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# Zionism, the Post-Zionists and Myth: A Critique

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## **An Overview of the Post-Zionists' Position**

During the past few years, “Post-Zionists” involved in social-historical research have voiced their views in a number of books and articles. What are the basic ideas and implications of these works? The present article undertakes to present and evaluate them. But first an introductory summary of their fundamental position is in order.<sup>1</sup>

Post-Zionists maintain that during the 40-year period extending from the 1920s to the 1960s of the 20th century, the Zionist Organization embarked on a campaign to disseminate Zionist ideology. It engaged the services of a large number of writers and scholars to influence public opinion through publications and educational activities. With their help, Zionist ideas penetrated almost all walks of life among the Jews of Palestine and later of Israel. Their daily lives during the period under consideration were permeated with concern about Jewry's collective life as viewed by Zionism.

According to Post-Zionists, people commissioned by the Zionist Organization spread a message constructed on the foundation of a series of myths purposely generated to mislead the public. Not only was this effort a kind of conspiracy on the part of the Zionist movement, but also the tales and legends circulated by the agents of Zionism were fabrications for purposes of propaganda, to infect Jewry with the “ideological germs” of Zionism.<sup>2</sup> The stories they told derived from historical events or from religious literary sources, such as the Bible, The Books of the Maccabees, the Talmud, etc. The propaganda agents embellished and transformed historical events and painted a falsified portrait of the persons involved as heroes and martyrs. The Zionists intended them to serve as role models for the Jewish youth of Palestine and Europe so they would be prepared to devote their energies, even sacrifice their lives, for the Zionist cause.

Post-Zionist works address the basic ideas, beliefs, and concepts of Zionism voiced by people from all walks of life in a vast library of written works of all kinds produced during the 40 formative years of Jewish society in Palestine/Israel. Post-Zionists also focus on particular events and historical figures. Among the figures discussed by Post-Zionist writers, sometimes in book-length treatises, are Bar-Kochba, Trumpeldor, the story of Masada, and others.<sup>3</sup> There can be no doubt that the overriding goal of the Post-Zionists' historical research and/or theoretical work is to discredit Zionism as thoroughly as possible.

The basic ideas of Zionism consisted of political myths, assert the Post-Zionists. These myths were singled out for severe criticism, ridicule and even fierce denunciation. One common criticism is that the Zionist myths disregard the tragic and destructive nature of Zionist ideas and beliefs, as well as of their underlying historical events. The retelling of certain historical events stressed their heroic features at the expense of the story's disastrous outcome. One such story is the Jews' defense against the Romans of the hilltop fortress of Masada in the Judean desert during the two years, 70 to 72 C.E., following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. Finally, in the year 72, the defenders decided to kill one another rather than be captured and enslaved by the Romans. Zionist ideology, like the myths on which it is based, leads to death and destruction, and not to any heroic glory that the myths erroneously would have us believe.<sup>4</sup>

It follows that Zionist ideology as well as its historical myths are basically prevarication and deception that misled several generations of Jews. Moreover, Zionist ideology was restricted to the fate and future of the Jews, to the “redemption” of the Jewish people to the exclusion of others, particularly the Arabs. Zionism was, and is, ethnocentric, and the Jews of Palestine/Israel who adopted Zionist beliefs are guilty of the crime of ethnocentrism. Indeed,

Zionism is itself a criminal phenomenon, in the view of the Post-Zionists. These are the main themes of Post-Zionist writings that are examined in the present essay.

In the Post-Zionists' writings, (Post-Zionism is hereafter referred to as PZ), the term myth is used to label Zionism's basic tenets, and therefore deserves close examination.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Meanings of Myth**

At least two diametrically opposed meanings of the term myth are in use today. One is a colloquial and derogatory meaning alluding to falsehood or deception. In this sense myth is attributed to the way in which an individual, group or institution presents a false version of a person's life or of past events. The myth, while often based on a set of events that actually occurred or on the lives of real people, is expanded and edited to the point where it is no longer historically credible and has lost its original meaning. The PZ writers assert that, on occasion, Zionist "myths" were composed with the explicit intention of presenting a distorted view of matters for purposes of political or religious gain. Contemporary critique of these myths, say PZ writers, seeks to expose these myths to the public in the hope it will elicit revulsion and ridicule.

A second meaning of the term myth in contemporary usage is prominent in the writings of philosophers, anthropologists, historians and other scholars. As a philosopher of human culture, Ernst Cassirer<sup>6</sup> wrote at length about the symbolic nature of several of humanity's basic cultural forms, such as art, language, religion, myth and science.

Cassirer<sup>7</sup> contends that the central message of myth can be grasped by understanding its symbolism, i.e. the ideas and/or feelings for which it stands, without recourse to the historical or psychological circumstances of its origin (called "the genetic fallacy"). A myth constitutes a cultural phenomenon in its own right, with its own unique features and meaning. Myth symbolizes a perspective on human consciousness of both nature and the human spirit, which is to say it refers simultaneously to both the external and internal manifestations of existence. Each myth has its special spiritual meaning.<sup>8</sup> Myth is an inextricable component of the symbolic systems serving civilization's needs for expressing values, goals, feelings and ideas.

In this sense myth is an idea or a story that expresses people's innermost response to the natural, social and personal world. Since time immemorial, myths have been generated by individuals and by groups, and are a universal cultural phenomenon. Moreover, they can reflect many different levels of human development, from the extremely primitive to the most sophisticated and spiritually edifying. Myths contain elements of both a very limited local kind and of a broad universal kind. They may undergo many alterations in form and substance as they migrate from one culture to another and evolve over the course of time. In short, myths are a basic manifestation of human symbolic culture.

Like all forms of literature, myths are expressed through the medium of symbols, not through logical or formal exposition. The myth consists of the story or narrative, the ideas and feelings conveyed. Symbols are its means of expression. The ideas or stories that comprise a myth symbolize a range and depth of feeling and meaning that appear in a form that stands for, i.e. symbolizes, these feelings and meanings. Often myths must be deciphered and interpreted, although the feelings and meaning expressed in some myths can be transparent. Myths warrant serious study for their historical, psychological and cultural meaning which can reveal the inner life and outlook of nations and people everywhere.

Cassirer emphasizes the symbolic meaning of cultural products in all of the domains of human culture. Myths woven around events, figures or ideas consist of symbols employed as

media for expressing meaning and belief as understood by the myths' authors (tribes, groups or individuals) as well as by those who hear or read them. These symbols assume both formal and informal features. One prominent example of a formal "mythical" symbol is the use of objects or verbal pronouncements during national, religious or secular public ceremonies. These objects or pronouncements are the means for expressing the contents of the myth.

In all societies, symbols of many kinds are thought to possess, or express, spiritual power capable of lifting people's minds and feelings to a loftier level. This view does not involve adopting the relatively primitive notion that the symbol's power is inherent (in a magical way) in some material substance employed to express a symbol, whether that be an object or words. Language, lighted candles, flags, a cross, music, a Star of David, a prayer, reading the Torah in synagogues, poems, blowing the *shofar*, a painting or sculpture, body movements, and so forth almost ad infinitum, are all examples of symbols that stand for ideas, strivings or feelings. On specific occasions, these symbols represent or propel an uplifting of men's spirits. This spiritual power is not "located" in the object or in the words. That approach is actually a manifestation of belief in magic. In some rare instances, the object ceases to perform the function of a symbol and is considered actually to be some other object of greater sanctity or power. The classic example of that phenomenon is the ritual of the Eucharist in which, as asserted by much of Christianity,<sup>9</sup> the wine and wafer *are or become* the blood and flesh of Jesus. An object or words are symbols only when people understand that they represent or express ideas or feelings not present in the object or words themselves. Undeniably, millions of people from all faiths, cultural spheres and nations, cling to the belief that the symbols' power or sanctity inheres in the object itself, rather than in the ideas or feelings for which it stands.

Symbols of extraordinary national, social, religious and psychological significance appear in Judaic-Hebraic sources from all historical periods, beginning with the first words of Genesis and continuing to today. They are devoid of any suggestion of possessing a primitive incarnation of (magical) power in the objects or words, however it may seem to semi-informed observers.<sup>10</sup>

Some myths have been designated as political myths whose implications are discussed by Henry Tudor.<sup>11</sup> He cites the definition of Georges Sorel<sup>12</sup> regarding the meaning of myth. Sorel asserts that myth

provides a vision of the future... It gives men a fixed point by reference to which they can express their feelings and explain their experience...without stultifying their will to act... Myths...depict the future...not description of things, but expressions of a determination to act... No doubt, many religious ideas are to be found in myths...but it is not the case that all myths contain religious ideas or that we have any good reason to regard myth as a kind of religion.<sup>13</sup>

The goal of a particular myth and its meaning are completely dependent on the context in which it is presented and the intentions of those who present it. The original or ancient meaning of a myth does not necessarily survive in the meaning attributed to it by people in a later era. Its original meaning is discarded like any other notion that has outworn its usefulness.<sup>14</sup> While they may contain religious elements, they are not to be confused with religion, as Cassirer warned,<sup>15</sup> even though their followers "believe" the myth. Myths are historical phenomena like all others. To deny their historical meaning by dismissing them as falsehood, as Post-Zionists do in relation to the ideas of Zionism, is to fail completely to understand them.

