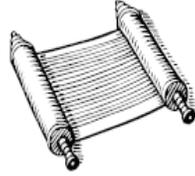


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# Was the Six Day War a Miracle? What, if anything, can make history meaningful?

Rabbi Aryeh Klapper

June 26, 2017

YCT Tanakh Yom Iyyun

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### ***Rabbi Moshe Feinstein***

Since the generation of King David was a righteous one which believed in God, David could request from God that they be victorious in war through natural means, because even if they were to fight with weapons and all the methods of war and overcome and defeat their enemies, all would recognize that it was God who was responsible for their victory. But in the generation of King Asa, in which the people were not of such great faith, Asa feared that if they would pursue the enemy and overcome it and were then victorious, the people would say that it was due to their own strength, and therefore he requested that God should cause the enemy's downfall before they even reached them. And Yehoshafat, who was concerned about the diminishment of faith in his generation, feared that even if they were just to pursue the enemy, they would say that they were victorious on their own, and therefore he prayed that God should smite them and he would only recite a song. And Hezekiah feared even reciting a song, lest they say, God forbid, that this served as a magical form of helping, and therefore he said that he did not have the strength to recite a song.

All the more so in our generation, in which those of small faith have increased, we require miracles exclusively, so that perhaps the people will recognize that it is God who is doing this. And so, thank God, this has been fulfilled, and He has produced the victory over Arabs far greater in number, who also had the assistance of a major empire for their weaponry, much greater than our state in the Land of Israel, and yet in just four days, they defeated all of the Arab nations and Egypt, in the time from Monday to Thursday, and we hope that He will send the King Messiah soon, and all Israel will recognize that "the Lord is a man of war" (Exodus 15:3).

*Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Darash Moshe, "Parashat Eikev" (Beth Medrash L'Torah V'Horaah, 1988). [Translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Krakowski]*

### ***Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm***

Even observant religious people usually possess an element of doubt within their faith. We use this doubt to excuse many of our transgressions, and we excuse the existence of this doubt by saying that had we lived in the age of the prophets or the age of miracles or the age of revelation, we would be sufficiently persuaded and convinced to be able to live according to the highest precepts of our faith, but that the absence of any such evidence justifies this seed of doubt. Were we exposed to the same wonders as was Israel of old, "and Israel saw the Egyptians dead at the shore of the sea," then we too would react as they did: "and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Ex. 14:31).

Such was the justification we offered ourselves for our doubt and our laxity heretofore. Now, we can no longer avail ourselves of that luxury. For we have seen, as did Jews in very special moments of history, *ha-yad ha-gedolah*, the "great Hand of the Almighty." Through electronic eyes and ears, each of us has been a personal witness to the great miracle, the great revelation of 1967.

*Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm, "O Jerusalem!," a lecture delivered at The Jewish Center on the Upper West Side of Manhattan on June 15, 1967 (the second day of Shavuot), <http://brussels.mc.yu.edu/gsd/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASH012a.dir/doc.pdf>.*

**FORMULATE THE ARGUMENTS OF RABBI FEINSTEIN AND RABBI LAMM REGARDING THE SIX-DAY WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON FAITH**

## רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ח

הלכה א

משה רבינו - לא האמינו בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה, שהמאמין על פי האותות יש בלבו דופי, שאפשר שיעשה האות בלט וכשוף, אלא כל האותות שעשה משה במדבר - לפי הצורך עשאו, לא להביא ראיה על הנבואה. היה צריך להשקיע את המצריים - קרע את הים והצלילן בתוכו; צרכנו למזון - הוריד לנו את המן; צמאו - בקע להן את האבן; כפרו בו עדת קרח - בלעה אותן הארץ; וכן שאר כל האותות.

ובמה האמינו בו? במעמד הר סיני - שענינו ראו ולא זר, ואזנינו שמעו ולא אחר; האש והקולות והלפידים, והוא נגש אל הערפל, והקול מדבר אליו ואנו שומעים 'משה, משה' - לך אמור להן כך וכך, וכן הוא אומר "פנים בפנים דבר ה' עמכם", ונאמר "לא את אבותינו כרת ה' את הברית הזאת".

ומנין שמעמד הר סיני לבדו היא הראיה לנבואתו שהיא אמת שאין בו דופי? שנאמר "הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם בך יאמינו לעולם" - מכלל שקודם דבר זה - לא האמינו בו נאמנות שהיא עומדת לעולם, אלא נאמנות שיש אחריה הרהור ומחשבה. הלכה ב

נמצאו אלו ששולח להן - הם העדים על נבואתו שהיא אמת, ואינו צריך לעשות להן אות אחר, שהם והוא עדים בדבר כשני עדים שראו דבר אחד ביחד, שכל אחד מהן עד לחבירו שהוא אומר אמת, ואין אחד מהן צריך להביא ראיה לחבירו - כך משה רבינו - כל ישראל עדים לו אחר מעמד הר סיני, ואינו צריך לעשות להם אות, וזהו שאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא בתחילת נבואתו, בעת שנתן לו האותות לעשותן במצרים, ואמר לו: "ושמעו לקולך".

ידע משה רבינו שהמאמין על פי האותות יש בלבו דופי ומהרהר ומחשב, והיה נשמת מלילך, ואמר: "והן לא יאמינו לי", עד שהודיעו הקדוש ברוך הוא שאלו האותות אינן אלא עד שיצאו ממצרים, ואחר שיצאו ויעמדו על ההר הזה יסתלק הרהור שמהרהרין אחריו, שאני נותן לך כאן אות שידעו שאני שלחתיך באמת מתחילה ולא ישאר בלבם הרהור, והוא שהכתוב אומר: "וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאתך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה".

נמצאת אומר

שכל נביא שיעמוד אחר משה רבינו - אין אנו מאמינים בו מפני האות לבדו, כדי שנאמר אם יעשה אות - נשמע לו לכל מה שיאמר, אלא מפני המצוה שצוה משה בתורה ואמר 'אם נתן אות - אליו תשמעו', כמו שצונו לחתוך הדבר על פי שנים עדים, ואף על פי שאין אנו יודעין אם העידו אמת אם שקר, כך מצוה לשמוע מזה הנביא, אף על פי שאין אנו יודעים אם האות אמת או בכישוף ולט.

הלכה ג

לפיכך -

אם עמד הנביא ועשה אותות ומופתים גדולים ובקש להכחיש נבואתו של משה רבינו - אין שומעין לו, ואנו יודעין בבאור שאותן האותות בלט וכשוף הן, לפי שנבואת משה רבינו - אינה על פי האותות כדי שנערוך אותות זה לאותות זה, אלא בעינינו ראינוה ובאזנינו שמענוה כמו ששמע הוא. הא למה הדבר דומה? לעדים שהעידו לאדם על דבר שראה בעיניו שאינו כמו שראה - שאינו שומע להן, אלא יודע בודאי שהן עדי שקר. לפיכך אמרה תורה שאם בא האות והמופת - "לא תשמע אל דברי הנביא ההוא", שהרי זה בא אליך באות ומופת להכחיש מה שראית בעיניך, והואיל ואין אנו מאמינים במופת אלא מפני המצוה שצונו משה, היאך נקבל מאות זה שבא להכחיש נבואתו של משה שראינו וששמענו?!

## **RAMBAM, LAWS OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF TORAH, CHAPTER 8**

Moshe Rabbeinu – the Jewish People did not put faith in him because of the signs he performed as one who believes on the basis of signs has a flaw in his heart, as it is possible for the sign to be done via stealth or witchcraft

rather all the signs that Moshe performed in the desert – he performed as needed, not as evidence for prophecy he needed to subdue the Egyptians – so he split the sea and drowned them within it; we needed food – he causes manna to fall for us; they were thirsty – he split the rock for us; the Korach faction denied him – the earth swallowed them up; and so too all the other signs.

