent of historicism. Indeed, it remains, even now, a powerful mode of shaping consciousness within the communities of the faithful, for whom Moses is ‘our rabbi’—not was, but *is*—even now.”⁷⁵ This also stands as a central part of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s thesis in his book *Zakhor*.

Teitelbaum was not part of any of these conversations and obviously was unaware of the debates around uniqueness, but Schorsch’s observation that the Holocaust’s uniqueness is itself a “secular version of chosenness” and Neusner’s notion of “paradigmatic thinking” speak directly to why Teitelbaum could never accept the Holocaust as a *novum* or as anything that would arise from such a claim. If something is “unique,” it arguably could never fit into the covenantal paradigm that informed Jewish theology for millennia. In fact, this is precisely what Richard Rubenstein and Emil Fackenheim point to as the very cornerstone of post-Holocaust theology.⁷⁶ If, however, the Holocaust was *not* unique but simply the most egregious and horrific affront against the Jews—that is, if it fit into Neusner’s paradigmatic model—then searching for ways to understand it through the portal of covenantal theodicy is understandable, even if dissonant to modern ears.

Here it is worth considering that for many today, Jews and non-Jews alike, the Holocaust made covenantal theodicy impossible. That is, while we can lament the destruction of the Temples “because of our sins” (this is how the liturgy expresses *hurban*), to even suggest this in regard to the Holocaust is blasphemy; for many, the Holocaust thus becomes a theological exception. It is this “theological exception” that Teitelbaum seeks to undermine.

The question as to whether the “Holocaust exception” subverts the rule of covenantal theodicy more generally, as Richard Rubenstein argued, or whether the Holocaust provides an exception that proves the covenantal rule, a position Rubenstein’s detractors such as Eliezer Berkovits and Irving (Yitz) Greenberg argued in different ways, remains an active debate. For a thinker such as Teitelbaum, however, the very suggestion of a theological exception is anathema because such an exception would undermine the covenantal principles set in motion by the Hebrew prophets and concretized by the rabbinic sages. Thus, while for modern readers *VM* may seem like an egregious and blasphemous exercise, from where Teitelbaum stands it is nothing more than an exercise in covenantal theodicy. Therefore, what is so dissonant for a modern reader of *VM* is not that Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as responsible for unleashing radical evil on the Jews, but the very fact that Teitelbaum would evaluate the Holocaust in such a covenantal manner. In short, it is much easier to criticize him for his anti-Zionism than for his covenantal theodicy. But the two are mutually inclusive.

What I suggest here is that the basis of resistance to *VM* is not only that Zionism is demonized and that it perpetuates, rather than resolves, Jewish exile, but that Teitelbaum’s open resistance to treating the Holocaust as categorically different than past tragedies (i.e., as a theological *novum*) is dissonant to many outside the ultra-Orthodox camp. In some way, perhaps, such resistance to the Holocaust as a theological *novum* is an anxiety underlying some of those who espouse it; that is, once the Holocaust is *not* viewed as a theological *novum*, theological reasons for the Holocaust such as we see in *VM* are inevitable. That is, for many post-Holocaust theologians, the Holocaust simply *cannot* be viewed as part of Jewish covenantal history in any conventional way. Both Berkovits and Yitz Greenberg struggle with that very point. The consequences of that move, radical in many ways, are often less acceptable than are its premises.

While Teitelbaum’s ire against Zionism is overt and obviously offensive to many outside his ultra-Orthodox circle, *VM*’s covenantal theodicy suggests an even deeper theological challenge. It is noteworthy, for example, that many *haredim* did not support, and many still do not recognize, the establishment of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, even as many of their relatives were murdered by the Nazis. This is not because they do not believe it should be recognized, but because they do not believe it should be given special status distinct from other commemorations of Jewish calamity such as Tisha B’Av. As we see from the liturgical writings of *Kinot* (supplementary readings that are read on Tisha B’Av and other days of mourning), historically Jews lamented tragedies by bundling them into the quintessential tragic days in Jewish history commemorating the destruction of the Temples. Setting aside a special day for the Holocaust suggests, if only by implication, that the Holocaust was categorically different. It is making a theological intervention into a stable covenantal model whereby Jewish catastrophe

gets folded into preexisting rabbinic models of Jewish suffering. Part of that difference was suggesting that any notion of covenantal theodicy regarding the Holocaust was inapplicable. This is certainly understandable given the preponderance of human suffering, not only for the victims but for their mourners and for survivors. But in *VM*, Teitelbaum maintains that given the depth of suffering—which he experienced firsthand—one must still seek out reasons for calamity in order to correct collective and individual Jewish behavior that lent itself to either God’s intervention or God’s lack of intervention in this tragedy. This was especially true, he surmised, in his own time, which he believed stood on the precipice of redemption. In the “Introduction” to *VM*, he writes:

If this is the case [regarding Yom Kippur], how much more so as we stand on the cusp of redemption, as it is known that after redemption the eradication of the evil inclination and Satan will be total in a way that hasn’t existed since creation.⁷⁷ We have also seen Tosafot to b.T. Rosh Ha-Shana (16b, s.v. “*kedai*”), who cites the Jerusalem Talmud that after the great shofar is blown it is time for Satan to be extinguished. Certainly, then, [evil will be strengthened in] all kinds of ways to prevent the coming of redemption. And miracles will be required to overcome this, miracles that far outweigh the miracle that occurred to the High Priest that he not experience a seminal emission [on Yom Kippur]. Thus, Satan established the Zionist state and the heretical polity [precisely] to prevent [the process of] redemption. God should quickly have mercy and bring upon redemption and the redemption of our souls.⁷⁸

Until we read the Zionist state as the product of pre-redemptive satanic action, this text will be read as a quite conventional rendering of the imminent end-time in rabbinic literature. And, of course, Zionists can easily read the statement that “miracles will be required to overcome this [the satanic threat]” as applying to Zionism itself. Such a reading would not be problematic at all, even though what is “miraculous” and what is “satanic” remains purely in the realm of speculation and, as Teitelbaum notes more explicitly in *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah* and more by implication in *VM*, there is rabbinic precedent for the satanic itself operating under the guise of miracle and mitzvah.⁷⁹ Thus, as mentioned above, Teitelbaum and the Zionists, certainly religious Zionists, do not really disagree on the basic structure of how redemptive history will unfold, but disagree on its content and on how one interprets the present reality.⁸⁰

An important element in the debate between Teitelbaum and Zionists—in fact, it is what they share—is the connection between Zionism and messianism. Rav Manitou (Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, 1922–96), a contemporary French/Israeli Zionist leader connected to the religious Zionist camp, says it most succinctly: “In truth: Zionism is the only movement that concretized the national will of the Jewish people to end exile. All previous attempts were mystical in nature. And they did not see themselves as gathering the entire Hebrew people from the dispersion. In this

way, the Zionist movement—in terms of its goal of gathering the dispersed—is the only authentic messianic movement. It and only it brought together the promises to end exile, promises directly connected to the people in its Torah of the nation (*Torat Ha-Uma*).⁸¹

As opposed to secular forms of Zionism in which the messianism is muted (although, I would argue, still present in some form), for Teitelbaum and the religious Zionists, messianism, as claim and counterclaim, stands at the center of the Zionist project.⁸² And the very apex of the messianic is (1) the role of miracle as sign of impending messianism and (2) the status of miracle in Zionism. That is, can “miracle” (*ot* or *mofet*) be a sign of impending messianism, and if Zionism is the ingathering of the exiles through a secular (even anti-religious) movement, can it legitimately constitute a “miracle”? This will be discussed at greater length below, in the context of how Teitelbaum utilizes Maimonides against the Zionist nationalist claim. Here, though, we can see what the two sides share in understanding the crucial nature of Zionism living in the end-time.

Before turning to some specific arguments in Teitelbaum’s “Essay on the Three Oaths,” a methodological point is in order. In general, in this chapter, I do not enter into a detailed analysis of how Teitelbaum reads the sources in relation to his detractors. While that is a necessary tack in any serious halakhic debate, my interest is neither apologetics nor defending Teitelbaum on halakhic grounds. I am interested, rather, in how he is using his sources to make a theopolitical argument about his world in relation to his understanding of tradition. For example, he suggests that Zionism holds there is ample evidence (some of it called “miraculous”) to claim that this moment, as opposed to others in the past, is the true beginning of the end-time. That Zionist claim, of course, is made solely through speculative conclusions drawn from empirical observations (which do not constitute evidence). That is, there is no *evidence* that what we are witnessing is a time of “signs and miracles.” It is an interpretation all the way down. This does not mean that it is false, or that it is true. It only means that the categories of truth and falsity do not apply to such speculative assertions.⁸³

What Teitelbaum argues is that those interpretive judgments are not legitimate criteria for judging the advent of Messiah. Maimonides warns against “wonders and signs” in numerous places in his writings, most specifically in his *Epistle to Yemen*. It is part of his messianic naturalism. But religious Zionists who use Maimonides readily call Zionism “miraculous” and then use Maimonides’s natural messianism as a template proving its veracity.⁸⁴ Teitelbaum claims that such a Zionist interpretation is stuck in both a logical and a textual contradiction. There is one true sign of redemption in Maimonides according to Teitelbaum, and that is that the Messiah will compel Jews to pledge fidelity to Torah and mitzvot. It is no provocation to state that Zionism has not fulfilled that condition according to Teitelbaum’s reading. It is thus a “false redemption” by definition, according to him, not only because it has not

fulfilled those necessary conditions, but because it has, in fact, undermined them. For Teitelbaum, therein lies its demonic core.

THE THREE OATHS IN CONTEXT

Suffice it to say that the Talmudic pericope of the “three oaths” serves Teitelbaum as the most obvious rabbinic text on which to base his war against the modern movement called Zionism, which sought to implement mass immigration of Jews to the land of Israel, with the desire to establish an autonomous secular polity there. A concise description of the oaths reads: “What are these three oaths? One, that Israel should not go up (*ya’alu*) like a wall (*homa*). Another, that God has Israel swear not to rebel (*yimradu*) against the nations; another, that God had the nations swear not to subjugate (*yishta’abdu*) Israel too much.”⁸⁵

More than simply a theological rebellion against the divine “decree of exile” (a topic Teitelbaum addresses at length in his essay on the mitzvah of residing in the land of Israel), Teitelbaum portrays Zionist immigration policy as a halakhic transgression of monumental proportions.⁸⁶ While most of the criticisms of VM focus on challenging his halakhic reasoning against mass immigration (*aliyah k’homa*), what is often lost is that the halakhic claim about the three oaths is part of a larger assault on Zionism more broadly.⁸⁷ As we will see, the first-tier attack on Teitelbaum’s reading of the three oaths is that they are not halakhic in nature but are purely a homiletic/haggadic flourish and, while provocative, are not binding. This is a matter about which earlier authorities seem to disagree, although for them it was a purely theoretical issue with no real consequences. Each side—Teitelbaum and his detractors—lines up earlier positions to strengthen its case.⁸⁸ As I will suggest below, though citing sources that claim the three oaths are not halakhic may erase the legally prohibitive nature of Zionism, the rabbinic sentiment about discouraging Jewish rebellion against the exile and premature immigration remains. Zionists, of course, have answers to these observations.

In fact, both Teitelbaum and his detractors—including not all but certainly many religious Zionists—are working from a similar playbook. Both view Zionism as part of a messianic process. For religious Zionists, it is the sign that exile has ended or that the end has begun. Their proof is largely in the reality that mass immigration has succeeded, thus suggesting that the divine decree has been annulled, offering a kind of Eusebian triumphalism about determining divine will through historical reality.⁸⁹ Teitelbaum views history in a more complex fashion. For him, the success of Zionism is the final test of exile to be resisted for the end to unfold. Teitelbaum, as I argue in my introduction to *‘Al Ha-Geluah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah* in chapter 4, is much more suspicious of interpreting reality, or history, in such a straightforward fashion.

Here again, the Holocaust looms large for both sides. For example, some of Teitelbaum’s critics argue that the Holocaust broke the divine promise of the three

oaths that God would not allow the Jews to suffer “too much.” Thus, since that oath was broken, the Jews are no longer bound by their oath not to immigrate en masse to the land. This may be considered one strand of “Holocaust exceptionalism.” But this assumption has its own internal contradiction. If, as is argued, the Holocaust nullifies the oaths, then before the Holocaust (and Zionism, of course, predates the Holocaust), Zionism’s call for mass immigration would still be an abrogation of those oaths. In any case, Teitelbaum disagrees with that theological assumption by interpreting reality in an inverse fashion. The collapse of Europe was indeed the final stage of exile, he suggests, and while it appears that the decree is annulled, in fact it is the final test requiring the Jews to resist the premature opportunities Zionism proposes. To my mind, on analytical grounds at least, the theological absurdity of Teitelbaum’s proclamation is no worse than the theological absurdity of the religious Zionist one. Both Teitelbaum’s view of reality and the religious Zionist one are equally unverifiable. The question comes down to who has a stronger case from within the sources.

The three oaths deal primarily with the prohibition of mass immigration and rebelling against the nations, that is, contesting the quiescence of an exilic posture. They obviously do not deal at all with the legitimacy of establishing a secular political entity envisioned by most Zionists, a topic that many Orthodox voices more sympathetic to Zionism, for example Isaac Breuer, opposed as well.⁹⁰ But while some Orthodox Zionists generally did focus on the attempt to end the Jewish state of exile before the arrival of the Messiah, many believed that redemption was upon us.⁹¹ Teitelbaum focused on the prohibitive nature of the Zionist project as an attempt to preempt the redemption from a halakhic standpoint. The basis of *VM*, certainly of its first essay, on the three oaths, is a halakhically based analysis more than a theological intervention. The resistance to *VM* comes almost exclusively from halakhic detractors—that is, those who counter Teitelbaum’s claim that the Zionist project of mass immigration and ending the exile early is transgressive. By subverting the halakhic nature of the Talmudic pericope (*sugya*), they claim to have undermined his anti-Zionist claim on textual grounds. However, as I argue later in this work, the halakhic component is only part of Teitelbaum’s intervention. The project is based on a theological claim that extends far beyond whether, in fact, it is prohibited or permissible to immigrate to the land of Israel. This is the basis of my claim that *VM* is a work of political theology.

The question as to the halakhic status of the three oaths today—that is, do they have halakhic weight and if so, why, and if not, why not?—is the operating concern of Teitelbaum’s critics.⁹² On the validity of a secular *state* from a halakhic perspective, most of Teitelbaum’s critics have no halakhic answer and lean on the mystical ideas of Abraham Kook and his school that became normative among religious Zionists by the 1970s. Many *haredim* such as Agudat Yisrael, while not Zionists, agreed to be part of the secular state in order to ensure their community’s rights and influence the state religiously as much as possible.⁹³ This was becoming

more common by the late 1940s and early 1950s, except among the staunch anti-Zionist enclaves in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, and other ultra-Orthodox locales.⁹⁴ This approach was anathema for Teitelbaum, who viewed Zionism in demonic, and not simply transgressive, terms. This demonization exhibits the theological nature of Teitelbaum's project, even when it is framed in halakhic terms. The question as to whether Teitelbaum overreached in his reading of the three oaths is a legitimate one but does not address his larger concerns regarding the rebelliousness of Zionism.

Here it is worth noting that religious Zionism as it exists today, certainly the Kookian version, was not operative in Teitelbaum's formative years. In Hungary and Transylvania—in particular, in Sighet (Sighetu Marmăției), and later Karoly (Nagykároly) and Satmar (Satu Mare), where Teitelbaum lived and served as a rabbinic leader—there were Zionist groups, most of which were secular. The leaders of the Zionist movement in those years were almost all secular and, in many cases, radically so. They attracted youth from religious circles to their cause, and many ultra-Orthodox rabbis, especially in the Hungarian Unterland (Transylvania), were threatened by the secularizing character of Zionism, offering young Jews not a path toward assimilation but a path toward substitution, a non-halakhic form of Jewishness in the form of nationalism.⁹⁵ It is not at all clear how much direct knowledge Teitelbaum had about Zionist thought and literature, but understanding Zionism as a radical break with traditional Judaism on almost all fronts was common.⁹⁶ Teitelbaum, like many of his contemporaries, viewed Zionism as a “competing form of Jewishness rather than as simply a political movement to (re) create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.”⁹⁷ This is not to suggest that Teitelbaum would have been sympathetic to a Kookian position that viewed Zionism as the fulfillment of Judaism; he certainly would not have been.⁹⁸ He often stated the dictum that “good does not come from evil” in *VM*, and he would have viewed Kook's project in that light. Nevertheless, the transgressive nature of Zionism was openly acknowledged by some of Zionism's most popular figures, including political ones like David Ben-Gurion, who once proposed to print a Hebrew Bible without the name of God. Teitelbaum remained committed to the radical nature of Zionism even after that radicalism diminished with the establishment of the state. That is because the establishment of the secular state (he called it the *melukha*) was, for him, the most radical articulation of the project. Not only did it not procure redemption, it subverted it. As opposed to Kook, I would venture to say that for Teitelbaum religious influence on the secular state does not make the state more religious (a major impetus for Kook), but rather makes religion more secular.

Unbeknownst to many outside the orbit of ultra-Orthodoxy, *VM* was taken quite seriously in that world, even by those who disagreed with it. Myriad figures mentioned the work, sometimes in agreement, often in disagreement, but it was far from marginal. Nonetheless, most of Teitelbaum's detractors, certainly in the Orthodox world, do not really address the larger theological point that undergirds his halakhic analysis, except to point to the Kookian dialectical view that the

secular can be the harbinger of the holy that will be transformed in the imminent future.⁹⁹ Teitelbaum was apparently aware of such an argument, and he rejected it completely. This itself is no surprise. Kook's views were largely rejected by his ultra-Orthodox constituents more generally—and also by many secular Zionists of his time—and became popular only later, with the emergence of Kookian thinking in the 1960s.¹⁰⁰

The purely halakhic attack on Teitelbaum is problematic for a few reasons. First, offering counter-texts to a halakhic argument does not invalidate said argument, since the tradition is full of counter-sources for almost every position. All counter-texts can do is curtail the unequivocal nature of an argument. We have many halakhic decisions on practical matters where more than one position is deemed legitimate. In this case, we have a halakhic disagreement that is based on two opposing theological premises.¹⁰¹ Thus, the readings of sources from both sides are deployed to validate a theological premise. For Teitelbaum, the premise is that Zionism is transgressive and is subverting the messianic process. For Zionists, the premise is that Zionism is in concert with divine will, that its proliferation is both mandated and supports the messianic process. This is where the real, irreconcilable, disagreement lies—and not in the intricate reading of this or that halakhic text. In this reading, the attempt to dismantle Teitelbaum's halakhic analysis without addressing the irreconcilability of both sides' theological premises turns into a kind of game. Both sides are trying to convince the other of their theological views through the halakhic sources, even as the halakhic sources are simply a projection of their theological views. The solidity of a halakhic position is the strength of its reading of the sources it reads; there is rarely if ever a halakhic position that has no counter-texts to challenge its reading. A halakhic argument of this nature cannot be severed from its historical and theological frame.

Here again, the Holocaust is a specter in this entire debate. For those who think theologically after the Holocaust, Zionism is almost always at the center. And for most, the Holocaust is a unique event in Jewish history that cannot be compared to previous calamities. We can see this in the work of Fackenheim, Yitz Greenberg, and Steven T. Katz, among many others. For most, Zionism becomes the salve for this unique event, a "miraculous" reversal of powerlessness and genocide, an exemplar of what in Hebrew is called *m'shoah le-tekuma* (from destruction to revival). In that case, Zionism is often, albeit not always, tied inextricably to the Holocaust, theologically if not also historically.

Thus, tying the establishment of the state of Israel to the Holocaust is not problematic, certainly not as a historical matter. Theologically it is more dubious, as contemporary Jewish theological scholar David Novak convincingly notes.¹⁰² The question, then, is really about examining the nature and parameters of that relationship. For most who engage in theological questioning, the claim is that Zionism is the beginning of redemption after the "birth pangs" that perhaps culminated in the Holocaust. Many religious Zionists, such as Zvi Yehuda Kook,

claim that the Holocaust subsumed the entirety of those messianic birth pangs, thus beginning in earnest the process of redemption. Some Hasidic figures, such as Shalom Noah Barzofsky of Slonim, argued similarly.¹⁰³ For Teitelbaum it is the opposite. While he may have agreed in principle that the Holocaust has subsumed the “birth pangs,” the establishment of the state is the final test whose resistance will yield the coming of the Messiah. In other words, if the Holocaust was a kind of inverse Sinai, Zionism is its golden calf, an idea Teitelbaum develops in *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*.

“ESSAY ON THE THREE OATHS”:
FROM HALAKHA TO POLITICAL THEOLOGY

As mentioned above, the arguments about the three oaths that Teitelbaum puts forth in “Essay on the Three Oaths” are the most widely read and openly criticized. The reasons for their popularity in the twentieth century are obvious. This obscure Talmudic pericope that appears in b.T. Ketubot 111a is, on the one hand, somewhat unproblematic for Talmudic sages who were cultivating a theology of exile and for medieval sages when such return seemed unlikely and far off. In some ways, the oaths can be read as a rabbinic addendum to Jeremiah 29:4–8 that the Israelites should settle in the lands where they reside and await the end-time, concluding, *Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them, declares God* (Jer. 29:8, 29:9). This is generally how the MaHa-Ral of Prague understands them in the contested chapter 24 of his *Nezah Yisrael* (which will be analyzed below).

Talmudic glossators paid little attention to these oaths, and they are accepted, for the most part, without much controversy. Maimonides, for example, simply ignores them in his *Mishneh Torah*, an omission that will become a source of much debate later on. The issue was really only, or mostly, about their status—are they halakhic (legally binding) or are they haggadic (homiletic)?¹⁰⁴ What did remain quite functional in the sources is the hazard of prematurely ending the exile or proclaiming the Messiah had arrived, known as “forcing the end” (*dekhiat ha-ketz*), a warning that is the operative message of the oaths themselves and is stated in the Talmudic passage by R. Levi when he offers three additional oaths, including not to reveal the end and not to force the end. Among many others, Maimonides devoted an entire epistle to this phenomenon of false messianism, *Igeret Teiman* (Epistle to Yemen); Nahmanides devoted a treatise to the dangers of messianic calculations, entitled *Sefer Ha-Geulah*; Don Isaac Abarbanel wrote a study entitled *Yeshuat Meshikho* (cited by Teitelbaum, in “Essay on the Three Oaths,” in his discussion of Bar Kokhba/Bar Koziba); and Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto wrote *Ma’amar ‘al Ha-Geulah*. These are just a few examples. The impetus to clarify matters of messianism was often invoked in direct response to false messianic claims,

in terms of either messianic calculations, such as in Nahmanides, or false messianic figures, as in the case of Maimonides's epistle.

With the advent of Zionism, one would think that the "three oaths," which prohibit mass immigration to the land before the proper time and prohibit calling for the end-time without clear messianic evidence, would be put into stark relief, and the Talmudic passage in question would become a major source of debate. And yet Abraham Kook only mentions the three oaths in passing, and other Orthodox thinkers, both Zionist and non-Zionist (e.g., Isaac Herzog and Isaac Breuer), seem to have little use for them.¹⁰⁵ Even Zvi Yehuda Kook, architect of the contemporary settler movement, writes about them only briefly.¹⁰⁶ However, religious anti-Zionists collected in the 1900 volume edited by Shlomo Zalman Landau, *Ohr Le-Shamayim: Shitat Neged Ha-Ziyonut*, and later Teitelbaum in particular, focus on this passage as proof that Zionism is a transgression of those oaths and thus an act of heresy.¹⁰⁷ Subsequent religious Zionist critics of Teitelbaum, such as Shlomo Aviner in his *Alo Na'aleh*, a chapter-by-chapter response to *VM*, spend enormous energy trying to undermine Teitelbaum's reading of the oaths.¹⁰⁸ I argue that the three oaths were somewhat overemphasized in Teitelbaum's writings and that his argument in "Essay on the Three Oaths" extends far beyond this Talmudic discussion to address other matters that are, at times, less ambiguous.

As we will see below, in his discussion of Maimonides on messianic signs and the requisite enactment of collective repentance, Teitelbaum does not consider the oaths as exclusively halakhic but, rather, argues that they serve as a theological promise (*haftakha*) by God to Israel, the abrogation of which constitutes a major covenantal breach.¹⁰⁹ As we will see, this is based primarily on his reading of the MaHaRal of Prague. That is, the three oaths serve as a frame rather than as the center of Teitelbaum's argument, in some way more essential than simply a halakhic mandate but also less valuable for his larger claim. Some religious Zionists seek to show, by combining their rereading of sources with their understanding of the present reality as "miraculous" and of obvious messianic import, that either (1) the oaths are not meant to be halakhically binding, but rather are homiletic in nature; or (2) that even if they are halakhically binding, the reality of (a) the nations' permitting the Jews to immigrate to the land (i.e., the Balfour Declaration of 1917; this is the position Kook takes) and/or (b) the Holocaust, which is a sign of God nullifying His oath not to allow the nations to persecute the Jews "too much," essentially makes the oaths null and void. In short, for Teitelbaum's religious Zionist critics, if they can prove that the three oaths are inoperable or irrelevant, his case against Zionism collapses. I will argue that this is a misreading of this essay in particular and of his project more generally.

Teitelbaum's critics engage in intricate textual revisions and rereadings in their attempts to undermine his argument on the oaths.¹¹⁰ Much of this is an extreme example of "insider baseball," or the dialectics of the study house, and, while interesting in its own right, it does not, to my mind, really get to what is at stake in *VM*.

Nor does it really speak to those who do not share the same commitment to the sources in question.

It is true that Teitelbaum lends himself to such critique in that he, too, seems mired in the sources, rarely contextualizing them in the larger debate about Zionism. The problem I see with this approach of Teitelbaum's critics is that they largely miss the theopolitical dimension of Teitelbaum's entire project by limiting its legitimacy to an ostensibly "correct" reading of the sources at hand. The general approach of this book is to read *VM* not as a halakhic treatise, but as a theological-political one. His sources are rabbinic and halakhic, but his questions are not. They are, rather, a more sweeping intervention into the complexities of Jewishness, Torah, and the weight of tradition in modernity, with themes of political activism and political resistance. In a sense, *VM* is a book of messianic politics.

Teitelbaum's view is that Zionism is what he calls a "false redemption" (*geulah shel sheker*), not unlike the false messianism of Bar Kokhba and Sabbatai Zevi that he mentions periodically in "Essay on the Three Oaths."¹¹¹ He argues that false messianism must be rejected to set the conditions for the true messianism that awaits. The work the sources do for him is to instantiate the falsity of Zionism by exhibiting how it does not meet the requisite conditions of a true redemption. The oaths, which constitute Israel's "covenant of exile," are the most obvious place to begin, but by no means do the oaths constitute the sum total of his theopolitical argument. Even if the oaths were no longer operative, Teitelbaum would maintain that Zionism cannot constitute a legitimate inauguration of redemption.

And here it is important to reiterate that Teitelbaum's argument is only with those who maintain that Zionism is a form of messianism. That is, it is largely an intra-religious debate. For secular Zionists who have abandoned, sometimes unabashedly, all theologico-religious categories and view Zionism as a rebellion *against* the dictates of tradition, his claim is much simpler and does not need proof; they are heretics of the highest order, whom he views as a modern-day version of the *erev rav* (mixed multitude) mentioned in the Book of Exodus. Here Kook and Teitelbaum do not disagree in principle, though Kook would never use such a negative appellation. The disagreement is only about the nature of such heresy within the transitional context in which they found themselves in the early twentieth century. That is, might heresy be a constitutive and constructive dimension of the unfolding end-time as the messianic era draws near?¹¹² Kook argues that it is, while Teitelbaum argues that it is a test that must be resisted. Kook claims that heresy that is devoted to rebuilding the land can serve as an act of purging to free Israel from the final remnants of defiled culture. Teitelbaum views it as a corrosive force that needs to be resisted and destroyed, not transformed.¹¹³ In this theological register, empirical evidence such as the shocking, rapid return of Jews to the land and the world's support (or, better put, the West's support) of the Zionist project cannot serve as a solid foundation for messianic claims because, as Teitelbaum notes, citing various sources, satanic

acts under the guise of “miracle” are always a possibility, especially on the cusp of the messianic era.

THE MIRACULOUS AS MESSIANIC: MAIMONIDES ON THE CONDITIONS OF REDEMPTION

One of the primary observations deployed by religious Zionists to argue for legitimating Zionism as a sign of the true redemption is the determination that the establishment of a Jewish state in the Jewish homeland constitutes a “miraculous” instance of an “ingathering of the exiles,” constituting a “sure sign” (*’ot*) that the age of redemption has begun.¹¹⁴ By no means was this view shared by all Zionists. Many secular Zionists abandoned any traditional notion of redemption, maintaining that Jewish sovereignty and “normalcy” was a sufficient outcome of Zionism; and certain non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox groups who decided to work with the state, such as Agudat Yisrael, were reluctant to give messianic credence to Zionism, which was, in the early years, an almost fully secular political ideology propagated by transgressors. They supported Zionism not on redemptive grounds, but because it gave their constituency an easier path to living in Erez Yisrael and influence in pushing certain traditional values in the larger society.¹¹⁵

Many who wanted Zionism to express a traditional notion of redemption turned to Maimonides, for a variety of reasons. First, he is perhaps the most celebrated post-rabbinic halakhic authority.¹¹⁶ Second, he wrote extensively on the messianic question in a variety of places—for example, in his commentary to *Helek*, the tenth chapter of Mishna Sanhedrin, in his *Commentary to the Mishna*; in his legal code, *Mishneh Torah*; in his *Epistle to Yemen*, where he addresses the question of false messianism; and, more briefly, in his *Guide for the Perplexed*. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Maimonides offers a somewhat unconventional view of messianism as “natural” and not “apocalyptic,” famously citing the Talmudic dictum that “there is nothing between this world and the messianic era except for Jews living under the rule of other nations.”¹¹⁷ Given that Zionism certainly offered Jews political sovereignty, and yet contains no messianic figure, it seems to square well with Maimonides’s natural messianic dictum, even as Maimonides never suggests that the messianic era can be ushered in without the Messiah. However, many religious Zionists, contra Maimonides, couple that sovereignty with an assessment of Zionism as “miraculous,” even constituting a “natural miracle” to justify their messianic claims.

Predictably, Teitelbaum also focuses on Maimonides’s views on messianism in his essay, not because religious Zionists do, but because any traditional case for or against messianism must draw on the writings of Maimonides. One place where he challenges the religious Zionist reading of Maimonides in “Essay on the Three Oaths” is focused precisely on the loosely formulated, but still operative, notion

that the success of Zionism constitutes a “miraculous” change in the course of history. Even among many secular Zionists, the language of “miracle” is ubiquitous. Teitelbaum once remarked half-jokingly that he was surprised how all these (secular) Jews who didn’t believe in God were suddenly talking about the miracle of Zionism after the Six-Day War.¹¹⁸ And yet many ultra-Orthodox Jews, who are believers, refused to view Zionism as miraculous.

For Teitelbaum, Maimonides clearly states that the one unassailable condition of messianic times is that the Messiah will return Jews to the observance of Torah and mitzvot, and Teitelbaum claims not only that Zionism has not done that, but that it has done just the opposite. Zionism, in his view—and this is not as fantastical as it may seem, certainly in his day—caused many observant Jews to abandon Torah for the Zionist cause, substituting nationalism for Torah. A second example (examined in the next section) is Maimonides’s clear indication of collective teshuvah (repentance) as a prerequisite for redemption. This is a much more complex topic, as religious Zionists, specifically in the Kook school, write extensively on collective teshuvah and its contemporary meaning.

In his “Laws of Kings” 11:3, in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides writes:

Do not think that King Messiah has to perform signs or miracles or bring forth anything new, or resurrect the dead, or any of those things. This is not the case. We see that Rabbi Akiva, a great sage from the mishnaic period, granted Bar Koziba messianic status. He said that he was King Messiah. And many other sages in his generation thought so as well, until he [Bar Koziba] was killed because of his sins. When he was killed, it was known to them that he was not the Messiah. And the sages never asked for any signs or miracles. The essential thing was as follows: that the Torah, its statutes, and precepts remained eternal. Nothing was added and nothing was subtracted.

Teitelbaum is puzzled by Maimonides’s seemingly arbitrary connection between the fact that the legitimacy of the Messiah does not emerge from signs and miracles (or wonders) and the eternal nature of Torah:

It seems to me the language of Maimonides is unclear. He begins by saying King Messiah need not show signs or miracles and concludes by saying that the essential thing is that the Torah remain eternal, and one cannot add or subtract from it. The connection between these two things is ambiguous. For instance, if we were to say that King Messiah needed to show signs and miracles, would that mean that there would be a change, an addition or subtraction, in the Torah, heaven forbid? Why hang the notion of signs and miracles on making changes to the Torah? What we see earlier [actually in “Laws of Kings” 11:4] is that “King Messiah will compel (*yikhof*) all of Israel to go in the way of Torah and to strengthen it.” The root of all this is found in “Laws of Repentance” 7:5: “Israel is only redeemed through teshuvah.” The Torah already promised that in the end Israel will repent at the conclusion of the redemptive era. And thus they will be redeemed.¹¹⁹

We will examine Teitelbaum's turn to teshuvah below. Here, he is asking what appears to be a purely textual question, suggesting that Maimonides somehow depends on the sustained eternality of Torah in denying that signs and miracles are a condition of the legitimacy of King Messiah. That seems incongruous. By introducing the teshuvah passage, he seems to be suggesting that there is only one condition for King Messiah in Maimonides, and that is his total fidelity to Torah, exercised by compelling Israel to return to its covenantal roots. Everything else, including signs and miracles, is immaterial.

In the final section of *Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides offers the existence of messianic signs as a warning. He cites numerous examples of would-be messiahs who performed signs and miracles and compelled many to follow in their wake. In each case, Maimonides warns his readers, the episode ended in tragedy and the would-be messiah was no messiah at all.¹²⁰ On this, Teitelbaum writes, in "Essay on the Three Oaths": "It is clear that even Maimonides was afraid to rely on miracles because all miracles can be false ones and draw from Satan in a variety of ways. Rather, the collective repentance of Israel . . . cannot be falsified."¹²¹

Teitelbaum picks up on those admonitions in *Epistle to Yemen* and reads them back into Maimonides's comments in "Laws of Kings." In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides simply states that signs are not a requisite condition of messianic stewardship although, perhaps, they can strengthen the purported messiah's claim if they are accompanied by a return to fidelity to Torah. In *Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides warns his readers against signs specifically, because it is being reported to him that signs indeed occurred and had an effect on Jews who believed in them.

I suggest that this is not simply a textual conundrum—what is called, in yeshiva circles, a "*shverer* Rambam" (a difficult Rambam). Again, my assumption in this book is that Teitelbaum is not engaging in a halakhic debate but is constructing a political theology against Zionism, using halakhic discussions as its foundation. Under the guise of his reading of Maimonides, Teitelbaum seems to be addressing the miraculous claim of Zionism ("signs and miracles") while noting that the one unassailable condition is not being met. Even if signs occur, if they are not accompanied by a return to Torah, they are not only meaningless but dangerous. In his estimation, Zionism did not return the Jews to Torah; thus it is, for him, in Maimonidean terms, "false messianism."

Before turning to the discussion on repentance as a condition of true messianism according to Teitelbaum, I want to bring one more example of "signs and wonders" that was common in the Zionist narrative, what is popularly known as "making the desert bloom." Teitelbaum seems aware of this and responds as follows:

Those who are drawn after the Zionists who say that with an influx of Jews immigrating to the land of Israel and practicing agriculture, fruits of the land greatly increased [in a miraculous way]¹²² cite the Talmudic passage that states: "R. Abba says, 'You have no more explicit manifestation of the end of days (*eyn ketz miguleh*) than this, as it is stated, *But you, mountains of Israel, you shall give your branches, and yield your fruit to my*

people Israel (Ezek. 36:8)” (b.T. Sanhedrin 98a). This is total nonsense. For this we need to see Maharsha, who notes, “as we see in the chapter in b.T. Shabbat, in the [messianic] future fruits will appear every day.” That is certainly miraculous and points to a change in the natural order. In this case, certainly, “you have no more explicit manifestation of the end of days (*eyn ketz m’guleh*) than this.” . . . If we take all this back to Maimonides’s “Laws of Kings” [12:5], that in the messianic time “produce will be as plentiful as dust,” this is surely the sign of redemption. But not that which comes about naturally as in the entire world. When you increase planting, you increase produce. This is no sign of redemption. In fact, quite the opposite; since most of the produce [grown in the land] is not subject to the laws of tithing or the sabbatical laws, they are, as a result of our sins, pushing us further away from the redemption. In fact, it would be better if there were not such an increase in produce that transgresses the agriculture laws, which in fact defiles the land and pushes back redemption.¹²³

Teitelbaum’s logic here is similar to that in our previous example. But he also weighs in on how miracles are determined. He does not deny the exponential success of “making the desert bloom.” What he denies is defining such success as a miraculous sign of imminent redemption. While the Jewish success in agriculture may appear impressive to any onlooker, the evaluation of messianic miracles is a very different matter and a very precarious business, as Maimonides makes quite clear in *Epistle to Yemen*. However, whether one understands Maimonides’s comment that “produce will be as plentiful as dust” literally or hyperbolically, the young nation’s agricultural success does not fit that comment, according to Teitelbaum. What we witness in such a case is simply the product of a healthy dose of human ingenuity, and here Teitelbaum may be closer to the secular kibbutzim than to their religious Zionist interpreters in eschewing miracle as the explanation of the Jews’ agricultural success. In *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah* he makes a similar case against evaluating military victory as miraculous. Wars are fought by human collectives and victory, or defeat, is the result of human agency.¹²⁴ In addition, in the case of agriculture, he points to the irony that flows through his entire discussion: that this supposed “miracle” unfolds by means of a transgression of the Torah in the abrogation of tithing and sabbatical laws. How can that which is born in sin constitute a messianic miracle? Here again, we see Teitelbaum’s rejection of the Kookian dialectics that would enable the profane, even the transgressive, to hold the potential for the holy within it.

REPENTANCE (TESHUVAH) AS THE CONDITION OF REDEMPTION

The linkage of teshuvah and redemption is stated quite unambiguously in the Talmud, becoming a major point of contention later on. As part of a long digression about the conditions of the Messiah, in b.T. Sanhedrin 97b we read: “Rabbi Eliezer says, ‘If the Jewish people repent, they will be redeemed, if not, they will not be redeemed.’ R. Yehoshua asks, ‘If they do not repent, will they not be redeemed

at all?' Rather, God will establish a king for them whose decrees are as harsh as those issued by Haman, and the Jews will have no choice but to repent, and this will restore them to the right path." Maimonides cites this passage in "Laws of Teshuvah" 7:5, where his language is somewhat confusing, even obfuscating: "All of the prophets commanded teshuvah, and Israel is not redeemed except via teshuvah. The Torah already promised that in the end (*sh'sof*) Israel will repent at the culmination of their redemption (*sh'sof ge'ulatan*) and immediately they will be redeemed, as it is written that *those shall return to God and hearken God's voice . . . that God will return your captivity . . . and will return and gather you from all the nations where God has scattered you* (Deut. 30:1–3)."

In "Laws of Kings," Maimonides does not mention teshuvah at all in his discussion of the Messiah but notes a condition that seems to imply it: "Messiah will return the Jews to Torah observance." Maimonides also does not mention teshuvah outright as a condition in *Epistle to Yemen*, nor does he do so in his commentary to *Helek*.

The ambiguity in Maimonides's language in "Laws of Teshuvah" is that there is no mention of Messiah—and what does "at the culmination of their redemption (*sh'sof ge'ulatan*)" mean? This has all been subject to a multitude of interpretations. Is teshuvah a prerequisite for redemption at all according to Maimonides? Must it occur while the Jews are still in exile? That is, is teshuvah Israel's last exilic act? What does "the culmination of their redemption" mean? And what about forced or involuntary teshuvah ("God will establish a king for them whose decrees are as harsh as those issued by Haman, and the Jews will have no choice but to repent") versus voluntary teshuvah? Is forced teshuvah a sufficient condition for messianic teshuvah?

To clarify matters according to his basic view, Teitelbaum turns to two midrashic renditions of the Talmudic passage in Sanhedrin that alter the order somewhat but also invoke an additional layer. The first is in Midrash Tanhuma and the second is in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*. Tanhuma lines up the positions differently: R. Joshua states that "if the Jews do not repent, they will not be redeemed." R. Shimon says that even "if they do not repent, if the time comes, they will be redeemed." And R. Eliezer says that "God will establish a king for them whose decrees are as harsh as those issued by Haman, and the Jews will have no choice but to repent." *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* states R. Joshua's position as in Tanhuma but then concludes by saying that "Israel will not enact a great teshuvah until which time [the prophet] Elijah arrives."

Teitelbaum wants to make sense of all this by arguing that, while there are various postures of teshuvah (voluntary or forced) and stages of teshuvah (before Messiah or afterward), the disagreement among the three Talmudic sages is only about the time *before* Messiah arrives, that is, as a *condition* of Messiah's coming. He cites Maharsha (Shmuel Eidels, 1555–1631) to the effect that all three sages are arguing about voluntary teshuvah and *not* the forced teshuvah of an evil king. That occurs if Israel does not follow the straight path, in which case those decrees will evoke

in them the desire to return. But Teitelbaum argues that forced teshuvah is not the messianic teshuvah Maimonides seems to imply in his “Laws of Teshuvah.” For Teitelbaum this is important, as it would undermine any notion that the rise of antisemitism or Nazism can be considered the occasion for messianic teshuvah, which some religious Zionists suggested. Voluntary teshuvah is, for him, a precondition for any legitimate messianic claim and not a reaction to harsh decrees. The Jews must return to the Torah, either by their own initiative (which was always unlikely) or by means of King Messiah. I think Teitelbaum prefers the midrashic rendering because it divides teshuvah into two periods.

This division became common in religious Zionism with the introduction of the “Joseph Messiah” and the “David Messiah,” the first representing a temporary state of military success, to be followed by the spiritual revival of the second. Rav Kook famously alluded to this in his eulogy of Theodor Herzl in 1904.¹²⁵ Citing Isaac Arama in his *Akedat Yizhak*, Teitelbaum writes:

There will be two periods of teshuvah, one before Messiah and a greater one afterward. And this is how to understand the verse *The wicked will abandon their wicked ways . . . and return to God*. It appears that, since he abandoned his wicked ways, he has already done teshuvah? Why does it then say, *And return to God*? Rather, abandoning one’s wicked ways is not itself complete teshuvah. Rather, afterward one must repent in an even greater fashion. There are many such readings on the need for two periods of teshuvah, one before Elijah and Messiah’s arrival captured in *Return to Me*, before Messiah is revealed; and one afterward, *And I will return to you*. . . . In “Laws of Kings” 12:2, Maimonides also states that Elijah will be the harbinger to straighten out the people and prepare them. Some sages say that Elijah will come before Messiah. But Maimonides notes that there is a discrepancy, and it is possible that King Messiah himself will cause Israel to repent and then afterward Elijah will come to institute an even greater teshuvah.¹²⁶

What Teitelbaum appears to want from all this is to deflect any notion that messianic teshuvah is something that can occur *after* redemption has arrived or even, perhaps, concomitantly with it. In fact, the entire frame of teshuvah as a prerequisite for redemption is that it must be a condition for, and not a consequence of, redemption. Thus, redemption can come in one of three ways. Either Israel will repent on their own (unlikely), or the Messiah (or perhaps Elijah) will come and compel them to repent (the more likely scenario), or God will appoint an evil king who will compel them to repent. The latter way, Teitelbaum claims, may indeed be happening in his time, but it is not a sufficient messianic condition. The Jews should see the evil king and repent by returning to Torah, but that teshuvah is not messianic teshuvah. Messianic teshuvah has to be generated by Israel, and it must be a reaffirmation of Torah and mitzvot.

This draws us back to an earlier discussion, about why Maimonides does not include the three oaths in the *Mishneh Torah*:

There is now no longer any question as to why Maimonides did not include the oaths in the *Mishneh Torah*. We have already explained that the oaths were not halakha. They do not fall on subsequent generations but speak to the punishment that would occur if they were abrogated, as Maimonides also states in *Epistle to Yemen*, describing it as a metaphor (*derekh mashal*). And we know that Maimonides does not include rebukes and punishment for sin in the *Mishneh Torah* but rather laws and the sources of laws that are necessary to know. . . . Thus, in his “Laws of Kings,” Maimonides lists all the verses in parshat Nezavim related to redemption, and one who does not believe in these explicit verses is a disbeliever in the entire Torah. Also, in “Laws of Teshuvah” he mentions these explicit verses from parshat Nezavim that redemption is impossible without teshuvah. This is a clear promise that Israel will repent while they are still among the gentiles “where they were dispersed” and only afterward will redemption commence. Therefore, it is clear from Maimonides’s work that one who does not believe this and thinks redemption is possible before all of Israel repents is a blasphemer (*kofer b’Torah*). . . . Thus, from any perspective, according to Maimonides, if Israel does not repent, [any claim of redemption] stands against the divine promise made in scripture, and is thus heresy. And if they do repent, according to Maimonides this is truly redemption. Everything hangs on teshuvah. Thus, Maimonides wrote in clear prose (*lashon ha-zahav*) after he stated [in “Laws of Teshuvah”] that “Israel is not redeemed except via teshuvah.”¹²⁷

Teitelbaum is attempting to accomplish a few things here. First, he offers a more expanded reading of why Maimonides does not include the oaths in the *Mishneh Torah*, a fact that some use to claim that Maimonides gave them no credence whatsoever. In fact, Teitelbaum argues that they are absent because they are not halakha but, following Rashi, constitute a divine promise (*havtakha*) that must be kept.¹²⁸ This promise of redemption then rests on two premises: Jewish collective repentance and a Messiah who compels the Jews to return to Torah and mitzvot. Without those conditions the oaths remain intact, not so much as obligation but as a matter of mutual promise. This brings him back to the oblique comment of Maimonides, in “Laws of Repentance,” that “Israel is not redeemed except via teshuvah.”

I know how dissonant this all sounds in retrospect, given the events of the twentieth century, but it does closely cohere with a detailed reading of the sources. We must recall that Teitelbaum, along with many others in his world, viewed the formation of Zionism as a rebellion against, and not a return to, Torah and mitzvot, and thus a move away from, and not closer to, messianic time. And many Zionists, certainly in his time, themselves viewed Zionism as a rebellion against normative Judaism. He thus could not fathom how either the Talmudic discussion or Maimonides’s blanket statement in “Laws of Teshuvah” (not mentioning Messiah *per se* but mentioning redemption) could be used in regard to a case where Jews are abandoning Torah in record numbers for the sake of national revival.

We will presently see how some religious Zionists responded to this conundrum by conceptualizing teshuvah differently, reframing it as national revival and immigration to the land. Teitelbaum rejects such a reading on a variety of textual

and empirical grounds. But for now, Teitelbaum wants to clarify that repentance as a condition for Messiah must be voluntary and must precede, and not be concomitant with, redemption. Some religious Zionists would agree with that, even as they conceptualize teshuvah differently.

RECONCEPTUALIZING REPENTANCE
AS IMMIGRATION (*ALIYAH*):
YISSACHAR SHLOMO TEICHTAL

Teitelbaum makes much of Maimonides's comments about the prerequisite of teshuvah as a condition for true redemption, combining his more oblique comment, in "Laws of Repentance," that redemption is conditioned on teshuvah and his comment in "Laws of Kings" that "King Messiah will return Israel to Torah and mitzvot." Thus, teshuvah can only mean for Teitelbaum a return to Torah in the conventional sense. The underlying assumption in all this is that Zionism does not meet that criterion and thus is an example of "false redemption" (*geulah shel sheker*), a test to be resisted and not a messianism to be embraced. So, while Teitelbaum and religious Zionists may agree that the end-time is approaching, they are diametrically opposed in terms of what role Zionism plays in the drama.

Religious Zionists were not unaware of this problem of teshuvah as a condition of redemption and sought to resolve it in a variety of ways. For Zionism to safely inhabit the orbit of true redemption, the notion of teshuvah must be conceptualized to include something other than the normative return to Torah, which many Zionists not only did not promote but arguably subverted. In fact, this is precisely what religious Zionism does, specifically in the Kookian school. It should be remembered that the entire premise of Kookian thinking is that the redemptive era has begun (*hitkhalta d'geulah*) and Zionism is its embodiment.¹²⁹ The question before Kook and his followers, then, was how to square the reality of Zionism, specifically secular Zionism, with that redemptive claim.

Before getting to Kook, however, we find such a reconceptualization in Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal's *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, which was written in hiding in Budapest and Slovakia in 1942. We had occasion to mention Teichtal briefly earlier in this chapter. His importance for religious Zionists is enhanced by the fact that he moved from a staunch anti-Zionist position to a Zionist one, considering the Nazi genocide he experienced firsthand. Here I want to focus on a narrow aspect of his writing: conceptualizing collective teshuvah as itself accomplished through immigration to the land. Teichtal was not the first to do this. In 1839, Judah Alkalai (1798–1878), a Jew from Sarajevo, published a book entitled *Darkhei Noam* in which he posited, among other things, that teshuvah (individual *repentance*) should be rendered *shuva* (return), the collective return of the Jews to the land of Israel.¹³⁰

Teichtal builds his case on four essential points. The first is that the aspiration for returning to the land is embedded in the entire tradition of exile and that

this aspiration should exist not solely in the realm of prayer, but also in action.¹³¹ For Teichtal, in his time, the shift from passivity to action is being hampered by the ultra-Orthodox leadership. Secondly, the Second Temple was a failure in part because Jews did not return en masse from Babylonia, thus making a complete redemption impossible. Thirdly, teshuvah itself can be understood as the act of return to the land. And fourthly, the fullness of teshuvah can occur only *in* the land and, thus, teshuvah in the Diaspora is a necessary but not sufficient condition for messianic teshuvah.

On the aspiration to return to the land, Teichtal writes:

From this we can understand what is written, *Afterward the Israelite will turn back and will seek God and David their king* (Hosea 4:5). That is, not by prayer alone; rather they will “seek” (*bikshu*), that is, actively seek after this. In translation [Yiddish], it says “they will actively seek out a way to return to the land of Israel.” Meaning that they will act and not only depend on prayer. This is what R. Shimon ben Manasseh says: “There is no good sign for Israel until they return and seek.”¹³² Specifically “seek” and not “ask.” . . . They must actively seek to return to our land and the heavenly kingdom, and the Davidic monarchy. When they actively seek out all three and do whatever they can to achieve it, they should also pray and then God will help them. But if they do not do this actively but depend on prayer alone—they will never achieve their ends.¹³³

Teichtal asserts here that activism is an integral part of the messianic aspiration to reestablish the land, curtailing Jeremiah’s (and Teitelbaum’s) notion of messianic quiescence and passivism. He does this by arguing that the standard liturgical assertion of return must work in tandem with activism.¹³⁴ The phrase “do whatever they can to achieve it” is significant here, since for most of Jewish history there was little that Jews could do to achieve it. This did not stop messianic movements, but all were thwarted in part because there was no universal support to achieve it, certainly as a collective. This is one of the crucial differences regarding Zionism, certainly by the time Teichtal was writing. The rabbis were quite adamant that rebellion—for example, the failed rebellion of Bar Kokhba—was not the way and, in fact, the three oaths seem to solidify that. In Teichtal’s time, however, a time when return was not only viable but necessary, the operative dimension once again became applicable, not as an act of rebellion against the nations but in agreement with them. In addition, one should not underestimate his claim that “when they actively seek out all three (land, heavenly kingdom, monarchy) and do whatever they can to achieve it, they should also pray and then God will help them.” This is not a Kookian messianic vision that places intrinsic, or even transitional, value on the secular Zionist project.¹³⁵ Return to the land has one purpose, to establish the messianic kingdom. But this gets inextricably mixed with the emergency effort to save Jewish lives under any circumstances, and Teichtal seems to drop any ambivalence about how that may counter his theological claim.

In terms of the failure of the Second Temple to fulfill a final redemption, Teichtal borrows from Judah Halevi's *Sefer Ha-Kuzari*, which states:

The sin [of the Jews refusing to return from Babylon to the land of Israel after the Temple was built] prevented the fulfillment of what God intended in the Temple, as it says, *Joy and happiness daughter of Zion* (Zach. 2:14). This divine call was already set to occur as in the beginning if they [Israel] would have all agreed to return [to the land] with full desire. But only some returned and most remained, even some of the great ones, in Babylonia. They preferred exile and did not want to part from their dwellings and work. And perhaps on this, Solomon said, *I am asleep but my heart is aroused* (Song of Songs 5:2).¹³⁶ . . . This remains true today, as we say in our language, "Our hearts are not aroused to actively return to the land and to increase there the conditions for Israel to return." And this is the cause of the disaster that has befallen us.¹³⁷

Teichtal sets this moment in the context of the last time Israel had the opportunity to return from exile with the permission of Cyrus.¹³⁸ The previous attempt failed because the Jews did not enact teshuvah as return and preferred to stay in exile. By "disaster," here, I assume he means the Nazi genocide, which puts him very close to Zvi Yehuda Kook, who makes a similar claim about the Jews refusing to heed the Balfour Declaration and establish a Jewish state. As Eliezer Schweid puts it, for Teichtal, "the Holocaust should be regarded as a *corrective operation*" (my emphasis).¹³⁹ In other words, the Babylonian Jews failed because they did not fulfill the teshuvah of returning to the land when they had the chance. In our time as well, the Holocaust, Teichtal implies, is a way to force Jews out of exile who refused to leave. Barbara Krawcowicz puts it most succinctly: "Teichtal's understanding of the persecutions against the Jews as correlated with the sin of complacency in exile together with his vision of messianic redemption led him to the notion of communal teshuvah that focused on the non-spiritual and political dimensions. For Teichtal, the immigration to Erez Yisrael is a teshuvah done with one's feet."¹⁴⁰ Teichtal states this explicitly:

The return to the land of Israel is itself considered [requisite] teshuvah. . . . In our time, when even the worst of us desire to return to our inheritance, and risk our lives to do so, and do not desire any other land, certainly this is considered teshuvah in the eyes of God. And the fact that many do not fulfill the mitzvot is because they were not raised and educated in this and are like captive children (*tinuk sh'nishpah*) among the nations, as Maimonides notes.¹⁴¹ But their immigration is certainly considered teshuvah and with it they fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah, because that is precisely what teshuvah is!¹⁴²

Teichtal addresses three points here that would be relevant for Teitelbaum. First, the time at hand created the condition for messianic teshuvah, and this teshuvah can be fulfilled by immigration. Second, the transgressors who are fulfilling this

mitzvah of teshuvah even though they do not consider it a mitzvah are simply the products of secularization and should not be faulted for that. And third, the decrees of a “king like Haman” are sufficient cause to initiate this messianic teshuvah.

As we saw above, Teitelbaum rejects the transformation of Maimonides’s notion of messianic teshuvah as return to Torah into a religious Zionist notion of return to the land. And Teitelbaum offers a more nefarious reading of secular Zionism not simply as the product of a lack of religious education (many secular Zionists actually came from yeshivot in Eastern Europe), but as an intentional attempt to subvert Torah and replace it with nationalism.¹⁴³ Finally, Teitelbaum would reject Teichtal’s claim, based simply on the observation that the catastrophic world they both experienced was a sure sign that redemption had arrived.¹⁴⁴ The Maimonidean warning against being convinced by messianic signs, stated in both “Laws of Kings” and *Epistle to Yemen*, seems to have been set aside by Teichtal and other religious Zionists when faced with the collapse of European Jewry. While certainly understandable, it is not unassailable. As a victim of the Holocaust, albeit a survivor, Teitelbaum certainly knew firsthand the world Teichtal experienced. And yet he was reticent to draw Teichtal’s conclusions regarding Zionism being the catalyst of that redemptive moment.

I do not think that Teichtal’s view of secular Zionism is tightly aligned with Rav Kook’s dialectical view, either.¹⁴⁵ For Kook, the secular serves a holy purpose without which the fullness of the holy could not reach its completion.¹⁴⁶ Teichtal is writing in a time of emergency, when transgressors and traditionalists alike are simply trying to save their lives through immigration. He certainly writes positively about Jews returning to the land and views that return as crucial, both pragmatically and theologically, but the metaphysical machinations seem less important to him than the return itself, even as that return is part of a messianic process that he believes has begun.

Regarding the three oaths, Teichtal mentions them periodically in *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, arguing that the moment of their efficacy has passed. In one place, he cites from Yonatan Eybeshutz’s *Ahavat Yonatan* the very same text that Teitelbaum cites to make his point about the continued efficacy of the oaths. Eybeshutz notes that the prohibition against immigrating en masse to the land applies “even if the nations agree, because the end-time is always concealed.” Teichtal responds:

Understand: the words of *Ahavat Yonatan* are correct when there is *no sign from heaven* [my emphasis] that God wants us to abandon the exile, that is, at a time when there is relative peace in the Jewish world. And the promise of exile, as written in Nahmanides, still holds and Jews can dwell in the exile in relative safety, as was the case in previous times. In that case, Eybeshutz is correct that we must remain in exile, even if the nations allow us to immigrate. . . . However, this is not true in our times, when the words of the prophet ring true: *The remnant of Jacob, Shall be among the nations, In the midst of the many peoples, Like a lion among beasts of the wild, Like a fierce lion among flocks of sheep, Which tramples wherever it goes And*

rends, with none to deliver (Micha 5:7). In addition, the nations have given us permission to return to our land. Yet there is still doubt as to whether God wants us to return to the land of Israel. *Yet I am certain* [my emphasis—S.M.] that had the author of *Ahavat Yonatan* been alive today in our state of exile and seen what has transpired, he would also say: “My Jewish brethren, the time has come to go up to Zion and the land of our forbearers, this is the will of God.” What is happening to us in exile is not by chance. Rather, it is the finger of God that is telling us to go from the *golah* to our ancestral inheritance.¹⁴⁷

Teichtal interestingly cites Eybeshutz, who makes a clear case that Jews must remain in exile (a point stressed by Teitelbaum in his use of this text) even if the nations enable them to immigrate, and then contextualizes the text to suggest that this would apply only in a time when life in exile was bearable. Thus, Eybeshutz’s text in *Ahavat Yonatan* introduces, for Teichtal, the exceptionalism of the Holocaust, which he uses to nullify Eybeshutz’s exilic claim. But Eybeshutz’s position more generally is that the time of Messiah is always in doubt (concealed) and thus, “until a time when the land is filled with divine wisdom” [a locution adopted from Maimonides], we can never be sure that the time to immigrate has arrived.”

Teichtal’s claim is based on the observation that, in fact, his time was unique, such that the binding nature of exile no longer applies. But even given the extenuating circumstances, he could never claim that the “land is filled with divine wisdom,” which is the condition Eybeshutz mentions. Rather, Teichtal must claim that his time is a “sure sign” of redemption simply on the basis of its exceptional status of danger, thus choosing to ignore Maimonides’s admonition against using signs to determine the end-time—which, Maimonides notes, led to disastrous ends for the Jews in Yemen and elsewhere.

As we will see below, religious Zionists use a similar tack to understand chapter 24 of the MaHaRaI’s *Nezah Yisrael*, about the three oaths. Teitelbaum, who believed in the miraculous, and not natural, unfolding of redemption (here, I would suggest, in line with Eybeshutz), and who was cautious about interpreting his time in such an unequivocally messianic light—although he did believe that his time stood on the precipice of redemption—deployed Eybeshutz as a cautionary text against precisely what Teichtal was advocating: immigration as an act of messianic teshuvah.

Before moving to teshuvah as embodied in the revival of the Jewish national project in the writings of rabbis Kook, father and son, I want to explore a bit more how Teichtal differs from Teitelbaum on these questions. For Teichtal, the notion of agency regarding redemption was always present, though not always operational.¹⁴⁸ Teichtal does not cede to Jeremiah’s exilic passivity once he recognizes that the end-time has been set in motion. He believed in the gradual redemptive process, as he witnessed it, and not its apocalyptic eruption. So, the agency of return/teshuvah was not transgressive to him in the way that it was for Teitelbaum, who was more wed to a miraculous unfolding of redemption.

Two things changed in Teichtal's time, as he understood it. First "a king like Haman" became a reality with the rise of Hitler, which created the opportunity and, even more strongly, the emergency, to return. Secondly, the world (e.g., the Balfour Declaration) seemed to agree. With that combination, the oaths were arguably nullified, although they are not central for Teichtal in any case, but more importantly, the prerequisite of teshuvah merged with the return to the land.¹⁴⁹ Because return to the land was always part of teshuvah for Teichtal, at least in *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, he didn't really require the Kookian dialectics whereby the holy embeds itself in the profane. Teichtal could largely retain the binary categories of his Hungarian ultra-Orthodox past (that he shared with Teitelbaum) and simply reconceptualize messianic teshuvah as return to the land because once the opportunity arose, agency, which always existed, became applicable.¹⁵⁰

Teitelbaum would reject two things in Teichtal's argument: the legitimacy of messianic agency and the reconceptualizing of teshuvah as anything other than return to Torah. On messianic agency Teitelbaum writes as follows: "In terms of us needing to engage in physical actions because God decreed in the verse *God will bless you in all your actions that you do* (Deut. 24:19), in [Bahya ibn Pakud's] *Duties of the Heart* there are reasons given for this. However, regarding redemption (*inyanei geula*), it is explicitly forbidden to engage in any proactive behavior (*la'asot shum ziz*) all the more so hastening the end. One who engages in these acts does so against faith and has no portion in Moshe's Torah."¹⁵¹ Teitelbaum argues that the three oaths, however they are understood, provide a counterexample to other mitzvot and prohibitions whereby human agency is that which serves as the impetus for reward, as Deuteronomy illustrates. The notion that the three oaths provide redemptive activity as an exceptional case regarding mitzvot filters through Teitelbaum's entire work and is certainly not exclusive to him. For Teichtal, no such exception exists, and thus agency in terms of return to the land fits into the covenantal paradigm.

Unlike Teitelbaum, Teichtal did not seem greatly concerned with the transgressors who were leading the way, though he did think that secular Zionists who immigrated would be looked upon favorably by God.¹⁵² As Eliezer Schweid notes, in many ways Teichtal seemed closer to Judah Alkalai and Zvi Kalischer than to Rav Kook.¹⁵³ Teitelbaum, however, could not get beyond the transgressive nature of the entire Zionist project writ large, which extended far beyond simply the establishment of a Jewish state. In this sense, we can ask whether, in fact, Teichtal was more focused on return to the land as a prerequisite for redemption while Teitelbaum was more focused on Zionism as a subversive project *against* tradition, as the carrier of that transgressive message. Teichtal did not address the larger heretical nature of Zionism as a cultural project but, understandably, remained focused on immigration as teshuvah as the central tenet of his text. Finally, while, by the time Teichtal wrote *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, immigration was impossible for him, one wonders why he did not pursue that route like so

many others while he was still able, unless we surmise that his view of messianic teshuvah as return to the land was something that tragically came to him when it was no longer possible.¹⁵⁴

MESSIANIC REPENTANCE AS NATIONAL REVIVAL:
ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK

Teshuvah plays a major role in the Zionist writings of Abraham Kook, as with those of his son Zvi Yehuda. Each is acutely aware of the Talmudic discussion of teshuvah as prerequisite for redemption and each presents a path to reconceptualize teshuvah so as to circumvent R. Eliezer's position that redemption requires teshuvah, codified in Maimonides's "Laws of Teshuvah." The literature on the Kookean School is enormous, and my focus will be very limited to a few salient texts that offer two views on the matter as they relate to messianic teshuvah, as a comparison to Teitelbaum's discussion in "Essay on the Three Oaths." Note that Zvi Yehuda Kook does not mention Teitelbaum (Abraham Kook died long before any writings of Teitelbaum appeared), nor does Teitelbaum mention either of them, although elsewhere I noted that he was likely aware of Abraham Kook's general perspective. And yet, we will see how they are reading identical sources to reach opposite conclusions—and, I argue, the stakes in each position become clearer through the lens of the other.

As opposed to Teichtal, as discussed above, the Kooks were not exclusively interested in immigration to the land of Israel but, closer to Teitelbaum, viewed Zionism through a much wider lens.¹⁵⁵ Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as a subversion of tradition and the Kooks viewed it as an exercise in national revival in physical (secular) form that held within it the seeds of a spiritual revival of the Jewish people. Abraham Kook speaks about this in many places. One salient example can be found in his *Ne'edar B'Kodesh*, in the section "The Holy and the Profane":

The holy and the profane (*kodesh v'khol*) are the two cornerstones of our life. Each requires of us proper development and value, care, and attention. And the proper admixture of both of them, in their beauty and advancement. . . . And if you argue we must separate the profane from the holy and thus nullify it, to send it away on its own; if you will say the holy should abandon the profane, this will weaken the entire value of life and will curtail the good influence of the holy on the world. The holy and the profane are siblings. Each is responsible to the other to forge its own path toward life, and even more so the path toward national revival which will grant us true life. . . . The profane will first appear on life's stage, in truth drawing from the supernal holy, the holy of holies. . . . But the holy will not be recognizable in the first iterations of the profane. However, after the first stages of the profane's appearance, it is necessary that the holy will come to appear, to illumine [the profane] in its light and glory.¹⁵⁶

In this compact text we can find the roots of Kook's notion of Zionism and national revival. This is how Kook understood the secular revival through the lens of tradition: as a counterintuitive, but necessary, process whereby the physical leads the way to creation of space for the spiritual, which is concealed in its depths. This process, unknowingly driven by spiritual roots, opens itself up to those roots, in what Kook calls "collective teshuvah" (*teshuvah klalit*). For Kook, teshuvah was a physical act of revival (that included return to the land but was not limited to it). This comes into play in the final chapter of Kook's *Orot Ha-Teshuvah*:

The revival of the nation (*ha-uma*) is the corner stone of the Great Teshuvah.¹⁵⁷ The return of the supernal Israel (*yisrael ha-elyona*) and the teshuvah of the world at large will follow in its path. . . . The inspiration of teshuvah in Israel is the arousal of the desire of the nation in its collectivity to return to its land, to its essence, to its spirit, and to its purpose. This is expressed very clearly in the Torah, *and return to God, For you will return to God*. This teshuvah comes from the inside (*penimit*) but is concealed in all manner of concealments. . . . The holy will be revealed though the profane, and also the beloved yoke [of Torah] (*ol ha-ahuv*) will come through the state of unfettered freedom (*ha-khofesh ha-parutz*) . . . and the entire world will know that the holy spirit speaks in Israel in all of its spiritual permutations. And in the end it is teshuvah that brings healing and redemption to the world.¹⁵⁸

Kook goes even further in *Arpelei Tohar* by provocatively suggesting that, in fact, the spiritual cannot reveal itself unless unleashed by the act of teshuvah of the physical. The desire to return to the land embedded in the soul of the people would have remained theoretical had it not been activated by the physical (secular) forces who, in some cases, claimed to be acting against tradition but, in fact, according to Kook, were acting in concert with it:

The souls (*nefesh*) of the transgressors of Israel (*poshei yisrael*) in messianic times (*sh'b'ikva d'mesikha*), those that bind themselves with love to all aspects of the Jews (*klal yisrael*), to the land of Israel, and to the revival of the people, are more purified (*m'tukan*) than the souls (*nefashot*) of the traditional community (*shlomei emunei yisrael*) who don't have the same independent feelings about the welfare of the general community, and the rebuilding of the people and the land. But the spirit (*ruah*) of these traditionalists is more purified even though the independent feeling and the arousal to act for the benefit of the Jews is not very strong in them. As opposed to those (transgressors) in whom there is a "spirit of distortion"¹⁵⁹ that prevents their hearts until they attach themselves to strange ideas and defiled physical behavior [that] prevents their spirit from being repaired. As a result, their souls are also blemished. The final rectification for this will come by means of the messianic light that will aid in the expansion of Talmud, esoteric teachings, and the disclosure of the light of divine wisdom in all its myriad forms. And the rectification of the souls of the traditionalists will happen through the perfection of the good transgressors (*poshim ha-tovim*) in relation to the larger community

regarding the physical and spiritual aspirations that are realized through its humanity. And the spirit of the transgressors will be rectified by means of the influence of the God fearers, the guardians of faith.¹⁶⁰

Kook articulates this idea in numerous places, but this text is often cited as the quintessence of the notion that, in fact, transgression, or rebellion, in the name of the Jewish collective and the land of Israel is an exercise of the transgressor's physical soul (*nefesh*) that is evolved beyond the physical soul (*nefesh*) of the guardians of Torah. While the spirit (*ruah*) of the traditionalists is more evolved regarding spiritual matters, the messianic time requires physical action, even if by means of transgression, to disclose the messianic light that will reveal the symbiosis between the two. This is a basic premise of Kookian Zionism without which his entire vision could not cohere. "Good transgressors" (he calls the transgressors *poshim tovim*) are necessary for the messianic moment to illuminate the reconciliation of opposites.

Here *nefesh* and *ruah* are used as kabbalistic tropes to describe two parts of the multifarious human soul, the *nefesh* being the lowest and the *ruah* being more spiritual but still lower than the more refined *neslama*. Kook uses the diversity of the human souls and their multifarious parts in a collectivist register to suggest—similarly to the way he distinguishes between Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David in his eulogy of Herzl and elsewhere—that the collective soul is perfected in different ways and through different channels, even ones that are transgressive. This, of course, gestures toward Sabbatean theology, a point that Teitelbaum notes periodically in "Essay on the Three Oaths" and that I will discuss below. If Teitelbaum is responding to Kook at all, it is not clear that he is doing so directly; rather, it is through the channel of Sabbatai Zevi cited in his essay. The Sabbatean/heretical resonances in Kook's views were not uncommon, and certainly were not limited to the likes of Teitelbaum. In fact, on March 23, 1932, the Jerusalem chapter of the Agudah youth (an organization Teitelbaum opposed for its collusion with Zionists) staged a mock trial in which Kook was tried for heresy. As Yehudah Mirsky notes, "Next, they mutilated him in effigy as the youngsters danced around and sang." This occurred on Purim, when Haman was often burned in effigy.¹⁶¹ Kook was not alone. German Orthodox leader, and supporter of Zionism, Azriel Hildesheimer was also put into *herem* by the Old Settlement Jews in Palestine.¹⁶² The precariousness of Kook's theological move, which today has often been accepted at face value, was quite controversial in its time for the way it subverted messianic politics as understood through tradition.

In any case, what we find in Kook, here and elsewhere, is a clear, one might even say unequivocal, conviction that the physical, transgressive, even rebellious spirits of the transgressors are playing a role in his redemptive vision. And teshuvah becomes the linchpin upon which a "holy" transgressive vision rests. Transgression can itself be teshuvah if its purpose is the revival of the physical body of the

people that is instantiated in part through return to the land. Thus, R. Eliezer's comment that "Israel is only redeemed through teshuvah," cited by Maimonides and then by Teitelbaum as the sole condition of the true Messiah, has been fully decontextualized and reconstructed, yet its message remains intact.

MESSIAH WITHOUT REPENTANCE:
ZVI YEHUDA KOOK

After Abraham Kook systematically argued that we need to reconceptualize messianic repentance as embodied in the revival of the nation that included immigration to the land as its necessary component, one would think that Maimonides's claim that "there is no redemption without teshuvah" in "Laws of Teshuvah" would have been resolved. And yet, in Zvi Yehuda Kook's lectures on his father's work *Orot*, he revisits this idea and offers a counterargument, claiming that redemption doesn't require repentance at all.¹⁶³ "When we enact teshuvah after all that has happened in exile it will become clear that this was not for naught, as all manner of divine action is meaningful (*lo haya b'hinam*), for the purposes of atonement and purification. Thus, we bring together rabbinic sources to claim that redemption is not dependent on teshuvah."¹⁶⁴ Kook then rehearses the rabbinic discussion in b.T. Sanhedrin 97b between R. Joshua and R. Eliezer on this question and concludes: "The explanation is that there is a set time for redemption. An end of exile! The time has ended! What will be, will be, the inevitability of the end-time. This law (*halakha*) appears in all the sources of all the sages. The time has come to end exile, now, and it is not dependent on repentance."¹⁶⁵ One has to wonder why Kook is writing this. He is certainly correct that there are authorities that decide, in favor of R. Joshua against R. Eliezer, that redemption is not dependent on teshuvah. But if that was decided, why did his father, and Teichtal, go through such efforts to reconceptualize teshuvah as national revival instead of the more normative return to mitzvot, and perhaps more significantly, why did Maimonides codify that teshuvah was a condition of redemption in "Laws of Teshuvah," upon which Teitelbaum bases his argument.

Instead of simply concluding with his rendering of the rabbinic discussion, much of Kook's chapter is devoted to a reading of the twentieth-century kabbalist Shlomo Elyashiv (1841–1926), author of the multivolume *Leshem Shevo ve-Akhlama* on the notion of "patriarchal merit" (*zehut avot*) as opposed to human agency (*zehut*) in determining redemption. Kook introduces him simply as the grandfather of Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (1910–2012), then leader of the ultra-Orthodox court in Jerusalem, but Shlomo Elyashiv, known simply as the Leshem (after the title of his book), was also a teacher of Kook's father, Abraham Isaac. Kook the elder helped Elyashiv immigrate to Palestine in 1922.

