

Between Separatism and Pragmatism: Judaism as National Identity in the Haredi Political Discourse

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Abstract: The Zionist perception of the Jewish people as a nation caused the Ultra-orthodox discourse split in the 1930s into two main positions. The first one is taking a passive but reluctant stance, which held an indifferent non-Zionist position. And the second one holds a strong anti-Zionism perspective that established an uncompromising theological conception that saw Zionism no less as an act of Satan. With the establishment of the State of Israel, the ultra-Orthodox leadership was forced to decide how to conduct politically in the “Jewish state”. Two main positions shaped the discourse. The first one is by Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, (*Chazon Ish*), that proposed a pragmatic approach holding utilitarian nature. The second one demanded severe separatism and presented an alienating and hostile attitude to the very idea that the ultra-Orthodox leadership would take part in the Israeli political game, led by Rabbi Yoel Moshe Teitelbaum of Satmar. By examining the ideological, theological and halakhic origins of each of the approaches, this article seeks to show that the position held by the Satmar Rebbe, in the context of the question of the character of the Jewish people, has a common and surprising ideological basis between Zionism and the serve ultra-Orthodox position who sees the Jewish people as a nation. On the other side, the pragmatic view considered the Jewish people as a religious community, therefore treats the Jewish state only as a hollow political tool that enabled political flexibility.

Keywords: Ultra-Orthodox, tradition, Halachic law, politics, Israel, Haredi society

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Introduction

In 1974, a pamphlet written in Hebrew was published in Brooklyn, New York, titled *Tora Judaism and the State*. Its goal was clearly stated in the subtitle: *A Conceptual Inquiry into the Question of the Relationship to Zionism and the State* (Gitlin 1974). In his attempt to define Zionism and the perceived threat it posed, the author, “A. Gitlin” (an unfamiliar name that was a pseudonym of Uriel Zimmer, a multilingual journalist who works as a translator both for the UN and the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic court in New York), came to the conclusion that the purpose of Zionism was to change the essence of the Jewish people (Ibidem, 7). The term “essence,” by its very nature, has a vague character, particularly when dealing with a group of people as historical actors. What is the essence that Gitlin spoke of, to which Zionism posed the greatest threat? In what follows I would like to claim that—according to the Haredi point of view—the Jewish people’s essence is strongly related to the traditional perception of the Jewish Community as a substance that holds a Jewish religious lifestyle. This argument enables me to explain the origins of two prominent Haredi political approaches: separation and pragmatism (as I will show in the *Shmita* polemics)². Each approach is informed by ideological, theological, and halakhic foundations that shaped how these distinct approaches responded to the Zionist challenge of a modern national Jewish movement.

The approach employed to substantiate this argument is fundamentally historical in nature. Specifically, it entails conducting a hermeneutic inquiry of a historical event (the *Shmita* polemics) by critical examination of primary source materials authored by rabbis and prominent figures within the ultra-Orthodox community. From these sources, a comprehensive portrayal of the perspectives concerning the nexus between politics, particularly Zionism, and the Jewish religion is gleaned. This portrayal is rendered from the standpoint of Orthodox interpretations.

This historical analysis also elucidates the rationale behind the omission in the present paper of comprehensive theories which wish to provide a universal examination of the interplay between religion and politics within this study. Instead, the focus here is centered on offering a historical case study possessing the capacity to illuminate the values and principles that once informed prominent figures intimately acquainted with the subject matter under consideration. Their enduring influence, still perceptible in contemporary contexts, underscores the significance of this approach.

² *Shmita* refers to the agricultural Sabbatical year in Jewish law. According to the Torah (specifically, the book of Leviticus, chapter 25), every seventh year is designated as a *Shmita* year. During this year, the land in the Land of Israel is given a rest, and agricultural activities such as planting, pruning, and harvesting are prohibited.