Theories that predict social events or situations can qualify as myths because they connect many events to one another in a causal order that hypothetically channels them to their

predicted outcome. These connections, and their anticipated consequences, are myths and not history if they exist only in the thoughts of the person or people who predicted them and do not find expression in people's behavior. They remain their dreamer's "myth". Other myths become translated into reality because they directed people's overt behavior. Once they become reality, they are, of course, no longer only myths. Undoubtedly, some myths turn out to be sorely misleading, and their followers are left with bitter disappointment. That may or may not deter them from their faith in the myth.

Myth is not to be equated with history despite their similarities, and despite the fact that the two are frequently interwoven. Tudor noted that the historian's methods of evidence differ significantly from those of mythmakers. Historical statements are believed to be true by citing official documents, eyewitness reports, archaeological finds and so forth. The view of the world in myths is always a practical view. Its aim is either to advocate a certain course of action or to justify acceptance of an existing state of affairs. Myths are believed to be true, not because the historical evidence is compelling, but because they make sense of men's present experience.

Events are selected for inclusion in a myth partly because they coincide with what men think ought to have happened, and partly because they are consistent with the drama as a whole...it is a fact that, in their practice, men often view themselves as acting in the light of eternally valid principles. They wish their deeds to be possessed of a significance that is more than merely temporal, and they plunge themselves into practical affairs in the hope of finding some way to overcome the destructiveness of time.<sup>16</sup>

The future is always of primary importance for myth and is invariably the subject of much speculation. Myths provide a kind of compass to assist people, as groups or as individuals, to set out their path into the future.

The theory of social change formulated by Karl Marx, for example, is a classic example of a "political" myth. What Marxian theory predicted as the desired consequences of the proletarian revolution, namely the establishment of a classless society, did not become reality, and thereby disappointed its devotees.<sup>17</sup> The dream became a nightmare – which, of course, is also a dream – as do many myths that initially inspire people to express their creative abilities and to give direction to their lives. Such myths can eventually be perceived as nightmares rather than dreams because, at some time after their emergence, they no longer exude a pleasant and hopeful atmosphere. The life situation and conditions that prevailed at the time of their creation no longer exist. Dreams associated with the advent of a new king in some country frequently became a nightmare not long afterward because nothing changed in reality. Even the dreams accompanying the establishment of the League of Nations following World War I, and to some extent the dreams associated in or own day with the appearance of the United Nations after World War II, often take on a nightmarish character.

The Marxian myth galvanized the political and social behavior of large numbers of people, and, as such, provided direction to people's lives. They certainly did not perceive Marx's theory as a pack of lies, or as a vision that was destined to disappoint them. Had that been the case, far fewer people would have continued to direct their behavior on the basis of dialectical materialism. Undoubtedly Marx's followers sincerely believed his theory as a reliable depiction of the past and a prediction of future events. A depiction of the past by a myth or theory that does not comply completely with the description offered in history books is not necessarily an impediment that would prevent people from acting in congruence with the myth or theory, unless it blatantly contradicts publicly known history.<sup>18</sup>

## The Rift Between the Post-Zionists and the Jewish People

During the past two centuries Jewry has seen the emergence of several major cleavages between Jewish groups of varying persuasions. On occasion we encounter publications that shed some light on a rupture within the Jewish people that hitherto was relatively ignored or largely unknown. While anti-Zionist groups have been outspoken in their opposition to Zionism ever since the latter emerged in history, their Post-Zionist derivative is less recognized. Books by the Post-Zionists embody what Collingwood<sup>19</sup> wrote (albeit in a slightly different sense) about the historian who, when all is said and done, discovers him/herself in the text he/she presents to readers no less than revealing the period and people he/she wrote about.

What the Post-Zionists<sup>20</sup> can see in their own work testifies to a profound rift between them and the entire Zionist enterprise since its inception in *Hibbat Zion* in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That includes a rift with the countless numbers of Jews, in the past and present, some of who shared in Zionism's realization in Palestine/Israel. They were literally saved from the *Galut* (in all the possible meanings implied by that term). Indeed, it is fair to say that the rift is between the Post-Zionists and the Jewish people itself, very few of who take exception to Zionism in the manner evident in Post-Zionist writings.

The Post-Zionists were born and raised in Zionist Palestine/Israel. It was in Israel that they developed their apathy toward, and alienation from, and in some, a burning hatred for, Zionism. Some Post-Zionists expressed their attitudes in writing only after leaving Israel to live elsewhere. Their rift with the Jewish people can be characterized as "opposition infused with rage". Except for rare intervals, books by Post-Zionists are suffused with a searing animus toward Zionism and Jews unparalleled in the Western academic world. This aspect of the Post-Zionist writings is rarely mentioned in public, in or outside of Israel. Why and how this phenomenon developed, of Israel-born Jews who live in or outside of Israel, who make a career of defaming and denouncing their own people, are questions that deserve an answer that cannot be provided here: They require separate investigation.

It is also of interest to ask how it happens that the academic world accords recognition to allegedly scholarly works that are so blatantly suffused with animosity toward the object of their study. Similar attitudes toward other peoples or groups would be summarily discredited as prejudiced, unbecoming scholarly work, and morally objectionable.

## The Zionist Myths According to the Post-Zionists

An appropriate title for books written by Post-Zionists could be: "An Encyclopedia of Jewish and Zionist Myths". Every idea associated with Zionism, whether drawn from the world of Jewish history, religious tradition, and literature, or from Zionist thought in the modern era, receives the imprimatur of "myth". But the Post-Zionists have not adopted the term myth in its universal symbolic sense of expressing people's innermost view of the world. Rather, they employ the term myth in its pejorative meaning of fraud and deception. Affixing this sign of Cain to the basic concepts of Zionism leads Post-Zionists to assume that their readers will automatically consider those ideas to be repulsive and disgraceful.

Just what are the basic ideas of Zionism that were given the honorific title of "myth?" It is to those concepts that we must turn now. Each one appears frequently in Post-Zionist works (see Chapter One, called "Idealistic Intoxication", in the volume by Oz Almog).<sup>21</sup> In the following section of this article, the Zionist myths as viewed by the Post-Zionists are presented first, followed by my comments and critique.

Post-Zionists call these concepts “myths” even though many people consider all or some of them to be overt historical events or facts. It is important to observe that these concepts are not all on the same phenomenological level. Some concepts are abstract theories, while others refer to manifest behavior. The (Hebrew) term “*aliya*” can serve as an example. In English, *aliya* literally means “going up” or “ascending”. But in common parlance it refers to “immigration” to Israel. Judaism and Zionism always referred to a Jew who comes from some country in the *Galut* and settles in Israel as “going up” to the Land of Israel. Since the period of the Second Temple, Jewish tradition considered the act of settling in Israel as possessing an added spiritual dimension and not just a physical act of immigration from one country to another. This dimension of significance added by Jewry long ago to the idea of immigration to the Holy Land is what labels this concept a mythological idea in the eyes of the Post-Zionists. The huge chasm separating them from the majority of Jews who do not share their point of view is expressed quite pointedly in the totally different way in which this concept is used by the Post-Zionists. In the view of the Post-Zionists, attributing a “mystical” notion of spiritual ascent to the act of immigrating to Israel, appears to be not merely senseless but ridiculous, or, at the very least, superstitious. Hence it is a mythical idea. For Jews who retain a historical Jewish and/or Zionist identification, this concept symbolizes an entire world of positive spiritual and social-cultural meaning whose manifestations are embodied in the political and social reality of the Jewish people in Israel. That is the rationale and implication of placing the stamp of “myth” on one of the basic concepts of Judaism and Zionism. The term “myth” clearly seeks to empty the concept of “*aliya*” of its historical-traditional-symbolic meaning, and reduce it to the level of the ordinary event of immigration.

The list of Zionist myths according to the Post-Zionists, include the following: (Any comment made by this author during the presentation of the Post-Zionists’ ideas is initialed with SS).

**Historical Determinism** – Jewish life follows a path largely set out for it in the past, in ancient Jewish history. The alleged relationship between modern times and the period of the Bible is akin to a “blood pact” between the Land and the Jews.<sup>22</sup> This pact “between Biblical mythology and Israeli life in the present”<sup>23</sup> served for Zionism as proof of the legitimacy for the conquest by Jews in recent times<sup>24</sup> of the Land of Israel. Schoolbooks quoted sections from Rabbinic literature, from the Books of the Maccabees, and from numerous works of writers and educators commissioned to serve the goals of Zionism.

All of this was done to create a link between “the mythological past of the Jewish nation to the present days of the (Zionist-SS) pioneers”.<sup>25</sup>

**“Going up” and “ascending”** (to the Land of Israel – SS) Zionism believed that it was elevating the Jews to a higher plane of existence. Each new project to create Jewish communities in Palestine/Israel expressed an “ascent on a moral and spiritual scale”<sup>26</sup>: ascent to the Land, ascent to Jerusalem, ascent to the mountains, and so forth. This repeated use of the term “ascent” (*aliya*) is “mythological semantics” inherited from Jewish religious tradition.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the term was borrowed from religion confirms that it is sheer prevarication and lacks basic morality. Jews who came from other countries to reside in Palestine/Israel were simply immigrants whose presence here was, and is, “**a random collection of individuals**”.<sup>28</sup> Any other description is religio-mythology, according to Oz Almog.