On what basis did they put faith in him? On the basis of the Standing at Sinai – which our eyes saw rather than a stranger's, and our ears, not someone else's; the fire and the thunder and the lightning, and him approaching the haze, and the Voice speaking to him and we hearing “Moshe, Moshe – Go say to them such and such”.

and so Scripture says “Face to face Hashem spoke with you”,  
and “It was not with your ancestors that Hashem established this covenant”.

From where do I know that the Standing at Mt. Sinai alone is the sole evidence for the truth of his prophecy that contains no flaw?

Scripture says: “Behold I am coming to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear when I speak with you, and they will put permanent faith also in you”, which implies that prior to this – they did not put permanently enduring faith in him, but rather a faith that is subject to questioning and reconsideration.

It emerges that this he was sent to – they are the witnesses that his prophecy is true, and he had no need to perform other signs for them, since he and they were witnesses for the matter like two witnesses who see a thing together, making each one a witness for his fellow that he is saying the truth, and neither has to bring evidence to his friend – So too Mosheh Rabbeinu – all Israel were witnesses for him after the Standing at Sinai, and he did not need to perform a sign for them,

and this is what The Holy Blessed One told him at the outset of his prophecy, at the time that He gave him the signs to perform in Egypt, and said to him” They will heed your voice”.

Mosheh Rabbeinu knew that one whose faith is based on signs has a flaw in their heart and questions and reconsiders, and tried to avoid going, saying “They will not put faith in me”, until The Holy Blessed One informed him that these signs were only for until they departed Egypt, but that after they departed and stood on this mountain, the questioning they have about you will go away, as I will give you here a sign so that they will know that truly I have sent you from the beginning, and no questions will remain in their heart,

which is what Scripture means when it says “This is for you the sign that I have sent you – when you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G-d on this mountain.”

What emerges is –

every prophet who arises after Moshe Rabbeinu – we do not believe him because of the sign alone, so that we say that if he performs a sign – we will obey him whatever he says, but rather because of the command that Moshe commands in the Torah, saying: “If he gave a sign – you must obey him”.

Just as he commanded us to decide a matter on the basis of two witnesses, even though we don't know whether they testified truthfully or falsely,

So too there is a command to obey this prophet, even though we don't know whether the sign is true or rather via witchcraft or deception.

Therefore –

if a prophet arose and performed great signs and wonders and sought to contradict the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu – we do not obey him,

and we know clearly that those signs occurred via witchcraft and deception, because the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu is not on the basis of signs, so that we can evaluate the signs against each other, rather our eyes saw it and with our ears we heard it just as he did.

To what is this similar? To witnesses who testify to a person about something he saw with his own eyes that it was not as we saw – he does not heed them, but rather knows for certain that they are false witnesses.

Therefore – the Torah says that if the sign or wonder comes about – “DO NOT OBEY THE WORDS OF THAT PROPHET”, since he is coming to you with a sign and wonder to contradict what your eyes saw, and since we believe in a wonder only because of the command which Moshe commanded us, how will we accept anything from this sign which comes to contradict the prophecy of Moshe which we saw and heard?!

## **TRADITION Symposium Summer 1968**

Shear Yashuv Cohen  
Norman Lamm  
Pinchas Peli  
Michael Wyschogrod  
Walter S. Wurzburger

The Six Day War has not only radically changed the political complexion of the Near East, but has wrought an upheaval in the consciousness of world Jewry. We witness considerable soul-searching among Jews all over the world who find themselves confronted with the challenge of re-examining their own personal relationship to the State of Israel. At the same time, there has developed, even in so-called secular circles, a new sensitivity and openness to questions pertaining to the religious significance of the establishment of an independent Jewish state. To provide a forum for the discussion of some of these issues, involving the very roots of contemporary Jewish existence, the Editors of TRADITION brought together prominent Jewish thinkers from both Israel and America who were asked to respond to a series of questions previously submitted to them.

**Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen** is Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and Director of the Harry Fischel Institute.

**Professor Pinchas Peli**, editor of the well-known Israeli weekly, *Panim El Panim*, is a distinguished author and presently serves as Visiting Associate Professor of Hebrew Literature at Yeshiva University.

The American participants in this symposium consisted of the following members of our Editorial Board:

**Rabbi Norman Lamm**, rabbi of the Jewish Center in New York and Erna Michael Professor of Jewish Philosophy at Yeshiva University;

**Dr. Michael Wyschogrod**, Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York; and

**Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger**, Editor of *Tradition*, rabbi of Congregation Shaaray Tefila in Far Rockaway and Visiting Associate Professor of Philosophy at Yeshiva University.

## **THE RELIGIOUS MEANING OF THE SIX DAY WAR**

### **A Symposium**

WALTER S. WURZBURGER:

Orthodox<sup>[RK1]</sup> Jewry is frequently accused of not facing up to the religious implications of the establishment of the State of Israel. As yet we have not formulated a proper response to the holocaust. nor have we reacted in religious terms to the realities of Israel's independence. With only a few exceptions, both our religious consciousness and behavior have for all practical purposes ignored the historic dimensions that have been introduced by Medinat Israel.

Although the panorama of Jewish existence has been completely overhauled, the area of religious life does not appreciably reflect the upheavals of our times. Impatience with the religious community's reluctance to grapple with these issues has grown immeasurably as a result of the Six Day War. Many maintain that the spectacular victories culminating with the recapture of Jerusalem represent an extraordinary manifestation of divine purpose in history. They are convinced that the events leading from the holocaust to present-day Israel reveal in a unique and special way that God acts in history.

Others disagree. We cannot, they argue, presume any of God's purposes nor are we equipped to apprehend a special divine intervention. As rational human beings we must interpret historical events in purely naturalistic category ies. Historic phenomena must, therefore, be explained exclusively in the light of political and military realities.

However, even if we were to assume that the events in Israel were due to the direct intervention of the Almighty, we are still left with the formidable problem of establishing criteria by reference to which we can determine whether and to what extent a historic event or group of events should be directly attributed to the manifestation of Divine Providence.

So far, apart from offering slogans, very little has been done to answer this question. But in the wake of developments since the Six Day War and the "miraculous" conquest of Jerusalem, it is imperative that we come to grips with the historic realities of our time and account for them in theological terms.

To crystalize our thinking about this issue and to provide a framework for discussion of these events, TRADITION has invited you as sensitive Jewish thinkers representing both the perspective of Israelis and Americans to direct your attention to the following questions:

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER EACH OF THE QUESTIONS BELOW?  
DO YOU THINK THEY ARE THE RIGHT QUESTIONS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

1. It has been said that the Six Day War represents a unique demonstration of God's acting in history. Do you believe that the Six Day War revealed God's operation in history to a far greater extent than other events since the establishment of the State? (For instance, the War of Liberation or the Sinai Campaign.)

2. Do the events in Israel reveal God's acting in history in a different way from other major events of our time which may also be said to reveal God's judgment in history - for example, the Cold War, Vietnam, race riots, etc.?

3. Do you look upon the events in Israel as a miracle that cannot be accounted for in terms of social, political, military or economic factors?

4. How would you compare the "miracles" of the Six Day War with the miracles of Chanukah and Purim?

5. If you attribute theological significance to the events in Israel, what are the practical repercussions for our religious life today?

6. Do you believe that the rebirth of Israel culminating now with the recapture of Jerusalem indicates that we are on the verge of a Messianic Era?

NORMAN LAMM:

I am convinced that any attempt to explain the events in June 1967 as no more than a remarkable coincidence of natural factors reveals, on the part of the non-believer, an extraordinary act of naïve faith in the dogmas of agnosticism, and, on the part of the believer, a defense-mechanism by which to protect himself against possible future disappointment.