The Roots of Religious Opposition to Zionism

Since its very beginning, key Haredi³ leaders had a skeptical and suspicious attitude toward the Zionist movement's political activities and ideas. The main aspect of their criticism referred to its secular character and Zionist leaders' lifestyles (Steinberg 1902, 9). According to some ultra-Orthodox critics, these aspects of Zionist leaders and their secular identities revealed the main Zionist aspiration, namely to establish a new, Gentile-like political Jewish enterprise (Birnbaum 1977, 117-19). Thus, the foundation of the criticism focused on the private behavior of the Zionist leaders; these behaviors were seen as a mirror reflecting the non-Jewish inspirational sources of Zionism as a Jewish political ideology. These religiously grounded criticisms decried the absence of religious justifications; their main sense was to oppose the pretensions of Zionism, which sought to replace the divine dimension of the aspiration for Messianic redemption with secular political activity that did not rely on Jewish religious tradition. Thus, it is quite clear why, for the majority of the Haredi leadership, Zionism represented a threat to the Jewish tradition.

This raises a crucial question regarding the meaning of religious tradition in the context of Jewish political and social discourse in modern times. At this point I would like to claim that "tradition", as an absolute obligation towards the customs and habits of the ancestors, is no less than the main feature of the definition of Haredi in its social and political sense; this is what distinguishes it from all other Jewish phenomena in modern times. I believe that clarifying the central place that the commitment to tradition takes in Haredi thought and lifestyles can also explain Haredi opposition to the conceptual revolution proposed by Zionism in terms of the Jewish people's self-perception. From this perspective, the Zionist proposition to treat the Jewish people not as a religious community violates one of the basic principles of Jewish religion—the uniqueness of the chosen people—and its definition as a distinct group with a special metaphysical destiny among the nations. That is to say, unlike other peoples, who demand sovereignty for themselves as a matter of realizing collective interests, the traditional Haredi interpretation places devotion to the *Torah*⁴ at the center of its worldview, as the divine expression of the moral and legal requirements of the Jew, both individually and collectively.

Therefore, the bone of contention is whether "Jewish nationalism" is a modern continuation of the Jewish people's singularity, defined by their religious obligation,

³ The term "Haredi" is associated with an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle, though at the end of the 19th century, it was the prevailing informal term for the entire Orthodox society. For details on the supporters of Zionism and its fiercest opponents, see Brown 2017, 12-13.

⁴ This term in Hebrew has a much more elaborate meaning than simply referring to the first five books of the Bible. It is generally used to describe both the halakhic and theological corpus of knowledge, that based on the interpretation of the Bible and the oral tradition, which primarily refers to the Babylonian Talmud.

or a deviation from it towards a new definition of Judaism as a culture whose chances of survival depend on sovereignty over a specific territory. As I would like to show in this article, the attempts to answer this question were reflected in the two forms of Haredi politics, separation and pragmatism. Before proceeding with the development of this argument, I first present some background on the role of traditionalism in Haredi thought.

The Principle of Traditionalism as a Fundamental Element in the Haredi Worldview: A Theoretical Preface

Although this article is not the place for a comprehensive dissection of the precise definition and meaning of the term “ultra-Orthodox,” some degree of theoretical clarification is needed given the term’s opaqueness, especially in its Hebrew meaning, i.e., Haredi (חרדי). For many researchers, “ultra-Orthodox” is a synonym of *Haredi*.⁵ The meaning of ultra-Orthodox belief is related to religious piety, devotion to religious studies, halakhic law observance, and anti-Zionism (Friedman 1991, 6-8). However, it seems that the reality is much more complicated, especially today when we can find ultra-Orthodox-like communities that do not recognize themselves as Haredi, in the whole meaning of this term, especially in terms of their relation to symbols associated with the state of Israel and how these relations are expressed in religious actions.

The birth of Orthodoxy is commonly identified with the work of Rabbi Moshe Schreiber, the *Chatam Sofer* (1762–1839) whose famous aphorism “New is forbidden from the Torah” (Orach Chayim, sign 28) expresses the highly conservative character of Orthodoxy as a historical and religious phenomenon that stands in opposition to modernity, with a view to preserving tradition through halachic strictness (Samet 2005, 306). In this context, it seems that the meaning of *tradition* according to the Orthodoxy is nothing more than some ancient and obscure lifestyle, but certainly not something that demands total dedication and commitment.