**Delivers Us from the Hands of Our Enemies** – The myth of “the redemption of Israel” is fundamental in Judaism and Zionism. It states that “the Jewish people rises from the dust to be delivered at the last moment” by the God of Israel the Redeemer. Jewish folklore on many holidays, such as Passover, Purim, Lag B’Omer, and Chanukah, repeats the refrain: “More

than one tyrant rose up to annihilate us.” Children in kindergartens and schools are “brainwashed” with these ideas.<sup>29</sup>

**The Few Against Many** – “The quality, uniqueness and superiority of the Jewish people...comprise one of the important myths of Judaism and Zionism.”<sup>30</sup>

This myth “is salient in the war stories so obviously influenced by Hollywood’s Western movies that were very popular during the 1940s and 1950s.”<sup>31</sup> The Israeli public perceived the Sinai Campaign as a miracle whose only explanation was this myth. The Sinai Campaign “endowed the myth of ‘the few against the many’ with enormous power in the eyes of the Israeli public.” Once again, the small and weak Jewish people – said public sentiment – overcame powerful opponents who outnumbered us.<sup>32</sup>

SS: On this matter Almog suddenly surprises readers of his book by noting that many Israeli publications following the Sinai Campaign used phrases such as “a handful of soldiers”, or “a small group that saved the Negev”. These and similar expressions reflected the real numbers of the troops aligned against each other. Almog states that “the myth and reality...reinforced one another.”<sup>33</sup> The author unexpectedly links this myth to reality while all other references in his book to myths locate them squarely in the realm of fraud and deception that bear no relation whatsoever to reality.

**The Binding of Isaac: Abraham the Pioneer (*Halutz*), and Isaac the *Sabra*** – For purposes of consumption by the public, the young soldiers who fell in the battles (SS: the reference here is directed in particular to the battles of the War of Independence in 1948) were depicted as sacrificial lambs on the altar of the nation and of the homeland. This interpretation of the Biblical story of the Binding of Isaac in the book of Genesis appeared with unusually high frequency in the Hebrew literature of the day. The Zionist interpretation of the topic of “sacrifice” removes it from its objective context. In the “objective” Post-Zionist and post-modern context, a soldier who falls in battle is someone “whose luck ran out and who lost his life”.

The Zionists transferred this objective view to a mythological plane by asserting that the soldier consciously sacrificed his life as an act of benevolent free will for the sake of the nation, as an act of exalted patriotism.<sup>34</sup> The mythological component in the public’s collective memory attributes to the soldiers who were killed the motive of self-sacrifice for the sake of saving the nation. Jews in Palestine of the 1948-generation, and their heirs, thought that the soldiers were a link in the chain of historical continuity with the Jews of past generations who died “for the sanctification of the Name”. That tradition has been a leitmotif in Jewish history since the days of the Bar-Kochba rebellion against Rome (135 C.E.) and the ten martyrs, through the Middle Ages, World War II and Israel’s wars with the Arabs, as if the tradition of self sacrifice links the war dead of our day with their ancestors of previous generations.<sup>35</sup>

The Israeli public “internalized” the myth of the “Binding of Isaac” as if they made peace with the fact that their loved ones who died in battle offered themselves as sacrifices on the altar of the homeland.<sup>36</sup>

**The Redemption of Israel** (the Jewish people) – “Jewish history aims from its very inception toward the goal of realizing the Zionist dream in the Land of Israel.” “The Law of Redemption” is a fundamental component of Zionist ideology.<sup>37</sup>

In the words of David Ben-Gurion:

Whatever is new in our generation...cannot be understood without seeing that the vision of The Messianic Redemption is planted in the heart of the Jewish people... This is true not only after

the destruction of the Second Temple, but ever since the days of the first literary prophets...this vision has filled the annals of Jewish history...with the certainty of the laws of Nature...<sup>38</sup>

This conception prevailed among most of Israel's leaders who believed wholeheartedly in this myth. The schools' curriculum and textbooks present the establishment of the State of Israel as "a victory for the relentless striving for Zion" by the Jewish people throughout the ages.<sup>39</sup> In a widely disseminated history book of that time, Dr. Ephraim Shmueli<sup>40</sup> summarized how Cabbalists viewed the subject of Exile and Redemption. Shmueli wrote:

Wherever Israel was in Exile, the *Sh'chinah* (God's Presence) went into exile with them to protect them... On the great day, at the end of time, the Land of Israel will return to serve as the center of supreme holiness and the complete unification of God with Israel (the Jewish people – SS). The masses of Israel will assemble in the Land of Israel.<sup>41</sup>

Almog comments that this quotation by Shmueli from the writings of the Cabbalists was inserted in the school texts "without interpretation or historical analysis, and without presenting the context in which they appeared. That resulted in a failure to distinguish between history and ideology, between what is and what should be."

The proximity in time of the Holocaust to the defeat of the Nazis and the establishment of the State of Israel reinforced in the mind of the Jewish public the relationship of Zionism to the "realization of prophecy" according to "the mythological scenario".<sup>42</sup> Almog goes on to claim that Yosef Tabenkin (SS: one of the leaders of the Labor movement in Palestine/Israel) made an additional "contribution" to the brainwashing of the Jews by suggesting that a special chapter be added to the Passover *Haggadah* relating the story of the Holocaust, since the *Haggadah* is devoted entirely to the myth of Jewish redemption.<sup>43</sup> (SS: A version of the Passover *Haggadah* with a great deal of material about the Holocaust and the new nation of Israel was edited in 1950 by Rabbi Menachem Kasher in New York.)

**Jewry's Right to the Land of Israel** – Zionism justified the settlement of Jews in Palestine by claiming that it was historical justice, says Oz Almog. In his view, use of the name "The Land of Israel" expresses the Zionist belief in the right of the Jewish people to reclaim the territory over which, they believed, Jewry possessed ownership. Nor was Jewry's right of ownership over the Land of Israel questioned by the representatives to the Zionist Congress toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even by those who favored accepting the British suggestion to settle Europe's Jews in Uganda.<sup>44</sup>

A variety of practical and moral explanations were offered as to Jewry's rights to the Land of Israel, but "mythological" reasons of a meta-physical character were invoked as well alongside the rational explanations.<sup>45</sup> The main explanation cited the belief in God's promise to give this land to the Israelites. This myth convinced the native-born Jews (*sabras*) that it was justified for the Jews to take possession of land abandoned by the Arabs during the War of Independence (which, in Hebrew, was also called The War of Liberation).

If the territory they liberated was ancestral soil, the *sabra*-warriors...were not just second generation immigrants from Europe, but were carrying on the tradition of Biblical youth... The myth implanted the sense of being natives, of ownership, in the *sabras* who were actually immigrants or the offspring of immigrants.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Post-Zionists' Goal is to Vilify Zionism, Not to Reveal the Truth**

Readers of Almog's book, *The Sabra – A Profile* could ask why the author devotes such a sizeable portion of his book to a presentation of his view of Zionist ideology? Zionist

ideology was not developed by native-born Israeli youth: They inherited it from their European-born parents and grandparents, some of whom settled in Palestine/Israel, as Almog indicates several times in his book. The answer is that the primary purpose for deliberating at such length about Zionist ideology is to negate it as completely as possible. First and foremost Post-Zionists seek to show that religious ideas, national patriotism and a host of other condemnable features contaminate Zionism.

The Post-Zionists' notion about "Zionist myths" shares nothing with the philosophical or historical approach to understanding myth as a universal cultural phenomenon. In fact, the Post-Anti-Zionists actually abandon academic criteria and grossly neglect objectivity in their historical studies. Many Jews have the false impression that the Post-Zionists constitute a typical group of academic social-science researchers who tell their story as they find it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead, the PZ authors write the kind of political propaganda that they accuse Zionism of using. They insist on identifying Israel Jewry's efforts at transmitting Jewish historical tradition to schoolchildren as an act of brainwashing. That claim had been made earlier in several books on education written by the well-known Israeli novelist and short-story writer, Yizhar Smilansky, who summarily denigrates the transmission of all historical-cultural values as indoctrination.

What Yizhar Smilansky, Yael Zerubavel, Oz Almog and other anti-Zionists fail to mention is that all nations, cultural and political groups, religions, families and ideological groups (including radical left-wing groups of all kinds), not just the Jews, consider it to be their moral and existential responsibility to transmit their heritage to the next generation. No group willingly commits historical and social suicide by creating a cultural vacuum for its children, which is precisely what the Smilanskys, Almogs and their nihilist ideological associates advocate. We shall return to this topic later.