In his *Hakdamot u' Shearim*, Elyashiv enters into a detailed discussion of the end-time, noting that "the future hope that the glory of Israel, its final fate

in messianic days and the afterlife (*hayye olam ha-bah*), are in truth dependent on covenant (*brit*) and not on merit (*zehut*). The final redemption is not dependent on teshuvah or on good works at all; it will surely arrive in any case. This is the patriarchal covenant (*zehut avot*), and the patriarchal covenant is never nullified.¹⁶⁶ He goes even further, making the quite provocative claim that even those Jews guilty of idolatry will merit redemption in the future on the merit of *zehut avot*. The Jewish soul is never excluded and never extinguished. Before I examine the Leshem a bit more closely, here is the comment with which Kook concludes his reflections: "When we return—that is, return to the land of Israel—national teshuvah, the revival of the nation, in one manner or another, in one expression or another, this arousal of return to the land itself has a side of teshuvah. The arousal and desire for the land of Israel, which can be called 'the lovers of Zion' (*hibbat zion*) or 'Zionism,' whatever you want to call it. This is all an expression of the collective (*klalei-yisraeli*), the very value of that collective of its enactment of teshuvah."¹⁶⁷

It seems somewhat curious, after Zvi Yehuda Kook's reading of Elyashiv arguing that redemption is not dependent on teshuvah, that Kook would return to his father's reconceptualization of messianic teshuvah as embodied in the return to the land and the revival of the nation. From his previous discussion, this reconceptualization would be unnecessary, as redemption need not include teshuvah at all. It seems that perhaps Kook wants to maintain his father's view of teshuvah and yet also feels the need to challenge those who would not accept it by arguing, through Elyashiv, that Maimonides's comment about teshuvah as a prerequisite for redemption is not normative.

Looking a bit more closely at Elyashiv's broader discussion, of which the section Kook quotes is only a small part, it is not clear that Elyashiv would agree with Kook's reading, depending on the question Kook is addressing, which is not entirely clear. Whether redemption requires teshuvah or not may be a part of, but not the sum total of, the questions as to whether Zionist transgressors can be the arbiters of redemption.

The larger issue Elyashiv takes up in these chapters is the categorical distinction between Jew and gentile, with the category of the *erev rav* (mixed multitude) as an intermediate category. The discussion is about evil and sin more generally and, in particular, the positive role sin plays in redemption:

God established that the sin itself becomes the punishment which itself is a great fixing (*tikkun*). By this means, evil is eradicated when all the punishments have been exhausted. This is because evil is not eternal. . . . In the beginning the evil inclination existed only in potential and was not yet evil per se. It is only with the sin [of Adam and Eve] that evil becomes actualized and creates the reality of what we call evil. And this evil is nullified later on through punishment. . . . Thus God established that the human nullifies evil [through sin and punishment] . . . according to human action whereby the sin becomes punishment, for they are one, and thus after the punishment, evil dissipates.¹⁶⁸

For Elyashiv, this is all about Israel. For him, the gentile in almost all cases simply evaporates after death because the gentile has no *zehut avot* (ancestral merit), only *zehut* that is the product of his or her own agency. The *erev rav* is an intermediate category who are judged by their actions and, after the requisite punishment, if they have merit, they can achieve immortality (*hayye olam ha-bah*). In other words, the *erev rav* have the potential to join the Jewish collective soul, but only through agency and punishment and not through ancestral merit, *zehut avot*. Teitelbaum himself claims that “there are Jews who are reincarnate from the *erev rav* and even from Amalek.”¹⁶⁹ For Elyashiv, however, inclusion is contingent. The gentile, as such, has no chance at all. For Elyashiv, the very telos of the gentile is erasure. For the Jew, however, immortality is assured, although punishments are required to cleanse the evil that was brought into the world through their sin, inevitably produced by the actualization of evil through Adam’s sin.

But He pays back those that hate Him to His face to destroy them (Deut. 7:10). This is only for idolaters, as we see in Midrash on Psalms 7. And also the *erev rav*, as we explained earlier.¹⁷⁰ But God does not deal with Israel this way at all. . . . In the case of Israel there is never an exchange between merit and punishment. Rather, merit is given for mitzvot and punishment for sins. Sins and punishments are not eternal but are nullified [in the future]. Yet mitzvot and merit are eternal for Israel. . . . Sin [for Israel] is occasional (*mikre*) because it consists of an admixture of good and evil by means of the sin [of Adam and Eve] and sin is thus eradicated through punishment. . . . But with idolaters it is the opposite because their essence is demonic, another god. Their essence is evil, which is the source of their destruction.¹⁷¹

Elyashiv here is making a point that Kook uses for his own purposes to say (1) that Jews are assured immortality not by personal merit but by the patriarchal covenant (*zehut avot*), and (2) that redemption is not dependent on teshuvah. In fact, Kook is merging these points that remain separate in Elyashiv’s text to say that, in fact, since redemption is predetermined, teshuvah cannot be a prerequisite. Thus, if the time has come, then the time has come, no matter the state of the world or the state of the Jews. This is not a new idea. We know from the Talmudic sages that redemption comes in its “time” and not by “merit,” even though that would be a very ugly process, as Kook himself acknowledges in regard to the role of the Holocaust in his vision.

While Elyashiv makes a provocative point about the necessity of sin to absorb evil through punishment, he does not make the Kookean dialectical point that sin can contain mitzvah, only holding that sin is necessary *because* it evokes punishment, which absorbs evil born through Adam’s sin. Sin is tikkun.¹⁷² In fact, if sin were mitzvah and thus did not require punishment, for Elyashiv, it could not eradicate evil. It is certainly the case that the notion of *zehut avot* ensures that the sinner will eventually achieve his or her proper reward once the punishment erases the sin, but the suffering must occur as well.

There is really nothing here in Elyashiv that Teitelbaum would disagree with, even regarding redemption. Teitelbaum would certainly agree that sin is erased through

punishment, that *zehut avot* is determinative, and that redemption is predetermined. He also argues that when the tradition links redemption to teshuvah, it refers to a return to Torah and mitzvot and not to a revival of the nation or a return to the land as an act distinct from mitzvot. But Elyashiv does not weigh in on that point. And the inevitability of redemption does not preclude false redemption whereby sin would evoke punishment for acting outside the parameters of the tradition.

Here is one example. In *Divrei Yoel* on the giving of Terumah (tithes), commenting on the verse from Song of Songs, *I am asleep but my heart is awake* (Song of Songs 5:2), Teitelbaum writes that even if a person is “asleep” from mitzvot, his or her “heart is awake”: “I am asleep from mitzvot, and I have no strength to draw my limbs to perform them; how could it be I am not embarrassed to perform any mitzvot? He can thus say it is through the merit of my ancestors (*zehut avot*). That is, ‘my heart is awake,’ I am returning to the inheritance of my ancestors. There should thus be no embarrassment for Jews who can’t bring themselves to perform mitzvot because the inheritance of their ancestors (represented in the awoken heart) will draw them near to God.”¹⁷³

In this sense, Kook’s linking of the inevitability of redemption (through *zehut avot*) with the notion that teshuvah is not required for its unfolding ignores Elyashiv’s strong reading of punishment as the ultimate purifier of sin. If we assume that Zionism is transgressive for Teitelbaum, then on Elyashiv’s own terms it may be a necessary act to absorb punishment within it as an act of purification. But Zionism remains a sin. In that case, one needs the elder Kook’s reconceptualization of teshuvah whereby the sinful act is also the purifying act without punishment—teshuvah facilitated through transgression or, at least, by transgressors. Whereas Elyashiv says that “sin and the punishment are one,” Kook would say in this case that “[redemptive] sin and purification are one.” While I have no textual evidence, my sense is that this may be why the younger Kook returns to teshuvah as revival at the end of his discussion. In some way, perhaps, he knew that Elyashiv did not solve the dilemma of Zionism, but only offered a way to understand why teshuvah was not required for redemption. But in affirming the idea that redemption does not require teshuvah, Elyashiv still maintains that sin requires punishment. He does not hold that the sin itself is an act of purification outside punishment. That is, for Elyashiv, the sin cannot also be the mitzvah, even as it can be part of the process of rectification.

THE NECESSARY ABNORMALITY OF EXILE: THE MAHARAL OF PRAGUE AND HIS *NEZAH YISRAEL*

Rabbi Judah Loew, popularly known as the MaHaRal of Prague (1520–1609), was one of the great Jewish thinkers of the sixteenth century.¹⁷⁴ A tireless writer, he produced a massive body of work that has been reprinted many times and his influence, as an exegete, kabbalist, and philosopher, remains ubiquitous. Living on the cusp of early modernity yet not exposed to the Enlightenment, Loew is often

seen as a bridge between late medieval thought and modern thought. His kabbalistic works are not influenced by the Lurianic school, which would not become popular in Central Europe until a few decades after his death. In one sense, he is at the end of one era, peeking into a new one that has not yet been born.

Among religious Zionists, certainly on the questions of the Jew, the land of Israel, and exile, Loew is often thought to be part of a series of premodern thinkers beginning with Judah Halevi (1075–1141), followed by Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides, 1194–1270), then Loew, then Rav Kook.¹⁷⁵ These figures, among others—for example, Judah he-Hasid, who headed to the land of Israel with over a thousand followers in 1770—expressed a deep yearning for the land of Israel (Nahmanides immigrated to the land at the end of his life) and a messianic belief that was founded on the return of the Jews to the land. The construction of the Jews as a people that become nationalized, a collective naturally connected to the land, is the germ cell of the religious Zionist narrative.¹⁷⁶

I mention this as a prelude because, in “Essay on the Three Oaths,” Teitelbaum focuses on one chapter in Loew’s *Nezah Yisrael* to support his notion that the oaths are not, in fact, simply halakhic but much more consequential, much more fundamental; in fact, Loew describes the state of exile, unnatural as it may be, as a crucial part of the covenantal bond that enables the Jews to survive as a covenanted people. Teitelbaum notes that the rabbinic choice to make the prohibitions against forcing the end and immigrating en masse to the land *oaths* in the Talmud elevates these prohibitions to an extraordinary level: “And even regarding the punishment, the prohibition of breaking an oath is greater than all other transgression in the Torah, as we see in b.T. Shavout 39a. . . . We see from all this the severity of breaking an oath, and in particular an oath upon which it is written, *I will abandon your flesh and will consume you like the gazelles and like the hinds in the field* (b.T. Ketubot 111a).”¹⁷⁷ Here Teitelbaum is speaking about the severity of oaths more generally and pointing to the rabbinic warning about these oaths in particular. The critique of Teitelbaum is founded on the notion that these oaths are no longer operative, a claim Teitelbaum believes is blatantly rejected by Loew.

In the notoriously dense chapter 24 of *Nezah Yisrael*, Loew addresses the three oaths, which I assume is the reason it attracted Teitelbaum’s attention. In fact, in some ways, the entire chapter, while stressing the “unnatural” state of the Jews outside their land that serves as a foundation for religious Zionism, also supports Teitelbaum’s claim of the need to remain in exile until the Messiah arrives. Thus, rather than nullifying the three oaths, or claiming they are inconsequential, Loew actually supports them and broadens their meaning. Before turning to Teitelbaum’s reading of Loew, I will summarize the basic points raised in chapter 24 of *Nezah Yisrael*. After my analysis of Teitelbaum on Loew, I will turn to a few counterarguments in regard to this chapter in *Nezah Yisrael* by Teitelbaum’s critics.

Loew begins the chapter as follows: “It is understood that the exile of Israel and the destruction of its glorious Temple initiated a change in the natural order

of the world. It is known that that which deviates from the natural order can only be temporary, for it is impossible for such deviation to be permanent. . . . Even more so, the Jewish people (*ha-uma ha-yisraelit*) is a unique people (*uma yehida*) that has no integral connection at all with other peoples and should not exist among them. Therefore, the existence of Israel among the nations is unnatural (*sh'lo ke-teva*).¹⁷⁸ The setup here is that exile is an unnatural state of the world order (*teva*) and thus the exile of the Jews is, by definition, a deviant and unnatural state of humanity. It is thus temporary, as all deviations from nature are temporary. Because, according to Loew, the Jews are categorically different from other nations, any coexistence with them cannot be permanent or integral. Redemption, for Loew, is thus a return to the natural order as opposed to the culmination of it. This is certainly a boost to the religious Zionist narrative. And yet, for Loew, exile is necessary—even, or precisely, as a deviation from nature.

Loew continues with a detailed exposition on b.T. Gittin 88a, a lengthy discussion about a verse from Deuteronomy 4:25 where God admonishes Israel that if they do evil, *I have called to witness against you heaven and earth that you shall surely perish quickly from the land into which you are about to cross the Jordan to take hold of it. You shall no longer endure upon it, for you will surely be destroyed.* Citing Daniel 9:14, *And so God has watched over evil and brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous (zaddik)*, the Talmud asks, “How can we call God righteous when he brings evil upon Israel?” and responds, “God performed charity (*zedakah*) with Israel by exiling them in the exile of Zedekiah while the exile of Jeconiah still existed in Babylonia (citing 2 Kings 24:16).”

The charity of exile is that God exiled Israel two years earlier than planned, based on the numerical value of a word in Deuteronomy, *venoshantem* (= 852) that means *and dwelling long in the land*; that is, they were exiled after 850 years and not 852, so the exile would be temporary and their annihilation, stated in Deuteronomy 4:25, would not take place. Loew uses this to make a point about homeland based on Gur Aryeh, Loew’s supercommentary to Rashi, on the verse in question (Deut. 4:25):

If Israel had remained 852 years (the numerical value of *venoshantem*) they would have forfeited their unique place (the land of Israel). This is the rendering of God’s “righteousness” in exiling Israel. Thus, when they were exiled from the land they would be lost, just as anything that lacks a specific place is lost. However, since God expedited the exile for two years before they could reach “long in the land” (*venoshantem*) even as they were exiled to other lands, their land was not removed from them because they had not yet finished their “dwelling” there. They were like someone who leaves their place but remains connected to it. Thus, even as they were exiled from their land, their land remains their place.¹⁷⁹

This serves as a fascinating explanation of homeland as a place integral to a people even when the people no longer dwell there, based on the presumption that they were exiled earlier and could not be subject to God’s admonition in Deuteronomy

4:15 that they would perish if they sinned.¹⁸⁰ Essentially, this suggests that God's righteousness in exiling them early prevented the implementation of his own warning. The return of the Jews to that land is predetermined because, for Loew, separation from the land constitutes an unnatural and therefore temporary state. Thus far, there is nothing here that either religious Zionists or Teitelbaum would disagree with. Both acknowledge the unnatural state of exile, and both acknowledge the ultimate return of Jews to their homeland in messianic times.

Here Loew turns to the three oaths: "This then proves that the end of our exile is predetermined (*m'hayevet*) because if they would remain in exile, one could say that God would have abandoned them and they [Israel] would be like any other nation. Except now, not in their land, they would live under the sovereignty of others, and no nation was created for this, as this is unnatural. It is impossible for it to be this way forever (*tamid*) and thus it will end one day (*ketz l'davar zeh*)." Loew then quotes the three oaths from b.T. Ketubot 111a and explains:

As we said, this exile is unnatural and it is difficult to maintain this unnatural state. Thus, there will always be the desire to change this natural deviation. That is, to gather and ascend [to the land] and separate from the nations.

The three oaths are then expanded by R. Levi to six oaths, and this is where the issue of "forcing the end" enters the discussion. [R. Levi] added three additional oaths, one being that the end-time should not be revealed because once the end-time is revealed, that itself is the end-time. This is because if one *knows* the end, it is as if they are already redeemed. And God decreed that the exile will not end before its time, thus, "Do not reveal the end." . . . The first three oaths are about not nullifying the state of exilic subjugation, and the final three oaths are about not making any changes in the end-time. This refers to not revealing the end-time to the nations. This is crucial, for if the secret of the end-time is revealed to the nations, this only pushes off the end-time. This is because Israel is totally under the jurisdiction of the nations, and is bound to them, even in their secrets. Thus, revealing the end-time distances the end because [the secret of the end-time] binds them [Israel and the nations] together in a way that Israel will never separate from them. . . . Exile is against human inclination and therefore very difficult to maintain. And if the Jews were only required to swear by "heaven and earth," this oath would not have survived the difficulty of exile. Thus they were also required to swear by their ancestors in order that they follow God's will even if it is difficult for them.¹⁸¹

The idea that the knowledge of redemption, or claiming to have reached redemption, is itself redemption is an interesting idea that carries with it, for Loew, great danger. Redemption is kept alive, so to speak, only when it is a secret, only when it remains in a state of concealment. This is because its disclosure brings it into existence, even if it is not the proper time. This Teitelbaum calls "false redemption" (*geulah shel skeker*). False redemption is still a kind of redemption, but one that has negative consequences for at least two reasons. First, it unleashes destructive energy, and second, it pushes off the true redemption even further.

For Loew, the three (or in the expanded version, six) oaths—including the prohibition against forcing, or revealing, the end—constitute a warning upon which the covenantal promise rests. It is significant that Loew suggests that this oath is necessary precisely because the exile, and the unnatural state it implies, is difficult to maintain and thus requires an oath to maintain it. Why not just prohibit forcing the end? Why subject it to an oath? Prematurely revealing the end, especially to the nations, pushes off its arrival. For Teitelbaum, as we will see, this is precisely what Zionism (or certain forms of it) has done, not only by making the claim that the redemption has arrived, but by disclosing this to the nations of the world—which, by the late 1950s, after the establishment of the state in 1948, had largely acceded to it. This is not to say that the Western world believed that redemption had begun, but it certainly had become sympathetic to the Zionist project. For Teitelbaum, the United Nations resolution establishing Israel was a sign of that, a sign he felt required a response.

Teitelbaum returns to this chapter in *Nezah Yisrael* many times in “Essay on the Three Oaths.” He uses it, of course, to fortify his claim about the efficacy of the oaths, but he also often cites it to diminish the harshness that Loew places on transgressing them. For example, Loew claims that one must abide by these oaths even at a time of life-threatening oppression (*shmad*), writing:

[The midrash suggests that] even in a case of *shmad* [harsh persecution] one should not deviate from these oaths. This is not difficult to understand. By “a generation of *shmad*” [the midrash] does not mean that literally, but rather when [the nations] begin to act in an oppressive way, even in such a situation, the Jews should not change their place in exile. Even if it may bring about their death in exile [I assume he means as a collective—S.M.], they should not change. Another interpretation of “generation of *shmad*” would be that even if the nations want to kill them with harsh forms of persecution, they should not leave.¹⁸²

Teitelbaum is somewhat perplexed by this, as it implies that transgressing the oaths would be tantamount to obligating martyrdom, something the Talmud explicitly states applies only to the three transgressions of murder, idolatry, and incest. Such a reading of the midrash would seem bizarre. Teitelbaum offers another reading:

It is possible to interpret the MaHaRal as follows. His intention cannot be that even if the nations force the Jews with the threat of death or persecution to leave exile and found a state (*malukha*), one should stay in exile. This seems far-fetched, as the nations would not do such a thing. Perhaps, then, his intention is that even if the nations should place upon the Jews all manner of suffering, so that they feel they have no other choice but to leave exile and found a state, they are forbidden to do so, as that would constitute entering into a “decree of *shmad*” and it is forbidden for them to do so, even to escape from death and all manner of persecutions. But even in that case, the case of martyrdom seems to apply. And where does [MaHaRal] get that?¹⁸³

Teitelbaum then cites Maimonides's *Epistle to Yemen*, warning its readers against heeding the will of the nations. Teitelbaum's point here may be to make Loew speak to his situation. The notion that the nations would compel the Jews to leave exile to establish a state was inapplicable in Loew's time, though today it is perhaps less so. In any case, the realization that exilic persecution has reached a fever pitch whereby Jews feel the need to exit exile (prematurely, in his view) and found a state is quite relevant. The nuance indicated here is that Loew cannot be suggesting that in times of danger one should not seek a safe haven, even if it is the land of Israel. Teitelbaum himself chose Palestine over the United States when given the choice after reaching safety in Switzerland. Seeking safe haven in the land of Israel is not breaking any of the oaths. However, doing so as an end to exile by founding a Jewish polity would be.

And here Teichtal may not fully disagree with Teitelbaum. Teichtal certainly believed that return to the land, even en masse, was legitimate at such a time (1944), even necessary, as such return would constitute the condition of teshuvah and thus part of a messianic process. Still, it would seem that even for Teichtal, this all creates conditions *for* the arrival of Messiah and does not constitute that arrival, though the precise view of Teichtal in this matter is not clear. That is, is he closer to Alkalai and Kalischer or to Kook? In any case, by diminishing the harshness of Loew's rhetoric, Teitelbaum makes it a source of reflection and not something to be summarily dismissed or radically reinterpreted.

In another chapter, Teitelbaum offers the example of Babylonia (Bavel), where Jews were being persecuted such that they established a specific blessing, cursing the empire ("Blessed are you who destroys Bavel").¹⁸⁴ Still, R. Joshua states that "all who go from Bavel to the land of Israel transgress a positive commandment." The gemara determines that this applies to the oath and then tries to make sense of R. Zera's view that this applies only to "going up en masse" and that Bavel's abrogation of their oath "not to oppress Israel too much" frees Israel from its oath. The sages do not accept such a view. His point here is simply to note that the Babylonian sages, at least as transmitted in this *sugya*, were faced with similar challenges and chose to remain in Bavel to abide by the oaths.¹⁸⁵

Throughout all this, Teitelbaum is acutely aware of Loew's position that the purpose of the oaths was not only to raise the stakes of the transgression but to acknowledge the difficulty of abiding by the exilic decree and the inclination to hasten redemption and call an end to exile under extraordinary circumstances. Having witnessed the hell of the Holocaust, Teitelbaum certainly knew that. The ability to resist that inclination underlies his entire approach. He was not advocating that Jews individually die in exile, although he and many others were tragically late in calling for their departure from the Nazi threat. Rather, he was opposed to viewing the horrific and murderous nature of that persecution as a call to end exile by viewing the events in a messianic light. Given their extraordinary nature, this was quite easy to do. And yet, using Loew here, Teitelbaum is suggesting that one

must resist that interpretation, a notion he would develop in greater detail in *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah* a decade later.

THE HERETICAL CONTEXT OF ZIONISM:
BAR KOKHBA AND SABBATAI ZEVI

Ben-Zion Dinur (Dinaburg), an Israeli historian at the Hebrew University and minister of religion in the first Knesset, once said that “all Jewish history is Zionist historiography.” I assume he meant that all of Jewish history, which is largely the history of Jews in the Diaspora, points to its natural culmination in the collective ideology of Jewish self-determination called Zionism. For Dinur, Zionism was not new and certainly not revolutionary, but rather it was the natural byproduct, and consequence, of exilic Judaism. In short, Zionism was always there waiting for the right conditions to arise. This is a very common trope in Israeli historiography, in some ways building on the work of the nineteenth-century historian Henrich Graetz.¹⁸⁶ It also comprised the kernel of the “Jerusalem School” of Jewish history after the establishment of the state.¹⁸⁷

Other religious Zionists (e.g., of the Kookian School) suggest that Zionism as the secular struggle of Jewish self-determination was indeed revolutionary, even transgressive, yet necessary, and divinely ordained, for the messianic era to unfold. Zionism is, in Kook’s dialectical rendering, a “mitzvah that is born from sin,” or perhaps a “sin for the sake of heaven.” Secularism was a vehicle that initiated collective teshuvah to return the Jews to their homeland.

Teitelbaum, of course, saw things differently. In excruciating detail, *VM* makes a case that Zionism stands not in a long tradition of Jewish normative practice or return to history, but in the long tradition of Jewish heresy; that, in fact, it is the worst iteration of such heresy, much of which was focused on the struggle to bring about the messianic era before its time. In the “Introduction” to *VM*, he writes: “Regarding the emergence of a movement that wanted to abrogate the three oaths, we have not seen that from Bar Koziba until the time of Maimonides, which was over a thousand years. Nor from the time of Maimonides until the time of Sabbatai Zevi. And [we have not seen it] from Sabbatai Zevi until our generation. Many generations passed without anyone paying attention to them. This is because they [the oaths] were not in the realm of possibility.”¹⁸⁸

While most of the critics of *VM* focus on the halakhic nature of his case against the three oaths, few notice the way Teitelbaum attempted to situate Zionism in the history of Jewish heresy (again, more than a few early Zionists would not disagree with this). In particular, he viewed Zionism as a reiteration of what we have seen before in Bar Kokhba (first century CE), a military leader known as “the Son of the Star,” an allusion to his messianic posture (from the messianic prediction that *a star will rise from Jacob* [Num. 24:17]), but called in rabbinic literature Bar Koziba (the great deceiver) because he was a false messiah who led

Jews astray and was responsible for the Jewish massacre at Betar.¹⁸⁹ This is not far from the view of many Zionists, who, as we will see, also revived Bar Kokhba as a Jewish hero, as opposed to his depiction as a failed and false messiah in rabbinic tradition. In addition, Zionism serves for Teitelbaum as a continuation of Sabbatai Zevi, the seventeenth-century false messiah who serves as the quintessential heretic of Jewish modernity, even as he became a topic of great interest among many Zionists as well.¹⁹⁰

These were complex figures who enjoyed considerable support in their time, even from rabbinic leaders. The Talmud tells us that none other than the quintessential rabbinic hero Rabbi Akiva supported Bar Kokhba's messianic pretensions, even crowning him Messiah. While the historical attestation is difficult to determine, it is significant that the sages saved this tradition for posterity, using it to discuss the nature of the conditions of the Messiah's arrival. Sabbatai Zevi is more of a historical figure than Bar Kokhba, and the story of his messianic claims and later apostasy to Islam is well documented, as is its tragic aftermath.

Sabbatai Zevi is not often mentioned in Hasidic literature, one striking exception being when he serves as an imaginary figure in a dream of the Baal Shem Tov in his ascension to heaven.¹⁹¹ He is, however, discussed periodically by Rav Kook.¹⁹² Yet throughout *VM*, and particularly in "Essay on the Three Oaths," Teitelbaum mentions Sabbatai periodically, even devoting almost an entire chapter to him toward the end of that essay.¹⁹³ Teitelbaum returns to both Bar Kokhba and Sabbatai Zevi in order to discuss their context and explain why they were as popular as they were, even though both were heretics. Only rarely, toward the end of his essay, does he openly make the comparison between both and Zionism, but the comparison is implied throughout. Below, I offer a brief analysis of his use of Bar Kokhba and Sabbatai Zevi to situate Zionism within that trajectory of heresy, an inversion of the Zionist historiography we see in thinkers like Dinur.

Bar Kokhba led a rebellion against the Roman occupation of Jerusalem in 132 CE, called by the Romans the "Jewish Expedition." After some initial victories, he was appointed *nasi* (prince) of Judea. His last stand at Betar brought about immense death and destruction for Jews and, ultimately, ended any pretense of recapturing Jerusalem and any form of Jewish sovereignty there. In the rabbinic imagination centuries later, his image toggles between a military hero and a false messiah.¹⁹⁴ The Talmud mentions him numerous times, the midrash a bit more, especially Lamentations Rabbah, changing his name from the more messianically inflected Bar Kokhba to Bar Koziba, "great deceiver" or "son of a deceiver," because even though he ostensibly said, "I am the Messiah" (b.T. Sanhedrim 93b), he turned out to be a false messiah and responsible for the deaths of many thousands of Jews.¹⁹⁵ There is little commemoration of Bar Kokhba's insurrection in normative Judaism, and what does exist was folded into Tisha B'Av (and hence Lamentations Rabbah), the commemoration of the destruction of the two Temples. While rabbinic literature is of two minds on Bar Kokhba, Teitelbaum focuses

on his negative depiction, as a false messiah responsible for Jewish tragedy and the prolonged decree of exile.

With this in mind, it is worth asking why Bar Kokhba was so important for Teitelbaum in his attack on Zionism. In fact, as is widely known, the Zionist revision of Jewish history revives Bar Kokhba, not as a failed messiah depicted in rabbinic literature, but as the quintessence of Jewish heroism against the powers of persecution. On this, Yael Zerubavel notes: "The transformation of Bar Kokhba from a dubious leader of a failed revolt to a prominent heroic figure from Antiquity is an important feature of the Zionist reshaping of the past. . . . The Zionist commemorative narrative thus shifts its focus from the *outcome* of the revolt to the *act* of rebelling; it emphasizes the initial success that brought about the liberation of Judaea rather than the defeat that led to exile."¹⁹⁶ The failed Bar Kokhba revolt moved from its place on Tisha B'Av to a relatively newer festival of Lag B'Omer, which Zionism helped construct, not as a holiday for "scholars" (traditionally, the end of the plague that killed the students of Rabbi Akiva) but for the heroic "soldier," a veritable military holiday. Indeed, Zionist literature saw a rise in interest in Bar Kokhba, the way it did with other heretical figures such as Baruch Spinoza and Sabbatai Zevi.

We can imagine that Teitelbaum, living deep in the ultra-Orthodox Máramaros region of Hungary, where Zionist activity certainly existed albeit in limited form, was aware of this slow but deliberate transformation of a failed messiah into a new national hero. This would be, for him, simply another blasphemous instance of Zionist revisionist history that was trying to erase the decree of exile, which in some rabbinic texts was finally instantiated with the failure of Bar Kokhba's revolt. Teitelbaum's interest in Bar Kokhba was thus likely an attempt to counter the revival of heresy as part of the national story with the transformation of Bar Kokhba from a "deceiver" to a "hero." Teitelbaum suggests that his negative image is imperative for understanding the acceptance of exile as itself the proper response that can best bring about the messianic era. As a false messiah, Bar Kokhba can never be revived as a hero unless the very notion of Messiah is abandoned or transformed. The revival of heresy as normative in a heretical movement like Zionism was for Teitelbaum quite predictable, albeit meriting a definitive response.

As a voracious student of rabbinic literature, Teitelbaum's interest in Bar Kokhba was quite limited and focused on the notion that Rabbi Akiva, the quintessential rabbinic hero, apparently acceded to Bar Kokhba's messianic claim, in large part because this is what the Talmud focuses on. Teitelbaum is not interested in the many references to Bar Kokhba and the mixed reaction he received in the tradition. As a work of political theology, *VM*'s focus is on how a figure like Bar Kokhba can serve Teitelbaum's argument about the heretical and subversive nature of the Zionist project.

The link connecting Bar Kokhba to Zionism is the fact that both exercised their messianic claim by attempting to return to the land "before its time." In the

case of Bar Kokhba, it was approximately seventy years after the destruction of Jerusalem (perhaps initiated by the prophecy of a return to the land after seventy years that was fulfilled in establishing the Second Commonwealth); in the case of Zionism, it was returning to the land without any clear indication of a messianic figure (even as Kookian Zionists claim that return to the land can precede the coming of the Messiah).

While mention of Bar Koziba is scattered throughout “Essay on the Three Oaths,” he is the focus in two chapters, 39 and 139, where Teitelbaum seeks to understand how R. Akiva could have erred in attributing messianic status to Bar Koziba. He does this by distinguishing between the generation of Bar Koziba and “our generation,” suggesting that while a leading Torah figure could have been mistaken in that case, in our case there is no excuse for such justification. Much of this is founded on the bifurcation between a “generation that is meritorious” (*kulo zokheh*) and a “generation that is liable” (*kulo hayav*), based on the verse in Isaiah 60:22 about the Messiah coming “in haste” (*akhishena*) or “in its time” (*b’eta*).¹⁹⁷ The former assumes Israel’s righteousness and does not require the same messianic conditions as the latter, which assumes Israel’s culpability, requiring conditions enumerated in Maimonides’s “Laws of Kings,” chapters 11 and 12.

The Talmud Sanhedrin 93b reads as follows: “Bar Koziba was king for two and a half years. He said to the sages, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They responded, ‘Regarding the Messiah it is written that he is able to smell and judge [intuitively understand proper judgment], so let us inquire as to whether Bar Kokhba can smell and judge.’ Once they saw that he was not able to smell and judge, he was killed.”¹⁹⁸ Interestingly, in this excerpt, our subject is called both Bar Koziba and Bar Kohkba, Bar Kokhba before he was evaluated and Bar Koziba after he was deemed a false messiah. Maharsha, in his commentary to Talmudic aggadot, notes that “R. Akiva also made a mistake, as he thought that Bar Koziba was the *star that will arise from Jacob*.” This passage from the Talmud and Maharsha’s comment are relevant to Teitelbaum’s question, “How did the sages think Bar Koziba was Messiah, even in the beginning, if he didn’t exhibit the requisite criteria for prophecy?” This would include R. Akiva. Teitelbaum responds as follows:

Bar Koziba’s generation were all righteous, and the sages did not find any sin in them except that they did not sufficiently mourn for Jerusalem. And it is possible that except for that one sin, they would have embodied the messianic maxim *I will hasten it* (Is. 60:22) and thus redemption would have commenced immediately.¹⁹⁹ But because of that one sin, the time was not right for *I will hasten it* [and Messiah will thus come only *in its time*]. And so [Bar Koziba] was guilty of “forcing the end,” the result being “I will abandon your flesh and will consume you like the gazelles and like the hinds in the field” (b.T. Ketubot 111a)” (this likely refers to the Roman massacre of the Jews at Betar). . . . David ben Zimra (1479–1573) suggested that “if R. Akiva never retracted his support, it was because he had no occasion to judge [whether Bar Koziba could judge] by means of ‘smell’ (intuition). Everyone agrees that the Messiah

must be able to ‘smell and judge.’ But this had never come to R. Akiva.” But this is difficult to accept. Since the sages inquired about all this, how did R. Akiva not know?

In Abraham Zakuto’s (1452–1515) *Sefer Yukhsin*, essay no. 1, we read that R. Akiva, after he saw that Bar Koziba would not “smell and judge,” abandoned him. And it is written that this is an essential requirement of Messiah. And Maharsha also notes (in his gloss to b.T. Sanhedrin 93b) that R. Akiva made a mistake and later reneged on his support.²⁰⁰

In this reading, Teitelbaum wants both to hold R. Akiva accountable yet also explain how such a sage could have erred. He rejects David ben Zimra’s claim that R. Akiva was unaware that Bar Kokhba did not meet the requisite criteria, and yet he suggests that he may not have realized the extent to which that one sin could have taken the generation out of the category *I will hasten it*, which would have diminished the requirements of the Messiah.²⁰¹ I will return to that one sin of “not sufficiently mourning the Temple” that Teitelbaum discusses earlier as the sin of Zionism. Before that, I will turn briefly to chapter 139, where Bar Kokhba returns as a subject of investigation.

One question that haunts the tradition is that of who killed Bar Kokhba. The passage in Sanhedrin cited above does not say who killed him, yet some midrashim claim he was killed by the Jews.²⁰² Maimonides, in “Laws of Kings” 11:3, simply cites the Talmudic passage and leaves his death ambiguous. In Lamentations Rabbah 2:4, it appears that the gentiles killed him and not the Jews.²⁰³ Don Isaac Abravanel in his *Yeshuot Mesikho*, chapter 4, and David ben Zimra both suggest that even if the Jews did not kill Bar Kokhba, they sentenced (*danu ’oto*) him to death, thus trying to resolve the discrepancy but, in doing so, claiming that the rabbis indeed wanted him dead.²⁰⁴ This striking locution gestures to New Testament references about the rabbinic attitude toward Jesus (they wanted him dead but had no jurisdiction to kill him). In any event, Teitelbaum uses all of this to make a somewhat shocking claim that thinly veils his view of Zionism as a case of false messianism likened to Bar Kokhba.

Teitelbaum notes, following the narrative suggested by Abravanel, that we know very little about Bar Kokhba from Jewish texts, while there is much more in Roman chronicles and medieval anti-Jewish Christian polemics that tell of his great military prowess, including sojourns to Alexandria, Rome, and Babylonia, where he subjected the population to violent retribution. Thus, “he served as a great support for the Jews, saving them from their enemies.”²⁰⁵ When Bar Kokhba was killed, the opposite occurred. The enemies of the Jews killed many more Jews than perished even in the destruction of Jerusalem [Betar], as the Talmud and midrashim relate. The death of Bar Kokhba was thus a time of extreme danger for the Jews.²⁰⁶

Since that was the case, Teitelbaum asks, “is it hard to understand why the sages killed him? They must have known with *ruah ha-kodesh* and even naturally that since he was such a successful warrior, the enemies of the Jews would take revenge

[once he was gone] and thus present a grave danger, as indeed occurred, according to our sins." Teitelbaum's setup here is now complete. The sages were presented with a dilemma. They had a false messiah who was protecting them from their enemies, who indeed looked very much like a savior even though he did not fit the requisite messianic criteria. If they destroyed him, they knew that they would suffer revenge from their enemies. And if they did not destroy him, redemption would not come, could not come, because they would have supported a false messiah. Teitelbaum writes: "Therefore, after they saw that he was not the Messiah, and thus his political project had come too early, it created a grave danger to the Jews. Who knows what more could occur had they allowed his political quest to continue? Thus, the sages chose the lesser of two evils and killed him, destroying his political aspirations with him. They viewed this as a small salvation. One who thinks carefully about this can see where this has all come with a political reality before Messiah, for it is indeed terrible."²⁰⁷

The veil has finally come off the narrative of Bar Kokhba as Teitelbaum presents a kind of exilic dilemma, a test framed by the ever-present challenge of "forcing the end"—a test that Zionism failed. The false messiah acts as a savior, but he creates a danger that far outweighs the danger he removes. Thus, the sages are forced to choose the "lesser of two evils," knowing that removing Bar Kokhba's protective shield may result in imminent danger to the Jews, but what will remain intact is a firm belief in the promise of redemption. In short, a false messiah that protects Jews is worse than no messiah (leaving Jews unprotected), because only the latter truly can maintain belief in the Messiah. For Teitelbaum, believing in a false messiah erases the belief in the true Messiah and, in doing so, prevents the future arrival of the Messiah because the Jews have already ceased believing in him.

The analogy is now clear. Teitelbaum is fully aware of the saving nature of the state of Israel after the trauma of the Nazi genocide. But for him, the saving qualities of Zionism hide a much more ominous danger, either a premature enactment of redemption or the erasure of belief in the need for the promised redemption. Thus, the sin Bar Kokhba's generation was guilty of was "not sufficiently mourning the Temple"—or, as Teitelbaum puts it elsewhere, "washing one's hands of the Temple" (*pashtu yadeyhem m'zevul*). Believing in a false messiah, one who does not meet messianic criteria, even if he stands in service of the Jews, is worse than having no Messiah. The salvation is temporary precisely because it is not messianic, but anti-messianic. With a deep sense of both irony and tragedy, Teitelbaum's view is that if we don't have a state, we are in danger. And if we do have a state built on the foundation of a false messiah or on false messianic premises (the Zionist state), we are in a more perilous state of danger.

The first state of danger is that while exile may put Jewish bodies in harm's way, it will maintain the requisite belief in redemption (*emunah b'geulah*) that comes through waiting for divine intervention and a messianic figure who meets the necessary criteria for that vocation. The second state of danger is abandoning

messianism altogether under the guise of false messianism. For Teitelbaum, the hazard of false messianism is pure survivalism and pure survivalism is itself, for Teitelbaum, the disbelief in God's covenantal promise that God will not destroy the Jews. The grace of true messianism is faith. I think that this largely coheres with Leo Strauss's review of Max Nordau's *Zionism*. Strauss notes that "Zionism retains the separation, effected by assimilation, between Zionism and messianism, between national world ends and spiritual means—but it abandons messianism."²⁰⁸ The great tragedy of false messianism is not the fallacy per se, but rather the end of the messianic idea. For this reason, in Teitelbaum's reading, the sages had to kill Bar Kokhba.

As we will presently see with Teitelbaum's rendering of Sabbatai Zevi, heresy is a complicated and elusive phenomenon precisely because its purpose is to place a test before Israel. Heresy is a necessary part of the redemptive process. It is always seductive, compelling, and convincing or it wouldn't be effective heresy. The seduction of a false savior was as present after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE as it was in the days following the Chmielnicki Uprising (also known as the Polish-Cossack War) in 1648, which may have contributed to Sabbatai's messianic declaration in 1666, and the establishment of the Jewish state after the Nazi destruction of European Jewry in 1945. The closer we move to the end-time, the more difficult it is to decipher truth from falsehood. This is standard rabbinic fare. There is only one anchor for Teitelbaum and that is fidelity to the covenant, what he calls *yisrael saba*: protecting ancestral norms that include, but are not limited to, Torah and mitzvot.²⁰⁹ This is precisely the message he seeks to present to his reader. *Yisrael saba*, for Teitelbaum, is more than tradition, halakha, or custom. He writes:

According to the verse . . . *a tree of life for those who hold on to it* (Prov. 3:18), this means those who hold on to the Tree of Life; this is the tradition (*ha-mesorah*) of our holy ancestors who were like angels. [We should hold on to it] and not loosen ourselves from it by following those who distort our holy Torah that was bequeathed to us and that was received from generation to generation. . . . Because this is all that is left to us in our orphaned generation for which all vision has been occluded—that is, to hold on to the ways of our ancestors (*ha-rishonim*) and to follow in their path (*b'ikvoteihem*).²¹⁰

The importance of unbending fidelity to ancestral norms is why dress, mannerism, language, communal precepts, education, and so on are as paramount as formal mitzvot for Teitelbaum. Elsewhere he writes, "The ability to reach a vision of the Torah is dependent on the power of the ancestors. That is, it accords with keeping close to the ways of the ancestors (*darkhei avot*). If one maintains fidelity to the ways of the ancestors in a compete fashion and does not move from them even a tiny bit, one will merit seeing the Torah in an elevated and proper way."²¹¹

The importance of this fidelity, for Teitelbaum, is that our time does not afford us any access to divine truth. We are left with only the norms of our ancestors.

Fidelity to such norms is based not on the claim that they are true by definition, but on the assumption of doubt, such that we need to simply depend on what was, rather than gamble on innovation. Ironically, Teitelbaum's form of ultra-Orthodoxy is based not on certainty but on irresolvable doubt, whereby the new is always more dangerous than the tried and true.

The Bar Kokhba revolt was used by Teitelbaum to draw an analogy to Zionism. Here he is on somewhat solid ground, as Zionism itself participates in Bar Kokhba's resurrection as Zionist hero. But what of Sabbatai Zevi? The initial question regarding Teitelbaum's use of Sabbatai Zevi in *VM* is what he really knew about him. Very little original Sabbatean material was in print during Teitelbaum's lifetime, and any material available was within scholarly circles that he likely did not read. For example, Gershom Scholem's massive study of Sabbatai, in Hebrew, was published in the 1950s as Teitelbaum was writing *VM*, but there is no indication that he was aware of it or would have been at all interested. In addition, one would assume that Scholem was aware of Teitelbaum's treatment of Sabbatai but, as far as I know, he never discusses it.²¹²

Reading through *VM*, we find that much of the data Teitelbaum garnered was drawn from Jacob Sasportas's *Zizat Novel Zvi* or from Jacob Emden. Moshe Hagiz is also mentioned. Sasportas (1610–98) was a Moroccan-born rabbi who later assumed the position of dean of the Eitz Hayyim yeshiva in Amsterdam, a leading institution of Spanish and Portuguese émigrés to Northern Europe.²¹³ Published in 1737, *Zizat* was an extensive collection of anti-Sabbatean correspondence. It underwent many printings, and even an abbreviated (*kitzur*) version, and was widely read in traditional circles. This seems to be the major source for Teitelbaum in addition to Emden's *Migdal 'Oz*, along with *Ohel Ya'akov* and other works. Teitelbaum often cites lengthy passages from *Zizat* to make a point about the dangers of heresy, all gesturing toward the Zionist heresy of his time. This is simply to say that Teitelbaum did not likely have a deep and nuanced historical view of the movement, but for his polemical purposes that was not necessary.

In one striking passage, Teitelbaum uses the Sabbatean phenomenon not as an example of Zionism but as a counterexample to Zionism. Citing both Sasportas and Emden, he notes that there was a certain rationale for the support of Sabbatai Zevi: "The reason so many followed Sabbatai Zevi was that he was an expert in rabbinic literature, legal codes, and Lurianic Kabbalah, which he knew from a very young age. In addition, his ascetic behavior was well known as he was praised in many circles. He also performed wonders and brought many Jews back to the tradition. We can see all this in the writings of Sasportas and Emden. Thus, it is not surprising that he was able to convince a nation thirsting [for redemption] that wanted to envelop themselves in a belief that the end-time had come."²¹⁴ The exaggerated prowess of Sabbatai Zevi is a common theme in later Sabbatean literature. But as Gershom Scholem's work shows, the account of Sabbatai's prowess here sounds more like that of his disciple Nathan of Gaza, whose youthful expertise in

Torah was viewed as indeed wondrous (Nathan became Sabbatai's spokesperson in his twenties), whereas Sabbatai's expertise was less certain and more suspect. In any case, Teitelbaum's point is to suggest, differently than Bar Kokhba but not categorically so, that in context one can understand the people's error. Even after his initial conversion to Islam, it was difficult for some to abandon their belief in Sabbatai's messianic stewardship. And yet, we know that after his conversion and the heresy that followed, many great Jewish figures distanced themselves from him or even waged war against him.²¹⁵ Finally, shifting from the seventeenth century to the twentieth, Teitelbaum writes this:

And Emden said in his wisdom that another such group will arise, and he warned us in *Migdal Oz* that we should not fear such a generation and not retreat even if such individuals remain in this world. . . . And now this group advocating false redemption (*geulah shel sheker*) in our day did not begin with the power of Torah and devotion and did not bring many back to Torah as did Sabbatai Zevi. Rather, they began by dismantling Torah, filling the world with all manner of heresy. And even so, they convinced the world to follow them. Satan saw that in our lowly generation it wasn't necessary to make *baalei teshuvah* and begin with Torah to fool the world the way it was in the time of Sabbatai Zevi. This is because our lowly generation is truly "on the heels of redemption" (*ikvata d'meshikha*) and thus can more easily be fooled with lowly nonsense.²¹⁶

In these and previous passages, a tripartite distinction is implied between three generations of false messianism. The first is the time of Bar Kokhba, a truly righteous generation that had only one fault that prevented them from a preemptive redemption. The second is the generation of Sabbatai Zevi, which was not as righteous as the first but still had great sages who were nevertheless fooled because Sabbatai exhibited such wondrous talents. The third is "our generation," one so confused and "lowly" that the forces of evil did not even have to trick them; they simply bought into the false messianism for the most mundane reasons. One could add a fourth, the false messiah that serves as the context of Maimonides's *Epistle to Yemen*. For Teitelbaum, this is proof of two things: first, that he thought he was living in the final generation, and second, that only divine intervention will be able to uproot the belief in false messianism. He concludes, "We can only hope that God will not abandon us and leave us . . . in this time when we are in *ikvata d'meshikha* and the truth is indeed concealed."²¹⁷

Unmentioned here but likely relevant are the three traumatic contexts of each generation: Bar Kokhba living in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem, Sabbatai Zevi coming in the wake of the 1648 Chmielnicki Uprising, and Zionism in the wake of the pogroms of the 1880s and subsequently the Holocaust. Each trauma evoked a messianic response, each with its own rationale. For Bar Kokhba, it was recapturing Jerusalem from the Romans; for Sabbatai, it was messianic fervor in light of a destabilizing and unsafe Europe; and for Zionism, it was the rise of pure

survivalism, in light of the Nazi genocide, coupled with secular nationalism born from Jews' absorption of modern European ideas.

The distinctiveness of the last generation, for Teitelbaum, was that modernity had already so weakened the faith of the generation that the collapse of European Jewry understandably introduced a kind of pure survivalism that faith could not counter. The Jews just gave up on waiting, which he understood as an abandonment of messianic hope and faith. The combination of secularization and the destabilization caused by systemic antisemitism made it almost impossible to maintain a belief in the messianic promise. Many forms of Zionism provided an answer to this despair. For Teitelbaum, however, Zionism was not the fulfillment of the messianic hope but its abandonment, not the fulfillment of Judaism but its destruction. He thus sees himself as a prophet in the desert with nothing more than the tradition that most had already ceded to the false messianism of survivalism.²¹⁸

Thus, Teitelbaum unequivocally believed that Zionism was in fact more dangerous than all previous false messianisms: "The Zionist sects, in all their factions, are much worse than all previous generations many times over. Nevertheless, everyone seems to be running after them and offering support. There has never been such a state of fallenness."²¹⁹

The final segment of Teitelbaum's use of previous heretical movements to distinguish Zionism as the more egregious iteration in "Essay on the Three Oaths" takes a surprising turn: the loss of the tradition of the Baal Shem Tov. In the previous two cases of Bar Kokhba and Sabbatai Zevi, the Jews had an authentic tradition upon which to depend, even if it was not foolproof and was open to distortion. In the case of Zionism, Teitelbaum claims this is no longer true.

It is well known in Hasidic circles that Teitelbaum remarked that today, we no longer have an authentic tradition of the Baal Shem Tov.²²⁰ To the consternation of many of his contemporaries, Teitelbaum sought to convert Hasidism from a movement of religious revival and innovation into a movement of ultraconservative traditionalism. In some way, there is historical context here. The Hasidic region of Máramaros, Hungary, in his time was the seat not of radical Hasidic theology but of conservative Jewish practice.²²¹ The influence of non-Hasidic figures such as the Hatam Sofer (Moshe Schreiber, 1762–1839), who was radically opposed to innovation but also did not support the radical theology of Hasidic expansiveness, was well known, and Teitelbaum saw himself very much as inside that hyper-traditional orbit.²²²

Yet it remains curious that one of Teitelbaum's most sustained discussions of this erasure of an authentic Hasidic tradition occurs in the final chapters of "Essay on the Three Oaths," which constitute, in effect, his final statement about the risks of Zionism and the failure of the ultra-Orthodox world to stem its tide. As part of his response, he recounts the weakness of his generation in the early twentieth century in his comparison to Sabbatai Zevi. But then he pivots to the loss of Hasidic tradition as a second part. Why?

First, Teitelbaum's own words:

The Sabbatean sects were deeply embedded in the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah, upon which their actions were based. Those teachings contain deep matters that most cannot understand. Thus, there was more power to distort their words falsely. But now the heretics in our day (*apikorsim b'zemaneynu*) envelop themselves in the Baal Shem Tov, but they really have no idea of the way of the Baal Shem Tov. When Judah the Prince permitted the writing of the Oral Law, things appeared in writing. And even with Isaac Luria, who wrote almost nothing, nevertheless his student Hayyim Vital wrote almost everything.²²³ But the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples wrote almost nothing of their holy path, and it appeared that it was heavenly ordained that everything should remain in oral form. On this, see Shneur Zalman of Liady's remarks on the circling (*hakafot*) on Simhat Torah in his *siddur*.²²⁴ What remains [of the Baal Shem Tov's authentic teachings] is very little, from words of Torah he gave at his holy table before his disciples. And it is known that he spoke to the souls of those present, according to what they needed to hear. One must contemplate this regarding where all these words have traveled.²²⁵

Aside from the oddity of such a claim from a celebrated Hasidic master, one wonders what it is doing at the end of his essay about the seductiveness of Zionism in the religious world. Who are the "heretics of our day," and in what way have the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov contributed to this seduction? While, to my knowledge, this never becomes clear, I suggest that Teitelbaum may be responding to the way in which Hasidic teachings about seeing the good in the evil, the holy spark embedded in the dross, the good intentions of bad actors, and so on had become a kind of justification for seeing the Zionists and Zionism as something good covered in transgression. Such a view would not be uncommon in Hasidic circles and certainly was used by modern interpreters of Hasidic thought such as Martin Buber, although it is unlikely that Teitelbaum knew of him, and certainly he did not read Buber's work. This approach certainly deeply informs both the writings of Rav Kook and his school, about whom Teitelbaum was certainly aware, and the tradition of Habad with which he was also familiar (he even cites its founder in the passage). In other words, the so-called authentic Baal Shem Tov tradition served as fodder for the religious community's ability to accept a transgressive movement of Zionism as somehow tied to divine will.

By invalidating the existence of such an authentic tradition, Teitelbaum undermines the very religious claim that could validate Zionism. Because the generation of Sabbatai Zevi indeed held an authentic tradition of secrets, the danger was in the ability to distort them. In the case of Zionism, no such tradition exists according to Teitelbaum, and thus the use of it as a validating force is not a distortion but simply a falsehood. Teitelbaum thus rejects the dialectical move, common in Hasidism, of seeing good in all things, preferring the more gnostic approach of viewing the world as a zero-sum game between good and evil. This becomes more

evident in his later work *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*. The stakes rise as the end-time nears:

I have already mentioned that the [messianic] generation of *ikvata d'meshikha* is a generation of the erasure of Torah, as the sages note. Thus, the [authentic] way of the Baal Shem Tov has been completely forgotten, and anyone who wants to use his name to his benefit by saying that he is acting in the way of the Baal Shem Tov is only self-serving. And there is deep misunderstanding about the many tales [of the Baal Shem Tov], most of which are false distortions that pass from one mouth to the next in many variations. And if these falsehoods get written down later in a book, they are considered esoteric matters. Maimonides has already written about this in his *Epistle to Yemen*. . . . The truth is that in our generation we have no one to depend on except our father in heaven, as the Talmud relates. And when Messiah comes and inspires all of Israel to teshuvah, our eyes will be open to the depths of Torah. Then the true tradition of the Baal Shem Tov will also be revealed [again], and prophecy will return and fill the earth with the knowledge of God. And may God merit us to see this soon.²²⁶

Erasing a traditional approach that would support the possibility of what I would call “transgressive redemption,” Teitelbaum falls back on his basic position that we now live in a time of turmoil and doubt, and he focuses on the proper way for the Jew to prepare for the end-time he believed was approaching. He thus takes a premillennialist approach that suggests we must simply resist change, innovation, and progress and maintain strict adherence to traditional norms that were tried and true in the past—in this case, guarding ancestral norms, avoiding all contact with heresy, and resisting what appears to be divine will enveloped in satanic garb. He calls this act of fidelity *yisrael saba*.

Here Teitelbaum argues that the way of the Hatam Sofer in his rejection of innovation should become the *sine qua non* of Hasidism as well. Hasidism had moved toward a conservative rather than innovative approach to Jewish life long before Teitelbaum, but here Teitelbaum argues that in the wake of the dangers of heresy that threaten Jews more now than in the time of Sabbatai Zevi, in part because of the template of modernity that pervades all aspects of life, Jews must sever ties with the Baal Shem Tov and side with the Hatam Sofer to protect the integrity of the tradition. The Besht had become—certainly by the early twentieth century, with the rise of neo-Hasidism in Europe, of which Teitelbaum may have had cursory knowledge—a tool of some radical critics of normative tradition. Modernity had sullied the Besht, and thus, perhaps, Teitelbaum thought it best for all to sever ties with him, since all claims of Beshtean authenticity were suspect.

Teitelbaum seems to fully understand the rationale behind the temptation, the fatigue of waiting, the challenge of seemingly hopeless hope, and the trauma of genocide. And yet, for him this is all part of the great messianic test. Zionism is so dangerous, in part, because it is so rational, because it presents a solution to a

problem in the present moment. And that is precisely its danger: anti-messianism posing as its opposite.

CONCLUSION

“Essay on the Three Oaths,” which serves as the centerpiece of *Vayael Moshe*, has been the subject of significant analysis in the scholarly world as well in traditional circles. The focus has been almost exclusively on its halakhic analysis of an obscure Talmudic pericope that Teitelbaum argues constitutes the roots of Zionism’s inviolability. In many ways, Teitelbaum himself is at fault for the largely exclusive halakhic attention to his work. He writes, “I have come in this work to decide [the matter] as it pertains to the essential law in regard to participating in the [Zionist] government and its election.”²²⁷ What I have tried to do in this chapter is read Teitelbaum somewhat against the grain to suggest that, in fact, “Essay on the Three Oaths” is about much more than a detailed halakhic analysis of a Talmudic passage (though it is also that) and extends far beyond the practical matter of participation in state institutions. Rather, it is a full frontal attack on the Zionist project as a messianic movement, suggesting, in a variety of ways, that its messianic posture is a veil hiding its anti-messianic program.

I argued that the frame of the essay is twofold: the Holocaust and messianism (*ikva d’meshikha*). The destruction of European Jewry did not precipitate Zionism, which began decades before, but certainly strengthened its claim, to both Jews and the world—and, for Teitelbaum, illuminated the end-time that was approaching. Therefore, I consider him a messianist no less than Kook or Schneerson; albeit for him, true messianic activity is passive rather than active, and messianic activism, by contrast, is destructive (or anti-messianic) in that it abrogates what he determined to be the passive covenantal reciprocity of waiting for the end-time. In this way, Teitelbaum exhibits a semi-quietist premillennialist alternative to Kook’s and Schneerson’s postmillennialist activism.²²⁸ The fear of messianic activism is not new here; in fact, it appears to be the dominant trope of the rabbinic tradition. And yet, for a variety of reasons that include secularism, intense Jew-hatred (the Holocaust), and the impending end-time, which places a final test on the Jews, Zionism has usurped messianic passivity and instituted a secular form of messianic activism that then becomes filtered through the lens of tradition by Kookian religious Zionists.

What I have attempted to illustrate is the extent to which Zionism, for Teitelbaum, is not limited to the question of mass immigration (*aliyah*) or even the establishment of a secular *memshalah* (sovereign political state), but extends to include a broad heretical attempt to undermine Judaism and its covenant and subvert the messianic process upon which the tradition stands. *Vayael Moshe* is thus a political-theological resistance to Zionism’s radical reinterpretation of the tradition.

Interestingly, the religious Zionist establishment today has fully absorbed the radicality of that reinterpretation, making it part of their normative tradition while its main architect, Rav Kook, seemed to be quite aware of the radical and precarious shift that Zionism instituted in relation to the tradition. Thus, the question of teshuvah as a prerequisite for the messianic age, Loew's (MaHaRal) concept of the unnaturalness and yet necessity of exile, the history of messianic heresy (Bar Kokhba and Sabbatai Zevi), and the broad discussion of the parameters of redemptive time all play a role in Teitelbaum's essay that extends far beyond a halakhic inquiry into the three oaths. My assumption here, and in this book more broadly, is that understanding Teitelbaum's political theology requires a close analysis and understanding of his anti-Zionist project as a battle against what can be viewed in his work as anti-messianism and as a resistance to what Peter Berger called "the heretical imperative" of modernity.²²⁹ It is thus a return to a more traditional notion of passive messianism, to counter the anti-messianism of Zionism's activist heresy, and an ultra-Orthodox articulation of political theology.

Between Residence and Commandment

On “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel”

THE PROBLEM

In chapter 1, I examined Teitelbaum’s best-known essay, focusing on an in-depth analysis of the Talmudic pericope of the “three oaths” (b.T. Ketubot 110b), a brief but oft-cited discussion about an exilic pact made between God and Israel—one might call it a “covenant of exile.”¹ Teitelbaum analyzes the passage and its reception extensively, claiming that its legal status would prohibit the project of Zionism. While the larger Talmudic discussion is structured as halakhic in scope, the passage itself is controversial, in part because it is not clearly legalistic in nature. Teitelbaum has thus been criticized for misconstruing the passage, taking it as a legal precept when in fact it is nonlegal (*aggadic*) and thus nonbinding on Israel.² While all but acknowledging that it is not a purely halakhic matter, Teitelbaum resists the notion that its aggadic status diminishes its force. In fact, he views it largely as a theological matter and thus as a very substantial matter of covenant positionality. That is, he views the three oaths as a kind of new exilic covenant initiated with the destruction of the Second Temple. The subject of this chapter, the second essay of *Vayael Moshe*, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel,” is a more clear-cut analysis of the mitzvah of residing in the land of Israel (*yishuv ha-aretz*) in the context of the existence of the state of Israel.

My annotated translations of this essay, published as a separate volume, comprise a selection of chapters in Teitelbaum’s extensive “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel” that encapsulate the major themes on adjudicating the question of the commandment to dwell in the land, or *mitzvat yishuv ha-aretz*. The chapters chosen represent part of Teitelbaum’s halakhic analysis as well as his more general contextual observations in regard to Zionism’s use of the mitzvah of dwelling in the land for its own political purposes, which Teitelbaum views as a distortion of

the tradition.³ In one sense, the halakhic discussion, focusing on medieval, early modern, and modern jurists and glossators, is informed by the context in which Teitelbaum was writing, different from that of almost any of the earlier authorities: the existence of a secular nation-state in the land of Israel. While Teitelbaum attacks the state as heretical, he does not claim that it invalidates the significance of residing in the land, unlike his predecessor, R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira (1872–1937), and the early writings of Shapira's student Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal.⁴

Teitelbaum never questions the significance of dwelling in the land or the opportunity it provides for fulfilling agricultural mitzvot (*mitzvot taluyot be-aretz*). Elsewhere in his Torah commentary *Divrei Yoel*, he makes a similar reference in regard to the divine call (*lekh lekha*) for Abraham to leave his home for the land of Israel. He writes: “Therefore, it says *lekh lekha* (go out), which is only advice (*derekh eitza*) and not an obligation (*derekh zivuy*). Thus, Rashi says, ‘Go out on your own accord (*le-da’atka*).’ I don’t command you to go out. Thus, what is written here is that God told him that by going to the land of Israel he would be able to fulfill the agricultural commandments. And thus, by his ‘going’ he would be able to bring himself to that status of obligation (*hiyuv*) and thus receive reward in this world. But he was not commanded to do so.”⁵ On a personal level, as already mentioned, while in Switzerland (having escaped the Nazis via the Kastner transport), Teitelbaum was given the choice to immigrate to America or to Mandatory Palestine and he chose Palestine. It was not until he visited America to raise money for his fledgling institutions in Jerusalem that he considered remaining there. Menachem Keren-Kratz argues that his choice to immigrate to Palestine already exhibited Teitelbaum’s compromising of some of the more strident positions of his past: “His father, grandfather, and even their ancestors had refused to set foot in the Holy Land and had certainly never considered the idea of settling there.”⁶ In addition, even after he settled in America, Teitelbaum supported Satmar institutions in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, and elsewhere in Israel, giving large sums of money to establish yeshivot, which all seemed to contradict his ideological belief that Jews must remain in exile until the redemption.⁷

Teitelbaum maintained that Torah-observant Jews dwelling in the land provide a necessary component for ending the decree of exile (*gezerat ha-galut*) by purifying the land, just as Jews in the Diaspora were performing the same function in the Diaspora. He believed that the final stage of this exilic decree was at hand, but exile remained operational.⁸ The question at hand in this essay is whether, to what extent, and under what conditions there is a mitzvah of *yishuv ha-aretz* in our time.⁹ “Our time” (*b’zemaneynu* or *bizman ha-zeh*) is a curious phrase. In one reading, it can mean any time after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, what the literature calls “the time when the Temple no longer exists” (*zeman sh’eyn Beit ha-Mikdash kayam*).¹⁰ Alternatively, “our time” could be a time when immigration is possible, that is, when edicts preventing or endangering Jews’ immigration to the land no longer apply.¹¹ Finally, it could refer to a time when “sinners”

and “heretics” (i.e., Zionists) rule the land and thereby prolong rather than culminate the exile.¹²

The intended audience for *Vayael Moshe*, as for Teitelbaum’s work more generally, is ultra-Orthodox (Hasidic and non-Hasidic) Jews for whom the sources of tradition are paramount. The very notion of a “mitzvah” to reside in Israel would play little or no role for secular Zionists who chose to live there. *Vayael Moshe* is a polemical project that seeks to undermine Zionist claims that secular Zionism can be viewed as part of a redemptive project. The case of Zionism more generally is here situated in the specific case of the mitzvah of *yishuv*. If there is no mitzvah to live in the land of Israel, one can certainly still choose to do so. But with no obligation, the motivation to dwell there, from a halakhic perspective, even in opposition to the Zionist project, is mitigated.

As I mentioned elsewhere, it is important to consider that Teitelbaum, much like his Zionist antagonists, held that he was living in the last phase of exile before redemption (*ikvata d’meshikha*).¹³ This is why for him (as well as for many religious Zionists) the volume was so high. The rabbinic notion of “forcing the end” (*dekhiat ha-ketz*), mentioned in the Talmudic discussion of the three oaths and elsewhere, was one of the greatest theological and halakhic challenges religious Zionists had to face.¹⁴ Many responses have been proffered, including the idea that the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the subsequent United Nations vote to establish the state of Israel in 1948 were providential signs that the exile had indeed ended and redemption had begun, thus nullifying not only the three oaths but any notion of forcing the end. In short, the rabbinic “covenant of exile” had ended. For example, contemporary rabbinic authority Herschel Schachter notes: “In view of the Balfour Declaration, the Partition Plan and other actions taken by the world community in recognition of the State of Israel, it is clear that the nations of the world voluntarily allowed us to return to Israel. . . . Similarly, with the period of our exile at an end, G-d is free to return to His land, even should we choose to tarry.”¹⁵ The speculative nature of such a comment, proclaimed as “clear” (the locution *clear* often indicates “no evidence”), informs many similar comments by religious Zionists. Teitelbaum viewed this as a theological trap. It is certainly “clear” that the nations enabled Jews to return to the land. What is less “certain” or “clear” is what role this plays in the larger redemptive vision. The confidence in this being “the end of exile” seems somewhat presumptuous. Others argued that the Holocaust was a sign that God had broken God’s oath not to persecute Israel “too much,” and thus Israel was no longer responsible for their oath. That is, even if exile continues, the three oaths no longer apply.

Teitelbaum, with others, disagreed with this reading of the Balfour Declaration and of the Holocaust, even as Teitelbaum, himself a survivor, begins *Vayael Moshe* with a brief discussion of the Holocaust.¹⁶ And he maintained that the establishment of the state was certainly a sign, but for him a negative one: a test Israel had to resist to bring the decree of exile to an end. He develops this in great detail in

‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah, a collection of lectures responding to the Six-Day War in 1967.¹⁷ In this book, much of it theological rather than halakhic or even aggadic in nature, Teitelbaum develops his demonology by constructing Zionism as a kind of Jewish Antichrist: that which must be rejected in order for the true redeemer to arrive.

All of this relates to the question of residing in Israel in the following way. One of the great challenges facing Teitelbaum was that the existence of the state made it much easier for his imagined constituency (*haredi* Jewry more generally) to immigrate to Israel. While he was not against immigration to Israel in principle—there remains a large Satmar community in Israel—he understood the dangers of becoming assimilated to the workings of the secular state, which, he held, was blasphemous and counter-redemptive. He believed that succumbing to the secular Zionist vision was much more likely than assimilating to American society, which would require a more radical severing of one’s connection to Jewishness.¹⁸ For a variety of reasons, it is more difficult to maintain an enclavist community in a larger society of Jews in the land than among gentiles. Becoming part of the counter-redemptive secular state seemed inevitable if one lived in Israel, whereas remaining in the Diaspora at least fulfilled the divine decree of exile.¹⁹

Teitelbaum addresses this challenge in a discussion about the difference between a gentile idolater and a Jewish heretic. It is based on the Talmudic passage in b.T. Ketubot that reads, “It is better to live in the land of Israel in a city that is mostly idolaters (the term *‘akum* is used and it is not clear if it means here, or elsewhere in Hazal, idolaters or simply non-Jews) than a city in the Diaspora of mostly Jews.”²⁰ Teitelbaum glosses this as follows:

This is only talking about a city of *‘akum* and not a city of [Jewish] heretics. Nevertheless, the great challenges can readily be seen empirically regarding yeshiva students (*yoshvei beit ha midrash*) who have been influenced (lit. grabbed—*nit’pasim*) by these horrific ideas of heresy and *apikorsus*. This begins innocently enough (*be-‘ones*) with the influence of the customs of the state and various sectors that they [the religious community] need. In the end the influence becomes more intentional. In the beginning it is “not for its own sake” (*lishma*) because the state is needed for matters of livelihood and other needs, but “from not for its own sake (*sh’lo lishma*),” it becomes for its own sake (*lishma*).²¹

Teitelbaum states that Torah-observant Jews must engage with the state for all kinds of reasons. In engaging with a gentile polity—which may or may not be idolatrous—the chances of being influenced by them are far less than in a Jewish polity that contains its own reading of the tradition that Torah-observant Jews share. Using a clever play on the value and worth of performing mitzvot “not for their own sake” (*lo lishma*), where the sages say that “doing something not for its own sake is permissible because by doing so, it will bring one to act for its own sake (*lishma*),” Teitelbaum uses the same formula to reach an inverse conclusion.²²

While Torah-observant Jews will engage with the heretical Jewish polity in Israel as a matter of necessity (not “for its own sake”), over time they will be influenced such that it will become “for its own sake.” Thus, for him, the dangers to Torah observance are stronger in Israel than in the Diaspora, even if Torah observance may be easier to uphold in Israel. In general, for Teitelbaum, the Talmudic pericope about living in the land versus living outside the land applies only when the polity in the land is one of believers:

Living outside the land is likened to idolatry only in the case where Israel is sovereign in the land (*shiruyim ‘al admatam*) and there is a polity of believers (*ma’aminim be-Ha-Shem*). Thus, if one takes oneself out of that polity and dwells among idolaters [outside the land], then it is as if one is committing idolatry. And all this does not apply in our times, when sovereignty in the land is in the power of heretics, which is worse than idolatry. Thus, it is not applicable to say, of one who dwells outside the land, that it is as if he or she is committing idolatry.²³

The mitzvah of *yishuv* may be one example of the magnetism of settling in the land that, in Teitelbaum’s assessment, may corrupt true Torah observance. Teitelbaum knew that religious Zionists touted the “mitzvah” of residing in Israel in part as an incentive for immigration of religious Jews, but it’s not at all clear that *mitzvat yishuv erez yisrael* was a burning concern for most *haredim* in the Diaspora, certainly not in the twentieth century. While religious Zionists certainly wrote about it, not much was produced among the ultra-Orthodox.²⁴ The issue is particularly relevant to the question of whether there is an “obligation” (*hiyuv*) to reside in the land of Israel, which is separate from whether one fulfills a mitzvah if one dwells there, a position held by, among others, the leading American jurist of the *haredi* world, Moshe Feinstein.²⁵ As we will see, Teitelbaum comes close to Feinstein in that he is willing to entertain the possibility that, for a Torah-observant Jew who immigrates to Israel for the purposes of study and practice, there may be a mitzvah to reside there. What he contests is any obligation to do so and certainly any collective obligation to do so. Such an obligation is not only diminished in the sources as he reads them, except in the case of Nahmanides and those who follow him, but would be counterproductive in terms of the vocation of the Jews in the Diaspora, a prerequisite for the finality of the decree of exile.