This approach was cultivated by the historian Jacob Katz, whose primary achievement was the establishment of the concept of the Jewish tradition as a structural mentality, the main existence of which was based on communal institutions. Therefore, tradition according to Katz was a social structure, based on economic, educational, and political institutions, the activity of which was based on the needs of the individuals and which in turn also produced their common religious culture. Furthermore, traditional customs function as a *de facto* juridical system when the whole structure is consolidated into one communal unit (Katz 2000, 95). From

⁵ Although the roots of this term can be found in the book of Isaiah (56:5), only in the late 18th century did it obtain its contemporary meaning, as an informal name for a devoted religious Jew.

this perspective, it can be easily seen why “emancipation” - the granting of citizenship rights to Jews in Western and Central Europe - was perceived as dismantling the communal structure by offering individuals an alternative based on the modern state. This situation made belonging to the community a private matter and legitimized the choice to withdraw from it. In practice, emancipation was perceived as the cause of the disconnection of Jewish society from the loose organizing cultural affinity known as tradition, because it forfeited the exclusive self - authority of the community.

Contemporary scholars have provided a commentary on Katz’s historical explanations. Some have shown that the *Chatam Sofer* aphorism is a new version of an ancient Ashkenazi halachic principle, emphasizing the religious validity of customs based on traditional commitment (Kahana 2017, 96-99). From the Haredi point of view, in addition to its juridical meaning, the aphorism in question holds something much deeper that is related to the exclusive authority that can lead and shape the Jewish people’s communal character, from which Zionism is a complete deviation. A book whose purpose was to gather anti-Zionist articles summarized this view in the following question: “Are these the changers and innovators that were forbidden in the Torah?” It went on: “Who appointed you as builders of Israel in the form of a new home?” (Zalman Landau and Rabinowich 1900, 11).

According to the Haredi interpretation, the aphorism does not just reflect a halachic framework in a folkloric sentiment, but represents a fundamental social principle of total obligation to ancestral customs from a broader perspective. The Haredi approach does not consider this statement merely a matter of halachic reaction against modernity (as a new kind of practical halacha that might lead to secularity), but as an effort of *Chatam Sofer* to preserve the existence of the *community* as a religious obligation; the term “tradition” is used as the fundamental religious justification of this effort. This justification is based, in the thought of *Chatam Sofer*, on the belief that since receiving the *Torah* at Mount Sinai the people of Israel had committed themselves—as a general concept uniting all the current and future souls of the individuals who inhabit the community—to obey the regulations of the community to the same extent they obey the customs given to them by their own fathers and mothers (Chidushei Chatam Sofer, Psachim, 50/1). Therefore, observance of tradition equals observance of the community, and observance of the community is a religious duty, just as required in the fifth commandment.

If we accept the principle above as a starting point for discussion, it is clear, then, why Zionism encountered a suspicious attitude on the part of ultra-Orthodox rabbis. Zionism, as a modern nationalistic idea, proposed a new type of community that was no longer based on the cultural axis created by tradition. As Rabbi Shalom Ber Schneershon from Lubavitch, a strong opponent of Zionism, wrote: “Their main assumption is that all about Judaism is nationalism” (Schneershon 1986, 296). These

words contain not only a warning about a situation in which tradition has no binding effect, so that the community inevitably becomes secular, but also includes a criticism referring to another problem, namely that Zionism breaks the fundamental principle of the Jewish people's religious singularity.

Singularity and Land

Belief in the destiny of being the chosen people (*Am Segula*) is one of the foundational pillars of the Jewish faith. This destiny is a consistent thread running through the Bible, such as when Abraham was ordered to go to the land of Canaan, or later when the people of Israel were ordered to enter the land and inherit it. The close connection between religious singularity and the land as a religious space is frequently symbolized in many places in the Bible. One paradigmatic example is the biblical order to sacrifice the first fruits of crops in four short sentences which gathers the whole essence of the Jewish faith (Deuteronomy 26: 5-9). Jacob escaped to Egypt from Laban the Aramean (Rashi Commentary, Leviticus 26:5)⁶. His descendants grew up to be the enslaved people of Pharaoh. They were redeemed in the Exodus, and brought by the lord to the Land of Israel (Ibidem, 9). The mitzvah of presenting first fruits exemplifies the principle of the distinctiveness of the Jewish people by virtue of its requirement to recite a verse narrating the historical account of Jacob's departure from Laban's household, an event that played a pivotal role in the establishment of the nation of Israel. Consequently, this principle elucidates the Jewish religious perspective on political behaviour, underscoring why any conceptual alignment between political ideologies commonly embraced by different nations is viewed with suspicion within the religious Jewish framework.