Post-Zionist publications are aimed primarily at vilifying Zionism, not necessarily at telling the truth about recent Jewish history, as they would have us believe. They do not assert, as they might have, that Zionism declined because its social-historical or cultural tasks are no longer relevant, and that during the course of its 100-year existence, new tasks and goals emerged that have replaced the older Zionist cause. The title "Post-Zionism" might suggest to some people that it was modeled on the post-modern school of thought. But post-modern thinkers did not become embroiled in the morass of trying to demolish, defame, delegitimize or ridicule all of the thinkers or ideas that flourished during the "Modern" period to which the "post-Modernists" were allegedly the heirs. Post-Zionists sought to create the impression that they were advancing intellectually along with the Post-Modernists of the Western world in terms of their interpretation of history and society. Their proclamation of the "decline of Zionism" was intended to sound like the harbinger of a new era that historically was replacing Zionism, as if the Post-Zionists were saying that Zionism had outlived its purpose.

What the Post-Zionists said in fact is very different. To their mind, Zionism was always a criminal enterprise founded on lies and distortions. The Post-Zionists are bitter enemies of Zionism. No other characterization befits a group of people whose animosity toward Zionism drives them to make statements in print such as: "...the pioneer ideology insinuated itself into the most miniscule capillaries of society's blood stream until it became an all-encompassing religious way of life."<sup>47</sup> This statement and many others of similar import have no legitimate place in an historical or sociological study of any kind and deserve unequivocal rejection by investigators regardless of their personal political orientation. These statements should arouse serious questions in the minds of readers regarding the nature of the feelings and thoughts of

those who employ such grotesque metaphors. “Post-Zionism” sounds like a respectable academic title, but it clearly serves to conceal a great deal of hostility.

Turning to a critical evaluation of the myths presented earlier, our main purpose is to identify the major motifs and assumptions of the Post-Zionists’ outlook concerning some of these “myths”. We will also discuss what is missing from this list and why.

### **Commissioned Agents of Zionism**

A long list of outstanding writers, poets, historians and educators who lived and wrote during the 40 years of 1920 through 1960 is mentioned in Almog’s book and in other Post-Zionist publications as having acted as commissioned agents on behalf of the Zionist Organization.<sup>48</sup> The word “agent” can be a completely neutral term in the sense of circulating information about ideas or products. Anyone who identifies with an idea and writes about it serves as an agent who disseminates that idea. But the Post-Zionists do not use that term within its neutral meaning. Their claim is that these literary or academic figures were actually commissioned by the Zionist establishment to carry on a calculated program of propaganda on its behalf to dupe the naive Jews into accepting Zionism. Yet, there is not one single reference in Almog’s 480 page volume in Hebrew (equivalent to approximately 600 pages in English) explaining who engaged the writers to act as “agents” for the Zionist movement, how they were engaged, or what they were promised in return.

In addition to the fact that no evidence for this claim is ever cited anywhere in Post-Zionists’ writings, the claim is singularly bizarre on other accounts as well. One would be hard pressed to believe that the foremost intellectuals, writers, poets, etc. of that era would agree to produce scholarly or literary works that were commissioned by a non-literary or non-academic, political institution to produce their work. Second, it is inconceivable that they would produce their literary or scholarly work for the explicit purpose of disseminating ideas in which they, the authors, were not in full agreement. Thirdly, it can be demonstrated that none of these authors received any compensation from the Zionist establishment in any form whatsoever. Can anyone entertain the wild notion that Yitschak Lamdan, one of the truly pure souls of Hebrew letters, poet extraordinaire and editor of one of the finest Hebrew literary journals ever to appear in Israel (*Gilyonot*), who almost never owned more than two suits of clothing, was a paid agent hired by a political functionary? Lamdan’s landmark poem “Masada” (1927) is cited frequently by Post-Zionists as a literary work responsible for popularizing one of Zionism’s major myths. I assume the PZ writers understand that Lamdan’s poem used Masada (or *M’tsada*, meaning “fortress”) exclusively as a symbol, and that he was not referring to the historical events that took place there, or even to Masada’s specific location. In fact, Lamdan wrote parts of the poem “Masada” while on his way to Palestine in the mid 1920s while escaping from Bolshevik Russia.

Another of the many classic works produced during this period is the extraordinary 2-volume study by Yehezkel Kaufmann, called *Golah V’neichar (Exile and Alienation)* devoted to the historical sociology of the Jewish people.<sup>49</sup> This work of 1,150 pages in Hebrew (written largely in Bern, Switzerland where Kaufmann received his PhD in philosophy) was published during the period of 1930-1932, after Kaufmann settled in Palestine. No group, political organization or institution ever commissioned Kaufmann to produce any of his great works, and certainly not this gigantic opus, which is, by far and away, one of the truly monumental socio-historical works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Hebrew language. In that work Kaufmann deals with the enigma of Jewish survival within the framework of contemporary scholarship and systematic historical investigation. This work provides powerful support for the

soundness of Zionism's grasp of Jewish history and of the problems confronting Jewish national and cultural survival in the modern world. That is the kind of work that Zionism typically *should have* commissioned.

Ironically, many of the writers cited by Almog and others as Zionist propaganda agents actually were rather sharp critics of the Zionist Organization, albeit not at all in the manner common among the Post-Zionists. Very few of the intellectuals allegedly commissioned by the Zionist establishment to carry out its propaganda effort identified with Socialism in any way. From the beginning of the 1930s, and thereafter, Kaufmann<sup>50</sup> chastised the Labor Party repeatedly for adopting Socialism as an important component of Zionist ideology and unceasingly warned the Zionist leadership that their socialist orientation would wreak disastrous effects on Jewry's national aspirations in Palestine from both an economic and a territorial point of view. Insisting on a platform of social and economic reform would distract the Zionist enterprise from its primary and overarching goal of reclaiming the territory of Palestine for the Jewish people. The results could be catastrophic, warned Kaufmann in the mid 1930s. Those were the days when the Communist star shone brightly in the firmament of Western intellectuals, including secular Zionist Jews in Europe and Palestine, over whom it held a powerful fascination and attraction. The Union of Hebrew Workers in Palestine (the *Histadrut*) at the time, which controlled a large portion of the funds available for "cultural" activities in the country, clung zealously to the Marxist notion of the unity of the Workers' International and the struggle for a classless society, albeit not by means of a bloody revolution. The Zionist-Hebrew writers in Palestine and Europe were, for the most part, demonstrably anti-communist. Lamdan, Kaufmann, Alterman, Vilnai, Greenberg, Hazaz, Shenhar, Agnon, Yitschak Baer, and many other great luminaries of Jewish literature and scholarship in Palestine/Israel during the decades discussed here clearly saw the darker side of Communism and wrote that it left little room for Mankind to surpass the level of animals. It is hardly reasonable to argue that a Zionist Organization dominated by Socialists would commission such spokesmen as agents to disseminate its views.

Since the writers referred to by the Post-Zionists did identify personally and profoundly with Zionism, they would have written works with a distinctly Zionist orientation without being encouraged by any official suggestion or invitation. Constant repetition of the claim that these writers and scholars were commissioned as Zionist agents does not increase its veracity. It actually testifies to the Post-Zionists' willingness to capitalize on any sensationalist claim they can drum up regardless of its merits. What must be said about all of the people mentioned as Zionist agents is that they are among the great intellectual architects of Zionist thought and modern Hebrew literary-historical culture. Their works enriched Jewry and Zionism, not the other way around!

### **The Few against Many**

It was widely accepted in Palestine/Israel that the Arab armies outnumbered the Jewish soldiers during the several wars between Israel and the Arabs. The Jews were always at a dangerous numerical disadvantage. Almog noted that this "myth" was reinforced by reality because the Jews in fact were outnumbered in every war with the Arab nations. This confusion between what is fact or fiction discloses a serious structural flaw in the entire argument of the Post-Zionist position. If the numerical superiority of the Arab armies over the Jewish army is a fact, then why is it consistently called a myth, and especially a myth with the explicit meaning of a lie? A myth is never just a simple fact, although facts can be part of myths. A myth is always a much broader phenomenon than a fact, providing a wider canvas

of ideas, hopes and observations about the world and about life than a mere recitation of facts. If facts and myths are indistinguishable, then, theoretically at least, where do we locate the objective world? What happens to the experiential distinction between fact and fantasy, between history and hopes for the future, between reality and dreams? Does history not leave behind any fingerprints of people, groups or nations who lived their lives in the three dimensional world, or do they too belong to the realm of “deceptive myths”? The Post-Zionist writings include many instances of identifying historical reality as myth in an attempt to reduce the meaning of Jewry’s national, political, cultural and social existence to disembodied ideology. The battles in which relatively few Jewish soldiers held out against, and often defeated, large numbers of Arab soldiers is one of the instances in which Post-Zionist social scientists and historians fail to distinguish between myth and reality because they would prefer that the reality be nothing more than what they call myth!

No doubt the history of the Jews challenges the accepted definitions of nation, religion, people, homeland, and other concepts. The confusion stems from the fact that the Jews were a nation in exile for 2,000 years who, beyond all reason, returned to their ancestral country and reestablished sovereignty there, as well as replanting their religion, language and other cultural features. These facts are unparalleled in world history, and hence defy understanding by analogy or comparison to similar phenomena that occurred among other nations.