The Six Day War was certainly a case of "revelation." But even more than a revelation of divine power and direction of history, it was a revelation in the sense that the author of the Tanya (R. Shneur Zalman MiLadi) uses the term: a revealing to man's consciousness of the unsuspected reservoir of religious faith within him ("The hidden and natural love") . . .

In attempting to understand these events in theological terms, I would rather not speak the language of messianism and redemption. Overloaded with centuries of sentiment, and so abused by repetition these past twenty years, terms such as atchalta di'geulah (beginning of the Redemption) and ikvata de'mashichah (Messianic Era) inspire but do not clarify.

I prefer to analyze our situation in terms of the Biblical concept of hester panim ("the hiding of the face," i.e., God's withdrawal from a direct relationship with Israel) . . . The Torah considers hester panim the ultimate punishment, in that it severs the dialogue between God and Israel which is the totality of Judaism. It implies that man is henceforth deprived of divine Providence and subject to chance and the accidents of nature and history. The opposite pole is nesiat panim, the resumption of the dialogue. Although individuals may be entirely cut off from this relationship, this is not true of the people of Israel as a whole.

Between these two poles there are, according to the Sages of the Talmud, two intermediate states. In the lower state, there is no relationship. Nonetheless, God does preserve Israel; His "hand is stretched forth" to protect us from oblivion. Other than mere survival, there is no real redemptive meaning to the vicissitudes of our history. But the second state, penultimate to nesiat panim, is that of "in a dream do I address him." There is a sudden, dreamlike, almost unreal and uncertain confrontation in which the two partners have caught a glimpse of each other's faces, and acknowledge each other's existence.

There is no conversation - but the possibility exists. Israel must overcome its bashfulness, its cherished theories of divine absence, its rigid habits of despair, and face God directly . . . The Six Day War was the emergence from the dreadful hester panim of mere survival to that of the dream confrontation, the state of new spiritual possibilities and historic meaningfulness. In three hours. God turned to His people and for six days we looked at Him – and "when the Lord returned the captivity of Zion we were as dreamers[RK2]."

What must we now do? We must undertake new and passionate campaigns to continue the dialogue. The "Yeshivah world" must break out of its stultifying withdrawal from Jewish society and embrace all Israel with love. The "Modern Orthodox" must abandon their self-consciousness, their apologetic stance, and their spiritual sterility and start advocating their ideals of a full Torah life within the context of Western culture without apprehension and superficiality together with a truly inspired commitment to Torah and mitzvot. Diaspora Jews, moreover, must take a fresh look at the question of Aliyah . . . And above all, we must acknowledge - humbly and happily - that "they," the non-observant Israelis, were right when they argued that Jews must forge their own destiny actively and not wait passively for heavenly miracles. Power, we must admit, is not necessarily antithetical to holiness. The "impulse from below," as the Zohar calls it, is necessary in order to evoke the "impulse from above." . . .

MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD:

No believing Jew who lived through that harrowing Monday in June of 1967 when the fate of the two million Jews of Israel hung in balance will ever forget the over-whelming gratitude that filled Jewish hearts when the magnitude of the Israeli victory became apparent. When for the first time in almost two thousand years many of the holiest places in the Land of Israel were once again under Jewish jurisdiction, it became difficult not to see the redeeming presence of God in the momentous events of the day.

At such moments, it is not easy to contain the pent-up messianism that, in spite of the tragic disappointments of the past, is never far below the consciousness of the believing Jew.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to proceed with caution, listening obediently to the Divine Word, rather than human emotion, and to the judgment of God on the affairs of men.

All events, as events, are equivocal. To the eyes of non-belief there is always the natural explanation that refuses to transpose the historic order into a theological event.

Concerning the events of the Six-Day War, I hear the voice of unbelief pose the following dilemma:

The government of Israel either had good military reasons to expect victory or it did not. If it did not and still embarked on the course it did, it acted irresponsibly. And if it did have good reasons, then the outcome was only as foreseen and no miraculous claims are justified.

The voice of unbelief is difficult to still.

Jewish faith is therefore not based on events as such, be they events that appear redemptive or those, such as the holocaust, that seem to point to God's powerful anger with the people He loves above all other. Jewish faith is based on events as they are transformed by the Word of God from the realm of ambiguity to that of clarity.

The events of the Red Sea become a fulcrum of Jewish faith because they are memorialized in the Biblical text by "And God on that day saved Israel from the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex. 14:30). Without these clear and simple words which speak to the man of the 20th century as they have to all those who preceded him, the events of the past would have their inherent ambiguity compounded by the further shadow-existence that envelopes events of the past, particularly the remote past. It is the Divine Word, not one of which "returns unfulfilled" (Isaiah 55: 11), which thus becomes not a report of the saving event but its theological center, the very meaning that God bestows on that which transpires.

Because we in our day do not have such a Word concerning the Six Day War, we remain in the realm of ambiguity. What we have witnessed may have been the opening of the redemption or it may have been merely one further chapter in a story that has many chapters. That God's solicitude never leaves his people is certain; as such we must be grateful for his acts again and again. But to make solid messianic claims, and to tie the fate of Judaism to the fortunes of the State of Israel, for whose preservation and prosperity we all fervently pray, is simply unauthorized and therefore irresponsible. Along this path could lurk, God forbid, a catastrophe similar to those that was the fate of other messianic claims.

PINCHAS PELI:

The Six Day War is just another chapter revealing God's hand in directing the Jewish people throughout its history. It is no different in quality from other events in the history of the people which exists, according to Scriptures, as a living testimony of God's sovereignty over human destiny ("Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 43:10)).

The Six Day War is perhaps extraordinary, albeit not unique, in its volume. It has all the ingredients of a Biblical miracle (the many in the hands of the few, etc.) and it therefore commands our attention to this truth which is clearly one of the basic tenets of the Jewish faith - God's role in shaping Jewish history.

We also hold that God's hand is manifested as well in the Cold War, on the battlefields of Vietnam and in the race riots. There is, however, as far as we are concerned, a substantial difference between our understanding of what happens to the people of Israel and the events which transpire in the rest of the world. While the ancient prophets of Israel proclaimed their prophecies even unto the Gentiles, they did so only inasmuch as those prophecies had an impact on Israel . . .

Moving along against this setting, our task is not to probe whether we can see God's hand in the events which take place and then search for a theological interpretation of these events. Our method in this case is rather the reverse: we have to see how and to what extent do the events fit into God's design of Jewish history as outlined and prescribed in such remarkable detail in the Torah and in the utterances of the prophets and sages . . . When we have done this, we may be shocked to discover that the word of God is being fulfilled in our own days not just in some general way, but to the most minute detail.

It is hard to find a more detailed description of the great holocaust visited on our people than the one which is rendered in the chapters of the Admonition (Tokhechah) in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. These chapters are a precise and concise summing up of the state of Galut as experienced by our people in the last two thousand years, reaching its bitter climax during the last, (alas, it was not the first) holocaust. Similarly, I can find no better description of the return of the Jews to the land of Israel, the rehabilitation of the soil, the reestablishment of the state, the ingathering of the exiles and the regaining of Jerusalem - than in the prophecies recorded thousands of years ago by almost every prophet and psalmist of Israel. Quotations from the Bible or sayings of the Rabbis to prove this are, I believe, not necessary. Open any book of the Bible or the Midrash and they are there, before you . . . The recent events in Israel can indeed, well be "accounted for in terms of social, political, military or economic factors." The miracle of the return of the Jewish people to its homeland (which, please mind, does not, as matter of fact, have any equivalent in world history) does not depend on the supernaturalness of these events, but in their very happening within nature.