Additionally, we can see here the tight connection between religious singularity and land in the Jewish religion. A significant proportion of the commandments outlined in the Torah are intricately linked to the land, specifically settling and conducting agricultural work within it. One of the halachic commandments that emphasize this can be found in a two-word commandment in Deuteronomy (7:2 "אל תחנם"). The Hebrew meaning can be understood in three different, but related, ways: (a) you should not give the idolaters a chance to encamp in the Holy Land, (b) you should not give idolaters favor, and (c) you should not appreciate their beauty (Babylonian Talmud, *Avoda Zara* 20a). The conceptual connection between these

⁶ This is the most common rabbinical interpretation for the first three words of the first sentence of the phrase.

three interpretations is clear; they refer to a crucial aspect of singularity, which is also shown in the prohibition against following the ways of the Gentiles (*Chukot HaGoym*)⁷; any imitation of non-Jewish customs or lifestyles is prohibited (Leviticus 18: 3; Deuteronomy 12: 30, 18: 10-11).

Although in the ancient and medieval Rabbinic literature the prohibition commonly only targeted clothes, hairstyles, architecture, and Idolatry,⁸ in modern times, especially because of Zionist actions, it was to receive a renewed political importance in the context of the Shmita polemic (as will be explained below). In this context, Zionism as a modern political movement came under attack by Haredi rabbis, who accused Zionism of blurring the singularity principle. Their criticisms against the attempt to treat the Jewish people in modern European terms, were also grounded in the fact that, after the destruction of the Second Temple, Jewish religious sentiment became the object of messianic expectation, framed within a metaphysical prohibition to renew the building of the land before the coming of the Messiah (Babylonian Talmud, *Ktuvot*, 111a; see Ravitzky 1997, 28-29). Thus, throughout Jewish history since the Bar Kochba revolt against the Roman empire (132–136 AD), the desire for redemption was mainly expressed in prayers and waves of migration whose main purpose was not building the land but only living in it out of a desire for spiritual ascension.

Zionism as a modern political idea offered a different way to treat this religious sentiment. Suddenly religious terms such as *redemption*, *Holy Land*, and *Jerusalem*, received new meanings and played a new and different kind of role in Jewish thought. Historical longing for the Messianic redemption was replaced by a vast political program to establish a "National Home" for the Jewish people in the "Land of Israel." Jerusalem, the city recognized in the book of Psalms as Zion, became the inspiration of the national Jewish movement and provided its name. These terminological changes symbolized the depth of the secularistic features of the Zionist Jewish horizon. Instead of hazy and distant dreams about supernatural salvation, the Zionist leaders suggested the adoption of values and practices derived from European nationalism.

This kind of political imitation was totally opposed by key Haredi leaders. The religious justification was taken from a phrase in a book written in the ninth century by Rabbi Seadia Gaon who lived in the city of Sura, Babylonia; he stated that the only meaning of the Jewish people as a nation is through its halachic system (see Gaon

⁷ There are two possible translations of the Hebrew word *Chukot* (חוקות): "laws" or "imitation." In either case, the prohibition against following foreign ways of living is clear.

⁸ The precise meaning of the prohibition has been subject to interpretation by many halachic scholars throughout history (e.g. Maimonides, *Mishne Tora*, Sefer HaMada, Ch. 11; R. Joseph Karo, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ab*, 178/1; Vilna Gaon, *Beur HaGra*, 178/7).

1970, 132). Through his use of the term *Sabria*,⁹ we can understand how he effectively dismantled the connection between the chosen people and the demand to practice the *Torah* in the chosen land.