Moreover, many concepts of Jewish historical-religious tradition appeared to be totally abstract and disconnected from territorial reality, i.e. “myths”, unlike other nations whose connections meant they enjoyed permanent residence in their geographical home, even if they were conquered for short or long periods of time by other nations. Jewry only lately had the opportunity to embody many of its seemingly spiritual notions in concrete form. Places named in prayers assumed physical shape, Jewish laws discussed in the Talmud were relevant to social situations for the first time in more than a millennium, legendary figures of the Bible had walked the roadways and towns where ordinary Jews today plough the soil or drive their cars. Many Jews still seem to be unable or unwilling, to make the transition from the world of verbal symbols easily manipulated in speech, to that of a political-social reality that impinges on unmediated experience.

Post-Zionist writers ignored the concept and reality of The Ingathering of the Exiles that assumed a physical-social form before our eyes over the past decades. Instead, these writers preferred to engage in their relentless denunciation of Judaic-Zionist “myths” as a mechanism for delegitimizing Zionist ideology. For the majority of Jewry, diminution of the validity or accuracy or even the morality of concepts or legends from the Judaic Zionist cultural heritage will not discredit the reality created by Zionism in the State of Israel, although that is precisely the goal of the Post-Anti-Zionists. Sadly, it cannot be gainsaid that their defamation of Zionism exacts a price from Jews and non-Jews alike in terms of their morale and support for Israel. Nevertheless, the Post-Zionist rampage ultimately will not detract from the symbolic-cultural significance of the historical ideas that directed Zionism’s efforts over the past 100 years. The genuine embodiment of all of these ideas inscribed on the flag of the Zionist enterprise is the idea of the Ingathering of the Exiles as it is being realized in Israel to this very day. Obviously, it is an idea of enormous vitality that sustains the hope for Jewry’s future in Israel, as individuals and as a collectivity. The subject of The Ingathering of Exiles as a basic concept of Zionism is discussed later in this essay.

### **“Brainwashing” and Pro-Zionist Views in Historical Documents**

In his book on the profile of the *sabra*, Almog presents a rich collection of documents found in archives written by high school students, young soldiers, educators and others during the period under discussion. The documents are often very moving and most revealing about their authors' personal feelings and commitment to the goals of Zionism, to the Land of Israel and/or the State of Israel, their concern about the dire condition of the Jewish people, and to their sense of responsibility toward events in the Jewish and non-Jewish world of their time. In almost each and every document one hears a voice telling clearly about that person's unlimited devotion and preparedness for making sacrifices to further the cause, ideas and goals of the Jewish people and of Zionism.

Decades later, along comes a sociologist and colleagues who argue that this set of beliefs expressed by the documents' authors was espoused in the wake of a propaganda effort by the Zionist Organization, a kind of “brainwashing” which accounts for the outpouring of positive sentiment about Zionism. In the eyes of the Post-Zionists, the probability is close to zero that Jews would feel such a deep sense of commitment to their country. It can be more easily explained on the basis of their having been exposed to Zionist propaganda. That is because, theoretically, ordinary people do not concern themselves with such abstract and impersonal issues. Theorists of Post-Modernism assume that most people pursue their lives exclusively in terms of their individual needs and interests unrelated to issues of the collectivity, such as the nation in which they live, and certainly not in respect to groups far away.

Furthermore, the entire notion of the existence of a “Jewish people” is a fiction lacking any basis in the world of scientific thought. No “Jewish people” exists anywhere, say Post-Zionists. What does exist, as mentioned earlier, is a random aggregate of individual Jews who happened by chance or circumstance to immigrate to Palestine/Israel, as well as to other countries. The existence of some “people” with a distinct identity is a myth in the sense of a fraud concocted for purposes of propaganda.

This interpretation of the documents that Almog recovered from several archives (almost all of them in various kibbutzim) departs radically from the overt meaning of the text. It is no less than an about-face of 180 degrees from the substance of the messages recorded in those documents, all of which were written in completely straightforward and unambiguous terms. What possible justification can Almog invoke to conceal this glaring departure from the obvious meaning of the source material sought out specifically for the purposes of this book? What rationale can there be for the assertion that the young people, or educators, who wrote the documents were unduly influenced by the official doctrine of the Zionist Organization but which, in their hearts, did not really concern them personally? That interpretation, attributed to dozens of documents composed over four decades, must rely on a bizarre theory of a systematic and prolonged Zionist conspiracy. The alleged conspiracy strove to convince the Jews of Palestine/Israel, and those in the Diaspora as well, to accept the string of lies known as Zionism. Once again, this assertion is made without even the most meager evidence.

No less serious is the obvious neglect by the Post-Zionist writers of the basic tenets of historical research and of the standards of the academic community whom they claim to represent. It is difficult not to receive the strong impression when reading these books that their authors arrogate to themselves the power to decipher, with their own personal x-ray machine, the unconscious part of the psyche of those people who wrote the documents under discussion. The documents are said to reflect a phenomenon, unknown to their authors, that they were foolish enough to be duped by an insidious propaganda. They wrote letters to family and friends about feelings and thoughts that were not authentically theirs but were

implanted in them by some alien source, namely the Zionist Organization, all the while thinking that they actually believed what they said. The only conclusion to be reached from this kind of interpretation of historical documents is that the interpreters lack fundamental understanding of their own thought processes.

### **“Myth” as Fraud and Deception**

Use of the term “myth” by Post-Zionist writers deserves special attention. Several of Israel’s distinguished historians, who have been reluctant to identify with the political “Left” or with the “Right”, have observed that “...the popular use of the term ‘myth’ in its connotation of referring to...an erroneous idea that can be refuted by logical analysis...has frequently been adopted in a naive way by the revisionist historians...”<sup>51</sup> One may ask if, indeed, they are naive, or are the Post-Zionists propelled by a logic which inexorably leads them to the conclusion that Zionism is founded on fraud and deception in the form of “myth”? If that is so, just what is it that coerces them to adopt that position?

We have suggested that the Post-Zionists derived direction from the post-modern school of social thought. Post-modernism has a fundamentally deconstructionist orientation. This view claims that the links historians make between prior and later events that create the sense of an unfolding of events, of a connection between events and ideas current in different times and places are the product of interpretation and imagination. A sense of “trends” or “schools of thought”, in a word, a view that discerns “continuity” in human affairs that people invoke when discussing the relationship between their behavior and that of their ancestors or forebears in any given realm of life – all of these so-called “connections” – occur in the mind only. They are not anchored in objective reality and cannot withstand criticism based on an empirical examination of the events and of people’s lives.

From a strictly empirical perspective, says Deconstructionism, each and every event constitutes a separate independent unit that has no necessary link to other such units. In that sense, all those historians and theoreticians of the “Idea of History” such as R.G. Collingwood<sup>52</sup> and his followers are hopelessly lost. They claim that history is a reconstruction of the thoughts entertained by people in a given period. By reconstructing these thoughts, the historian can comprehend the relationship between the behavior of different people (or groups, or nations) who preceded or followed them in the course of time, or who flourished at the same time in different places. Collingwood’s theory of the historian’s task is built on the notion of the interrelatedness of historical periods, of groups and individuals, in an attempt to attribute meaning to human experience that, in its entirety, is called “history”. Such meaning, say post-modern writers, emerges from the creative imagination of the historian but it is not inherent in any way in the events themselves.

To assist their radical negation of the meaning that Zionism attached to a series of ideas and events, the Post-Zionists adopted a view of history that involves an atomization of human experience itself. Elimination of interpersonal, inter-group, inter-period continuity, of the relationship between events and ideas and so forth, leaves in its wake a bare skeleton of disconnected elements. There is no longer any “living history” but only “the corpse of history” known as “a chronicle of events”. That is the corpse that remains after the living organism has relinquished its soul, as Collingwood put it.<sup>53</sup> The death of living history was caused by the reinterpretation of human existence as a random collection of events and bits of behavior displayed by a motley crowd of people who lack an “identity”. An interpretation of history of this kind allows the Post-Zionists to think that they have virtually dismantled

Zionist ideology since it is contingent upon a view of Jewish history as the meaningful continuity of the Jewish people.

In sum, Post-Zionism based its approach to Zionism on several assumptions regarding the nature of human history, its study and presentation by its “practitioners”. These assumptions explain how it is possible for academically based scholars to suggest that the Jews who came to Palestine/Israel were a random group of immigrants. (Perhaps the country they went to should be called the western portion of the Fertile Crescent, or Canaan, or Philistia, as long as it is not called “The Land of Israel” that carries mythical connotations imposed upon it by the Jews). They were not members of a people seeking to return to their historic homeland. The entire list of Zionist myths can be explained away by the same deconstructionist rationale.

### **“The Ingathering of Exiles” and the List of Zionist Myths**

The vision of the “Ingathering of Exiles” from the countries of their dispersion is an ancient component of Judaism. It certainly qualifies as a “myth” in terms defined by Cassirer, Tudor and others. Amazingly, this concept was omitted from the Post-Zionists’ list of Zionist myths. How could such a central idea of Zionist ideology, and of Judaic tradition through the centuries, be overlooked by the myth-seekers among the Post-Zionists? “The Ingathering of the Exiles” is such an essential component of the Jewish ethos that a prayer for its realization has been recited three times a day for the past 1,500 years by all Jews who pray:

Give a loud blast on the shofar to announce our freedom, perform a miracle to gather us from our countries of exile, and bring us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are Thou Lord who gathers in the dispersed ones of His people Israel.