This, I believe, is the right concept of a miracle in Jewish thinking which emphasizes nes (miracle) within teva (nature). We do not require events which run contrary to nature as proof of God's role in this process of geulah. The greatest "miracle" of all is not that the victories of the Six Day War came despite the prevailing "social, political, military or economic factors," but, that the Jews, with the help of the Almighty, have again created, in the last few decades, the conditions which made it possible for Israel to win the war for its survival in such an astonishing fashion. For us, the question should not be whether God is now on our side, but, whether we are on God's side, to fulfill His will and blueprint . . . We already are on a very advanced stage of the arrival of the Messianic Era - not just on the verge of it. Our casting doubt on this is tantamount to questioning the validity of Torah and prophecy. It is a serious flaw in our faith.

SHEAR YASHUV COHEN:

The entire course of events of the Six Day War is definitely more of a unique demonstration of hashgachah (what you have termed God's acting in history) than the events that preceded it. Somehow we awaited the establishment of the State of Israel; it was the result of long-time planning. Not so with the Six Day War; it came as a surprise, Nobody in Israel had made plans for the quick course of events that took place. Rather I would say that every effort was made by Israel's leaders to delay any action leading to a war for survival. It all happened so suddenly. Nobody has logically explained what occurred: the blockade, the unusual pact between Hussein and Nasser which led to the eventual liberation of Jerusalem. Your eyes have to be blind, your ears have to be deaf, your mind has to be closed to claim that the events were anything but unusual. It was as if the hand of God was pushing us towards the second stage of atchalta d'geulah (beginning of redemption) and bringing us to geulah (redemption) Living through the danger of extermination and seeing the threat lifted miraculously through a stunning victory gives one the feeling that you are part of the historic divine planning, that you are only a tool in the hand of God. And the more you know about Israel's foreign policy and the struggles between different factions trying to delay war the more this feeling is reinforced. The miracles that happened during the war and the miracles that are occurring today - until this very moment - convince you that the Six Day War was another sphere of hitgalut hashechinah (revelation of the Divine Presence). There is no doubt in my mind that we are living now in yemut ha-mashiach. I have no explanation for the shoah (holocaust). I have no explanation for the miracles of the War of Independence. I have no other explanation for the miracles of the Six Day War but the belief that we are part of the final geulah. Both Rav Kook zt"l and Rav Herzog zt"l had the same idea. It is tragic that the present leadership of the rabbinate in Israel and outside of Israel is afraid to rise to the moment by creating new means and methods. Our minds should be geared to making Israel the central abode of the Jewish people, to making it a mamlechet kohanim v'goi kadosh (a kingdom of priests and holy nation). It's not a theological question any more; it's admitting that what we see and hear is the hand of God acting in history.

I am sure that the Six Day War has started a new era of understanding between religions. The Jew will not be an am golah (a people in exile), that lives among others and has to clarify the dividing principles between Jew and Gentile. It is now becoming an or l'goyim (a light for the nations). This, I think, is the deep meaning of the happening of the Six Day War from a religious point of view.

WALTER S. WURZBURGER:

We have reached a stage where very sharp dichotomies come to the fore: On the one side you have the viewpoint that all of Jewish history should be conceived as the gradual unfolding of the Messianic Era; on the other side, you have the theory that without the Word we cannot possibly interpret any event as revealing God's acting in history. In between we have the view which placed the recent events somewhere between the absolute hester panim and, what Rabbi Lamm calls, nesiat panim.

My first question is to Professor Wyschogrod: Might one not be inclined to say that the Word of the Bible, as interpreted by Prof. Peli, is the Word which enables us to decipher the meaning of

the event? Secondly, if you say that without the Word we cannot interpret the event, then how would it ever be possible for human beings to hear the Word unless they themselves are endowed with the gift of prophecy?

NORMAN LAMM:

May I amplify that question for Dr. Wyschogrod?

If you're going to say that the event, by virtue of its being an event, is ambiguous, and, therefore, you await a word, then you remain with the question that a word, too, is ambiguous. People can hear a word and have doubts as to whether it is hallucinatory or real. The dichotomy that you make between word and event is not valid. I think you are taking the word "word" a bit too literally. Does the concept of devar Hashem (word of God) mean only a verbal or intellectual or prophetic communication, or can it be clothed in terms of an event so that an event becomes its own interpretation, as it were, or the event is the communication?

PINCHAS PELI:

Is this word that you expect different from the words that you accepted for other mitzvot? In the case of all other mitzvot you accept the written word as handed down in tradition and do not wait for a new Word. Is not there a Word, and a very clear and explicit one, in regard to 'exile and redemption - why then wait for another one?

SHEAR YASHUV COHEN:

The historical approach provides Yehuda Halevi with this proof of the existence of God. The miracles experienced by the Jewish people constitute his evidence. Why should we not view the events of the last thirty years - the holocaust, the birth of Israel, and the Six Day War - as events continuing to prove the existence of God and thus constituting devar Hashem b'metsiut (a manifestation of Divine Word in reality), if not devar Hashem literally?

MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD:

...

One more observation and that will conclude my response. I observed that no one has referred to any of the catastrophes of false messianism in Jewish history. This is significant. In Shabtai Zvi there was the rousing of not one Jew or a hundred Jews but multitudes of Jews who heard the steps of the Messiah. And this event ended in one of the greatest tragedies in Jewish history. Can we, as we observe the events of Israel, simply forget about false messianism? They are unpleasant questions and you don't want to think about it. But are you considering it?

SHEAR YASHUV COHEN:

All the false messianic movements arose as dreams and not as a result of an historic, long, physical process. They did not start from a national, economic, political involvement.

NORMAN LAMM:

You just spoke about the suddenness of the whole victory!

...

NORMAN LAMM:

We are, I think, going very far astray if our two participants from Israel declare so positively and, to me, with shocking dogmatism, that we are presently in the midst of yemot hamashiach. I must say I feel astounded. For if you accept this as the Messianic Era you have to draw certain consequences. First, what Dr. Wyschogrod said concerning pseudo-messianism. Second, you have to be aware that, unconsciously, you are adopting the Reform interpretation of the Messianic Era. Mashiach is no longer an individual personality. Speaking of an era instead of a personality as the Messiah smacks more of 19th century progressivism than it does of the original Jewish concept . . .

WALTER S. WURZRURGER:

I see a certain danger in saying as our Israeli friends reiterate that every event in Jewish history is holy. If you endow everything with holiness then every natural event is holy. This leads to a rejection of our distinction between that which is holy and that which is not holy or "not yet holy." You are bound to end up with a complete repudiation of any kind of normative Judaism when you bestow holiness on every manifestation of Jewishness in Israel. It is this kind of mentality that prompts Prof. Peli to assert that every event in Jewish history is holy.

...

SHEAR YASHUV COHEN:

I must reject the idea that any discussion on the Messianic Era is futile. In the Talmud Sanhedrin there are many opinions expressed. Such a discussion is legitimate within the framework of Emunah (belief of Israel) . . .

I tend to agree with Prof. Peli that we are now closer to acharit hayamim (end of days). It is the first time in nineteen centuries that we have Jerusalem under Jewish dominion and a Jewish government controlling the Holy Land. Now it is possible for every Jew to visit or live in Eretz Yisrael. It did not happen before in history. It is this change in Jewish history that cannot be ignored. That is why I cannot accept or understand the resentment our American rabbis, our friends, have expressed today. I think it is a binding duty to admit that we live in a different era in Jewish history - an era that we have waited for nineteen centuries. To ignore this would be to ignore metsiut Hashem (existence of God) and hitgalut Hashem (revelation of God) on the course of history.

NORMAN LAMM:

Historically, wherever people started to interpret their own events as messianic events they ended up in trouble, from the great Rabbi Akiva down to the times of the false Messiahs . . .