From the Haredi point of view, the deviation from the religious concept to nationalism not only amounted to an increase of secularism, but also harmed the messianic vision of redemption, since it pushes back the expiration of the Talmudic prohibition on postponing the end, an essential and partial purpose of the complete religious vision of redemption (Ravitzky 1997, 29-32). In the next section, I show how this Haredi criticism of secularism was tested in the late nineteenth century in the context of debates around the continuation of the practice of *shmita*, and how these tensions led to the emergence of the distinct political approaches: separatism and pragmatism.

The *Shmita* Polemics of 1888: A Beginning of the Haredi Political Discourse

According to halachic law, every seventh year in the agricultural biblical cycle is a Sabbatical year. In that year, it is prohibited to conduct any kind of agricultural work in the holy land (see Safrai 1967, 1-5), a halachic rule known as *Shmitat Karkaot* (referred to as *shmita* herein; Exodus 26: 10-11, Leviticus 25: 1-7; Maimonides, Ch. 7). After the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem, efforts were made to maintain the *shmita* rules (Safrai 1967, 21). However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that from the Byzantine period in the 6th century until the first Zionist immigration wave in the late 19th century, the rules of *shmita* were not observed in the land of Israel, due to the lack of an active agricultural Jewish settlement.¹⁰

Thus, the renewed discussion of the question of *shmita* in the context of agricultural settlements in the Zionist era was innovative, especially given that the year 1888 (5649) was a year of *shmita*. In other words, this question went to the heart of the Haredi discourse about how to treat the attempt to establish a new kind of Jewish community. As a result, the Haredi discourse split into two main positions. One, taking a reluctantly passive stance, held an indifferent and pragmatic non-Zionist position. The second represented a strong anti-Zionist perspective that established an uncompromising theological conception demanding total separation from any kind of Zionist action.

⁹ The book is written in Jewish-Arabic (Arabic words written in Hebrew letters); translation of "בשרי ענאד" means "in its laws."

¹⁰ One unique exception is the case of Hasbaya (حاصبييا), a town in southern Lebanon with a Jewish community, which was mentioned in the context of preserving *shmita*. R. Yom Tov Tzahalon *responsa*, (news), Sign 176.

Historical Background

One of the points of tension and criticism between the old Jewish inhabitants of the land (*baYishuv haYashan*) and the first wave of Zionist settlers was the observance of halachic laws. For the old inhabitants, religious piety was their main reason for living (especially in the Holy Land), while the new settlers were much less committed to it. Nonetheless, although they cannot be defined under one homogeneous framework, some of the new settlement regulations stated the will to conduct life in the spirit of halachic law. For example, in the *Rishon LeZion* regulations book it was decided to establish a synagogue, a Mikveh (a Jewish bathhouse for purification), a school where people could learn Torah and employ teachers, a Kosher butcher, and a rabbi for consultations about religious questions and matters. Moreover, any conflict between the residents was to be resolved according to halachic law and with the consent of the rabbis of Jerusalem (Freiman 1912, 5, 8). Further evidence for religious sentiment in some of the new settlements is found in a description by *Rehovot's* founders: "The people of *Rehovot* were originally the type of home owners who were of the age and wisdom that the religious sentiment was very strong in their hearts [...] And from the first days of the foundation of the settlement, a prominent stamp of religiosity was imprinted on its public life and institutions" (Smilansky 1950, 33). Although relating to only two settlements, these descriptions surely represent that a large number of settlements held a communal religious sentiment (see Keniel 1998, 407-08). It is also quite clear, just by reading these two testimonies, why the question of keeping the *shmita* (i.e., abandoning working the land for a whole year) had turned from theory to practice and was an issue with significant economic consequences.

The beginning of the polemics around the *shmita* started in a letter sent in 1888 from the settlers of Gedera to Leo Pinsker, leader of the proto-Zionist movement, *Hovevei Zion*. In it, they wrote about the catastrophic economic consequences of abandoning of the land in the year of *shmita*. Pinsker then wrote to a R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin from Volozhin and recommend that he ask R. Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, head of the Jewish court in Kaunas (Laskov 1979, 288-89). For R. Spektor, the first person to consult with was R. Shmuel Salant, head of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem (and the Halachic leader of the old Yishuv inhabitants).