Of course this vision was enunciated earlier (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and after) by the Biblical prophets (*Jeremiah* 31, 9-11; 32, 38-40; *Ezekiel* 36, 25-27; *Isaiah* 11, 12; *Amos* 9, 14-15), as well as in other ancient sources such as in the book of Ben-Sirah (Ecclesiasticus, written between 250 and 245 B.C.E.) See Chapter 36, 10: “Collect all the tribes of Jacob and let them settle (in the Land – SS) as in earlier times.” The Ingathering of the Exiles echoes throughout the entire length of Judaic literature in Hebrew and other languages in all eras and in all countries where Jews resided. Herzl’s political Zionism placed this vision at its very foundation in full consciousness of its being Jewry’s modern expression of its ancient Messianic dream. By virtue of its Messianic vision, Zionism earned its honored place among the basic ideas and strivings of many Jews until it finally, albeit barely, reached its most central goal of a Jewish national entity, Israel.

No one can disregard the fact that, almost since its inception, Zionism was opposed by a variety of Jewish groups, such as: ultra-Orthodox groups in Eastern Europe (after they heard that the Zionist congress would deal with “cultural” matters and not only with political ones) and later in the United States; the American Council for Judaism (Rabbi Berger); many, but not all, Reform rabbis and theologians in Germany (before World War II) and the United States; Communist and Socialist Jews (such as the Bund) in Europe before the Second World War as well as in Palestine/Israel. In more recent times, Zionism has been opposed by some, but not all, of the ultra-Orthodox groups in Brooklyn and Jerusalem (such as the *Neturei Karta* or Guardians of the City); by many Leftists and some well-known academics in the United States, such as Noam Chomsky and his followers; by some journalists such as Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times*, for example; and, last but not least, by the Post-Zionists of today, inside and outside of Israel. These groups can be viewed as trying to derail the collective will of the great majority of the Jewish people, even if one thinks that the idea

of a “collective will” is a myth. It is a myth in the same sense that all groups who express some form of social idealism have formulated a vision by which they live. Most important, as noted previously, the collective will of the Jewish people has assumed a distinct material, cultural and political form. Hence, it is a myth that has become history. The Post-Zionists are trying to undo their own people’s history.

In modern times, the vision of the Ingathering of Exiles caused stormy arguments among Jews, especially when Britain offered Uganda as a solution to the “Jewish problem”. Many Jews thought that Palestine was too small and barren to accommodate all the Jews of Europe who, they thought, would move to a Jewish country.<sup>54</sup> It was deemed imperative to settle many Jews in another territory in addition to Palestine. The conflict within the Zionist movement over the Uganda offer must be understood against the background of the principle of The Ingathering of Exiles that was so fundamental in Jewish thinking about the future of the Jewish people, and, hence, in Zionism as well. In December 1952, in Jerusalem, in the course of a conversation, Professor Yehezkel Kaufmann rather unexpectedly said that a few hours earlier he had been visiting David Ben-Gurion who told him that “there was room for two-million Jews in the Negev.” Kaufmann expressed relief at Ben Gurion’s statement because he, Kaufmann, was among those who were skeptical about the possibility of finding space and sustenance in the miniscule country of Israel for all of the Jews (even after the Holocaust). Hence for a short time he had supported the suggestion of settling Jews in another territory in addition to Palestine. That anecdote illustrates to what extent The Ingathering of the Exiles dominated the thinking of modern Zionist thinkers and political figures.

Why then was “The Ingathering of the Exiles” omitted from the list of Zionist myths identified by Almog and colleagues? Clearly, the subject of The Ingathering of Exiles poses a difficult intellectual-theoretical challenge for the Post-Zionists. That “myth” cannot be explained as another example of Zionist fraud and deception. During the centuries of exile the Ingathering of Exiles warranted the title of a myth that Jews clung to. In Herzl’s day, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that idea still occupied the status of a myth as explained by Cassirer and like-minded scholars.<sup>55</sup> However, that status began to undergo significant change by the 1930s as its effect on the behavior of tens of thousands of Jews became evident in terms of directing them toward the practical, non-dreamlike settlement in Palestine as social-historical reality. In a few years from now the Jewish population of Israel will constitute the majority of the Jewish people in the world for the first time since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

In order to deal satisfactorily with the concept of The Ingathering of the Exiles, the Post-Zionists would have to admit that Zionism is far from being merely a series of myths, and is now a social, political and cultural reality born from a social vision. If, despite all that, Post-Zionists persist in dubbing Zionism a myth, then logically the same label should be applied to any social movement bearing the distinctive signs of being an unrealized dream whose followers are devoted to turning it into a reality. Such was the rebellion of the American colonies against Britain at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa under the pressure of the black political organizations there in the 1990s. They too were founded on myths not dissimilar to the Zionist myth except for the one, unparalleled and unprecedented fact that the Jews were not located geographically on the soil of their national home and had to exit from the many countries of their dispersion to occupy the Land of Israel once again. Clearly the title “myth” is a glaring misnomer when applied to Zionism, just as it would be if applied to the United States, or to the recent termination of apartheid in South Africa, as if it has not happened yet! Post-Zionist theory confuses its ideological objections to Zionism with social reality.

Undoubtedly, many Jews entertained the hope that the realization of Zionism's primary goals would simultaneously permit the achievement in the land of our fathers of many additional dreams that they cultivated over the years, such as the dream of socialist economic reform, or the final demise of anti-Semitism. More than a few Zionist thinkers warned Jewry long ago that it was imperative to remain focused on the core goals of Zionism, and not be captivated by a myriad of pipe dreams that the geo-political condition of the Jewish people, or the political and religious interests of many nations in the world, could not conceivably accommodate. That was, and remains, a difficult message to disseminate among dreamers bent on implementing their visions of the future. Many idealists became disaffected over Zionism's failure to solve all of the major problems confronting Jewry's return to the Land of Israel, and over the continuous stream of anti-Semitic venom, in words and deeds, directed at Israel and the Jews. However, The Ingathering of the Exiles continues to be a high level priority in Zionism, and great strides have been made thus far to transform this vision into social-political reality.

### **Post-Zionism and Nihilism**

The deconstructionist approach to the understanding of human history is nihilistic in the extreme. Post-Zionism is no less nihilistic in its approach to Jewish history, to Judaism in general and to Zionism. Hopefully, readers of the Post-Zionist books who do not have pre-formulated opinions or prejudices about the matter, will not be convinced that millions of Jews from all over the world came to Palestine/Israel randomly – whether out of Zionist convictions or because circumstances forced them to leave their country of birth – as if chance factors can explain the remarkable phenomenon of the rebirth of the Jewish nation in Israel. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was less than 1% of the total number of Jews in the world living in Palestine. Now, a century later, there are over 5 million who comprise more than 45% of world Jewry. From the point of view of statistical probability alone, without any reference to ideas of any kind, those numbers contradict any notion of randomness. Social scientists who studied only elementary statistics should know better than to make such a claim, even if they harbor a burning hatred for Zionism.

Only the nihilism inherent in the Deconstructionist approach to history can generate the perception that Zionism is tantamount to death and destruction. A view so absurd must ignore everything that Zionism accomplished in Palestine/Israel in a relatively short span of time. It made possible the emergence of a society numbering 5 million Jews and one million Arabs living on a relatively high social, economic and cultural level, including sophisticated agricultural and industrial complexes, universal public education, 7 major institutions of higher education that include four medical schools, several symphony orchestras, institutions of social welfare and an up-to-date military enterprise. There are also numerous *yeshivot* that continue the millennia-old study of Jewry's traditional literary sources, primarily (although not exclusively) the Talmud. **No random collection of individuals with a self-perception of being disconnected socially and historically from the other immigrants, regardless of their number, would ever be able to accomplish that.** The economic and cultural accomplishments of Israel demand a relatively high level of social cohesiveness. Post-Zionist sociologists who overlook these facts display the depth of their antagonism toward their own people.

Zionism appeared as the greatest historical hope that the Jewish people has known for the past 300 years or more. That hope was the *raison d'être* and foundation of Israel's cultural, social, and economic development. The Zionist "myth" propelled itself into reality to a degree far

beyond anyone's expectations, including those of its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who foresaw an Israel of 3 million Jews as the realistic limits of his fondest dreams for the country (there were 650,000 Jews in Palestine in 1948 when Israel gained independence). With all its limitations, Zionism is the single most successful movement of social and national idealism in the Western world since the French Revolution. The objections to Zionism of the Post-Zionists and of other similarly oriented groups will not distract the majority of Jews in Israel, most Jews outside of Israel, and an astonishingly large number of non-Jews, from seeing the reality of the nation and society built by Zionism in Israel.