There are varying opinions regarding whether the mitzvah of *yishuv* applies to every Jew as an individual or is a collective obligation. Is it an individual mitzvah or a collective one? For example, it may be that according to Nahmanides, for whom the mitzvah of *yishuv* was operative in his time as a positive Toraic commandment (*d’oraita*), the mitzvah applies to individuals, from the verse . . . and [you shall] dwell therein (Num. 33:53). And there may be a second collective mitzvah of “conquering” (*kivush*) the land from the first part of that verse, *Conquer the land* (Num. 33:53).²⁶ Some religious Zionists argue that while the mitzvah of *yishuv* was fulfilled by individuals who resided in the land before the existence of the

state, once the state was established, the entire Jewish people collectively fulfilled the mitzvah of *yishuv*.²⁷ This is because they hold that the second part of the verse related to *yishuv* (residing) was a subsidiary of the first part of the verse related to *kivush* (conquering). And *kivush* is certainly a collective obligation. Thus, when *kivush* is fulfilled—as it is, in their view, through the establishment of the state and the War of Independence—the mitzvah of *yishuv* becomes collectivized as well. While many read Nahmanides's seemingly distinct notions of *yishuv* and *kivush* as merging at a time when *kivush* was possible, Teitelbaum is among those who do not. As we will see below, Teitelbaum reads Nahmanides to claim that, even given Nahmanides's position on the Toraic basis of dwelling in the land, the Zionist project has no traditional foundation to stand on.²⁸

THE CENTRALITY OF THE LAND

There are few things as central to the Israelite covenant with God as the land. Rashi, in his commentary to Genesis 1:1, invokes the issue of the land as the very telos for the creation story. Asking why the Torah begins with creation, instead of with the first mitzvah, Rashi argues that the Hebrew Bible needs to begin with the story of a creator of heaven and earth to communicate God's absolute jurisdiction to give the Israelites the land even if it was inhabited by others.²⁹ One of the earliest iterations of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1–4, 15:7, 18, 28:4, etc.) mentions the land as the telos of the divine promise, the very backbone of the covenant. Throughout Scripture, the land of promise, the land of Israel, later adopted by Christians as the Holy Land, maintains itself as a central motif of the biblical worldview. The fact that the land is “holy” (both separate and consecrated) and that it is a possession bequeathed to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac (sons of Jacob/the Israelites/Jews) is a pillar of Scripture. One of the later strata of Scripture that comprises Deuteronomy retains earlier iterations of the covenant as fulfilled through the land. Harry Orlinsky notes: “With all the rhetoric that characterizes the Book of Deuteronomy, the bottom line throughout is the fulfillment of the contract with the patriarchs to give their descendants the Land.”³⁰ Thus, even if we posit that the Deuteronomist comes in the wake of King Josiah's religious reforms (641–608 BCE), the land remains the very spine of the biblical covenant.³¹

Rabbinic discussions of the land, premised on biblical precedent, focus primarily on questions of residence (*yishuv ha-aretz*) in the land versus outside the land (*hutz le-aretz*), the continued sanctity or depreciated sanctity of the land after the destruction of the Second Temple, issues of tithes obligatory only within the land of Israel, and questions of borders and other lands (e.g., Syria) that have quasi-sacred status but are not fully part of the land of Israel.³² The Mishna does not focus on the land except as it relates to mitzvot, but not the mitzvah of dwelling in the land itself.³³

In the Middle Ages, two very different approaches emerge: First, kabbalistic literature begins to reify and spiritualize the land, speaking of its supernal nature and its status as “sacred space” and the “center of the universe,” what Moshe Idel calls “geosophy.”³⁴ In terms of Kabbalah, Idel notes that “the growing interest in the mystical meaning of the Land of Israel, or of Jerusalem, for that matter, was a symbol of a weakening of the tendency to live there. In the eyes of many kabbalists intent on glimpsing something of the nature of the divine, contemplation of literary symbols of the supernal Land was more effective than the more natural and remote contact with the concrete extension of the divine—the terrestrial Land itself.”³⁵ According to Idel, the holiness of the land becomes intensified when proximity to the land diminishes, and we can see this in some radical ways in two medieval thinkers. First, in *Megillat Ha-Megalleh* by Abraham bar Hiyya (ca. 1065–1136), we find a radical de-territorialization of the land, such that, in the time of the resurrection, “the land of Israel will be greatly expanded so as to fill the entire world.”³⁶ Second, Ezra of Gerona (d. 1245) speaks more directly to Teitelbaum’s concern with obligation: “Today, the Jews are already exempt from the obligation of dwelling in the Land of Israel and it [exile] is like an atoning altar. They suffer for their love of God in exile by suffering through afflictions, as it says, *It is for your sake that we are slain all day long* (Ps. 45:23).”³⁷ Ezra suggests here that Israel’s afflictions are necessary to complete the decree of exile, and thus any obligation to immigrate to the land and take them out of exile cannot be operative, as that would subvert the process of purification through suffering (*isurin shel ahavah*).

Teitelbaum offers a more positive spin regarding Diasporism, suggesting that Israel’s presence in exile “purifies the air of the gentile [lands].” However, in both cases, an obligation to immigrate serves counter-redemptive purposes.³⁸ Teitelbaum cites a similar passage to those quoted from both bar Hiyya and Ezra of Gerona, from Sifteï Kohen’s (Shabbatai HaKohen, 1621–62) commentary to the Torah, where he claims that Jacob never left Erez Yisrael, even when he traveled to Egypt (Goshen), but “there was a thread/cord (*rezuah*) of the land of Israel that unfolded before him and it was also within him.” Teitelbaum notes that

the explanation of this thread that went before him from the land to outside the land refers to the inner nature of the land (*penimiyut ha-aretz*), and everyone that dwelled in the land did not notice this and did not see any change in the land. Nevertheless, when Jacob was in Goshen he was also in the land of Israel. And it is never explained when the holiness of the land of Israel departed from Goshen. And perhaps as long as Joseph was alive Goshen had the holiness of the land of Israel and after he died the thread departed from there.³⁹

When the Safed kabbalists returned to the land of Israel in the sixteenth century, largely due to the Spanish expulsion and the Turkish sultan’s invitation to be part of the newly formed Ottoman Empire, physical land began to take on more redemptive qualities in conjunction with its supernal nature in earlier Kabbalah

and the notion that the expulsion from Spain contained redemptive potential.⁴⁰ But even there we should note that residence in the land for many Safed kabbalists was driven by its mystical and not its terrestrial nature. After the demise of Safed—in the wake of a plague in the 1570s that killed Isaac Luria, among many others—many in this circle immigrated to the Diaspora, mostly to Southern Europe and other parts of the Levant and Maghreb.⁴¹ And even for Lurianic kabbalists who remained in the land of Israel, the role of the Diaspora (as exile) continued to play an essential role in their messianic vision.⁴² We find scant mention of Nahmanides's Toraic obligation to immigrate to Israel in these kabbalistic sources. The land became the place where the fullness of Kabbalah can be fulfilled (just as prophecy can occur only in the land, with the one exception of Ezekiel), but it retained its spiritualized status, now wed to its territory.

The land continued to play a central role for mystically oriented Jews, especially in the Baal Shem Tov's teaching, in Nahman of Bratslav's writings, among a circle of disciples of the Vilna Gaon who immigrated, and among a small circle of Hasidim who immigrated to Palestine in the late eighteenth century.⁴³ For Nahman, the trip to the land was spiritually transformative. Upon his return, he directed his disciples to forget everything he had taught them beforehand.⁴⁴ But even here, and especially for the circle of Hasidim that congregated in Tiberias to perform a mystical tikkun that would end exile, immigration was a way to complete an esoteric messianic project for elites and did not constitute an obligation to the collective.⁴⁵ One could add to this list the immigration to the land of Israel by two central disciples of the Maggid of Mezeritch, Abraham of Kalish and Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, in 1777 after the death of the Maggid.⁴⁶

The other dimension of the land that began to receive attention in medieval and early modern literature is the nature of the land as the object of mitzvah, duly called *mitzvat yishuv ha-arets*. The delineation of mitzvot more generally began in Gaonic times (eighth to tenth centuries) but is more concretized in Maimonides's *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, which became the gold standard for subsequent discussion and analysis. The facts that the land is holy, that only certain mitzvot (agricultural ones) may be performed there, and that it is generally preferable for a Jew to dwell in the land were never really contentious, nor is this necessarily a halakhic issue. However, the notion that *all* Jews should live in the land raises certain theological concerns, as we will explore below, in regard to the necessity of Jewish presence in the Diaspora to complete the redemptive process.

We know that there was *never* a time when *all* Jews lived in the land, even during Joshua's conquest and subsequently during Temple times, and so even if one ties the operational dimension of the mitzvah to the existence of the Temple, such a mandate was rarely followed. Historians tell us that it is likely that most Jews did not return to the land with Ezra after the first exile and once the Second Temple was built. And Scripture itself attests that two and a half tribes chose to settle outside the land even in the days of Joshua (Josh. 22:13–16; 1 Chron. 5:23).

Teitelbaum's inquiry into dwelling in the land focuses on the nature and status of the mitzvah of *yishuv* largely because this halakhic idea becomes tied to the Zionist immigration and the establishment of a state. He certainly acknowledged the great value of dwelling in the land. His issue is how one negotiates an ostensible obligation—if it indeed exists—at a time when “sinners” and “heretics,” in this case secular Zionists, have jurisdiction in the land. Does this constitute the halakhic category of “being in control of the land” to make the mitzvah of residence once again operative? As mentioned above, underlying his whole approach is an intention to weaken the impetus to immigrate to Israel under the auspices of the heretical state, or at least to relieve Jews of its obligatory status. The reasons for Teitelbaum's analysis are obvious enough. From a religious perspective, Zionism bases itself on the mitzvah to dwell in the land as an impetus to become part of the state/heretical project. Thus, close examination of the contours of that mitzvah and its obligatory nature is obviously a desideratum.

THE LAND AND THE QUESTION OF THE OBLIGATION OF RESIDENCE (*YISHUV*)

As mentioned above, if “Essay on the Three Oaths” is more of a hermeneutical exercise of Talmudic adjudication founded on the premise that the Talmudic pericope in question had some halakhic dimension, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel,” by contrast, is focused intently on a purely halakhic matter: Is there a mitzvah and obligation today to dwell in the land of Israel? Still, Teitelbaum's rhetoric is not exclusively halakhic throughout. In numerous places, he veers off into anecdotal stories of sages—ancient, medieval, or modern—who either refused to go to the land, traveled there and returned to the Diaspora, or advised others to refrain from immigrating to the land. In most instances, their reasons for this are not clear, but concerns about safety, livelihood, and commitments to family and communities in the Diaspora likely overrode their desire to immigrate to the land. There is an implicit argument from silence—to wit, if there was such a mitzvah, why did sages who devoted their entire lives to Torah not perform such a mitzvah, especially at times when it was possible? However, these asides do not constitute the “meat” of Teitelbaum's argument, which is based on a halakhic debate about the status of the land. Much of the essay is devoted to analysis of the adjudication of later authorities (known as Acharonim) regarding a halakhic matter using the deliberations and arguments of earlier authorities (known as Rishonim).

The “mitzvah” of *yishuv ha-aretz* (dwelling in the land) can be divided into various layers and sub-layers, which Teitelbaum addresses in turn. Much of this comes from an oblique discussion in a braita in b.T. Ketubot 110b regarding whether a husband or wife can coerce the other to immigrate to the land of Israel, and what happens if one of them refuses to go. The Talmudic discussion assumes the holiness of the land (“The land of Israel is holier than all other lands,” Mishna

Kelim 1:6), but it does not delineate the formal obligation to reside there. Some commentators suggest that the Mishna would never mandate destroying marriage for something that did not constitute a mitzvah, but such thinking remains speculative at best.⁴⁷

Regarding the mitzvah itself, there is a difference between dwelling (*yishuv*) in the land and conquering (*kivush*) or inheriting (*yorash*) the land. Joshua was clearly commanded to conquer the land (Josh. 1:2, 6, 11, 13). First, the halakhic status of conquest in our time is not clear and Teitelbaum doesn't deal much with this issue. The question asked is whether the divine command to conquer the land in the days of Joshua was limited to that time or whether it applies in every time. In general, the mitzvah of conquest, which Nahmanides seems to argue is a separate mitzvah from dwelling, may be inoperative until the messianic end-time. And what about conquering lands that are beyond the borders given to Joshua, for example in the time of the Davidic and Solomonic dynasties?⁴⁸ Teitelbaum briefly addresses that issue as well, but only as it relates to the question of defining the boundaries of the land of Israel for the purposes of immigrating and/or dwelling there.

Second, there is a distinction between immigration (*aliyah*) and residence (*yishuv*).⁴⁹ This is paramount in the halakhic literature. Many medieval authorities maintain that residing in Israel is a mitzvah although there is no obligation to immigrate there. Others claim that immigration is concomitant with residence. Third, there is a debate as to whether one is permitted to leave the land once one dwells there, which is separate from whether one is obligated to immigrate there in the first place. One contemporary use of this question was offered by R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe, who allegedly claimed that he never visited Israel because, once there, it would be unclear whether he would be able to leave.

A final layer has to do with the nature of the secular state. Teitelbaum began publishing the essays collected in *Vayoel Moshe* in the 1950s, and some of them were serialized in the New York Yiddish daily *Der Yid*, founded in 1953, which he purchased from Yiddishist Aaron Rosmarin. Thus, even though much of "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel" does not deal extensively with Zionism (later chapters 140–159 do focus on the state), Zionism and the state serve as the background of the entire essay. Thus, an additional layer of his analysis in this essay, which perhaps has the least solid halakhic grounding, is the question of "sinners" or "heretics" in the land, in this case having sovereignty over the land—terms he uses to define secular Zionists. Even as the land remains holy, which Teitelbaum openly acknowledges, even emphatically, and while he affirms that residing in the land of Israel is of great value for those who abide by the conventions of Torah and mitzvot, the question of the heretic in the land plays a role in the way he adjudicates the medieval positions in this essay.

Of course, medieval authorities such as Moses Nahmanides, the main force behind the idea that there remains a mitzvah to dwell in the land even in his time,

did not deal with Jewish sinners and heretics in the land, but assumed that those who came to dwell in the land did so for reasons of Torah observance. As we will see, even as Teitelbaum ultimately disagrees with Nahmanides's assessment in regard to the obligation to immigrate (something Nahmanides did personally in 1267, as did Teitelbaum in 1945), Teitelbaum is willing to cede ground to Nahmanides and admit that those who immigrate for the purpose of studying Torah and living a pious life are certainly fulfilling the mitzvah of *yishuv*, even though they may not have been obligated to do so.

The distinction between immigration and residence in the land cuts through the entire essay, as does Teitelbaum's distinction between reasons for immigrating. In fact, much of the destructive nature of Zionism, for Teitelbaum, is founded on his notion of the hyper-sanctity of the land, such that sinful behavior is an act of defilement that undermines what religious Zionism sought to procure: the redemption of the Jewish people. Often reiterating a common trope—that just as mitzvot count more in the land than outside it, sins are more destructive in the land than outside it—Teitelbaum writes:

There are many prohibitions that we learn from the Torah that defile the land. . . . And all agree that defiling the land is very serious as it causes the departure of the Shekhina from Israel. . . . This prevents redemption, for, as we will explain below, all the sins committed in the land of Israel have a greater negative impact than those committed in the Diaspora. Thus it is understood, as has been discussed in the responsa of R. Meir of Rottenberg, and in [Azikri's] *Sefer Haredim*, and in the Shelah [Isaiah Horowitz] and other jurists, that only those who fear God should ascend to the land of Israel.⁵⁰

This is likely based on the Sifra (Torat Kohanim), which reads, “. . . *so that God will not spit you out from the land where I have brought you* (Lev. 22:22). The land of Israel is not like other lands, it cannot suffer (*m'kayemet*) transgressors. . . . Therefore every person should be fearful (*y'hared*) when he comes to the land of Israel, to be a fearer of heaven much more so than they were in the Diaspora. He should know he is sitting in the house of the king.”⁵¹

Another important element in this essay has to do with Teitelbaum's views on the Diaspora as a necessary component of redemptive history. In a number of chapters, some of which are included in my volume of translations, Teitelbaum adopts a theologically considered pro-Diasporic position by deploying myriad sources about the requisite need for Jews to live throughout the world during the decree of exile in order to procure redemption by “purifying the air of the gentiles.”⁵² Commenting on a widely discussed question as to why Scripture states that the sons of Jacob “came” to Egypt, rather than “descended” to Egypt (Exod. 1:1), in a talk he gave to his yeshiva in Brooklyn, Teitelbaum said, “We need to know that we were not sent here by God for naught. Rather, we were sent to establish schools where we could wage war against the powers of defilement that rage against us.

This is certainly the reason that we were sent, to fix that which requires fixing. Thus we should strengthen ourselves that we should embody 'coming to' and not 'descending to,' heaven forbid."⁵³

Such a position has wide support, certainly among kabbalists and some Hasidic masters, but also among others who view the exile coming to its organic and proper conclusion as a necessary prerequisite for redemption. Having experienced it firsthand, Teitelbaum is certainly aware of the trauma of the Holocaust, and thus he understands the impetus to take the opportunity to settle the land when possible. Nevertheless, he remains steadfast against viewing his time as the end of the exile. In his mind, prematurely abandoning the Diaspora and claiming that exile has ended would have deleterious effects on the redemptive program. Thus, while Teitelbaum never mentions the Zionist program of "negating the exile" (*shlilat ha-golah*), he was certainly aware of it and, in some ways, responded to it as heretical when discussing the importance of the Diaspora and of the role Jews play in it.⁵⁴

In the next section, I lay out the major sources Teitelbaum uses to construct his position. Here he is on common ground, as anyone interested in these questions must grapple with the same cadre of sources—medieval, early modern, and modern—in order to offer nuanced readings that support their desired position. The adjudication of such a knotty and complex question—one that, in our own time, is charged with a high level of emotional investment—lends itself to a robust debate among those Jews whose opinions and behaviors are driven by the halakhic tradition.

THE EARLY HALAKHIC POSITIONS: RASHI, MAIMONIDES, NAHMANIDES

Any halakhic discussion on the question of *yishuv erez yisrael* is founded on three earlier medieval sources that are then used to expand the discussion in later literature. As mentioned above, the Talmudic discussion is relatively brief, focusing on a narrow issue of the desire to immigrate in relation to marital relationships. There is no mention of a "mitzvah" in the Mishna or the Bavli, which is not uncommon. Rashi does not quite deal directly with this issue, except briefly in his comment to the verse *And you shall conquer in the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land for you to possess* (Num. 33:53), where he writes, "If you are able to fulfill it, do it, if you cannot, don't do it." The ambiguity of Rashi's comment is clarified somewhat by Hayyim ben Attar in his *Or Ha-Hayyim* on the same verse: "It is a mitzvah to conquer it (*vehorastem*) but dwelling there is a promise (*havtakha*)."⁵⁵ The question then arises whether the mitzvah to conquer applies only in the days of Joshua, or whether it applies today. For our limited purposes, ben Attar understands Rashi to mean that there is no mitzvah to dwell in the land. This is generally how Rashi is understood in later literature and how Teitelbaum understands him as well.

Maimonides famously does not list *yishuv ha-aretz* as a mitzvah in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*. In his treatment of the Talmudic discussion in b.t. Ketubot 110b in

his *Mishneh Torah* ("Laws of Relations" 13:19), Maimonides mentions the Talmudic discussion and clearly reinforces the significance of living in the land, though he refrains from explicitly giving it any halakhic significance, and certainly he does not mention that it is formally a "mitzvah." Glossators such as Yitzhak de Leon (fifteenth-century Spain) in his *Megillat Esther* claim that *yishuv ha-arets* is a mitzvah for Maimonides, yet he does not list it because it was operative during Temple times and will be so again in messianic times, but not now. Maimonides, de Leon argues, limits his list to mitzvot that are *always* relevant. The obvious difficulty with this is that he lists sacrificial mitzvot that are not relevant without the Temple.⁵⁵ Others, such as Israel ben Shmuel of Shklov (1770–1839) in his *Pe'at Ha-Shulkhan*, argue that for Maimonides there is no biblical commandment to reside in the land but only a rabbinic one, which would justify its exclusion from his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, even though such an argument has no solid textual base. Maimonides certainly believed there was great value in residing in Israel, as does Teitelbaum. Its status as a mitzvah, however, is another matter.

The primary source for the mitzvah of *yishuv ha-arets* stems from Moses Nahmanides in two places: his gloss to Maimonides's *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, and a passing comment in his commentary to the Torah. In the gloss to *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, in response to Maimonides's silence on the question of *mitzvat yishuv ha-arets*, Nahmanides writes in reference to the passage about husband and wife in Ketubot 110b:

All of this [regarding *yishuv ha-arets*] is a positive commandment that we were commanded to *conquer the land and dwell in it* (Num. 33:53). If so, it is a positive commandment for generations that is obligatory for each individual, even in the time of exile, as we find in many cases in the Talmud.⁵⁶ And we read in the language of the Sifri,⁵⁷ "In the episode of R. Yehuda ben Betara and R. Matya ben Harash and R. Haninah ben Ahi, R. Joshua ben Nun and R. Natan, as they were leaving for the Diaspora [*hutz le-arets*], when they reached Palatia [at the border of Erez Yisrael] and they remembered Erez Yisrael, they lowered their eyes and tears came pouring down. And they rent their garments and recited the verse *you shall conquer and dwell in the land and remember to do it*. They said dwelling in the land is equal to all the other mitzvot."⁵⁸

More well known is Nahmanides's commentary to Numbers 33:53, where he writes:

And you shall conquer in the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land for you to possess (Num. 33:53). According to my view, this is a positive commandment; they are commanded to dwell in the land and possess it, because it was given to them and they should not discard their divine inheritance. And if they would consider conquering the land of Shinar or Ashur and dwell there, they would transgress a divine command. And about which the sages disagreed regarding residing in the land and the transgression of leaving the land, judging a woman who does not want to follow her husband to Israel as a "rebellious" [woman]. And so too with a man [who does not want to go]. From here we can learn this mitzvah [of *yishuv ha-arets*], as this all refers to a positive commandment. And this

mitzvah is rehearsed elsewhere, for example, *Go and conquer the land* (Deut. 1:8) and you will be able to fulfill it; if you don't, you will not be able to fulfill it. And the way we interpreted this is correct.⁵⁹

There are several points in this comment, which is more expansive than his gloss in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*. The first is that Nahmanides hangs the mitzvah of *yishuv ha-aretz* on the verse *And you shall conquer in the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land for you to possess*. In his gloss to *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Nahmanides specifically notes that the mitzvah is on "each individual" and he does not note it explicitly as a collective mitzvah (which conquest certainly is).⁶⁰ This will become important as Teitelbaum addresses the question regarding Zionism. Yet, in his comment to Numbers, Nahmanides seems to imply that it is a collective mitzvah, as he uses the language of collective settling ("the land of Shinar or Ashur") as an example. Finally, it is not clear what work is being done by rehearsing the Talmudic discussion on b.T. Ketubot 110b, except to suggest that the context of the discussion *implies* that the operational nature of residing in the land is a mitzvah, in that the sages would not be so adamant about this question if it were *not* a mitzvah. Again, this is an argument from silence, since the sages make no mention of a mitzvah of *yishuv* as the frame of their discussion.⁶¹

In any event, Nahmanides's position is the base text for those who maintain that *yishuv* is a positive Toraic commandment and serves as a central text in Teitelbaum's analysis, especially in the early chapters.⁶² To illustrate his basic approach, I consider one discussion toward the end of Teitelbaum's essay. The main thrust of Nahmanides's position is that the positive commandment of *yishuv* applies even after the destruction of the Temple—that is, in every generation. This is what Teitelbaum needs to evaluate, given that his entire argument is that it does not. He addresses this in "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," chapter 156:

Even in the mitzvah of *yishuv b'erez yisrael* itself there is a distinction, and we don't even have to consider those who hold that after the decree of exile the mitzvah of *yishuv* was nullified. Certainly, there is a difference of opinion at the time when the Temple was still standing, as there is a verse to settle the land, and not afterward. But even according to Nahmanides, that even now there is a mitzvah of *yishuv*, nevertheless that mitzvah is pushed off because of the decree of exile and one can't imagine that it is the same as when there was a definite obligation [during Temple times]. The Torah states, *When you have begotten children and children's children and are long established* [venoshantem] *in the land* . . . (Deut. 4:25). We read in b.T. Gittin 88a, "Ulla says God performed a charitable act with the people of Israel by advancing their exile by two years in relation to the numerical value of *venoshantem* (are long established) that appears in the verse, in order that the decree *you will be utterly destroyed* (Deut. 4:26) would not be fulfilled. However, they were not permitted, on their own, to leave the land of Israel before the appropriate time was reached, which we learn from the verse. And also, in regard to the Second Temple, they knew before

it was built how long it would stand and when it would be destroyed, as we see from b.T. Nazir 33b, where it is also learned from a verse.⁶³

Teitelbaum makes an important distinction here, which he will deploy throughout the essay, between “nullification” (*bittul*) and “deferred” (*dikhui*). There are those who say that the mitzvah of *yishuv* was nullified after the destruction of the Temple (Maimonides may hold this position, we don’t know), and those who say that it still applies (Nahmanides). Yet even those who maintain that it remains operative can argue that it is “deferred” (*dikhui*) due to the decree of exile, which for Teitelbaum retains a positive, even essential, function. Elsewhere, Teitelbaum makes this explicit: “As we see from many verses and rabbinic texts, God decreed that Israel be scattered like the winds of the world; thus, in the time of exile the mitzvah of *yishuv* is pushed off (*nidkhe*) because it is impossible to fulfill both of them [exile and immigration] at the same time.”⁶⁴

Above, Teitelbaum offers two Talmudic discussions to argue his case for an established, yet no longer applicable, mitzvah—that is, a state of being “deferred” (*dikhui*). Deuteronomy 4 (verses 25 and 26) uses the phrase “are long established” (*venoshantem*) in the land, which is often cited to support the notion of *yishuv*. The context of the term is problematic, as the full verse reads: *When you have begotten children and children’s children and are long established [venoshantem] in the land, should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculpted image in any likeness, causing God displeasure and vexation, I shall call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.* Teitelbaum uses the Talmudic discussion of this verse to make the point, using the numerical value of *venoshantem*, that God permitted Israel to leave the land two years earlier than decreed so that they would not be destroyed, to suggest that the decree of exile is fixed, and thus that the notion that there can still be an *obligation* to dwell in the land after that time is superfluous. The whole point of the decree here is that Israel is to be exiled.

In regard to the Second Temple, Teitelbaum uses another discussion in b.T. Nazir about a tangential discussion regarding the status, after the destruction, of a Nazirite vow that was made before the destruction. The question is whether the vow is enforceable if it was made before the decree of exile. The Talmud reads as follows:

Rav Yosef said: If I had been there, when those Nazirites arrived, I would have said the following to them, in order to dissolve their vows: Isn’t it written: *The Sanctuary of the Lord, the Sanctuary of the Lord, the Sanctuary of the Lord, are these* (Jer. 7:4). This thrice repetition of “Sanctuary of the Lord” is referring to the First Temple and the Second Temple which are destined to be destroyed, leading to a Third Temple. These Nazirites should have considered the possibility of the Temple’s destruction, and this can serve as a means of broaching the dissolution of their vows. . . .

Although they might have known that the Second Temple would be destroyed, as the verse speaks of three Temples, did they know when it would be destroyed? Would

they have considered that it might occur in their lifetimes, preventing them from sacrificing their offerings? Abaye said: And did they not know when? But isn't it written: *Seventy sevens are decreed upon your people and upon your sacred city* (Dan. 9:24), which indicates that the Second Temple would be destroyed seventy Sabatical cycles of seven years after the destruction of the First Temple, which is 490 years? And still, did we know on which day it would be destroyed? It was therefore impossible to use this factor as a means to broach the dissolution of their vows.

Teitelbaum's use of this Talmudic passage here is simply to note the sages' use of the verse in Jeremiah 7:4, which continues: *If you mend your ways and actions, if you execute justice between one man and another; if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, to your own hurt—only then will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time.* The assumption here is that Israel knew when, and why, the Temples would be destroyed. The sages are concerned that the Nazirite should have known, if he was living close to the time of the destruction, not to take a vow that might be inapplicable and thus put his vow in doubt. For Teitelbaum, it is simply that the decree of exile was not "unknown" but could be learned from Scripture. Thus, claiming that the mitzvah of *yishuv* could still apply in the midst of an exilic decree while knowing that the Temple would be destroyed seems untenable. He reads Nahmanides as saying that while the mitzvah may still apply, it is in a deferred state, or *dikhui*, due to the decree of exile that preempts it. Of course, Zionists claim that the decree of exile is over, but such an assertion is founded on a particular interpretation of history (e.g., Balfour, the Holocaust, the UN vote establishing the state) as messianic. The rabbinic "decree of exile," however, was to end with the final redemption.

Although Teitelbaum does not address Zionism directly here, it certainly seems plausible that his use of these verses speaks to Zionists in regard to the land. In Deuteronomy, we read that *should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculpted image in any likeness, causing God displeasure and vexation, I shall call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.* And in Jeremiah, *if you execute justice between one man and another; if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, to your own hurt—only then will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time.* Both verses are clear in making inhabiting the land conditional on Israel's behavior. Elsewhere, Teitelbaum claims that Zionism is idolatry and that Zionists' actions against religion and morality render it counter-redemptive. Thus, rather than ending the decree of exile, Teitelbaum claims throughout *Vayael Moshe* that Zionism only reinforces it and that it is anti-messianic. Elsewhere, he writes that while mitzvot purify the land, sin defiles it.⁶⁵

These Talmudic discussions are deployed to make a narrower point, questioning how Nahmanides can hold that the mitzvah of *yishuv* still applies, but they also allude, in my view, to a broader point about the way Zionism undermines the project of ending the decree of exile, at least according to these sources, while claiming

to be promoting it. This is a repeating trope in the essay and is articulated in many ways. None of the medieval and early modern sources that Teitelbaum deploys had to confront the specific challenges that Zionism posed to their modern traditional reader. Thus, while Zionism is rarely mentioned explicitly in this particular essay (only in the later chapters, as discussed below), it is obviously the condition for, and context of, the entire halakhic project.

THE NECESSITY OF EXILE: TEITELBAUM'S RESPONSE TO NEGATING THE EXILE

A more complete and more nuanced understanding of the question of the mitzvah of *yishuv ha-aretz* and its historical ramifications in Teitelbaum's work must consider the notion of Diaspora (*hutz le-aretz*) and its function within that schema in Jewish history and, in particular, in the Zionist ideology that he opposes. Teitelbaum addresses the halakhic question of *yishuv* in regard to individual Jews, and yet the entire context of this discussion is framed around the establishment of the state of Israel, and Zionism more generally; thus, the question of the collective (*klal yisrael*) and its obligation to dwell in the land is paramount. As mentioned above, Teitelbaum is willing to go quite far in acknowledging that individuals who immigrate to the land for the purpose of fulfilling mitzvot may indeed be fulfilling a mitzvah of *yishuv*, even though that may not be obligatory.

The question as to the nature and status of the Diaspora is a crucial component in understanding Zionism as a collective project and Teitelbaum's opposition to it. Much has been written about the notion of "the negation of the Diaspora" (*shlilat ha-golah*) and its role in Zionist thought. Eliezer Schweid understands it this way:

The rejection of Jewish life in the Diaspora—*shlilat ha-gola*—is a central assumption in all currents of Zionist ideology. First, the concept is used to justify the denial of that other solution to "the Jewish problem" in modern times—the one which opposed Zionism and takes a positive view of continued Jewish existence in the Diaspora, based on faith in the success of emancipation. Second, the concept encourages the dedication necessary for the vast national enterprise implicit in Zionism. . . . In its most extreme formulation, the idea of *shlilat ha-gola* implies that the condition of exile will ultimately destroy the Jewish people, first of all in the moral and spiritual sense, and afterward in the physical sense as well, whether by discrimination and persecution, or by total assimilation.⁶⁶

Arnold Eisen essentially agrees: "Moreover, on the matter of Diaspora negation, more than any other, virtually all Zionist theorists and activists have agreed in one way or another—from the very start of the movement almost until the present day, and no matter whether these theorists and activists were religious or secular, socialist or revisionist—that *galut* (exile) and *golah* (a word connoting both exile and Diaspora in Zionist usage) must be opposed, condemned, denied legitimacy,

and speedily brought to an end, in short, ‘negated.’”⁶⁷ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin puts it even more succinctly, writing that negation of the Diaspora comprises “a central axis of an all-embracing viewpoint that defines the self-consciousness of the Jews in Israel,” which “informs their conception of history and collective memory, as well as cultural practices that both fashion and reflect Zionist-Israeli identity.”⁶⁸ The idea that Zionism’s success depends, in part, on a notion that Jewish life in the Diaspora is dangerous, either physically or spiritually, is common in Zionism’s early phase and remains active even in its contemporary iteration.

Zionism’s claim to be the only solution to the “Jewish Question” goes back at least to Theodor Herzl’s 1897 essay “A Solution to the Jewish Question,” and even before that to Leon Pinsker’s 1882 pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation*.⁶⁹ Much of the Zionist argument was pitched against integrationists and those who believed that emancipation was the solution to the Jewish problem even though it was arguably emancipation that *created* the modern iteration of the “Jewish Question.” These thinkers did not take seriously the ultra-Orthodox theological anti-Zionism that was pervasive in large parts of Eastern Europe and, in particular, in the Máramaros region of Hungary where Teitelbaum was born and raised.⁷⁰ One reason may be that the debate for or against Zionism was a “modern” debate among factions that all rejected, in some fashion, the notion of “exile” as an operative category of Jewish existence. The ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionists rejected such a rejection, claiming that Jewish destiny remained deeply embedded in its exilic state, which would be brought to its culmination only through religious observance and the coming of the Messiah. There were Orthodox accommodationists to the Zionist project, but most did not sign on to the idea that exile had ended, though many felt that Zionism had inaugurated a new stage in that exilic existence.⁷¹

Much of the secular Zionist and anti-Zionist debate depends on how one labels Diaspora, whether it is “exile” (*galut*) or “dispersion” (*golah*), and on whether Jews continue to live in a “decree of exile” or whether that decree has ended. Here Teitelbaum stands in opposition to the two distinct camps of integrationists/Diasporists and Zionists.⁷² Interestingly, both the liberal Diasporist and the religious and secular Zionist camp agree that *exile* is not an operative term. The first camp prefers *golah* to *galut*, while the Zionist camp that delegitimizes the Diaspora through negation views the entire exilic decree as null and void. The question is only how Jews want to take part in this new post-exilic era.

Thus, figures such as celebrated Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua argue—and many religious Zionists share this sentiment, albeit for different reasons—that “if you don’t live in Israel, your Jewish identity has no meaning at all,” and that “Judaism outside Israel has no future.”⁷³ In a completely different register but expressing similar sentiments, Zvi Yehuda Kook wrote, “Every Jew living in Israel . . . is observing the Torah, and every Jew living outside the Land of Israel, religious or not, violates the law and this violation is a sin.”⁷⁴ The Diasporists and Zionists both “negate” exile, the first to suggest normative Jewish life in the Diaspora, the latter

to suggest the end of exile that makes living in the Diaspora either superfluous or “sinful.” Raz-Krakotzkin puts it this way: “Seemingly contrary positions shared a common denominator: the definition of Jewish existence based on a break from the exilic principle and on the full acceptance of the concept of modern nationalism—the guiding principle of the dominant culture.”⁷⁵ The Diasporists envision the end of exile as the end of oppression *in* the Diaspora *and* as the existence of a sovereign Jewish state, while the Zionists envision the end of exile as the end of the Diaspora, with *only* the Jewish state.

Notions like America as a “New Promised Land,” which floated around late nineteenth-century Reform Judaism in America, and the general distancing of the land as territory in modern liberal Judaism lent themselves to a notion of a post-exilic reality of Jewish integration in democratic societies.⁷⁶ In this sense, Zionism’s “negation of the Diaspora” not only is a belief that when exile ends so should dispersion, but also strongly resists the Diasporic notion that the Diaspora can continue to exist after exile.

Teitelbaum contests both notions by making his case that the “decree of exile” established in the rabbinic tradition remains not only operational but the very core of normative Judaism, and thus any attempt to argue for its culmination is a prohibited act of “forcing the end.” Religious Zionists following Rav Kook must make the case for an end to the decree of exile without the appearance of the Messiah.⁷⁷ These claims are usually made as proclamations rather than through textual analysis, though texts are certainly deployed to fortify the speculative claims. Secular Zionists can more simply argue that the end of exile is marked by “normalization,” which means Jews achieving sovereignty or, to quote Yeshayahu Leibowitz, “no longer having to live under the aegis of the gentile.” Nothing more.

In all these cases, it is interesting to note that this “decree of exile” is a constructed category and not a historical event. To put it another way, it is a rabbinic retrojection of a historical event. As Israel Yuval notes, there was never any formal decree of exile. The Temples were destroyed and some Jews, but not all, dispersed to lands outside the land of Israel.⁷⁸ But Jews lived in those lands during Temple times, and some Jews remained in the land after the destruction. And yet, the “decree of exile” that serves as a cornerstone of Teitelbaum’s view of Jewish history became a theological category (and not just a territorial one) that marked the formation of Judaism in the Diaspora, to be nullified only in the messianic age.⁷⁹ Thus, in some unspoken way, exile became synonymous with Judaism, such that arguably, “the ‘negation of the exile’ is in fact the negation of ‘Judaism.’”⁸⁰ The Zionism that pretends to have a monopoly on Jewish history is in fact its negation, or at least the negation of foundational approaches that it defines as irrelevant.⁸¹ Thus, for figures such as Teitelbaum, religious Zionism is as much an expression of anti-Judaism as the thought of radical rejectionists of religion such as Yosef Hayyim Brenner and Micha Josef Berdichevsky. To negate the “decree of exile” takes the spine out of Judaism from its inception in its rabbinic articulation.

Even as they shared an end to “exile,” there were important differences between the religious Zionists of the Kookian school and the secular Zionists on the matter of negating the exile. The secularists maintained that the end of exile meant, in a sense, the *end* of normative Judaism and the transformation of religion into culture or, as Leo Strauss wrote, “pure politics.” Thus, negation of the exile *is* a negation of Judaism. The debate between the secularists was about how much the past informed this new cultural project. Groups like those led by Yonatan Ratosh and the Canaanites (and by Brenner and others) maintained that the severance had to be complete, while those following Ahad Ha’am, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, or A. D. Gordon maintained that tradition played a crucial role in this post-exilic Jewish culture.⁸²

Kook and his followers maintained that sovereignty and living in the land enabled normative Judaism to fulfill its destiny, and as Eliezer Don-Yehiya writes, “Jewish sovereignty will establish the infrastructure for a full Jewish existence both for individuals and for the community as a whole.”⁸³ Thus, for the religious Zionists, the end of exile was the *fulfillment* of Judaism. There were groups that tried to split the difference, as it were, such as the “Hasmonean Covenant,” established in 1937 by students of Rav Kook who also considered themselves Revisionists; but in general, religious Zionists and secular Zionists maintained two distinct visions of how “negation of the Diaspora” should be applied, with one claiming that Judaism was over and the other claiming that it was fulfilled. But both affirmed that Zionism was the end of exile.

While Teitelbaum was not conversant in these movements, he certainly knew of them more generally and was aware of the “negation of the Diaspora” principle that drove much of Zionist discourse. It is for this reason, I claim, that he includes an extensive discussion—consisting of more than ten dense chapters—discussing the theological value and necessity of the Diaspora.⁸⁴ Two examples will suffice. First: “And this is one of the reasons why this evil state [*malkhut*], which is the state of heretics in the land of Israel who are in a battle against our holy Torah and faith in God, exert as much influence as possible to bring all Jews to Israel such that none remain in the Diaspora. They think that then all Jews will be under their dominion. And they will do all in their power to uproot from them Torah and faith.”⁸⁵ And in the following chapter we read: “This has become a statute of Zionism, to draw the hearts of all Jews after them with the claim that all must come to Israel, that this is their very purpose.”⁸⁶ Aside from the more predictable epithets he throws at Zionism, this recognition that part of what Zionism seeks to achieve is to empty the Diaspora of Jews presents a separate theological challenge that Teitelbaum needed to address: the role that Jews in the Diaspora play in cultivating the culmination of exile.

Here Teitelbaum veers away from the purely halakhic nature of his essay and enters a theological orbit of how the “decree of exile” informed rabbinic and later kabbalistic understandings of the “necessity of exile” as a theological precept that must be maintained. I think he knew that Zionism was not solely about the

establishment of a Jewish state (that, he believed, was prohibited, certainly as a secular state), but also about negating the Diaspora, which he believed was tantamount to undermining the redemptive process, thus undermining Judaism itself. Ending the exile prematurely was not only prohibited but was, in fact, anti-messianic.

Teitelbaum begins, as one would expect, with the oft-cited Talmudic passage in b.T. Pesahim 87b, “R. Elazar said that Israel was only exiled among the nations in order to gather converts (*gerim*), as it says, *I will sow her in the land as My own* (Hosea 2:25), thus a person cannot sow a *se’eh* unless he first plants numerous *kurim*.” He continues with a like-minded passage from b.T. Ta’anit 3b:

The Gemara asks: However, regarding winds, from where do we derive that the winds are not withheld but perpetually blow? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that the verse states: *For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, says the Lord* (Zech. 2:10). He clarifies: What is God saying to them? If we say that this is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, is saying to the Jewish people—I have scattered you to the four winds of the world—if so, why did He say, “as the four winds”? He should have said *to* the four winds. Rather, this is what God is saying: Just as the world cannot exist without winds, so too, the world cannot exist without the Jewish people. This interpretation of the verse is based on the claim that the winds never cease.

These are well-known passages read widely in Zionist circles, and yet Teitelbaum uses them to build a case for the necessity of exile in opposition to the negation of the Diaspora in Zionist thinking. If one assumes that the “decree of exile” has been nullified, these passages are no longer relevant. But Teitelbaum rejects that assumption and, in doing so, uses this discussion to counter religious Zionism’s arguably radical claim that exile has ended. For example, he deploys a gloss by Maharsha, in a comment that he made on a passage in b.T. Avodah Zara 10b:

The four winds of the heavens: It seems obvious that this would prevent Israel from being destroyed because they would be scattered from one end of the earth to the other. But this could not be the meaning of the *drash*, but rather the *drash* comes to give a reason for this. That is, they are scattered so that they will not be able to be destroyed, since they [Israel] are pillars of the world, as are the winds, as Rashi states in Ta’anit 3b. . . . It appears to me that the winds establish dry land and without the wind the world would be totally water, as we see through [the biblical] flood, *And God brought the wind on the land and the waters subsided* (Gen. 8:1). So too with Israel. If they were not in the world, the world would return to void (*tohu v vohu*), *and the water subsided on the land*. This happens through God scattering them to the four winds to publicize their faith, and their Torah will establish the world.

In addition to the more common notion of scattering as protection against destruction, Maharsha adds an idea drawn from the b.T. Pesahim passage that Jews *need* to be scattered in order to spread Torah to the world, as part, Teitelbaum adds, of the redemptive project.

In general, Teitelbaum avoids kabbalistic literature in making his argument and stays close to the classic Talmudic, midrashic, and exegetical tradition. On the question of negating the Diaspora or nullifying exile, however, he finds in Lurianic texts strong support for his notion that Jews dwelling in exile is perhaps the central component in Luria's view of exile.⁸⁷ One noteworthy citation from Hayyim Vital makes his point. Regarding the difference between the exile of Egypt (where Jews were prohibited from returning) and all other exiles, Vital writes:

And this is the meaning of what Moshe said to Pharaoh, *You will not see them again* . . . that since they had rectified all the sparks from the *kelippot*, anyone who would return there [to Egypt] to serve under the *kelippot* would be defiling the holy and the Shekhina for no reason, and thus be subjugated under the *kelippot*. And this tells us about the difference between the exodus from Egypt and the other kinds of exile, because only the exodus from Egypt was complete. The future redemption will be even greater than Egypt, the reason being that with the exodus from Egypt no holy sparks remained there, but nevertheless, in all the lands besides Egypt there remained portions that were not clarified and defilements remained there from the time of the sin of Adam.⁸⁸

The Jews did not need to return to Egypt, and thus they were prohibited from doing so, because the exodus was so complete that the Israelites redeemed all the remaining holy sparks with them when they left. Perhaps this was because their exit from Egypt was the product of an open miracle. This is distinguished from all other exiles, the very purpose of which was to gather those sparks and purify the air of exilic lands as a prelude to redemption.⁸⁹ Thus, in the Lurianic schema—much of which, ironically, was written in the land—the necessity of the Diaspora is paramount.

Here Teitelbaum makes perhaps his strongest statement on the Diaspora:

Menachem Azaria da Fano [1548–1620] writes that the purpose of the various exiles is to purify the air of the lands of the gentiles. This is the language of Menachem Azaria from the *Asarah Ma'amarot*, "Ma'amar Hoker Ha-Din," section 4, chapter 13: "God sent [Israel] into exile to purify the places where they are dispersed. This is the essential reason of all exile, for the first one was, *And God banished Adam* (Gen. 3:24). Adam was banished from the garden in order to purify the air outside it with his breath and prepare the throne for the Shekhina. This idea repeats itself with all the exiles of Israel, because in the exile of Shomron there were not enough Torah scholars (*bnei Torah*), so it was sufficient for them to sanctify the one corner of the world.⁹⁰ However, in the exile of Jerusalem, from there the exiles were sent to the four corners of the world (see Prov. 5:17, *Your springs shall gush forth*) in order to spread wisdom to everyone."⁹¹

The essence of what da Fano is trying to say is that being exiled in every land is necessary in order for there to be Torah and devotion to God in all the lands to purify the air of the world in preparation for the indwelling of the Shekhina. . . . But

this all requires preparing the air of the entire world to be fit to receive the sanctity of the land of Israel. Thus, righteous ones must be spread throughout the world to prepare the air. Due to the sins of our generation, our strength has been weakened such that there is no way to accomplish this except by residing in all places, as we already read in the words of the *Or Ha-Hayyim* in regard to the sparks that are spoken about by the masters of esoteric wisdom.⁹²

As I've maintained throughout this discussion, Teitelbaum is not contesting the importance of dwelling in the land of Israel—leaving aside the question of obligation—but rather attacking the premise of the Zionist project, built on the assumption that the decree of exile has ended and thus must be negated and that, as a result, Jews have no redemptive responsibility in the Diaspora. It is as if to say, referring back to Hayyim Vital on Egypt, that the advent of Zionism resulted in the present state of the world becoming equal to biblical Egypt and so there is nothing more to be done there other than return to the land. Unlike others, for example Ezra of Gerona, Teitelbaum does not focus on Israel's suffering in the Diaspora as part of the purification of their own souls (e.g., Isa. 2). In some ways, he may side with other authorities (including many Zionists) in holding that the suffering of the Holocaust subsumed all the necessary "birth pangs" of the pre-messianic era. But for Teitelbaum, exile is not solely the occasion for Israel's suffering but serves as a necessary component of redemptive history.⁹³

Refracting this through biblical mythology, he writes: "When Adam and Eve sinned and were exiled from the Garden of Eden, even though the exile was a punishment, nevertheless being scattered was for the good in order to spread sanctity to the entire world to know and serve God."⁹⁴ Elsewhere Teitelbaum notes that one of the great achievements of Abraham was not only that he acceded to God's requests but that he did so "with joy" (*b'simcha*). This even includes exile: "With others, even though they may accept divine decrees, they may be pained by what they are being asked to do. . . . But Abraham, since he saw that it was divine will that he suffer exile, he was joyous in this thing . . . such that he did not experience any pain in his exile or all his other tests."⁹⁵

Context matters here. Although Teitelbaum wrote these essays while he was living in a diasporic context (in America) where the suffering of the Jews was not paramount, he certainly witnessed and suffered the horrors of the Holocaust. It is thus no surprise that for him, the role of dwelling in the Diaspora can be framed as positive and necessary, as being not exclusively for Jews but also for the world. It may seem somewhat odd that a leader who urged an enclavist community to separate from the world would argue that Jews need to be *in* the world in order to bring exile to its culmination. Teitelbaum had a different tack than his contemporary Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who also espoused a theological Diasporist view whereby Jews needed to be in "exile" in this final phase.⁹⁶ But they both seemed to maintain a similar mind-set, that exile was still operational and the correct way to interpret the present moment, even in the wake of the state

of Israel. As such, neither could avoid being anti-Zionist, even as they obviously expressed it in different ways.

What I am calling Teitelbaum's "necessity of exile" argument can be viewed as a response to Zionism's "negation of the Diaspora" by turning the Zionist claim on its head. Establishing a secular state in the land of Israel is one thing. Negating the Diaspora is another. While the former may be prohibited on halakhic grounds, the latter is prohibited on theological grounds. Zionism, the very movement whose *raison d'être* is redemptive in nature, in some way really survives only if the exile is erased and the Diaspora negated. Teitelbaum's claim is just the opposite.⁹⁷ Zionism, for Teitelbaum, is the archetype of anti-messianism.

QUEERING ZIONISM

In the latter portion of "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," after Teitelbaum has made his halakhic case using medieval and modern adjudicators on the question of whether there is an operative obligation to immigrate to the land of Israel, he turns to Zionism as a way to explain how it has threatened the trajectory of the redemptive process as he understands it. I use the term *queering* to describe Teitelbaum's rendering of Zionism in two senses: first, in its more formal usage, meaning "upsetting" or "unsettling"; and second, to indicate a way of twisting and inverting a subject, often by using its own terms against it, to arrive at a reading that is the opposite of what the subject claims, arguing that the subject's goals turn against it. The latter sense of *queering* comes close to deconstruction.

Teitelbaum begins by distinguishing between Zionism as an ideology and the act of settling the land, something that arguably gets lost in the aftermath of Zionism's success:

Before the advent of Zionism there was a call to develop agricultural colonies (*ovdei adamah*) in the land of Israel. And there were some great Torah sages who supported this, their intention being "for the sake of heaven." But many other sages opposed this idea and preferred to send financial help to foster Torah study in the land instead. A book was published that attempts to strength the argument of the colonists, called *Hibat Ha-Aretz*. In that text, we find that the authors acknowledge the opposition to this idea of colonization, except that their arguments seem to have little merit, as one who looks [in the text] will see.⁹⁸

This excerpt is useful because it implicitly distinguishes between an early attempt at proto-Zionist colonization and what would soon become a full-blown ideology of Zionism that would undermine Teitelbaum's understanding of redemptive history. In the case of early colonization, Torah sages were divided as to whether it was a good idea. Religious groups such as Hibat Zion supported colonization in part because it enabled Jews to fulfill agricultural commandments, such as the sabbatical year (*shmittah*), that were not possible in the Diaspora.⁹⁹

While Teitelbaum opposed this project on the grounds that dwelling in the land should be exclusively about Torah study and mitzvot, he distinguished early colonization from Zionism.¹⁰⁰ More deeply, as a prelude to his more extensive discussion of Zionism, Teitelbaum wanted to unmoor early colonization from Zionism by suggesting that the very core of early colonization's legitimacy was its devotion to Torah and mitzvot combined with its agricultural endeavor. The accuracy of this claim is less pertinent than the distinction it draws. Colonization complicates Teitelbaum's general claim that individual immigration to the land is legitimate while collective immigration is not. Colonization essentially serves as a third category in Teitelbaum's schema: more problematic than individual immigration, but not quite the state-building project of Zionism. As noted above, Teitelbaum's view of the necessity of the exile does not exclude settlement in Israel as part of the redemptive process. Torah study and mitzvot indeed purify the land in preparation for Messiah, even if it is not a purely individualistic exercise. But when Torah and mitzvot cease being the driving force behind settlements, which is certainly the case for Zionism more generally, the purification process is reversed; that is, secular settlement becomes an act of defilement, and Zionism—religious Zionism, for sure—turns against its own professed redemptive aspirations. And as Teitelbaum tried to show, if Zionism has intentions other than purification for the sake of redemption, it subverts any positive view of settlement according to traditional sources.¹⁰¹

Here the Holocaust serves as an important background. I discussed the role of the Holocaust in Teitelbaum's anti-Zionism elsewhere, but it is worth returning to here, because in many ways he views the Holocaust similarly to some religious Zionists such as Zvi Yehuda Kook viewed it, albeit to opposite ends:

According to the reality of our time, we can even better understand the proximate juxtaposition (*semihut*) of the Torah portion dealing with Amalek and coming into the land, as there is nothing in Scripture that cannot give us hints for all generations. This is a hint that Amalek is still involved with the arrival of Jews in the land. And now, after Jews have suffered the birth pangs of Messiah according to our sins, the propitious time has arrived to merit the arrival of the Messiah in which the entire nation will immigrate together in joy to our land. But due to our sins, Amalek arrived to grab hold [of us] in the heretical state [*malkhut ha-minut*] and this has caused the prevention of redemption until God will save us. Thus their [the Zionists'] coming to the land prevents the entire people from coming to the land with King Messiah. And this is the way to understand the proximate juxtaposition of the Torah portion dealing with Amalek and coming to Israel.¹⁰²

The comparison of Zionists to Amalek or some demonic alternative occupies much of Teitelbaum's post-1967 demonological work *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*, discussed in another chapter. But there is something else going on here that is worth noting in regard to the land. As mentioned, like many religious Zionists, Teitelbaum fully acknowledges the extent to which the Holocaust absorbed Jewish suffering such that in its aftermath, the time of redemption was at hand. And

redemption would result in the collective immigration of Jews to the land to fulfill the messianic promise. But whereas people such as Zvi Yehuda Kook and others understood the same predicament as an affirmation of full immigration in a Zionist register, even if it was precipitated by transgressors, Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as a kind of Amalekite proxy that undermined what was supposed to happen.

Instead of Zionism being the very vehicle of redemption, it becomes for Teitelbaum its impediment. Teitelbaum reads this into the proximate juxtaposition of the Torah portions of Amalek and coming to the land, the opposite of how Zionists read them. For many Zionists, the Amalekite manifestation was Nazism itself, the attempt to destroy the Jews in the Diaspora, which resulted in the opening of immigration and the settlement of Israel.¹⁰³ Zionism itself became the redeemer and savior from Amalek. While Teitelbaum certainly agrees with Nazism's Amalekite heritage, he reads the juxtaposition of these Torah portions to suggest that the Holocaust as a final subsuming of Israel's suffering opened up the potential for the end-time that is then scuttled by Zionism, which he determines is a kind of internal Amalekite phenomenon. The very idea that messianic time can be inaugurated by heretics and transgressors is itself an Amalekite manifestation. Hence, the Amalekite threat from within—an idea that has precedent in medieval sources in regard to some heretics—now becomes manifest in the Zionist project.

Teitelbaum rarely mentioned Kook but seemed aware of the dialectical move he made in suggesting that the secular can carry within them a mitzvah unbeknownst to them.¹⁰⁴ This is flatly rejected by Teitelbaum: "We see from myriad sources that the mitzvah of *yishuv* applies only to those who observe God's Torah. Without Torah and mitzvot, God does not desire that Jews dwell in the land of Israel. In this manner it is clear that the mitzvah of *yishuv* applies only to Torah-observant Jews. Sinners, however, do not enter into the orbit of this mitzvah at all. . . . Their dwelling does not contain any element of mitzvah but rather a grave sin, as we explained."¹⁰⁵ His point here, as I read it, is to undermine the religious Zionist claim that transgressors can play any role in the legitimate project of settling the land. It is not just that their actions do not constitute a mitzvah; rather, those actions are a "grave sin," since their presence pollutes rather than purifies the land. For religious Jews, especially those who follow Rav Kook, for Zionism to function inside the tradition it must find a place for secular Zionists (transgressors) in their vision. Even if one sides with Sifra Leviticus in holding that the mitzvah of dwelling in the land is juxtaposed (*k'neged*) with all the other mitzvot, this does not mean that it frees one from performing them. As we have seen, the holiness of the land suggests that sinning in the land is much more serious than sinning in the Diaspora.

Abraham Kook was famous for making the case that transgressors are, unbeknownst to themselves, fulfilling such a mitzvah. Teitelbaum counters that the Zionist project writ large, because its intensions are not "*le-shem shamyim*" and not focused on Torah observance, is counter-redemptive. We needn't be distracted

by Teitelbaum's obviously provocative language. His point is subtler. He offers a counter-reading of Zionism within the context of the land; to use language that Scholem made famous in regard to the Sabbatean heresy, "a mitzvah cannot come through a sin."¹⁰⁶ Of course, Sabbateanism inverts that rabbinic dictum to read that in messianic times, "a mitzvah can, even must, come through sin." Resonating with that notion, we read in Eliezer Azikri's *Sefer Haredim*: "All who come to the land should be careful in the laws of the sabbatical year and all the agricultural mitzvot, just as the sages were when they lived there, as the Talmud Yerushalmi mentions. This is so that dwelling in the land does not come through the transgression of nullifying the agricultural mitzvot, which would result in a greater deficit than the merit [of living in the land]. And the God of Israel should help us fulfill them. Amen."¹⁰⁷ Teitelbaum's anti-Zionist approach echoes Azikri's assessment.

Modern Hebrew and Its Discontents

On “Essay on the Holy Language”

THE PROBLEM

In 2014, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Pope Francis at the Vatican. During their conversation, Netanyahu asserted proudly, even triumphantly, that “Jesus spoke Hebrew.” The pope gently but assertively corrected the prime minister: “He spoke Aramaic but *knew* Hebrew.” Netanyahu quickly withdrew the comment.¹ Of course, the question of what language Jesus spoke is long-standing and has occupied a fair amount of attention among New Testament scholars.² Netanyahu’s claim was a typically Zionist one, suggesting without much evidence that Hebrew was a spoken language in the time of Jesus (first century CE). Of course, as scholars have observed, the reality of Hebrew and of other languages spoken in antiquity is much more complicated.³ Seth Sanders notes that the very notion of any kind of monolingualism in antiquity is a misnomer. Languages, and especially their spoken forms, were an amalgam of various tongues and regional vocabularies. As Sanders puts it, “Contemporary texts paint a bracingly cosmopolitan linguistic picture of first-century CE Jerusalem: Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek, with two of the three sometimes together, are inscribed all over the city.”⁴ But the question, or the assertion, of the existence of Hebrew as a spoken language in antiquity was very important for Zionists as they revived Hebrew in what was known as the New Hebrew movement, claiming to “return the crown to its proper place.”⁵ What Netanyahu articulated was common fare among Zionists, especially in the formative period of Zionism’s New Hebrew movement. But he was wrong.

Joseph Stalin once said that the Jews are not a nation because they lack two essential national attributes: language and territory. Many Zionists agreed.⁶ In some ways, the Zionist project was founded on the assumption (shared by many anti-Semites) that the Jews were a flawed and even diseased people who had no

culture of their own. This was concretized in a provocative speech by Shai Ish Hurwitz in 1903, published in the Hebrew journal *Ha-Shiloah*, in which Hurwitz even questioned the legitimacy of Jews' continued existence.⁷ This was not uncommon among early Zionists, thus raising the stakes whereby Zionism was presented as the very last possibility of continued Jewish survival and the only way for Jews to overcome their sickly demise. For example, Zeev Jabotinsky wrote in 1905: "Our starting point is to take the typical Zhid [Jew] of today and to imagine his diametrical opposite . . . because the Zhid is ugly, sickly . . . [W]e shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty. . . . The Zhid is trodden upon and easily frightened, and the other one ought to be proud and independent."⁸

The Zionist project can thus be divided into three main categories: sovereignty (the political), land (the territorial), and language (the cultural). The first deals with the establishment of a secular Jewish polity, the second with the return to a homeland, and the third with the establishment or, according to some, the reestablishment of Hebrew, or *lashon ha-kodesh*, as a vernacular language and vehicle for cultural production. More than simply an attempt to unify Jews around a common language, a monolingualism—an experiment that Liora Halperin has shown was initially quite unsuccessful in Israel—the New Hebrew movement in Europe and Palestine viewed language as a mode of cultural renaissance, not only in the land of Israel but in the Diaspora as well.⁹ The first Hebrew journals were established not in the land of Israel but in Eastern Europe, where they cultivated a new form of scholarship and literary creativity in a language that was being created on the fly. Abraham Mapu's *Ahavas Tsiyon*, perhaps the first Hebrew novel, was published in Russia in 1853. The first Hebrew newspaper, *Ha-Tsifira*, was published in Warsaw in 1862. *Ha-Shiloah*, edited by Ahad Ha'am, was first published in Russia in 1897, and Hayyim Nahman Bialik's Hebrew poetry in the 1890s was written in Russia, not in the land of Israel. Bialik didn't immigrate to Mandatory Palestine until 1924, at the age of fifty-one. He died there ten years later.

Yoel Teitelbaum addresses each of these categories (politics, territory, and language) in three distinct essays in *Vayoel Moshe*. In "Essay on the Three Oaths," he engages the question of whether a pre-messianic Jewish polity is halakhically viable. In "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," he addresses the halakhic parameters on whether there is a mitzvah to dwell in the land in our times. And in "Essay on the Holy Language," perhaps the least popular of the three but in some ways the most creative, he offers a detailed analysis on the nature and obligation of teaching and knowing the holy language (*lashon ha-kodesh*) from a halakhic standpoint, focusing on a variety of rabbinic sources that are then filtered through responsa literature.

Quite interestingly, this third essay, on *lashon ha-kodesh*, was written in the 1950s as a response to a question asked by Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung of Montreal, then principal of the Bais Yaakov girls' school, about girls' education, and specifically about teaching Hebrew language as a subject.¹⁰ The occasion for the

essay was not Teitelbaum's animus toward Zionism per se, though that comes into play later in the essay. The first part of the essay offers a detailed halakhic rendering of the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* in classical literature, while the second part focuses on girls' education, a subject of great interest to Teitelbaum, who had established the first Satmar girls' school, Beis Rochel, a few years earlier in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.¹¹

As we will see, Teitelbaum juggled his general ambivalence toward girls' education (this was true of many ultra-Orthodox leaders at the time) with his recognition that America required Hasidic women to function in the workplace and the realization that denying them a Torah education could alienate them from the community.¹² Given that Teitelbaum's general religious worldview was that abiding by ancestral norms is of utmost importance, not only in purely halakhic matters but in matters of custom as well, establishing such a school required considerable justification on his part, as to why he should deviate from established precedent against girls' education. Ancestral norms (*yisrael saba*) can be overturned periodically, but doing so would require (1) extenuating circumstances with significant social and economic impacts and (2) solid halakhic verification. Girls' education was one such topic of consideration in Teitelbaum's time.

Debates about girls' education stemmed back to the early twentieth century with the establishment of the Bais Yaakov school in Warsaw, and many halakhic authorities weighed in on its viability and limitations.¹³ Teitelbaum was certainly aware of these earlier debates and even mentions one of them in his essay. However, he viewed himself as within a particular tradition of Hasidic maximalism that distanced him from what he viewed as a modernizing trend, even among his contemporaries.

Of course, more generally, this third essay sets its sights on the New Hebrew movement that was endemic to Zionism and that had already become normative by the time the essay was written in the 1950s. Zionism was, for Teitelbaum, the embodiment of heresy, and New Hebrew was an integral part of that.¹⁴ Teitelbaum was likely not particularly aware of the debates around the New Hebrew movement among Zionists, though he certainly knew of the ways in which the teaching of "Hebrew in Hebrew" (Ivrit be-Ivrit) in Mandatory Palestine began to infiltrate the ultra-Orthodox school system—for example, in the famous Takhkemoni School in Jerusalem, where Abraham Isaac Kook weighed in to support Ivrit be-Ivrit education.¹⁵ Another example is the German-Hebrew language conflict of 1913, where fault lines were drawn between the languages of education in Jewish schools in Mandatory Palestine.¹⁶ During a trip to the land of Israel, Teitelbaum spoke out against the Bais Yaakov school system, in which girls studied "in Hebrew."¹⁷ He was more concerned about the transition from *lashon ha-kodesh*—a language that contained both Hebrew and Aramaic and was the written language through which tradition was transmitted—to the secularized Ivrit, or Modern Hebrew, which detached the language from Torah, essentially making it, for him,

the vehicle of heresy, not only in terms of ideas but also in the bastardization of the holy language through the importation of secularization and defamation. He argued, against Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who is often viewed as the founder of New Hebrew (Teitelbaum seemingly refers to him once in his essay as “the professor”), that *lashon ha-kodesh* was rarely a spoken language and, if so, only in a very limited manner and only among Torah sages.¹⁸

The heretical nature of the New Hebrew movement was rooted not solely in its secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh*, but also in its contribution to the larger Zionist project, which Teitelbaum held in contempt.¹⁹ However, as we will see, Teitelbaum was not the only one with reservations about New Hebrew; in fact, Hebraists such as Bialik and Gershom Scholem were very wary of the secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh* in the land of Israel. One cannot sever the secularization process from the revival of Hebrew. As Benjamin Harshav notes, “the revival of the Hebrew language in Eretz-Israel was a historical challenge—indispensable for the emergence of a new Jewish Secular Polysystem.”²⁰ It is therefore no surprise that traditionalists such as Teitelbaum contested this experiment and viewed it as dangerous. But it was not only the traditionalists. Below, I will analyze some of the ambivalences of Bialik and Scholem to put them in conversation with Teitelbaum. Teitelbaum likely did not know of their work, and certainly they were not aware of his (Scholem could have been, but as far as I know he never refers to *Vayael Moshe*).²¹ However, as we will see, there is some interesting common ground between them, certainly on the dangers of New Hebrew in its relationship to the sacred, albeit for very different reasons.²²

“Essay on the Holy Language” contains fifty double-column folios and fifty chapters, broken up into various parts. As he does in all three essays in *Vayael Moshe*, Teitelbaum begins with a detailed halakhic analysis of the question at hand, in this case the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* more generally, and specifically its relation to Torah study and education. As mentioned earlier, Teitelbaum was a halakhist par excellence, and thus every question had to first be categorized and evaluated through halakhic lenses. This was true of immigrating to the land of Israel, dwelling in the land, and speaking Hebrew.

Essentially, Teitelbaum is asking: What is the halakhic nature and stature of *lashon ha-kodesh*? Is there a separate mitzvah to teach and know *lashon ha-kodesh*, as some sources suggest, or is *lashon ha-kodesh* simply a functional tool for Torah study since the texts are written in this language, as other sources suggest? That is, does *lashon ha-kodesh* have any status whatsoever, separate from Torah? It turns out that rabbinic tradition is quite unequivocal on this question, with ample weight given in the Babylonian Talmud to the notion that *lashon ha-kodesh* is a purely functional vehicle for Torah knowledge—thereby, in Teitelbaum’s mind, undermining any vernacularization disconnected from Torah study. In this reading, the transformation of *lashon ha-kodesh* to Modern Hebrew is not only void of a halakhic status but, in Teitelbaum’s estimation, may be transgressive. As in

every other case, Teitelbaum's audience is Torah-observant Jews (why would secular Jews care about the halakhic status of *lashon ha-kodesh*?), largely in his wider ultra-Orthodox community, many of whom had begun to become Hebraized in Israel in the 1950s.

The essay's second section contains a lengthy discussion using midrashic and Zoharic sources on the question of whether *lashon ha-kodesh* was the "natural" language of humankind that was erased with the confusion of languages in the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). This question, as we will see, was not one that exercised only Jewish scholars. In his *City of God*, Augustine devotes an entire chapter to the question of Hebrew as the antediluvian language, the "one language" spoken by the generation of Babel, the remnants of which were transmitted to Abraham and subsequently became the Hebrew language. The Zohar argues similarly and yet, as Teitelbaum shows, the Zoharic understanding of antediluvian Hebrew was that its power, when used for rebellious purposes, can empower the success of evil. Implied, of course, is that this is precisely what the New Hebrew movement is doing, Zionism here compared to the generation of Babel, known in Jewish sources as *dor ha-palaga* (the generation of division).

Teitelbaum then turns his attention to Hirschprung's question of educating ultra-Orthodox girls, specifically in teaching them Hebrew. As we will see below, he supports moving beyond the very limited Torah education of girls but is also concerned that Torah authorities maintain control of girls' education, which he believed would be undermined if girls knew the language of study, whereby they could circumvent rabbinic authority and study Torah for themselves. In this section, he also weighs in on New Hebrew as part of the Zionist project and its threat to the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* through linguistic secularization.

In order to situate Teitelbaum's discussion, before entering into an analysis of his essay, I begin by discussing a seminal work by the ostensible founder of New Hebrew, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, entitled *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* (*Ad Matai Dibru Ivrit?*). In this work—published, ironically, in New York City in 1919, the same year as Nahum Sokolow's two-volume *History of Zionism*—Ben-Yehuda argues that Jews used Hebrew sporadically as a spoken language throughout classical and late antiquity. He makes his case from rabbinic sources, inferences from biblical texts such as Ezra and Nehemiah, and apocryphal sources such as the Books of the Maccabees, suggesting that Hebrew existed as a spoken language in addition to Aramaic and Greek, the two dominant languages in the late Second Temple and rabbinic periods. But it would appear, from Nehemiah 13:24, that most or many Israelites could not speak their ancestral tongue, as *half spoke Ashodite and did not speak Judean*.²³

In the following section, I engage two Zionist figures, Hayyim Nahman Bialik and Gershom Scholem, and their essays on the Hebrew language. Each expresses in different ways the dangers of the secularization of the holy language. Each worried that the Hebraization of Palestine/Israel could have disastrous consequences

unless its architects began rooting it more deeply in classical Jewish culture—that is, in Judaism. While both Bialik and Scholem were concerned precisely about secularization, both affirmed its viability and even necessity in the Zionist project, yet each also understood, and witnessed, that the secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh* to a Hebrew vernacular severed from its roots in tradition would undermine the potential for Zionist culture as the fulfillment of a true nationalist project.²⁴ This section includes a reading of Teitelbaum's understanding of the Tower of Babel in conjunction with Augustine and the Book of Jubilees.

The essay's final section examines some of the debates around girls' education in Europe, the United States, and Israel to contextualize Teitelbaum's halakhic discussion of the scope and nature of women's education in his own community. It seems that Teitelbaum felt that until he was able to situate the halakhic parameters of *lashon ha-kodesh* as a language, he could not respond to the question of how that language would or should function in an educational system for girls, given that most halakhic authorities do not view women as being obligated to study Torah. Without that obligation, what role would the study of Hebrew as a language play? Thus, Teitelbaum shows how *lashon ha-kodesh* plays a purely functional role in Torah education more generally. Given that he supports a system in which women are not obligated to study and thus have no obligation to know *lashon ha-kodesh* for that purpose, even if study becomes necessary for a variety of reasons, Teitelbaum asks: How would, or should, the study of Hebrew fit into an educational curriculum for girls? While the many authorities who weigh in on women's education in Orthodoxy delve deeply into the question and status of Torah study as a non-obligatory practice, none (to my knowledge) address the specific question of language study as part of that exercise. This becomes Teitelbaum's main contribution to the conversation.

HEBREW, GREEK, ARAMAIC: ELIEZER BEN-YEHUDA

Ben-Yehuda's *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* is an odd work.²⁵ Ben-Yehuda was certainly adept at drawing from classical sources and seemed to be aware of the contemporary scholarship on those sources, yet the program that underlies this book is not scholarship per se. Rather, it seems more like an intervention to address a contemporary ideological question that is never stated outright: How radical is the New Hebrew movement? Ben-Yehuda is viewed as the patriarch of New Hebrew in large part because of his groundbreaking essay "A Burning Question" in the Hebrew Viennese journal *Ha-Shachar* in 1879. He immigrated with his young family to Palestine in 1881, part of the First Aliyah (1881–1903). Despite being considered the father of the Hebrew revival, though, Jack Fellman claims that he initially had very little influence.²⁶ The revival really took place during the Second Aliyah (1904–14), some two decades after Ben-Yehuda immigrated. Most Jews who immigrated to Ottoman Palestine during the First Aliyah spoke

a variety of languages—Yiddish, German, Russian, Arabic, French—but they did not speak Hebrew. The first “Hebrew School” was established in the colony Rishon le-Zion in 1886, where Hebrew was taught, but not much Hebrew was spoken there. The first Ivrit be-Ivrit (Hebrew in Hebrew) textbook was published in 1901 by Yitzhak Epstein (1862–1943), not in Palestine but in Warsaw. What Harshav calls the “Jewish Secular Polysystem” of New Hebrew arose in Palestine toward the end of the Second Aliyah, not before.²⁷ This is not to say that Jews who did not share a common language tried to communicate with one another in *lashon ha-kodesh*, as they had probably been doing so much earlier. But the broken sentences and limited vocabulary they drew from the written language, mixed with a variety of other languages, did not constitute anything close to the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language that we see in the Second Aliyah. For example, it was only in 1909 that the socialist organization Poale Zion stated, “We recognize Hebrew as the national language of the Jewish people.”²⁸

The New Hebrew movement was embraced by many, but not all, Zionists and was challenged by many, but not all, traditionalists, in Europe and in the land of Israel. For example, Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910), an important *maskil* and Zionist, was staunchly opposed to Ben-Yehuda’s revival of the Hebrew language as a lingua franca. Lilienblum asked, “Why does Ben-Yehuda care if, when we succeed in reviving the land of our fathers, the language will be German or English, the language spoken by so many of us? Why does he have to be more of a patriot than our ancestors? Abraham was from Ur Chasdim and certainly spoke Aramaic until coming to the land of Canaan.”²⁹ It seems that *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* was in part an attempt to assuage traditionalists by arguing through classical sources that Jews spoke Hebrew intermittently from the time Ezra returned from the first exile to the early rabbinic period. Ben-Yehuda acknowledges that, by the time of the academies in Babylonia that produced the Babylonian Talmud, Hebrew had fallen away and the lingua franca was almost exclusively Aramaic. In fact, he held that in Babylonian communities this was the case much earlier. This is significant, as we will see below, because Ben-Yehuda’s argument is that those who resided in the land of Israel were more apt to keep Hebrew as a spoken language, though never being monolingual, whereas Jews who lived in the Diaspora more readily adopted other languages (Aramaic and Greek). This is not to say that the land of Israel was not deeply Hellenized; Ben-Yehuda acknowledged that it was. Rather, it is to suggest that even in the period of Hellenization, spoken Hebrew functioned, even if in very limited ways, specifically because of priests who returned to the land rather than those who dwelled in Babylonia. But, as Yael Chaver suggests, “the choice of Hebrew as the language of revival was an act that involved an adjustment of the perception of the past, or of a particular (imagined) past, to suit the nationalist requirement.”³⁰ This was, in many ways, the very core of Ben-Yehuda’s project.

Such a source-driven analysis would be of little interest to secular Zionists of the Second Aliyah, most of whom had abandoned traditional Judaism. By 1919,

Ben-Yehuda would have recognized the initial success of the Hebraization project, yet he was also aware of the reluctance of some who viewed the Hebrew revival as a radical and blasphemous movement. My reading of *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* is that perhaps these reluctant traditionalists were Ben-Yehuda's intended audience.³¹ The work was his attempt to convince them that the New Hebrew movement in their midst was not nearly as radical as it seemed—that, in fact, throughout much of their history, Jews sporadically spoke Hebrew, and thus the creation of a Hebrew “polysystem” in Zion was simply an expansion of an existing paradigm, rather than a radical break from the past. This required an analysis of classical sources on the question of language that, as we will see, also required some pretty speculative leaps, since discussions of spoken languages were almost nonexistent in these sources.