In his letter, R. Spektor asked R. Salant to consider the option of selling the land to non-Jewish people for one year, similar to the sale of chametz in Passover, so that the settlers could continue agricultural work (Igrot R. Yitzchak Elchanan 2004, 195). R. Shmuel Salant's answer was clear-cut. Any kind of anti-halachic premise - including the sale of land to a non-Jewish person for one year - was totally forbidden. The land had to be completely abandoned. Such a prohibition was an interpretation of the biblical prohibition against selling parts of the Holy Land to non-Jewish people

(Deuteronomy 7: 2), who might use it for idolatry (Torat Rabenu Shmuel meSalant 1998, 175-76).

R. Salant's answer did not surprise R. Spektor, for he understood the broader political context, influenced as it was by two distinct political powers. On one side were the settlers, supported by the *Hovevei Zion* movement and especially one of their religious supporters, R. Shmuel Mohaliver from Bialystok. On the other side were the leaders of the old inhabitants who totally opposed the new settlers for their inadequate devotion to halachic law. In this situation, R. Spektor's sympathies lay with the settlers, and he was willing to permit the sale of the land, but it seems that the pressure against this action was too great. For example, he once wrote to R. Mohaliver about 17 rabbis shouting strong reproaches at him for daring to allow the sale, to whom he did not even bother to reply (Igrot R. Yitzchak Elchanan 2004, 306).

His disregard of their reproaches is unsurprising, given R. Spektor's correct understanding of the gap between these two competing perceptions. According to the old Yishuv religious leaders, any kind of deviation from strict halachic law was no less than a new path towards secularity. In that case, the inclusion of non-pure halachic reasons, such as nationalistic ideas, was forbidden. There was only one way to preserve the *shmita*, and the new settlers should, or rather must, adopt the strict way (just as it was done by *Petach Tikva* settlers), namely by observing the abovementioned Sabbatical year (Torat Rabenu Shmuel meSalant 1998, 176). However, for R. Spektor, this question—occurring as it did in a period of changes for the Jewish people—required a pragmatic point of view. From his position as the *de facto* chief Rabbi of all eastern European Jewry, it was obvious that in this case the nationalistic reasons could not be ignored. The question was not whether the new settler communities would continue to exist, but rather was about what their religious character would be. Another (and no less important) matter was the involvement of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, the main sponsor of many settlements. For R. Spektor, the motivation of the Baron was ensuring the "holiness of the Land" (Igrot R. Yitzchak Elchanan 2004, 300) so preserving the *shmita* as much as possible was also in his interest. Thus, one key challenge involved maintaining good relations with the Baron and his bureaucrats while avoiding any harm to the settlers who, as mentioned before, also held a strong religious sentiment despite their desire for flexibility on *shmita*. Therefore, all of these contradictions came together in a completely political case that required clever political conduct, relying on a good sense of public responsibility; if handled incorrectly, the danger was not only economic disaster for the settlers' families, but also the destruction of the whole new settlement action (Ibidem, 203).

Above all, R. Spektor's efforts to resolve this case reflect his pragmatic approach. The easy way would have been for him to join the prohibition put forth by the leaders of the old settlements and close the case. However, he decided to find a pragmatic

way which took into account the challenges of the Jewish community that wished to continue to preserve tradition but under new conditions. In the end, R. Spektor agreed to allow the sale of the land, but only as a concrete instruction for the upcoming year of *shmita* and not for future ones.

New Communities or a New Nation?

The discourse referred to in polemics around the *shmita* revealed two political intuitions—separatism and pragmatism—which can each be linked to a geographical background. It is no coincidence that supporters of the land sale permit came from Europe and those who opposed it were from the old Yishuv, mainly Jerusalem. The main difficulty involved the question of how to treat the character of the new settlements as new and modern Jewish communities in the Holy Land.