### **The Messianic Core of Zionism**

Another dimension of the Ingathering of the Exiles is the messianic vision eloquently expressed by the Biblical Prophets. That core concept of the Judeo-Zionist vision was totally missed by Post-Zionist writers. As such it also missed the dubious honor of being dubbed a "Zionist myth". *The single most powerful and significant message to Jewry of the Judeo-Zionist ethos is the messianic vision.* In more colloquial but no less expressive terms, the significance of Zionism derives from the Prophetic worldview that orients Jewry toward the future. The messianic message holds out the promise of redemption from exile and suffering and offers hope for a redeemed world. Messianism in its very essence transforms all present time into preparation for the future: "It places the tension of the future at the heart of the present."<sup>56</sup>

From Biblical times to today, Judaism never ignored the past in its orientation toward the future. The Exodus from Egypt, the "glory" of David's kingdom, the Destruction of the Temple, and so forth – all events and themes that recur constantly in manifold forms in Jewish tradition – are never forgotten in the vision of Jewry's restoration in the future. Nevertheless, the prophetic vision of the future is not a paean to the glories of the past and a hope that it will be restored. The future envisioned by the prophets never existed at any time in the past. Jerusalem is the center of Jewry's restoration, but the social order, the nature of Israel's life in the future, the condition of the nations of the world in the future other than their physical features (location, etc.) have no precedent in the historical experience of Israel or of the other nations of the world. It is *not* a case of "what was is what will be." The prophetic vision is unlike other nations' hopes to restore the former glory of Athens, Rome, Byzantium or any other sacred or semi-sacred place on earth that nations wished to have rebuilt after its destruction. It is certainly not the Paradise of Islam, the Heavenly Jerusalem of Christianity or Valhalla of the Germanic tribes. It remains located uncompromisingly in this world.

The future orientation of the prophets was thoroughly absorbed into the fabric of all authentic Jewish thought through the ages, including that of the foremost Zionist thinkers and leaders. It was, and is, the source of hope and optimism for survival and for the recreation of Jewish civilization radiated by Judaism and Zionism throughout Jewry's exile, in the face of horrendous and unrelenting destruction, slaughter, enslavement, dispersion, forced conversion, repeated expulsions, homelessness, communal incarceration in ghettos, starvation, and on and on. We will not speak of the horrors of Jewish life between the two world wars or during World War II.

The assertion by post-Zionist writers that the myths of heroism that Zionism sought to propagate ignored the tragic end of the historical events related in the myths is a pathological mockery of Jewish history and memory.<sup>57</sup> Did Jewry ever fail to commemorate, or distort the scope of, the tragic events that the nation experienced throughout history? In their zeal to delegitimize Zionism, the Post-Zionists fall into the trap of making contradictory demands or

claims about Zionism. On the one hand, the “myths” developed and circulated by Zionism – so it is claimed – should be historically accurate, or else bear the title of “myth” as a pejorative assignation. The story of Masada disseminated among Jewish youth in Israel and elsewhere should have focused on the defenders’ decision not to allow themselves to be enslaved and on their ultimate suicide, rather than on their resistance against the Roman army that surrounded them in the years 70-72 C.E. On the other hand, the Masada story deserves to be called a myth because it intends to commemorate the bravery of Ben-Yair and his followers who held the hilltop fortress at Masada but fails to mention that the defenders of Masada died without even trying to fight off the Romans.<sup>58</sup> The underlying and unarticulated assumption is that myth has no legitimate function of its own if it is not purely historical. To the extent that it departs from historical facts, myth is deception and falsehood.

We have already seen how that position is utterly untenable and bears no relation to any objective examination of the symbolic nature of myth and its social-historical function, for Jewry or for any other group or nation. As an instructive analogy, one could point to the innumerable “myths” circulated in American history books – and not only in textbooks for children – about the great achievement of Abraham Lincoln of saving the Union (of the United States) and preventing the secession of the southern States. Is that set of myths invariably accompanied by a statement reminding readers that the United States Civil War involved the death of more soldiers and civilians than all the other wars combined fought by the United States in its entire history anywhere in the world? The Civil War also resulted in the termination of slavery in the United States. Do the Afro-Americans in the United States consistently (or ever) link their ancestors’ freedom from slavery to the death of tens of thousands of young boys and men in that conflict? If the Post-Zionists would apply their logic to American history (which, of course, they would not dare to do) they would have to demand that Afro-Americans acknowledge the horrifying circumstances under which their ancestors were freed and declare their willingness to compensate the descendents of those killed in that war. If anyone thinks the Afro-Americans in the United States should do that, no one I know has ever heard about it.

No one reads the “myths” about Masada, Bar-Kochba, Trumpeldor or whomever else or whatever other events serve as the object of myth, without understanding beyond a shadow of a doubt that the undisguised, explicit purpose of these myths was to support hope and optimism, to provide an electrifying idea that could rally a tired, driven and persecuted people, rather than adding to the ocean of pain that already flooded so much of Jewish life. The historian (or sociologist, anthropologist, or what have you) of myth has the responsibility of seeking to appreciate the significance of a myth, its substance and message, its meaning for those who transmit it, or perhaps even added to it.<sup>59</sup> A responsible historian does not abandon his/her task of trying to fathom and express the thoughts of the people or culture of the past, and assume the role of judge, critic and detractor of the myth’s authors by accusing them of sins of omission or distortion of historical fact. That would be appropriate if the authors of the myths claimed that the story as told was constructed systematically and presumed to express a complete and accurate record of the subject at hand. Obviously, the original authors, or those who disseminated the story in later generations, never made such claims or had such pretensions. They had something else in mind other than what their detractors, centuries later, or even just decades later, think they should have had in mind. The Post-Zionists display no reluctance to deride historical figures (who originally generated the myth, or who later disseminated it) for failing to think the thoughts that the Post-Zionists think today. Nor does it occur to them that if Lamdan, Bialik, Dinur, Reuven Grossman, Alterman, Yigal Yadin, Hazaz, U.Z. Greenberg, Z’ev Vilnai, etc. would be alive today, the Post-Zionists’ ideas would be an anathema to them. Post-Zionism also would be dismissed as rubbish by theoreticians of

historical research, its methods and meaning, such as the British philosopher R.G. Collingwood,<sup>60</sup> who would undoubtedly consider their work as an affront to their profession.

The widespread disparagement of the messianic dream among super-rationalists from various ideological camps, including Post-Zionist writers, also reflects a basic flaw in their grasp of the Biblical Prophets. Secular socialist Zionists in Palestine-Israel were particularly vehement in their abhorrence of Judaic messianism because they identified messianism completely with the notion of Divine intervention in history and the exclusive reliance on the Messiah for redeeming Jewry from Exile.

There is ample documentation to show that the prohibition against attempting to restore Jewry's sovereignty over Palestine did not dominate Jewish religious thought for most of Jewry's long sojourn in *Galut*. Even as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century it had not obtained complete acceptance by world Jewry, although many famous rabbis opposed human initiative in the matter. That fact is more than evident in the enormous popularity of Shabbetai Zvi's (1626-1676) bid to collect a large army and reconquer Palestine for the Jews from the hands of the Ottoman Empire in the face of rabbinic injunctions. But rigid rejection of "pushing the end" (i.e. trying to redeem Jewry from Exile through human agency) gradually came to dominate Orthodox Jewry during the past three centuries, after numerous attempts over the course of earlier centuries to regain control of Palestine ended in tragedy. On the one hand, religious thinkers negated the legitimacy of any expectations of Jewish restoration to Palestine. They removed it from the realm of history and placed it almost entirely in the realm of the Divine will. On the other hand, outspoken assimilationists, as well as Reform rabbis and theologians in Germany and the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, also opposed the idea of Jewish "redemption" from Exile. To subscribe to the idea of an ultimate "redemption" from Exile meant that Jewry rejected social and economic assimilation into the dominant Christian society. It also implied that Jews did not necessarily affirm their complete acceptance of the national identity of the country where they resided. That unequivocal affirmation was precisely what Napoleon demanded, and received, at his famous convocation of a mock "Sanhedrin" in France, in February 1807.<sup>61</sup>

Ironically, the secular socialist Zionists themselves, who denounced religious Judaic messianism, clung ferociously to a fantasy-laden Marxist dream of a "just" (i.e. materially equal) society in the future for the "workers of the world". That dream excluded, of course, the bourgeoisie who lived in the fleshpots (that offered precious little to eat) of the little towns of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or the even smaller town of Haifa in the 1920s and 1930s.

### **Zionism and the Biblical Vision of the Future**

Post-Zionists who dismiss the view of historic continuity between Jewry's ancient past and Zionism, should note that Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, foremost among the "founding fathers" of the United States, considered themselves to be heirs to the future-oriented message of the Biblical prophets, whatever post-modernists and deconstructionists think today notwithstanding. It was in the light of these moral, political and cultural traditions that they formulated the basic documents of the new democratic nation.