# TRADITION SYMPOSIUM<sup>[RK3]</sup>: SUMME 1992

## Reflections on the Six-Day War After a Quarter Century

The Six Day War evoked a sense of religious euphoria. Many people spoke of revelatory miracles and the hastening of the Messianic Era with the recapturing of Jerusalem. Soon after the war, Tradition invited a number of Orthodox Israeli and American intellectuals to respond to a series of questions. That symposium was published as "The Religious Meaning of the Six Day War" (Tradition, Vol. 10, No. 1, Summer 1968). The original questions were:

1. It has been said that the Six Day War represents a unique demonstration of God's acting in history. Do you believe that the Six Day War revealed God's operation in history to a far greater extent than other events since the establishment of the State? (For instance, the War of Liberation or the Sinai Campaign).
2. Do the events in Israel reveal God's acting in history in a different way from other major events of our time which may also be said to reveal God's judgment in history—for example, the Cold War, Vietnam, race riots, etc.?
3. Do you look upon the events in Israel as a miracle that cannot be accounted for in terms of social, political, military or economic factors?
4. How would you compare the "miracles" of the Six Day War with the miracles of Chanukah and Purim?
5. If you attribute theological significance to the events in Israel, what are the practical repercussions for our religious life today?
6. Do you believe that the rebirth of Israel culminating now with the recapture of Jerusalem indicates that we are on the verge of a Messianic Era?

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of that war, we deem it appropriate to reconsider those issues and see if perspectives have changed. Accordingly, we turned to a select group of serious Jewish thinkers, and asked them to consider those same questions and, perhaps more importantly, to reflect on how their perspectives on the issues might have changed since 1967. Not all of those to whom we turned responded. We are grateful to those who did for providing us with their thoughtful observations and challenging insights.

## DAVID BERGER

As important and challenging as the issues in this symposium are, they require a preliminary confrontation with questions that are even more fundamental. What do we mean by a miracle? What is our theory of providence? How regularly and under what circumstances does God intervene in the natural order? Is any providential act by definition miraculous? . The relationship between providence and the natural order is complex and elusive. On the one hand, we often speak of God's exercising providence through nature; on the other, the Ramban has forcefully argued that no one has ever prayed without implicitly affirming the belief in miracles, since any divine response requires that God intervene in the causal chain in order to alter its outcome. While thoroughly naturalistic theories of providence have been constructed, it is difficult to accommodate fundamental religious instincts without an appeal to the belief in subtle divine intervention, which the Ramban labels "hidden miracles."

The frequency of such miracles and our ability to discern them remain problematic. Moreover, the borderline between hidden and manifest miracles is fuzzy and often indeterminate. If a manifest miracle is defined as an event whose miraculous character cannot be denied by any rational witness, then the Rambam has informed us that only the revelation at Sinai qualifies (Hilkhos Yesodei HaTorah 8:1-2). Although we would probably seek a broader definition, it remains true that after Sinai, the framework provided by the observer's faith plays a crucial role in evaluating the miraculous character of any event.

The Implausibility of the event is certainly an important consideration in any such evaluation, but it is far from decisive. Many surprising developments, some of them even less predictable than the Israeli victory in 1967, not only fail to strike us as miraculous but appear so trivial that the serious assertion that they are miracles seems almost blasphemous. The sports pages, for example, are replete with references to "miraculous" results of individual games and entire seasons. Sometimes the players on those teams prayed fervently for the unlikely result. I do not think that a believing Jew could regard such prayers as less appropriate than any other prayer for enhancing the supplicant's livelihood, and yet the notion that we are witnessing a miracle, whether hidden or manifest, makes us squirm. In determining whether a particular historical process is a miracle, context is almost everything.

For the non-believer, the context of faith is entirely absent, and for such a person, the Israeli capture of Jerusalem, the unraveling of Communism, and the events of the Gulf War can reasonably be attributed to "social, political, military or economic factors." Where faith is present, context takes on a broader meaning encompassing both theology and historical evaluation.

- a. Do I believe that God intervenes frequently even in everyday affairs of relatively little moment?
- b. Do I think that this is a period of hester panim in which natural processes almost invariably prevail?
- c. Do I consider divine intervention more likely in Jewish history than in the affairs of the nations of the world?
- d. Do I assign a positive, negative or neutral evaluation to the event under consideration?

e. Do I regard it as a passing episode or as a critical development in human history?

Although God's knowledge is unlimited and the possibility of His intervention is always present, many major authorities have maintained that miraculous intervention in the daily lives of ordinary Jews is relatively infrequent; and some degree of uncertainty extends to larger matters as well. I am inclined to believe, for example, that God had something to do with the low casualty rate following the launching of Scud missiles toward Israel, but I do not feel that my faith requires the categorical affirmation that He changed the flight path of a particular missile or caused its warhead to malfunction. Nonetheless, there are events that are so earthshaking within the context of Jewish belief that the failure to attribute them to divine intervention leaves Judaism bereft of meaningful faith in the God of Hazal and of the prophets.

The establishment of the State of Israel and the capture of Jerusalem are such events. Given the most fundamental assumptions about providence, the goodness of God and His concern for the Jewish people, the position that developments of such magnitude came about wholly through the working of an impersonal historical process is inadmissible. It banishes God from history and declares in effect that "the Lord has forsaken the earth" (Ezek. 8:12; 9:9). If the hand of God is not to be found in these events, where is it to be found?

One of the great ironies in contemporary Jewish piety is that many deeply religious Jews have inverted the hierarchy of providential events. For many non-Zionist Orthodox Jews, the operation of micro-providence is taken for granted to the point where innumerable events in the lives of prominent Rabbis are confidently regarded as miracles. At the same time, the return of the land of Israel to the Jewish people is assigned no religious value whatever. It is true that God intervenes to protect the land: He guides Scud missiles to targets of brick and stone in large measure because of the merit generated by students studying in Israeli yeshivot. Nonetheless, He appears to have played no role in the establishment of the State.

This position is so incongruous that it is rarely if ever formulated in such stark terms; nevertheless, I believe that it is a fair extrapolation from the rhetoric and behavior of many religious Jews. When pressed, such Jews will dismiss Israel's theological significance by speaking of the anti-religious character of mainstream Zionist ideology or pointing to the secularism of the State and its impact on the religiosity of early Sephardic olim; when really pressed, they will recognize God's role by describing the State as a test (a nissayon), which is presumably as much a cause for concern as for celebration. But even the theology of nissayon would mean that God has given the Jewish people an unparalleled opportunity, and for the most part, one searches vainly in these circles for an expression of gratitude for such a gift.

The incongruity of this phenomenon is so great that it cries out for explanation, and several possibilities come to mind. Before the establishment of the State, rabbinic opposition to Zionism did not face the theological obstacle that now confronts it: there was no monumental providential event to explain away. Consequently, the secularism of the movement along with other considerations generated a rejection of Zionism by most major authorities. Given certain assumptions about the near-infallibility of gedolei Yisrael, even an overwhelmingly transparent act of divine providence could not produce a fundamental reassessment. Moreover, among Israeli haredim, such a reassessment might have necessitated a fresh look at the question of timely army service for the majority of yeshiva students or the religious obligation to establish an

educational system geared to producing citizens with the skills required to serve the needs of a modern state.

Whatever the explanation, substantial segments of religious Jewry find themselves in an unacknowledged theological morass in which they commit the Jewish version of original sin: the failure to recognize the munificence of the Creator.<sup>3</sup> The sharpest formulation of this anomaly—so sharp that I would probably have softened it had I thought of it myself—was reported to me by a rabbi standing to the right of Modern Orthodoxy who heard it from a distinguished talmid hakham in a private conversation. We are being told, he said, that God brought about the Holocaust but not the State of Israel.

Recognition that the establishment of Israel is an act of God undoubtedly has practical religious repercussions. It means that the refusal to celebrate Yom Haatzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim is a refusal to give thanks to God. It means that support of Israel is a religious imperative and that the obligation of aliya demands serious attention. It means that a host of questions ranging from the hetter mekhirah during shemittah to the Sabbath observance of Israeli soldiers must be seen through a prism which affirms the religious value of the State, without, of course, predetermining the conclusion of halakhic deliberations.