A more speculative reading of *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* might suggest that Ben-Yehuda was really writing not about antiquity at all, but about his own time disguised in the folklore of antiquity. That is, he wanted to see the return to Palestine as a kind of replay of the return of Ezra to the land and wanted to portray the European Diaspora as fulfilling the role of Babylonia. Whereas Hebrew existed then but ultimately succumbed to the dominance of Aramaic and Greek and largely disappeared, in contemporary Palestine, Jews once again had the opportunity to “revive” what was lost in the “Second Commonwealth.”³² Here Yael Zerubavel's observation seems apt: “The selective reconstruction of Antiquity was part of the historical mission of reviving the ancient national roots and spirit. Antiquity became both a source of legitimation and an object of admiration.”³³

Ben-Yehuda begins his argument with a rather curious assertion. He recognizes that most Jews chose to remain in Babylonia during the return of Ezra the Scribe to the land of Israel, something that perturbed many Zionists. “But from the perspective of language,” Ben-Yehuda writes, the fact that most Jews chose not to return “was a good thing”:

Because of the great travails of returning to the ‘land of our ancestors’ (*eretz ha-avot*), most remained in the foreign land (*nekhar*). This was good for the new community in terms of the ‘language of our ancestors’ (*lashon ha-avot*). There is no doubt that those who remained [abroad] were the wealthy and more inclined toward Aramaic. This was already mentioned by Hertzfeld in his book on the Babylonian exile (586–538 BCE). This seems so obvious that it is not worth providing any more evidence. If those Aramaic-speaking Jews had come to the land of Israel in great numbers without their families, even the few would not have spoken Hebrew at all because Hebrew would not have had the power to persevere.³⁴

Ben-Yehuda goes on for a bit in this vein, arguing that the establishment of Hebrew in the Second Commonwealth necessitated that most Jews remain in the Diaspora, so as not to taint the language revival in the land. In fact, he claims later on that Babylonian Jewish priests did immigrate and thus contributed to the diminution

of Hebrew that, as we will presently see, was saved only by the preponderance of Greek that overtook Aramaic. Ben-Yehuda writes:

The first priests who went up with Ezra spoke Hebrew. However, over the course of time, those remaining in Bavel [Babylonia] began to speak only Aramaic. And most of the Jews remained in Bavel and the trade between Bavel and the land of Israel was not frequent. The Babylonian Jews were more and more conversant in Aramaic. And those priests who later came from Bavel to Jerusalem were already Aramaic speakers and guarded that language zealously. . . . And those priests from Bavel, who were of great number and had great power, spoke Aramaic, even in the Temple, and caused extreme damage to the Hebrew language.³⁵

It is significant to note that scholars of this period readily admit that evidence for these kinds of assertions are very thin. Ben-Yehuda really has no evidence for his claim that “the first priests who went up with Ezra spoke Hebrew.” We know very little about the lives of Jews of that period, outside of the canonical and apocryphal texts by Jews, which, in any case, do not dwell on matters such as what language they spoke. I don’t think that really matters for Ben-Yehuda, whose rendering of Ezra’s return is really about early twentieth-century Palestine. This was written in the heyday of the Second Aliyah, when Jews from Eastern Europe were beginning to immigrate in larger numbers, most of whom were committed Zionists and committed to the revival of Hebrew. Ben-Yehuda seems to be reflecting the sentiment that it is perhaps better that the more assimilated Jews in Europe stay there for now while the Hebrew revival continues to unfold in the land of Israel, and that their presence may be a negative factor in terms of language. In addition, by the late teens of the twentieth century, Ben-Yehuda had to be aware of the large number of Second Aliyah immigrants who were returning to Europe, perhaps trying to convince them to stay. Ironically, Ben-Yehuda seems to ignore, in recounting his Babylonia/land of Israel paradigm, that the Hebrew revival actually began in Europe and not in the land of Israel. However, he was correct that moving the Hebrew revival from its more literary origins to a vernacular stage required the context that the land of Israel provided.³⁶ The fewer Jewish languages present, the better. We will see that this attempted monolingualism was not only a failure but also, as Scholem argued, detrimental to the flourishing of the society.³⁷

According to Ben-Yehuda, the linguistic theater for the Jews of antiquity in the land of Israel was threefold: Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. He views these three languages as stable and autonomous, which scholars of ancient Hebrew such as Seth Sanders and William Schniedewind argue was not the case at all in the ancient world. In any event, the relationship between Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew does exhibit a kind of linguistic triangle for the Jews of that period. Many scholars, following the ancient sages themselves, suggest that the danger for the Jews was Hellenization (a complex term that includes the adaptation of Greek as a spoken

and even written language). Ben-Yehuda sees it otherwise, arguing that Greek, ironically, saved Hebrew from extinction:

With the conquest of Alexander the Great, Greek became increasingly widespread in all the lands he conquered. . . . Even in the land of Israel, Greek increased exponentially, especially on the coastal plain during the Ptolemaic kingdom. Nevertheless, this was not true of the literary language and doesn't compare to subsequent generations [when Greek became even more prominent].

Thus, we can't say that the introduction of Greek had a profound impact on Hebrew. In some ways, we can say that this [Hellenistic] linguistic revolution in the world, and in the land of Israel, was a blessing for Hebrew, although now less so.³⁸ This is because if Aramaic had remained the dominant language, it would certainly have stymied the progress of Hebrew that now progressed more quickly. This is because of the similarity of Aramaic to Hebrew. But the spread of Greek weakened Aramaic, also in the land of Israel. Those close to the king, such as Bnei Tuvia, certainly knew Greek. But this language was so far from Hebrew that it did not threaten "to rob" [the Jews from Hebrew] as did Aramaic.³⁹

The real linguistic battle among Jews in this period, for Ben-Yehuda, was between Aramaic and Hebrew. Greek was the third part of the triangle, as it were; in one sense, it opened Jews to the wider Hellenistic world, thus posing dangers to communal fidelity, but it also was less threatening to Hebrew because of its vastly different linguistic structure. Aramaic, on the other hand, in its Jewish iteration (various forms of Aramaic were spoken in the Mediterranean basin), is a language that resembled Hebrew enough to erase Hebrew entirely. As Aaron Koller notes, given that "the two languages [Aramaic and Hebrew] are both fairly closely related and were in contact for many centuries, it is often difficult to discern what is a shared inheritance and what is a borrowing in one language from the other."⁴⁰ As Ben-Yehuda stated earlier, the more acculturated Jews of Babylonia that made their way to the land of Israel during the Second Temple period brought Aramaic with them, which diminished the use of Hebrew.

As mentioned above, I think that the best way to read Ben-Yehuda's work is as a commentary on the present through the lens of the past. Ben-Yehuda curiously depicts Aramaic as close to the Yiddish of his time. Ben-Yehuda was as Ashkeno-centric as his fellow European Zionists and thus, for him, the real threat to the Hebrew revival was Yiddish, a language that many European Jews already spoke and one that resembled Hebrew, not in its linguistic structure, but in terms of being a "Jewish" language that served for centuries as a *lingua franca* for many Jews. Arabic did not pose such a threat, and languages such as Ladino were already diminishing in the Yishuv.⁴¹ French was the common "colonial" language and the language of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, but it excluded many German Jews and Jews of lower classes. The true threat to a Hebrew revival was other "Jewish" languages, Yiddish being the most dominant, Ladino less so. Many Hebraists in the land of Israel were adamantly opposed to Yiddish in the land, so

much so that some tried to prevent the establishment of a chair in Yiddish at the Hebrew University.⁴²

Ben-Yehuda acknowledges that by the Hasmonean period (140–37 BCE), the land of Israel was deeply Hellenized and Hebrew ceased to function in any discernible way, though he claims that the fact that the oddity of the Book of Daniel, composed at that time, having both Aramaic and Hebrew sections led him to believe that Hebrew was still a living language even in that period. Once Ben-Yehuda moves to the early rabbinic period (second to fourth centuries CE), there is less material at his disposal. He makes very speculative claims about Hebrew still functioning as a spoken language among some sages, as teachings in their name were transmitted both in Hebrew and Aramaic.⁴³ For example, he writes:

This is even clearer if one looks at the two Talmuds, the Jerusalem and Babylonian. In both, the language is more Aramaic than Hebrew; both are basically Aramaized [texts]. And there is no way to really say that these texts lean toward Hebrew. Yet both contain sections that are in Hebrew, and we can attest to the fact that these texts were recited [orally] in the language in which they were written. And there are places where Aramaic and Hebrew are mixed together. Thus, we can see as clear as the sun in the sky that they [the sages or redactors] did not change the language of things that were said and were careful to transmit things in the language in which they were spoken.⁴⁴

Ben-Yehuda makes this point in various ways throughout the work. Talmudic literature exists in a predominantly Aramaic context. This suggests that Aramaic was not only the written language of the Jews, but their spoken one as well. And yet, given this context, we see that they decided to transmit certain teachings in Hebrew. For Ben-Yehuda, this suggests that the sages were careful to write things just as they were said, and hence he claims that Hebrew still functioned as a spoken language, even in a time when Aramaic dominated.

Elsewhere, Ben-Yehuda argues similarly in regard to the Hasmonean renaming of towns and cities:

We can see a clear example of the importance of language for the Hasmoneans. In places that had Greek names they renamed them with Hebrew names. Don't think that they did this only in these specific cases. We can determine with absolute certainty that this was a national ethos (*ma'aseh le'umi ha-kelali*). In every place, city, or village that was called by a Greek name, they changed the name to a Hebrew name. But there were not so many of these places and therefore it didn't make much of an impression. Now, you could say that just because the Hasmoneans changed the names of places to Hebrew and not Aramaic names, that doesn't mean they spoke Hebrew. But even if they didn't speak Hebrew, nonetheless they viewed Hebrew as a national language (*lashon ha-le'umit*).⁴⁵

Ben-Yehuda liked to use expressions such as “this is totally clear” and “clear as the sun in the sky” in cases where there is very little evidence. Aside from his anachronistic use of the phrase “national ethos” (*ma’aseh le’umi ha-kelali*), his point here is to suggest that Hebrew functioned as a language of collective or national identity, even if Aramaic was the lingua franca, which would explain why the Hasmoneans would give places Hebrew and not Aramaic names.⁴⁶

This process of renaming was common fare in Zionism, especially in the early post-state period. Meron Benvenisti’s book *Sacred Landscape* and, more recently, Mostafa Hussein’s *Hebrew Orientalism* carefully delineate the way in which Zionists, including Benvenisti’s father, renamed the topography of Israel to de-Arabize the land. His father was a geographer and cartographer whose job it was to travel the land of Israel and map its territory. “My father’s expeditions, his friendly contact with Arabs notwithstanding, were not innocent scientific excursions,” Benvenisti writes. “He had a clear agenda: to draw a Hebrew map of the land, a renewed title deed. . . . The map he drew and the textbook he wrote were meant to transform symbolic possession of the land into actual possession by inculcating his children and countless other young Israelis with the Zionist ethos of *moledet* (homeland).”⁴⁷ Much of this happened after Ben-Yehuda’s time, but the ethos from which it grew was very much a part of the Second Aliyah period in which his book was written. This is yet another instance where Jewish antiquity functions, for Ben-Yehuda, as a kind of folk tradition from which one can draw rubrics of contemporary identity, here in relation to the revival of a language.

What does Ben-Yehuda’s archaic and novel *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* tell us about the Hebrew revival that may better enable us to understand Teitelbaum’s essay? First, as Chaver notes, “the choice of Hebrew as the language of the revival was an act that involved an adjustment of the perception of the past, or of a particular (imagined) past, to suit the nationalist requirement.”⁴⁸ In trying to connect the New Hebrew movement to ancient Israel, Ben-Yehuda, to some extent, had to invent the past. But for Teitelbaum, as we will see, that was beside the point. He was not interested in whether Jews in antiquity spoke Hebrew. He was interested in the halakhic parameters of *lashon ha-kodesh*, either as the object of a mitzvah or as a function of a mitzvah (Talmud Torah). If the language has the separate status of a mitzvah, as some rabbinic sources suggest, then its being taught as a “language” is acceptable, even mandated. If not, Modern Hebrew would have no intrinsic value and would even represent a dangerous severing of *lashon ha-kodesh*, the language of Torah, from its sacred source. To the larger point of the New Hebrew revival, here Ben-Yehuda and Teitelbaum may be in conversation. Ben-Yehuda argued that Zionism, at least in terms of language, is not a radical break from the past but rather a new iteration of it. He focuses on language and not sovereignty to make that point. Teitelbaum argued that Zionism is a total deviation from the past in all its aspects. In his essay, he cites many rabbinic

sources that exhibit how, as he reads them, the sages really knew very little Hebrew as a spoken language. They were certainly masters of *lashon ha-kodesh*, but as Teitelbaum reads those sources, they cared little about the language outside of Torah and therefore communicated matters not pertaining to Torah in other languages. So, even if they may have expounded on Torah in *lashon ha-kodesh* orally, as Ben-Yehuda suggests, that is a totally different matter than creating a lingua franca from that language. Such a move of secularization was, for Teitelbaum, blasphemous, and thus it fit in well with the larger Zionist project in his eyes. Ben-Yehuda argues that Hebrew never ceased being a spoken language, even among elites, and thus the New Hebrew project is a renewal movement and not deviant at all. The problem is that neither Teitelbaum nor Ben-Yehuda has any substantive proof for his claim. That said, Ben-Yehuda's claim faces a bigger challenge because Teitelbaum is mostly out to adjudicate the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* halakhically, for which he has myriad sources, whereas Ben-Yehuda wants to make a claim about Hebrew as a spoken language, for which he has very thin evidence.

In any case, while Ben-Yehuda (b. 1858) was almost a generation older than Teitelbaum (b. 1887), Teitelbaum was an adult when *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?* was published. While he was a rabbi in Transylvania at the time, and it is unlikely that he ever read the book, he was certainly aware of Ben-Yehuda's basic approach, once likely referring to him derisively as "the professor" in his essay. If Teitelbaum had read *Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?*, he certainly would have been interested in Ben-Yehuda's use of sources, though I doubt he would have been sympathetic with his method or conclusions. Teitelbaum was a halakhist and a theologian and not a historian, and his rejection of Zionism, be it political, residential, or about language, was on halakhic grounds alone.

LINGUA FRANCA OR HOLY TONGUE? SCHOLEM, BIALIK, AND TEITELBAUM

There were many philosophical, theological, and speculative reflections on the New Hebrew movement during the Second and Third Aliyot (1904–23) by figures such as Yosef Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921) and Micha Josef Berdichevsky (1865–1921), among others, who created a body of literature in New Hebrew that was taking shape in both written and spoken form in the first part of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ Some of these writers, Bialik and Scholem being two examples, wrote reflectively on the dangers inherent in this linguistic revolution, even as they promoted it. Language played a central role in Scholem's studies in Kabbalah, culminating in a two-part essay entitled "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," which appeared in German in 1970.⁵⁰ But his most audacious thoughts on New Hebrew are found in a short letter to Franz Rosenzweig on language, written for the occasion of Rosenzweig's fortieth birthday in 1926.⁵¹ The letter was never published and was basically forgotten, only discovered in the

Scholem archives by Stephane Moses in 1985. One of its first public analyses was offered by Jacques Derrida in a lecture at the School for Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth College in 1987.⁵² Bialik addressed the question of language in a talk he gave in Tel Aviv in 1927, interestingly only a year after Scholem's letter. Bialik's essay was published in English as "The Sacred and the Secular in Language," and another essay, "Revelment and Concealment: Reflections on the Nature of Language," appeared in English in *Commentary* magazine in 1950.⁵³ The latter essay was about language in general and not specifically about Hebrew, but Hebrew is also implied in Bialik's remarks.

Both Scholem's and Bialik's essays have attracted a lot of attention, in part because each in his own way positions himself as a critic of the New Hebrew project while also endorsing it.⁵⁴ Both men recognize and fear the process of "secularization" occurring within New Hebrew, yet both recognize its necessity and reflect on its implications, each offering an ominous diagnosis coupled with potentially redemptive resonances. I use scare quotes here around "secularization" because both Scholem and Bialik, in different ways and perhaps toward different ends, argue that secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh* is not truly possible, which is part of the problem. Each surmises that the holy language can never be secularized, only sacralized. The sanctity will inevitably erupt from the blasphemy, even if, for Scholem, it does so in a demonic and destructive way, whereas for Bialik the profanation becomes, under certain conditions, a vehicle for the fulfillment of the sacred. Galili Shahar notes that for Scholem, "the crime of the New Hebrew is the forgetfulness of tradition, a form of denial and indifference that brings it to invoke God's names in a foreign, inappropriate context. The apocalypse of the New Hebrew thus lacks the horizon of redemption."⁵⁵ And yet, the revival of the people in the land is not possible without it. As we will see, Bialik has a less dialectical rendering but an ominous one nonetheless.

One of the oddities in all the studies of Scholem and Bialik on Hebrew is that, to my knowledge, none deal with Teitelbaum's "Essay on the Holy Language" at all. In fact, the only scholarly treatment of Teitelbaum's essay on language is an essay in Hebrew by Oded Schechter.⁵⁶ And while that essay offers a nuanced and creative analysis of Teitelbaum and *lashon ha-kodesh*, Schechter does not put him in any sustained conversation with either Scholem or Bialik.

On one level, this is understandable: Teitelbaum's essay is written in *lashon ha-kodesh* and not New Hebrew (though Scholem's essay on Hebrew is written in German, something Derrida had much to say about), and the nature of Teitelbaum's argumentation requires literacy, even expertise, in the halakhic form of debate, which is not common among modern literary scholars. It is relatively easy to discount Teitelbaum's essay as simply a halakhic intervention into the status of *lashon ha-kodesh*. But I will show that underlying this particular form of argumentation is a theory of language, and *lashon ha-kodesh* in particular, that shared some basic tenets with Bialik and Scholem. All three were concerned with the "secularization"

of *lashon ha-kodesh* in one form or another. All three were concerned with the consequences of making a language of Torah, or tradition, into a lingua franca for mundane matters. That is, all three focus their remarks on the complex relationship between the sacred and the profane, to borrow Bialik's locution, and on the intricate nature and problematic of that binary. Scholem is a deeply dialectical thinker, while Teitelbaum lives in the halakhic binary of "permitted and forbidden" (*'issur ve heter*). Yet both are enthralled, even obsessed, by the notion of evil, the demonic, and its unseen manifestations in Jewish history and human society.

It is important to note that Scholem's 1926 essay was written three years after he immigrated to the land of Israel.⁵⁷ At that time, the young Scholem was neither accustomed nor particularly equipped to deal with Hebrew as a spoken language (not uncommon among most immigrants). That is, the letter was written by a relative neophyte, albeit a brilliant one, a highly idealistic immigrant who was quickly seeing the difference between his idealistic view of Zionism—born in Berlin and permeated with the language of *lashon ha-kodesh* and Jewish texts—and the reality on the ground, what he called the "gibberish" spoken in the street. In addition, Scholem did not grow up with *lashon ha-kodesh* on his lips. He was not a product of the world of the *beit midrash* like Brenner, Berdichevsky, or Bialik. For Scholem, Hebrew was a foreign language and although he was fluent, he was never a native speaker.⁵⁸ Another important note of context is that Scholem had a contentious encounter with Rosenzweig in Germany in 1922, soon before he immigrated, mostly about whether Zionism was the only viable way for Jews and Judaism to flourish. Rosenzweig, who was also deeply committed to the sacrality of the Hebrew language, argued that this "normalizing" process of Zionism would empty Jews of their religious identity and essentially rob them of their spiritual essence.⁵⁹

Scholem and Rosenzweig parted and never met again, and thus the debate was left unfinished.⁶⁰ Annabel Herzog reads Scholem's 1926 letter as a kind of "confession"—that is, when Scholem came to see the Zionist project in real time, he recognized Rosenzweig's concerns and, though he remained steadfast in his Zionism, he also realized that Rosenzweig's critique was not unfounded.⁶¹ Secularization is a dangerous bargain, and in 1926 Scholem saw the odious possibilities of catastrophe. In the beginning of the letter, Scholem writes, "More than anything else we are concerned today about the Arab. But much more sinister [uncanny] (*unheimlicher*) than the Arab problem is another threat, a threat which the Zionist enterprise (*zionistische Unterfangen*) unavoidably has had to face: the 'actualization' (*Aktualisierung*) of Hebrew."⁶² Scholem calls the secular language he hears in the street "*volapuk*" (ghastly or ghostly). He calls the revivalists those with "demonic courage" who "believed blindly and almost obstinately in its miraculous power." He warns: "Fraught with danger is the Hebrew language [*Unheilschwer ist dies Hebraish*]." The danger of secularization was not that "the apocalyptic thorn had been pulled out." For Scholem, that was impossible because secularization of the holy is impossible. In fact, the danger is that the "apocalyptic thorn" can never

be pulled out! This “secular amnesia” is dangerous when the holy breaks through again, as it inevitably will.⁶³ This is why he described Hebrew in Palestine as a “volcano.” It is only a matter of time; the secular is merely the pressure that keeps the lava at bay. Scholem ends with an ominous prediction and prayer: “Those who called the Hebrew language back to life did not believe in this trial, yet they created it. May it not come to pass (*Moge uns dann nicht der Leichtsinn*) that the imprudence which has led us on this apocalyptic road ends in ruin.”⁶⁴

On the one hand, Herzog seems right: Scholem seems to be giving ground to Rosenzweig in his letter. Yet Scholem also knew that the eruption, even the “demonic courage,” must come about. He is, after all, a self-described “religious anarchist,” a scholar of heresy, a believer that the demonic and sacred are inextricably intertwined. William Cutter puts it quite succinctly, writing that for Scholem, “the Hebrew language contains a deep reservoir of religious power which must simultaneously be exploited and guarded against.”⁶⁵ For Scholem, Zionism was concealing the sacred but not extinguishing it. Yet it was “incapable of recognizing, let alone of grasping, the religious problematics, only incompletely and ineffectually concealed by that secularization.”⁶⁶ But Scholem’s “apocalyptic fantasies,” as Herzog writes, have both a disastrous and a potentially positive coda.⁶⁷ God will return because the language has been revived. What that will mean, however, is anybody’s guess. This is quite different, I submit, than Rav Kook’s dialectical reading of the secular.⁶⁸ For Kook, in the end the holy will swallow up the profane, which now houses it, and reemerge stronger than before. For Scholem, by contrast, the secular is not unwittingly taking part in the sacred that will burst forth from the Jews’ devotion to the land.⁶⁹ On the contrary, the profane or secular, for Scholem, is pressing down on the sacred, trying to extinguish it, trying to utter the names of God (as all *lashon ha kodesh* is, for Scholem following Nahmanides, divine names) in inappropriate places. Unlike Kook, the secular is not being swept up in cosmic history. Rather, it is trying to destroy it. But it cannot. Its attempt at murder will only awaken the beast. God is being rejected and called simultaneously. Waking the cosmic bear from hibernation is a dangerous endeavor about which Scholem was acutely aware.

Scholem’s notion of rupture through volcanic eruption in his letter to Rosenzweig mirrors, in some ways, an earlier essay by Scholem, “On Lament and Lamentation,” which is a reflection and extension of Walter Benjamin’s “On Language as Such and the Language of Man.”⁷⁰ There Scholem views language more generally as the expression of a fragmented absolute that can appear only through destruction and *zimzum*. Thus, expression is already an exilic state whereby the absolute appears only via a brokenness that is unalterable.⁷¹ Modern Hebrew, in this reading, may even represent a double brokenness: first a break from the absolute through *lashon ha-kodesh*, and then re-fragmentation from *lashon ha-kodesh* to a lingua franca.

And here I think we can see how Scholem, in his anarchic manner, speaks to the traditionalist Teitelbaum. On the question of language, Scholem is closer to

Teitelbaum than to Kook, even as he rejects both Teitelbaum's traditionalism and Kook's romanticism. Both Scholem and Teitelbaum view the secular as destructive, even demonic, and both view it as ephemeral—as Scholem called it, “*a facon de parler*” (passing phase). Kook sees the secular as ephemeral as well, but in a different way. Scholem and Teitelbaum have a different approach. Scholem believed that modernity had destroyed traditionalism, eviscerated the sacred, and made a traditional notion of faith impossible.⁷² But the holy remained because it is eternal, even in its absence. Teitelbaum may have agreed with this, but for him, tradition remained the only tool, even with modernity's challenge. In the very fallenness of modernity, what remained for Teitelbaum was attaching oneself to the ancestral norms (*yisrael saba*), even against one's will. As a premillennialist, Teitelbaum felt that holding on to tradition and waiting for the end was the only hope against the erasure of Jews and Judaism.⁷³ For Scholem, as he expressed to Rosenzweig, Zionism was the last remaining possibility of Jewish vitality, even though it might fail. For Teitelbaum, as he expresses in his post-1967 book *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al-Ha-Temurah*, Zionism was the final test that had to be resisted. The time will come, both Scholem and Teitelbaum say, when the divine will return. The question is only where one stands in the interim.

Language, for Bialik, is sacred. Speech, on the other hand, is secular: “But there came a day when these same words, having fallen from their height, were thrown aside, and now people wallow in them as they chat, as casually as one wallows in grass.”⁷⁴ But it is in the profanation through speech that language reaches its fulfillment: “The word receives its full vitality only within its existence in its country.”⁷⁵ I don't think that Bialik means “country” in a literal sense; rather, he is saying that language reaches its fulfillment when it can move from the purely ceremonial to the language of everyday speech, as long as it remains connected to its lofty roots. Speech is secular for Bialik because everyday language can never capture the wholeness and multivalence of sacred language but can only “concentrate on the one meaning that we need at the moment.”⁷⁶ Thus, for him, language as speech only conceals and never reveals. Holy language, on the other hand, stays in the realm of the “ceremonial,” always pointing beyond itself. The challenge of creating a lingua franca from the sacrality of a holy language is to ensure that the language carries its sanctity into its profanation: “The whole purpose of Hebrew speech, that is to say, the rule of that language over life, is to turn the sacred into the profane. . . . We must create and produce from the language and raise it to be a sacred tongue. And this can be done if we do not drive out of the language all the souls that have dwelled in it for thousands of years.”⁷⁷

In part, Bialik is pleading for profanation in the service of sacralization: to carry the sacred into the realm of the profane and, in doing so, enable language to reach its fulfillment in speech (as well as in secular prose and poetry, the topic of his essay “Revelment and Concealment”). If the ancient roots of Hebrew get lost in the process of profanation, “there will be no reason for speaking Hebrew.”⁷⁸ Why is this so? Because the very act of speech—which holds the potential to fulfill,

through profanation, the holiness embedded in the holy tongue—loses its potential. Even more so, the very function of the secular, which is the fulfillment of the sacred, is lost. Bialik does not express the drama of Scholem's demonic but simply laments the potential outcome of futility.

In some ways, one can hear Rav Kook's dialectical sacrality in Bialik, who, of course, knew Kook personally. But for Kook, embracing the secular was for the sake of return (*teshuvah*) to a more pristine notion of the sacred that would come to overrun its temporal vehicle. Not so for Bialik. The profanation of language was a gamble; this was not all a stage in a predetermined cosmic process. New Hebrew was a precarious experiment. If the mundane could bring the sacred beyond the ceremonial and into the world, a people could rise from obscurity. If not, the sacred would be lost in what Scholem called the "gibberish" of a language profaned and thus futile. It will be a skeleton with no flesh, and its opportunity for transformation will be lost.

Teitelbaum did not share Bialik's optimism for the secular. He was closer to Scholem's view of its "demonic" roots at best, but, more to the point, he did not believe that fulfillment was in the offing without divine fiat. Teitelbaum believed that the secular was a seductress and not a vehicle for sacrality. It would swallow up the sacred and not transform it. Teitelbaum and Bialik may have had similar views of the sacrality of *lashon ha-kodesh*, but they differed when it came to New Hebrew. That is because, for Teitelbaum, *lashon ha-kodesh* was instrumental for the proliferation of Torah and had no intrinsic value independent of that. He argues this by claiming that there is no halakhic mandate to know Hebrew outside of Torah study. Yet, as we will see, he believed that *lashon ha-kodesh* was the original language of humankind and even the language of creation, as the midrash teaches. But its sanctity was its inextricable connection to Torah. Once severed, once it serves the people and not God—that is, in Bialik's locution, once it is turned into the profane—it is not only futile, but also dangerous, to speak New Hebrew. And this brings us back to Scholem. New Hebrew was dangerous because there is nothing more dangerous than the holy severed from its roots. That is the recipe for the demonic. In his conclusion to "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," Scholem writes, "All profane languages are corrupted forms of the holy language that still, however, inherit and bear God's names."⁷⁹ With the insight that God's name evoked through a corrupted form is dangerous, Scholem comes close to Teitelbaum on this issue.

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE, HEBREW, AND THE TOWER OF BABEL: AUGUSTINE AND TEITELBAUM

Having (hopefully) created some avenue of exchange between Scholem, Bialik, and Teitelbaum, I will now examine one of the more homiletical aspects of Teitelbaum's essay and argue that it offers a kind of response to issues raised by Scholem and Bialik in regard to New Hebrew and the question of the secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh*. This section of Teitelbaum's essay has been adeptly analyzed

by Schechter in his essay on “The Defiled Language Called Hebrew,” cited above. Here, I offer a somewhat different but largely complementary approach.

One of the most mythic genealogies of language is the Hebrew Bible’s story of the Tower of Babel (Migdal Bavel), also called “the generation of dispersion” (*dor ha-palaga*) (Gen. 11). It is also the chapter in Genesis that introduces us to Abraham, which will be relevant to the genealogy of *lashon ha-kodesh*. The verse *Everyone on earth spoke the same language* (Gen. 11:1) has bothered Jews and Christians alike. What language was spoken before God confused the languages and caused human dispersion? The “why” is much more explicit in Scripture than the “what”: *And the Lord said, “As one people with one language for all, if this is what they have begun to do [build a tower to heaven], now nothing they plot to do will elude them. Come, let us go down and baffle their language there so that they will not understand each other’s speech”* (Gen. 11:6, 11:7). The language they spoke in unison is never delineated. This question also becomes linked to the language of Abraham, who emerges in the latter part of chapter 11. In his commentary to the Torah, Rashi comments on *Everyone on earth spoke the same language* to suggest that the language was *lashon ha-kodesh*.⁸⁰ This suggests that today’s *lashon ha-kodesh* was the remnant of the antediluvian language of humankind, which, according to some texts, stretches back to Adam and Eve. Of course, midrashic texts suggest that *lashon ha-kodesh* was the language with which God created the world, an idea that (excluding Maimonides) many Jews accept as true.⁸¹ But in speaking about human language, Rashi’s comment, echoing midrashic tradition, places *lashon ha-kodesh* as a remnant of an antediluvian world.⁸²

Most Jewish thinkers view Hebrew as the antediluvian language in somewhat triumphalist terms—that is, that *lashon ha-kodesh*/Hebrew is the original language of humankind. However, Teitelbaum has a different reading, while still agreeing with the premise of the language’s inherent sanctity. In many cases, the question of the antediluvian status of *lashon ha-kodesh* becomes focused on Abraham, given that his introduction in the text shares space with the Tower of Babel’s demise. In the pre-rabbinic Book of Jubilees (second century BCE), we see one of the earliest comments about Abraham’s language: “Then the Lord God said to me, ‘Open his mouth and his ears to hear and speak with his tongue in the revealed language. For from the day of the collapse [of Babel] it had disappeared from the mouth(s) of all humankind. I opened his mouth, ears, and lips and began to speak Hebrew with him—in the language of creation. He took his father’s books—they were also written in Hebrew and copied them’ (Jubilees 22, 12:22–27).” Jubilees fuses three distinct points: first, that Hebrew is the language of creation; second, that Hebrew was the antediluvian language that disappeared after Babel; and third, that God spoke to Abraham in Hebrew and thus Abraham must have known that language. That is, Abraham understood Hebrew in some way, even though it was subsequently lost. As we will presently see, Augustine takes up that question and offers a genealogical answer.

Augustine (354–430 CE) devotes an entire chapter in *City of God* to the origins of Hebrew, apparently elaborating on the Book of Jubilees:⁸³

This is the reason why, as I mentioned above, Heber/Eber is given prominence as the first in the list of those sons of Shem who were the ancestors of individual nations, although Heber/Eber was Shem's great-great-grandson. The same language [Hebrew] continued to be used in the family when the other nations were divided [in the Tower of Babel story] and there is good reason to believe that this was the language common to all humankind in previous ages. This explains why this language was henceforth called Hebrew (Heber/Eber) for at that point it had to be distinguished from the other tongues by a proper name. . . . [Before that] it had no other name than "the human tongue" or "human speech" since it was the only language spoken by humankind. . . . It is not without significance that Hebrew was the language used by Abraham, and that he could not hand it down to all his descendants but only to those who were descended from Jacob. . . . And Heber/Eber himself did not bequeath that language to all posterity, but only to the line whose generations can be followed down to Abraham.⁸⁴

According to Augustine, Abraham was one of the few (or perhaps the only one) who inherited the antediluvian language that was otherwise lost. And he handed it down to the Jacobean lineage alone: "And so, when the question is raised, about the division of languages, where that language could have persisted which was the common language of earlier days—the only answer that suggests itself is that it persisted in the family of the man from whom the language took its name [Heber/Eber]. And there is an impressive indication of the righteousness of that nation in the fact that when the other nations were chastised by the change of languages, this punishment did not extend to that people [descendants of Jacob]."⁸⁵

Abraham's knowledge of *lashon ha-kodesh* is embedded in both Jewish and Christian traditions and used for different purposes. Teitelbaum devoted a series of chapters in his essay to the genealogy of *lashon ha-kodesh*. He does not offer anything new but, in true homiletic form, uses classical sources to make a case against the secularization of the language based on its sacred power. He begins by citing *Sefer Kuzari*, essay 68, which he draws from a comment by Jacob Emden (Yaavetz, 1667–1776), in his commentary to the Torah, suggesting that Abraham spoke two languages: Hebrew (Ivrit) and Aramaic. Teitelbaum asks,

Why then did Abraham need to speak another language, since certainly a person of his high stature should speak *lashon ha-kodesh*? And it is not legitimate to say he needed to speak Aramaic in order to communicate with other peoples, because for that purpose he would have needed all seventy languages, since "[Abraham was so knowledgeable in astrology] that all the kings of the east and west would come early to his door" (b.T. Baba Batra 16b). And Rashi comments on the verse *the Valley of the King* (Gen. 14:17) that "all the kinds agreed in appointing Abraham as prince and leader over them."⁸⁶

Teitelbaum then cites alternative views suggesting that the language Ivrit was not necessarily *lashon ha-kodesh* but in fact the language from “over the river” (*‘ever ha-nahar*) where Abram originated. In doing so, he deflects the notion that Abraham knew *lashon ha-kodesh* but spoke Aramaic to others:

R. Ovadya Bartenura (1445–1515) and Tosafot Yom Tov [R. Yom Tov Lippman Heller, 1579–1654] on Mishna Yadayim 4:5 write that *lashon ivri* is *lashon ha-kodesh*, which appears to agree with Kuzari. Tosafot Yom Tov brings his proof from Rashi. But from what we see in the midrash that Abraham spoke “*Lashon Ivri*,” Yofe To’ar [commentary to Midrash Raba] states that this was not *lashon ha-kodesh*. This is all the more so in regard to Rashi, who didn’t comment from the language but only from the place, that is, from beyond the river, which is no proof at all that the language was *lashon ha-kodesh*.

Maimonides is not decisive about this in his comment in the *Commentary to the Mishna*. People want to claim that for Maimonides *lashon ivri* is *lashon ha-kodesh*, and yet from Maimonides’s words we do not see anything definitive about this.⁸⁷ In any case, according to Kuzari, who clearly held that *lashon ivri* is *lashon ha-kodesh*, he nevertheless held that in mundane matters Abraham spoke Aramaic.⁸⁸

His point in all of this is first to complicate the midrashic notion (cited in Rashi) that Abraham spoke *lashon ha-kodesh*. And yet Teitelbaum does not at all reject *lashon ha-kodesh* as the antediluvian language. Rather, his assessment is founded on a question not asked in the sources: “If Abraham did indeed speak *lashon ha-kodesh*, which was the holy language of creation, why did he use Aramaic as a lingua franca? Why would he forgo using the sacred language for all purposes?” One possibility is that *lashon ivri* is not *lashon ha-kodesh*. But he seems to reject that and holds that it is. And so his question remains. One can see here how this question is a setup for his critique of the New Hebrew project. There had to be a reason why Abraham knew *lashon ha-kodesh* yet chose to speak Aramaic.

His answer is based on a Zoharic passage that he cites a few chapters later, one of the few Zoharic passages in *Vayael Moshe* upon which Teitelbaum bases an argument:⁸⁹

If you ask: why was their language scattered and scrambled?—it is because they were all speaking *lashon ha-kodesh*—and that language aided them, for the act of enunciation is essential to attaining one’s intention.⁹⁰ In this way they supported the place they sought to erect. So their language was confounded to prevent them from empowering their desire in *lashon ha-kodesh*. As soon as this language mutated, they failed in their project, since the powers above know and recognize only *lashon ha-kodesh*. Come and see: A word spoken by lower creatures in *lashon ha-kodesh* is comprehended by all the powers in heaven, who are thereby invigorated, but with any other language they do not comprehend or recognize it. So as soon as their language was scrambled, they stopped building the city. For their power fractured, and despite their desire they could not accomplish anything.⁹¹

See that it is written, *Look they are one people with one language for them all* (Gen. 11:6). Since they share a single heart, a single will, and a single language, *lashon ha-kodesh*, now *nothing that they scheme to do will be barred from them* (Gen. 11:6). What will I do? I will confound the levels above and their language below, and thus prevent their actions.⁹²

The Zohar suggests that the success of the Tower of Babel was due to their utilization of *lashon ha-kodesh*, which contains intrinsic power such that in whatever they will do, even destructive things, they will be successful. That is, for the Zohar, *lashon ha-kodesh* has the power even to successfully wage war against God. Here Schechter suggests that “the language before Babel was the great heresy of Babel.”⁹³ That is, the language itself gave human beings too much power if it was severed from fidelity to divine will. Thus, to thwart such a rebellion, God stopped them from speaking *lashon ha-kodesh*. Teitelbaum continues:

According to the Zohar, it is clear that the entire episode was dependent on the fact that God took *lashon ha-kodesh* away from them. And all the while they spoke *lashon ha-kodesh*, miracles occurred in order for them to succeed, as we see in Midrash Raba on the verse *And they came upon the valley in the land of Shinar and settled there* (Gen. 11:2).⁹⁴ R. Nehemia said they found jokesters there to make fun. According to *Yofe To'ar*, in that place miracles happened in order for them to enact their evil deeds.

Nevertheless, anyone who looks at the Zohar will know and understand the great tragedy if evil ones speak *lashon ha-kodesh*, for this is precisely how the generation of the Tower of Babel succeeded in compelling the entire world against God and subsequently caused great punishment [to descend upon the world]. Even though this was the generation of Abraham and Noah, and of Shem and Ever, nevertheless there was no way to nullify the evil [of the people] and successfully calm this rebellion without the miracle of removing *lashon ha-kodesh* from their midst.⁹⁵

Teitelbaum is responding here to those authorities who claim that *lashon ha-kodesh* was the antediluvian language, using the Zohar's insight that the language was the source of their successful rebellion, which would be undone only if *lashon ha-kodesh* was taken away from them. He then swings back to answer his original question, based on the Kuzari, of whether Abraham knew *lashon ha-kodesh* but spoke Aramaic as a lingua franca. The reason, he suggests, is that Abraham knew that *lashon ha-kodesh* contained divine power that could be used for destructive ends (like the rebellion of Babel) and thus did not want it to become a lingua franca, lest others use it for similar purposes.⁹⁶ That is, Teitelbaum claims that Abraham knew the power of *lashon ha-kodesh* and thus refrained from speaking it: “After this there is no longer any question as to why Abraham didn't speak *lashon ha-kodesh* all the time, because he did not want others to speak it. We have already seen the great destruction that occurred through this language in the generation of Babel.”⁹⁷ This approach is another iteration of Teitelbaum's view that the demonic is simply the holy that became severed from its roots. Whereas in *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*, Zionism becomes the embodiment of the

Antichrist (my term, not his), here he argues that what we mean by the “secularization” of Hebrew is really a severing from its utility as a vehicle of Torah. This secularization process enables others to use it for rebellious purposes. And those intentions will invariably be successful because they have the power of *lashon ha-kodesh* as their tool, a tool that becomes a heretical weapon. Elsewhere, in a sermon he gave during the war, Teitelbaum accuses Agudat Yisrael of siding with the Zionists and thereby being, like many innocents in the time of the Tower of Babel, guilty by association.⁹⁸

Teitelbaum is not alone here. Sholom DovBer Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher rebbe, also argued, around 1916, that *lashon ha-kodesh* was a “revealed language” that preceded any “people” and should not be used to communicate mundane matters. He writes, “*Lashon ha-kodesh* is the language of Torah and not the language of any people. . . . It is separate from all other languages. With all other languages, the people preceded the language, but *lashon ha-kodesh* precedes all creations.”⁹⁹

In some ways, Teitelbaum here cedes to both Scholem and Bialik, but especially to Scholem, on the dangers of the New Hebrew project. Each concedes that its ostensible secularization could lead to destructive consequences. Scholem goes so far as to call it a “volcano,” and Bialik warns his readers of the futility of the New Hebrew movement if it does not function as an expression of continuity with sacred sources instead of a rebellion against them. Here Bialik may be thinking of Yosef Hayyim Brenner’s view of Zionism as the Nietzschean “transvaluation of all values.” But there is perhaps a more general fear of the danger of nationalism. Oded Schechter suggests that “the first act of language was the confusion of languages. The additional act [or the other end] of languages is the Nationalist-Zionist project. The great heresy of Zionism, of nationalism, must pass through the Tower of Babel by means of a universal language.”¹⁰⁰ In this sense, the great danger lies in bringing back that which God removed or, as Teitelbaum argues elsewhere in *Vayael Moshe*, returning before the apportioned time.

Teitelbaum stands on one side of the debate while Scholem and Bialik stand on the other. All three seem to consider the New Hebrew movement a rebellion, albeit for Scholem and Bialik perhaps a necessary one—for Bialik, in order to bring the sacred language (as “ceremonial”) to its fully embodied state in a people through speech; for Scholem, to cut through the tradition to the bone and to the point of rupture whereby something new, yet undetermined, will arise. Teitelbaum remains strictly bound to the traditional paradigm. For him, Zionism (or nationalism more generally), like Babel, will initially succeed because the Zionists have the power of *lashon ha-kodesh* on their side. But that success is ephemeral (Scholem’s “passing phase”) because it is all a rebellion, ultimately, against the trajectory of history as Teitelbaum understands it. The success of Zionism for Teitelbaum, like the Tower of Babel, is not necessarily a sign of divine favor but could just as easily be viewed as the opposite, an exercise in the use of divine power to undermine redemptive history.¹⁰¹ Scholem, and to a lesser extent Bialik, considered that possibility as well.

But given each one's view of the damaging impact of modernity on the possibility of traditional faith, there was really no other choice in their minds.

The secularization of *lashon ha-kodesh* is impossible, as Scholem and Bialik acknowledge. The names of God embedded in it hold the power to redeem and the corollary power to destroy. For Teitelbaum, Babel was the paradigm of the nationalist project, the Zionist project, that evoked the antediluvian language of *lashon ha-kodesh* to fulfill its mission, even in its corrupted form. But even in that form, the power of sanctity remains; and, when used to unify, it results in division. And thus, the attempt at unification is the very cause of dispersion (*palaga*).

IS THERE AN OBLIGATION TO KNOW HEBREW? A HALAKHIC INQUIRY INTO LANGUAGE AS ARBITER OF CULTURE

As mentioned earlier, Teitelbaum's essay on *lashon ha-kodesh* was originally constructed as an answer to a letter by Pinchas Hirschprung from Montreal about the proper education of girls in the *haredi* mindset. Teitelbaum gets to that question only in the latter part of the essay.

There is considerable other work that he needs to do, in order to be prepared to weigh in on that contemporary issue. The essay can be divided roughly into four separate yet interconnected sections. The first is a halakhic analysis of the role of *lashon ha-kodesh* in rabbinic and responsa literature, which I briefly analyze in this section. The second is a homiletic reading of the Tower of Babel and of the antediluvian status of *lashon ha-kodesh* and the natural language of humankind, which I analyzed above. It is here that Teitelbaum makes his case, mostly covertly, against the New Hebrew movement. The third section engages the rabbinic debate about whether women should be taught Torah at all, focusing on the disagreement between R. Eliezer and Simeon ben Azzai in the Mishna on the question of Sotah. Finally, Teitelbaum gets to the more contemporary question of how girls' education should proceed in our time, engaging the Hafetz Hayyim and others whose sources were used to establish girls' schools in Europe, specifically the Bais Yaakov schools.

I rehearse the division of these sections again here because the ordering is intentional. As a halakhist, Teitelbaum begins all such inquiries with a purely halakhic argument, before he can move to the question at hand about girls' education, where the teaching of *lashon ha-kodesh* as a language becomes a relevant issue, even in the context of Torah education. Unless the halakhic and thus obligatory nature of *lashon ha-kodesh* can be properly adjudicated, the educational question cannot be properly assessed. Embedded throughout the essay is Teitelbaum's study of the nature of language more generally, in its roles and functions as a means of communication, a vehicle for disseminating Torah knowledge, and a necessity for communal cohesion or national revival. This is all made more complex by the mythic origins of *lashon ha-kodesh* and its contemporary importance, as its status shifts from the

divine language of creation itself, to the antediluvian natural language of humanity, saved from obscurity after the Tower of Babel by Abraham, to a tool of revival as a lingua franca in Zionism. Above, I discussed some of these questions by putting Teitelbaum in conversation with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, and Gershom Scholem on the New Hebrew movement. Here I will briefly review the parameters of Teitelbaum's halakhic argument, with attention to what is at stake and the ways in which his narrow analysis suggests a broader definition of the status of language within the orbit of Torah study and discussion of whether *lashon ha-kodesh* should or can play a role outside the orbit of Torah.¹⁰²

One of the salient rabbinic discussions about the nature and status of language, specifically *lashon ha-kodesh*, is embedded in a debate about parents' obligation to teach their children *lashon ha-kodesh*. Teitelbaum begins with a small cadre of rabbinic texts about this issue: the early midrash Sifri on "Akev,"¹⁰³ a Tosefta in Hagigah, and two Talmudic passages, one in b.T. Sukkah 42a and the second in b.T. Kiddushin 29a.¹⁰⁴ The biblical verse in question is Deuteronomy 11:19, *And you should teach them to your children and speak to them*. The early midrash uses this verse to exclude women from the obligation to study Torah (*them*, your sons but not your daughters), but Sifri then parenthetically notes, "From this we learn that when a child begins to speak, the father should speak to him in *lashon ha-kodesh* and teach him Torah." That is, the verbs *to teach* and *to speak* in the verse are connected, such that, just as a father is obligated to "teach" his son Torah, he is also obligated to "speak" to him in *lashon ha-kodesh*, the language that he teaches him. Whether this "speech" refers to a vernacular conversation or simply an act that will hone his son's language skills for study is not made clear in the rabbinic material and becomes relevant only later on.

On the recitation of the Shema, there are two positions. First, b.T. Sukkah 42a: "[When a child begins to speak] his father should teach him Torah and how to recite the Shema. From where do we learn that he must teach him Torah? R. Hamenuna teaches, *Moses commanded us in the Torah as an inheritance to the community of Jacob* (Deut. 33:4). From where do we learn that he must teach him to recite the Shema? From the first verse [*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*]. And second, Tosefta Hagigah 1, 'When a child begins to speak the father should teach him to recite the Shema, Torah, and *lashon ha-kodesh*.'" Teitelbaum notes, as others have, that these three sources seem to be saying slightly different things. The Sifri included *lashon ha-kodesh* in a father's obligation, as does Hagigah 1, albeit the order is changed. In the Tosefta, *lashon ha-kodesh* is last, whereas in Sifri it is first. And finally, in Sukkah 42a, *lashon ha-kodesh* is not mentioned at all, as the father's obligation applies only to teaching one's son Torah and the Shema. In addition, in b.T. Kiddushin 29a, *lashon ha-kodesh* is also not mentioned. The father's obligation is only circumcision, Torah, and a vocation (and, in some cases, teaching the boy to swim). Of course, since the Torah is written in *lashon ha-kodesh*, the son must know the language. Teitelbaum's point here

is only to note that teaching the language may not have an obligatory status, meaning that it serves an auxiliary and not a primary function in the mitzvah of Talmud Torah and has no function outside of that.

The question as to why the earlier sources (Sifri and Hagigah) include *lashon ha-kodesh* while the Babylonian Talmud excises *lashon ha-kodesh* from its list of parental obligations is a subject of continued scholarly debate. The reader can go through my annotated translation of "Essay on the Holy Language," chapters 1, 2, 11, 13, and 16, to see how Teitelbaum addresses this issue. Here I want to briefly review one of his arguments that speaks to what I view as his larger point about language.

In chapter 13 of "Essay on the Holy Language," Teitelbaum raises a point on the dangers of *lashon ha-kodesh* in a comment by Ezekiel Landau in his book *Tziyyon le-Nefesh Haya* that addresses the rabbinic prohibition against studying *higayon* (logic).¹⁰⁵ Above, we saw that regarding the Tower of Babel, Teitelbaum argued that *lashon ha-kodesh* served as a human tool of divine power that can be used for both constructive and destructive purposes. Here the danger of the language is more mundane: Severed from the tradition, here meaning the Oral Law, it can be used as a tool of heresy. In both cases, the New Hebrew movement seems to hover over the homiletic and halakhic discussions.

In b.T. Berakhot 28b, the sages taught: "When R. Eliezer was sick, his students came to visit him. They said to him, 'Teach us the proper ways to live (*orkhot hayyim*)' so that we may merit the world to come. He said to them, 'Be vigilant in honor of your colleagues and keep your children away from logic (*higayon*).'" On this Rashi comments, "Do not teach them too much Scripture." Landau writes that "this is because the study of Scripture, even for those who have corrupt ideas (*de'ot nifsadot*), is to learn the language [of Scripture] as one would learn other languages. And if you only accustom your children to study Scripture, one may hire a teacher from those [heretics], as they know how to teach very well. As a result, your child will be drawn after their corrupt ways."¹⁰⁶ However, educating the youths according to the path of Torah and having them 'sit on the knees of Torah scholars [is the proper way].'"¹⁰⁷

Landau was living right on the cusp of biblical criticism, when the question of language loomed large for Orientalist philologists.¹⁰⁸ As a result, the medieval prohibition against studying Scripture without the Oral Law took on new meaning as the study of the Hebrew Bible "on its own terms," as Spinoza suggested, grew in prominence.¹⁰⁹ Teitelbaum uses Landau's warning about Bible teachers who use the Bible to learn its language as a rendering of Rashi's understanding of the prohibition of *higayon*, read here not as logic but instead as studying the Written Law without the Oral Law. This gives him an occasion to offer reasons for why the Talmud does not include the study of *lashon ha-kodesh* as obligatory:

Nevertheless, we are afraid of those who teach Scripture [alone] because there are those among them who do so for the purposes of language. This is thus even more

the case with language teachers, among whom we see even more who have corrupted views. In addition, the study of language is not obligatory like the study of Scripture, which is certainly part of the Toraic mitzvah of Talmud Torah.¹¹⁰ Therefore, perhaps the Talmud does not mention *lashon ha-kodesh* even as it may not stand in contradiction to Tosefta, which argued that perhaps *lashon ha-kodesh* is rabbinic because, in any case [according to both], there is great benefit [in knowing *lashon ha-kodesh*]. However, this may also include certain hazards, heaven forbid, as we see from Tosafot Yebamot 86b s.v. “*mar*”: “Because it may contain hazards, perhaps the sages did not mandate it, since there was a fear that he may come to eat it. . . . We can say that as the generations diminished and licentiousness increased, the Talmud returned to erase the study of language [from its list].”¹¹¹

Once Teitelbaum has removed *lashon ha-kodesh* as part of a Toraic mitzvah, perhaps even a rabbinic one, he offers a reason as to why it can even, possibly, constitute a prohibition if it is used for purposes other than Torah. That is, *lashon ha-kodesh* operates in a purely functional mode, as it is the language of Torah. Here he comes close to the Maimonidean position on Hebrew, where Maimonides frames *lashon ha-kodesh* as a “light mitzvah.” Teitelbaum goes even further: In certain instances, *lashon ha-kodesh* may be prohibited. This is not to diminish its importance—one cannot study Torah without it—but only to suggest that it plays a crucial yet auxiliary role in the orbit of mitzvot. Language makes Talmud Torah possible, but language itself is not obligatory. Thus, if *lashon ha-kodesh* becomes severed from the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, or if it is used to undermine the Torah’s authenticity as represented in the Oral Law, it becomes prohibited as *higayon*.

There is more to Teitelbaum’s argument than one can see in the translation of the essay in this volume. Suffice it to say here that Teitelbaum’s claim to decouple *lashon ha-kodesh* from mitzvot and make it rather a function of mitzvot, based on the curious absence of *lashon ha-kodesh* as obligatory in the Talmud, enables him to consider the instances when *lashon ha-kodesh* can function productively and its boundaries. By using Landau’s comments on *higayon* as applying to language in a world where Torah itself is being decoupled from tradition, Teitelbaum sets up his case against the secularization of Hebrew as well as his position on the role of language instruction in girls’ education. Needless to say, boys do not need formal language instruction because they absorb knowledge of the language through Torah study and thus, for boys, language study simply folds into Talmud Torah. Moreover, the entire educational structure for boys is designed to reproduce the rabbinic power structure. But since girls are not commanded in Talmud Torah and are not educated to be part of that authoritative system, Torah knowledge serves a different function for them. According to Teitelbaum, girls need to know the laws, and thus a legitimate question is how the study of *lashon ha-kodesh* should function in their curriculum. Before moving there, however, it is worth briefly considering what Teitelbaum has accomplished thus far.

In his homiletic analysis, Teitelbaum noted the mythic power of *lashon ha-kodesh* as a tool that enables human beings to accomplish what they wish, for

good or evil. In that case, when human beings abuse *lashon ha-kodesh* as a tool of rebellion in the Tower of Babel, God takes it away from them, disassembling their rebellious unity, and *lashon ha-kodesh* survives solely in the line of Abraham, keeping it within the boundaries of divine will (i.e., Torah). As we saw, both Augustine's *City of God* and the Book of Jubilees make similar comments.

All of this, of course, takes place before Sinai, and thus the halakhic frame does not apply. Teitelbaum's halakhic analysis is post-Sinaitic, and *lashon ha-kodesh* is already inside the orbit of Torah, so the question then becomes its place, status, and function within that system. Is *lashon ha-kodesh* a mitzvah—and if so, what kind? He concludes from his analysis of the rabbinic sources that while it may once have had the status of mitzvah (in Sifri and Tosefta Hagigah), it seems to have lost that status in the Talmud Bavli for unknown reasons. Elsewhere in his essay (though not analyzed here), Teitelbaum suggests that the position of the Sifri was before the decree (*takana*) of establishing schools, so *lashon ha-kodesh* was required in cases where a child would have to teach himself Torah if his father could not teach him, whereas the Bavli's position is made after the decree establishing schools, so self-learning was no longer a fear and thus the child could learn Torah from a teacher in school.¹¹² This does not suggest that one should not learn *lashon ha-kodesh*, but severs it from an obligatory status; thus, in cases where language itself can become a source of heresy outside and against the orbit of Talmud Torah, it should not be taught as a separate subject.

The danger of *lashon ha-kodesh* as a tool of heresy is taken up parenthetically elsewhere, when Teitelbaum discusses the hazards of heresy that cloaks itself in Torah, basing his discussion on b.T. Berakhot 12b, “do not go after your heart's desire, this is heresy (*minut*),” where Rashi comments, “*Minut*—those who turn Torah's meaning (*ta'amei ha-Torah*) to error and idolatry (*midrash ta'ut ve alil*).”¹¹³ This long passage, which I will examine more closely elsewhere, appears to be a covert critique of Rav Kook or religious Zionism more generally, but the underlying assumption is that heresy that cloaks itself in mitzvot is worse than heresy that doesn't (*kofer b'ikar*).¹¹⁴ In addition, harkening back to the Tower of Babel, the success of the New Hebrew movement, or of Zionism more generally, is not necessarily a sign of divine will, but could easily be the opposite. This is because, as the Zohar argues, the use of *lashon ha-kodesh* empowers anyone who uses it, whatever their intended purpose. Even if that purpose is to cause rebellion against God, it may be successful until which time God intervenes.

HEBREW AND TORAH EDUCATION: SHOULD WOMEN BE TAUGHT HEBREW?

In his book *Jewish Women's Torah Study*, Ilan Fuchs writes:

Women's religious education became a fact of Orthodox Jewish life. After the Second World War, haredi society built itself around the learners' society, which

required women with the ideological stamina to accept the hardship of full-time employment as well as traditional domestic duties. The old debates on women's education were long forgotten and Beis Yaakov is portrayed as an eternal part of Orthodoxy. While in the pre-war years Beis Yaakov encountered some opposition, the eventual approval of the rabbinic leadership helped the schools in the post-war era become a fundamental and natural part of haredi society. The rationale for Beis Yaakov is that women are not a part of the core of Torah learning: the realm of the Talmud remains a masculine dominion, but women are granted access to some Jewish texts.¹¹⁵

Fuchs's assessment is quite succinct. By the 1950s, it seemed like the battles around women's Torah study, and the establishment of schools for ultra-Orthodox girls, had been resolved. But some issues remained, particularly pertaining to questions of curriculum and the study of Talmud. Importantly, there was ongoing debate as to whether girls could study from original texts or if they must study via condensed excerpts prepared for them, and whether language study was to be part of the curriculum.

I begin this section with Fuchs's quote because Teitelbaum was one of the few who stood on both sides of this debate. Some of the most vehement opposition to the Bais Yaakov schools in prewar Europe came from the region of Máramaros in northwest Hungary where Teitelbaum served as a rabbi. He openly criticized the Bais Yaakov school project in numerous places before and after the war. As a Holocaust survivor and one of the most conscientious builders of postwar ultra-Orthodoxy in America, Teitelbaum also had to confront the reality that a girls' school was necessary for his community to flourish. While hardly an innovator, Teitelbaum had to justify doing what much of the ultra-Orthodox rabbinic establishment in prewar Europe had prohibited: establishing a school to educate women in Torah. He is open about his deviance from accepted norms in his community, although he argues that there is loose precedent, even in rabbinic literature, for establishing such schools. He focuses on the curricular parameters of this new development to maximize communal fidelity and the perpetuation of religious norms and practices.

In many ways, the entire program of women's education is founded on the Hafetz Hayyim's (Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1838–1933) famous remark regarding *Sotah* that, due to changed circumstances, women had to be educated in Torah. He writes: "But now, because of our sins, the tradition of our fathers has been greatly diluted, and it is common not to live in the same place as our forefathers; especially for those women who are learning to read and write the languages of the gentiles, it is a great mitzvah to teach them Scripture and the prophets and sacred and moral teachings of our sages . . . because if not, they might leave the path of God completely and act against the foundations of our faith, God forbid."¹¹⁶

Much has been written about the Hafetz Hayyim's views in this regard that far exceed the limits of the present examination, though I will discuss Teitelbaum's reading of the Hafetz Hayyim below.¹¹⁷ Even as the Hafetz Hayyim was writing in

Poland, suffice it to say that almost everyone, including Teitelbaum, recognized America as a place where the role of women in the ultra-Orthodox community required some revision, given both the factors Kagan described and the economic conditions that required women to enter the workforce.¹¹⁸ Teitelbaum was aware of this, and his “Essay on the Holy Language” is, in part, an intervention showing how to proceed.

Before examining this part of Teitelbaum’s essay, it is worth noting that in this case—unlike with his remarks on *lashon ha-kodesh* more generally—there was a plethora of contemporary material available, even when this essay was written in the 1950s. Whether Teitelbaum was aware of that contemporary writing is unclear, but he never cites any of it. This is not unusual; Teitelbaum typically builds his arguments through an analysis of earlier (Rishonim) and later (Acharonim) halakhic authorities, the latest of which precede him by a generation or two. This was a very common practice in the world in which he was raised and trained. In addition, he is very regional in his thinking, focusing on later authorities within his Hungarian/Transylvanian/Slovakian environs. Like most halakhic authorities, he has favorite medieval glossators and decisors (*poskim*) who return again and again in his work. At the very least, Teitelbaum viewed himself as the best among equals and had little need to cite his contemporaries.

My point in these preliminary remarks is simply to note that Teitelbaum’s method is jurisprudential in a classical sense, working through the relevant rabbinic material, its medieval glossators, and then selected later authorities. Here, as in the case of his assessment of *lashon ha-kodesh*, this is not done in a vacuum, and here in particular Teitelbaum is quite open about the context in which he is writing (this is less overt in his comments about Hebrew). Fuchs notes: “Halachic discourse on women’s education is thus the interplay of three motifs: traditional community, modern Western values, and women. Beyond giving voice to deep-seated assumptions about gender, rabbis and community leaders create different models of how community and Western culture relate, which in turn may shape their vision of women’s education.”¹¹⁹ For Teitelbaum I would add another dimension: the role that language plays in an educational framework, in terms of maintaining fidelity to authority (as opposed to threatening to undermine it). As an ultra-Orthodox leader who was committed to maintaining strict standards of communal cohesion in an attempt to resist modernity while enabling it to also subtly alter communal norms, Teitelbaum understood the hierarchical structure of education not only in terms of disseminating knowledge (what women could or could not learn), but also in regard to maintaining control of even elements of the ultra-Orthodox life that are permitted to change. As we will see, that is where the study of language enters into his analysis.¹²⁰

It is not until chapter 30 of “Essay on the Holy Language” that Teitelbaum turns to the question of girls’ education, which was the initial occasion for the essay. In the essay’s first part, he established a position on *lashon ha-kodesh* that views it as

a subsidiary, albeit necessary, dimension of Torah study but not as a part of the obligatory orbit of commandments. The result is that for him language, specifically *lashon ha-kodesh*, serves a functional role whose sole purpose is to disseminate Torah. Thus, he argues against any evidence (of which there is little) that Hebrew functioned as a spoken language in antiquity, except perhaps among small circles of elite Jewish sages.¹²¹ *Lashon ha-kodesh* serves no other purpose in his mind, and thus, due to its inherent sanctity, using it for secular purposes is not only prohibited but destructive, as he argued in his reading of the story of the Tower of Babel. As we will see when he turns to girls' education, which was already quite normative in the ultra-Orthodox world by the 1950s (largely due to the founding of the Bais Yaakov schools in 1917), Teitelbaum uses *lashon ha-kodesh* as a wedge issue that separates his views on girls' education from the views of his contemporaries, such as proponents of Bais Yaakov, about which he was very critical.

Teitelbaum begins with a detailed halakhic analysis of the disagreement between ben Azzai and R. Eliezer in the Mishna on Sotah, about women studying Torah, a disagreement that stands at the center of any halakhic debate about this issue. I will not rehearse the way in which Teitelbaum reads the ben Azzai and R. Eliezer debate, as it appears in my translation of his essay in a separate volume. Here, I will merely examine a few points he makes in transitioning to the question of schools and curricula.

The notion that there is no obligation (*mitzvah*) to teach women Torah is not contested in the classical sources. "Daughters" (*b'noteyhem*) are explicitly excluded from the obligation of being taught Torah in the early midrashim. The only issue is whether they can or should learn Torah at all (and, if so, what kind and how). Much of this revolves around the notion of *tiflut*, or folly, the term R. Eliezer uses in the Mishna to dissuade men from teaching their daughters ("teaching women Torah is teaching them *tiflut*"). Even the Hafetz Hayyim, whose comments are the basis for girls' education, does not dispute the term but (1) speaks of changed circumstances that may require women to know Torah in spite of the prohibition and (2) argues that *tiflut* applies only to Oral Law and not to the Written Law or the books of character development (*musar*).¹²² Thus, decisors that are open to women's Torah education must contextualize this Mishnaic term or significantly limit its scope.

Teitelbaum takes a slightly different tack by suggesting that the permissibility of teaching women Torah arises, ostensibly, from ben Azzai's position about teaching them the laws of Sotah so that they can know the laws that may impact their lives. But once Sotah is nullified, as in ben Azzai's position, there is really no disagreement between ben Azzai and R. Eliezer. Ben Azzai would agree that, apart from the laws of Sotah, women are not permitted to learn Torah. Teitelbaum writes:

The essential nature of the decision of Maimonides and the *Tur* [*Shulkhan Arukh*] not to teach one's daughter Torah is written in the *Kesef Mishneh* [by R. Joseph Karo]

on Maimonides and the *Beit Yosef* [by Karo] on the *Tur* that when there is a disagreement between ben Azzai and R. Eliezer we decide according to R. Eliezer. Barkhi Yosef [R. Yosef David Azulai, 1724–1806] asks why we decide according to R. Eliezer and not according to ben Azzai. . . . In my humble opinion, I am not sure why we have to say that we decide according to R. Eliezer here in his disagreement with ben Azzai. This is because ben Azzai also writes that the entire reason for teaching girls Torah is so that they should know the laws of Sotah. Thus, the only reason for them to know Torah is for the purposes of their knowing the laws of Sotah. If so, today the waters of Sotah [to discern a women's infidelity] are not consumed, as we learn from the Talmud Sotah 7b, cited in Maimonides in [*Mishneh Torah*] "Laws of Sotah" 3:19, that the waters of Sotah were consumed only when there was a Sanhedrin of seventy elders. And even during the Second Temple in the days of R. Yohanan ben Zakkai, they nullified consuming the waters of Sotah, as we see in b.T. Sotah 47a: "When adulterers proliferated the ritual of bitter waters was nullified, as it is written, *I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry* (Hosea 4:14)." Thus, since in our time the waters are not consumed, the reason of ben Azzai [for girls learning Torah] was nullified and we really no longer find a disagreement between [R. Eliezer] and ben Azzai on this issue.

So too we can say that *your sons* and thus "not your daughters" refers to the entirety of Talmud Torah. Thus, in regard to what ben Azzai states about [girls] learning Torah, know that this applies only to the question of Sotah—that is, only to those aspects of Torah relevant to Sotah—and we cannot extend the obligation of studying one portion of Torah to the study of the entirety of Torah. Thus [ben Azzai's position] does not uproot the verse *your sons* [and the implication in b.T. Kiddushin 30a] "and not your daughters," which would apply to the entirety of Torah.¹²³

Once Teitelbaum claims to have moved beyond discussing the disagreement between ben Azzai and R. Eliezer, since for him both would forbid Torah study for women, he seeks out other sources that would permit women to study Torah. He finds an unlikely source in the thirteenth-century pietistic text *Sefer Hasidim*, not known for its lenient positions:

It is explained in *Sefer Hasidim* no. 331: "It is obligatory to teach one's daughters mitzvot such as legal decisions (*piskei halakhot*), and regarding what is written, that one who teaches women Torah teaches them nonsense (*tiflut*), this refers to the depths of the Talmud, reasons for the commandments, and *sidrei Torah*. These are the things one should not teach women. Rather, one should teach them laws and mitzvot because if she does not know, for example, the laws of Shabbat, how can she observe Shabbat? The same with other mitzvot. In the time of Hezekiah, king of Judea, men and women, adults and even children, knew the laws of purity and the sacrificial laws (*taharot ve kodshim*).¹²⁴ Thus they were all gathered, which refers to *You stand this day, all of you, before God* (Deut. 29:9). All Israelites [were gathered], including children and women . . . from woodcutters to water carriers, in order that [even] slaves and maidservants should know the laws of what to do and what not to do (Deut. 29: 10, 11)."¹²⁵ And all of this is included in the word of the *Sefer*

Mitzvot Gedolot [by R. Moshe Coucy, thirteenth century] as cited in Rama [to “Yore Deah” 246:6], that one is obligated to teach women laws that are relevant to them. This would include all prohibitions and obligations of mitzvot, Toraic and rabbinic, excluding those mitzvot that are time-bound. This is also implied in the language of Tosafot on b.T. Sotah 21b, where it states that men and women came to hear, to know how to perform mitzvot.¹²⁶

In short, Torah study for women is a purely utilitarian exercise, done for the sake of teaching them how to act properly according to tradition. Thus, (1) only relevant sections of Torah are permitted to them; and (2) “the depths of the Talmud, reasons for the commandments, and *sidrei Torah*” are not permitted, because they do not fill the pragmatic need. Teitelbaum then draws all of this back to the question of language by making a distinction between women’s need to *know* Torah and the permissibility of women *studying* Torah, which would require them to know *lashon ha-kodesh*:

It is also written, in the Bologna edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, that women must learn [the laws] of mitzvot relevant to them and can do so in any language, but a man is obligated to study in *lashon ha-kodesh*. The distinction is clear that laws and their sources that are written in responsa literature are written in *lashon ha-kodesh* and men are commanded to learn them, their sources, and rabbinic discussions in their complexity (*pilpulim*); all of this must be studied in the language of the adjudicators. This is because the language of the sages heals and cultivates understanding in ways that communication from one language to another does not. Thus, a man must learn from his teacher.¹²⁷

Whereas earlier, Teitelbaum claimed that *lashon ha-kodesh* was not obligatory as a mitzvah, here he stresses that the full performance of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah requires *lashon ha-kodesh* because only the language endemic to Torah can transmit it fully. This excludes spoken Hebrew, even as a language of study, something Teitelbaum rejected. For girls and women, on the other hand, Torah knowledge is purely practical; it is not connected to the mitzvah of Talmud Torah but simply is a vehicle for knowing mitzvot. Basing his case on rabbinic sources and *Sefer Hasidim*, he argues that women must know what they need to know in order to abide by the law and know how to ask halakhic questions. Since, for women, Torah study has no mitzvah framework, *lashon ha-kodesh* is not necessary and, as *Sefer Hasidim* suggests, they can learn Torah in any language and by any means that conforms with traditional mandates. Thus, in Teitelbaum’s analysis, *lashon ha-kodesh* for men can be likened to Torah study for women. Each serves a function for an end beyond itself. *Lashon ha-kodesh* for men is necessary in order to fully perform Talmud Torah. And Torah study for women is necessary for them to live by the law.

Teitelbaum goes one step further. If *lashon ha-kodesh* is functional as a vehicle to fulfill Talmud Torah, what if that function is granted to women, for whom there is

no mitzvah of Talmud Torah? “On the other hand, regarding women, it is forbidden for them to learn from the sources themselves and their detailed discussions (*pilpulim*); thus, they should not study in *lashon ha-kodesh* so that they should not study Torah by themselves, and the Oral Law and other things that are forbidden to them. Rather, they should learn laws and that which they need to know in other languages that they understand.”¹²⁸ His notion of *tiflut* follows earlier authorities who define it as “cunning” (*arama*) that arises from in-depth, and independent, study. Such study can occur only if women have facility in *lashon ha-kodesh*. He continues:

This may be another reason not to speak *lashon ha-kodesh* until it becomes forgotten [as a spoken language]. If we would accustom ourselves to speak *lashon ha-kodesh* with each other, they [women] would come to speak it in their homes, and then would also become conversant in it, and thus they would be able to study Torah on their own and come to study that which the sages forbid them to study. Thus, we should be strict about “teaching them *tiflut*,” as this is very damaging to Israel, as I will explain below. Therefore, the language [as a spoken language] should be abandoned.¹²⁹

As I understand him, Teitelbaum is suggesting that if girls or women have facility in *lashon ha-kodesh*, they can easily move from Torah study as a functional act of knowledge to Torah study as an act in itself (i.e., a mitzvah). On the non-obligatory nature of Torah study for women, there is no disagreement in classical sources. The Hafetz Hayyim never addresses the question of language that is central to Teitelbaum, but his basic position is not dissimilar: Women need to be educated because they need to know what to do and because they need to function in the world. Before moving to Teitelbaum’s defense of the Hafetz Hayyim against his detractors, a word about his rendering of *tiflut*.¹³⁰

Throughout “Essay on the Holy Language,” Teitelbaum uses *tiflut* largely as it is posited in earlier sources. It’s not until chapter 42 that he seems to suggest his own reading:

While it appears that there is a disagreement between Maharil and *Sefer Hasidim* [regarding women studying Torah], in actuality [I will show that] there is no disagreement. That which is said [by R. Eliezer in Mishna Sotah], that one who teaches women Torah teaches them *tiflut*, does not mean that the substance that is taught is *tiflut*, heaven forbid, but rather that the Torah that she absorbs can be detrimental to her well-being (*mazik lah*). Maharil also suggests this in the following way: “‘This teaches her *tiflut*.’ When you teach her this wisdom, cunning (*arama*) will enter her, as we know that ‘when wisdom enters the heart of a person so does cunning.’”¹³¹ Thus Rashi notes that this will result in her doing things privately, and thus there is a fear that she will come to deviance, because her mind is light (*datan kalot*).¹³²

Unlike Fuchs, I do not think that Teitelbaum is arguing that women should not study Torah because they cannot understand it (a common reading of *datan*

kalot). Rather, his point is quite the opposite; the word *arama*, or cunning, suggests that they *will* be able to understand it and thus use it to act on their own without the sanction of authority. *Datan kalot*, or “light-mindedness,” is here a deficiency not in intellect, but in moral aptitude or the ability to control one’s desire to move outside an authoritative system that dictates one’s role in the community. More troubling for Teitelbaum is that if girls and women know *lashon ha-kodesh*, they might learn Torah on their own and come to their own conclusions regarding its teachings. This is partly because girls are not under the auspices of direct rabbinic supervision as much as boys who spend their lives in yeshiva. There is plenty of deviance there too, but it is more easily monitored. Knowing *lashon ha-kodesh* would thus become a liberating force that would, or at least could, result in rebellion against rabbinic authority. Women should not study Torah independently, according to Teitelbaum, not because they won’t understand it, but because they will!