From the Haredi point of view, the *shmita* polemics were used to justify the importance of the ancestral tradition preservation, in line with the writings of the *Chatam Sofer*. If one of the obligations that the souls of the people of Israel received in Mount Sinai, as the *Chatam Sofer* wrote, was to accept public rules that held as strongly as the rules put forth by the parents, and which implied total loyalty to the ancestors (Chidushei Chatam Sofer, Psachim 50/2) how should such a modern kind of Jewish community be treated? Was the attempt to create a new definition of Jewish nationalism, beside the obligation to the Torah, completely contrary to the essence of the Jewish people's reason for existence, as they perceived it to be? How can the traditional community exist if Judaism is not only a religion based on common beliefs and commandments, but a destiny that must be fulfilled in a certain land, especially when this destiny demands from the halachic law to be much more pragmatic for nationalistic reasons? As shown above, the debate about the *shmita* raised all these challenges to the Haredi worldview (Friedman 1974, 470).

Between Separatism and Pragmatism

In later years, especially after the establishment of the state of Israel, the Haredi answer to these questions was split between two approaches. The pragmatists were led by R. Avaraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, *HaChazon Ish*, leader of the Litvak (Lithuanian) community in Israel, whose main perceptions were quite similar to those of R. Spektor (Brown 2011, 280). The separatists were led by R. Yeol Moshe Teitelboim, the Leader of Satmer Chasidic community. Each one of them became representative of the two distinct approaches shaped by the *shmita* polemics. The main question remained the same, but this time applied to a much larger scale. Namely, how to consider the state of Israel? As a new kind of a Jewish community, in which case efforts should be made

to make it more traditional, or as a complete and irreparable deviation from tradition, in which case it should be considered as an enemy to be fought or at the very least completely ignored.

The Chazon Ish showed signs of pragmatism at the very beginning of his leadership, which were manifested in the entry of an ultra-Orthodox party into the political game in Israel. Contrastingly, the Rabbi of Satmar presented any political recognition of the state, even a vote in the elections, as an unforgivable sin (Teitelboim 1984). One way or another, it was clear that the Zionist perception of the Jewish people as a nation, which—as shown above—was expressed already at the end of the 19th century in the question of the status of the *balacha* in political issues such as the *shmita*, caused a split in Haredi discourse into two main positions. If tradition means a sense of deep loyalty, feeling, and obligation to the ancestors' way of living, there are different political methods to approach the question of maintaining tradition in modern times. One, taking a reluctantly passive stance, held an indifferent non-Zionist position, and was pragmatic in questions related to the religious character of the new communities. The second, a strong anti-Zionist perspective, established an uncompromising theological conception that saw Zionism as no less than as an act of Satan which aimed to demolish and replace the pattern of the traditional community.

In other words, the separatist position held by the radical anti-Zionists surprisingly had a common ideological basis with Zionism, which sees the Jewish people as a nation, whose essence cannot therefore be changed under any circumstances. Contrastingly, the pragmatic view considered the Jewish people as a religious community, and therefore treated the Jewish state as a hollow political tool, which enabled their political flexibility.

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Лиор Алперович

Између сепаратизма и прагматизма: јудаизам као национални идентитет у политичком дискурсу Хареди Јевреја

Сажетак: Ционистичка перцепција јеврејског народа као нације утицала је на поделу унутар ултра-ортодоксног дискурса 1930-тих година на две главне позиције. Прва се заснива на пасивном, али невољном, ставу индиферентности према ционистичком покрету. Друга се заснива на јакој анти-ционистичкој перспективи која држи до теолошке концепције око које нема компромиса - да је ционизам дело сатане. Након формирања државе Израел, ултра-ортодоксни лидери били су присиљени да одлуче како ће се политички понашати у "Јеврејској држави". Ове две позиције обликовале су дискурс. Рабин Аврахам Јесахају Карелиц предложио је праграмтични приступ који има утилитарну природу. Други приступ захтева одвајање и непријатељски статус према самој идеји да би ултра-ортодоксни Јевреји могли уопште да буду део политичке игре у Израелу, и њега води рабин Јоел Моше Тајтелбаум. Истражујући идеолошке, теолошке и правне основе ових приступа, овај чланак показује да је позиција коју има Самтар Ребе по питању карактера јеврејског народа веома слична ционистичким и ултра-ортодоксним позицијама, које виде јеврејски народ као нацију. Са друге стране, прагматисти виде јеврејски народ као верску заједницу, па стога третирају државу само као политички алат који им омогућава политичку флексибилност.

Кључне речи: ултра-ортходоксија, традиција, халаха, политика, Израел, Хареди