The step from affirming the providential character of Israel to identifying it as the inauguration of the Messianic process is tempting but dangerous.

I certainly hope that the State constitutes the beginning of that process and that the ingathering of exiles unfolding before our eyes means that we stand on the verge of redemption. But I do not know. When the Messianic age will come and what conditions will attend its coming are, as the Rambam stressed, unknown to us (Hilkhot Melakhim 12:2), and it is always dangerous to lay claim to knowledge that we do not possess.

We hear, of course, periodic affirmations of the imminence of redemption, and such affirmations do not have to emerge from Zionist premises. There are influential groups who believe that the Messiah will arrive in the immediate future but will presumably inform us that the proximity of his arrival to the establishment of Israel is pure coincidence. To put it mildly, this position is counter-intuitive and results from the reluctance to assign the State its proper religious significance. At the same time, the more plausible hope that the State itself is the harbinger of a Messianic age should not be turned into absolute assurance. God has declared us a kingdom of priests. Despite Moses' selfless wish, He has not yet transformed us into a nation of prophets.

#### **NOTES**<sup>[RK4]</sup>

1. The widespread view that the Ramban denied the existence of a natural order misconstrues his position. See my "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations In his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. by Isadore Twersky, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 107-128.

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## IMMANUEL JAKOBOVITS

. . . In the light of subsequent events—from the Yom Kippur War to the Intifada and the Gulf War—the questions posed in the heady days of 1967 seem utterly dated, almost anachronistic. Whether the "miracles" of the Six-Day War were comparable with those of Chanukah and Purim is hardly relevant to Israel's contemporary condition. Nor can it make much difference whether the Six-Day War revealed a greater or lesser Divine intervention in history than other milestones in the development of Israel before and after 1967, or whether these were different in kind from God's judgment in History as manifested in the Cold War or in race riots. Least of all is there any present-day meaning to the question whether we are on the verge of the Messianic Era.

In fact, the past twenty-four years have shattered many illusions and exposed many false promises. The doctrine of Secular Zionism, promising that a Jewish State would eliminate anti-Semitism and "solve the Jewish problem" has been turned on its head. Today, anti-Zionism is the principal cause or form of anti-Semitism, and certainly its main expression. The survival of Israel against such heavy odds is wondrous enough. But the miracle of final Redemption is hardly at hand. The Holocaust apart, the outrages against Jews from Crusades to pogroms in medieval and modern times claimed victims within corresponding periods comparable with the thousands killed in Israel's wars and in anti-Jewish acts of terrorism inside and outside Israel.

. . . In 1967, many believed that Israel's special relationship with the Guardian of Israel imposed extra commitments only on the latter, a debt payable in the coinage of miracles. By now, we should have been weaned of this illusion, realizing that the Covenant imposes reciprocal obligations on each partner.

Which leaves the question on having reached "the verge of a Messianic Era" to be answered. In the expectant days of 1967, the question was indeed immediate and acute. The Jewish people had never experienced a military victory of such dimensions and such universal acclaim. Since then, countless dates of anticipated Messianic fulfillment have come and gone, and more sober calculations generally prevail . . .

Today, there is an altogether new peril. The belief that the coming of the Messiah is definitely around the corner presupposes that the process of Redemption is now irreversible, and that risks can therefore be taken which would not otherwise be warranted . . .

Not without reason did Maimonides include the historical lessons to be drawn from the Messianic disillusionment of Bar Kochba in his authoritative code of Jewish Law.

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## SOL ROTH

Hester Panim, the concealment of the Countenance, means at least in part that God withholds temporarily the implementation of His covenantal promise that He will intervene in history to ensure that the people of Israel will inherit the Holy Land . . . The belief in the Messianic era is a conviction that the redemption of mankind, which is contingent upon the achievement by the people of Israel of its historic goal, is inevitable.

There are, accordingly, significant periods of Jewish history, which may be termed redemptive in the sense that they expedite the realization of the divinely prescribed historical aims. There are other periods, however, in which God does nothing to advance the covenantally guaranteed historical destiny of the people of Israel. The latter are manifestations of hester panim, non-redemptive eras of Jewish history.

There are therefore two distinct and, to some extent, distinguishable, phases of Jewish history—the redemptive and the non-redemptive, those in which the Jewish people advances towards its historic destiny and those devoid of such movement. It is difficult to pinpoint those moments of time when a redemptive period ceases or to establish the criteria by which we can ascertain that God is indeed present in Jewish history in a manner that accelerates the Jewish people's progress towards its historic goals. In a general and non-rigorous way, however, it may be suggested that the redemptive phase of Jewish history involves, as an essential feature, though not necessarily in a continuous manner, movement towards the creation of a Jewish state, or progress, not necessarily consistent, in a state already established, towards the achievement of the spiritual ideal that should be embodied within it . . .

The birth of the contemporary state of Israel ought, therefore, to be perceived as a redemptive event. I take this to be the essential meaning of the phrase . . . "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption". This assertion, however, should be understood as a statement of faith, not as an interpretation of facts in accordance with a theological hypothesis. A theological statement with regard to the course of history is not in the same category as a scientific law. The latter claims to be applicable to individual facts in a verifiable manner. The former is applicable to processes rather than facts and is justifiable on the basis of belief rather than empirical confirmations.

The attempt to hold up a solitary event as the proof positive of a theological dogma is essentially misguided and often dangerous. It results in the kind of absurd pronouncements as that which declared that a bus filled with school children met with an accident that resulted in many fatalities because the families to which these children belonged violated an explicitly identified biblical precept. . . . The assumption that a human being can penetrate into the mind of God and reveal what He thinks is incredibly presumptuous both intellectually and religiously.. . . The same is true of any attempt to interpret the theological significance of events such as the Six Day War. We are charged with the task of interpreting historical processes according to religious beliefs, not individual historical facts . . .

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## MAYER SCHILLER

. . . the question before us is, how are we to understand the Six Day War. Obviously, one's understanding of that conflict will be colored by one's prejudices regarding Israel and the entire Zionist enterprise.

In Agudah circles, one would expect the 1967 reaction to have been something along the lines of: "We didn't ask for the State and we warned you that there would be trouble if you Zionists got it. Well, the troubles came, but thankfully, God has mercifully saved us." However, except in more rightist Agudah circles, the first part of the above was left unstated. This is owing to the Agudah's increasing unwillingness to address the fundamental questions raised by political Zionism, namely: Should the State have been created? Is its creation inherently bad, good or neutral? What about its practical effects? Should we support the State, through military service, emotional involvement, and so on? The Agudah position seems to have become essentially pragmatic. This State is here; it is not going away, so let's make the best of it. As for deciphering God's intent in allowing the State's establishment, we no longer discuss that question. When Israel is successful in its wars, we attribute that to God's mercy and the Torah and mitzvot of religious Jews. (Of course, as the kanaim never fail to point out, this position, by stating that Torah and mitzvot are factors in God's decision to maintain Israel, clearly implies that Israel's existence is a positive thing. Is that not a philosophic acceptance of Religious Zionism?) In sum, the Agudah position on the Six Day War would seem to be "it was an instance of God's mercy," and beyond that or into deeper matters we do not wish to venture. (Whether those who gathered at Katowicz would be pleased with this silence is a matter for further inquiry.)

Obviously, Religious Zionists see the Six Day War as an instance of God's intervention on the side of His people which is conceivably apocalyptic in significance. This interpretation has been put to the test during the past twenty-five years of wars, compromises and increasing economic decline. Moreover, the notion that whoever wins in history is inherently favored by God would seem a dubious proposition for anyone at all familiar with world or Jewish history. Probably the positive religious significance attributed to the Six Day War by Religious Zionists owes, not to its "miraculous nature" (was the Lebanese invasion equally miraculous?), but to their belief in the great practical and meta-historical good which they see Israel representing. This prior belief colors their explanation of all later developments.