The danger of girls’ education, and the reason Teitelbaum was so adamant about defining its halakhic parameters in as limited a fashion as possible, while still meeting the needs of communal flourishing, lies in his understanding of the challenges facing the community in America. He knew not only that knowledge is power, but that the independent ability to acquire knowledge is the most dangerous tool of power, because authority structures are destabilized by that independence and begin to collapse. In some ways, inside the orbit of an ultratraditional community, Teitelbaum expresses what many in the general public felt about feminism at that time. It was the argument made by anti-suffragettes in the early twentieth century. The fear was not primarily about female promiscuity, but rather about female power, women’s ability to function outside the parameters of rabbinic authority.¹³³

Teitelbaum was in the throes of rebuilding what would become the largest ultra-Orthodox community in a country with arguably the greatest opportunities and freedoms that Jews had ever known. He understood that. And he understood that the lack of language proficiency was the only thing that prevented girls from studying Torah on their own and quietly rebelling against the norms that he sought to maintain, not unlike the ambivalence medieval authorities had about Jewish men studying Scripture without the Oral Law.¹³⁴ He writes: “Certainly one should not teach them *lashon ha-kodesh*, because if they knew *lashon ha-kodesh* they could learn on their own that which the sages prohibited, which we must prevent.”¹³⁵ Like his contemporary Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, Teitelbaum saw the advantages and dangers of America. But they had different views on the best approach to maintaining communal norms during a time in which each man, in different ways, thought that he had a unique role in ushering in the messianic age.¹³⁶

The Hafetz Hayyim is the cornerstone of women’s education in the Orthodox world. His stature as a halakhic authority, the respect he commands in the ultra-Orthodox world, and his remarks on the subject opened the doors to the Bais

Yaakov movement (and to many other, similar approaches that Teitelbaum opposed). It is significant that Teitelbaum chooses to end his long essay on *lashon ha-kodesh* with a defense of the Hafetz Hayyim, by offering a reading of the latter's position that supports his own view. It seems that Teitelbaum's critique here is directed not toward the more modern interpretations of the Hafetz Hayyim (he is critical of those elsewhere), but toward his more ultra-Orthodox detractors. And here one can see that Teitelbaum is surreptitiously defending his own choice to establish the Satmar Beis Rochel school for girls:

There are fools who (mis)interpret the words of the Hafetz Hayyim, who wrote in his *Likkutei Torah* on tractate Sotah about the prohibition of teaching women Torah. He cited all the relevant laws and ruled that in his view, in terms of previous generations . . . oral transmission from one's parents was a very viable way . . . to prohibit the study of Torah by women, depending on knowledgeable parents to educate their daughters. But today, owing to our sins, when parental transmission has been weakened . . . it is a great mitzvah to teach Humash [Pentateuch] and the prophets and writings [*Nakh*] and the ethical teaching of the sages . . . in order to strengthen the faith [of girls in our community].¹³⁷

Teitelbaum thus strikes out against those who consider the Hafetz Hayyim an innovator at all and think that social conditions caused him to uproot decided law. "This is all a denigration of that great *zaddik* [Kagan] as if he, heaven forbid, adjudicated that a clear law (*halakha pesukah*) from the Talmud, early glossators (Rishonim), and the *Shulkhan Arukh* is not practiced because of our time. Heaven forbid to suggest that he advocated uprooting such a clear law." Rather, the Hafetz Hayyim "advocated teaching women Humash but not with Rashi's commentary, which is certainly completely prohibited (*'issur gamur*). This is because the words of Rashi constitute the body of Torah (*gufei Torah*) examining the *drashot* of the sages, about which the sages said, 'This is teaching them *tiflut*.'" ¹³⁸ The danger (and here he seems to be speaking directly to Hirschprung, to whom the essay is addressed) is in using the Hafetz Hayyim's permission, which is not contra rabbinic law, to justify the teaching of forbidden subjects, such as the Oral Law. If the question is social cohesion and fidelity to tradition, the Oral Law makes sense. When one becomes adept at the Talmudic process and its rejected positions in addition to the positions that become codified law, questions of authority will inevitably arise. While this may occur with boys as well, they are being trained and cultivated to *become* the authority, which may ameliorate the deleterious effects of knowing too much.

And here, I think, the question of language is precisely the point. Teitelbaum implies that for the Hafetz Hayyim's directives to be maintained properly, rabbis must maintain control of the parameters of any educational curriculum for girls. This would seem to entail making sure that girls don't have sufficient language proficiency for studying beyond the confines of the limited curriculum determined

by the rabbis; their Torah study should be solely focused on knowing the necessary laws pertinent to girls and women. This whole approach extends back to ben Azzai's comments about the laws of Sotah and the narrow way they were interpreted by Teitelbaum and many others. For the Hafetz Hayyim's directive to be properly implemented, *lashon ha-kodesh* should not be a part of a girls' school curriculum.¹³⁹ This is essentially Teitelbaum's practical contribution to the discussion in ultra-Orthodox circles and why he opposed Bais Yaakov schools teaching in Hebrew. As noted, Hirschprung was principal of a Bais Yaakov school when he asked Teitelbaum for advice. In terms of larger questions about curriculum, Teitelbaum stood in agreement with the Hafetz Hayyim and considered all who deviated from his words to be transgressive.

"Essay on the Holy Language" addresses a variety of issues related to the larger question of language and the narrower question of the creation of Hebrew as a lingua franca as part of the Zionist enterprise. While using halakhic discourse extensively, it is hardly an essay limited to halakha. As a part of his larger political theological project, it exhibits the extent to which Teitelbaum's war against Zionism was not limited to the realm of the political (that is, the establishment of a nation-state), but equally extends to the cultural implications embedded in the project of secularizing Judaism more generally. In addition, combining halakhic analysis on the relationship between the mitzvah of Talmud Torah and the language of Torah, Teitelbaum addresses the question of language as power.

Both in his creative reading of the Tower of Babel as an example of the dangers and even demonic power of language (and especially of monolingualism) and in his warning that girls' knowledge of *lashon ha-kodesh* would subvert the authority structure necessary to maintain the traditional transmission of Torah, Teitelbaum weighs in on an issue that troubled others such as Scholem and Bialik: the secularization of Hebrew. Teitelbaum knew that those who own the language control the production and maintenance of culture. In liberating *lashon ha-kodesh* from its role as the vehicle of Torah, making it a language for mundane matters, and by expanding *lashon ha-kodesh* to those (i.e., women) who could use it to circumvent rabbinic authority by studying Torah outside the bounds of such authority, Teitelbaum enters precarious uncharted waters. He had very definite concerns about the maintenance of halakhic society—or, as he puts it elsewhere, *yisrael saba* (fidelity to ancestral norms). Yet recognition of this danger, in different ways and toward different ends, was shared by many others, including Scholem and Bialik. Perhaps unbeknownst to himself, Teitelbaum was contributing, through his halakhic and aggadic approach, to one of the burning issues of his day.

Zionism and the Demonic

On 'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah

THE SIX-DAY WAR AS A TURNING POINT IN ANTI-ZIONISM

By the time the first edition of *Vayoel Moshe* appeared in 1959/1960 and the complete edition a year later, Teitelbaum was already one of the most widely known and respected representatives of ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionism in the world. Having moved from Jerusalem to Brooklyn about a decade earlier with little money and few followers, Teitelbaum quickly began to assemble what would become the largest Hasidic court in the world, creating a large footprint in Orthodoxy while garnering the admiration of some of the greatest sages of the generation.¹ His prowess as a deeply learned and creative interpreter of the classical tradition and his pugnacious, witty, and charismatic personality were acknowledged even by those who disagreed with his radical views on Zionism.

He was part of the generation of leaders trained in Europe, mostly survivors, who embodied the deeply pious prewar experience of Jewish life and of learning. The immigrant generation of Jewish sages included figures in America such as Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, Joseph Soloveitchik, Isaac Hutner of Yeshivat Hayim Berlin, Shlomo Halberstam of Bobov, and Aaron Kotler of Lakewood Yeshiva, among many others. Even as they vehemently disagreed on many things and were often engaged in raucous turf wars, they were all, in their own ways, trying to figure out America and how their form of Judaism could survive there. They all thought as immigrants, somewhat uncomfortable in their new environs but resolute in their commitment to rebuild their lives and institutions in a new land that provided new opportunities.²

One of the salient issues debated in those circles was how to respond to Zionism or to the state of Israel. In Europe before the state was founded, this was not as contentious an issue, since most ultra-Orthodox leaders were opposed to Zionism. Post-1948, the debate became more multivalent, as many asked whether it was possible to choose *not* to live in the land of Israel, now that the new state provided such an opportunity. Yet the ultra-Orthodox Jews in America were not flooding to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. They were rebuilding their lives in the Diaspora. Israel as a secular (and, in many ways at that time, anti-religious) state presented a serious challenge for religious Jews. Nationalizing the Jews and marginalizing Judaism from the body of Jewish identity was a serious impediment for these communities. There are at least two reasons why these Orthodox communities were ambivalent about Zionism. The first has to do with its secular and even anti-religious nature, and the second with the way it essentially took the end of exile into its own hands, rather than waiting for the long-awaited Messiah to redeem the Jews. In short, for many of these Orthodox Jews, Zionism was abandoning the ideal of messianism; it was anti-messianic, even as many Zionists (religious Zionists, certainly, but not only them) held that Zionism was the fulfillment of the messianic idea.

During those same years (the 1960s), Israel was a new and developing country, having weathered the early decades of financial instability and regional conflicts, in particular the Suez Crisis of 1956. The ultra-Orthodox communities living in Israel, while still largely opposed to Zionism, were becoming more acclimated to living in a secular Jewish state and receiving benefits from it. They entered the political arena enough to secure resources for their communities while remaining ideologically opposed to Zionism.

Here Teitelbaum, still adamantly committed to rejecting the state on theological grounds, faced a serious challenge. On the one hand, his stature in the ultra-Orthodox world was growing precipitously; on the other hand, he witnessed the fissures in his anti-Zionist position. It was not so much that his constituents rejected his worldview as that they were making pragmatic peace with the reality of a Jewish state, even one they held had no intrinsic value.³ It is worth noting the extent of Teitelbaum's success. Even though, in the late 1940s, he lost the election to lead the Edah Haredit, the foremost ultra-Orthodox institution in Jerusalem (which precipitated his move to America), by the 1960s, he returned to Israel as the titular head of that institution, even as he resided in the Diaspora.⁴ In general, Teitelbaum seemed to make every failure—and there were many, starting with his father's choice of his less talented elder brother to lead his community in Sighet after his death—into a success. In many instances, Teitelbaum seemed to come in second, and then come out first.

One could see his soaring popularity, in those postwar years, in what would be his final trip to Israel in 1965. Teitelbaum's biographer, Menachem Keren-Kratz, describes the scene: "When [his boat] reached Haifa, thousands of Hasidim were waiting and some even took small boats out to escort the ship to port. Later that

day a special train transported him and his retinue. Tickets to ride on his train were in great demand and in [the ultra-Orthodox city of] Bnei Brak tickets sold for large sums of money. The train stopped in Tel Aviv where Teitelbaum was greeted by rabbis and students who waved flags. In Jerusalem, the final stop, thousands awaited his arrival, including the leaders of the ultra-Orthodox community and Neturei Karta.⁵ The contrast between his initial experience in Jerusalem after the war and his 1965 visit is quite startling. In the late 1940s, he left Israel for America almost penniless, hoping to raise money for his fledgling yeshiva in Jerusalem. By 1965, he returned as a veritable king of ultra-Orthodoxy.

During those years, when he had reached the apex of his popularity in the ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel (mostly Jerusalem and Bnei Brak), Teitelbaum was concerned about a series of issues there, concerns the ultra-Orthodox community fully supported. These included his opposition to autopsies of Jewish bodies in Israeli hospitals, the building of new neighborhoods on land he and others believed were ancient burial grounds, and even mixed swimming in a public pool in Jerusalem. In short, while he opposed the state, he certainly was willing to work within its bureaucratic system in seeking to impose his worldview on its policies, and in this he largely had the support of the ultra-Orthodox world.

The steady nation building that was taking place in Israel was suddenly bracketed in the spring of 1967 when the specter of war loomed large.⁶ The prospect of war was daunting for many who had experienced the Holocaust, including Teitelbaum. Keren-Kratz writes that “in the days preceding the Six-Day War, like all Jews R. Yoel was terrified about the fate of those living in Israel. He recited prayers for the welfare of Jews residing in the land, and personally took part in such [public] prayer recitation. He also raised money for the sake of the state from various congregations who were part of his larger community.”⁷ Any notion that Teitelbaum’s deep concern for Jews was somehow curtailed by his vehement anti-state position is mistaken. This is also true of his concern for Jews leaving Hungary after the Nazis invaded. Like many others, he erred in his prediction of what would transpire, but once Jews’ lives were in danger, he used his considerable leverage to help as much as he could.⁸

The exaltation, relief, and messianic sentiment that arose from Israel’s sudden victory in 1967 had a profound impact on world Jewry, including the ultra-Orthodox. Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall (Kotel), Rachel’s and Joseph’s tombs, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and other holy sites deeply affected the lives of many Jews in Israel. Even though Teitelbaum quickly prohibited his community from visiting the Temple Mount (many other religious leaders did the same) on the basis of myriad halakhic sources that prohibited ascending to the Temple Mount (including, for Teitelbaum, the Kotel) and other holy sites, he probably knew that such prohibitions would be unlikely to hold. The emotional impact of access to these holy sites was too strong.⁹ This only strengthened his view of the destructive nature of the entire Zionist project.

In the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967 and amid the celebration of Jews in Israel of being saved from defeat and potential annihilation, Teitelbaum felt that he had to respond to the new reality, firmly believing that Zionism remained as strong a heresy as before, and even stronger. In addition, he refuted the notion that the war was a miracle, claiming—in a short essay on war included at the end of *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah*—that wars in general are not miraculous and that, in this case in particular, one does not call a heretical enterprise the product of a miracle.¹⁰ He was elated, along with other Jews, that Jews had been saved, but this only strengthened his anti-Zionist resolve. He maintained his lifelong belief that Zionism was a test of will that needed to be resisted. But given the post-1967 reality, this case needed to be made differently. While there is clearly a distinction between Zionism and the state of Israel, for Teitelbaum that distinction is often blurred. For him, Zionism was not only the state—though he often referred to Israel as “the Zionist state” (*medinat ha-tziyonut*) in his writings—but also the larger project of modernizing Judaism through nationalism, which he maintained was not only anti-messianic, but blasphemous on traditional grounds.

Already eighty years old and ailing from a stroke, Teitelbaum, clearly seeing the dilemma and the stakes involved, expressed interest in putting together a book in response to the events of 1967. Keren-Kratz avows that his aides were opposed to the idea, though their reasons are unclear.¹¹ In any case, the resulting work, published posthaste some months after the war and titled *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah* (On Redemption and Exchange), consists of his introduction (ostensibly the last will and testament of a theological anti-Zionist) followed by transcriptions of a series of public talks that he delivered in the 1960s.¹²

The essential argument of *‘Al Ha-Geulah* can perhaps be captured in the penultimate chapter of the book. Teitelbaum, summing up previous arguments, writes quite starkly as follows:

And now, in our present lowly situation, because of our sins, we are drawn to think about what Rashi said [on the verse] *consider the matter diligently* (Jer. 2:4).¹³ This is all like an evil revolution that has befallen Israel. Many who were guardians of Torah and mitzvot, who recognized until now the defiled state of Zionism, whose entire success story is the result of satanic acts to seduce Israel, suddenly had a change of heart and speak as one with the Zionists and act in accord with these evildoers even in that which relates to foundations of faith.¹⁴ And in the study hall one can hear him proclaim, *A brutish man cannot know and a fool cannot understand this, though the wicked sprout like grass, though all evildoers blossom . . .* (Ps. 92:8) *attesting that God is upright* (Ps 92:16). And he never feels that he is actually one of the fools, not understanding that he is enabling the evildoers to blossom and succeed. And truly, who doesn't know that it is the way of Satan to act in various ways, even by means of great miracles, to enact strange and distorted things that are false and deceptive in order to blind the eyes of the righteous (*kasherim*) that descend into their very bowels, as I explained above—and much more than I wrote [above, for] there is a great deal I had

to abbreviate, and I could not submit to writing [about it in full] in this work. All of this is clear and obvious to anyone literate in the tradition (*yodeah sefer*). But I had to be judicious in this matter. How can anyone who truly believes in God and God's holy Torah not seek the truth [in this matter] and rather turn to the idolatry of Zionism?¹⁵

From his perch as an elder statesman of ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionism, having been reared in a community and region where Zionism was viewed negatively, Teitelbaum, along with many others, witnessed a seismic shift in ultra-Orthodox attitudes toward the state. In part, this was the natural process of people making peace with the country in which they lived or where they had close relatives. And in part it was the significant changes, with religious significance, that resulted from the events of 1967. Access to holy sites, the ostensible unification of Jerusalem, the swift and decisive victory that begged deployment of the term *miracle*, and the expansion of territory that evoked feelings of impending redemption all contributed to this shift in attitude.

In the wake of 1967, I would also add the emerging Kookian Zionist vision that, while still in its infancy and not particularly attractive to most ultra-Orthodox Jews, provided a new religious template espoused by pious Jews in relation to the Zionist project. As I stated in the introduction, while Teitelbaum and Kook (both father and son) did not respond directly to one another, each was somewhat aware of the worldview of the other, at least in general terms, and thus one must keep both in mind as one excavates the thought of each.¹⁶

While the state was viewed as a secular entity and still, in many ways, as an "enemy," tolerance for it began to slowly take root in some ultra-Orthodox circles. Teitelbaum viewed this entire episode as part of the messianic drama, albeit in the reverse of someone like Rav Kook. Whereas the Kookians viewed it as the unfolding of divine will, Teitelbaum viewed it as the work of its satanic opposite, to test the Jews' resolve to resist the transgressive project couched in holy garments.¹⁷ Thus, he felt the strong inclination, even in ill health, to respond once more, this time in full theological mode. This was the impetus for *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah*.

Teitelbaum's audience was clearly the pious community who had been increasingly seduced (in his view) into thinking that the Zionist project or the state was now divinely sanctioned in the aftermath of the decisive Israeli victory in 1967. He warns that they are fulfilling "the prophets' prophecy to the Jews who guard Torah and mitzvot and fulfill God's commandments, that they are the ones who *make the arrogant happy* [and praise those who do evil], *they have done evil and endured, they have indeed tested God and escaped* (Malachi 3:15). They have praised the success of the evildoers with whom God tested them and have prevailed."¹⁸ Teitelbaum held no hope that the Zionists would be convinced by his call. According to him, they had already abandoned Torah and mitzvot, and thus their new Zionist view of Judaism/Jewishness made sense to them.¹⁹ What deeply concerned him

were the true believers (*kesherim*) who had been drawn into the politics of heresy in part by false miracles, as if all of this were somehow a divine mandate.

Commenting on the Israelites' complaints, led by the riffraff (*asafsuf*) among them, that they lacked meat to eat in the desert (Num. 11), Teitelbaum writes:

The elders and Sanhedrin and the elite of Israel, . . . the good among them also, consumed the meat even though they were aware of [Moses's] warning. They were severely punished even though they meant well (*kavanatam le-shem shamayim*) because they joined the *erev rav* and thus there was no inherent difference between them. . . . Perhaps the mistake of the Sanhedrin was that they thought that because their intentions were good, their actions were not sinful. Thus, even though Moses warned them about eating the *slav* [the fowl that served as meat in the desert], they suffered the punishment. . . . In truth, when one joins the wicked, one's actions are like theirs.²⁰

The difference between the ultra-Orthodox and the religious Zionists (it's not clear to which he is referring) is that the ultra-Orthodox remained ideologically opposed to Zionism but justified interacting with them, whereas the religious Zionists built an entire theological system that not only tolerated secular Zionism, but viewed it as a new form of the sacred. This will play itself out in Teitelbaum's reading of the Israelites and the *erev rav* in the story of the golden calf.

Unlike *Vayoel Moshe*, which brought Teitelbaum significant notoriety, *'Al Ha-Geulah* does not spend much time on halakhic matters. In chapter 1, I argued that in *Vayoel Moshe*, the theological frames the halakhic discussion. In *'Al Ha-Geulah*, especially in its "Introduction," the theological stands at the very center of the argument and halakhic matters largely disappear except in his short coda on war.²¹ The need for halakhic opposition to the state seems to have passed; or perhaps, since it was made in *Vayoel Moshe*, he had little more to say in that register. After 1967 it was time for a full-blown theological opposition to Zionism—that is, a true heresiology. Below, I argue that the political-theological argument that Teitelbaum makes in *'Al Ha-Geulah* reflects an Antichrist theology that was common in a variety of Christian texts.²²

Calling this, as I do, a "Jewish theology of the Antichrist" is not as dissonant as it sounds. Of course, Teitelbaum never uses the term *Antichrist*, which was certainly not a part of his lexicon. And yet, the notion of a false messiah that precedes the true one is rooted in the Book of Daniel, Satan figures prominently in the Book of Job (discussed at length in *'Al Ha-Geulah*), and Antichrist scenarios are prominent in other Jewish apocalyptic texts such as *Sefer Zerubavel*, attesting to a final test the chosen must pass by resisting the false messiah who looks like the true one. Some forms of Christianity developed this idea in myriad ways—including Protestant sects that view the papacy as the Antichrist—and Nietzsche, coming full circle, viewed Christ himself as an Antichrist.²³ As a premillennialist who believed in isolating his community from the world to await redemption via divine fiat,

Teitelbaum was fully open to the notion of an Antichrist who comes to seduce the righteous as a final test for redemption. Zionism plays that role for him.²⁴ Assessing the antecedents of Antichrist in the Hebrew Bible and whether it is a “Jewish” idea at all, Jeremy Cohen notes: “Simply put, whether one does or does not view the idea of the Antichrist as grounded *primarily* in the Hebrew Bible, that idea should certainly feel at home in the matrix of those teachings.”²⁵

Therefore, I use the Antichrist motif to describe Teitelbaum’s view of Zionism, not to claim that he was aware of the myriad discussions of the Antichrist in Christian literature, but only to suggest that the Christian motifs themselves have resonance in biblical and rabbinic texts—especially those regarding the end of days, with which Teitelbaum was deeply conversant. Teitelbaum’s critique of Zionism includes the notion of a satanic figure who would appear *as if* he were the Messiah as the end-time approached—a figure or episode that needed to be resisted in order for the end-time to unfold.

Teitelbaum draws on Jewish versions of this Antichrist theology that date mostly to the ancient world, most prominently in Daniel 11. He is certainly not getting his views from Christianity, and it is unlikely he is drawing from Second Temple materials.²⁶ His views on this, as always, draw from canonical material woven into the complex web of rabbinic literature to construct what I am calling a *political theology of Zionism as anti-messianism*. As we will see, Teitelbaum knew that the world was becoming more sympathetic to Zionism, including among his own ultra-Orthodox constituents—and thus he felt a need to raise the volume on the theological ramifications of this “false messiah.” *‘Al Ha-Geulah* is the final product of this resistance of Zionism. In that sense, it is a messianic text.

Below, I analyze a series of major aspects of Teitelbaum’s argument in *‘Al Ha-Geulah*. The first is his view that Satan plays a major role as the end-time approaches, in this case embodied in Zionism. I suggest that the category of a *Jewish political theology of the Antichrist* best captures Teitelbaum’s view of the challenge of Zionism, especially after 1967. I then move to his theory of miracle, because the language of miracle becomes ubiquitous in the reception of the Six-Day War in Israel and beyond. Teitelbaum argues that (1) miracle is never an operative category in wars; and (2) true miracles do not happen to evildoers, but only to the righteous.²⁷ With the rise of satanic power, however, Satan is given the jurisdiction to perform “false” miracles that appear to be miraculous but that actually serve to undermine divine intervention. The examples he uses are various strata of rabbinic readings of Satanic miracles sanctioned by God but not performed by God in the Book of Job.

Finally, I analyze the short essay on war mentioned above, included in the second and subsequent editions of *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, to explicate Teitelbaum’s views on the permissibility of war for Jews in general in the time of exile, an argument he used to place the blame for the Six-Day War on the existence of the state, and not only on its enemies. Teitelbaum is no pacifist, nor does he advocate any kind of internationalism. Rather, he argues that part of Israel’s role in exile is to refrain

from statecraft, war being the latter's inevitable outcome. To have a state requires one to go to war, yet Teitelbaum argues that waging war is not permitted in exile; thus, the state, aside from itself being prohibited for other reasons, also creates the necessity of prohibited war and thus the inevitability of transgression.²⁸

SEPARATION FROM THE EVILDOERS AND CONSTRUCTING THE ANTICHRIST ARGUMENT

Teitelbaum was largely responsible for rebuilding the communities of ultra-Orthodox Jews from Hungary and Romania decimated in the Holocaust.²⁹ While his Hasidic court in Satu Mare (commonly known as Satmar) and Kroli was relatively small, he became a magnet for survivors from those regions after the war. His extreme ideology was transplanted from the Máramaros region of Hungary, where ultra-Orthodoxy espoused rigid separation from all forms of secularism as an act of redemptive piety. Zionism, for Teitelbaum as for most other religious leaders from that region, was a volatile mix of secularism dressed in Jewish redemptive language that was particularly dangerous because it held the seductiveness of resolving the diasporic Jewish problem of anti-Semitism. One could cite numerous instances in Teitelbaum's work to illustrate this point, many of which are allusions to Zionism without mentioning it outright. For example, we read in *Divrei Yoel*, his collected homilies on the Torah:

It is not sufficient that God took us out of Egypt; it is still necessary to remove Egypt from within us. For this we need divine help, to get to its source and uproot Egypt from our insides (*b'penimiyutam*). And this is even more true in other exilic residences. The demonic shell (*kelippah*) and "ruler" (*sar*, lit. prince) of that nation wants dominion over our bodies and wants to enter inside us. We need divine aid to be saved from this, to separate ourselves. Therefore, it says "from amidst the nations." This is a general warning for all generations to distance themselves from the defilement of the nations and not allow the demonic shells (*kelippah*) of that nation to enter us. . . . This is the preparation for the Messiah, as was taught by Isaac Luria.³⁰

The idea of getting rid of the Egypt "within us" is a common Hasidic trope, what Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer called "self-redemption," that often suggests a kind of existential act of self-reflection and purification. Teitelbaum, however, politicizes this idea to suggest an act of separation from the world around him. The process of purification, which for Teitelbaum was the true messianic act, requires precisely residing in exile and, through living separately from the nations, slowly excising "Egypt" from the midst of Israel. In this reading, diasporism is the only true messianism. As Amos Funkenstein puts it, according to Teitelbaum, "a catastrophe is imminent, after which only a few, the 'remnants of Israel,' will survive to witness the true redemption. Indeed, Teitelbaum's whole argument is embedded in the apocalyptic premise that the true redemption, through divine miracle, is very

close at hand.”³¹ According to Funkenstein, and I fully agree, Teitelbaum was a classic premillennialist.³² The separation, however, is not only from the gentile world but also from the sinners in Israel. Enclavism becomes the social model of collective purification.

Elsewhere, Teitelbaum argues that Jews—specifically, righteous Jews—need to reside in exile because they must engage in acts of rectifying the world, only after which the Messiah will come. In “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel,” we find a lengthy discussion of the Talmudic passage in Pesahim 97b and Ta’anit 3b, each of which slightly differently makes the claim that Israel was exiled in order to either “gather up souls (*gerim*)” or match the four winds, for “just as it is impossible to think of the earth without its four winds, it is impossible to think of the four winds without Israel [residing there].”³³ In each passage is the notion that Israel residing outside of the land is a necessity in order to bring exile to an end. Elsewhere, Teitelbaum specifically advocates enclavism—that is, the creation of communal social spaces separated from the influence of the outside world as much as possible—but here he is more ambiguous on the manner in which Israel must complete the work of exile by residing outside the land.³⁴

Teitelbaum often gestures to the idea that only the enclave who abide by Torah law will survive. To some extent, this echoes Christian tribulationism, the belief that God will save the remnant of believers before the final rapture that will consume most of humanity. While Teitelbaum only periodically refers to Zionism as the seduction that believers will have to resist, his comments often allude to the Jewish national project. For example, in *Divrei Yoel* on parshat Vayakel, Teitelbaum cites and discusses a Zoharic passage that states that the Mosaic command to “gather the people” (Exodus 35:1) is a call to separate the righteous from the *erev rav*, or mixed multitude, who seduced Israel to worship the golden calf, writing:³⁵ “What we can now see is that the gathering Moshe commanded [in the desert] was to call for a complete separation of the righteous (lit. kosher Israelites) from the *erev rav*. Without the separation of the righteous, it is impossible to be protected from the *erev rav*. This is what the Zohar means when it says ‘they needed to gather’; that is, they needed that separation, and thus the very purpose of that gathering was to separate from the *erev rav* who made the calf.”³⁶ He then gestures to the present: “Because of our many sins, only a few righteous (*yehidim keshirim*) remain and they will continue to diminish. And the power of the *erev rav* is very strong and they have gathered in many kinds of organizations. Hence, it is incumbent upon the few righteous ones who remain to gather and strengthen themselves to stand against the powerful forces of the *erev rav* [or mixed multitude, as mentioned once in Exodus].”³⁷ Teitelbaum’s entire program is devoted to this kind of separation—not convincing the secularists of their evil ways (for he considers them the *erev rav* and unredeemable), but convincing the otherwise “kosher” Jews of the dangers of being seduced by them. “There are many of these organizations in which we can find kosher Jews,” he writes. “But since they mixed in

with the *erev rav*, there is no 'gathering,' as explained in the Zohar. For the true gathering is not possible if the *erev rav* are in its midst."³⁸

This notion of separation as the messianic challenge comes through in various places in Teitelbaum's collected works.³⁹ For example, in a long section of parshat Vayakel on preparations for Purim, Teitelbaum cites Zohar 2.195a, which suggests that since the *erev rav* were responsible for the golden calf, the verse *And Moshe assembled the community of Israelites* (Exod. 35:1) refers to an exclusion of the *erev rav*.⁴⁰ As the Zohar puts it, "From now on, the worship at the Tabernacle will only be led by Israelites [and not the *erev rav*]." Exodus 35:1 reports the words of Moses after he descends from the mountain and shatters the tablets, as a mandate for Israel to separate from the *erev rav* who were guilty of building the calf. Teitelbaum asks, "Why does it say, *And Moses assembled* . . . [when rather] it should say, "And Moses separated the community [from the *erev rav*]." He continues to suggest that the evil inclination works in a variety of ways, one of which is to fool the righteous into thinking that perhaps they should not separate from the *erev rav*:

When Israel left Egypt and the *erev rav* went with them, Israel did not know that they should protect themselves from them because they did not yet know the harm they would cause. . . . After the sin of the calf and the danger of the *erev rav*, it became apparent that they should separate themselves from them. However, they still were unsure because they were so broken from the experience of the calf. Thus, they were vulnerable to the evil inclination that came and suggested they act with humility, saying, "How can we separate from those who are among us?" As a result, because of this false humility, they would not separate from the *erev rav*. From this we should learn to strengthen ourselves not to be seduced by this false humility, but rather strengthen ourselves with a holy sense of conviction (*ga'avah shel kedusha*). . . . We should learn that we should attach ourselves to those who fear God; and as for those evil ones who have abandoned tradition, we should treat them with holy conviction to separate ourselves from them and abandon our false humility.⁴¹

While Zionism is not mentioned here, one cannot avoid the assumption that Teitelbaum is speaking of his own time, certainly in regard to Zionists, but perhaps also in regard to the agenda of Habad, who seek to go out and embrace secular Jews and bring them close to tradition. For Teitelbaum, basing his argument on the Zohar, Vayakel (the communal Israelite gathering) is a corrective for the golden calf perpetrated by the *erev rav* through Moses's commanding of the Israelites that now only they, and not the *erev rav*, can serve in the Tabernacle. In addition (and here, perhaps, we can see the specter of the Holocaust), he gestures to the trauma of the calf episode, which might seduce the Israelites into an exercise of false humility, saying that perhaps they should not exclude those who also shared in the trauma. The test for him is thus not one of sympathy or false humility, but rather of enacting the "holy conviction" of exclusion for the sake of the covenant by avoiding the seductiveness of the evil inclination, which acts in many unconventional ways.

Habad and Teitelbaum's community of Satmar are the most successful Hasidic groups in America, and perhaps in the world, today.⁴² And even though the fifth and sixth Lubavitcher rebbes were ardent anti-Zionists (the seventh rebbe's position was more complicated), Teitelbaum is perhaps most widely known for articulating the most strident Orthodox opposition to Zionism, certainly after the war, articulated at great length and with immense learning in his two major works.⁴³ Interestingly, the two largest ultra-Orthodox communities, Habad and Satmar, have diametrically opposed programs: Satmar, isolation and separation; Habad, outreach and moving into nonreligious communities to bring them close to Judaism. Habad is not Zionist in any discernible way. But today, Habad is pro-Israel while not being Zionist, an interesting position that is only now receiving the attention it deserves.⁴⁴

Teitelbaum's anti-Zionism was distinctive but not completely exclusive among postwar Hasidic grand rabbis, as Keren-Kratz notes: "Most Jews and Orthodox rabbis [after the Holocaust] were sympathetic to the Jewish state, even if they were suspicious of its secularism and the success of religion [in Israel] in the coming years. For the first five years, R. Yoel [Teitelbaum] was the only one who continued to maintain a staunch anti-Zionist position which had emerged [earlier] from the schools of radical Orthodoxy in Transylvania and its environs."⁴⁵ He may not have been the only one, but he certainly was the most vocal. Until the late 1950s, however, he did not publish anything substantive on the subject, but made his views known in oral sermons and in various articles in his Yiddish paper, *Der Yid*, which was founded in 1953 by the Yiddishist and Zionist Aaron Rosmarin and bought by Satmar Hasidim. It was edited by a well-known Satmar Hasid, Sender Deutsch. However, Teitelbaum worked hard to garner support from other Hasidic grand rabbis and fought hard against the Zionist influence of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael in America.

As noted above, the twenty-six-page "Introduction" to *'Al Ha-Geulah* is the only part of the book that Teitelbaum wrote; he states there that he reviewed all of the other chapters included in the book and offers them because he fears being misunderstood and underappreciated, something that seemed to bother him for much of his adult life.⁴⁶ One can see, in the body of the work, many themes that appear in his earlier *Vayoel Moshe* (I tried to locate as many as I could and include them in the annotations of my translation, published separately), while the "Introduction" seems more original and more a direct assessment of his views in light of the Six-Day War. *'Al Ha-Geulah* is really the final testament of a man at the end of his life who believed that the world was abandoning a messianic opportunity by succumbing to the work of satanic forces embedded in Zionism. His opposition to the state should not be mistaken for opposition to dwelling in the land; after all, he planned to dwell in the land himself when rescued from almost certain death in the Holocaust.⁴⁷

As discussed in the introduction, my assumption throughout this book is that *'Al Ha-Geulah*, like *Vayoel Moshe*, is a work of political theology and heresiology.

While its foundations are embedded in various biblical episodes and midrashic renderings of those episodes, the presentist concerns are both the impetus of the work and also its telos. In *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, as in *Vayael Moshe*, Teitelbaum emerges often from his well-trained vocation as expert exegete and homilist to openly make connections between rabbinic discussions of biblical episodes and his assessment of heresy and Zionism. In other words, one need not infer his anti-Zionism from his interpretive moves. While the three essays in *Vayael Moshe* weigh in on what he considers the blasphemous act of creating a Jewish state in the land of Israel and embracing an ideology that usurps traditional normative practice, only in *‘Al Ha-Geulah* does he explore the nature of this heresy in depth, and thus it is in the later work that a Jewish theology of the Antichrist appears in full.⁴⁸ In this sense, *‘Al Ha-Geulah* is where Teitelbaum’s heresiology is most fully articulated.

While many themes in *Vayael Moshe* reappear in *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, one feels an increased sense of urgency in the latter. In addition, the latter is more theological and focuses on the nature of miracle and its satanic implications as a response to the language of miracle that arose surrounding Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War.⁴⁹ Aviezer Ravitzky offers a concise formulation, writing that “the people of Israel now face the greatest test of faith they have ever encountered. It is no longer the classic situation in which Jews, confronted with the gray reality of exile in an unchanging world, are asked to persevere in their belief in messianic deliverance. The present trial is a more difficult one, a test of the faith that the true redemption is yet to come in the face of a reality that has only the appearance of redemption but is in fact the work of the Devil.”⁵⁰

Ravitzky was speaking more generally about Teitelbaum’s views, but it is certainly the case that the messianic tenor is more pronounced in *‘Al Ha-Geulah* than in *Vayael Moshe*.⁵¹ Having viewed the establishment of the state in demonic terms in *Vayael Moshe*, 1967 became, for Teitelbaum, further confirmation of Zionism’s satanic roots. This is a classic apocalyptic move, arguing that any worldly success of transgressive actions is a sign of satanic intervention. It is for the very same reason that many in the ultra-Orthodox community, his intended audience, became more sympathetic to Zionism. In his English biography of Teitelbaum, entitled *The Rebbe*, Dovid Meisels reports that Teitelbaum knew that even many who attended Teitelbaum’s own synagogue were moved by the ostensibly miraculous nature of Israel’s victory.⁵² In some way, I think, Teitelbaum knew that his ideological position was already a lost cause, but he firmly believed that it would prove correct, on both theological and halakhic grounds, in the end-time.

In “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel,” Teitelbaum addresses the founding of the state in general, basing his argument on a comment by the sixteenth-century kabbalist Menachem Azariah da Fano, who argued for the necessity of exile because Satan is strongest in Jerusalem. Teitelbaum writes: “In his [da Fano’s] day the notion that Satan is strongest in Jerusalem spoke to how Satan influenced those dwelling there.”⁵³ Now, however, according to our sins, Satan’s strength is

revealed even more. It has chosen Jerusalem to fool the entire world under the 'guise of Jerusalem' (איצטלא ירושלמית), and how heavy a burden this is for Jerusalem, the holy city.⁵⁴ The notion that Zionism itself expands its influence beyond the Jews in order to fool the world into accepting its justifications would become even more prominent after the Six-Day War, but for Teitelbaum, as is evident here, it existed prior to that. He was likely gesturing to the receptivity of the world to the state of Israel after the Holocaust. The Holocaust and that which seduces the world to accept Zionism are not mentioned explicitly here but are discussed elsewhere, in both *Vayoel Moshe* and *Divrei Yoel*.⁵⁵

The Six-Day War was a watershed for the acceptance of Zionism, not only among many Jews who may have been ambivalent beforehand, including many in the ultra-Orthodox community, but in the larger world as well. But Teitelbaum foresaw this shift years earlier. For example, during his visit to Israel in 1959, the same year the first edition of *Vayoel Moshe* was published and following the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the state, Teitelbaum came to recognize firsthand that the state was not a fleeting phenomenon. Keren-Kratz puts it this way: "The country had increased to more than two million people [by 1959] and Teitelbaum understood that the state of Israel was an established entity (*'uvdah kayemet*) and not a passing phenomenon (*hofa'ah kholefet*). In addition, many ultra-Orthodox Jews who were against the establishment of the state had reached a more moderate position, in part because they witnessed the things that ultra-Orthodoxy had achieved, diminishing the [anti-Zionist] animus over 'the true intention of Zionism' being to destroy the Jewish religion."⁵⁶ Teitelbaum, however, was not deterred. His opposition to the state increased as he saw that its detractors were diminishing.

The stabilization of the state evoked apocalyptic sentiment in some circles in the Christian world as well. For example, *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, a very popular evangelical book published in 1970, argues that the foundation of the Jewish state in 1948 and the conquest of Jerusalem in 1967 are sure signs that we are living in the generation of the final redemption.⁵⁷ This belief became quite common among American evangelicals, as well as in the larger American Christian community, and contributed to the rise of contemporary Christian Zionism.⁵⁸ While most likely unaware of Lindsey and the evangelicals, Teitelbaum was surely aware of this general inclination, and thus his view of Zionism as an Antichrist becomes more pronounced in *'Al Ha-Geulah*, its worldly success becoming, for him, the proof of its demonic stature.

In general terms, Teitelbaum's ideological commitments against Zionism are not new but part of a much longer trajectory of Jewish anti-Zionism that stems back to the early twentieth century in the work of Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz, the "Old Settlement" Jews in Palestine, and Neturei Karta in Israel, to say nothing of liberal anti-Zionists in Europe and America.⁵⁹ This anti-Zionism was also shared by much of the prewar ultra-Orthodox world, including Lithuanian giant Elchanan Wasserman, Lubavitcher rebbes Sholom DovBer Schneersohn and Yosef

Yitzchak Schneersohn, and many others.⁶⁰ The essential difference between Teitelbaum and the others is that only he spent significant intellectual capital developing a political theology countering Zionism that not only reacted to the circumstantial instantiation of Zionism as heresy, but placed it in a theological context that has its roots in the Israelites' rebellion against Moses in the desert, the golden calf, Job's blasphemous response to his suffering, and the history of miracle in the Israelite and Jewish tradition.

ZIONISM AND HERESY

As discussed throughout this book, the claim that Zionism is a quintessential form of heresy is central to Teitelbaum's entire project.⁶¹ While he doesn't devote a separate section or work to articulating his position on Zionism as heresy, he offers a variety of explanations in numerous places throughout his corpus, including in his Torah commentary *Divrei Yoel*. Two places that I examine below are the episode of the spies and the Korah rebellion, both in the Book of Numbers. In these cases, though he does not mention Zionism openly, one can infer from his argument that Zionism is implied.

In *Divrei Yoel*, parshat Shelah, concerning the spies sent to assess the land when the Israelites were in the desert (Num. 13, 14), Teitelbaum addresses a distinction Rashi makes on the verse *Do not turn toward your heart's (desire)* (Num. 15:39). Citing b.T. Berakhot 12b, he writes: "*Do not turn toward your heart*—this is heresy (*minut*), saying in one's heart, 'There is no God.' *And after your eyes*—this is licentiousness, as it says, *Get me that one, for she is the one that pleases me* (Jud. 14:3). *That you lust after*—this is idolatry, as it says, *and Israel went astray after Baalim* (Jud. 8:33). And Rashi says, *after your heart*, this is heresy, for these refer to those who overturn (*ha-hofkhim*), the true meaning of Torah, to mistaken interpretation (*midrash ta'ut*) and an idol (*ve-alil*)."⁶² Teitelbaum continues:

We need to explain Rashi's language as to why he interprets heresy here as one who exchanges the true word of God to mistaken interpretation. Why not just read heresy more simply, that is, as one who disbelieves in the fundamentals of faith (*kofrim b'ikar*)? In fact, the verse in the Talmud seems to suggest just that when it says, "and say in one's heart, 'there is no God.'" That seems to refer to those who disbelieve in the creator. Why then does Rashi have to explain *Do not turn toward your heart* as meaning distortion of Torah, which is something else?

And it is true that distorting Torah is worse than those who disbelieve completely, because those who disbelieve cannot base their position on Torah. This is not true of those who distort Torah and can insert their crooked ways into Torah itself. In the end, they too will deny God.

Teitelbaum uses Rashi's distinction to make a point that is elaborated elsewhere in b.T. Berakhot 54a: "*Love your God with all your heart (levovkhem)*, with both of

your inclinations (good and evil). And we see, in Genesis 18:5, Abraham speaking to the angels that approach his tent, *That you may refresh yourselves (libkhem).*” Rashi there suggests *libkhem* (your heart/yourself) and not *levavkhem* (all your heart) to note that angels do not have an evil inclination.

Teitelbaum then reads the distinction between human beings, who have two inclinations, and angels, who have only one inclination:

One must purify oneself such that one’s evil inclinations becomes good, and then serve God. But the opposite is not possible. That is, one must be careful not to stumble with one’s good inclination toward heretical thoughts. How is it possible for the good inclination to stumble into heresy? Regarding other transgressions, it is possible that one can be seduced into thinking that a transgression is a mitzvah, as the way of Satan is to trick someone into imagining that a transgression is a mitzvah. . . . Thus, one must also be careful about one’s good inclination, since once one is seduced into thinking that a transgression is a mitzvah, one will be inclined to act on it with the help of the good inclination and will not be aware of the error. They will thus perform a transgression enveloped in a mitzvah and invoke their good inclination to aid them in transgressing. But with heresy this is not possible. That is, how can one think about heresy as a mitzvah? Thus, saying, “*Do not turn toward your heart’s (desire)*, this is heresy” [Rashi’s comment] is a problem.

The meaning is that the Torah commandment, *Do not turn toward your heart’s (desire)*, is not a warning against heresy itself but against those things that may bring one to heresy. . . . While we cannot command faith itself, we can warn against those things that may bring one to faithlessness. Thus, in the case of Rashi’s comment “*Do not turn toward your heart’s (desire)*, this is heresy,” the verse comes to warn against those things that may bring one to heresy and that one should distance oneself from the crooked way that may cause one’s faith to be undermined. And if we succeed in distancing ourselves, our faith will be secured, according to words of Maimonides.⁶³

One can read this as general guidance against exposing oneself to heretical things. An important distinction is made here between transgressions more generally—which one can fool oneself into thinking are mitzvot and faith itself—and heresy, which is not as easily vulnerable to self-deception. In what follows, though, it appears that the entire discussion is a warning against Zionism, certainly religious Zionism: “There are many ways to be drawn into heresy. And one of these ways is to distort the true Torah and twist its meaning by being fooled by a faulty reading and embedding it into the Torah itself. By means of this, one can come to true heresy (*kefira*), as we read in b.T. Yoma 62b that ‘if one does not merit it (Torah), it is a poison that kills.’ And thus, the sages were assiduous in warning us not to learn Torah from those who are not fit to teach it.”⁶⁴

This notion of being careful not to learn Torah from someone suspicious is mentioned numerous times in this homily and very well may be a reference to Rav Kook, though Kook is never mentioned explicitly. Teitelbaum later continues: “How can the good inclination help heresy? Rashi addresses it when he writes of

those who turn the true meaning of the Torah into ‘mistaken interpretation and an idol (*drush ta’ut ve-alil*).’ This phrase speaks of those things that are not yet heresy, and whose intentions are good, without knowing that their ideas are moving toward heresy. The path is cleared and will lead to heresy and the rejection of the God of Israel. And this can all be done in partnership with the good inclination, because error can come from studying Torah in an improper way.”⁶⁵ Whether this is a reference to Kook or to Agudat Yisrael, with whom Teitelbaum had a lifelong battle, the point is that engaging in dubious readings of the tradition to justify an act that is clearly heretical (i.e., Zionism)—though this itself may not be heresy and may be intended to benefit the community—will invariably lead to a collapse of the tradition. This is because, for Teitelbaum, the heretical cannot be transformed by the good; rather, it must be destroyed or resisted. His rejection of Zionism chooses the path of resistance, to remain apart from this heretical movement and continue the work of bringing about the end-time in the proper way: in exile.

That Zionism is heresy is not really Teitelbaum’s main point here, in part because he considers it obvious. His main point is about the nature and limits of engagement with heresy, and how sympathy for heresy will lead directly to it. Perhaps this is because he understands the reasonableness of the Zionist project in context, certainly from a survivalist perspective and so soon after the Jewish genocide that Teitelbaum experienced firsthand. This, then, is his Tertullian-like warning: “The more reasonable it seems, the more likely it is heresy to be resisted.”⁶⁶ Teitelbaum knows the power and draw of Zionism in a very deep way, arguably as deeply as Kook. And thus, for him, the sermon’s volume needs to be turned high enough to save those in his broader community from the trap that for him would be the completion of the unfulfilled genocide, in this case a physical and spiritual one.

Regarding the Korah rebellion in Numbers 16, Teitelbaum devoted a lot of attention to the nature of Korah’s intentions, where he was right and where he was wrong, and the hazards of his argument. The founding assumption of Teitelbaum’s reading is based on the Lurianic teaching (very much in line with Hasidism more generally) that Korah was correct but his timing was wrong, and that in the future he will merit the priesthood that he argues for in scripture. Here too, I suggest, there is a possible veiled reference to Rav Kook, who is almost never mentioned explicitly in Teitelbaum’s writing.

Teitelbaum reads Korah’s heresy as distinct from a challenge to Moses’s authority and as an act of “forcing the end”: “The essence of the matter is that Korah’s error (*te’uto shel Korah*) was that he wanted to bring about the redeemed world (*olam ha-tikun*) before its time against divine will. Thus, the midrash teaches, ‘And Korah took, he “took on,” a bad decision for himself (*mekakh ra lazmo*).’ He acted to bring about the *tikkun* before its time; this was certainly a very bad decision, because the end is solely the decision of the creator, and such an act is not given to others.”⁶⁷ A series of passages later in the same homily suggests that he may be referring to Rav Kook:

We can understand this in a different way. There is a vast difference between Korah and Datan and Aviram (Num. 17:24). They were evildoers who blasphemed God. This is not true of Korah, whose intentions were good. He saw that in the future he would indeed be a priest (*kohen*), as the Ari z"l [Isaac Luria] taught. Everyone in Korah's group thought something different, but Korah separated himself from the others [in thought], for only he saw the future. Thus, his thoughts [on these matters was different], even as they all acted the same . . . but on the level of thought, Korah was different.

Thus, it says, "do not be like Korah and his community" (Mishna Avot 5:17). Even regarding a person who is unique in his generation (*meukhad shb'doro*), it is still forbidden to learn from them if they go with the others who are against the Torah. We only have the ways of our ancestors, and only by their merit do we live. It is forbidden for us to deviate from their ways at all.⁶⁸

This can be explained in the way I explained the midrash earlier: How did Korah initiate his dispute with Moshe? He did so with regard to the Red Heifer (*parah adumah*). On his reasoning, Korah intended to do something good, to serve God on a higher level. But how can someone contest Moshe, who was the very source of Torah. . . . Therefore he took [the evil ones] Datan and Aviram, who provided strength to oppose Moshe, as we know the *kelippah* (divine dross) has its mirror image in holiness. Korah thought that with them he could turn his [good] thought into action, even though he knew they were evil. Yet Korah thought that evil could produce something good. He took the Red Heifer as an example, as the midrash teaches that "what can bring purity from defilement . . . [is] one who works with the Red Heifer. [The ash of the Red Heifer] defiles the clothing [of the one who sprinkles it] and purifies the clothing [of the one who receives it]."⁶⁹

In this series of passages, we can see how Teitelbaum tries to explain what he considers the egregious—yet certainly, in the final passages, well-intentioned—error of Korah. This was not simply a power play against Moshe, but rather a belief in actualizing the future before its time. And while the "person who is unique in his generation (*meukhad shb'doro*)" remains unnamed, it is certainly plausible that he is thinking of Rav Kook, who he may have believed had good intentions, like Korah, but erred in thinking he could transform the evil intentions of Zionists (Datan and Aviran) into a higher level of divine service. Neither Korah nor Kook was without precedent, for indeed the entire saga of the Red Heifer teaches that purity and defilement are intertwined, such that the act of purification itself results in defilement. And purity can come about by means of an act of defilement. Korah thought he could use Datan and Aviran to achieve sanctity, as Kook thought he could use the Zionists to achieve redemption. Teitelbaum claims that both were wrong because the dialectic of purity and defilement is an exceptional divine decree and not a model for behavior.

Zionism is thus heretical on three levels for Teitelbaum. First, it sought to be a substitute for Torah. Second, it sought to end the exile before its time. And third, it mistakenly viewed the Red Heifer or the dialectic of purity and defilement as a

model for tikkun. But if I am right that this is an allusion to Kook, Teitelbaum cedes some real ground here by recognizing that Kook's intentions, like Korah's, may have been good, albeit his understanding of the mechanics of redemption were mistaken and the consequences tragic, both for Korah and for Kook's Zionist vision.

A JEWISH POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF THE ANTICHRIST

I argue that here, Teitelbaum's writing against Zionism moves into uncharted territory for post-rabbinic Jewish literature and constitutes a full-blown Jewish political theology of the Antichrist. Teitelbaum's use of a satanic force (Sama'el) that comes to test the community of the faithful before the end-time, the basis of Antichrist theology, should come as no surprise. On the role of Satan more generally, we read:

Sama'el is sent by God to seduce one to sin. And why is he [Satan], *the yezer ha-ra*, killed in the future? Rav suggests it is because he was guilty of dying; that is, he dyed [colored] the sin and made it look like a mitzvah.⁷⁰ And it was very difficult to overcome this. He tricked people by coloring sin, compelling them to fall into the pit [of sin]. And [all the while] he says to them that the sin is a mitzvah. And one simply has no capacity to distinguish between good and evil. Thus, the *yezer ha-ra* is culpable in the future, for we know that the only thing [Satan] was commanded to do was to trick people into sinning, and if Satan would not have done this, the only ones who would fall into his net would be complete evildoers, but anyone with some fear of heaven would not be seduced into sin. But know that the *yezer ha-ra* "colors" the sin, enveloping it in the garments of mitzvah. And with that trickery he traps many in his net, even those who are not evil (*shleimim*). But they cannot stand against him.⁷¹

The interchange between Satan and the *yezer ha-ra* is common in Teitelbaum's writings, as it is in *musar* and kabbalistic literature more generally.⁷² The sins of the righteous are due to Satan "coloring" transgressions and making them look like mitzvot. This concept is used by Teitelbaum to explain why so many were seduced by Zionism. It is only in the future, he surmises, in the end-time when "the spirit of defilement is cleaned from the land and the world will be filled with knowledge, that they will see the truth and they will know how despised these things are in the eyes of God. And even the evildoers will know this."⁷³

To better frame Teitelbaum's approach, we can turn to Christian premillennialism, an idea that the chosen need to remove themselves from the world and wait for the final redemption that will appear suddenly, after which they will be the saved remnant who will accept Christ.⁷⁴ Teitelbaum was a premillennialist thinker in that he firmly believed in sudden and apocalyptic messianic intervention, that the role of the faithful was to resist the pre-messianic force and to be saved in the future, and that the time before the end is filled with a dominance of evil

and transgression, sometimes “colored” as mitzvot. Thus, premillennialists often deploy Antichrist ideologies to fulfill the messianic drama. For example, some Christian premillennialists are quite sympathetic to Zionism, albeit they view it as a temporary state to be overturned with the Second Coming.⁷⁵ Whether the state, for them, is an Antichrist of sorts is unclear, but they certainly view it as a necessary step in their dispensationalist thinking. On this, Yaakov Ariel notes: “As a rule, Zionist leaders did not understand the premillennialist theology and viewed it as a somewhat eccentric conviction, focusing instead on the support it provided for their cause.”⁷⁶ For Christian premillennialists, Jewish embrace of the state is a good thing in that it sets the conditions for their redemptive dispensationalist vision (which would *not* be good for Jews who, in the end-time, still refused to accept the Savior). For Teitelbaum, Jewish embrace of the state was so tragic precisely because it was anti-messianic and, even worse, undermined the entire belief in redemption by mistakenly thinking it had already come.

If we are looking for some structural, and not historical, antecedents to Teitelbaum’s view of Zionism as an Antichrist, they can be found in the writings of the medieval monk Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) and, in particular, Martin Luther (1483–1546). Beginning with Fiore, and more so in the Reformist writing of Luther and later Puritans, the Antichrist moves from apocalyptic, mythic, and biblical references to being applied to historical events and the imminent end-time.⁷⁷ Once we move deeper into Reformist theology, institutions—specifically, the papacy—become the target of Antichrist accusations. Luther’s 1545 work *Against the Roman Papacy: An Institution of the Devil* shifted the discussion of the Antichrist to a presentist model, where it would remain for the next two centuries. “What was Luther’s real originality in the history of Antichrist traditions?” asks Bernard McGinn. “The reformer’s rejection of the legendary accretions to the scriptural picture of Antichrist and his adherence to a totally collective interpretation of the Final Enemy distinguish him from any medieval view, even those that identified the institutions of the papacy with the Last Enemy.”⁷⁸

Obviously unaware of this, Teitelbaum continues to utilize satanic imagery, as depicted in classical midrash and biblical exegesis, but connects the satanic episodes. For example, he cites the golden calf; the meat given to the Israelites in the desert (Num. 11), for which they were summarily punished for succumbing to satanic seduction; and the Book of Job, in which Satan has a prominent place, as corollaries to the contemporary reality of Zionism and the Israeli state.⁷⁹ Still, for Teitelbaum, Zionism functions in a similar way as the papacy functioned for Luther. Teitelbaum uses classical Jewish literature primarily because this is the intellectual world in which he lived; secondarily, he used it as a tool to engage ultra-Orthodox colleagues whom he believed were being seduced into the demonic embrace.⁸⁰ He writes:

It is really a wonder, how it is possible that guardians of the faith can be convinced by their [the Zionists’] success and false miracles. There is no room for doubt that great

[satanic] miracles were done for the benefit of the wicked. We see that from the very day Adam was born, the serpent came to seduce him to act against God's directives and performed miracles for him, as we explained. And this happens generation after generation. . . . And this is not simply stories but is found explicitly in verses and rabbinic teaching whose truth cannot be questioned. And if one doesn't believe them, one is a heretic.⁸¹

Teitelbaum argues here that the seduction and danger of satanic forces is written into creation and, by extension, into the covenant itself. There are certainly midrashim and kabbalistic traditions that can confirm this. Thus, miraculous acts must be scrutinized by criteria outside their mere existence, as the existence of miracle itself does not imply divine sanction. In the case of the *slav*, for example, Teitelbaum claims that the Israelites erred because they mistook the sudden appearance of this bird as a divine miracle.⁸² This is especially true as the end-time (*ikvata d'meshikha*) approaches. "And if one thinks clearly," he argues, "there is no doubt that all their [the Zionists'] success is only through Samael and the *sitra akhra* [miracle of the demonic] that is seducing this fallen generation. And thus, it is important not to give them strength in words, actions, or thoughts."⁸³

There is a Talmudic source (b.T. Shabbat 89) that Teitelbaum often deploys to give an example of his "Antichrist" position. It states: "It is like the figure (*demut*) of Moshe that Satan showed Israel [in the desert] who was being carried in a coffin in the heavens. Satan showed them his bed to prove that Moshe had died." Of course, Teitelbaum comments, "this was all deception and illusory, for in truth Moshe was in the heavens."⁸⁴ This notion of satanic trickery is not foreign to rabbinic teaching.

The more formal idea of the Antichrist is rooted in the Satan figure in the Book of Job and the Book of Daniel 9–11. For example: *The King will do as he pleases; he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and he will speak awful things against the God of gods. He will prosper until his wrath is spent, and what has been decreed has been accomplished* (Dan 11:36). This is one reason, I suggest, why Teitelbaum includes a long excursus on Job in the body of *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah*.⁸⁵ Understanding the relationship between Satan and Job and examining the midrashic deployment of Satan in the golden calf episode (another central motif of *'Al Ha-Geulah*) is crucial for Teitelbaum's assessment of the world around him, especially given his belief in the proximate opportunity of redemption after the Holocaust.⁸⁶ The trickery of Satan in classical texts serves Teitelbaum as an example of the "trickery" of Zionism in its victory in 1967. The precariousness of miracles more generally, something he develops in "Essay on the Three Oaths," is a potentially damaging way to assess what is actually happening, if only because, in his reading (and here he finds midrashic support), Satan can perform miracles as well.⁸⁷

The idea of an Antichrist (again, without use of that nomenclature) emerges from the depictions of Satan in Job, in Daniel, and in midrashic renderings of the golden calf episode; it is taken up in Jewish apocryphal literature; and later

it is merged with messianism in certain Christian literature. The idea is that, by design, the final redemption is preceded by the emergence of a satanic figure or figures (individuals, communities, or even ideologies) who test the community of believers' fidelity to God's word and will. This satanic figure appears as an arbiter of divine will, often performing miraculous feats, having great, almost unprecedented success, such that, by all appearances, he is an emissary of God.⁸⁸ This speaks to a significant difference between Teitelbaum and his anti-Zionist predecessor Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz. Ravitzky describes this difference succinctly: "The Munkaczer Rebbe need only ask, 'What is the source of their wickedness?' The Satmerer [*sic*] Rebbe, however, needed to go on to ask, 'What is the source of their worldly success?'"⁸⁹ Simply put, this means that because Shapira died in 1937, he never had to confront the worldly success of Zionism, and thus the theological challenge was not as acute. But it also speaks to the way in which this worldly success serves as the cornerstone of Teitelbaum's political theology of the Antichrist. The *success* of Zionism is the crucial question Teitelbaum must answer, especially after 1967, and thus, for him, the failure of the defiled ideology of Zionism to meet its end does not prove that its source is divine will (the claim of many religious Zionists), but instead is proof of its Antichrist status. To make that case, he must resort to the original sources of past Antichrist ideologies: Job, Daniel, the episode of the *slav* in the desert, and the golden calf.

Teitelbaum is very much in line with a premillennialist mindset, in that Antichrist theologies generally argue that Satan *is* an emissary of God but functions as a tool of seduction, one who arises immediately before the impending redemption as a final test of the community of believers. Antichrist theologies are also almost always connected to a messianic claim.⁹⁰ What is required of the community of believers is resistance against, rather than acquiescence to, satanic seduction. For example, in "Essay on the Three Oaths," Teitelbaum writes that "Satan will act, under the guise of miracles in the battle of heretics against the Torah, to seduce (*liftot*) and draw the hearts of the people after heretical and blasphemous ways, heaven forbid."⁹¹

This is developed somewhat differently in Teitelbaum's "Introduction" to *Al Ha-Geulah*, where he develops the notion of a satanic miracle in the case of Job, whereby Satan is commanded by God to afflict Job but not kill him. Reflecting on the Six-Day War, he writes: "And who knows, heaven forbid, in these times, whether we have come to the state of Job whereby the afflictions and also the salvation that were true miracles came about through Satan, and what will result will be a great evil, as I have discussed elsewhere."⁹² In *Divrei Yoel*, with no direct reference to 1967 (*Divrei Yoel* having been written years before), he takes up the possibility of satanic miracle in the Holocaust with a long excursus on Job:

And now, in the great destruction (*hurban*) that happened to the Jews, we all know that those who survived did so as the result of a miracle and not by natural means.

One need not provide proofs for this. Anyone who spent any time in concentration camps saw this with their own eyes, that one could not survive there naturally, for reasons which I will not enumerate. And now we must make a calculation (*hesbon nefesh*) as to the source of that miracle. And why? There are two very different groups. There were those who were saved from the side of holiness, to expand Torah and increase honor to God, thereby bringing us closer to redemption. And then there is the opposite, who were saved by a miracle of the demonic (*sitra akhra*), in order to increase heresy, heaven forbid. Who knows why, and by means of whom, and from which side these miracles come? Everyone must make a calculation with their own soul if they are in the second group or if they are not in that group that will prevent the redemption.⁹³

This division of miracle into the divine (e.g., exodus from Egypt) and the demonic (e.g., Job) that Teitelbaum draws from the rabbis' reading of Job enables him to engage the Zionists on their own terms, in their use of the language of miracle to describe Israel's triumphant victory in 1967, while maintaining his position that God does not perform miracles for transgressors. Without denying that Israel's victory was a "miracle," Teitelbaum can still argue that the victory is not necessarily a event that illustrates divine favor. It can just as easily illustrate the opposite.

The notion of satanic miracle amounts to a kind of Jewish post-tribulationist idea that the Antichrist comes to test the faithfulness of the community of believers, even by performing miracles. By all accounts, Teitelbaum knew that Zionism was seen as a liberating force for the Jews, especially in the wake of the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust. Yet it is precisely Zionism's success, especially after 1967, that convinces him of God's real use of Zionism as that final test that requires resistance.

Antichrist ideologies in Christianity are founded on a very developed notion of Satan and of heresiology, elements that are less prominent in, but not totally absent from, Jewish sources.⁹⁴ The most prominent Jewish sources in which Satan appears include certain medieval midrashim such as *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the medieval books of the German Rhineland pietists (thirteenth century) such as *Sefer Hasidim*, and Kabbalah, especially the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah. Interestingly, while Teitelbaum makes use of the midrashic sources and occasionally cites German pietism (*Sefer Hasidim*, *Sefer Rokeah*, etc.), he almost never uses kabbalistic sources in which mentions of Satan and the *sitra akhra* are plentiful.⁹⁵

For example, the "Introduction" to *Al Ha-Geulah* does not treat the Zohar and, in the body of the text, Teitelbaum refers to the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah only in passing.⁹⁶ Given that he was certainly well versed in kabbalistic literature, the absence of kabbalistic references is conspicuous. The only thing I can suggest is that, in this work of political theology that he hoped would reach as wide an audience as possible within the ultra-Orthodox community, he chose to focus on the textual tradition that was most widely accepted—which includes Talmudic and midrashic literature, biblical commentary (which he uses quite often), and

Maimonides. In this way, no one could discount his approach as simply “kabbalistic” and thus not necessarily “normative,” even though Kabbalah was certainly part of normative ultra-Orthodox Judaism.⁹⁷ And, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Teitelbaum is able to make his case without extensive use of kabbalistic sources.

It is true that Teitelbaum was less interested in Kabbalah than most of his Hasidic contemporaries, as one can see from his Torah homilies in *Divrei Yoel*, but its absence from his anti-Zionist writings is particularly striking. Alternatively, Teitelbaum was aware of the dialectical nature of many medieval kabbalistic texts that suggest that holiness resides in the husks of evil that await redemption. The dialectical tendency of kabbalistic discourse could easily be deployed to undermine Teitelbaum’s more binary model whereby “evil never comes from good.” While Kabbalah could support his argument on the one hand, it could just as easily refute it on the other.

Teitelbaum’s commitment to the theological binary of “good never comes from evil” is worth exploring because it stands at the center of his political theology. A good example of this approach can be found in his lengthy comments to parshat Bo (Exod. 10) in *Divrei Yoel*. Having begun by citing a midrash that interprets the verse *Go unto Pharaoh* as meaning “You will go as my emissary (*b’shelikuti*),” he writes:

If it possible to say so, this is very difficult [to understand], as we know that God does not lend God’s name to evil and that the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was a punishment for Pharaoh’s initial willful sin, as Maimonides explains in his “Laws of Repentance.”⁹⁸ How, then, can God lend God’s name to this when God says that “I” hardened his heart? [We know that] evil does not go out from God (*m’ito yitbarakh lo tezei ha-ra’ot*). Yet we already know from *Kedushat Levi* [by Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev] in regard to miracles in general that the plague of the firstborn was done by Godself [and not an emissary], even though “evil does not go out from God (*m’ito yitbarakh lo tezei ha-ra’ot*).”⁹⁹ Here, however, [in the case of the firstborn,] it was also good for Egypt because through this plague God’s name will be sanctified through them, and there is nothing greater than sanctifying God’s name in public, see there in full his holy words that burn like a flame. . . . In *Kedushat Levi* we see that he [separates the plague of the firstborn] from the earlier plagues that were still evil for the Egyptians, therefore they were performed by means of an emissary because “evil does not go out from God.”¹⁰⁰

Having taken a somewhat circuitous route, Teitelbaum returns to his main point, suggesting that while the other plagues may have been “somewhat good for the Egyptians,” in that those plagues also sanctified God, in them we see that some good can come through a divine emissary, which is why the Jews were liberated from Egypt by means of an emissary. However, even that redemption was not the permanent one. Therefore, “in the final redemption—it should come quickly—this will be by Godself because that will be the final redemption, as is known. Thus, even though the plagues may have been somewhat good for the Egyptians, the

complete expression of goodness came only through the plague of the firstborn when the publicization of God's Name spans the generations."

This text rarely mentions current events, but it is not hard to see that Teitelbaum may be implying something about his present battle against Zionism. On the one hand, a Zionist reading of these comments could argue persuasively in a Kookean register that Zionism is a sanctification of God's name through the emissary of history. And yet Teitelbaum would respond that even if this is so, or precisely *because* it is so, it cannot be the final redemption because it occurs through an emissary. Thus, the claim that Zionism is messianic—messianism implying the final redemption—is for Teitelbaum not only impossible but trickery. Here one could offer a generous reading of Teitelbaum (one he would likely reject), that if Zionism were only about ensuring the safety of the Jews and not messianic at all, it might have been legitimate. However, the notion that Zionism was the sign of some kind of final redemption—a notion that informs not only religious Zionism, but much of secular Zionism as well in many forms—is for Teitelbaum blasphemous.

His textual proof here is that it occurred through an emissary and not as the result of an open act of divine intervention.¹⁰¹ In fact, a false redemptive claim is not, and cannot be, only an error but is an act of heresy. And its embeddedness in evil proves its falsity because "evil does not go out from God (*m'ito yitbarakh lo tezei ha-ra'ot*).” Yet the appearance of Zionism as redemptive is something Teitelbaum could not ignore, especially after 1967, and thus he deploys biblical and rabbinic notions of the success of Satan as a test before the advent of true redemption to explain the dissonance between the reality he sees and the political theology he advocates.¹⁰²

In *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, we read: "It is known in our literature that as soon as there is a sign of our redemption and the salvation of our souls, Satan devises ways to exchange it with false redemption that brings sorrow, anguish, and darkness to the world."¹⁰³ Rabbenu Gershom (Gershom ben Judah, 960–1040 CE) notes in his gloss to b.T. Tamid 32a, on the words *Satan will be successful*, "Do not be surprised that Satan is successful in leading them astray by offering them redemption and then leading them to hell."¹⁰⁴ Later on, Teitelbaum quotes a rabbinic source that I have been unable to locate: "Satan is given permission to perform miracles and wonders in its establishment of idolatry."¹⁰⁵ It may be that he is quoting this inaccurately from memory. In any case, this sentiment appears in various medieval kabbalistic texts but, to my knowledge, not in the exact form he cites. It also appears in early Christian texts such as Jerome's *Epistula*.¹⁰⁶ This sentiment is replete in Teitelbaum's work. For example, in "Essay on the Three Oaths," we read: "There have been many false prophets and messiahs that misled the world with great (false) miracles (*mof-tim*) and caused great destruction such that righteous leaders could not save the people."¹⁰⁷ This is even more the case in our orphaned generation, which doesn't even require a miracle. Rather, with unabashed falseness, Satan can blind the eyes

such that it will appear that his destructiveness appears as miracles. This itself is deficient to deflect the entire world from the truth.”¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere, we read: “If we see success in establishing redemption in opposition to its legal mandate (*sh’lo kdat*), this is only the success of idolatry upon which it says, ‘If he comes to defile, he will be able to do so (*potkhin lo*),’ and great miracles will be made for them.”¹⁰⁹

Teitelbaum often invokes idolatry when describing Zionism and, at times, when criticizing groups such as Agudat Yisrael that he believed were guilty of collusion with Zionists. Relating this to the notion of *lishma*, or doing a thing for its own sake, which refers usually to mitzvot but also to transgressions (*averah lishma*), Teitelbaum writes:

Even as the sages say, regarding mitzvot, that “even by doing something not for its own sake (*sh’lo lishma*), one can come to do it for its own sake (*lishma*),” the evil inclination is strengthened and sometimes prevents one from reaching *lishma*. But regarding sin, the evil inclination always helps one to sin. And thus, even if one is not sinning *lishma* (in this case serving idols just for the money, *elohei kesef*) one will eventually sin *lishma*, that is, without the desire for financial gain. Thus, the verse says, *Do not make with me gods of silver* (Exod. 20:20), that is, serve idols for the silver, even if one’s heart is not in it and one is still bound to faith in God [that is, *with me*]. Thus it states, *Do not make with me gods of silver*, for even if you are doing it “with me,” that is not *lishma* [i.e., in that you still believe only in God], and *do not make for yourselves gods of gold* (Exod. 20:20), because this will all bring you to sin *lishma* and do “for yourselves.” . . . One should not say, “I am not doing this *lishma* and my heart has not turned toward idolatry.” Rather, just as with the instruction for how to act in a political sense (*shosin be-medina*) in order to benefit financially, scripture teaches *do not make for yourselves*, because in the end it will be for you and it will become *lishma*, heaven forbid.¹¹⁰

While Teitelbaum mentions neither the Agudah nor any contemporary issue here, it is easy to see what he may have in mind. Much of the justification for buying into the Zionist program, among the ultra-Orthodox, was that they were doing so not because they believed in it (*lishma*), but to benefit from it (that is, *lo lishma*). This transactional relationship is a dangerous bargain, according to Teitelbaum, because the evil inclination will always draw one from *lo lishma* to *lishma* when it comes to sin. Before one knows it, he surmises, that which you were doing for ulterior motives you will come to believe in. Therein lies the true danger of idolatry. And therein lies the situation of false messianism.

It is important to note that the context of *‘Al Ha-Geulah* is impending redemption (*ikvata d’meshikha*), even more so than in *Vayael Moshe*, and thus it is in line with almost all Antichrist theologies. As discussed earlier, this messianic tenor is inextricably intertwined with the Holocaust, and thus Teitelbaum’s Jewish Antichrist theology can be categorized as a kind of post-Holocaust messianic theology.¹¹¹ What I mean is that for Teitelbaum, the Holocaust created the conditions for a new theological paradigm, one in which the Antichrist would come by

design as the final stage before redemption.¹¹² Thus, in some ways, Zionism is not a surprise for Teitelbaum but in fact quite expected. From another perspective, he also blames Zionism *for* the Holocaust.¹¹³ In this reading, it is not so much that the Holocaust created the conditions for the rise of the Antichrist, but rather that the rise and acceptance of the Antichrist yielded divine punishment in the form of the Holocaust. In “Essay on the Three Oaths,” he claims that Israel breaking its oath by immigrating en masse to the land of Israel severed the covenantal promise of divine protection, which then unleashed the evil of the Holocaust. The continued success of Zionism is due to the retraction of divine influence in the world as the result of Israel’s sin.

Teitelbaum begins “Essay on the Three Oaths” with a short reflection on the Holocaust, which I suggest is the contextual frame of the entire essay.¹¹⁴ In it he implies two things. The first is that the Holocaust was punishment, not so much for Israel’s secularization via the Enlightenment (a common theme among ultra-Orthodox leaders at the time), but more for the emergence of Jewish nationalism in Zionism. Abrogating the oaths against “immigrating to Israel en masse” becomes the *sine qua non* of Teitelbaum’s theopolitics in that it exemplifies a rejection of the oath Israel swore to God that thereby removes the covenantal protection promised by God. In short, it represents a *rejection* of messianism.

Second, he believes that the decimation of European Jewry was a sign of the final purging of Israel before redemption. Here, ironically, he agrees with religious Zionists; Zvi Yehuda Kook, for example, makes a similar comment, albeit toward the opposite end.¹¹⁵ However, they diverge in terms of their interpretation of the event. Kook, for example, viewed the Holocaust as an act of “divine surgery” (*nituah elohi*) that forced the Jews to abandon the Diaspora and immigrate to the land of Israel, for him a prerequisite of redemption.¹¹⁶ Teitelbaum viewed the Holocaust in the opposite manner. For him, the Holocaust and then the success of Zionism are part of a continuum. According to Amos Funkenstein, “for Teitelbaum the Holocaust came because Jews were too active; for the Gush Emunim [disciples of Kook], because Jews were too passive,” and for both the Holocaust is a portent of the Messiah. I am suggesting that for Teitelbaum, Zionism thus constitutes a kind of Antichrist; in his view, Zionism seduced Israel to break its oath with God, which resulted in the unleashing of evil in the Nazi genocide.¹¹⁷

For Teitelbaum, the proper response to this turn of events is to maintain the binaries of divine will (defined by the three oaths) and sin (the Antichrist), and not to view history dialectically—that is, not to construct a theology whereby transgression (Zionism) can be the vehicle for the good (redemption). Among the repeating tropes in Teitelbaum’s writings are the Talmudic dicta that “evil cannot come from God” and “sin cannot bring about the holy.” He may be gesturing toward the Sabbatean heresy of, as Gershom Scholem coined it, *ha-mitzvah ha-bah b’averah*, often translated (problematically) as “redemption through sin” (Teitelbaum likens Zionism to Sabbateanism often in *Vayoel Moshe*, finding it even

worse than Sabbateanism because of its widespread success).¹¹⁸ However, it is just as likely that Teitelbaum is referring to Kookian thinking, at least to the extent that he knew about it.¹¹⁹ For Teitelbaum, the proper response to the emergence of the Antichrist in the form of Zionism is resistance to the (understandable) temptation of Jews to believe that they are the agents in their own survival, that they can procure what God does not give. In this sense, while some view Zionism as a mitzvah, as the embodiment of the biblical mandate *You shall inherit the land and settle it* (Num. 33:53), Teitelbaum views such action as the quintessential sin, the final rejection of divine sovereignty and thus a rupture in the protective layer of the divine covenant.¹²⁰ As opposed to Zionism inaugurating “the first flowering of redemption” (Nobel Prize-winning Israeli author Shai Agnon’s felicitous phrase, included in the liturgical prayer for the state of Israel), for Teitelbaum, Zionism is the tragic failure of the Jews. This is why much of *‘Al Ha-Geulah* is a long meditation on the golden calf episode in Exodus 32 (he often uses the phrase “the golden calf of Zionism”).

The irony of succumbing to the Antichrist is that it is, in large part, a sin that is unintentional and whose consequences are often concealed. In fact, as Teitelbaum notes in his discussion of Bar Kokhba in *Vayoel Moshe*, although the false messiah can, in fact, temporarily save Jewish lives (like Bar Kokhba), in the end it destroys the covenant.¹²¹ Here Teitelbaum leans heavily on Nahmanides’s rendering of the golden calf narrative whereby the majority of those worshipping the calf (not the “*erev rav*” who forced Aaron to make it) did so with the intention of serving God. Those who were guilty of idolatry were killed immediately (Exod. 32:27), while the remainder were punished but not killed (Exod. 32:30) precisely because their intentions were noble. In regard to religious Jews celebrating Israeli Independence Day, Teitelbaum writes, “And so with those who praise God for the miracles of the evil ones; even if their intentions were to praise God, they prevent the possibility of true miracles, by saying that ‘this is a revealed miracle, like the miracles of the Exodus.’”¹²² Like the story of the calf, the story of Zionism is, for Teitelbaum, an episode of “redemption and exchange,” in which satanic power deludes even the well-intentioned.

Teitelbaum views the entire narrative as an illustration of the calf as the Antichrist. His understanding of the calf as an instantiation of the Antichrist is based on Targum Yonatan’s rendering of Exodus 32:19: *As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged*. Cleverly shifting the verb *dancing* from the Israelites to Satan, the Targum reads, “Satan was in the calf and leaped out before the people.”¹²³ The miraculous nature of that event was interpreted by the Israelites as divine intervention, and so they responded in kind. The (satanic) miracle was precisely the trap. This is how Teitelbaum understands the Six-Day War. It was indeed a miracle, like Satan jumping from the calf in the desert, or Bar Kokhba protecting the Jews in the short term.¹²⁴

The notion of Satan entering the bodies of righteous Christians is a common thread in early modern Antichrist theology. Moreover, the notion of “Jewish

devils" (*shadin yehuda'im*) appears in the Zohar, in Sabbateanism, and in early Hasidism.¹²⁵ The Zohar uses it in reference to rational philosophers, the Sabbateans to label those who do not believe in Sabbatei Zevi, and Hasidism as a pejorative for its opponents (the Mitnagdim). Thus, Teitelbaum's use of satanic language to describe the Zionists is hardly new.¹²⁶ While the calf is not the focus in Christian Antichrist literature, and Teitelbaum certainly did not know this literature in any case, the Christian sources could have been aware of Targum Yonatan and *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 45, where the satanic depiction of the calf is mentioned.

The point here is that for Teitelbaum, Zionism is very much a divine act and very much a part of the impending messianic drama. He is a messianist no less than Kook, although, unlike Kook, Teitelbaum views resistance, or political quietism, as the quintessential messianic act.¹²⁷ The exercise of *shtadlanut*, or appeasement of the authorities, is a long-standing approach taken by Jews for millennia and utilized by Teitelbaum in Hungary and America. A Zionist state, for Teitelbaum, is not one that merits *shtadlanut* precisely because he believes that it is a state of heresy, built on false notions of Jewish sovereignty in exile or as the fulfillment of the messianic idea by secular Jews.

The question of pacifism is a complex one. I see no indication that Teitelbaum was a pacifist, though he discusses it in his short essay on war, addressed below. He was more of a political quietist who believed that resisting Zionism, rather than justifying it (like Kook), is acting in fidelity to tradition.¹²⁸ In any event, he shares the notion with the radical religious Zionist camp that Zionism has a role to play in the messianic drama. The difference between them is that Teitelbaum sees Zionism as the Antichrist and not as the redeemer. Hence, he believes that the proper response is not to envision, dialectically, how "redemption can come from sin," but to recognize that redemption is the final eradication of sin, the result of resisting this final test. Kookean thinking views Zionism and its success as part of the unfolding redemptive drama. For Teitelbaum, Diaspora is not a consequence of history but a part of the covenantal design. Ending the exile prematurely is thus the quintessential anti-messianic position. In terms of the proper time to end exile, Teitelbaum discusses that at length in "Essay on the Three Oaths," basing his argument largely on the criteria laid out in Maimonides's "Laws of Kings," chapter 11. Kookeans also base their thought on Maimonides, albeit they read the sources differently.¹²⁹

In *Vayael Moshe*, Teitelbaum writes:

It is known that this is the fourth kingdom [of exile] and no one will be able to collect from them to bring redemption except by means of the merit of the Avenger (Natrona), that is, [we need] to guard [the mitzvot] and wait and to fulfill [as it is written] "do not partake of any of it." That is, before the apportioned time. Because of our sins today, as redemption nears, the multitude have become ensnared (*nitpas*) in this to transgress the warning of "not partaking" and have taken from the bitter food and thus prolong the exile, heaven forbid.¹³⁰

This seduction, coming close to the time of redemption, squares with other Antichrist theology. Teitelbaum introduces us to the notion that the Antichrist is not a purely Christian idea, but one embedded deeply in Hebrew scripture and apocrypha and present throughout the exegetical tradition in episodes such as the golden calf, the divine license given to Satan in the Book of Job, and the power of demonic miracle.¹³¹ We see similar manifestations in some of the great schisms of Jewish history: Rabbinites versus Karaites, kabbalists versus philosophers, Sabbateans versus anti-Sabbateans, Hasidism versus Mitnagdim, Orthodox versus Reform.¹³² Even if one rejects Teitelbaum's political theology and his assessment of Zionism as the Antichrist, this line of thought may at least enable Jews to question the extent to which contemporary Jewry, of all stripes, seems to ignore the very *possibility* that, theologically, Zionism could be precisely the opposite of what they think it is. Teitelbaum reminds us that false messianism filters through the entire exilic tradition and, on those grounds, there is no reason one should not consider Zionism a part of that tradition. Teitelbaum would argue that for any religious Jew to consider Zionism possible, they must look for precedent to justify that possibility. He finds no such evidence that conditions of Zionism and its larger program fit messianic criteria defined in the tradition. He finds ample precedent for the opposite: that Zionism is a manifestation of a divine test facilitated through a satanic force. The very notion of "the success of Satan" in b.T. Tamid should at least enable that question to be a live hypothesis, even if, as William James might put it, we "will" to believe otherwise.¹³³

The sleight of the divine hand, as it were, plays itself out in Teitelbaum's work in various subliminal ways. For example, in a long homily on parshat Zakhōr, the Shabbat before Purim that mandates Jews publicly read the commandment to eradicate the memory of Israel's quintessential enemy, Amalek, Teitelbaum cites a passage from Moshe Hayyim Ephraim of Sudilkov's *Degel Makheneh Ephraim* on the verse of Jacob's pleading, *Please save me from my brother Esau* (Gen. 32:12), and then loops it into the world of divine allusion:

As the midrash suggests, in the future Esau will don a tallit and fringes and sit amongst the righteous, and God will have to drag him from there.¹³⁴ And it appears that this phenomenon happens even in our times, when falsity pervades the world, and everyone wants to be considered among the legitimate Jews (*shlomei emunei yisrael*). And we see they dress in white on Shabbat and wear *talitot* on *mincha* of *erev* Shabbat, and they say, "I will be like them." And this is most difficult, as they are prolonging exile. They are called the *erev rav* who are mixing with Israel, and it is very difficult to separate from them. And this is what Jacob meant when he said, *Please, save me from my brother Esau*, that is, he is in my midst and attached to me, and even so, he is Esau.¹³⁵

While not an explicit gesture, the Kookians (or religious Zionists more generally) often dressed in white on Shabbat, according to kabbalistic custom, and also wore

talitot for *mincha* on Friday afternoon.¹³⁶ And it is certainly the case that their piety was expressed through their deep belief in the messianic import of Zionism. This is all read by Teitelbaum as an example of the pre-messianic illusion that is being imported into the religious sphere by these practitioners. They are the representatives of Esau that have attached themselves to the righteous Jacob. Avoidance of secular Zionists was not a challenge for him, given that its heretical foundations are obvious. It is the religious Zionists who evoke his ire, because it is they who have infiltrated the inner sanctum of the covenantal tradition that, in his view, demands resistance to false messianism. The messianic ante has been raised through the doubt embedded in the enemy within.

The notion of doubt that permeates Teitelbaum's understanding of the holy and its opposite appears under numerous guises. For example, in Genesis 45, when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, the midrash suggests that he proves who he is by speaking to them in *lashon ha-kodesh* and showing them his circumcision. Asking why *lashon ha-kodesh* was not sufficient, Teitelbaum writes in *Divrei Yoel* as follows:

Joseph proved to them that he was a *zaddik* by showing them his circumcision (*milah*). Only then would they believe that his speaking to them in *lashon ha-kodesh* [was authentic].¹³⁷ Even though his language seemed true, that sign (*siman*) alone was not sufficient because it could have been done through magic (*kishuf*), as we see in Maimonides [*Mishneh Torah*, "Laws on the Foundations of the Torah," chapter 7]. . . . Thus the brothers relied on these two signs (language and circumcision). And here these signs were clear to them, that he was righteous only after seeing his circumcision, whereby they saw that divinity rested upon him. . . . Thus these [two] signs were a clear indication [of his righteousness] upon which the brothers (*shevatim*) relied. But one cannot rely on a sign that is not clear.¹³⁸

Teitelbaum is certainly not speaking about Zionism here, but rather addressing the danger of believing something to be true, or divine, without clear proof. Joseph speaking *lashon ha-kodesh* was insufficient because it could easily have been the work of magic or the *sitra akhra*. Circumcision, however, was more tangible and thus assuaged the doubt that remained with the brothers in accepting what seemed to be the impossible: that this Egyptian viceroy was actually their long-lost brother. Much of the discourse around the Six-Day War, more than with the war in 1948, circled around the language of miracle, a belief that the swift victory was "unnatural" and "miraculous." While Teitelbaum certainly witnessed Israel's victory with everyone else in the Jewish world, he was unwilling to accept its miraculous status—or, rather, that this was a divine miracle indicating divine favor. He suggested that such apparent signs could easily be the result of demonic forces. His reasoning as to why Joseph had to show his brothers his circumcision—that is, why speaking *lashon ha-kodesh* was not sufficient to convince them—illustrates his ambivalence about the apparent miracle of a secular, and for him heretical, Jewish force being the recipients of divine intervention.

In sum, I suggest that we read Teitelbaum's *Al Ha-Geulah* as a full-blown political theology that rests on the notion that a final test before redemption will come by way of Satan returning to the world looking and acting like a savior under the guise of Zionism. A few questions remain. First, is Teitelbaum an apocalyptic thinker? In one sense, no. He does not predict the end-time, nor does he write in apocalyptic tones, though he certainly believed that he was living in redemptive times (*ikvata d'meshikha*), but that was true of many Jewish thinkers after the Holocaust. And yet, his Jewish Antichrist thinking has apocalyptic implications. A second, related question is whether Teitelbaum was a pacifist.¹³⁹ Setting aside the obvious inflammatory language and imagery, he never advocates any action to overthrow the state, nor was he in favor of any collusion with the Palestine Liberation Organization or Yasser Arafat, a difference that eventually led him to break with Neturei Karta. His preference was to avoid the state and call for its dismantling, not because it created animus against the Jews (though he firmly believed the Zionists were endangering the Jewish people), but because he viewed the state as a heretical act no less egregious, and perhaps more so, than the sin of the golden calf in Exodus.¹⁴⁰ Even more strongly, Teitelbaum's call to dismantle the state was, in his mind and according to his reading of the sources, for the sake of the survival of the Jews and messianic redemption.¹⁴¹

Teitelbaum is best understood, in my view, as a premillennialist separatist rather than a postmillennialist militant activist. A useful contrast here (which I have made elsewhere) is between Teitelbaum and the militant rabbi Meir Kahane, who shared some of Teitelbaum's apocalyptic ideas, albeit toward opposite ends.¹⁴² Kahane's open militancy can be contrasted with Teitelbaum's seeming pacifism, even as both advocated enclavist ideologies, Teitelbaum in his upstate New York village of Kiryas Joel and Kahane in the state of Israel.¹⁴³

Teitelbaum's separatism is founded on his belief in the dangers of coexisting with evildoers, even for the sake of bringing them to Torah. One salient example of this can be found in *Divrei Yoel* on Numbers, in his reading of the word *asafsuf* (riffraff, or deviants, in the desert): "The Tosefta mentions a disagreement in *Sifrei* on the identity of *asafsuf* (Numbers 11:4). One position says they are the *erev rav*, and one position says they are the Sanhedrin. It is said that the intention of the Sanhedrin was for the sake of heaven. After they saw how the *erev rav* erred they thought it worthwhile to join them, thinking perhaps that they would return them to the proper path."¹⁴⁴ Teitelbaum goes on to bring up Abraham as an example. Citing the psalm *Happy are those who do not do the way of the evildoers* (Ps. 1:1), he argues that Abraham did not join those in the generation of the Tower of Babel or of Sodom. This of course counters the conventional wisdom that Abraham did proselytize among idolaters and bring his message of one God to them, but Teitelbaum stresses that he never really became a part of their society but remained at a distance and influenced them from afar or as they came to him. The implied reference, of course, is to Agudat Yisrael and their

collusion with the Zionists for the purposes of having a positive impact on them. The mistake of the Sanhedrin is that they chose to become part of the *erev rav* (Teitelbaum elsewhere calls Zionists the *erev rav*) and in doing so, even with good intentions, became the *asafsuf*, the rabble who sinned, with their desire for meat in the desert causing Israel great tragedy. This is classic premillennialism, saving the surviving remnant for the end-time, here using the great proselytizer Abraham as an example of keeping oneself separate from those who could influence one in negative ways. One could also postulate that this may be directed against Habad as well, whose methods of reaching out were well known, though Habad keeps its distance from the culture it is trying to influence, certainly more than Teitelbaum's constituency did with Zionists.

ON MIRACLES

In previous sections, I mentioned the misuse and misunderstanding of miracle as an important part of Teitelbaum's critique of Zionism. The language of miracle, or divine sign (*nes, mofet*), became ubiquitous after the Six-Day War in 1967, having been employed to some extent by many in Israel after the War of Independence in 1948.¹⁴⁵ But the seemingly unnatural phenomenon of a war of such magnitude lasting less than a week, coupled with the fear of annihilation that permeated collective Jewish consciousness in the months preceding it, certainly and justifiably raised the question of miracle—ironically, as Teitelbaum once quipped, among many who previously didn't believe in either God or miracles.

It is therefore no wonder that Teitelbaum devotes considerable space in *'Al Ha-Geulah* to the parameters of miracle, addressing the question in three ways. First, he looks at the sources in regard to who can be a recipient of divine miracle. Second, he shows that miracles can also be performed by Satan, that Satan has divine sanction to perform miracles in order to test the true believers, and that the ostensibly miraculous nature of an event does not prove that its source is divine. Third, he considers the relationship between miracle and war. Are wars miraculous or do they simply follow the course of natural events, even though they may sometimes appear extraordinary? This, of course, excludes the wars God fought with Israel in TANAKH. The extraordinary and the miraculous are thus two distinct categories, only the latter requiring very specific criteria. These three subtopics—who merits miracle, divine versus satanic miracle, and miracles and war—cover for Teitelbaum the question of whether this war, while certainly extraordinary, can be accurately described as miraculous.¹⁴⁶

Teitelbaum writes: "It is foundational in rabbinic teaching that God does not perform miracles to evildoers but only to the righteous."¹⁴⁷ That is, unless the miracle comes from Satan or his emissaries. It is clear that the belief in satanic miracles is found in rabbinic teaching."¹⁴⁸ A few pages later, he continues: "It is clear and simple from the rabbinic sources we have cited that when it states that miracles do

not come to evildoers, it means only [miracles] from the side of holiness. But Satan has permission to perform miracles and wonders and he is given the power from heaven to trick and test the people.”¹⁴⁹ Since the source of miracle can be either divine or satanic, the only way to judge which one it is, if one can judge at all, is by the nature of the recipient, righteous or sinner.

Teitelbaum brings in an example of the idea that divine miracles function only for the righteous from the language of the ‘Al Ha-Nisim liturgy for Hanukkah, which explicitly uses the term *miracle* as an explanation of the events in question, in particular the military victory during the Hasmonean revolt. Teitelbaum suggests that the language of divine miracle is used here precisely because the liturgy states that the Hasmoneans “cleansed the Temple court and purified the altar.” Questioning the language of the liturgy itself, he asks why it stated that after the Hasmoneans won the war, they returned to the Temple to cleanse it of idolatry. This should have been assumed and adds nothing new to the narrative told in the prayer. Rather,

this was all to support the completion of the miracle. That is, the miracle was operational because of this act. If they had not cleansed the Temple of idolatry, all the [so-called] miracles that preceded this would not have been miraculous at all, and there would not have been “a great salvation” (*teshuah gedolah*). And the miracle of the menorah lights would not have been miraculous. This is because God does not perform miracles for those who remain attached to idolatry. Rather, it was because they cleansed the Temple court and purified the altar from idolatry that the miracle [of Hanukkah] was fulfilled.¹⁵⁰

Teitelbaum’s point here is that miracles are judged as divine in retrospect. In this case, the seeming act of divine intervention of some sort may have laid the conditions for the Hasmoneans to rebel and recapture the Temple, but the miracle was deemed divine only when they proceeded to cleanse the Temple of idolatry. If they had not done so, the miracle would not be considered a true divine miracle. He suggests that this is why the liturgy includes not only the great salvation of recapturing Jerusalem, but also the very process of purification. It is precisely this purification process that instantiates the miracle as a divine act.

It is not a stretch to connect Teitelbaum’s reading of the Hasmonean victory to his response to the Six Day War. While divine intervention of some sort may have contributed to the war, or so it seemed, its status as divine miracle can only be applied after the fact, that is, after the war was won, dependent on how the victors behave. In his estimation, given that Israel had not cleansed itself from its status as a secular polity that defiles the land, as a transgressive act of “forcing the end,” the miracle could not be a divine miracle, but only a satanic one. Miracles thus enter a state of doubt once they appear, until the results become clear.¹⁵¹ If Teitelbaum is correct that the tradition does not support a divine miracle for the wicked but does support satanic miracles to benefit the wicked in order to test the righteous,

then the entire concept and status of supernatural intervention is dependent on the status of its recipient. Since he has already determined that the state itself is not in accord with divine will, any miracle that occurs can only be a test and not an example of divine will.

On the question of war and miracles, Teitelbaum takes an interesting approach, again basing his line of thought on Hanukkah:

We see from Nahmanides that victory in war, even in a case where a great majority (for example, the tribes of Israel were ten times more populous than the tribe of Benjamin), is not miraculous at all.¹⁵² Quite the opposite: Since God enabled natural events to unfold and removed divine providence [in the time of war], the weak majority fell to the strong minority. Therefore, it appears clear that such a victory is a natural occurrence. We can see from Gur Aryeh's (MaHaRal of Prague) reading in parshat Balak on the verse *because that people [Moab] was so numerous* (Num. 13:18)¹⁵³ that a multitude does not assure victory. Sometimes the majority cannot win if they are not suitable warriors.

This is also the case in the miracle of Hanukkah where "the few defeated the many and the weak defeated the strong." The sages did not establish the holiday on the military victory but only on the story of the miracle of the oil. And most authorities reject the position of the *Beit Yosef* [Joseph Karo's commentary to the *Tur Shulkhan Arukh*] that the miracle [of the oil] was only seven days, and answer him in a variety of ways.¹⁵⁴ And the answer of the *Pri Hadash* [Hezekiah da Silva's supercommentary to *Shulkhan Arukh*] that the first day was a celebration of the military victory [and the other seven of the oil] is not convincing. On this, see *Pri Megadim* [Joseph ben Meir Teomim's commentary to *Shulkhan Arukh*] explaining his words regarding the military victory, which was not miraculous. Thus, we bless the miracle of the oil, which is only on the oil and not the war. There is room for the position of *Turei Zahav* [David ha-Levi Segal's commentary to *Shulkhan Arukh*] that a miracle is only that which recognizably works outside of nature. We can add the words of *Pri Megadim* to the effect that even if we join the two together (that is, the victory of the weak and small in number over the strong and great in number), this is still not a miracle, as this can also occur naturally in the course of war.¹⁵⁵

The only Talmudic pericope about Hanukkah appears in b.T. Shabbat 21b and does not mention the military victory at all, but only a story about the oil burning eight days, which does not appear in any previous literature of the Hasmonean rebellion.¹⁵⁶ Much has been written about why the sages chose to ignore the military victory even though it was included in the earlier liturgy of 'Al Ha-Nisim. Above, Teitelbaum gives his rendering of 'Al Ha-Nisim, arguing that the term *miracle* applies there only in relation to the Hasmoneans cleansing the Temple after recapturing it and not the military victory itself. Here he stays closer to the rabbinic pericope, arguing that they only chose to brand the oil story miraculous and ignored the war altogether not because, as some claimed, the rabbinic sages were not supportive of the Hasmoneans, who quickly Hellenized Jerusalem, but because the military victory did not merit the language of miracle at all.¹⁵⁷

Teitelbaum suggests a few things in this discussion: (1) that the extraordinary, especially in cases of war, does not necessarily constitute the miraculous; (2) that miracles are acts of divine intervention only for the benefit of the righteous and not the wicked; and (3) that miraculous phenomena can sometimes happen to the wicked, but those are the product of satanic forces given divine sanction to test the righteous. In short, for Teitelbaum, one can at best be agnostic about miracle and thus should not deploy it as a justification for any turn of events, including the extraordinary victory of Israel in 1967. In chapter 1, I examined Teitelbaum's views of miracles and wonders as they apply to messianism, where Teitelbaum relies on Maimonides, specifically his "Laws of Kings" and *Epistle to Yemen*, to argue that miracles and wonders cannot be used as criteria for the Messiah. Here he is more specific about how to judge miracles more generally. On one reading, Teitelbaum wants to contest the use of the term *miracle* in regard to the 1967 war for at least two reasons. First, the beneficiaries were not righteous. And second, even if one argues that the righteous living in the land also benefited, wars in general are not miracles, even if they may be extraordinary.

On another level, the danger of deploying miracle here or elsewhere for Teitelbaum is that it establishes a sense of certainty that is neither provable nor falsifiable. Teitelbaum's entire worldview is founded on fear and doubt as the operative categories of living on the precipice of the end-time. "I remain fearful," he admits, "for who knows what the new day will bring? I hope that it will not come to pass, and that we will not be tested from heaven with these great tests because our weak generation has no strength to endure them. But a person does not know what tests will come upon us in these days of *ikvata d'meshikha*."¹⁵⁸ Thus, interpreting events, changes, and progress as divinely sanctioned is, for him, a dangerous enterprise because we live in a world close to the end-time and satanic forces are constantly appearing as holy and reasonable alternatives to test the faithful.

The existence of a Jewish state that can ensure the safety of Jews *appears* to be both reasonable and necessary, and perhaps that is even true. And yet, claims Teitelbaum from his perspective, the price paid to have that state and short-term protection is the abandonment of the tradition as the sole criterion of fidelity to the covenant. Therefore, he suggests that the state of Israel is, and can only be, a satanic test, an Antichrist. Of course, no one can ever know, and that is the point. Living in a fully premillennial mindset, all one can do, in his mind, is continue in the paths of our ancestors (*yisrael saba*) as much as possible. For Teitelbaum, miracle is not proof of anything except when considering its recipients, what it accomplishes, and the price of that accomplishment. Thus, so-called miracles can never dispel doubt. Interpreting them or relying on them to determine whether one's actions are in concert with, or in opposition to, divine will is a hazardous enterprise that Teitelbaum warns against.

This is how I understand his notion of *yisrael saba*. Adherence to these ancestral norms is not by definition correct, as one can never quite know the right path, but

it is the safest option we have. Attachment to ancestral norms—and this includes, for Teitelbaum, accepting the exilic decree and waiting for the true redemption—is subverted by Zionism in two ways: first by rejecting exilic quietism, and second by secularizing and nationalizing the Jews and offering a new form of Jewish identity outside of Torah. By attaching miracle to those transgressive acts, Zionist discourse around the Six-Day War only deepens his conviction that what is at work is not God's mercy but satanic seduction. For Teitelbaum, the extent to which the war made Zionism, which he viewed as anti-messianic, more palatable to the world only strengthened his conviction that the "miracle" was of satanic and not divine origin.

ON WAR

In a short essay that did not appear in the first edition of *‘Al Ha-Geulah* but is included in subsequent editions, Teitelbaum engages in a fiery rebuke, accusing Zionists of putting Jewish lives in danger by engaging in war to protect the state. This seems strange, given that Israel initiated war neither in 1948 nor in 1967 and Teitelbaum knew that, but he argues that the existence of the state itself creates the inevitability of military conflict and, thus, Zionism has responsibility for the conflict by dint of its very existence.¹⁵⁹ In most cases, Teitelbaum saved his wrath for Zionists in general or those in Agudat Yisrael, ultra-Orthodox constituents who, he believed, had succumbed to the Zionist heresy. However, here he specifically targets "religious Zionists" (*ziyonim ha-dati'im*) for claiming that Israel's wars were both necessary and halakhically permissible, under the rubric of either mandatory war (*milkhemet mitzvah*) or discretionary war (which would include defensive war, *milkhemet reshut*).¹⁶⁰ Whereas earlier in *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, Teitelbaum accused those who claimed the war was miraculous of heresy, here he focuses on the religious (halakhic) justification for a war that he claims has no justification whatsoever but was the consequence of Israel's provocation in existing as a state at all.

The relevance of these two categories of war has been scrutinized at length, and Teitelbaum, uncharacteristically, does not delve too deeply into them, only enough to argue that most medieval authorities (Rishonim) maintain that these categories of war would not apply in our time for a variety of reasons.¹⁶¹ The argument in this essay on war appears somewhat dissonant. It is largely uncontested both that the war in 1967 was not initiated by Israel, even given its preemptive attack on the Egyptian air force, and that the attack by Arab countries necessitated Israel to act defensively to protect its citizens, with some arguing that it constituted *pikuah nefesh*.¹⁶² And yet, Teitelbaum argues that although the war may have needed to occur—that is, once Israel was attacked, the war became purely self-defense—giving halakhic sanction to the war is both mistaken and blasphemous. He would add that the very existence of the state was a provocation that made such a conflict inevitable: "The ways of the religious Zionists were to justify the defiled

behavior of the Zionists and add 'insult to injury' (*khet 'al pesha*) by justifying these actions as congruent with Torah, by twisting Torah to their will and distorting Torah to suit their errant views. Their intention and purpose were to blind the eyes and divert the hearts of naive Jews who simply want to follow the Torah and to convince the multitude that the Torah sanctions their views, heaven forbid.¹⁶³ His first point of attack was to challenge those religious Zionists who justified the war halakhically, which Teitelbaum viewed as invalid because, as he saw it, there is no justification for Jews to wage war during the exilic period, even defensive war. Here he is on solid halakhic ground, although Zionist authorities at the time, such as Shlomo Goren, argued that defensive wars were permitted. Goren and others reach their conclusion largely by silence, since Maimonides prohibits mandatory war but says nothing of discretionary war, thus leaving open the inference that he would permit such wars.¹⁶⁴

In his *Divrei Yoel*, Teitelbaum addresses war in a discussion about the confrontation between Judah and Joseph in Genesis 44:18. His comment is based on a comment by Moshe Teitelbaum in his *Yismakh Moshe*, citing Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev's *Kedshat Levi*:

In the days of the Hasmoneans, the miracle was not complete because it occurred through warfare. And the way of Torah is that those below (human beings) should not engage in a physical act [of resistance] but rather act through prayer and supplication. There are times when war is permitted from heaven, such as in the days of the Hasmoneans when the great priests engaged in battle via "spiritual intuition" (*ruah ha-kodesh*). And King David went to battle after engaging the Urim ve Tumim [the magical priestly breastplate]. . . . In our days, however, the time immediately preceding redemption (*'ikvata d'mesikha*), we have no permission to engage in war. Our only recourse is to engage in prayer to God.¹⁶⁵

Teitelbaum is surely aware that such a position is not viable in the case of a nation-state, as a nation-state cannot easily adopt such a pacifist stance.¹⁶⁶ Statehood arguably demands the right to go to war to save itself or its interests. Thus, the time of *'ikvata d'mesikha* demands that the Jews do not engage in statecraft precisely because it makes waging war inevitable. The miracle of Hanukkah, successful through an insurrection of the Hasmoneans against the hegemony, is for him the example of why war cannot bring about redemption. The Hasmoneans regained autonomy over the Temple, but that soon faded and exile continued. Perhaps this is why the later sages removed the insurrection as the miracle and chose to focus on the miracle of oil.

In any case, the very notion that the war in 1967 "was necessary and obligatory according to the Torah" was mistaken on halakhic grounds for Teitelbaum, even as he may recognize that given the already transgressive circumstances built into the founding of the state, it may have been justified to defend the residents in the land. It is interesting that his focus here is against the religious Zionists and not Zionists

more generally. As we know, Teitelbaum was as concerned as other Jews about the lives of those in Israel and raised money that was sent to help them. There is thus something else going on here. He writes:

To begin with, it is known, to all who see the truth, that the entire source of trouble and the danger of war is only the consequence of the establishment of the Zionist state. It is the state that has evoked the ire of the Arabs, provoking them in numerous ways. If they did not desire it and would nullify the evil state (which serves no purpose for God or the Jews, in fact quite the opposite, it is the cause of much anguish, destruction, and the uprooting of Torah), without such a state, there would be no war. And there would be no reason to endanger the lives of Jews with the dangers of war. How can one really think that the Torah would sanction spilling the blood of Jews for this defiled state? And there is no doubt that there is no Toraic dispensation (*heter*) to sacrifice even one Jewish soul for this Zionist state. Even if these evildoers want to convince most of the world of their errant views, the Torah will not change and not move from its true path. And heaven forbid that a Jew who believes in God and Torah would accede to this kind of heretical thinking, that it is permissible to shed Jewish blood for this Zionist state.¹⁶⁷

There is a lot going on in this passage, much of it quite common for Teitelbaum, but what stands out is his position that the war was not *only* the result of Arab hatred of Israel but also a natural consequence of Israel's very existence as a state. In other words, the choice to establish a state was one that carried with it the consequence, even the inevitability, of war. A state that would not wage war would never survive as a state. War is what states do. Leo Strauss states it quite clearly: "There is no criterion for the value of a state other than its usefulness for satisfying the needs of the nation. An essential national necessity is the security of the nation vis-à-vis other nations. If need be, the state provides this security by means of war. War, as the form of the highest reality of the state, is not in the service of ideas: wars need not be dressed up as crusades."¹⁶⁸ Thus, when the Jews chose to establish a state, they chose to wage war, and in doing so they endangered the lives of the state's constituents in the service of protecting them, or protecting the state. In Teitelbaum's view, they chose to enter a situation where transgression was inevitable. Moreover, given that his reading of the halakhic sources is that war is not permissible for Jews in exile (and the state itself, for him, does not end exile but exists *in* exile), the state necessarily puts Jews in a position where they would have to transgress by waging war in order to survive as a state. If it is not permissible for Jews to wage war, it is not permissible for them to have a state.

Teitelbaum's position on war and messianism was not very provocative. As Robert Eisen notes, "most Orthodox Jews subscribed to a passive form of messianism according to which the messianic era would come about through God's sudden and willful intervention into history."¹⁶⁹ It was really the influence of Rav Abraham Kook, who advocated a more activist form of messianism that put war on the table as a form of messianic activism, even though Kook was quite critical

of violence as part of his Zionist project.¹⁷⁰ But given the inevitability of war and violence, Zionist halakhists in his wake had to renegotiate the halakhic status of war in order to make it permissible to substantiate a state.¹⁷¹ In that sense, Zionist halakhists and Teitelbaum both recognize the same problem.

For Teitelbaum, a state (and certainly a Jewish state among Arabs states) is, by definition, a provocation. This is the consequence of establishing such a state without divine intervention—that is, without it being under the protection of the Messiah. “And also, their provocation was not *le-shem shamayim* [for the sake of heaven] but rather based on heresy and the mere desire for victory [and power, *nizahon*].”¹⁷² This does not exonerate Israel’s enemies, but it extends responsibility to Israel as having agency in that provocation. As a secular state, Israel would need to defend itself and, by definition, put its citizens in danger, as all states do, and thus it would need to go to war and sacrifice the lives of its citizens and soldiers. From a halakhic perspective, the question as to whether a (secular) Jewish state is or is not permissible before the coming of Messiah is a murky one; it is not even clear if the halakhic tradition contains the necessary rubrics to adjudicate such a question. But the issue of whether it is permissible for Jews to wage war is well documented, and many Zionist halakhists grappled with that question precisely because if there is a state, it must be able to wage war.

This all, of course, begs the question of normalization: the ambition, part of the Zionist program, to be a nation “like all the other nations,” which included the ability to wage war in self-defense (most wars claim to be waged in self-defense). This was one way many Zionists thought they could resolve “the Jewish Question”: through political sovereignty as normalization. Teitelbaum and others who shared his view were opposed to normalization in principle, arguing that the state of exile for the Jews was a state of *abnormalization* and that being “like all the other nations” was not an aspiration but a lack of faith—in fact, the abandonment of the covenant.¹⁷³ Teitelbaum asks:

Secondly, even according to their evil view that they want to establish a state so that Jews could be “like all the other nations,” and principally so that they can fulfill their desire to uproot Torah, still, how can they dare say that the war would be permissible according to Torah? And one is tearing out one’s hair, wondering how Jews who dress like God fearers hold the hands of these heretics in the name of Torah to support waging war and endangering the lives of Jews and falsely prophesying that Israel will succeed in the war through the power of Torah, and give sanction to such a war as a [halakhically] obligatory war.¹⁷⁴

The extent to which Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as the very antithesis of Torah cannot be overstated, which is why he was so incensed by the religious Zionists’ attempt to distort Torah to support an anti-Torah movement. Agudat Yisrael were pathetic in his eyes because they were simply “selling their soul to the devil.” But religious Zionists were far more pernicious because they used

the tradition to subvert it: “And all these religious Jews that give [Zionists] strength and affirmation (*hizuk*) and distort the Torah [for their benefit] will later stand in judgment [for their actions]. One must run from them as far as possible, because joining them puts one in great physical and spiritual danger and they will also be implicated in murder.”¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

In this book, I have offered an extensive rendering of Teitelbaum's political theology as a broad intervention into the challenges of Judaism and modernity. I framed my analysis by suggesting that Teitelbaum viewed his time as a particular iteration of what Leo Strauss called the "theologico-political predicament," the irreconcilable synthesis of Judaism as an age-old, venerated religious tradition founded on revelation, and the secularized frame, including nationalism, of the modern Jewish project. Zionism became the focus of his ire, but Zionism was not the only problem—just the most overt and, for him, the most dangerous.

It seems likely that by 1967, Teitelbaum knew his anti-Zionist crusade would not succeed. Israel was an established nation-state, it was not going away, and, after the Six-Day War, Teitelbaum (with many others) witnessed a sea change in Jewish and world support for Israel, even among a growing number of his constituents. This is arguably why he adamantly wanted to publish his final testament, *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah*, even in failing health. And yet, even as he knew that he represented a fading voice against the increasing nationalization of Judaism, he remained steadfast that this new project embodied in Zionism—for him, this new iteration of Jewish heresy—would not achieve its intended goals. It would not bring a solution to the Jewish Question, it would not end the fear of Jewish vulnerability, it would not bring an end to exile, and it would not usher in the messianic era. Here, looking back over half a century later, I think he was correct.¹

As he saw it, political power and sovereignty might assuage some of the fears Jews had in the aftermath of the Holocaust, fears he understood quite well. But the burden of tradition weighed heavily on him, and he could not accept Zionism as a legitimate alternative to the "theologico-political predicament" in which he lived. He was thus not in agreement with Strauss, who, even with all his reservations,

did not fully reject Zionism (though, like Teitelbaum, he saw political Zionism as a heretical movement).²

Theological speculation is neither provable nor falsifiable. In the long arc of Jewish history, we are always living one frame at a time. It may seem to many that Teitelbaum was mistaken and that his argument was disproven by history. But that assessment is myopic, for we are always in the middle of the story, trying to assess the past and ever unsure of the future. Right or wrong, Teitelbaum gave us a provocative reading of Jewish history “against the grain,” and a reading of Judaism and modernity the likes of which does not exist in this form in the annals of (modern) Jewish thought. As I discussed in the introduction to this book, his battle was not solely against Zionism as nationalism, but also against the way in which Jews had abandoned the traditional parameters of their covenantal responsibility, at least as he understood it.

But even given his anger, animus, and acrimony in regard to the paths most Jews had taken—and though, a mercurial personality, he often treated those who challenged him with disdain—he retained a deep love for the Jewish people and never sought their harm in any way. It is interesting, for example, that he broke with Neturei Karta, the staunchly anti-Zionist group in Jerusalem, in the 1960s when they began communicating with Yasser Arafat. For Teitelbaum this was a bridge too far.

His life was full of personal and collective tragedy. Aside from being a victim of the Holocaust, even though he was saved from almost certain death, he lost his beloved first wife and his two young daughters in Europe before the war (he remarried but did not have more children) and suffered many disappointments in his career, even though he was deemed an *iluy* (Torah genius) from his youth. For example, he was passed over, in favor of his elder brother, for his father’s rabbinic post in Sighet, and later he lost the election to lead the Edah Haredit in Jerusalem after his arrival in Palestine following the war.

He arrived in America almost penniless, staying with friends and disciples until he was able to secure a home of his own.³ And yet his belief in the possibility of reconciliation never waned. In all its complexity, his work remains a gift to those among us—including those who disagree with him—who are forever intrigued by the immensity of his learning, the depth and passion of his commitment, and the originality of his thought. His intervention is not pretty, his critique is not easy to take, and, as the saying goes, “he did not pull any punches.” I only hope that I have succeeded in giving his work the attention and seriousness it deserves.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. See, e.g., Michael Meyer, *The Origin of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany 1749–1824* (Wayne State University Press, 1972); Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Of course, Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* devotes much to the political, but his political thought uses Judaism (mostly the Hebrew Bible) as a template for the modern republic. See Christopher Skeaff, *Becoming Political: Spinoza's Vital Republicanism and the Democratic Power of Judgment* (University of Chicago Press, 2018); Nancy Levene, *Spinoza's Revelation: Religion, Democracy, and Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

2. This approach filters through much of Buber's writings on Hasidism. In particular, see Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man* (Princeton University Press, 2016). The idea of Hasidism as a contribution to the modern existential crisis exists in many close readers of Buber on Hasidism. For example, see Arthur Green, "A Neo-Hasidic Credo," reprinted in Arthur Green, *The Heart of the Matter* (Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 269–90.

3. There are, of course, exceptions to this assessment. See, e.g., Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Harvard University Press, 1992), 23–84. Buber's political writings, for example his *Paths in Utopia* and *Kingship of God*, do not engage much in Hasidic literature. See Samuel Hayim Brody, *Martin Buber's Theopolitics* (Indiana University Press, 2018).

4. See, e.g., Michael Walzer et al., eds., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, 4 vols. (Yale University Press, 2000–2018). More recently, see Julie E. Cooper and Samuel Hayim Brody, eds., *The King Is in the Field: Essays in Modern Jewish Political Thought* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).

5. Of particular note in this regard is Nahum Syrkin, who was quite explicit in his view that Zionism uproots the religion of Judaism in a way more radical than any of its competitors (e.g., Reform). Yadgar notes: "As Syrkin is keen to stress, this comparison (between

Zionism and Reform) proves that the Zionist confrontation with the past is more forceful than those offered by its ideological or sociopolitical competitors. Zionism, he proclaims, ‘does indeed uproot religious Judaism in a more forceful and deeper manner’ than its competitors.” Yaacov Yadgar, *To Be a Jewish State: Zionism as the New Judaism* (NYU Press, 2024), 54. This is even truer for more radical Zionist thinkers such as Yosef Hayyim Brenner, who viewed Zionism as an open rebellion against Judaism.

6. See Menachem Keren-Kratz, “*Va-yo’el Moshe: The Most Anti-Zionist and Anti-Israeli Jewish Text in Modern Times*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 113, no. 3 (2023): 479–505.

7. On the secular interpretation of redemption in Zionism, see Arie Saposnik, *Zionism’s Redemptions: Images of the Past and Future in Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

8. In particular, see Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism* (Brill, 2002); Yosef Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence: Orthodoxy in the Grip of Nationalism* (Academic Studies Press, 2013).

9. See Yadgar, *To Be a Jewish State*, 40–75.

10. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2019). The preface is also reprinted in Daniel Schwartz, ed., *Spinoza’s Challenge to Jewish Thought* (Brandeis University Press, 2019), 216–32.

11. On heresy as a mode of modern Judaism, see Shaul Magid, “Is the Academic Study of Judaism Heresy?,” in *Canonization and Alterity*, ed. Gilad Sharvit and Willi Goetschel (De Gruyter, 2020), 266–90.

12. See Leo Strauss, “Progress of Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization,” in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (SUNY Press, 1997): 87–136.

13. See Shaul Magid, “The Theologico-Political Predicament, Zionism, and the Crisis of Modernity: Leo Strauss and Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar,” in *Modern Jewish Thought on Crisis: Interpretation, Heresy, and History*, ed. Ghilad H. Shenav, Cedric Cohen-Skalli, and Gilad Sharvit (De Gruyter, 2024), 107–26. See also Steven Smith, “Leo Strauss’s Discovery of the Theologico-Political Problem,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 12, no. 4 (2013): 388–408; Leora Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and the Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeffrey Bernstein, *Leo Strauss: On the Borders of Judaism, Philosophy, and History* (SUNY Press, 2015). For Orthodox responses to Strauss, see Jeffrey Bloom, Alec Goldstein, and Gil Student, eds., *Strauss, Spinoza, and Sinai: Orthodox Judaism and Modern Questions of Faith* (Kodesh Press, 2022).

14. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). On the origins of the term, see Jonathan Cole, “The Art of Political Theology—Finding the Right Definition and the Proper Set of Questions,” *Political Theology Network*, March 8, 2017, <https://politicaltheology.com/the-art-of-political-theology-finding-the-right-definition-and-the-proper-set-of-questions-jonathan-cole/>.

15. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

16. Menachem Lorberbaum, “A Theological Critique of the Political,” in Cooper and Brody, *The King Is in the Field*, 238.

17. Lorberbaum, “Theological Critique,” 224.

18. The conventional view that redemption is a category only in religious Zionism is challenged in Saposnik, *Zionism’s Redemptions*. Teitelbaum notes that Zionism contains two

dangers, equally significant: Either Zionism views itself messianically, which he views as an instantiation of the prohibition of “forcing the end,” or Zionism is the very erasure of messianism altogether, arguing that once Jews have political sovereignty, Messiah is no longer necessary. These dangers will be explicated below.

19. The collection *Divrei Yoel* is, in my view, more classical Hasidism, though it often contains references to Teitelbaum’s political theology.

20. On Hasidism and halakha, see Maoz Kahana and Ariel Evan Mayse, “Hasidic Halakha: Reappraising the Interface of Spirit and Law,” *AJS Review* 41, no. 2 (2017): 375–408; Ariel Evan Mayse, *Laws of the Spirit: Ritual, Mysticism, and the Commandments in Early Hasidism* (Stanford University Press, 2024).

21. On heresiology, see Robert Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy: A History of Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (Routledge, 2012), esp. 117–76. On heresiology in rabbinic Judaism, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 37–88.

22. On Schmitt and another Hasidic master, see Zalman Rothschild, “Sovereignty, Reason, and Will: Carl Schmitt and Hasidic Legal Thought,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 37, no. 2 (2022): 319–33.

23. See Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*, 82, 83.

24. See, e.g., Martin Buber, “Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (March 1957): 9–23.

25. Scholem letter to Buber, June 22, 1932, cited in Paul Mendes-Flohr, “The Kingdom of God: Martin Buber’s Critique of Messianic Politics,” *Behemoth* 1 (2008): 26–38.

26. See Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*; Martin Buber, *Königtum Gottes* (Schocken Books, 1932); Mendes-Flohr, “Kingdom of God.”

27. See Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 189. Reflecting on the Jewish massacre of Arabs at Kibiyeh, Leibowitz, asking how such a generation was raised to act so egregiously, writes, “The answer is that the events at Kibiyeh were a consequence of applying the religious category of holiness to social, national, and political values and interests.”

28. Lorberbaum, “Theological Critique,” 236.

29. A similar critique of Zionism’s “redemptive” model can be found in Franz Rosenzweig. See his “Letter to Gertrud Oppenheim, February 15, 1917,” in Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher, Vol. 1* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 345. Cf. Zohar Maor, “Scholem and Rosenzweig: Redemption and (Anti)Zionism,” *Modern Judaism* 37, no. 1 (2–17): 1–23.

30. See Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*, 86–88.

31. On the history of kingship and politics in the Books of Samuel, see Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

32. See Martin Buber, *On Zion* (Schocken Books, 1973), 125; Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*, 241.

33. See Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*, 86–90. On Buber’s Hebrew humanism, see Greta Schaeder, *The Hebrew Humanism of Martin Buber* (Wayne State University Press, 1973).

34. See Mendes-Flohr, “Kingdom of God,” 35.

35. See Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*, 239.

36. See Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 74–88.

37. See Marc B. Shapiro, *Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011); Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006).

38. On Islam, see Bernard Lewis, "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam," *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953): 43–63. In Islam the term *ilhad*, or "deviation," is used. On Buddhism, see John Bowker, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 239, 240.

39. David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008).

40. See, e.g., Aharon Yaakov Lieberman, *Kuntres Shmoi shel Moshiah* (independently published, 2021).

41. On heresy and the contemporary world more generally, see Shaul Magid, "Is the Academic Study of Judaism Heresy?," in *Canonization and Alterity*, ed. Gilad Sharvit and Willi Goetschel (De Gruyter, 2020), 266–90. For another, less sophisticated, attempt at a kind of contemporary heresiology, see Natan Sharansky and Gil Troy, "The Un-Jews: The Jewish Attempt to Cancel Israel and Jewish Peoplehood," *Tablet*, June 16, 2021, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/the-un-jews-natan-sharansky>. In this essay, Sharansky and Troy argue that Jews who do not support, or accept, Israel as a Jewish state are essentially writing themselves out of Jewish peoplehood or clearly putting themselves on the margins. They become "Un-Jews," an interesting contrast to Teitelbaum's Zionist-as-heretic. In any case, like Berger's book, Sharansky and Troy's essay has gained little traction, in part because the very notion of setting certain beliefs, doctrinal or political, as the litmus test for legitimate Judaism or Jewishness remains unconvincing in a modern context.

42. *Al Ha-Geulah*, 20.

43. See Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (SPCK, 2009), 1–5. McGrath argues that heresy is attractive in our time precisely because it is "seen as the subversion of authoritarianism, offering liberation to its followers." As promoters of a revolutionary and even openly subversive project, some Zionists proudly identified as heretics precisely because this was a rebellion against the rabbinic authority, part of which mandated remaining in exile until the Messiah arrives. This notion of heresy as choice being part of modernity is also developed in Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Anchor Press, 1979). In this sense, Zionism is a fully modern phenomenon.

44. Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—Ha-Admor mi-Satmar* (Magnes Press, 2020), 99–129. Sighet was part of Romania following World War I and then was part of Hungary from 1940 to 1944. In the nineteenth century, it was part of the Kingdom of Hungary. In English, see Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—the Satmar Rebbe—and the Rise of Anti-Zionism in American Orthodoxy," in *Contemporary Jewry* 37 (2017): 457–79. See also David Sorotzkin, "Binyan Erets shel Mata ve-Hurban Erets shel Ma'ala: Ha-Rebe m'Satmar ve Ha-Ortodoxit Ha-Radikalit," in *Erets Yisrael Ba-Hagut Ha-Yehudit Be-Meah Ha-Esrim*, ed. Avi'ezer Ravitsky (Yad Ben Zvi, 1991): 133–67.

45. On Teitelbaum's and his disciples' response to Kastner, see Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Hast Thou Escaped, and Also Taken Possession? The Responses of the Satmar Rebbe—Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—and His Followers to Criticism of His Conduct During and After the Holocaust," *Dapim: Studies in the Holocaust* 28, no. 2 (2014): 97–120. Kastner immigrated to Israel after the war. He was later accused of collaboration with the Nazis and, on March 3, 1957,

was assassinated by a small group of men connected to Lehi, a Jewish terrorist cell in Israel. Teitelbaum appears to refer to Kastner, although not by name, in *Divrei Yoel*, “Beha’alotkha,” cited on page 191 of “The Contents of the Teachings of Rabbenu,” which is part of an edition of *Divrei Yoel* on parshat “Vayishlach” 1957; and in Yoel Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel on Noso, Beha’alotkha, Selah, and Korah* (1967; published in Brooklyn, 2024).

46. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 198–202.

47. On the “Old Yishuv,” see Menachem Friedman, *Hevra ve Dat* (Yad Ben Zvi, 1978).

48. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 214–18.

49. See Keren-Kratz, “Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—the Satmar Rebbe.”

50. See Keren-Kratz, “*Va-yo’el Moshe*,” 479; Alexander Sender Deutsch, *Bozina Kadisha* (Jerusalem Book Store, 2000), 2:61.

51. Israel Rubin, *Satmar: An Island in the City* (Quadrangle Books, 1972), is the first ethnography of Satmar in America. See also Refael Kadosh, “Extremist Religious Philosophy: The Radical Doctrines of the Satmar Rebbe” (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 2010). Recently, two monumental studies have appeared that both broaden and deepen Rubin’s analysis: Nomi M. Stolzenberg and David N. Myers, *American Shtetl: The Making of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic Village in Upstate New York* (Princeton University Press, 2021); and Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper, *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* (Yale University Press, 2021). *American Shtetl* focuses on the Hasidic village founded by Teitelbaum, and *A Fortress in Brooklyn* focuses on the building of Hasidic Williamsburg, spearheaded by Teitelbaum after his arrival in the United States. Each exhibits the massive project of constructing a Hasidic community in America after World War II. On the Supreme Court case regarding Kiryas Joel, see also Louis Grumet and John Caher, *The Curious Case of Kiryas Joel* (Chicago Review Press, 2016). The building of the Satmar community in Israel was somewhat less dramatic, since ultra-Orthodox communities with Teitelbaum’s proclivities already existed there long before his arrival. See Menachem Friedman, *Hevra ve Dat* (Yad Ben Zvi, 1978).

52. *Forverts*, June 27, 1958, 2, 5; Keren-Kratz, “Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum,” 19 (in transcript).

53. On lost causes and their relevance, see Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (Verso, 2017).

54. On Buber’s theopolitics, see Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics* (on Buber’s *Kingship of God* as a kind of response to Schmitt, see 82–83, where he writes that it “addresses Schmitt’s favored themes . . . in most cases we find the Schmittian themes inverted”).

55. See Dovid Meisels, *The Rebbe* (Israel Bookshop Publications, 2010). See also Chaim Moshe Stauber, *The Satmar Rebbe: The Life and Times of Rav Moshe Teitelbaum ztl: A Close Talmid’s Personal Recollections* (Feldheim Books, 2011).

56. See, more recently, Keren-Kratz, “*Va-yo’el Moshe*.”

57. When Teitelbaum returned to Israel in 1952, his first trip since leaving Palestine in 1946, he was greeted as a kind of savior, bringing much-needed funds to the ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist community. He was appointed “honorary president” of the Edah Haredit, and in 1952, when the chief rabbi of the Edah died, he was appointed to succeed him.

58. On Neturei Karta, see Friedman, *Hevra v Da’at* and Motti Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism, and Woman’s Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). His relationship with Neturei Karta and its founder Amram Blau was complicated much earlier than that. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 205–7.

59. On Teitelbaum's critique of Beis Yaakov, see Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 204, 205. On Beis Yaakov, see Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Beis Yaakov Movement* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2019), esp. 51–68.

60. I discuss this at greater length in chapter 3.

61. While not wholly clear, it is curious that in *'Al Ha-Geulah*, as opposed to *Vayoel Moshe*, Teitelbaum uses the term *world* ('*olam*') frequently in reference to Zionism's success. See, e.g., *'Al Ha-Geulah*, 20, 21.

62. Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 205–9.

63. *Vayoel Moshe*, 361.

64. For a particularly acerbic assessment of Teitelbaum's work, in response to my essay on Teitelbaum in *Tablet* magazine, see James A. Diamond and Menachem Kellner, "A Reply to Shaul Magid on the Satmar Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum's Anti-Zionist Theology," *Tablet*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/belief/articles/shaul-magid-teigelbaum-reply>. There were numerous traditional responses to Teitelbaum, including one by Menachem Kasher entitled *Ha-Tekufa Ha-Gedolah* (Machon Torah Shelemah, 1968), though Kasher never openly mentions Teitelbaum. There is also Yoel Kahn's *Maneh Hakham* (Maneh Hakham Institute, 2012), a Lubavitch response to Teitelbaum, and Shlomo Aviner's *'Alo Na'aleh* (Hava Books, 2012), a chapter-by-chapter critique of *Vayoel Moshe* (Aviner is in the religious Zionist camp). See also Gil Student, "The Religious Zionism Debate," 2008, *Torah Musings*, <https://www.torahmusings.com/2010/04/religious-zionism-debate-2/>. Student draws much of his material from Kasher.

65. On Teitelbaum as a premillennialist thinker, see Shaul Magid, "Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II: Satmar," in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, ed. David Watt and Simon Wood (University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 92–107.

66. See Myers and Stolzenberg, *American Shtetl*, which alludes to the modernity of the Kiryas Joel communal experiment.

67. In a passing reference, Mirsky notes that the anti-Zionist doctrines of Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz are the "photographic negative of Kook's writings" and that Teitelbaum was influenced by Shapira. See Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2014), 175. While this is true, Shapira and Teitelbaum parted ways on some very important matters, one of which was whether the Zionists defiled the land such that Orthodox Jews should not reside there. Shapira held that position, whereas Teitelbaum did not. For Teitelbaum, as for Kook, the land retained its sanctity.

68. For Kook's lineage, see Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic*, 10–15; on his early life, see Yehudah Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity: The Making of Rav Kook 1865–1904* (Academic Studies Press, 2019), esp. 278–328.

69. See, e.g., Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic*, 43–91.

70. See Avraham Vaserman, *Kore le-Degel: R. Kook ve Degel Yerushalayim: Ha-Alternativa Ha-Nishkakhat le-Tenua't Ha-Zi'ut* (Makhn Ha-Berakhah, 2020).

71. For a comparison of Teitelbaum and Zvi Yehuda Kook, see Motti Inbari, "Messianism as a Political Power in Contemporary Judaism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 392–406.

72. On Volozhin, see Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century: Creating a Tradition of Learning* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014). On Berlin, see Gil Perl, *The Pillar of Volozhin: Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin and the World of Nineteenth-Century Lithuanian Torah Scholarship* (Academic Studies Press, 2013).

73. For details, see Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience*.

74. In general, see Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in Wertheimer, *Uses of Tradition*, 23–84. On the district in Hungary where Teitelbaum was raised, see Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Maramaros, Hungary—the Cradle of Extreme Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 35, no. 2 (May 2015): 147–74.

75. On *Sefer Zerubavel* and its doctrine of the satanic false messiah, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

76. 'Al Ha-Geulah, 20.

77. 'Al Ha-Geulah, 20. See also *Divrei Yoel*, "Shelah," cited in "Contents of the Teachings of Rabbenu," 192.

78. See Yehudah Mirsky, "From Every Heresy, Faith, and Holiness from Every Defiled Thing: Towards Rav Kook's Theology of Culture," in *Developing a Jewish Perspective on Culture*, ed. Yehuda Sarna (Ktav, 2014), 103–42.

79. Mirsky, "From Every Heresy"; see also Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1964).

80. Mirsky, "From Every Heresy," 136.

81. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Pinkasei Ha-Reayah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 2008), vol. 1, 7:86. I used Mirsky's translation of the passage.

82. On Ahad Ha'Am, see Steve Zipperstein, *Ahad Ha'Am's Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'Am and the Origins of Zionism* (Peter Halban, 1993).

83. Mirsky, "From Every Heresy," 122.

84. From *Hidushei Divrei Torah* 1957 to parshat Tazriah, 52. See also *Dibrot Kodesh: Yoel Teitelbaum on the Fifth of Iyar*, 3.

85. On the question of censorship in Kook's published writings, see Avinoam Rosenak, "Hidden Diaries and New Discoveries: The Life and Thought of Rabbi A.I. Kook," *Shofar* 25, no. 3 (2007): 111–47.

86. On Brenner's critique of Kook, see Jonathan Meir, "Teshukatan shel Neshamot 'el Ha-Shekhina: Birir Masekhet Ha-Kesharim bein Ha-Reayah Kook le-Hillel Zeitlin ve-Yosef Hayyim Brenner" (The Desire of the Soul for the Shekhina: The Connection Between Rav Kook, Hillel Zeitlin, and Yosef Hayyim Brenner), in *Derekh Ha-Ruah: Sever Ha-Yovel le Eliezer Schweid*, ed. Yehoyada Amir, vol. 2 (Hebrew University/Van Leer, 2005), 771–818.

87. See Shaul Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbalah* (Indiana University Press, 2008), 16–33.

88. See, e.g., Yitzhak Mualem, "The Satmar Hasidic Sect and the Exodus of Yemeni Jews," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 32 (2022): 4–41. Mualem argues that most of the Satmar activity in Yemen in the 1970s was an attempt to prevent Jews in Yemen from immigrating to Israel. That is, it was largely part of their anti-Zionist agenda. This is certainly true. However, what Mualem does not focus on is the process of secularization often forced upon Yemeni immigrants after 1948, including separating children from their families. Thus, for Satmar, as much as it was anti-Zionist, it was also about stripping away what Teitelbaum believed was Yemenite Jewry's authentic Jewish existence to be integrated into the secular Zionist project. Teitelbaum founded an organization called Rav Tov that also aided Jews in Tunisia, Syria, and Iran. See Daniel Elazar, "The Relations Between Israel and American Jewry in the Context of the Worldwide Jewish Community," *Kivunim* 3 (1979): 93–116.

89. In Brooklyn in 1956, Hasidim close to Teitelbaum purchased the Yiddish daily *Der Yid* (founded in 1953) from Aaron Rosmarin, an Orthodox Jew with sympathies to Zionism.

When Rosmarin owned *Der Yid*, it contained essays that spoke of Zionism in a variety of ways. After it came under the provenance of Teitelbaum, *Der Yid* became exclusively anti-Zionist and rose to become the largest Orthodox Yiddish daily in America and the vehicle for communicating Teitelbaum's brand of Judaism to the larger ultra-Orthodox community. See Hertz Frankel, *The Satmar Rebbe and His English Principal: Reflections on the Struggle to Build Yiddishkeit in America* (Menucha, 2015).

90. See Princeton University Press, "Nomi M. Stolzenberg and David N. Myers on *American Shtetl*," February 10, 2022, <https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/nomi-m-stolzenberg-and-david-n-myers-on-american-shtetl>.

91. On these communities, see Liora Halperin, *The Oldest Guard: Forging the Zionist Settler Past* (Stanford University Press, 2022).

92. Teitelbaum is far from alone in this. For example, Sholom DovBer Schneersohn writes in his responsum on *lashon ha-kodesh*: "But the desecrating Zionists took another path completely. They substituted the entire Torah and made it into a national cause and said 'my people' Israel. They aspire to be a nation like all other nations. And thus they took the land by force not in the name of the holiness and purity of the place but because of nationalism, which is dependent on the land, as nationalism cannot exist without a state (*medina*). Therefore, they also took hold of the language, as there is no nation without a language." Sholom DovBer Schneersohn, *She'elot ve Teshuvot Torat Shalom* (Otsar ha-ḥasidim, 1982), 5:9, no. 87, 193. Like Teitelbaum, Schneersohn argues that Zionism is more than simply the establishment of a state in the land of Israel, being as well a larger project of nationalism, which is a distortion of Torah.

93. It is significant to note that other forms of religious Zionism did exist in this early period, for example the religious Zionism of R. Isaac Herzog among others. Herzog in particular developed a theory of a pluralistic theocracy as the template of the state. Teitelbaum did not seem to be aware of Herzog's work. My assumption is that for Teitelbaum, the very notion of supporting a Jewish state before the coming of the Messiah, even if it is ruled by Jewish law, would be blasphemy. On Herzog and theocratic pluralism, see Alexander Kaye, *The Invention of Jewish Theocracy: The Struggle for Legal Authority in Modern Israel* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 24–50. Another example of religious Zionists active in the 1930s is a group established in 1937, known as the "Hasmonean Covenant," founded by students of Rav Kook, who died in 1935. This group of Kook students found some common cause with the secular Revisionists, some even joining Lehi. See Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "The Negation of Galut in Religious Zionism," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992): 129–55, 137, 138.

94. Don-Yehiya, "Negation of Galut," 132.

95. Menachem Mendel Schneerson dropped the *h* from his last name when he immigrated to the United States.

96. On the centrality of America in Schneerson's messianism, see Phillip Wexler and Eli Rubin, *Social Vision: The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Transformative Paradigm for the World* (Herder & Herder, 2022).

97. Lorberbaum, "Theological Critique," 225.

98. This is, for example, the main argument of religious Zionists against *Vayael Moshe*. See, e.g., the works of Menachem Kasher, Shlomo Aviner, and Gil Student.

99. Rav Kook's son Zvi Yehuda is one of the most rigid proponents of negating the exile as a religious precept. A more recent articulation of the negation of exile in Zionism that

follows Zvi Yehuda Kook can be found in Harold Fisch's *The Zionist Revolution* (St. Martin's Press, 1978).

1. HERESIOLOGY AND ZIONIST ANTI-MESSIANISM

1. The first edition, including just "Essay on the Three Oaths," was published in 1959/1960. The second edition, which included "Essay on Residing in Israel" and "Essay on the Holy Language," appeared at the end of 1961.

2. The history of *Vayoel Moshe* is itself an interesting subject. According to Menachem Keren-Kratz, Teitelbaum had the idea of writing a book about his anti-Zionist ideology after returning to America from a trip to Israel in 1959, where his willingness to work with the state was criticized by Neturei Karta, the anti-Zionist faction in Jerusalem (see, e.g., the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot*, July 24, 1959, 2). *Vayoel Moshe* was first published in Brooklyn in 1959 in pamphlet form and in 1960 as a book. Keren-Kratz implies that Teitelbaum wrote the book (parts of which were written earlier in various forms) partly in response to the criticism by Neturei Karta that he was not anti-Zionist enough, that he had softened his views against the state. In general, Keren-Kratz argues that while Teitelbaum proudly wore the label of "zealot" in these matters, he was often more pragmatic than many thought, negotiating with modernity in various ways to promote the building of his Hasidic empire. See Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Is the Jewish State the Ultimate Evil or a Golden Opportunity? Ideology vs. Politics in the Teachings and Actions of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—the Satmar Rebbe," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 29, nos. 1–2 (September 2018). There was considerable resistance to Teitelbaum and his zealous views. For example, a year before *Vayoel Moshe* appeared in print, Haim L. Lieberman published a scathing critique in Yiddish, *Der Rabbi und der Satan* (Komitat für Israel, 1958). See also Yitzhak Kraus, "Shalosh Ha-Shevuot Ke-Yesod Mishnato Ha-Anti-Ziyonit Shel R. Yoel Teitelbaum" (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

3. The term *yisrael saba* speaks to a broad notion of traditions of one's ancestors, an idea that plays a prominent role in Teitelbaum's writing. I discuss this in more detail below.

4. See Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Can Jews Be Anti-Semitic? The Case of Neturei Karta's Extreme Orthodox Anti-Zionist and Anti-Israel Ideology," in *Anti-Semitism in Hungary: Appearance and Reality*, ed. Jeffrey Kaplan (Helena History Press, 2022), 185–212.

5. Even Teitelbaum's detractors, such as Shlomo Aviner and Menachem Kasher, readily acknowledge his deep learning and creative interpretive skill. Aviner's book opposing Teitelbaum will be discussed below. Kasher doesn't mention Teitelbaum by name but sometimes offers a veiled reference, for example: "As is written by a well-known authority, 'It is a great crime to claim that redemption comes from a state before its time. The very notion of a [Jewish] state before the redemption that is promised in our tradition is truly heresy.'" Menachem Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah* (Machon Torah Shelemah, 1969), vol. 2, 472. Kasher's is often considered the first and most comprehensive critique of *Vayoel Moshe*. It doesn't seem to really integrate Teitelbaum's *Al Ha-Geulah ve'al Ha-Temurah*, which had been published two years before.

6. It is at least partly a critique of the Bais Yaakov movement, which had already emerged in Eastern Europe before the war. Teitelbaum's school, Beis Rochel, was an attempt

to recalibrate girls' education according to the stricter mandates of Hungarian Unterland ultra-Orthodoxy.

7. See, e.g., the 1976 foreword to Efraim and Menachem Talmi, *Lexicon of Zionism* (Ma'ariv, 1981).

8. See, e.g., David Sorotzkin, "Redemption of Darkness and Gloom: R. Yoel Teitelbaum, the Rebbe of Satmar" [in Hebrew], in *Ha-Gedolim*, ed. Benjamin Brown and Nissim Leon (Magnes Press, 2017), 371–401.

9. On messianism more generally, see Raphael Jehuda Zwi Werblowsky, "Messianism in Jewish History," in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (NYU Press, 1992), 35–52. On Schneerson's messianism, see Avrum M. Ehrlich, *The Messiah of Brooklyn: Understanding Lubavitch Hasidism Past and Present* (Ktav, 2004); Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (Schocken Books, 2003); Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Chaim Miller, *Judaism Turned Outward: Chabad's Outreach in Historical Perspective* (Kol Menachem, 2014); Phillip Wexler, Michael Wexler, and Eli Rubin, *Social Vision: The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Transformative Paradigm for the World* (Herder & Herder, 2022). For a general assessment of Kook's messianism, see Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2014), 44–92.

10. On *atkhalta d'geulah* in religious Zionism, see Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*, vol. 2, 445, 446, 480.

11. Some scholars argue that Habad messianism predated the war and the seventh rebbe. The fifth and sixth Lubavitcher rebbes were virulently anti-Zionist.

12. Aviezer Ravitzky, for one, draws attention to the connection between the three oaths and the Holocaust in Teitelbaum's writing. See Aviezer Ravitzky, "Forcing the End": Radical Anti-Zionism," in *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 63–70.

13. Yoel Teitelbaum, *Vayael Moshe* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1985), 5. Interestingly, like the Book of Lamentations itself, Teitelbaum does not abandon hope. The tragedy of the Holocaust is refracted through the rabbinic theodicy of destruction and redemption. See, e.g., Lamentations, 3:22–26, 3:31, 3:32; and, on our generation as living on the cusp of redemption, Yoel Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, 9 vols. (Jerusalem Book Store, 2004), vol. 9, 181. In the final chapters of "Essay on the Three Oaths," especially in the chapter comparing the generation of Sabbatai Zevi to his own post-Holocaust world, he frequently deploys the term *ikva d'meshikha* to describe his generation. See Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 175, in *Vayael Moshe*.

14. On Teitelbaum and the Kastner transport, see Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Thou Hast Escaped and Also Taken Possession? The Responses of the Satmar Rebbe—R. Yoel Teitelbaum—and His Followers to Criticism of His Conduct During and After the Holocaust," *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah* 28, no. 2 (2014): 97–120.

15. Most recently, see Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper, *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* (Yale University Press, 2021).

16. See Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), 2.

17. See, e.g., Joel Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*

(Oxford University Press, 1995). The German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz introduced the term *theodicy* in 1709 in his *Theodicy: Three Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and Origin of Evil* (Open Court, 1996).

18. See Frank M. Cross, “The Structure of Deuteronomic History,” *Perspectives in Jewish Learning* 3 (1968): 9–24; Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Harvard University Press, 1974); Barbara Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil: Jewish Theological Responses to the Holocaust* (Academic Studies Press, 2021), 4–20.

19. See, e.g., Shaye Cohen, “The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 2 (1982): 18–39; Mintz, *Hurban*, 17–48.