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## DAVID SINGER

The bad news since June 1967 is that the Messiah has not come. The good news is that the waiting, the expectation, have never been so pleasurable. I made the point in the pages of Commentary and I am glad to repeat it here: we are the luckiest generation in the last two thousand years of Jewish history. We live not only with the messianic promise, but with the beginning of the fulfillment as well. Think about it: the State of Israel exists, Jerusalem is united under Jewish sovereignty, and the ingathering of the exiles proceeds apace. And we are privileged to witness all this.

What constitutes an adequate response to an event of this magnitude, to something as momentous as, in the words of the prayer for the State of Israel, the "first flowering of the promised redemption?" . . . Clearly, a Judaism that is serious about the "first flowering", that sees itself as part of the unfolding of the messianic process, will be, above all, future-oriented, that is, open, dynamic, and eager to take on the challenge of the new. How could it be otherwise when the thrust of the historical process, now moving into high gear, is in the direction of what lies ahead? Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook understood all this, and that is why he remains the model, the paradigm. It is not at all a matter of sources or prooftexts, but of a "first flowering" that Rav Kook felt in his bones.

Judged by these standards, the record of contemporary Orthodoxy, with a few honorable exceptions, is simply wretched. Instead of nurturing an Orthodox Judaism faced firmly toward the future, we have developed one fixated on the past, holding up as a model the never-never land of Eastern Europe . . . Rav Kook's poetic "I aspire for the heights, for lofty visions" has been transformed into contemporary Orthodoxy's prison of the mind . . .

How is one to account for the astonishing failure of contemporary Orthodoxy to respond adequately to the religious implications of the "first flowering?" In the case of the "black hat" world, I think the key factor is the Holocaust, which thoroughly traumatized the traditional sector of the Orthodox community. Having been battered by history, this element cannot bring itself to trust the historical process . . . In short, for this portion of the Orthodox world, the "first flowering" comes too late.

If the "black hat" Orthodox are unable to trust in history, centrists find it difficult to believe in it at all. I refer here to the phenomenon of secularization, which, frum posturing notwithstanding, has taken a heavy toll in centrist circles To be modern in any sense—and that, most certainly, is what centrists claim to be—is to find it difficult to credit the notion of meaning in history, let alone the working out of a messianic process through providential design. Of course, centrists continue to mouth the right words, talking bravely about a future messianic age. But that is the point: they have consigned the messianic fulfillment to some indefinite future, while allowing it no weight as a current religious reality. Centrists loudly proclaim "Ani maamin," but in their heart of hearts many do not.

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## WALTER S. WURZBURGER

The "miraculous" victory over Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War gave rise to such euphoria that it is extremely difficult to reflect critically on the very questions I first raised twenty-three years ago in the Tradition symposium on the "Religious Significance of the Six Day War." With charismatic and venerated religious leaders proclaiming in the media that "overt miracles" on the part of the "Guardian of Israel" were responsible for protecting Israel against casualties from Scud missiles, it is widely believed that there can be no doubt that the triumphs of the Six Day War, the development of Jerusalem into a truly metropolitan center of Jewish life, the retention of Judea and Samaria in the face of international pressures, the mass aliya from Soviet Russia, combined with the elimination of Iraq as a threat to Israel, reveal in a special and unique manner that God operates in history.

Can there be any explanation other than God's providential design to account for Saddam Hussein's blunder, to invade Kuwait and not to retreat even in the face of the overwhelming forces marshalled against him? Would not prudence have dictated that in order to realize his ambitions he first consolidate his position of leadership in the Arab world by launching an attack against Israel—with Syria and Saudi Arabia as allies rather than his enemies—before occupying another Arab country?

The notion that these "miraculous" events demonstrate that we are at the dawn of the Messianic era is gaining ever more adherents. While in the 1968 Symposium only the Israeli participants unequivocally asserted that the military and political achievements of the Six Day War possessed Messianic significance, at the present time, especially against the background of the Gulf War, large segments of religious Jewry are persuaded that they hear the "footsteps of the Messiah."

Notwithstanding the popularity of this view, I am uncomfortable with all eschatological perspectives. I profess complete ignorance of what the Gemara calls "the highways of God." Unless endowed with the gift of prophecy, human beings cannot fathom the meaning of the Divine design for history. As a believing Jew I am committed to the proposition that God acts in history and particularly in that of Israel. But I am unable to point to any concrete evidence which would convince a secularist that the establishment and development of the state of Israel does not make sense without reference to divine miraculous intervention.

Isaac Breuer, in a famous essay, discussed the difficulties we encounter when an event is to be apprehended as a miracle—not just as a puzzling phenomenon to be explained. How do we know that the event in question cannot be given an adequate causal explanation in naturalistic terms? In Breuer's opinion, the perception of a miracle is possible only when in addition to performing a miracle God also grants us the faculty to recognize it as such rather than as a phenomenon for which a causal explanation is feasible . . .

It must be emphasized that my position is totally free of any traces of pseudo-Messianic elements. While I hope and pray that the State of Israel will eventually develop into a Messianic state, a prayer is not a prognosis. I was highly impressed by the suggestion of the late Rishon Lezion, Rabbi Nissim, that the State of Israel should not be characterized as "the beginning of the sprouting forth of our Redemption," but rather as "the test of our worthiness for Redemption."

I am prepared to attach Messianic significance to the State of Israel only in the same fashion as our Sages viewed Chanukah, when they chose as the Haftorah for Shabbath Chanukah a selection from the Prophet Zechariah with pronounced Messianic overtones. It is well-known that the Sages were not enamored of the Maccabees. The book of Maccabees was not admitted into the Holy Writ and there are very few references to Chanukah in the Talmud. Moreover, the accomplishments of the Maccabees were only temporary. Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael was short-lived and the Temple was later destroyed by the Romans. Yet, these shortcomings did not prevent the Sages from endowing the historic achievements of the Hasmoneans with genuine Messianic significance.

It is in a similar fashion that we ought to react to the establishment of the State of Israel. While we have no guarantees about its future, we should hail it as a remarkable opportunity to advance our Messianic ideals— the establishment of the rule of God over our individual and collective lives. With the attainment of Jewish sovereignty, we have the opportunity to conduct our socio-political as well as economic and military activities in accordance with the Divine Will as formulated in the Halakhah.

Our task is not to engage in speculations about the role of contemporary events in the unfolding of our eschatological destiny, but to operate in the here and now in accordance with the norms and ideals of Halakhah. As the Torah puts it, "The hidden things belong to God, but the revealed matters are for us and our children to do."

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## **MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD**

Almost a quarter century has passed since the 1968 symposium on the "The Religious Significance of the Six Day War" in which I argued that events, as such, are always ambiguous and that it is only the prophetic word that provides an authoritative interpretation of events. It seemed to me that messianic claims with respect to the Six Day War were premature and to be treated with great caution. If anything, my wariness about messianic claims has grown.

It is not that messianism plays a minor role in my Judaism. The opposite is the case. Most of Orthodox Judaism is rooted in sacred history, in the revelation at Sinai and the authority of the past. Messianism is the open future, that which lies ahead and cannot be fully envisaged in the present. Messianism points to God's future intervention in history in the form of possibilities we cannot even imagine. It prevents us from sinking into the psychological rut of thinking that there is nothing new under the sun, that the future will be like the past, that repetition is human destiny and that God has done and said everything important that He will ever do and say. Messianism tells us that we haven't seen anything yet because the God we worship is a living God who has a few tricks up His sleeve that will surprise us. Messianism is thus an essential complement to halakhic Judaism with its emphasis on the predictable and the established.