20. See Haym Soloveitchik, “Catastrophe and Halakhic Creativity: Ashkenaz—1096, 1242, 1306, and 1298,” in *Haym Soloveitchik, Collected Essays I* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013).

21. See Mintz, *Hurban*, 6. On Hasidei Ashkenaz, see Haym Soloveitchik, “Three Themes in *Sefer Hasidim*,” in Haym Soloveitchik, *Collected Essays III* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 5–69. See Ivan Marcus, *Sefer Hasidim and the Ashkenazic Book in Medieval Europe* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). The reason for this move away from covenantal theodicy is not clear. Robert Chazan suggests that it could be because the notion of Jews being slaughtered for their sins only supported the Christian notion of their rejection. See Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The First Hebrew Crusade Narratives* (University of California Press, 2000), 140, 141. The notion that pagans use the destruction to claim that Judaism is a failed religion and Christians use it to argue for God’s rejection of the Jews stems back to antiquity. See, e.g., Menachem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 2 vols. (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), vol. 2, 286, 292, 93; Reuven Kimelman, “Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 567–95.

22. Alan Cooper, “The Message of Lamentations,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 28 (2001): 1–18. See, e.g., b.T. Yevamot 78b: “*There was a famine during the reign of David, year after year for three years. In the first year, David said to [the Israelites] perhaps [the famine] was because there are among you idolaters, as it is written, [Take care not] to be lured away to serve other gods. . . . [For the Lord’s anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies] so that there will be no rain [and the ground will not yield its produce. . . .] They searched and did not find [idolaters]. In the second year, he said to them maybe you are guilty of other sins [such as promiscuity], as it is written. . . . They searched and did not find that to be the case. In the third year, he said to them, perhaps it is because people announced publicly, they would give charity but did not give, as it is written. . . . They searched and did not find that to be the case. [David] then asked the Urim ve-Tumim and it responded, It is because of the bloodguilt of Saul and [his] house.*”

23. On anti-theodicy, see Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 19–34.

24. See the collection of ultra-Orthodox responses to the Holocaust in Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg, eds., *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 2007); see also Eliezer Schweid, *Wrestling Until Daybreak* (University Press of America, 1994); Steven T. Katz, ed., *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (NYU Press, 2005); Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil*.

25. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 80, 100a/b.

26. Interestingly, the phrase "last Jew and first Hebrew" was also mistakenly attributed to Ahad Ha'Am. See, e.g., Ghassan Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, trans. Mahmoud Najib (Ebb Books, 2022), 8. Given Ahad Ha'Am's commitment to Judaism as part of his Zionist ideology, he would never have said such a thing.

27. For an overview of religious Zionism, see Ehud Luz, *Religion and Nationalism in Early Zionist Thought (1882–1904)*, trans. Lenn Schram (Jewish Publication Society, 1988); Yosef Salmon, *Dat ve Ziyonut: 'Imutim Rishonim* (Magnes Press, 2001); Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology* (Academic Studies Press, 2008); Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism* (Brill, 2002), esp. 131–55. On Kook specifically, see Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic*.

28. Other Hasidic leaders, such as Abraham Mordechai Alter of Ger, were more overtly critical of Kook. See, e.g., Abraham Mordechai Alter's *Collection of Letters and Articles* [in Hebrew], 66–68, cited in Daniel Reiser, "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal and a Study of New Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 143–88, 159.

29. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot* (Mossad HaRav Kook, n.d.), 160. See Yehudah Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity: The Making of Rav Kook 1865–1904* (Academic Studies Press, 2021), 304–7. On Messiah ben Joseph, see Yehuda Liebes, "Yonatan ben Amitai ke-Moshiah ben Yosef," *Mekharei Yerushalayim bi-Makhshevet Yisrael* 3, nos. 1–2 (1983–84): 269–311. For a plethora of sources on Messiah ben Yosef, see Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*, vol. 2, 499–515. See also Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi (Rav Manitou), *Mispel le-Moshiah* [on Kook's eulogy of Herzl] (Manitou Institute, 2006).

30. Exod. 31–34.

31. Exod. 32:35.

32. This short foray into the golden calf episode is greatly expanded in Yoel Teitelbaum, *'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1967); see esp. "Introduction," 4–26. Teitelbaum only touches on it here because his main focus in *Vayoel Moshe* is halakhic and not theological, whereas in *'Al Ha-Geulah* the discussion is almost exclusively theological.

33. Deut. 29:17. For a definition of this term, see Rashi to Ezek. 19:10. It is often tied to the rebellion of idolatry. See Nahmanides on Deut. 29:21, 32:32.

34. Teitelbaum, "Introduction," in *Vayoel Moshe*, 6. Elsewhere, Teitelbaum cites other examples where Israelite leaders erred in attempting to join sinners with the righteous. One is the attempt of King Jeroboam to join the righteous with the sinners (see 1 Kings 12:28). The notion of separation from sinners as a way to avoid the defilement of the righteous is a central theme in Teitelbaum, one that openly opposes the position of figures such as Rav Kook who believed in the transformation of the sinner through interaction with the holy. See b.T. Sanhedrin 101b and Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6 (on the festivals), 286, 287.

35. For an example of how Teitelbaum views this prohibition of "forcing the end" to be more fundamental than the prohibition in b.T. Ketubot states, see his reading of Rashi's comment in Genesis 47:38, where Rashi suggests that Jacob wanted to reveal the end to his sons and was prevented from doing so. Teitelbaum cites *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 48, which states: "We learn that the sin of the sons of Ephraim who forced the end and left Egypt before the apportioned time caused the continued servitude and a decree that Israel remain in Egypt another thirty years." For Teitelbaum, pushing the end is precisely what protracts the end. For details, see Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 492, 493.

36. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 8, 17.
37. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 8, 21.
38. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 400.
39. Lam. 3:21.
40. Deut. 4:44.
41. Ps. 119:92.
42. Teitelbaum, *Vayael Moshe*, 9.
43. Another useful lens for understanding secular Zionism and Teitelbaum's rejection of it may be Martin Hägglund, *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (Anchor Books, 2019).
44. See, e.g., Takashi Shogimen, "Rethinking Heresy as a Category of Analysis," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 3 (2020): 1–23, esp. 4 and 11.
45. See, e.g., Alexander Kaye, *The Invention of Jewish Theocracy: The Struggle for Legal Authority in Modern Israel* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Asaf Yedidya, *Halakha and the Challenge of Israeli Sovereignty* (Lexington Books, 2019). The story of Reines is a bit more complicated. For example, examining Reines's *Or Hadash al Zion*, Dov Schwartz writes: "In his apologetic response, Reines argued that Zionism has no connection with redemption. The goal of Zionism is simply to save Jews from the horrors of anti-Semitism. . . . Reines also stated conflicting claims on the link between Zionism and redemption. In his apologetic writings . . . Reines had considered them to be separate. In other writings, however, he claimed that Zionism is deeply tied to redemption. Reines, then, did view the national renaissance as one of redemption's stages, be it as a corridor or a threshold to the ultimate end." Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology* (Academic Studies Press, 2009), 12, 13. On Reines, see Yosef Shapira, *Hagut, Halakha ve-Tziyonut: 'Al Olam Ha-Ruhani she Ha-Rav Yitzhak Ya'akov Reines* (Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'uhad, 2002). On Herzog and messianism, see Robert Eisen, *Religious Zionism, Jewish Law, and the Morality of War* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 82–103. On the nature of redemption and Zionism more generally, see Arie Saposnik, *Zionism's Redemptions: Images of the Past and Future in Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).
46. It seems that many of Teitelbaum's critics miss this very central point of *Vayael Moshe*. They often delve into his halakhic analysis without quite recognizing the frame of the project and what it seeks to achieve, thinking that, if they can successfully counter his analysis with other sources or with rereadings of the sources he cites, his work can be discounted. I argue that this approach misses the forest for the trees, in that *Vayael Moshe* is a full-blown response to the Holocaust from within a covenantal paradigm that Teitelbaum maintained was necessary.
47. Mintz, *Hurban*, 8.
48. See Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha* (Pri Ha'aretz, 1983), 78–80, 109. On the requirement of repentance as a necessary precondition for messianic immigration, see Moses Nahmanides, *Sefer Ha-Geulah*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, Vol. 1 (Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), 277ff; Menachem Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*, 95–117; cf. Sorotzkin, "Redemption of Darkness," 385–87.
49. See Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Sihot Ha-Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook*, ed. Shlomo Aviner (Hava Books, 2017), 264–86. For a book-length study of Kook's views on the Holocaust, see Shlomo Aviner, *Orot M'Ofel: 'Al Ha-Shoah* (Hava Books, 2009). See also Ishay Rosen-Zvi,

"The Holocaust in the Thinking of R. Zvi Yehuda Kook" [in Hebrew], *Democratic Culture* 6 (2002): 199–206. Abraham Kook's student Yaakov Moshe Charlap also suggested that the destruction of European Jewry was a necessary step in redemption. See, e.g., Gershon Greenberg, "Ha-Gra's Apocalyptic Expectations and 1947 Religious Responses to the Holocaust: Harlap and Tsierman," in *The Gaon of Vilnius and the Annals of Jewish Culture: Materials of the International Scientific Conference, Vilnius*, ed. Izraelis Lempertas (Vilnius University Publishing House, 1998), 231–38; Uriel Barak, "Like a Lily Among the Thorns: The Lily Motif in the Thought of R. Yaakov Moshe Charlap" [in Hebrew], *Da'at* 70/80 (2015): 251–62.

50. Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil*, 43–80. The first time that Teitelbaum is known to have mentioned Zionism as the cause of the Holocaust seems to be in a 1958 speech he gave in New York City, protesting a public swimming pool in Jerusalem that allowed mixed swimming. In that speech, later published in *Ha-Ma'or* in June 1958, Teitelbaum said, "Today everybody know that Zionists caused the annihilation of the six million Jews." See Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—the Satmar Rebbe—and the Rise of Anti-Zionism in American Orthodoxy," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 37 (2017): 457–79, 471.

51. Kook, *Sihot Ha-Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook*, 282–83; cf. Aviner, *Orot M'Ofel*, 105–22.

52. On Kalischer, see Jody Myers, *Seeking Zion: Modernity and Messianic Activity in the Writings of Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003). See also Monty Penkower, "Religious Forerunners of Zionism," *Judaism* 33, no. 3 (1984): 289–95.

53. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 66. Motti Imbari discusses Teichtal's earlier letter in which he claims that his anti-Zionist work *Tikkun Olam* was written at a time when Jews did not face existential threats. Now, Teichtal notes, "I rescind my earlier views." See Motti Inbari, *The Making of Modern Jewish Identity: Ideological Changes and Religious Conversion* (Routledge, 2019), 75, 76. Inbari's entire chapter on Teichtal (67–85) is worth reading. See also Reiser, "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal."

54. Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil*, 91.

55. See Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 28–30.

56. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 176–92.

57. I develop the Antichrist-like political theology of Teitelbaum in chapter 4.

58. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 193–99.

59. On Teitelbaum and the rebuilding of Satmar in America, see Israel Rubin, *Satmar: An Island in the City* (Quadrangle Books, 1972); Samuel Heilman, *Who Will Lead Us?* (University of California Press, 2017), 152–210; Deutsch and Casper, *Fortress in Brooklyn*. Interestingly, since Teitelbaum did not speak French, German, or English, a young Jew who was in Switzerland came to his aid. This young man was Jacob Taubes, who later became a well-known, and quite controversial, Jewish philosopher. Taubes continued his relationship with Teitelbaum after both moved to America and, when he visited him in Williamsburg, Taubes was seated next to the rebbe. See Jerry Muller, *Professor of Apocalypse* (Princeton University Press, 2022), 43, 44.

60. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 69–98; Sorotzkin, "Redemption from Darkness," 374.

61. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 24; Inbari, *Making of Modern Jewish Identity*, 78.

62. In general, see Mintz, *Hurban*. On modernity, see David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse University Press, 1999).

63. There is, of course, more than one description of the covenant. The covenant of reciprocity that Teitelbaum is wed to is expressed in various verses in Torah and also in prophets such as Jeremiah. One finds the covenant of promise—that is, that the covenant cannot be broken, that it is forever (*ad olam*)—in Isaiah and other places. Thanks to Benjamin Sommer for this articulation.

64. See Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*; Allan L. Nadler, “Piety and Politics: The Case of the Satmar Rebbe,” *Judaism* 31 (1982): 135–52.

65. On Wasserman’s anti-Zionism, see Elchanan Wasserman, *Ikvata d’Meshikha* (Defus Ha-Mesorah, 1955; Yiddish edition first published in New York in 1939, Hebrew edition in Jerusalem in 1942). On Weissmandel, see his *Min Ha-Mezar* (Y. Fuks, 2007 [1960]), published the same year as the first edition of *Vayoel Moshe*. On Sholom DovBer, see Shalom Ratsabi, “Anti-Zionism and Messianic Tension in the Thought of R. Sholom DovBer” [in Hebrew], *Ha-Zionut* 20 (1996): 77–101.

66. Sorotzkin notes that what is characteristic of *Vayoel Moshe* is that it was written after the state was founded, when increasing numbers of *haredim* were softening their position on Israel. This may be, in part, because Teitelbaum’s opposition extends far beyond the state itself to the entire process of historicization and “normalization” of Judaism and the Jews. See Sorotzkin, “Redemption of Darkness,” 374, 375.

67. One question that is worth thinking about is whether Teitelbaum and Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher rebbe—the two towering figures in postwar American Hasidism—were engaged, even surreptitiously, in responding to one another on these and other matters. Ariel Evan Mayse posits what he calls “counter-exegesis,” which he defines as “conceptually entangled interpretations of the same texts [that] are more than coincidence.” He suggests that perhaps, though Teitelbaum and Schneerson never responded to one another overtly, they may have been aware of each other’s positions on such matters and may have interpreted the same texts differently as a way of response. While Schneerson was not a Zionist, in my view, he did offer justification for the state on practical grounds, and thus opposed Teitelbaum’s zero-sum rejection of Zionism as heresy. See Ariel Evan Mayse, “The Calf Awakens: Language, Zionism, and Heresy in Twentieth-Century American Hasidism,” in *Kabbalah in America*, ed. Brian Ogren (Brill, 2020), 271, 272. See also Chaim Miller, *Judaism Turned Outward* (Kol Menachem, 2014), 262–318; Chaim Daflin, *Satmar and Lubavitch* (Jewish Enrichment Press, 2017).

68. Sorotzkin, “Redemption of Darkness,” 376.

69. Aharon Shmuel Tamares, *Knesset Yisrael u Mikamot Ha-Goyim* (Blima Books, 2024 [1921]), 107–12.

70. On the *theological novum* of the Holocaust, see Emil Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History* (HarperCollins, 1972). On the *historical novum* of the Holocaust, see Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context, Vol. 1* (Oxford University Press, 1994). On the Holocaust and theology, see Katz, *Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (NYU Press, 2005), and (more relevant to our concerns), Katz, Biderman, and Greenberg, *Wrestling with God* (interestingly, editors Katz et al. do not include Teitelbaum in this volume, likely because his engagement with the Holocaust is rarely direct and usually, rather, by implication).

71. On the debates about the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Washington, DC, see Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (Columbia University Press, 1995); Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy*

and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Shaul Magid, "The Holocaust and Jewish Identity in America: Memory, the Unique, and the Universal," *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 2 (2012): 100–135. On the question of uniqueness, see the essays in Alan Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Westview Press, 2008); Gabriel Rosenfeld, "The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turns in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999).

72. On Shapira and the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust, see Shaul Magid, "Covenantal Rupture and Broken Faith in R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira's *Aish Kodesh*," in *Hasidism, Suffering, and Renewal*, ed. Don Seeman, Daniel Reiser, and Ariel Evan Mayse (SUNY Press, 2021), 305–32.

73. The response of silence is also proffered in Pinhas Peli, "In Search of Religious Language for the Shoah," *Conservative Judaism* 32, no. 3 (1979): 3–24. Rav Manitou disagrees with such an approach and argues that one must find religious language to respond to the Shoah. See Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, *Misped le-Moshiah?* (Manitou Institute, 2006), 175.

74. Ismar Schorsch, "The Holocaust and Jewish Survival," *Midstream* 27, no. 1 (1981): 39. The question of uniqueness, and how it can lift the Holocaust out of history by mystifying it, is addressed by Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer in *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (University of Washington Press, 1982), 4.

75. Jacob Neusner, "Paradigmatic Versus Historical Thinking: The Case of Rabbinic Judaism," *History and Theory* 36, no. 3 (1997), 360, 375, 377. See also Cohen, "Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash," 20, 21. Barbara Krawcowicz adopts Neusner's paradigmatic model for thinking about *haredi* responses to the Holocaust. See Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil*, 40–98.

76. See the theodicy versus anti-theodicy debate in Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 19–34.

77. This is in regard to the "miracle" that the High Priest would not have, on the night of Yom Kippur, a seminal emission that would prevent him from entering the Holy of Holies to expiate Israelite sin on Yom Kippur. See Tosafot Yom Tov to Mishna Avot 5:5.

78. Teitelbaum, "Introduction," in *Vayoel Moshe*, 9.

79. See, e.g., Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah*, 7; see also parshat Beha'alotekha, cited in Yoel Teitelbaum, "Contents of the Teachings of Rabbenu," in *Divrei Yoel with Contents of the Teachings of Rabbenu* (published in Brooklyn, 2024), 175–79.

80. Lamentations Rabbati blames Bar Kokhba and his warriors for fomenting wars and rebellion against the Romans. See, e.g., discussion in Cohen, "Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash," 27.

81. Ashkenazi, *Misped le-Moshiah*, 169.

82. See Saposnik, *Zionism's Redemptions*, where he argues that redemption plays a prominent role even in most secular forms of Zionism.

83. On the miraculous nature of the Six-Day War and of Zionism more generally in religious Zionism, see Kasher, *Ha-Tekufa Ha-Gedolah*, vol. 2, 444–61.

84. On "natural messianism" in the religious Zionist context, see Kasher, *Ha-Tekufa Ha-Gedolah*, vol. 2, 437. Maimonides's naturalistic messianism somewhat reflects Augustine's anti-millenarian eschatology. On this, Paula Fredriksen writes: "The end-time events and more—Antichrist, Gog and Magog, the sea giving up its dead [Revelation 20:13]—Augustine

through Tyconius, can consistently deeschatologize, transposing them back into the present, where they serve to describe typologically the current experience of the Church.” See Paula Fredriksen, “Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Cornell University Press, 1992), 32.

85. B.T. Ketubot 111a.

86. On the use of the term *decree of exile* (*gezerat ha-galut*), see Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 422a, in reference to Yehuda’s confrontation with Joseph in Genesis. This notion of a decree of exile has been challenged by scholars. See, e.g., Israel Yuval, “The Myth of Jewish Exile from the Land of Israel: A Demonstration of Irenic Scholarship,” *Common Knowledge* 12, no. 1 (2006): 16–33. While there was no actual decree of exile, rabbinic theology cultivated a notion of such a decree in part to square the apparent abandonment of God, via the destruction, and the continued relevance of the covenant in its wake.

87. See Sorotzkin, “Redemption of Darkness,” 398, 399. See also Shogimen, “Rethinking Heresy as a Category,” esp. 11, citing Durkheim’s notion of heresy more broadly as a breach in “religious phenomena,” by which he means any accepted norm or practice that is denied or rejected—in our case, even if it is not halakhically obligatory. So, while the halakhic nature of the “three oaths” is a matter of debate, even if it were conceived of merely as “opinion” (*aggadah*) and were accepted as a norm, if that norm is rejected it could have the status of “heresy” per Durkheim’s definition.

88. Most extensively and comprehensively, see Shlomo Aviner, *‘Alo Na’aleh: Ma’aneh le-Sefer Vayael Moshe*, ed. Mordechai Zion (Hava Books, 2012). See also Gil Student, “The Religious Zionism Debate,” 2008, *Torah Musings*, <https://www.torahmusings.com/2010/04/religious-zionism-debate-2/>; Elie Holtzer, “The Evolving Meaning of the Three Oaths: Within Religious Zionism” [in Hebrew], *Da’at* 47 (2001): 129–45. Zvi Yehuda Kook also responded to Teitelbaum’s arguments on the three oaths. See Motti Inbari, “Messianism as a Political Power in Contemporary Judaism—A Comparison: Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy and Messianic Religious Zionism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford University Press, 2014), 391–406.

89. See, e.g., Student, “Religious Zionism Debate,” 18: “Evidently, if we immigrate *en masse* and do not fail, the time of exile has ended. The existence today of a high portion of the Jewish people in the land of Israel . . . indicates that the Divine decree of the exile has been fulfilled and our punishment has ended.” This is the strange kind of Augustinian logic found in the saint’s *City of God*. Augustine argued that Constantine’s conversion to Christianity was *proof* that God had chosen Christians and that Jews were no longer chosen and would eventually disappear. The apostle Paul claimed that the destruction of the Temple was *proof* of God’s rejection of the Jews. Jews interpreted these matters otherwise.

90. See Alan L. Mittleman, *Between Kant and Kabbalah: An Introduction to Isaac Breuer’s Philosophy of Judaism* (SUNY Press, 1990); Asher Beiman, “Isaac Breuer: Zionist Against His Will?,” *Modern Judaism* 20, no. 2 (May 2000): 129–46; Itamar Ben Ami, “The Total State of the Torah: Isaac Breuer and the Foundations of Orthodox Radical Politics,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 113, no. 4 (2023): 692–791.

91. See, e.g., Alexander Kaye, *Invention of Jewish Theocracy*; Yedidya, *Halakha and the Challenge of Israeli Sovereignty*.

92. See, e.g., the works of Menachem Kasher, Shlomo Aviner, Joel Kahn, Eli Holtzer, Gil Student, and others, all of whom focus almost exclusively on the halakhic component of

Teitelbaum's argument and specifically on the questions around the three oaths. They mostly ignore his claims about the mitzvah of *yishuv ha-arets* and the desacralizing of *lashon ha-kodesh*. In addition, they do not address the theological claims in 'Al Ha-Geluah ve 'al Ha-Temurah.

93. See Gershon Bacon, "Imitation, Rejection, Cooperation: Agudat Yisrael and the Zionist Movement in Interwar Poland," in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 85–94; Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Inclusion Versus Exclusion in Intra-Orthodox Politics: Between Agudat Israel and Hungarian Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 40, no. 2 (2020): 195–226; Daniel Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion: From Prewar Europe to the State of Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

94. See Sorotzkin, "Redemption of Darkness," 378, 379.

95. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 141–63; and, more generally, Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (JTS Press, 1992), 23–84.

96. See Shmuel Ettinger, "The Ideology of the Second Aliyah and the Socio-Political Ideology of Eastern European Jewry," in *The Second Aliyah: Studies* [in Hebrew], ed. Israel Bartal, Zeev Tsahor, and Yehoshua Kaniel (Yad Ben-Zvi, 1997), 3–10; Shmuel Almog, "The Role of Religious Values in the Second Aliyah," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Brandeis University Press, 1998), 237–50.

97. Joshua Shanes, "Orthodoxy as a German-Jewish Legacy," in *German-Jewish Studies: Next Generation*, ed. Kerry Wallach and Aya Elyada (Berghahn, 2022).

98. Teitelbaum first arrived in Palestine over a decade after Kook's death, and while he corresponded with Jerusalem contemporaries such as Hayyin Sonnenfeld who knew Kook, it is not clear how much the latter was discussed.

99. See Abraham Isaac Kook, *Pinhas Aaron me-Boisk* (n.d.), 63, 64, cited in Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 325.

100. See Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Menachem Friedman, *Hevra ve Dat* (Yad Ben Zvi, 1978); Motti Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism, and Women's Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

101. On halakha and theology, see Chaim Saiman, *Halacha: The Rabbinic Idea of Law* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 77–90.

102. For a counter-position, see David Novak, "Is There a Theological Connection Between the Holocaust and the Reestablishment of the State of Israel?," in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology*, ed. Steven T. Katz (NYU Press, 2005), 248–63; for a more extensive discussion, see David Novak, *Zionism and Judaism: A New Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 225–50.

103. See Shaul Magid, "The Holocaust as Inverted Miracle: Shalom Noah Barzofsky of Slonim on the Power and Divine Nature of Radical Evil," in *Spiritual Authority: Struggles over Cultural Power in Jewish Thought*, ed. Haim Kreisel and Boaz Huss (Ben-Gurion University Press, 2010), 33–62.

104. The nonbinding nature of the Aggadah has a long history, going back to Hai Gaon and, more commonly, as asserted by Moses Nahmanides in his disputation with Pablo Christiani. Nahmanides's rendering of the disputation was published as *Sefer Ha-Vikuah*.

See Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (University of California Press, 1992).

105. Thanks to Itamar Ben Ami for this observation.

106. See, e.g., Abraham Isaac Kook, *Le-Netivot Yisrael* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1989), vol. 2, 115, 116. On Zvi Yehuda Kook and his view of Zionism as messianism, see Dov Schwartz, *Challenge and Crisis in Rav Kook's Circle* [in Hebrew] (Am Oved, 2001), 23–71.

107. On *Ohr Le-Shamayim*, see Dalia Levy, “Ohr Le-Shamayim—Manifesto Anti-Zioniu Teguvot Ahadot” [in Hebrew], *Ha-Tziyonut* 19 (1995): 31–65. See also Rav Shlomo of Munkacz, *Tikkun Olam* (published in Munkacz, 1934), a pamphlet dedicated to a critique of Agudat Yisrael and its stance on Zionism. For some other examples of anti-Zionist literature, see Shmuel Yaakov Rabinowitz, *Ha-Dat ve Ha-Leumiyot* (Tziyoni Kovno, 1900); Abraham Baruch Steinberg, *Da'at Ha-Rabanim* (printed in Warsaw, 1902). On anti-Zionist newspapers, see Menachem Keren-Kratz, “*Ha-Peles*: An Orthodox Newspaper and Its Struggle with the Challenges of Modern Spirits of the Early Twentieth Century” [in Hebrew], *Kesher* 54 (2020): 43–75.

108. See Shlomo Zalman Landau, *Ohr Le-Shamayim: Shitat Neged Ha-Ziyonut* (printed in Warsaw, 1900), a collection of ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist writings from all over Europe. The “three oaths” are certainly discussed there.

109. Teitelbaum certainly claims that the oaths are *also* halakha, but below I argue that they are not exclusively so. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 75, 90: “If one should think that the oaths are nullified because the nations transgressed their oath, we see that no one in the gemara says such a thing. Rather, according to the gemara all the oaths are established as halakha in one way or another (*b'ezev ofen*), such that it is forbidden to immigrate to the land of Israel.”

110. Kasher alludes to this numerous times in *Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*, though he doesn't mention Teitelbaum explicitly. The most comprehensive treatment is Aviner, *'Alo Na'aleh*. See also Gil Student, “Religious Zionism Debate,” chap. 4 on the three oaths. Student draws much of his material from Kasher.

111. See, e.g., Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 42, 56; chap. 175, 168.

112. See Yehudah Mirsky, “From Every Heresy, Faith, and Holiness from Every Defiled Thing: Towards Rav Kook's Theology of Culture,” in *Developing a Jewish Perspective on Culture*, ed. Yehuda Sarna (Ktav, 2014), 103–42; Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 233–77.

113. See Kook, *Pinhas Aaron me-Boisk*, 53, 54, cited in Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 316.

114. This is endemic to the entire Kookian enterprise. The notion of the “revival of the nation” stands at the center of Kook's claim about Zionism and redemption. See, e.g., Kook, *Orot*, 115–18, 135–37.

115. Bacon, “Imitation, Rejection, Cooperation”; Kaye, *Invention of Jewish Theocracy*; Yedidya, *Halakha and the Challenge of Israeli Sovereignty*; Alan L. Mittleman, *The Politics of Torah: The Jewish Political Tradition and the Founding of Agudat Israel* (SUNY Press, 1996). In addition, see Menachem Keren-Kratz, “Inclusion Versus Exclusion in Intra-Orthodox Politics: Between Agudat Israel and Hungarian Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 40, no. 2 (2020): 195–226. Teitelbaum's critique of Agudat Yisrael is founded on his notion, common in the tradition, that even if one does a mitzvah, if it is done through the vehicle of defilement, it strengthens the powers of evil. For an example that seems to allude to Agudat Yisrael without mentioning it explicitly, see Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 3, 330, and vol. 4, 20.

116. There is literally a library of works on Maimonides and his halakhic status. Most recently, see Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2014; translated from the 2009 Hebrew original).

117. B.T. Shabbat 63a; 151b. Maimonides stresses this point in his commentary to *Helek*. On this distinction, see Dov Schwartz, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* [in Hebrew] (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), 9–12.

118. I have heard this orally but have not located a written source.

119. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 40, 51.

120. For a useful discussion of *Epistle to Yemen*, see David Hartman and Abraham Halkin, *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership* (Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 151–99. Teitelbaum has a very different reading of the epistle on the question of the Messiah.

121. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 80, 101.

122. Teitelbaum doesn’t use the language of miracle here, but this seems to be implied in his language.

123. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 66, 82, 83.

124. See chapter 4.

125. See Abraham Isaac Kook, *Ma’amrei Ha-Re’ayah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1984), 98–100. For a close reading of the implications of Kook’s eulogy, see Ashkenazi, *Mesped le-Moshiah?*, 35–55.

126. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 41, 54.

127. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” 80, 99.

128. Teitelbaum uses the language of divine promise (*havtakha*) to understand the verse *And you will be holy* not as a commandment but rather as a promise. If it is a command, it should have read יהיו and not תהיו. See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 3, 102.

129. On Kook, see Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 233–72. In this sense, there is a resonance with moderate Sabbateanism in Kook’s thought. On the status of the beginning of redemption in moderate Sabbateanism, Scholem writes: “On the whole, it was the view of the ‘moderates’ that during the transitional period under way the *kelipot* still retained a good deal of their power, which could only be eliminated by continued performance of the mitzvot: the ‘façade’ of rabbinic Judaism must be allowed to remain temporarily standing, although great changes had already taken place within the edifice.” See Gershom Scholem, “Redemption from Sin,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Schocken Books, 1971), 101, 102. Kook attempted to balance the continued fidelity to mitzvot while also acknowledging that something had already changed. This is different than *ikvata d’meshikha*, a term used often by Teitelbaum, which refers to an “almost-but-not-yet” that more readily maintains a strong fidelity to normative Judaism.

130. See Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 17–20. Teichtal has attracted a lot of scholarly attention of late, perhaps most recently in Reiser, “Aspects in the Thought of Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal.” For our purposes, the question of his Zionism has also attracted a lot of attention. See, e.g., Eliezer Schweid, *Between Destruction and Deliverance: Contemporary Ultra-Orthodox Responses to the Holocaust* [in Hebrew] (HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 1994), 89–104; Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer, “Confession on the Brink of the Crematoria and ‘Afterward’: A Haredi Rabbi Regrets” [in Hebrew], *Kivunim* 23 (1984): 49–62; Yehuda Friedlander, “Shlomo Teichtal’s Attitude Toward Zionism and the Holocaust,” *Religious Zionism* 5 (2002): 80–86. More generally, see Isaac Hershkowitz, “The

Vision of Redemption in Rabbi Shlomo Teichtal's Writings: Changes in His Messianic Approach During the Holocaust" [in Hebrew] (PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2009). See also Esther Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives on Faith, Halacha, and Leadership During the Holocaust*, 2 vols. (Mossad HaRav Kook, 2007).

131. In "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," in *Vayael Moshe*, Teitelbaum challenges that by bringing up many examples of Jews throughout history, including many rabbinic sages in Babylonia, who could have immigrated to the land but did not, for a variety of reasons. I discuss this in chapter 2.

132. *Yalkut Shimoni*, vol. 2, 106.

133. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 106, 107; see also 102, 119–20.

134. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 25. See Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil*, 92, 93.

135. The relationship between Teichtal and Kook is complicated. Teichtal never mentions Kook in *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*. Eliezer Schweid, however, maintains that Teichtal's views and Kook's are strikingly similar. Daniel Reiser makes a similar case in "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal," arguing that from new documents, including letters, we can see that Teichtal reflects some of Kook's ideas. I argue below that while similarities may exist, there are significant differences, both in terms of metaphysics and in terms of practice. See Eliezer Schweid, "The Zionist Theodicy of Rabbi Yissakhar Shlomo Teichtal," in Schweid, *Wrestling Until Daybreak*, 245. The question of Teichtal and Zionism is a vexed one. Teichtal's son, Chaim Menachem Teichtal, opposes those who claim that his father was a Zionist, or even sympathetic to Zionism. He does claim that he was closer to Agudat Yisrael, which is still quite a distance from his earlier vehement anti-Zionism (see his foreword to *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 7–12, and Friedlander, "Shlomo Teichtal's Attitude," 246). See also Inbari, *Making of Modern Jewish Identity*, quoting *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 55, where Teichtal seems to accede to Kook's notion that even if the builders of the land are sinners, God still welcomes their actions. Teichtal does not go as far as Kook, to say that these sinners are inadvertently doing God's will or that such action *must* come from the sinner.

136. Judah Halevi, *Sefer Ha-Kuzari* (Hadran, 1959), essay 2, no. 24, 79.

137. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 106, 107; see also 82, 83.

138. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 16.

139. Schweid, "Zionist Theodicy," 263.

140. Krawcowicz, *History, Metahistory, and Evil*, 95.

141. See "Laws of Mamrim" 3:3, in Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Hu Ha-Yad Ha-Hazakah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1955).

142. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 109, 110; see also 169, where he says that the very fact of the desire to return to the land is an indication of the repentance that Maimonides requires.

143. Reiser, in "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal," 161, suggests that Teichtal was far more sympathetic to transgressors who returned to the land than seems apparent to me; see also 162–65. Reiser cites *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 58, 59, where Teichtal talks about "the simple Jew . . . with no spiritual intent" and then compares this with Abraham Isaac Kook, *Iggrot Ha-Re'aya* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1961), part 1, 348. It is not clear to me, however, that by "simple Jew" Teichtal means secular Jew, or transgressor.

I think this is certainly the case with Kook, which is where I think they differ. For Kook, it was precisely the transgressor who initiated this redemptive phase.

144. One can see this, for example, throughout Kasher's *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*. Claims of miracle and the obviousness of the beginning of redemption are stated with absolute certainty—of course, without any proof.

145. But see Reiser, "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal"; Isaac Hershkowitz, "*Em Ha-Banim Semekha*: From Canonical Treatise to Dialectic Completion" [in Hebrew], *Alei Sefer* 22 (2011): 9–12.

146. See the famous, and controversial, passage in Abraham Isaac Kook, *Arpelei Tohar* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1983), 11, 12. See also Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 292–300. Mirsky focuses there on some of Kook's early writing, particular *Li-Nevuchei Ha-Dor*, his essays in *Ha-Peles* where Kook begins to develop his dialectical view that would later be deployed to affirm the legitimacy of secular Zionists in the land of Israel. Mirsky shows that Kook's relationship to Zionism, certainly early on, was much more complicated than we have thought. For example: "Yet, Israel is not the same as other nations—and, he says in a dig to political Zionism, any attempt to base Jewish nationalism on anything other than ideals, is doomed to failure." Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 297.

147. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 148, 149. See Yonatan Eybeshutz, *Ahavat Yonatan* (Beit Ha-Sefer, 1974 [1875]), 71b.

148. See Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 28–30; and 103, where Teichtal notes that prayer is not a passive act, but requires one to take action to fulfill his or her desire.

149. Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 9. Teichtal argues here that the oaths are operational until "our eyes see the acts of God with divine providence on the people of Israel."

150. Schweid notes that Teichtal wanted *Em Ha-Banim Semekha* to be a halakhic text working inside halakhic and not metaphysical categories. See Schweid, "Zionist Theodicy," 244, 245.

151. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," in *Vayoel Moshe*, chap. 76, 92.

152. The story is more complex than I can elucidate here. For a detailed account, see Hershkowitz, "Vision of Redemption in Rabbi Shlomo Teichtal's Writings"; Reiser, "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal."

153. See Schweid, "Zionist Theodicy," 246; Schweid, *Between Destruction and Deliverance*, 94, 95.

154. See Teichtal, *Em Ha-Banim Semekha*, 26.

155. It should be noted that Kook was not unequivocally wed to Zionism and presented his movement Degel Yerushalayim as an alternative to Zionism, believing that Zionism would eventually fold into his movement. See Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 233–77.

156. Abraham Isaac Kook, "The Holy and the Profane," in *Ne'edar B'Kodesh*, reprinted in *Ma'amrei Ha-Re'ayah*, vol. 2 (Mahad, 2015), 1, 2.

157. This notion of the Great Teshuvah is mentioned by Teitelbaum, citing R. Joshua's position in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, as well as in the context of teshuvah that can take place after redemption as opposed to the small teshuvah that is limited to a return to Torah and mitzvot.

158. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot Ha-Teshuvah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1977), chap. 17, 158–60.

159. See Isa. 19:14. Robert Alter translates this as "twisted spirit."

160. Kook, *Arpelei Tohar*, 11, 12.
161. Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic*, 203.
162. See Penkower, "Religious Forerunners of Zionism," 293.
163. Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Sihot R. Zvi Yehuda Kook 'al Sefer Orot* (Hava Books, 2006), 85–91. Zvi Yehuda Kook was the editor of *Orot* and his views appear throughout its pages. On his editorial hand, see Meir Monitz, "The Editing of *Sefer Orot* of R. A. I. Kook" [in Hebrew], *Alei Sefer* 20 (2008): 125–69. On Zvi Yehuda, see Dov Schwartz, *Etgar u Mashber B'Hug Ha-Rav Kook (Crisis and Challenge in Rav Kook's Circle)* (Am Oved, 2001), 15–138.
164. Kook, *Sihot R. Zvi Yehuda Kook 'al Sefer Orot*, 85, 86.
165. Kook, *Sihot R. Zvi Yehuda Kook 'al Sefer Orot*, 86. See, e.g., Nahmanides, *Sefer Ha-Geulah*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 1, 275, and Nahmanides's comment on Deut. 32:40.
166. Shlomo Elyashiv, *Leshem Shevo ve-Akhlama: Hakdamot u' Shearim* (Aaron Barzani Bros., 2006), gate 6, chap. 9, 61.
167. Kook, *Sihot R. Zvi Yehuda Kook 'al Sefer Orot*, 91. This reference to *hibbat zion* seems to allude to the movement Hibbat Zion, a forerunner of Zionism, founded by religious Jews, who were not always in line with political Zionism as it emerged a few decades later. Kook suggests that in any case, both of these movements embody collective acts of revival.
168. Elyashiv, *Leshem Shevo ve-Akhlama*, 54–56.
169. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, on Exodus 80 and parshat Beshalakh 340. He also alludes to this point in his discussion of the *erev rav* in 'Al Ha-Geulah ve 'al Ha-Temurah (see, e.g., 5, 6). In *Divrei Yoel*, parshat Beshalakh, 340, Teitelbaum quotes Zohar 1.25a, which states that "there are five types of people that constitute the *erev rav*, and the Amalekites are one of them." In Zohar 1.169b, we read that to "wipe out the memory of Amalek" is "the choice of the Egyptians who are mixed with Israel." Teitelbaum continues: "In every generation, Israel contains the *erev rav* that come by means of *gilgul* (soul migration) from the seed of Israel, and their soul roots are from Amalek who converted and entered into the *erev rav*."
170. On the *erev rav*, see Zohar 1.25b; 3.276.
171. Elyashiv, *Leshem Shevo ve-Akhlama*, 63–65.
172. On Kook's view of deviance as providential, see Mirsky's excellent locution, "[Kook] undertakes a historical theodicy of modernity, justifying the mass defections from tradition as the hand of Providence, purging the dross of Judaism before the final coming of the Messiah." Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 301.
173. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 178.
174. For some salient examples, see the collection of essays in *MaHaRal: Overtures—Biography, Doctrine, Influence* [in Hebrew], ed. Elchanan Reiner (Shazar Center, 2015). On the MaHaRal and Teitelbaum, see Eli Garkinkel, "Nezah Yisrael she Ha-MaHaRal of Prague ve Tefisat Ha-Geulah shel R. Yoel Teitelbaum m'Satmar," *Da'at* 78 (2015): 77–92.
175. See, e.g., Uriel Barak, "The Collective Soul: Some Remarks of R. Zvi Yehuda Kook's Readings of Maharal of Prague and R. Avraham Azulai," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 24 (2016): 300–317.
176. See Penkower, "Religious Forerunners of Zionism," 289–95.
177. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 32, 44.
178. Judah Loew [MaHaRal], *Nezah Yisrael* (published in Jerusalem, 1972), chap. 24, 121.

179. Loew, *Nezah Yisrael*, 122.
180. On homeland more generally in relation to the land of Israel, see David Ohana, *Birth-Throes of the Israeli Homeland* (Routledge, 2020), 1–22.
181. Loew, *Nezah Yisrael*, 123, 124.
182. Loew, *Nezah Yisrael*, 124.
183. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 33, 45; but see chap. 76, where he cites Shelah (Levi Horowitz of Prague), who claims that changing one law for the sake of the nations is tantamount to an obligation of martyrdom, since doing so would be disbelief in divine providence, which would amount to idolatry.
184. See Joseph Karo, *Shulkhan Arukh*, “Orakh Hayyim” no. 224: 3.
185. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 75, 90.
186. See, e.g., Derek Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State* (Rutgers University Press, 2023).
187. On the “Jerusalem School,” see David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (Oxford University Press, 1995).
188. Teitelbaum, “Introduction,” in *Vayael Moshe*, 11.
189. The question as to whether the name Koziba (deceiver) was a negative appellation given to Bar Kokhba by the rabbis is a matter of some debate. Recent letters discovered thought to be from Bar Kokhba list his name as “Shimon bar Koziba,” and thus that may have been a given name. In any event, his status as a deceiver in rabbinic literature remains. See Richard G. Marks, *The Image of Bar Kokhba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (Penn State University Press, 1993), 6.
190. See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton University Press, 1973). See also “Redemption Through Sin” in Scholem, *Messianic Idea in Judaism*; and, published more recently, Pawel Maciejko, ed., *Sabbatian Heresy: Writings on Mysticism, Messianism, and the Origins of Jewish Modernity* (Brandeis University Press, 2017).
191. See Avraham Rubinstein, ed., *Shivhei Ha-Besht* (Reuven Mas, 1991), 133–34. See also Rachel Elior, *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006), 183.
192. See, e.g., Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical*, 317–23. See also the periodic discussion of Sabbatai Zevi in the writing of Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto. See also Isaiah Tishby, “Yahasho shel Ramhal el Ha-Shabta’ut,” in *Netivei Emunah ve-Minut* (Magnes Press, 1964), 169–85.
193. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 175.
194. See Marks, *Image of Bar Kokhba*, 13–56.
195. In general, see Marks, *The Image of Bar Kokhba*. Bar Kokhba may have been considered a false messiah (i.e., the Antichrist) in some Christian literature as well. See the allusion in the Apocalypse of Peter 2:7–12 and the comments of Jeremy Cohen in his book *The Salvation of Israel: Jews in Christian Eschatology from Paul to the Puritans* (Cornell University Press, 2022), 80.
196. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 96. See also Aharon Oppenheimer, “The Revolt of Bar Kokhba: Ideology and Modern Scholarship,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36, no. 1 (1985): 33–60; Aharon Oppenheimer, *Mered Bar Kokhba: Mekhkarim Hadashim* [in Hebrew] (Yad Yitzhak ben Zvi, 1984).

197. See Kasher, *Ha-Tekufa Ha-Gedolah*, vol. 2, 438, 478–80.

198. The notion of “smell” (*reakh*) is ambiguous. Rashi notes that “he would smell a person and know who was guilty.” But we also read on the same page that “R. Alexandrei said, we learn that ‘smell’ is from the word [*reihayim*]. God would burden the messiah with mitzvot and afflictions like a millstone.”

199. On *I will hasten it*, Rashi comments: “If they are worthy, *I will hasten it*, if not it will be *in its time*.”

200. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 39, 50; see also chap. 80.

201. Maimonides weighs in on this question as well; see Moses Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Abraham Halkin (American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), 98–103. Marks argues that Maimonides used Bar Kokhba, and R. Akiva’s support of him, as an example of a naturalistic form of messianism. Bar Kokhba certainly exhibited the leadership skills to be a messiah without recourse to miracles and wonders (even though his strength was sometimes described in miraculous ways), and thus R. Akiva’s error was understandable. See Marks, *Image of Bar Kokhba*, 83.

202. See j.T Ta’anit 4:8 (24a/b), where it states that a “Cuthean” killed him.

203. Teitelbaum claims that both Kesef Mishna and Lekhem Mishna in Maimonides, “Laws of Kings” 11:3, in *Mishneh Torah*, claim that the Jews killed him, but that is not what is stated there.

204. See Marks, *Image of Bar Kokhba*, 99–134.

205. See, e.g., Raymundus Martini, *Pugio Fidei* (ca. 1270), which makes the case that Bar Kokhba was a false messiah and an example of rabbinic errancy. *Pugio Fidei* was widely known in Abravanel’s time and it is likely he was aware of it. See Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Semitism* (Cornell University Press, 1985), 143, 146, 147, 151.

206. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 139, 143. It is not clear what the “Roman chronicles” mentioned in Abravanel were. We do know that Cassius Dio’s *Roman History* contains a broad discussion of the revolt, and there are other discussions in Christian literature, which views the failed revolt as the final severing of God’s covenant with Israel. See Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary (Heineman, 1955 [1925]), 69.12–14, 447–51, cited in Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 48, 49.

207. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 139, 143.

208. Leo Strauss, “The Zionism of Nordau (1923),” in *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921–1932)*, trans. and ed. Michael Zank (SUNY Press, 2002), 86.

209. For one example of *yisrael saba* in Teitelbaum’s writings, see *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 3, 15a/b: “Our generation has diminished, and we see in this great descent from previous generations. But nevertheless, our progeny need to strive to act in accordance with the ways of their ancestors and previous sages and not to be ‘orphans of orphans’ like their predecessors who were like orphans who abandoned the ways of their forefathers.” This notion of “the way of our forefathers” is for Teitelbaum, in my view, more than simple fidelity to Torah and mitzvot. It is closer to fidelity to ancestral norms. Another example is Teitelbaum’s response to Aaron Rokeah of Belz, who told his Hasidim to vote for the joint *haredi* party in the 1955 Israeli elections. Rokeah had been a staunch supporter of the Edah Haredit who refused to vote in Israeli national elections, but he changed course here. Teitelbaum accused him of abandoning the “traditions of his ancestors” as opposed to transgressing a halakhic precept.

See Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Is the Jewish State the Ultimate Evil or a Golden Opportunity? Ideology vs. Politics in the Teachings and Actions of R. Yoel Teitelbaum—the Satmar Rebbe," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 29, nos. 1–2 (2018): 17.

210. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 187.

211. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, 11b, on Shavout.

212. Isaiah Tishby's new edition of Sasportas was available during Teitelbaum's life, but it doesn't appear that he cites from it. See Yakob Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi: The Life of Jacob Sasportas* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 416.

213. On Sasportas, see Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi*. Dweck notices and discusses Teitelbaum's use of Sasportas at some length; see, e.g., *Dissident Rabbi*, 409–23. On Teitelbaum's use of Sasportas, see Allan L. Nadler, "Piety and Politics: The Case of the Satmar Rebbe," *Judaism* 31 (1982): 135–52, 142.

214. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 175, 168.

215. See, e.g., Elisheva Carlebach, *In the Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatean Controversies* (Columbia University Press, 1990).

216. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 175, 168.

217. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 175, 168. See b.T. Sanhedrin 97a.

218. On the question of survivalism more generally, see Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Indiana University Press, 1986); Shaul Magid, "From Kiruv to Continuity Survivalism and Renewal as Competing Categories in Judaism," in *Jewish Revival Inside Out: Remaking Jewishness in a Transnational Age*, ed. Daniel Monterescu and Rachel Werczberger (Wayne State University Press, 2022), 43–64. The question of Zionism, both political and cultural, as the very undermining of Judaism is also espoused in a different register by Leo Strauss in his early Zionist writings. Strauss remained very sympathetic to Zionism but argued that it undermined the very possibility of a future Judaism. See Daniel May, "The Ouroboros: Leo Strauss' Critique of Zionism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 113, no. 1 (2023): 105–30.

219. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 185, 175. Dweck notes that "[for Teitelbaum, Zionism] constituted the most noxious form of Jews imitating the behavior and customs of the gentiles. It sought to uproot the law." Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi*, 416.

220. See Silber, "Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy," 23–84.

221. Earlier iterations of Hungarian Hasidism, such as Teitelbaum's ancestor Moshe Teitelbaum of Uhel and the school of Zkitochov and Komarno, indeed exhibited many radical Hasidic theories. But these were generations that preceded Teitelbaum and the influence of the Hatam Sofer.

222. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 43–47; Sorotzkin, "Redemption of Darkness." See also Jacob Katz, "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* II (1986): 1–17; Maoz Kahana, "From Prague to Pressburg: Halakhic Writing in a Changing World from Noda be-Yehudah to the Hatam Sofer, 1730–1893" [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2010).

223. This of course requires nuance, since a large circle of Luria's disciples wrote many volumes of his teachings. See Yosef Avivi, *Binyan Ariel* (Misgav Yerushalayim, 1987); Yosef Avivi, *Kabbalat Ha'Ari, Kabbala Luriana*, 4 vols. (Yad ben Zvi, 2008).

224. This refers to Shneur Zalman of Liady, *Tefillah M'Kol Ha-Shana* (Kehot, 1980), 269. This is an odd reference since, in fact, Habad are among of the strongest critics of

Teitelbaum's claim, arguing that they have the authentic tradition of the Baal Shem Tov. The passage in *Tefillah M'Kol Ha-Shana* deals with *hakafot* as drawing from *mohin d'abba*, which is higher than the water libations of Sukkot. This *mohin d'abba* is embedded only in the Oral Law, and hence drawing from that high place of *abba* comes about only through the Oral Law. The apparent reference suggests that the teachings of the Besht were destined to remain oral to embody this higher state of consciousness. As a result, Teitelbaum argues, its lofty orality also makes it inaccessible. Thus, the claim to embody the teachings of the Besht, which remain in that lofty place, is in error. Those authentic teachings will be revealed only in the future.

225. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 180, 172.

226. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 185, 175; Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 179.

227. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," 146. See also Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi*, 412. Dweck takes him at his word here, whereas I suggest that his program is much broader.

228. See Shaul Magid, "Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part I: Habad" and "Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II: Satmar," in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, ed. David Watt and Simon Wood (University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 70–91, 92–107.

229. Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Anchor Press, 1979).

2. BETWEEN RESIDENCE AND COMMANDMENT

1. Following Judah Loew [MaHaRal], *Nezah Yisrael* (published in Jerusalem, 1972), 24, which is discussed in chapter 1. Teitelbaum often uses the phrase "decree of exile."

2. Perhaps the most extensive critique is Shlomo Aviner, *Ala Na'aleh: Ma'aneh le-Sefer Vayael Moshe*, ed. Mordechai Zion (Hava Books, 2012). For the most recent critique of Teitelbaum, see Shnayor Burton, *Ha-Aretz Asher Ar'eka: Mitzvat Yisruva Eretz Yisrael* (Orot, 2023). For a recent review that covers other responses to Teitelbaum as well, see Bezalel Naor, "Of Swords and Books: 'The Land That I Will Show You,'" *Times of Israel*, March 16, 2023.

3. See Yoel Teitelbaum, *Vayael Moshe* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1985), esp. "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," chap. 139 (discussed below).

4. See Allan L. Nadler, "The War on Modernity of R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz," *Modern Judaism* 14 (1994): 233–64; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 40–78. On Teichtal, see Rav Shlomo of Munkacz, *Tikkun Olam* (published in Munkacz, 1934), discussed in Daniel Reiser, "Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal and a Study of New Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 143–88, 145–47.

5. Yoel Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, 9 vols. (Jerusalem Book Store, 2004), vol. 1, 213.

6. Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Is the Jewish State the Ultimate Evil or a Golden Opportunity? Ideology vs. Politics in the Teachings and Actions of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—the Satmar Rebbe," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 29, nos. 1–2 (September 2018), <https://jcfa.org/article/jewish-state-the-ultimate-evil-or-golden-opportunity/>.

7. See Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—Ha-Admor mi-Satmar* (Magnes Press, 2020), 192 (Kastner transport), 210–36 (America), and 237, 238

(Teitelbaum's continued support of Satmar institutions in Israel). See also Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Hast Thou Escaped, and Also Taken Possession? The Satmar Rebbe—Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum and His Followers' Response to Criticism of His Conduct During and After the Holocaust," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 28, no. 2 (2014): 97–120; Keren-Kratz, "Is the Jewish State the Ultimate Evil."

8. See the discussion of Teitelbaum and exile in Shaul Magid, *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Ayin Press, 2023).

9. Joseph Karo, *Shulkhan Arukh* (standard edition, 1742), "Even Ha-Ezer" no. 75, notes that the discussion in b.T. Ketubot regarding forcing a spouse to immigrate to Israel applies "in our time" as well, though he does not apply it directly to the question of a mitzvah.

10. The whole concept of exile and the "decree of exile" is a later rabbinic interpolation. Even the term *Erez Yisrael* doesn't really appear until the second century CE, after the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Before that, *Judea* was a more common geographical term. Yuval suggests that the operative term *Erez Yisrael* is "an apologetic term expressing Jewish struggle not only against the new name 'Palestina' but also, at least after the fact, against the claim, made in Christian propaganda, that the Jews had been exiled from their land." See Israel Jacob Yuval, "The Myth of the Jewish Exile from the Land of Israel," *Common Knowledge* 12, no. 1 (220): 24. Even the custom of burying people in the land of Israel began only around the time of Judah the Prince. See Isaiah Gafni, "The Bringing Up of the Dead for Burial in the Land" [in Hebrew], *Cathedra* 4 (1977): 113–30. Yuval suggests that in rabbinic literature the "land of Israel" refers to the Kingdom of Israel, as opposed to the southern Kingdom of Judea. See Yuval, "Myth of the Jewish Exile," 24. For a close analysis of these issues within the rabbinic corpus, see Chaim Milikowsky, "Notions of Exile, Subjugation, and Return in Rabbinic Literature," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (Brill, 1997), 266–96.

11. The oft-cited Tosafist's comment by Hayyim Ha-Cohen to b.T. Ketubot 110b claims that there is no longer a mitzvah to dwell in the land because immigrating to the land is dangerous. This comment has been the subject of much controversy, though Teitelbaum does not use it extensively in his study of the question—partly, I think, because in his time such dangers did not exist. Other dangers did exist for him, such as being influenced by the heretical ideology of the Zionists.

12. The status of "time" as a historical period in regard to the applicability of mitzvot is a much-discussed issue in halakhic literature. That is, what are the criteria to say that a particular mitzvah may have been operational at one time and is no longer operational? Many mitzvot that had a status during Temple times are no longer operative, or had a Torahic status during Temple times but now have only a rabbinic status. For examples among the medieval French Tosafists, see Ephraim Urbach, *Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot* (Mossad Bialik, 1968), 50, 79, 151–53, 320–21; Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford University Press, 1961), 30.

13. Teitelbaum makes this clear in numerous places in *Vayoel Moshe*; see, e.g., the beginning of the introduction to "Essay on the Three Oaths."

14. For a particularly interesting reading of the centrality of "forcing the end," see Teitelbaum's reading of Joseph's dream in *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 337, 338.

15. Herschel Schachter, "The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael," *Journal of Halacha* 8 (1984): 17–37, 28, 30.

16. On the Balfour Declaration as a messianic sign, see Larry Domnitch, “The Balfour Declaration and the Reaction of Rav Kook,” *Israel Unwired*, October 27, 2022, <https://www.israelunwired.com/the-balfour-declaration-and-the-reaction-of-rav-kook/>.

17. See chapter 4.

18. On Satmar and its struggles with integration and separateness, see Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper, *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* (Yale University Press, 2022); Nomi M. Stolzenberg and David N. Myers, *American Shtetl: The Making of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic Village in Upstate New York* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

19. Teitelbaum offers an interpretation of Jacob’s change of name to Israel as an example of exile. Addressing the difference between Abraham and Jacob—the former is no longer called Abram after his name is changed, whereas the latter is still called Jacob after his name is changed to Israel—we read: “Thus it is imperative that the name Jacob remains to denote the time of exile. In the future when the redeemer arrives, Israel will become the name that marks dominion and kingdom. Then he [Jacob] will only be called Israel. But this is not so today in the time of exile.” See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 135.

20. Teitelbaum addresses the use of the term *’akum* in Hazal as something less than definitive. He writes: “Nevertheless, the sages use the term *’akum* (idolater) because the majority of gentiles are idolaters; even if they are only acting on received traditions (*minhag avoteyhem b’yadehem*), nevertheless they are idolaters. The sages did not want to come to exclude those who were not by saying that these laws apply only to idolaters and not to gentiles that are not. . . . Hence, the sages did not make a distinction between those gentiles who are idolaters and those that are not.” Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 32, 232. Abraham Cardozo argues that today there is no real idolatry, as those who engage in those practices only do so as familial custom and all believe in the First Cause, even if they do not believe in the God of Israel. See Abraham Cardozo, *Boker le-Avraham*, ed. Leor Holzer (Holzer Sefarim, 2023), 130–33, and elsewhere. This was also argued much earlier, albeit somewhat differently, in Menachem Ha-Meiri, *Beit Ha-Bekhira to Berakhot* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1960).

21. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 135, 349. On the use of *lo lishma* and *bo lishma*, see b.T. Nazir, 23b: “Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: Greater is a transgression committed for its own sake, that is, for the sake of heaven, than a mitzvah performed not for its own sake. The gemara then asks: ‘How could this be, given that we know that a person should always occupy himself with Torah and mitzvot even not for their own sake, as it is through acts performed not for their own sake that good deeds for their own sake come about?’”

22. On Teitelbaum and *lishma* and *lo lishma*, see Shaul Magid, “Is Torah Study a Sin? The Necessity of *Averah Lishma* in R. Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2023): 1–19.

23. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 327. The notion that heresy is worse than idolatry appears in numerous places in Teitelbaum’s work. See, e.g., “Introduction,” in Yoel Teitelbaum, *’Al Ha-Geulah ve ’al Ha-Temurah* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1967), 8; Yoel Teitelbaum, *Teshuvot* (Hotsa’at Sefarim, 1982), nos. 59:5 and 141:3.

24. The *Shulkhan Arukh* does not deal directly with it at all. It does address the question of compelling a spouse to immigrate to the land from the Talmudic discussion in

b.T. Ketubot 110b, but it does not use the language of mitzvah, *yishuv ha-aretz*. See Karo, *Shulkhan Arukh*, “Even Ha-Ezer,” 75:4. Abraham Zvi Hirsch Eisenstadt, in his *Pitkhei Teshuvah* on *Shulkhan Arukh*, does rehearse the question of the mitzvah of *yishuv* without coming to a conclusion. Of course, later jurists (Acharonim) spend a great deal of time adjudicating this question, which serves as the foundation of Teitelbaum’s analysis.

25. See *Responsa Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-Ezer* 1:102: “Most *poskim* are of the opinion that it is a mitzvah. But, at this time, it is not a positive commandment on the body (that is, one who immigrates fulfills a mitzvah, but there is no personal obligation to immigrate). For if so (if it were compulsory to immigrate to Israel), consequently, we would find that it is forbidden to live abroad . . . and no mention was made of the prohibition.” This is known as a “*mitzvah m’kayemet*”—that is, it is a mitzvah if one does something but one is not obligated to do it. The example often given is *zizit*. It is a mitzvah to wear *zizit* if you wear a four-cornered garment, but there is no obligation to wear a four-cornered garment. Cf. Moses Maimonides, “Laws of Kings” 5:9, in *Mishneh Torah: Hu Ha-Yad Ha-Ḥazaqah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1955).

26. Various later authorities hold by Nahmanides unambiguously. See, e.g., Eliezer Azikri, *Sefer Haredim* (Moshe Ezekiel Grinvald, 2005), end of chap. 57. Azikri also mentions that this mitzvah equals all others and concludes, “One who leaves the land to dwell in the Diaspora should be in your eyes as one who commits idolatry.” *Shulkhan Arukh, Or Ha-Hayyim* 249 reads: “One can travel to Israel even if a caravan is prepared to depart on *erev Shabbat* since it is a *devar mitzvah*.” The notion of “*devar mitzvah*” is a bit ambiguous, as to whether it could have been written as a *mitzvat aseh* (a positive commandment). Abraham Gombiner, *Magen Avraham to Shulkhan Arukh, Or Ha-Hayyim*, 249, 15, reads: “Even if the traveler intends to return to the Diaspora, since even walking four cubits in the land of Israel is a mitzvah.”

27. See, e.g., Eliezer Melamed, “The Obligation to Immigrate to Israel,” *Arutz Sheva*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/279964>.

28. Sholom DovBer notes that “all medieval commentators until Nahmanides did not think that dwelling in the land of Israel was a positive mitzvah. And some of those after him, such as *Sefer Mitzvot Gedolot* and *Sefer Hinukh*, also did not list it as a positive commandment, while others such as *Zohar Ha-Rakiya* and *Sefer Haredim* did think it was a positive commandment.” Sholom DovBer Schneersohn, *She’elot ve Teshuvot Torat Shalom* (Otsar ha-ḥasidim, 1982), 5:9, 173. On Schneersohn and Zionism, see Shalom Ratsabi, “Anti-Zionism and Messianic Tension in the Thought of R. Sholom DovBer” [in Hebrew], *Ha-Zionut* 20 (1996): 77–101.

29. See Shaul Magid, “Who Owns the Holy Land?,” *The Christian Century*, July 25, 2006, available at *Religion Online*, <http://www.religion-online.org/article/who-owns-the-holy-land>. See an expanded version in Magid, *Necessity of Exile*, 133–56. Teitelbaum has a different interpretation of that first Rashi commentary that counters the notion that the Torah begins with creation to teach of the Jews’ ownership of the land through covenantal promise. See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 1, 9–11.

30. Harry Orlinsky, “The Biblical Concept of the Land of Israel,” in *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Lawrence Hoffman (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 39.

31. See Eliezer Schweid, *Homeland and a Land of Promise* [in Hebrew] (Am Over, 1979).

32. On the holiness of the land, see Mishna, Kelim 1:6–9. On the mandate to dwell in the land, see the braita in b.T. Ketubot 110a; see also Saul Lieberman, ed., *Tosefta Kifshutah* (JTS Press, 1967), 386; Maimonides, “Hilkht Ishut” 13:17, in *Mishneh Torah*.

33. See Richard Sarason, “The Significance of the Land of Israel in the Mishnah,” in Hoffman, *Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, 109–38.

34. Moshe Idel, “Some Conceptions of the Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought,” in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture, Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman* (Catholic University of America Press, 1980), 129.

35. Moshe Idel, “The Land in Medieval Kabbalah,” in Hoffman, *Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, 181.

36. See Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Megillat Ha-Megalleh* (published in Berlin, 1924), 110; Idel, “Some Conceptions of the Land of Israel,” 124–41. This idea also filters down to more contemporary times. On Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch’s notion of the land as extending to America, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 226, citing *Torat Menachem* 5747, 2:54, 55.

37. See Gershom Scholem, “A New Document for the History of Early Kabbalah” [in Hebrew], in *Sefer Bialik*, ed. Jacob Fichman (Emunot, 1934), 161–62; see also Idel, “Some Conceptions of the Land,” 130.

38. The history of this idea goes at least as far back as Lurianism, but it takes an interesting form in Sabbateanism. See, e.g., Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton University Press, 1973), 45, 46, citing Isaiah Horowitz, *Shney Luchot Ha-Brit* (Even Israel Institute, 2009 [1698]), 189a.

39. See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 3, 12a; Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” 129, 339–41.

40. On Safed, see Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Mishna Consciousness, Bible Consciousness: Safed and Zionist Culture* (Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 2022) [in Hebrew].

41. See Abraham David, *To Come to the Land: Immigration and Settlement in 16th Century Eretz-Israel*, trans. Dena Ordan (University of Alabama Press, 1999), 95–172.

42. See, e.g., Hayyim Vital, *Sha’ar Ha-Pesukim* (Bnei Brak, Zvi Michel Vidovsky, 1986), vol. 7, 101, 102 (on Exodus).

43. See, e.g., Mor Altshuer, *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism* (Brill, 2012); Arie Morgenstern, *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “The Land of Israel in the Thought of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav,” in *The Land of Israel in Modern Jewish Thought* [in Hebrew], ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Ben-Zvi Institute, 1998); Aubrey Glazer and Nehemiah Polen, eds., *From Tiberias, with Love* (Fons Vitae, 2019). A collection of writings on the land of Israel from the Bratslav tradition, mostly gleaned from the writings of Nathan of Nemerov, can be found in Nathan Sternhartz, *Sefer Erez Yisrael and Zimrat Ha-Aretz* (Breskov Books, 1976). On Nahman, see Arthur Green, *Tormented Master* (University of Alabama Press, 1979), 63–93.

44. Teitelbaum deals with R. Nahman briefly in “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 150.

45. See Altshuer, *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism*, 81–104; Aubrey Glazer and Nehemiah Polen, eds., *From Tiberias, with Love: A Collection of Tiberian Hasidism, Vol. 2* (Academic Studies Press, 2021).

46. See, e.g., Ariel Evan Mayse, “Moving Mezrich: The Legacy of the Maggid and the Hasidic Community in the Land of Israel,” *Shofar* 3 (2020): 117–81.

47. The whole notion of the holiness of the land, and its status after the destruction in 70 CE and even before, is taken up in Milikowsky, “Notions of Exile, Subjugation, and Return,” 266–96.

48. See, e.g., Mishna, Orlah 3:9; Tosefta Terumah 2:9 and 13; Tosefta Avodah Zara 2:809 and elsewhere.

49. It is important to note that Teitelbaum was not opposed to people from his community immigrating to Israel, especially after 1933. In fact, he joined with groups of rabbis of various persuasions to aid those from his community who sought to immigrate to agricultural colonies. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 128, 129.

50. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 44, 245.

51. Sifra Leviticus 20:22.

52. A similar approach is taken by Aharon Shmuel Tamares in his *Knesset Yisrael u Mikhamot Ha-Goyim* (Blima Books, 2024 [1921]). Especially in part 3, beginning on page 123, Tamares offers a rendering of exile as the very *raison d'être* of the covenant, spreading Torah wisdom to the world. His problem with Zionism was not so much that it opposed tradition by “forcing the end,” but that it succumbed to “nationalism,” which was the “modern idolatry” for Tamares. Thus, Zionism was wrong for Tamares not because it was secular in its makeup but because the very notion of Zionism as nationalism was idolatrous and would yield only war and human suffering. For Tamares, Zionism was a form of assimilation no matter what form it took. Unlike Teitelbaum, Tamares doesn’t engage in halakhic debate about the three oaths or the mitzvah to settle the land. His critique is structural in that he viewed Zionism as antithetical to the covenant of exile, which he viewed as the covenant of our time. Teitelbaum engages the notion of the necessity of exile in this essay, but that does not appear to be his focus. Tamares, who was initially sympathetic to Zionism and then turned strongly against it, especially its political form, writes against Zionism more forcefully in his *Yahadut ve-Herut* (Judaism and Liberty; independently published, 1905). For an abbreviated translation, see Everett Gendler, ed. and trans., *A Passionate Pacifist: Essential Writings of Aaron Samuel Tamares* (Ben Yehuda Press, 2020), 93–119; on Zionism, see 213–29.

53. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 3, 16b. See also *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Venice edition), chap. 39, which makes the case for why Jacob abandoned the land to go to Egypt when he discovered that Joseph was alive. God said to him, “Do not be afraid of going to Egypt; it is there I will make you a great nation, and I will descend with you.”

54. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 141, 356, cited below.

55. De Leon’s *Megillat Esther* is a response to Nahmanides’s criticism of Maimonides in his gloss to *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*. This has been noted by Hayyim Joseph David Azulai in his *Shem Ha-Gedolim* (S.H. Deutscher Books, 1856). See “Ma’arekhet Gedolim” 10, no. 333 [Jerusalem 1994 edition, p. 120].

56. The reference to “many cases in the Talmud” is to mitzvot that remain operational even after the destruction of the Temple.

57. Sifri, “Re’ah,” 80.

58. Nahmanides, gloss of mitzvah no. 4 in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot ‘im Hasagot Ha-Ramban* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1981), 246.

59. Moses Nahmanides, *Perush Ha-Ramban 'al Ha Torah*, Vol. 2 (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1960), 335.

60. The printed version reads “*kol yahid*” (each individual). Charles Ber Chavel, ed., *Nahmanides on the Torah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1971) notes that in other variants we read “*kol ehad*,” which means every individual. The difference could be significant, in that *kol yahid* more likely refers to the mitzvah as an individual one, whereas *kol ehad* is to be read as a collective mitzvah.

61. One example among many is a recent essay by Moshe Aberman, “Yishuv Ha'aretz and the Modern Diaspora Jew,” *Torah M'tzion*, December 23, 2014, <https://torahmitzion.org/learn/yishuv-haaretz-modern-diaspora-jew/>. Discussing Maimonides, Aberman writes: “In both these examples [referring to b.T. Ketubot 110b] we see that the Rambam is of the opinion that living in Israel is of halachic significance. It is clear that though the Rambam saw halakhic importance to living in Israel, he did not feel it should be included as one of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot.” It is interesting to consider what Aberman means by “halachic significance” and yet not a mitzvah. Teitelbaum would agree if by “halachic significance” it is meant that it maximizes the ability to fulfill as many mitzvot as possible. Using the term *halakhic* in relation to Maimonides's position requires further clarification.

62. Teitelbaum spends a great deal of time analyzing Nahmanides's position. It serves as one main focus of “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chaps. 1–22.

63. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” 366.

64. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 117, 324. Teitelbaum goes on to say that many medieval jurists state that the mitzvah of *yishuv* is not pushed off but nullified completely in the time of exile. This certainly does not prohibit Jewish settlement in Israel; it just takes such settlement outside the orbit of mitzvah.

65. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 135, 349, 350.

66. Eliezer Schweid, “The Rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist Thought: Two Approaches,” *Studies in Zionism* 5, no. 1 (1984): 43–70, reprinted in J. Reinhartz and A. Shapira, eds., *The Essential Papers on Zionism* (NYU Press, 1996), 133. Cf. Shalom Ratzaby, “The Polemic About ‘Negation of the Diaspora’ in the 1930s and Its Roots,” *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 6, no. 1 (2008): 19–38.

67. Arnold Eisen, “Zionism, American Jews, and the ‘Negation of the Diaspora,’” in *Between Jewish Tradition and Modernity: Essays in Honor of David Ellenson*, ed. Michael A. Meyer and David N. Myers (Wayne State University Press, 2014), 176.

68. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty: Critique of ‘The Negation of Exile’ in Israeli Culture,” in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept* (Columbia University Press, 2017), 393.

69. See Scott Ury, “Strange Bedfellows? Anti-Semitism, Zionism, and the Fate of ‘the Jews,’” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1151–71.

70. See Menachem Keren-Kratz, “Maramaros, Hungary—the Cradle of Extreme Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* (2015): 147–74. Schweid was certainly aware of ultra-Orthodox literature, but he does not engage that literature on the question of negating the exile.

71. See, e.g., Daniel Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 105–31.

72. For more details, see Magid, *Necessity of Exile*.

73. Talk given at the 2006 annual American Jewish Committee meeting in Washington, DC. On this, see *The A.B. Yehoshua Controversy: An Israel-Diaspora Dialogue on Jewishness, Israeliness, and Identity* (Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations, 2006).

74. See, Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "The Negation of Galut in Religious Zionism," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992): 129–55.

75. Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile Within Sovereignty," 400.

76. On the diminished focus on the land as territory in modern Judaism, see Arnold Eisen, "Off Center: The Concept of the Land of Israel in Modern Jewish Thought," in Hoffman, *Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, 263–96. Cf. Hasia Diner, *A New Promised Land: A History of Jewish in America* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

77. For a lengthy and nuanced reading of Rav Kook on this question, see Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi [Rav Manitou], *Mesped le-Moshiah?* (Manitou Institute, 2006), which offers an extensive commentary to Kook's controversial 1904 eulogy of Theodor Herzl.

78. See Yuval, "Myth of the Jewish Exile," 16–33.

79. See Eliezer Schweid, "The Magic of the Diaspora and the Problem of Normalization," in *Between Judaism and Zionism* [in Hebrew] (Ha-Sifriya Ha-Ziyonit, 1983), 139; Susannah Heschel, "Can There Be a Prophetic Voice Today Without Diaspora?," *Contending Modernities*, September 25, 2020, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/ending-exile/>. Heschel writes: "The paradox of Jewish exile is that it never happened. There was no edict of exile from the land of Israel after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE; Jews continued to live in Palestine, even composing the Palestinian Talmud and various Midrashim. Most Jews lived in the Diaspora, at least since the sixth century BCE, flourishing and transforming Israelite religion into Judaism. Although Jews were never exiled from the land of Israel, the Jewish belief that Jews live in exile shaped Jewish self-understanding as a major theme in religious literature and liturgy. The reality is that Jews settled in Diaspora in lands around the globe, assimilating various cultures, languages, and religious ideas. Although Diaspora constituted the political and cultural state of Jews, exile became internalized as an existential state, with Jews alienated from society while awaiting redemption."

80. For a study of rabbinic literature in this register, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

81. Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile Within Sovereignty," 399.

82. On the Canaanites, see James S. Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land? The "Canaanite" Critique of Israel* (Indiana University Press, 1986).

83. Don-Yehiya, "Negation of Galut in Religious Zionism," 132. On the differences among secular Zionists regarding how much Judaism matters, see Schweid, "Rejection of the Diaspora," 140–59.

84. Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land," chaps. 110–19. Interestingly, Zionist ideologues from Herzl to Ahad Ha'Am did not think that a Jewish state would empty Jews from the Diaspora. Herzl believed that this was not possible, and Ahad Ha'Am believed that it was not even preferable. Herzl thought that a Jewish state would provide refuge for Jews under duress, and Ahad Ha'Am believed that it would serve as the engine of secular Jewish culture that would extend into the Diaspora.

85. Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land," chap. 141, 356; cf. chap. 132, 346.

86. Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land," chap. 142, 356.

87. On Lurianic Kabbalah and the Diaspora, see Shaul Magid, “Lurianic Kabbala and the Idea of the Diaspora,” in *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, ed. M. Avrum Ehrlich (ABC/CLIO, 2009), 35–38.

88. Hayyim Vital, *Sha’ar Ha-Mitzvot* (Bnei Brak, Zvi Michel Vidovsky, 1986 [1872]), “Reah,” 111, 112. Teitelbaum cites this text in *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 5, 274–76. He has a long discussion on the nature of the Egyptian exile that focuses on the biblical reference to the Israelites leaving Egypt with “great wealth” (*b’rekhush gadol*). His discussion there is based on the notion of taking the possessions of the Egyptians with them when they left Egypt as an act of lifting the sparks from those objects that required liberation.

89. In *Divrei Yoel*, volume on Passover (Drasha no. 10, pp. 16 and 17), Teitelbaum offers a different rendering of the exile in Egypt in relation to other exiles. There he offers an explanation as to why one eats bitter herbs and matzoh at the Passover seder, suggesting that the Israelites left Egypt too early without completing the final tikkun and thus the other exiles are, in part, responsible for completing the incomplete exile of Egypt. The Israelites left too early (*b’khipazon*) because they were so enmeshed in impurity that if they did not leave, they would not have been able to. In this reading, exile is necessary not only to complete its own agenda of purification, but to complete the purification of the Egyptian exile the Israelites left unfinished.

90. On the exile of Shomron, see Abravanel on Isa. 8:1 and 9:3. On the exile of Shomron not having Torah scholars, see R. Naftali Hertz Bachrach, *Emek Ha-Melekh*, 2 vols. (Yaris Sefarim, 2003), vol. 1, 112, 113. For a study of Bachrach, see Yehuda Liebes, “Toward a Study of the Author of *Emek Ha-Melekh*: His Personality, Writings, and Kabbalah” [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993): 101–37.

91. R. Menachem Azaria da Fano, *Asarah Ma’amarot* (David Tsevi Shrentsil, 1858), 276.

92. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 110, 316–18. Similarly, see *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 9, 179, 180, where Teitelbaum writes that in our day, as much as we have sinned and suffered the catastrophic burden of an evil kingdom, God’s promise not to destroy us remains intact: “The curses and suffering exist for the purposes of redemption.” See Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 14, 34. See also Nahmanides, *Mishneh Torah*, on Deut. 28:42. In *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 5, 274, Teitelbaum writes: “As we understand from the Zohar, the Israelites didn’t descend to Egypt to remain there. Rather, they came to liberate sparks that were embedded there by means of establishing houses of study to expand the borders of holiness. And those sparks that they redeemed from those depths through their Torah study became their portion and inheritance forever.”

93. This is the position of Noah Barzofsky of Slonim. See Shaul Magid, “The Holocaust as Inverted Miracle: Shalom Noah Barzofsky of Slonim on the Power and Divine Nature of Radical Evil,” in *Spiritual Authority: Wrestling with Cultural Power in Jewish Thought*, ed. Haim Kreisel and Boaz Huss (Ben-Gurion University Press, 2010), 33–62.

94. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” 317.

95. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 1, on “Lekh Lekha,” 207.

96. On Schneerson and Diaspora, particularly America, see Philip Wexler, Michael Wexler, and Eli Rubin, *Social Vision: The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Transformative Paradigm for the World* (Herder & Herder, 2022), 43–49. On Satmar and America, see David N. Myers and Nomi M. Stolzenberg, “Rethinking Secularization Theory: The Case of the Hasidic Public Square,” *AJS Perspectives* (Spring 2011): 37, 38.

97. On the necessity of “negation of the Diaspora” for the survival of Zionism today, see Schweid, “Rejection of the Diaspora,” 159: “In the face of phenomena such as emigration from Israel and alienation from Zionism both in Israel and abroad, the Zionist movement must sharpen its criticism of the Diaspora experience and bring it up to date, in order to make the people face the cruel truth of disintegration and decadence in Jewish life abroad.”

98. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 108, 313; cf. chap. 102, 308. Teitelbaum is referring to Baruch David Kahane, *Sefer Hibat Ha-Aretz* (Yitzhak Nahum Leow, 1897). For a recent study of *Hibat Zion*, see Yossi Goldstein, “Reflections on the Failure of the Lovers of Zion,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14, no. 2 (2015): 229–45.

99. Observing *shmittah* became a major issue even before Zionism as Jewish settlers found it difficult to keep and maintain enough food to eat. See, e.g., Isaac Horowitz (Shelah), *Shney Luchot Ha-Brit*, 5 vols. (Even Israel Institute, 2009), vol. 1, 472, 474; see, e.g., 471: “One who lives in the land of Israel and does not fulfill his religious obligations is a sinner (*poshea*). But happy is the one who sanctifies himself in *terumot u maserot* and *shvi'it* according to his obligation.”

100. On the early colonies, see Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 108, 313, 314. On the First Aliyah and its combination of Torah observance, agriculture, and entrepreneurship, see Liora Halperin, *The Oldest Guard: Forging the Zionist Settler Past* (Stanford University Press, 2021), 39–66.

101. This same approach is taken by R. Sholom DovBer Schneersohn in his responsum on “the mitzvah of dwelling in the land of Israel in our time,” in Schneersohn, *She'elot ve Teshuvot Torat Shalom*, 5:9, no. 85, 164–95. Schneersohn's responsum is mostly dedicated to the reasons behind setting up a Chabad yeshiva in Hebron and not Jerusalem, arguing in part that Jerusalem was too full of transgressors and Zionists while Hebron remained a largely pure city for Torah study.

102. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land,” chap. 145, 359.

103. The use of Amalek in religious circles extends far beyond Nazism and often also applies to powers inside Israel. See, e.g., Elliot Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 107–46.

104. There are several places where Kook may be alluded to in Teitelbaum's writings; see, e.g., *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 17b, on the festivals: “One should not learn from a rabbi that does not follow the right path even though he may be a great sage and the entire nation needs him.” In 1932, Teitelbaum visited Palestine to explore the possibility of running for a rabbinical position in Jerusalem after the death of R. Yosef Hayyim Sonnenfeld. His first Shabbat in Jerusalem, he gave a sermon at a Hasidic synagogue in the Hungarian Quarter in Meah Shearim in which he came out strongly against Rav Kook. After that sermon, he met up with a student from his yeshiva in Kroli who had become close to Rav Kook. The student tried to convince Teitelbaum to visit Kook, but Teitelbaum flatly refused. A letter Teitelbaum wrote on the ship returning to Europe reads: “When I merited being in Jerusalem many people, even from among us, asked me about Rav Kook, who stood as chief rabbi and tried to expand the influence of the defiled Zionists and Mizrahim [referring to the Zionist organization]. I refused to engage with them or listen to them at all.” See Shlomo Yaakov Gelbman, *Moshian shel Yisrael*, 9 vols. (Kiryat Yoel, 1992), vol. 5, 410, 420. See also Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 132–34. In any case, Teitelbaum was not chosen to replace Sonnenfeld. The position went to R. Yosef Zvi Dushinsky.

105. Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land," chap. 43, 245.
106. Gershom Scholem, "Redemption Through Sin," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Schocken Books, 1971).
107. Azikri, *Sefer Haredim*, end of chap. 56.

3. MODERN HEBREW AND ITS DISCONTENTS

1. See Seth Sanders, "Jesus' Language More Complicated Than Experts Claim," *Religion Dispatches*, June 4, 2014.
2. See, e.g., Steve E. Fassberg, "Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?," *Catholic Quarterly Review* 74 (2012): 263–80.
3. See William Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period* (Yale University Press, 2013), esp. 27–51, 73–99, 164–91; Seth Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (University of Illinois Press, 2011), 103–56. See also Chaim Rabin, *A Short History of the Hebrew Language* (Jewish Agency, 1973); Edward Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Magnes Press, 1974).
4. Sanders, "Jesus' Language."
5. See b.T. Yoma 69b.
6. See Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 82. For example, Micha Josef Berdichevsky claimed that Jewish survival depended on a national culture that "cannot exist without a territorial, land-based national foundation, without a tangible social-historical well from which the spirit and the body can draw." Micah Josef Berdichevsky, *Kol Kitvei Berdiczewski* (Kibbutz Ha-Meuhad, 1960), 62, 63, cited in Arie Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Palestine* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 17.
7. Shai Ish Hurwitz, "Le-she'alat kiyum ha-Yahadut," *Ha-Shiloah* 12 (April 1904): 287–303. On this essay, see Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Brill, 1980), 112–48.
8. Zéev Jabotinsky, *Ketavim Ziyoniyim Rishonim*, cited in Yael Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse University Press, 2004), 8.
9. See Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine 1920–1948* (Yale University Press, 2014). See also Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 133–45; Israel Bartal, "From Traditional Bilingualism to National Monolingualism" [in Hebrew], in *Ashkenaz: A Language of Exile*, ed. Lewis Glinert (Oxford University Press, 1993), 141–50.
10. Hirschprung later served as chief rabbi of Montreal, from 1969 until his death in 1998. He reestablished a Bais Yaakov girls' school in Montreal in 1953 and became the principal of the Chabad Tomchei Temimim girls' school in 1965. See Steven Lapidus, "Memoirs of a Refugee: The Travels and Travails of Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 27 (2019): 68–84.
11. See Israel Rubin, *Satmar: Two Generations of an Urban Island* (Peter Lang, 1997). More recently, see Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper, *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* (Yale University Press, 2021). See also Me-nachem Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—Ha-Admor mi-Satmar* (Magnes Press, 2020), 221–23; Hertz Frankel, *The Satmar Rebbe and His English Principal: Reflections on the Struggle to Build Yiddishkeit in America* (Menucha, 2015).

12. On girls' education more generally, see Ilan Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study: Orthodox Religious Education and Modernity* (Routledge, 2014); Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2019); Tamar Ross, "A Bet-Midrash of Her Own: Women's Contribution to the Study and Knowledge of Torah," in *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought*, ed. Howard Kreisel (Ben-Gurion University Press, 2006), 309–58.

13. The definitive study of Bais Yaakov is Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement*. See also Rachel Manekin, "'Something Entirely New': The Development of the Idea of Orthodox Education for Girls in the Modern Period" [in Hebrew], *Masekhet* 2 (2004): 63–85.

14. See Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew*, 65–93.

15. The notion of teaching Hebrew in Hebrew reaches back further than the Takhkemoni controversy in Palestine. See, e.g., Yitzhak Epstein, "Ivrit be-Ivrit," in *Ha-Shiloah* 4 (1898). This is also discussed in Roni Henig, *On Revival: Hebrew Literature Between Life and Death* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), 98–108. The shift in instruction from Yiddish to Hebrew began in Eastern Europe, in the institution known as *heder me'tukan* (improved *heder*). I assume that Teitelbaum was aware of this new school. See Maya Barzalai and Shai Ginsburg, "Ha-Dibur Ha-Ivrit: Keriah Mehudeshet," *Mi-Kan: Ketav be-Heker Ha-Sifrut ve Ha-Tarbut Ha-Yehudit ve Ha-Yisraelit* 20 (2020): 198–226.

16. See Elyakim Rubenstein, "Mi-Yishuv le-Medina: Mosadot u-Miflagot," in *Ha-Yeshuv b'Yemey Ha-Bayit Ha-Le'umi*, ed. Binyamin Eli'av (Keter, 1979); Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 181–221; Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten*, 15–20.

17. See Yoel Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," in *Vayoel Moshe* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1985), chap. 23, 427. See also Yosef Lev Yakav, *Derekh Ha-Melekh*, Vol. 1, 209, cited in Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 205. The first Hebrew kindergarten was established in Jerusalem in 1903, to the consternation of many of the "Old Yishuv" rabbis in Jerusalem.

18. The question of whether Hebrew was a spoken language in antiquity remains a matter of scholarly debate. See, e.g., Seth Sanders, "Ancient Hebrew," in *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Languages*, ed. Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee (Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 279–98. There are some texts from the Great Revolt (67–70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–136 CE) that indicate that Hebrew may have been a spoken language, but scholars cannot determine how common it was. It likely was very limited and spoken among sages of the period. Others claim that Mishnaic Hebrew was more widely spoken. See Aaron Koller, "Hebrew and Aramaic in Context," in Hasselbach-Andee, *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Languages*, 47.

19. Teitelbaum is not alone here. See, e.g., Sholom DovBer Schneersohn, *She'elot ve Teshuvot Torat Shalom* (Otsar ha-ḥasidim, 1982), 5:9 no. 87, 187–95. Schneersohn's approach is very similar to Teitelbaum's, albeit much more abbreviated. For example, Schneersohn states quite plainly, "Everyone agrees that *lashon ha-kodesh* cannot be used for mundane matters. And one who does so takes things from the holy into the realm of the profane. Thus, they called it Hebrew (*sefat 'aver*) precisely to remove it from its holiness" (191, 192).

20. Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 100.

21. It is true that Scholem voices his concerns in his 1926 letter to Franz Rosenzweig, and *Vayoel Moshe* is published in the late 1950s, at which time Israel was already a fully Hebraized society.

22. On Scholem and Bialik on language, see Ilit Ferber, “Language and Instability: Scholem and Bialik on Language and Secularization,” in *Language as Bridge and Border*, ed. Sabine Sander (Hentrich & Hentrich, 2015), 179–94.

23. See Frank H. Polak, “Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community in the Achaemenid Empire,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Eisenbrauns, 2006), 589–628.

24. See Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew*, 65–92.

25. All translations of Ben-Yehuda’s book are my own.

26. See Jack Fellman, *The Revival of a Classical Tongue: Eliezer Ben Yehuda and the Modern Hebrew Language* (Mouton, 1973), 112–40.

27. Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 93–100.

28. *Der yiddisher kemfer*, May 4, 1906.

29. Moshe Leib Lilienblum, *Kol Kitvei* (Tsilin, 1910), vol. 4, 7. See also David Sorotzkin, “Redemption of Darkness: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum’s Confrontation with Modernity,” *Modern Judaism* 36, no. 3 (2016): 369–404, 397.

30. Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten*, 13.

31. I thank Pinchas Giller for providing me his personal copy of Ben-Yehuda’s book.

32. Schniedewind claims that Hebrew disappeared as a spoken language, but there is no real evidence for how common it was circa 200 CE, the Mishna being the last gasp of a living language in Palestine. See Schniedewind, *Social History of Hebrew*, 4. In addition, he notes that Aramaic and Hebrew shared the same Northwest Semitic linguistic tradition and that Jews often moved between these two languages, due to their similarity. See *Social History of Hebrew*, 79. Seth Schwartz is much less convinced of the influence of spoken Hebrew, arguing that there is insufficient evidence to attest to any sense of Hebrew as a lingua franca in late Jewish antiquity. See Seth Schwartz, “Hebrew and Imperialism in Jewish Palestine,” in *Ancient Judaism in Hellenistic Context*, ed. Carol Bakos (Brill, 2005); Seth Schwartz, “Language, Power, and Identity in Ancient Palestine,” *Past and Present* 148 (1995): 3–47.

33. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press), 25.

34. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *‘Ad Matai Dibru Ivrit? [Until When Did They Speak Hebrew?]* (Nabu Press, 2011), 17. See also Nehemiah 13:23, 24: . . . half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples.

35. Ben-Yehuda, *‘Ad Matai Dibru Ivrit?*, 106.

36. See Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 181–221. We now know much more about the lives of Jews in Babylonia than we did previously. See, e.g., Simcha Gross, *Babylonian Jews and Sasanian Imperialism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

37. Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 1–25.

38. What Ben-Yehuda means is not clear. Does “now less so” refer to scholarship on that period that views Greek as more detrimental? Or is he speaking about the use of other language in the Palestine of his time?

39. Ben-Yehuda, *‘Ad Matai Dibru Ivrit?*, 52, 53. On Bnei Tuvia, see Ezra 2:60 and Saadia Gaon on Ezra 2:60, *They married gentile women and no longer knew their patriarchal lineage, or if they were even Israelites or not*.

40. Koller, “Hebrew and Aramaic in Context,” 439.

41. See, e.g., the Israeli Netflix series *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem*, which tells the story of the Ermosas, a Ladino-speaking family who had lived in Jerusalem for many generations and witnessed the arrival of Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim and Hebrew-speaking Zionists. While Hebraized, the Ermosa family still retain their Ladino Levantine heritage, even as it is quickly disappearing.

42. See, e.g., Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten*.

43. See, e.g., Ben-Yehuda, 'Ad Matai Dibru Ivrit?, 90.

44. Ben-Yehuda, 93.

45. Ben-Yehuda, 115.

46. On nationalistic ethos, see Schniedewind, *Social History of Hebrew*, 82: "[Christopher] Rollston understands the creation of a Hebrew national script as a 'conscious decision' intended as a nationalistic statement and not merely an evolutionary development."

47. Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948* (University of California Press, 2002), 2. See Mostafa Hussein, *Hebrew Orientalism: Jewish Engagement with Arabo-Islamic Culture in Late Ottoman British Palestine* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 139–224.

48. Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten*, 13.

49. See esp. Henig, *On Revival*, esp. 25–63.

50. Gershom Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," *Diogenes* 20, no. 79 (September 1972). See also David Biale, "Theology, Language, and History," in *Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Harvard University Press, 1979). Scholem's lecture was originally given at the Eranos Conference in Ascona, Switzerland, in 1970. On Eranos and Scholem's role in those conferences, see Steve Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

51. See Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (Paul Dry, 2012), 140.

52. See Jacques Derrida, "The Eyes of Language: The Abyss and the Volcano," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (Routledge, 2009), 191–227.

53. Hayyim Nahman Bialik, "Revelment and Concealment: Reflections on the Nature of Language," trans. Jacob Sloan, *Commentary* 10 (January 1950): 171–75. Both essays are available in English in Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *Revelment and Concealment: Five Essays* (Ibis, 2000).

54. See, e.g., William Cutter, "Ghostly Hebrew, Ghastly Speech: Scholem to Rosenzweig, 1926," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 3 (1990): 413–33; Galili Shahar, "The Sacred and the Unfamiliar: Gershom Scholem and the Anxieties of the New Hebrew," *German Review* (2008): 299–320; Anabel Herzog, "'Monolinguisim' or the Language of God: Scholem and Derrida on Hebrew and Politics," *Modern Judaism* (2009): 226–38. See also Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Harvard University Press, 1991). On Bialik, see Hamutal Zamir, *Bialik Ba'al Guf: Teshuka, Tzionut, Shira* (Keter, 2006); Shmuel Warsis, *Beyn Gilui le-Kisui: Bialik Be-Sipur u be-Masa* (HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 1984).

55. Shahar, "Sacred and the Unfamiliar," 311.

56. Oded Schechter, "The Defiled Language Called Hebrew: Between *Lashon Ha-Kodesh* and Aramaic, The Genealogy of Hebrew" [in Hebrew], *Meta'am* 2: 124–38.

57. I use the German original reproduced by Cutter in “Ghostly Hebrew” and both his and Gelley’s English translations, both of which appear in Cutter’s essay.

58. See Dan Miron, “Perplexity in Hebrew Literature at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century” [in Hebrew], in *Simon Halkin Jubilee Volume*, ed. Boaz Shahevitch (Reuven Mas, 1975). Noam Zadoff notes how much Scholem continued to write in German and that he often preferred to speak in German. See Noam Zadoff, *Gershom Scholem: From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back* (Brandeis University Press, 2017). See also Biale, *Kabbalah and Counter-History*, 205–9.

59. Franz Rosenzweig’s book *The Star of Redemption* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) is full of insights on language and Hebrew (see, e.g., 298–308). See also Franz Rosenzweig, “Classical and Modern Hebrew,” in *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (Schocken Books, 1953), 263–71, which offers his reflections on Jacob Klatzkin’s Hebrew translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. See also Nahum N. Glatzer, “The Concept of Language in Rosenzweig’s Thought,” in Franz Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland* (Philo Verlag, 1926), 723–29. See Shahar, “Sacred and the Unfamiliar,” 302–8; Zohar Maor, “Scholem and Rosenzweig: Redemption and (Anti)Zionism,” *Modern Judaism* 37, no. 1 (2017): 1–23, esp. 6–8.

60. For his views on New Hebrew, see Franz Rosenzweig, “Neuhebräisch,” in *Kleinere Schriften* (Schocken Books, 1937), 220–27.

61. See Herzog, “Monolingualism,” 228, 229.

62. Cutter, “Ghostly Hebrew,” 417. Note that when Scholem arrived in Palestine in 1923, only about 5 percent of its inhabitants were Jews.

63. See Shahar, “Sacred and the Unfamiliar,” 301.

64. Cutter, “Ghostly Hebrew,” 417.

65. Cutter, 426.

66. Gershom Scholem, “On the 1930 Edition of Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Schocken Books, 1971), 321–22.

67. Herzog, “Monolingualism,” 230.

68. See Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2014); Avinoam Rosenak, “Who’s Afraid of Secret Writings? Eight Files from the Manuscript of Rav Kook” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 9, no. 2 (2000): 257–91; Avinoam Rosenak, “Hidden Diaries and New Discoveries: The Life and Thought of Rabbi A.I. Kook,” *Shofar* 25, no. 3 (2007): 111–47; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Secrecy, Apophasis, and Atheistic Faith in the Teachings of Rav Kook,” in *Negative Theology and Jewish Modernity*, ed. Michael Fagenblat (Indiana University Press, 2017), 131–60.

69. See Shaul Magid, “Myth, History, and Mysticism: Gershom Scholem and the Contemporary Scene,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 4 (2011): 511–25.

70. See Gershom Scholem, “Über Klage und Klagelied” [On Lament and Lamentation, 1917–18], in *Tagebücher nebst Aufsätzen und Entwürfen bis 1923*, ed. Karlfried Gründer, 2 vols. (Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995–2000), 128–33; in English, see Gershom Scholem, “On Language and Lament,” in *Lament in Jewish Thought: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel (De Gruyter, 2014).

71. For a discussion of this in great detail, see Paula Schwebel, “The Tradition in Ruins: Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem on Language and Lament,” in Ferber and Schwebel, *Lament in Jewish Thought*.

72. On Scholem and faith, see his interview with Muki Zur in Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (Schocken Books, 1976), 1–48.

73. On Teitelbaum as a premillennialist, see Shaul Magid, “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II: Satmar,” in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, ed. David Watt and Simon Wood (University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 92–107.

74. Bialik, “Revelment and Concealment,” 12.

75. Bialik, “Sacred and the Secular,” 90.

76. Bialik, “Sacred and the Secular,” 90.

77. Bialik, “Sacred and the Secular,” 89–91.

78. Bialik, “Sacred and the Secular,” 92.

79. Scholem, “Name of God,” 55.

80. Rashi is citing Midrash Tanhuma, Noah, 19.

81. On Maimonides and language, see Joseph Stern, “Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Hillel Levine (Kluwer, 2000): 173–226; Menachem Kellner, “Maimonides on the ‘Normality’ of Hebrew,” in *Judaism and Modernity: The Religious Philosophy of David Hartman*, ed. Jonathan Malino (Ashgate, 2004), 413–44.

82. On Rashi’s comment that Joseph was able to convince his brothers that he was truly Joseph by speaking to them in *lashon ha-kodesh* and Nahmanides’s disagreement, see Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 489. Teitelbaum bases his position on the view of Hatam Sofer that *lashon ha-kodesh* is only that which is rooted in Scripture. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Holy Language,” 28, 430–32.

83. We have no evidence that Augustine got this idea directly from Jubilees, though it is entirely possible that the ideas in Jubilees could simply have become a matter of common parlance in late antiquity.

84. Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Penguin Books, 2003), book 16, chap. 11. It became quite popular to believe that the Hebrew language was retained by the Hebrews and, in some cases, also the Canaanites. On the Canaanites (descendants of Ham) and the Hebrews (precursors to the Jews) as both retaining *lashon ha-kodesh* after the Flood, see Arthur Talmage Abernethy, *The Jew a Negro* (Dixie Publishing Company, 1910), 44.

85. Augustine, *City of God*, book 16, chap. 11.

86. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Holy Language,” chap. 16.

87. It seems that Teitelbaum is referring to Maimonides’s comment on Mishna Parah 3:6. See also Moses Maimonides, *Iggerot Ha-Rambam*, ed. Yitzchak Shilat (Ma’aliyot, 1987), vol. 1, 208; and see his comment to Mishna Avot 2:1, to the effect that although Hebrew may be a “light” mitzvah (*mitzvah kala*), people should take it seriously.

88. The influence of Judah Halevi on Maimonides is a matter of scholarly debate. See, e.g., “Parallels Between the *Kuzari* and the Non-Philosophical Treatises of Maimonides,” in Shlomo Pines, *Studies in the History of Jewish Thought*, ed. Warren Z. Harvey and Moshe Idel, 5 vols. (Magnes Press, 1997), 248–51; Howard Kreisel, “Judah Halevi’s Influence on Maimonides: A Preliminary Appraisal,” in *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 95–122.

89. Teitelbaum often cites the Zohar in passing or as a proof-text, but here his argument is based on a Zoharic passage.

90. That is, speaking the language activates its inherent powers. See Zohar 3.112b.

91. Zohar 1.65b.

92. Zohar 1.76b. There is a plethora of scholarship on the mystical nature of language generally, and of Hebrew in particular, that Teitelbaum seems to be uninterested in. See, e.g., Moshe Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford University Press, 1992), 42–79; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being* (Fordham University Press, 2005), 1–45.

93. Schechter, "Defiled Language," 135. That is, the very notion of a unity of language (*devarim ahudim*) was heretical.

94. See Genesis Raba 38:7, "And they came upon the valley . . . R. Yehuda and R. Nehemia. R. Yehuda said all the idolaters gathered together to see which valley was making them strong, and in the end, they found it." It seems like this part of the midrash makes an even stronger case for Teitelbaum, and it is curious he chose not to mention it. It is likely that he cites the second part because that is what is mentioned in *Yofe To'ar*, which he seems to be following in the midrash.

95. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 19. That is, since *lashon ha-kodesh* seems to have a power that activates the upper worlds (Zohar), the only way to nullify it was through a miracle as an antidote to the power of *lashon ha-kodesh*. This answers his earlier question as to why God needed to perform this specific miracle of confusing languages in order to stop the rebellion. For another rendering of the Tower of Babel in which the builders use language for their own needs without recognizing its lofty roots, see Shlomo Elyashiv, *Leshem Shevo ve-Akhlama: Hakdamot u' Shearim* (Aaron Barzani Bros., 2006), 110–13 (English pagination). Elyashiv uses similar Zoharic passages to build his case but does not mention *lashon ha-kodesh* as operative. Rather, he makes the provocative claim that whereas other sins, even other acts of heresy, engage in using holiness toward destructive ends, only in the generation of Babel was there an infiltration of the generation into the palace of holiness itself in order to essentially kidnap the king for the purpose of separating *malchut* from the nine higher sephirot, which constitutes the quintessence of heresy. "The [the generation of Babel] entered into the holy sanctum and both intended and desired to forcibly take the scepter of the king to use it for all manner of rebellion." *Leshem*, 113.

96. In a speech he gave in 1955 at a conference of ultra-Orthodox leaders in America, Teitelbaum spoke out against, among other things, Zionism and the state of Israel, "where they speak Hebrew." See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 230.

97. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 19.

98. See Shlomo Yaakov Gelbman, *Moshian shel Yisrael*, 9 vols. (Kiryat Yoel, 1992), vol. 1, 497, 498; Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 178.

99. Sholom DovBer Schneersohn, *Igrot Kodesh* (Kehot Publication Society, 1986), vol. 2, nos. 817 and 492. See also Sorotzkin, "Redemption from Darkness," 392. Schneersohn suggests that Jews stopped speaking *lashon ha-kodesh* after the destruction of the First Temple because their holiness had diminished. While his reasoning is different, he is not too far from Ben-Yehuda on this point. See Ariel Evan Mayse, "The Calf Awakens: Language, Zionism, and Heresy in Twentieth-Century American Hasidism," in *Kabbalah in America*, ed. Brian Ogren (Brill, 2020), 269–89.

100. Schechter, "Defiled Language," 136.

101. Teitelbaum similarly argues that the so-called miracle of the Six-Day War was not necessarily a sign of divine favor, given that Satan sometimes has the power of miracle, as

the sages note in their reading of Job. See “Introduction” in Yoel Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah ve ‘al Ha-Temurah* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1967), 14.

102. Teitelbaum begins the essay with the halakhic argument and moves to his rendering of the Tower of Babel only afterward, but I decided to treat that part first because it reflects his engagement with the New Hebrew movement that stands at the center of his anti-Zionism.

103. Sifri to Deuteronomy 10.

104. These are all laid out in detail in “Essay on the Holy Language,” chaps. 1 and 2.

105. *Tziyn le-Nefesh Haya* is Landau’s gloss on the Talmud, first published in Prague in 1783. On Landau, see Sharon Flatto, *The Kabbalistic Culture of Eighteenth-Century Prague: Ezekiel Landau and His Contemporaries* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010).

106. See R. Abraham Zachut, *Sefer Yuhasin*, ed. Herschell Filipowski, 124, “from *higayon*—from reading Scripture (*le-hagot ba-mikraot*) because they tend to teach heresy.” See also R. Menachem Ha-Meiri, *Beit Ha-Bekhira to Berakhot* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1960), 101, which seems to follow Arukh’s rendering of *higayon* as “Scripture.”

107. Landau, *Tziyn le-Nefesh Haya*, on b.T. Berakhot 28b.

108. Flatto, *Kabbalistic Culture*, 64–96.

109. Frank Talmage, “‘Keep Your Sons from Scripture’: The Bible in Medieval Jewish Scholarship and Spirituality,” in *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation*, ed. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (Paulist Press, 1987), 81–101.

110. Here he incorporates his earlier discussion, where he severed the study of language as a separate mitzvah in itself and folded it into Talmud Torah.

111. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Holy Language,” chap. 13, 417. This passage in Yebamot 86b deals with whether the Levites must donate a portion of their tithes to the Kohanim. One sage states that this was a punishment of the Levites for not ascending to the land of Israel. Another says that it was to ensure that the Kohanim have food to eat when they are impure and not able to fulfill their Temple duties. One anonymous sage (*mar*) suggests that the penalty of the Levite’s tithes must be given to the poor, and one says that Kohanim are considered poor when they are impure. Tosafot addresses this last discrepancy regarding the definition of the poverty of Kohanim and Israelites, in regard to tithes. In the midst of this analysis, Tosafot writes that in the case of “the one who holds that First Tithes (*Ma’aser Rishon*) are forbidden for strangers (i.e., Israelites) to consume, it does appear they could permit giving these tithes to the poor Israelite in order that he might sell them (apparently to Kohanim or Levites) because perhaps he will easily come to err (*takala*); [and thus] the sages did not decree it; that is, perhaps the Israelite would come to eat the tithe [that would be forbidden to him].” Teitelbaum’s use of this reasoning suggests that even if we say that the study of *lashon ha-kodesh* has benefit, the dangers therein in regard to corrupt teachers and so on made it such that Talmudic sages chose to excise it from their obligatory list.

112. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Holy Language,” chap. 11. The discussion about the decree establishing schools is an interesting one in regard to literacy. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 22, argues that between about 27 BCE and 284 CE in the Mediterranean Basin, only about 10 percent of the population was literate (i.e., had reading and writing skills). With the establishment of schools, that number increases exponentially. There is no reason the Jewish situation would have been that different.

113. See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 241–43.
114. See the discussion of heresy in chapter 4.
115. Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study*, 94.
116. Israel Meir Kagan, *Likkutei Halakhot*, Vol. 3 (The Sacks Family, 2003), 40.
117. Fuchs's *Jewish Women's Torah Study* does an excellent job analyzing the many positions that emerge from Kagan's comments on this matter.
118. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 240: "In spite of the Transylvanian ethos of women not going out to work, R. Yoel made peace with the new economic reality [of America]. This required women to learn English, math, and other professional skills."
119. Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study*, 228.
120. The centrality of language in his discussion about education is where I think Fuchs misses Teitelbaum's main point. The second part of "Essay on the Holy Language," on girls' education, must be read through the prism of the first part, which discusses *lashon ha-kodesh*, its value, its limits, and its dangers.
121. Ben-Yehuda's *Ad Matai Dibru Ivrit* argues for Hebrew as a lingua franca in antiquity—in part, as I argued above, to lessen the radical nature of the New Hebrew movement of which he was a part. My assumption is that Teitelbaum was not aware of Ben-Yehuda's book, first published in New York in 1919.
122. On *tiflut* in medieval commentaries, see Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study*, 13–15, 18–21. The term stands at the center of almost all discussions on this matter. I will examine how Teitelbaum read it below.
123. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," 30, 433, 434.
124. See b.T. Sanhedrin 94b and R. Yosef Shaul Nathanson (1810–75), *Teshuvot Shoel u Mashiv*, part 4, 3:41. Nathanson's work was originally published in 1844.
125. See Judah Ben Samuel, *Sefer Hasidim* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1957), 244.
126. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 36, 436.
127. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 36, 436.
128. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 36, 436.
129. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 36, 437.
130. For another reading of Teitelbaum on *tiflut*, see Fuchs, *Jewish Women's Torah Study*, 162–66. My reading of Teitelbaum is quite different than his.
131. B.T. Sotah 21b. The gemara continues by citing R. Eliezer, who fears that women will use such cunning for promiscuous behavior. One can ask why this would not also apply to men, as it does in Amish thought, in which knowledge is viewed as a source of arrogance (and thus Amish do not educate their children past a certain stage of literacy). Teitelbaum would respond that this may very well apply to men as well, except that men have a mitzvah of Talmud Torah and so they don't have a choice and thus need to curb the propensity for arrogance through the study of *musar* or Hasidism.
132. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 42, 446.
133. See, e.g., Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai* (HarperOne, 1991); Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (Schocken Books, 1995). These and other early works of Jewish feminism made this point quite clearly. The issue is one not merely of equality but of power sharing. In what ways can Jewish women have a voice in the decision-making of Jewish life and law?
134. See Talmage, "Keep Your Sons from Scripture," 81–101.
135. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Holy Language," chap. 50, 452, 453.

136. Elsewhere, I argued that Schneerson was a postmillennialist whereas Teitelbaum was a premillennialist. See Shaul Magid, “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part I: Habad” and “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II: Satmar,” in Watt and Wood, *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, 70–91, 92–107. Schneerson had different views of both women’s education and *lashon ha-kodesh*. On those views, see Bonnie Morris, *Female Education in the Lubavitcher Community: The Beth Rivka and Mechon Chana Schools* (Syracuse University Press, 1992); Fuchs, *Jewish Women’s Torah Study*, 128–56.

137. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Holy Language,” chap. 49, 451.

138. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Holy Language,” chap. 49, 451, 452.

139. Teitelbaum’s was not the last word on the Satmar approach to women’s education. Samuel Yehuda Geshtetner, *Torat Imekhha Dinei Nashim b’Talmud Torah* (Monsey, 1996) elaborates Teitelbaum’s approach and, in many ways, makes it less accommodating than Teitelbaum himself did. Here we find *tiflut* defined as adultery and promiscuity in ways that we do not find in “Essay on the Holy Language.” For a reading of Geshtetner, see Fuchs, *Jewish Women’s Torah Study*, 168–82.

4. ZIONISM AND THE DEMONIC

1. On his imprint in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he built his community, see Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper, *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* (Yale University Press, 2021). On Kiryas Joel, the town he built in Rockland County, New York, see Nomi M. Stolzenberg and David N. Myers, *American Shtetl: The Making of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic Village in Upstate New York* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

2. See, e.g., Samuel C. Heilman, *Who Will Lead Us? The Story of Five Hasidic Dynasties in America* (University of California Press, 2019).

3. Teitelbaum wrote often about the dangers of participating in Israeli elections. See Yoel Teitelbaum, “Introduction,” in *Vayael Moshe* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1985), 11b.

4. Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—Ha-Admor mi-Satmar* (Magnes Press, 2020), 270, notes the unlikely success of Teitelbaum more generally.

5. Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 247.

6. There is a plethora of literature on the war in 1967. See, e.g., Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Ballantine Books, 2003).

7. Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 248.

8. Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 250–53. See also Menachem Keren-Kratz, “Hast Thou Escaped, and Also Taken Possession? The Responses of the Satmar Rebbe—Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—and His Followers to Criticism of His Conduct During and After the Holocaust” [in Hebrew], *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 28, no. 2 (2014): 97–120.

9. On the prohibition against visiting those holy sites, see Yoel Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah ve’al Ha-Temurah* (Jerusalem Book Store, 1967), 139, 144, 155.

10. Minister of Postal Services Yisrael Yeshayahu said, at a meeting after the Six-Day War, that even one who does not believe in miracles must admit that the war was a great miracle, and most rabbinic figures at the time agreed. Cited in Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism and the Six-Day War: From Realism to Messianism* (Routledge, 2019), 117.

11. Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 250.
12. A full annotated translation of his introduction can be found in Shaul Magid, *Jewish Anti-Zionism as Political Theology: The Major Writings of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum* (University of California Press, 2026).
13. Rashi writes, "Put your heart to the matter to consider this matter diligently."
14. By "revolution" (*ma'hapakha*), Teitelbaum means that things have turned into their opposite.
15. Teitelbaum, *'Al Ha-Geulah*, 186. See also Yoel Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel* (Jerusalem Book Store, 2004), vol. 6, 197: "Satan goes as an emissary of God to trick one to sin. Why will Satan be killed in the next world? Rav teaches it is because he 'colors (*zove'ah*).' That is, he colors a sin as if it is a mitzvah. And that is very difficult to resist." These kinds of comments, of course, often seem to gesture to Zionism.
16. I address this at some length in the introduction. Abraham Kook was certainly aware of the general position espoused by Teitelbaum, as it was not uncommon where Kook was raised. See Yehudah Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity: The Making of Rav Kook 1865–1904* (Academic Studies Press, 2021). Teitelbaum was likely less aware of Kook's work, though it seems he had some sense of how it used tradition to justify the heretical nature of Zionism.
17. On miracle as a test, see Teitelbaum, *'Al Ha-Geulah*, 62, 63.
18. Teitelbaum, *'Al Ha-Geulah*, 28.
19. I would add that for the followers of Kook, they too have already been seduced into a heretical view of Judaism in Teitelbaum's estimation.
20. Teitelbaum, *'Al Ha-Geulah*, 64.
21. This may be one reason why religious Zionist critics of Teitelbaum do not really address the arguments in *'Al Ha-Geulah* but stay close to the halakhic arguments in *Vayael Moshe*.
22. In general, see Jeremy Cohen, *The Salvation of Israel: Jews in Christian Eschatology from Paul to the Puritans* (Cornell University Press, 2022).
23. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (Tribeca Books, 2010 [1895]).
24. See Shaul Magid, "Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II: Satmar," in *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, ed. David Watt and Simon Wood (University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 92–107.
25. Cohen, *Salvation of Israel*, 76.
26. In general, see Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (Blackwell, 2010); Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book Zerubbabel* (Harvard University Press, 2017).
27. On the two conditions of true miracle, see Teitelbaum, *'Al Ha-Geulah*, 69. See also Nahmanides on Deuteronomy 11:13: "Miracles are not done for good or evil, only for the fully righteous or the fully wicked. But for everyone else (*benonim*) the world goes according to its laws, and good or evil is done in that matter."
28. On the complex debates about the permissibility of war for Jews, see Robert Eisen, *Religious Zionism, Jewish Law, and the Morality of War* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 29–55; Aviad Hacohen, Yitzchak Avi Roness, and Menachem Butler, eds., *Milkhemet Mitzvah* (Institute for Jewish Research and Publications, 2025).
29. His enclavist project was not new but an extension of a much broader separatist program in the Máramaros district of Hungary where he grew up. See Menachem Keren-Kratz,

“Maramaros, Hungary—the Cradle of Extreme Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 35, no. 2 (2015): 147–74; Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Maramaros-Sziget: ‘Extreme Orthodoxy’ and Secular Jewish Culture at the Foothills of the Carpathian Mountains* [in Hebrew] (Carmel, 2013). Cf. Motti Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism, and Women’s Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 131–72; Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Jewish Hungarian Orthodoxy* (Routledge, 2023). The seeds of this separatist approach arguably began much earlier. Sorotzkin argues that its beginnings were in the seventeenth century. See David Sorotzkin, *Orthodoxy and Modern Disciplination: The Production of Jewish Tradition in Europe in Modern Times* [in Hebrew] (HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 2011).

30. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vols. 8–9, to “*nezavim*” 178 (on Deut.). His point here is that if we “force the end” and enter into Erez Yisrael as a collective too early, we bring “Egypt,” or the defilement of the nations that still resides in us, into the land and thereby defile the land. In this reading, there is no more anti-messianic act than Zionism. Becoming “like the nations,” or normalization, is the demonization of the land and its inhabitants.

31. Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (University of California Press, 1993), 308.

32. See Magid, “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II,” 92–107; Shaul Magid, *Piety and Rebellion* (Academic Studies Press, 2019), 263–310.

33. I discuss this passage at some length in chapter 2. See also Shaul Magid, *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Ayin Press, 2023), 259–98.

34. Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel,” chaps. 109 and 110, in *Vayoe! Moshe*, 314–17. On the struggle of urban enclavism in the Satmar community in Brooklyn, see Deutsch and Casper, *Fortress in Brooklyn*.

35. See Zohar 2.195a; Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 347–49.

36. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 347–49.

37. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 347–49.

38. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 349.

39. See *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 241–43, on the festivals.

40. Interestingly for our reading, in his translation of the Pentateuch, Robert Alter notes that this verse is “a neat reversal of the inception of the Golden Calf episode: ‘the people assembled against Aaron’ ([Exod.] 32:1). Instead of a rebellious assembling of the people, their leader now assembles them in order to rehearse for them all that God has enjoined them.” Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (W.W. Norton, 2004), 514 n1.

41. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 142, 143, on the festivals.

42. On their complex relationship in America, see Chaim Dalfin, *Satmar and Lubavitch* (Jewish Enrichment Press, 2017).

43. For some important studies of Teitelbaum on the question of Zionism, see Norman Lamm, “The Ideology of Neturei Karta: According to the Satmarer Version,” *Tradition* 13 (Fall 1971): 38–53; Allan L. Nadler, “Piety and Politics: The Case of the Satmar Rebbe,” *Judaism* 31 (Spring 1982): 135–52; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (University of Chicago Press, 1996), chap. 2, 40–78; Michael Silber, “The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition,” in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (JTS Press, 1992), 23–94; Zvi Jonathan Kaplan, “Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, Zionism, and Hungarian Ultra-Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* (May 2004): 165–78.

44. On the similarities and differences between Habad and Satmar on this question, see Shaul Magid, “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part I: Habad,” in Watt and Wood, *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*, 70–91; Magid, “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II,” 92–107; Magid, *Piety and Rebellion*, 263–310. Cf. Shaul Magid, “The Necessity of Exile: Two *Haredi* Responses in America to ‘Negation of the Diaspora,’” *Tablet*, November 9, 2020. See also Chaim Dalfin, *Satmar and Lubavitch* (Jewish Enrichment Press, 2017).

45. Menachem Keren-Kratz, “Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—The Satmar Rebbe (1887–1979)” [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2013), 363.

46. This may have begun quite early. When Teitelbaum’s father died, after his marriage at seventeen, he was forced soon after that to leave his hometown of Sighet (or Sziget) to enable his older brother to assume his father’s position as rabbi of the city. His competitive spirit seemed to drive him to attain a status that he felt he deserved but was deprived of because of his older brother. See Keren-Kratz, “Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum,” 48–52.

47. See Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 248. I also discuss this in chapter 2.

48. Teitelbaum discusses heresy (*minut* or *apikorsut*) in many places in his writings. For a particularly lengthy exposition, see *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 341–45. While Zionism is not mentioned there at all, it appears that he is criticizing religious Zionism as engaging in the most dangerous kind of heresy, one that wraps itself in distorted interpretations of Torah, making it seem as if it is legitimate from a Toraic perspective.

49. The language of miracle became a point of conflict not only between Teitelbaum and Zionists but between Teitelbaum and others in the *haredi* community, including the rebbe of Lubavitch, Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Schneerson called the Six-Day War “miraculous” and was critical of Teitelbaum’s *‘Al Ha-Geulah* when it appeared. On the controversy between Satmar and Habad, see *Ma’ariv*, August 31, 1967, 10; see also Keren-Kratz, “Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—The Satmar Rebbe,” 351–53.

50. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 75.

51. In general, I think it is incorrect to assume that Teitelbaum was not a messianist. He was as much a messianist as the Kookians or Habad but had a different way of expressing it. See Magid, “Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II,” 92–107. I agree with Motti Inbari when he writes, “While radical ultra-Orthodoxy theology indeed sanctified passivity, the purpose of this approach was intended to hasten redemption, as illustrated by many examples I provide later here. Accordingly, this theology should not be viewed as antimessianic, but rather as an alternative path for active messianism. Passivity is merely a different course of action to channel immanent messianic expectations.” Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy*, 12.

52. Dovid Meisels, *The Rebbe* (Israel Bookshop Publications, 2010), 449. Cf. Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy*, 163. Meisels’s *The Rebbe* is an abbreviated version of the nine-volume work *Moshian shel Yisrael*.

53. See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 182, on “Emor”: “Satan chooses to strengthen himself against his adversaries in the righteous city [Jerusalem].” Interestingly, this *drasha* was given in Jerusalem in honor of the Yetev Lev Yeshiva there. Cf. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 1, 255, on “Lekeh Lekha.”

54. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel,” chap. 149, 361.

55. See, e.g., Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 185, on “Emor,” where Teitelbaum discusses the education of the young as the primary goal in a decimated generation such as ours.

56. Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana'i*, 235.

57. See Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan, 1970), 43; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 258.

58. See Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Yakov Ariel, "Israel in Contemporary Evangelical Christian Millennial Thought," *Numen* 59 (2012): 456–85; Goran Gunner and Robert Smith, eds., *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Fortress Press, 2014). The role of Jews occupying the Holy Land was paramount for many Christian millenarians. For example, as Cogley notes, "for Judeo-centric millenarians, the Jews had to occupy Palestine so that Christian history could start anew." Richard Cogley, "The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the 'Judeo-Centric' Strand of Puritan Millenarianism," *Church History* 72 (2003): 130, 131.

59. See, e.g., Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Zed Books, 2006); Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 40–78; Silber, "Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy," 23–94. On Shapira, see Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy*, 94–130; Allan L. Nadler, "The War on Modernity of R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz," *Modern Judaism* 14 (1994): 233–64. On the non-Zionist "Old Settlement" community, see Menachem Friedman, *Society and Religion: The Non-Zionist Orthodox Community in Erez Israel 1918–1936* [in Hebrew] (Yad Ben Zvi, 1977).

60. See, e.g., Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg, eds., *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 2007), a collection of primary texts and introductions on ultra-Orthodox Jewish leaders and the Holocaust.

61. On heresy more broadly, see Gilad Sharvit and Willi Goetschel, *Canonization and Alterity: Heresy in Jewish Thought and Literature* (De Gruyter, 2020).

62. See Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 341.

63. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 342.

64. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 342.

65. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 343.

66. Church Father Tertullian (d. 220 CE) famously said, "Certum est, quia impossibile" (It is certain because it is impossible).

67. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vols. 8–9, 10b.

68. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vols. 8–9, 17b.

69. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vols. 8–9, 21.

70. The notion of dying refers to b.T. Shabbat 75b, where Rav says that one who slaughters an animal on Shabbat transgresses because of its dying—that is, the blood of the animal will color what it touches.

71. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 197.

72. On the *yezer ha-ra* more generally, see Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: Yetzer Hara and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), esp. 65–101.

73. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 197.

74. On the use of the term *premillennialism* to define Satmar, see Magid, "Is There an American Jewish Fundamentalism? Part II," 70–91.

75. An example is John Hagee and his group Christians United for Israel. See, e.g., Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee's Christians United for Israel* (Brill, 2018).

76. Ariel, "Israel in Contemporary Evangelical Christian Millennial Thought," 463. See also Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

77. See Cohen, *Salvation of Israel*, 200–220.

78. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 207.

79. In general, see Archie Wright, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: From the Bible to the Early Church Fathers* (Fortress Press, 2022), esp. 11–50. On Satan in Job, see Gordon Christo, "The Battle Between God and Satan in the Book of Job," *Journal of Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos. 1–2 (2000): 282–86.

80. He had particular animus toward the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael for its collusion with Zionists. See, e.g., Teitelbaum, "Introduction," in *Vayoel Moshe*, 7a, where he is discussing the golden calf: "And even among the legitimate Jews (*makhshirim sh-be-Yisrael*), even among those that resisted the Zionists' attempts to undermine religion and establish heresy, heaven forbid, but regarding the basic defiled idea of establishing an autonomous state before Messiah, which is the fundamental act of rebellion, in this, many legitimate Jews were convinced. This is because the power of the evil inclination blinded their eyes and they did not take to heart [what they were doing]." In his English biography of Teitelbaum, much of which is collected from the nine-volume (Hebrew) *Moshian shel Yisrael*, Dovid Meisels writes of Teitelbaum: "One may not join the Agudah because Agudah cooperates with the Zionists, working alongside them to achieve a Jewish state. That state, once achieved, will certainly be ruled by heretics and nonbelievers who will use it as a vehicle to wipe out Torah and Emunah (faith) from the holy land." Meisels, *The Rebbe*, 95. Agudah, while defining itself as non-Zionist or, as Daniel Mahla suggests, "counter-Zionist," were not the only ones who became increasingly sympathetic to a Jewish state. Moshe Blau, brother of the founder of avowedly anti-Zionist Neturei Karta Amram Blau, and leader of the Old Yishuv, by the 1930s also began to soften his anti-Zionist and anti-statist views. See Daniel Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 155, 156.

81. Teitelbaum, 'Al Ha-Geulah, 121.

82. Teitelbaum, 'Al Ha-Geulah, 63.

83. Teitelbaum, 'Al Ha-Geulah, 174.

84. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 415b.

85. Teitelbaum, 'Al Ha-Geulah, 14–17.

86. The Holocaust plays a primary role in his entire anti-Zionist project. See Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 63–65.

87. See Hershey Fishman, "Satan the Accuser: Trickster in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature," *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor* 18 (1999): 31–41.

88. Nietzsche claims that Christ himself, as depicted in Christianity, is the Antichrist. See Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 40.

89. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 73.

90. See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 3: "The roots of the Antichrist legend are found in the apocalyptic and messianic beliefs of late Second Temple Judaism (from the Third Century B.C.E.

to 70 C.E.). These beliefs often involve individuals and groups opposed to the hoped-for messiah who is to rescue Israel from the forces of evil. But such 'antimessiahs' are not yet Antichrist. The full-blown legend of Antichrist was born only when some Jews of the first century CE came to believe that the messiah had actually arrived in the person of Jesus of Nazareth." For some early Jewish models, see David Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations and the Figure of Armilus," *AJS Review* 10 (1985): 141–61.

91. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 135, 140.

92. Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah*, 16, 17.

93. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 8, 152.

94. See, e.g., Andrei A. Orlov, *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (SUNY Press, 2011).

95. On the *sitra akhra* in the Zohar, see Nathaniel Berman, *Divine and Demonic in the Poetic Mythology of the Zohar* (Brill, 2018); Nathaniel Berman, "Demonic Writing: Textuality, Otherness, and Zoharic Proliferation," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2017). Bernard McGinn notes that "a fully satisfactory explanation of how the figure of Satan emerged in the Jewish tradition has yet to be developed." McGinn, *Antichrist*, 22. On demons in early Judaism, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

96. The story of the twenty-seven-page "Introduction" to *Al Ha-Geulah* is a bit unclear. It is widely thought that it was written by Teitelbaum himself, whereas the remaining chapters were collected from talks on Shabbat that he gave in the months after the war. However, Yisroel Meir Goldberg, a student of Teitelbaum, as told to me by his grandson Chananya Groner, said that Teitelbaum did not write the "Introduction" but was shown the text and then signed off on it. Thanks to Chananya Groner for this.

97. While it is true that normative Judaism already included the Kabbalah by the twentieth century, the non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox community had still not really adopted it as a part of their worldview.

98. This is a reason he gives in the "Introduction" to *Al Ha-Geulah* as to why God did not afflict Job and yet miraculously prevent him from dying. He claims that the reason for the miracle of keeping Job alive was to test whether Job would curse God, which Job did indeed do. Thus, he gave the miracle to Satan to perform, as God does not perform miracles for nefarious ends.

99. See Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, *Kedushat Levi*, "Klalut Nisim," no. 1.

100. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 3, 227.

101. On this, see Arie Saposnik, *Zionism's Redemptions: Images of the Past and Future in Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). See also Sagi and Schwartz, *Religious Zionism and the Six-Day War*.

102. See Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," chaps. 148 and 168.

103. On "false redemption" and "satanic redemption," see Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah*, 179.

104. Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah*, 31, 32 (my translation). This is a common trope. For example, the fourteenth-century Italian kabbalist Menachem Recanati wrote, "When Israel fails to do the will of God, the influx of spiritual power is not found in the *shekhina* but is the forces of impurity." Cited in Eliyahu Dessler, *Mikhtav me-Eliyahu*, vol. 2,

translated into English in Eliyahu Dessler, *Strive for Truth*, trans. Aryeh Carmell (Feldheim, 1985), vol. 2, 30.

105. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 11 (my translation).

106. See Jerome, *Epistula* 121.11, cited and discussed in Cohen, *Salvation of Israel*, 91.

107. See also Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 56, 60.

108. Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 47, 61b.

109. B.T. Shabbat 104a. See Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 45, 58b; and cf. chap. 58, 67a, and chap. 60, 101a.

110. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 4, 20. On the notion of *lishma* in Teitelbaum, see Shaul Magid, “Is Torah Study a Sin? The Necessity of *Averah Lishma* in R. Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2023): 68–86.

111. Here, I agree with Motti Inbari, against Ravitzky, that Teitelbaum’s theology is highly messianic. See Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy*, 12: “While radical ultra-Orthodox theology indeed sanctified passivity, the purpose of this approach was intended to hasten redemption. . . . Accordingly, this theology should not be viewed as antimessianic, but rather as an alternative path for active messianism.”

112. For a brief comment on this, see Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 268. I develop my views on the connection to the Holocaust in chapter 1.

113. The Holocaust served as an important, and also troubled, aspect of his life and work. Given that he was saved by the Zionist Kastner transports, critics often point to the duplicity in Teitelbaum’s drawing of correlations between the Holocaust and Zionism. See Keren-Kratz, “Hast Thou Escaped, and Also Taken Possession?” See also a speech he gave to the “Rabbinical Council” in 1958, cited in Keren-Kratz, *Ha-Kana’i*, 234.

114. For a brief discussion of *Vayael Moshe* and the Holocaust, see Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 63–66. For a lengthy discussion of Teitelbaum’s experiences in the Holocaust, see Keren-Kratz, “Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum—The Satmar Rebbe,” 179–211.

115. For Kook’s remarks, see Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Sihot Ha-Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook*, ed. Shlomo Aviner (Hava Books, 2017), 264–86. For a book-length study of Kook’s views on the Holocaust, see Shlomo Aviner, *Orot M’Ofel: ‘Al Ha-Shoah* (Hava Books, 2009).

116. See Gideon Aran, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Land: The Spiritual Authorities of Jewish-Zionist Fundamentalism in Israel,” in *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, ed. R. Scott Appleby (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 294–327; Shai Held, “What Zvi Yehuda Kook Wrought: The Theopolitical Radicalization of Religious Zionism,” in *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism*, ed. Michael L. Morgan and Steven Weitzman (Indiana University Press, 2014), 229–55.

117. See Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 308.

118. See, e.g., Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” chap. 139.

119. See the discussion of Sabbatai Zevi in chapter 1; see also Teitelbaum, “Essay on the Three Oaths,” esp. chap. 175.

120. See, e.g., David Novak, *Zionism and Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 90, 91. For a comparison of Teitelbaum and Novak, see Shaul Magid, “Politics and Precedent: David Novak, Meir Kahane, and Yoel Teitelbaum on Judaism and Zionism,” in *Covenantal Thinking: Essays on the Philosophy and Theology of David Novak*, ed. Paul E. Nahme and Yaniv Feller (University of Toronto Press, 2024), 177–200.

121. Teitelbaum, "Essay on the Three Oaths," chap. 139.

122. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 1, 98, "Letters."

123. See Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah*, 6.

124. The connection of a satanic act (מעשה סטן) to idolatry that is implied here is made explicit in Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," chap. 157, 370b: "It is clear that God will not return Israel to the Jews until the time of salvation on Mount Zion. This [Zionism] is an act of Satan, heaven forbid, like idolatry itself."

125. On "Jewish devils" (*shadin yehuda'im*) in early Hasidism, see "Makor Mayim Hayim" in Israel Ben Eliezer, *Sefer Baal Shem Tov* (Makhon Da'at Yosef, 1992), vol. 2, 464.

126. A discussion of this appears in "Lectures on Hasidism," an unpublished manuscript written by Gershom Scholem in English in 1946 (see p. 106). The manuscript is available in the Gershom Scholem Archives in Jerusalem. I thank Noam Zadoff for making this available for me to read. On these lectures, see Shaul Magid, "Gershom Scholem on Hasidim and its Relationship to Martin Buber," in *Scholar and Kabbalist: The Life and Work of Gershom Scholem*, ed. Mirjam Zadoff and Noam Zadoff (Brill, 2019), 40–75.

127. Bernard McGinn notes that "the process of understanding present conflicts in terms of symbols of the end can have apocalyptic significance even in the absence of definite prediction about the immanence of the last things." McGinn, *Antichrist*, 120.

128. See Teitelbaum, *Al Ha-Geulah*, 181–89.

129. In general, see Arnold Eisen, *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflections on Home and Homecoming* (Indiana University Press, 1986). I discuss this at length in chapter 1. On the necessity of exile more generally, see Magid, *Necessity of Exile*.

130. Teitelbaum, *Vayoel Moshe*, 57b, citing Yalkut Shimoni, parshat Bo, no. 191. He adds that religious practices such as selling *etrogim* from Israel during the Shmittah year through the legal loophole of temporarily selling the land to gentiles is a transgressive act that prevents redemption. See Teitelbaum, "Essay on Dwelling in the Land of Israel," 268–70.

131. See Teitelbaum, *Vayoel Moshe*, 59b. The context of the discussion of the miracle of the demonic (*sitra akhra*) is that God wanted to wean Israel away from having miracle be a basis of their faith. Hence, God gave the demonic the power of miracle too. This directly challenges the use of "miracle" as a proof that 1967 was an act of God. It could just as easily have been the opposite. On the notion of inverted miracle, see Shaul Magid, "The Holocaust as Inverted Miracle: Shalom Noah Barzofsky of Slonim on the Power and Divine Nature of Radical Evil," in *Spiritual Authority: Wrestling with Cultural Power in Jewish Thought*, ed. Haim Kreisel and Boaz Huss (Ben-Gurion University Press, 2010), 33–62.

132. See, e.g., Rafael Jospe, ed., *Great Schisms in Jewish History* (Ktav, 1981); Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1955–1816* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Jay Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank: From Jewish Messianism to Esoteric Myth* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

133. James's idea is that belief is possible only in a live hypothesis—something that is distinctly possible and that we have an investment in. See "The Will to Believe," in William James, *Essays on Faith and Morals* (Meridian Books, 1962), 33–35.

134. There is a popular teaching said in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe: "Even Esau wore a streimel."

135. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 418, on the festivals.

136. This was also the custom of other Jewish communities such as Yemenite Jews, but it is hard to believe that Teitelbaum is referring to them.

137. The midrash states that he spoke to them in *lashon ha-kodesh* but they remained suspicious.

138. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 416. See also Teitelbaum, 'Al Ha-Geulah, 70: "And this is a general principle: We do not marvel on miracles alone."

139. See David N. Myers, "'Commanded War': Three Chapters in the 'Military' History of Satmar Hasidism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 2 (2013): 314. Here a comparison between Teitelbaum and Aharon Shmuel (or Aaron Samuel) Tamares, who was indeed an ultra-Orthodox pacifist, is certainly worthwhile. Tamares was initially sympathetic to the Zionist movement, even attending the Zionist Congress in London in 1900, but then abandoned it largely on pacifist grounds. See Aharon Shmuel Tamares, *Knesset Yisrael u Mikhamot Ha-Goyim* (Blima Books, 2024 [1921]); and the collection of translations in Everett Gendler, *A Passionate Pacifist: Essential Writings of Aaron Samuel Tamares* (Ben Yehuda Press, 2020). On Tamares, see Aryeh Cohen, "'The Foremost Among the Divine Attributes Is to Hate the Vulgar Power of Violence': Aharon Shmuel Tamares and Recovering Nonviolence for Jewish Ethics," *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 1, no. 2 (July 2015): 233–52.

140. For example, Neturei Karta, a group of anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox Jews aligned but not identical to Satmar, claims that they call for the destruction of the state of Israel in "peaceful" ways. See Assaf Uni, "Neturei Karta Delegate to Iranian Holocaust Conference: I Pray for Israel's Destruction 'in Peaceful Ways,'" *Haaretz*, January 7, 2007. Cf. Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy*.

141. See Steven Schwarzschild, "On the Theology of Jewish Survival," in *The Pursuit of the Ideal* (SUNY Press, 1990), 83–98.

142. Kahane's apocalyptic writing appears toward the end of his life, when Zionism abandons him through the 1986 "Racism Law" in Israel, which made his political party KACH illegal. His small book *Forty Years*, written in Ramle prison in Israel when Kahane was imprisoned for the allegation of sedition and illegal arms trading, is his most overtly apocalyptic work.

143. On Kiryas Joel, see Stolzenberg and Myers, *American Shtetl*. On Kahane and Teitelbaum, see Shaul Magid, "Politics and Precedent," 177–200.

144. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 7, 318. See, e.g., *Sifrei Bamidbar* 86:1.

145. See, e.g., Eran Kaplan, *Projecting the Nation: History and Ideology on the Israeli Screen* (Rutgers University Press, 2020), 19, 20: "For decades, the 1948 War was perceived by most Israelis as a miracle. According to this image of the war, a small, vulnerable Jewish minority was able to first overcome the much larger Arab majority in Palestine, which had instigated the fighting, and then withstood an invasion by the much larger and better-equipped surrounding Arab armies." Israel's New Historians began to deconstruct that image in the 1980s with new histories of that period and that war in particular. See, e.g., Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also Shay Hazkani, *Dear Palestine: A Social History of the 1948 War* (Stanford University Press, 2021).

146. On miracles in religious Zionism, see Menachem Kasher, *Ha-Tekufa Ha-Gedolah* (Machon Torah Shelemah, 1968), vol. 2, 444–61. On page 445, Kasher quotes from a military journalist in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* in response to the Six-Day War: "Even one who is not religious certainly must (*mukhrakh la-hodot*) believe that this [victory] was all from heaven."

147. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 39. See b.T. Avodah Zara 18, b.T. Megillah 12, Midrash Numbers Raba 9:14. Ramban to Lev. 27:29; Rashbah, Responsa 4: 286. Ribash, Responsa no. 171. In all these cases, and more, questions are asked about whether a miracle can happen to one who is guilty of sin and the response always suggests that the sin was either unintentional or nonexistent.

148. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 39

149. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 43, 44.

150. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 163. On Hanukkah and miracle, see also Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 6, 289.

151. See Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*, vol. 2, 444–61.

152. See Nahmanides on Genesis 19:8. This refers to a contrast Nahmanides makes between the Sodom story of the Pilegish of Gibeah, where the Benjaminites did not consent and entered into conflict with the other tribe, even though they were much smaller in number.

153. Gur Aryeh (a supercommentary to Rasha) discusses at some length what constitutes strong and weak and the relationship between that and the land where those people dwell. He suggests that a multitude does not necessarily constitute military strength, and strength is not always in numbers. Rashi notes that strength or weakness is determined by whether they live in open or fortified cities. Gur Aryeh notes on Rashi that strength or weakness is determined by many other factors.

154. That is, on the first day the oil burned as it should, and only during the following seven did it burn when it should already have been extinguished. Teitelbaum makes a similar argument about the miracle of Purim. See Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 80, 81.

155. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 34. See also Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, “Naso,” cited in “Contents of the Teachings of Rabbenu,” 178, 179 (the latter is part of an edition of *Divrei Yoel* on parshat “Vayishlach” 1957).

156. See, e.g., Zvi Ron, “Antecedents of the Hanukkah Oil Story,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* (March 2015): 63–74; Vered Noam, “The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil: The Metamorphosis of a Legend,” *HUCA* 73 (2002): 191–226. On Teitelbaum and the Hasmoneans, see Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, “Shelah,” cited in “Contents of the Teachings of Rabbenu,” 175, 176.

157. In Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 34, 35, he offers another reading of ‘Al Ha-Nisim to suggest that, in fact, it may have been a bit of a miracle because this was a case where Satan was particularly active to destroy the possibility of purifying the Temple and thus divine intervention was needed in this case to ensure victory. That is why, he claims, the liturgy includes the statement that “the pure defeated the defiled,” which he claims is somewhat superfluous without an explanation.

158. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 138.

159. Here and elsewhere, his views cohere with those of Aharon Shmuel Tamares on nationality and violence. See esp. Tamares, *Knesset Yisrael*. Tamares was not a theological anti-Zionist in the way that Teitelbaum was, though he abandoned Zionism after attending the London Zionist Congress in 1904. But he was an antinationalist and believed that nationalism necessitated violence that he believed was antithetical to Judaism.

160. See Menachem Keren-Kratz, “‘There This Is Not a Voluntary War’: The Six-Day War in the Eyes of the Ultra-Orthodox” [in Hebrew], *Et-Mol* 250 (2017): 9–12. More generally, see Sagi and Schwartz, *Religious Zionism and the Six-Day War*. See also Kasher,

He-Tekufa Ha-Gedolah, vol. 2, 411–23; Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs: 1882–1948: A Study of Ideology* (Oxford University Press, 1987); Ehud Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity* (Yale University Press, 2003); Aryeh Edrei, “Law, Interpretation, and Ideology: The Renewal of the Jewish Laws of War in the State of Israel,” *Cardozo Law Review* 28 (October 2006): 187–227.

161. For recent extensive studies of this question, see Aviezer Ravitsky, “Prohibited Wars in the Jewish Tradition,” and Michael Waltzer, “War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition,” both in *The Ethics of War and Peace*, ed. Terry Nardin (Princeton University Press, 1996), 95–127; Lawrence Schiffman and Joel B. Wolowelsky, eds., *War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition* (New York University Press, 2007); Eisen, *Religious Zionism*. Eisen discusses five contemporary Orthodox rabbis on the parameters of permissible war in our time. See also Reuven Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism: The Rise and Fall of a Controversial Idea* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Geoffrey Claussen, “War, *Musar*, and the Construction of Humility in Modern Jewish Thought,” *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 2, no. 2 (2018): 216–42. For a recent incisive essay on this question, see George Wilkes, “Religious Wars in the Works of Maimonides,” in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihad*, ed. Sohail H. Hashmi (Oxford University Press, 2012). While Wilkes focuses on Maimonides, he offers a broad assessment of the question of war and its permissibility in the Jewish tradition. In addition, he argues the extent to which Maimonides’s views on war were influenced by Islamic figures with whom he was familiar.

162. On preemptive war more generally, see J. David Bleich, “Preemptive War in Jewish Law,” in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (Ktav, 1989), vol. 3, 251–92.

163. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 191, 192.

164. See Shlomo Goren, “*Milhamot Yisrael be-Zeman Ha-Zeh le-Or Ha-Halakha*,” in *Mashiv Milhamah* (Ha-Idra Rabah, 1982–91), vol. 1, 110–38; Eisen, *Religious Zionism*, 200–203. See Moses Nahmanides, *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot ‘im Hasagot Ha-Ramban* (Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1981), introduction, *shores* 14; Moses Maimonides, “Laws of Kings,” in *Mishneh Torah: Hu Ha-Yad Ha-Hazakah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1955), 5:1. For these and other sources, see Hachohen et al., *Milkhemet Mitzvah*.

165. Teitelbaum, *Divrei Yoel*, vol. 2, 423a.

166. This is one reason why Aharon Shmuel Tamares abandoned Zionism. A pacifist, especially after World War I, Tamares held that homeland nationalism necessitated war and could not be defended for Jews. His first statement on pacifism is his essay on Passover, *Yahadut ve-Herut*, published in 1905. More generally, see, e.g., Tamares, *Knesset Yisrael*; Aryeh Cohen, “‘The Foremost Amongst the Divine Attributes Is to Hate the Vulgar Power of Violence’: Aharon Shmuel Tamares and Recovering Nonviolence for Jewish Ethics,” *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 1, no. 2 (2015): 233–52.

167. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 192, 193.

168. Leo Strauss, “Paul de Lagards (1924),” in *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921–1932)*, trans. and ed. Michael Zank (SUNY Press, 2002), 96.

169. Eisen, *Religious Zionism*, 7.

170. Abraham Kook wrote an essay called “The War” (*Ha-Milkhama*) during World War I while he was trapped in Switzerland that has become the source of much scholarly debate. See Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2014), 121–40; Hanoah Ben-Pazi, “R. Abraham Isaac Kook and the Opening Passage of ‘The War,’” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 25 (2017): 256–78.

171. See Eisen, *Religious Zionism*, 13–18. See also Jody Myers, “The Messianic Idea in Zionist Ideologies,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry Volume VII: Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era: Metaphor and Meaning*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (Oxford University Press, 1991), 4–7.

172. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 81.

173. See, e.g., the position of Eliezer Shakh (1899–2001), a leading ultra-Orthodox figure who claimed that if Jews go to war, they are no different than other nations, which he meant negatively. See Edrei, “Law, Interpretation, and Ideology,” 200–202.

174. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 194.

175. Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 196. Going to war outside the proper criteria, which Teitelbaum argues cannot exist in our time, puts one at the mercy not only of the enemy but of God. He notes that in Nahmanides’s rendering of the *pilegish b’givah* (Judg. 21:1–15), even though they went to war *le-shem shamayim* (for the right reasons), because they did not properly request permission from the Urim ve-Tumim, it was considered a grave sin and they were severely punished. See Teitelbaum, *‘Al Ha-Geulah*, 198.

CONCLUSION

1. See Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (Atheneum, 1969), 20; Yaacov Yadgar, *To Be a Jewish State: Zionism as the New Judaism* (NYU Press, 2024), 64: “Zionism has failed to solve what the European nationalist terminology of its time identified as the Jewish questions. In other words, Zionism has failed to reframe (or to be more attuned to the language of supersessionism, replace) Judaism and Jewishness by way of modernizing, politicizing, and secularizing them.” See also this trenchant comment by Zionist Ahuviah Milkin: “Whoever had believed that Zionism was a total solution to all the problems of the Jewish people—whoever had thought that, by its very nature, it ensures us absolute security and fosters in us all the qualities appropriate to a free and decent society—was wrong.” Ahuviah Malkin, “Editorial” [in Hebrew], *Alpayim* 1 (1989): 7. See also Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism*, trans. Batya Stein (Brill, 2002), 136.

2. On Strauss’s complex relationship to Zionism, see Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921–1932)*, trans. and ed. Michael Zank (SUNY Press, 2002); Daniel May, “The Ouroboros: Leo Strauss’s Critique of Zionism,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 113, no. 1 (2023): 105–30; Jerry Muller, “Leo Strauss: The Political Philosopher as a Young Zionist,” *Jewish Social Studies* 17, no. 1 (2010): 88–115; Shaul Magid, “The Theologico-Political Predicament, Zionism, and the Crisis of Modernity: Leo Strauss and Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar,” in *Modern Jewish Thought in Crisis: Interpretation, History, and Heresy*, ed. Ghilad H. Shenav, Cedric Cohen-Skalli, and Gilad Sharvit (De Gruyter, 2024), 107–26.

3. Personal communication, Satmar Hasid Mendy Schwimmer. I thank Mendy for his patience and vast knowledge of the history of Satmar in America.

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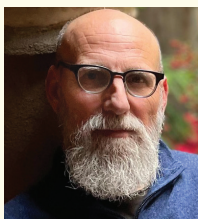
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Cover design and illustration: Glynnis Koike.

ISBN: 978-0-520-42718-1



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