In recent years it has become clear to me that I stand for messianism without violence. I have deep sympathy for Gush Emunim but I have deep reservations about Gush Emunim's lack of discomfort with violence. Now I am not a pacifist. There are tragic situations in which violence cannot be avoided. But the shedding of human blood is a frightful enterprise and extreme measures have to be taken to prevent violence and injustice . . .

We may be on the verge of the messianic era but whether we are or not may depend on us. I simply cannot believe that the messianic era will be preceded by the reality of Jews becoming accustomed to killing. I find it much easier to believe that the messianic era will be preceded by the reality of Jews recognizing the image of God in all human beings, even those foolishly convinced that God did not promise the land to his people.

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## RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

To THE EDITOR:

Reading "Reflections on the Six-Day War after a Quarter of a Century" in the special issue on Religious Zionism (Tradition, 26:4 Summer 1992) was a sobering study on how current events influence faith. Except for David Berger, who still maintains that miraculous events have occurred to us with the establishment of the State of Israel, the respondents are very reluctant to interpret contemporary history as evidence of God's intervention. There is no proof, they insist, that the momentous events relating to Israel, such as the Six-Day War, is God's way of calling us to respond. And therefore, if I understand them correctly, they counsel caution. When in doubt, shev ve-al ta'aseh is the better part of wisdom. The respondents may be right in their assessments, but they may also be wrong. And if they are, the consequences may not be less dangerous. It may be that God creates, not messianic events, but events laden with messianic potential, and it is the Jewish nation which decides to make them redemptive or not. The Six Day War is possibly such an event. And it was not God who did not follow through, so to speak, but the Jewish nation. We did not accept the event as messianic and so it was not. Shalom Carmy in the same issue of Tradition cites Shelby Steele in another context, but the quote expresses this thought and applies to the question of the Symposium: "The promised land guarantees nothing. It is only an opportunity, not a deliverance."

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 94) tells us Hezekiah was supposed to be the mashiah. But he did not act on the great messianic event of his day-the deliverance of Jerusalem. His failure to sing shirah the symbolic signal of the messianic era (as in the Haggadah before the second brakhah) is counted as a failing on his part and he was judged by middat ha-din. As punishment the geulah sheleimah did not come in his day. Shev ve-al ta'aseh may not be the safe path through our era. We may be held culpable for not taking the existential initiative when the redemptive potential was there. Though we cannot be sure of this, neither can we be sure that we are not failing future generations by our inaction and hesitation. And we may be judged for it. In this context the war on the holiest day of Yom Kippur, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, may make sense-a rebuke for our failure to act.

(RABBI) SOLOMON J. SPIRO

Young Israel of Chomedey  
Laval, Que., Canada

Norman Lamm

Dr. Lamm, Tradition's founding editor, is Chancellor of Yeshiva University.

## REMEMBERING THE SIX-DAY WAR: THEN AND NOW

The comparison between “then and now” is depressing, and immediately brings to mind the verse: “For forty years I was wearied with that generation” (Ps.95). The stark contrast between the triumphs and subsequent wide-spread euphoria of 1967 and the national malaise of 2006-2007 demands careful and sober thought.

I am concerned with three aspects of this latest chapter of Israeli history: the spiritual, the secular, and the emotional. By “spiritual” I mean the religious; by “secular”—the military and political (which, as we shall see, runs parallel with the religious); and by “emotional”—what appears to be a novel psychological change in the character of Jews, especially Israelis, as a result of the intermittent wars of the last 40 years.

...

### THE SIX DAY WAR

The Six Day War began, we are told by historian Michael Oren in his important *Six Days of War: June 1967*, because of an accident—the unintended delay by an ambassador in delivering a message to Jordan.

What was not an accident was the terror that gripped Israelis—and Jews the world over in the days leading up to the war. Fear infiltrated the highest levels of government and society, much like Jeremiah's description of the Destruction of the First Temple (Jer.9:5)—that death seemed to creep in through the windows. So ominous was the situation (cause) were stolen from us retroactively. Israel's power and the might of its hand had begotten for us not wealth, but confusion and resentment along with puffed up self-importance—and an image as unattractive as it was unrealistic.

### THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

That both conflicting emotions—the Messianic euphoria and the military self-assurance—were unrealistic was proven by the Arab surprise attack on Yom Kippur 1973, which punctured the balloon of Israel's imaginary invincibility. Israel was unprepared, the troops untrained for war, supplies were largely unavailable when and where needed, and so on. The successful counterattack by the Israelis, no matter how brilliant, did not make up for the sudden feeling that we had all been “taken.”

Who knows what our situation would be had Nixon not intervened in Israel's favor? Jews began to look back wistfully to their youth when it seemed that everything was so certain, so clear, so secure. Dying illusions are painful, and also enraging.

My mind, during this period, inevitably turned to the powerful passage in (Deut. 8:11-18): Beware lest you forget the Lord your God . . . lest when you have eaten and are full and you say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.” But you should remember the Lord your God: for it is He who gives you the power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

What happened to cause such a reversal of fortune? What happened was that self-confidence morphed into arrogance, and arrogance into unforgivable carelessness. We forgot the God of Israel and learned nothing from the triumph of the Six Day War and the near disaster of the Yom Kippur War. Soon after the rescue engineered by the US in the latter event, the same pattern began to reassert itself, like a plague that will not go away. The Israeli leadership's mentality continued in disdainful ignorance of the lessons of that almost catastrophic war. Profoundly indifferent to its own military and diplomatic failures and redolent of ingratitude towards the Heavenly forces (however defined) that had come to our assistance, it effectively presaged the dreadfully similar failures in 2006.

...

In a Tradition Symposium (Summer 1968), I addressed my belief that just as much of Jewish history since the destruction of the Temple was an expression of *hester panim*, God hiding from us, as it were, so was the Six Day War mystery an expression of its antonym, *he'arat panim*, God smiling upon us, and that we now had a historic chance to reconnect with the Almighty. It presented us with a magnificent historic opportunity to realize the destiny of Israel as the "people of God," thus fulfilling the dreams of centuries. But that was not to be. Instead, we returned to our wonted ways. In 1973 and again in 2006, when defeat and disaster stared us in the face, we should have understood that this was another God-given opportunity to turn to Heaven and pray that He break through His hiddenness and turn to us His "Shining Face so that we might rededicate ourselves to the spiritual heritage of our people—a heritage which includes confidence but not overconfidence, hope but not haughty ness—which justifies the hopes and sacrifices suffered on its behalf.

...

After the Six Day War I was an optimist tinged with pessimism. Today I am a pessimist tinged with optimism. Were I to graduate to a higher degree of optimism, I would be like the Israeli in the anecdote who, when asked if he's an optimist or a pessimist, replied that he was an optimist. In that case, his interlocutor wondered, "why do you look so bad?" His answer: "Do you think it's so easy to be an optimist these days?" No, it is not easy to be an optimist these days. But it is imperative that we try, or at least act as if we are optimists with even more than a tinge of pessimism. That is called realism.

נחם ה' אלקינו את אבלי ציון ואת אבלי ירושלים  
ואת העיר האבלה החרבה, הבזויה והשוממה,  
האבלה מבלי בניה, החריבה ממעונותיה, הבזויה מכבודה,  
והשוממה מאין יושב  
והיא יושבת וראשה חפוי כאשה עקרה שלא ילדה  
ויבלעוה לגיונות, וירשוה עובדי זרים,  
ויטילו את עמך ישראל לחרב, ויהרגו בזדון חסידי עליון  
על כן ציון במר תבכה וירושלים תתן קולה  
לבי לבי על חלליהם, מעי מעי על חלליהם  
כי אתה ה' באש הצתה, ובאש אתה עתיד לבנותה  
כאמור: ואני אהיה לה, נאם ה', חומת אש סביב ולכבוד אהיה בתוכה.  
ברוך אתה ה' מנחם ציון ובונה ירושלים.