Moshe Meisels (under the pen-name of M.H. Amishai) provided a brilliant explanation of the future-orientation of ancient Israel, of the Torah and the Prophets, and of Zionism as heir to the prophetic heritage. A glimpse of Amishai-Meisel's penetrating depiction of the Bible's remarkable concentration on the future is as follows:<sup>62</sup>

The earliest roots of the Biblical message of the future as the most important dimension of existence actually precedes the advent of the ancient Hebrews. Unlike the myths of other nations, no Hebrews were present at the time of the “myths of origin”. The first man, Adam, was not a Hebrew. Moreover, the Biblical pre-Hebraic myth paints a picture of a world inhabited by many nations and languages existing before the Hebrews emerged in history, totally unlike the myths of the world around them<sup>63</sup> and that focused exclusively on their own people, and particularly on the role of the ruler’s connection to the gods. The few remnants of the mythological literature produced by the pre-Israelite Hebrews that appear in the first few chapters of Genesis, depict an awareness of a vast social world whose diversity is explained in the myth of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent divergence and dispersion of peoples and languages. Out of this diverse world of peoples and cultures emerges the figure of Abraham.

The covenant with Abraham is the prototypic Hebraic worldview whose classic document in the book of Genesis is largely directed toward the future, at least on its latent level, not always obvious on the manifest level. Its message is one of comfort and hope for Abraham that his descendants will inherit “the Land” in perpetuity, for all future time. What Abraham received, or in more contemporary terms, what he anticipated or expected from his life of trial, after uprooting himself from his homeland and going to an unknown land that God “showed him”, was to guarantee his descendants’ future. He lived with a consciousness of being the “father of a nation”. As such, his every act was devoted to perpetuating the nation-to-be and safeguarding its future.

Abraham’s consciousness of his descendants’ nationhood and its future was not occupied solely with the future as physical time in the natural world, but as a historic-cultural-consciously created and designed dimension of human existence, as the unfolding of the Divine and human will. It was not the danger of having his descendants’ future terminated suddenly that concerned Abraham, nor was it the search for happiness taught by the ancient Greeks. Without the ability to fulfill the Divine will in the future, to live out our collective and individual history into the future, the present and the past become devoid of meaning. For Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, concern for the future expresses the fundamental purpose of existence. Abraham’s covenants with God all focus on existence-into-the-future for which each person and each nation, including the Hebrew nation-to-be, bears responsibility. This sense of historical responsibility reaches explicit formulation in the amazing words of Deuteronomy (5, 9-10):

For I the Lord your God...visit...the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep my commandments.

These verses convey the message that *generations of people are responsible for one another*, or what can be called “historical moralism”. The concept of historical moralism stands in sharp distinction from “historical materialism” which is best renamed “materialist sociology” without the word “historical” because Marxist ideology had, in fact, little or nothing to do with history.<sup>64</sup> Three thousand years after Abraham and 2,500 years after the Prophets of Israel, historical moralism has finally caught the attention of many nations and individuals in some parts of the world in the wake of the awareness of nuclear and ecological dangers threatening the continuity of the human race. The Prophets’ warnings and promises about the future focused exclusively on events in the real world, not on any otherworldly, supernatural vision.

For Abraham and for all of Israel, the Land of Israel is the Promised Land, the land of Jewry’s future. The Land and the people of Israel are indivisible because the land is the location of the

people's future, namely its existence. Zionism's return to the Land is an affirmation of Jewry's future. Its long history in Exile is over, although not forgotten by any means. It is no longer possible for the Jewish people to live in the *Galut*, in Exile. The *Galut* has been destroyed, meaning that Jews who live outside of Israel in countries where they cannot have collective political representation or sovereignty, can no longer survive as a collectivity. Assimilation is no longer avoidable except for small enclaves of totally ghettoized Jews. They too will eventually succumb to the inevitability of assimilation because the possibility for Jews to live in a condition of *Galut* was eradicated with the Final Solution. The absence of a threat to Jews' physical survival in countries like the United States, Argentina, and others, probably increases rather than decreases the assimilatory power of the surrounding society. The children or grandchildren of the Israel-born Post-Anti-Zionists living in various countries will also no longer be recognizable as Jews, except, perhaps, in name only. Like the descendents of all immigrants, they will not be able even to read the books their forebears wrote (in Hebrew). Some Jews will undoubtedly be very happy about that. But, *the Jewish people can never again go into Galut and survive as a nation*: That is the unequivocal conclusion to be reached from the catastrophe of World War II that put a near-total end to the Jewish community of Europe whose origins go back to the second century B.C.E. or earlier.

The nation of Israel is, of course, also subject to the powerful influences of contemporary world culture fixated on the present that includes just a few years into the future. Israel must not follow suit and slough off its responsibility for its long-term future. Zionism can and must continue to perform its historic role as Jewry's medium for striving to secure its collective future, in both its spiritual-cultural and historical-national sense. Zionism has always been the road into the future for Judaism. Our future is our salvation.<sup>65</sup> Getting lost in the present by rejecting or forgetting the past on which Israel has built its future can be our damnation. To strive to reach upwards from our past in order to achieve our unique spiritual-cultural future will secure our existence on a perpetually higher plane. Jacob's ladder "was placed firmly on the ground, but its top-most rung reached to the sky" (Genesis 28, 12-15). Years later Jacob became Israel!

### **National History as a Universal Value**

In all countries, people teach their offspring their national/cultural history and the meaning they attribute to the continuity of generations through the course of time. No nation entertains any doubts or hesitation in this matter. The citizens of the United States cling tenaciously to the interpretation given to the deeds and intentions of the "founding fathers" when it comes to understanding the Constitution and its application to contemporary public and legal dilemmas. One cannot overlook the extent to which the cultural heritage of Germany, France, China, and other countries emphasizes the meaning for the present of the deeds of their forebears centuries or longer beforehand. In some cases, these ancestors lived in what can be objectively called "mythological" times because there is very little or no documentation about the lives of the people involved. King Arthur was a British chieftain who won a decisive battle against the Anglo-Saxon invaders circa 500 C.E. The figure of Arthur always exerted great influence on the development of English cultural identity. The legends about his associates and exploits, such as Lancelot, The Knights of the Round Table, Merlin the Magician, the sword Excalibur, are myths that emerged many centuries later but are all closely linked to the figure of King Arthur in the English collective memory. The Vikings of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries did exist and affect history, but our knowledge of their lives is still very limited. Nevertheless, they are viewed as the ancestors of the Danes and Swedes who collect every scrap of archaeological evidence found about them. The 12<sup>th</sup> century poem *La*

*Chanson de Roland* exerted a powerful influence on French history, language, culture and identity even though none of the events or figures portrayed in that remarkable poem ever existed, except for Charlemagne himself.<sup>66</sup> Nor did the Niebelungen ever exist, and yet they form an indelible part of German identity and cultural “history”. All of these myths are draped in the clouds of time that hide their empirical-historical reality, if there ever were such a reality. Nevertheless, the French attribute great significance to *La Chanson de Roland*, as the Germans do to the stories of Siegfried, Brunhilde, Wotan, etc. as the foundation of their identity and language. Most, if not all, of the *dramatis personae* of the Homeric epics, such as Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Achilles, Hector, Priam, Cassandra, Hercules and so forth probably never walked the earth. These characters have been household names in the Western world for millennia. The consideration of their historicity is of little or no significance in the culture and identity of the Greeks. The question of their historical existence is a matter for antiquarians. For Greeks, the reality of Homer’s heroes is not a matter of historical accuracy. Precisely the same statement can be made about how people in China, India, Thailand, Vietnam, or Cambodia would react to questions about the stories of the life of Buddha. In the Far East, the stories of the life of Buddha wield enormous influence on the behavior of many millions of people, on public behavior and religious practice. The majority of Buddhists would dismiss questions about the historical authenticity of these legends as irrelevant.

In the case of the Jews, the situation is almost reversed. Jewry’s historical record is supported by massive documentation. There is abundant written material from antiquity (1200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.), most of it in the form of historical narratives or legends, as well as an enormous collection of religious and legal works, the extensive writings of the Hebrew prophets, the Wisdom literature, the books of the Apocrypha, Josephus, The Dead Sea Scrolls, etc. Of course, that does not mean that we can establish that there was indeed a specific person such as Abraham as depicted in the Bible. Yet, his “life history” is imprinted on the collective memory of the Jewish people, and on the memory of countless non-Jews, for all time. These works were followed by a vast number of texts produced over the 1,800 years of Jewish history after the Bar-Kochba rebellion (135 C.E.) against Roman control in Palestine. Almost all of these works were and are accessible to anyone who wishes to study/read them. There is also an enormous amount of corroborating evidence from the archival and published documents in many countries, as well as from archaeological evidence. Jewry has always been a historically conscious people about itself and about many of its neighboring nations. Any comparison of Judaic history (including myths) to that of other Western and even Far Eastern nations highlights the relatively well-documented historicity of Jewry’s collective saga compared to the decidedly beclouded origins and development of any of the other peoples and nations that have existed since ancient times. Of course there is a rich store of “myths” that form part of this historical heritage.

The most common source of myth for Christians is, and remains, the Evangelists (known to Christians as part of the New Testament) and the Koran for the Moslems. Post-Zionists would never presume to utter reservations about the inter-generational transmission of these texts, where history and myth are inextricably interwoven, as they have about the texts of the Jewish people.

### **Post-Zionism is Anti-Semitic in Essence**

The denunciation of Jewry’s behavior in certain cultural and political domains when these same standards or patterns are typical of most nations and individuals in the world is one of

the common denominators of all classic manifestations of anti-Semitism. Yehezkel Kaufmann identified 4 salient characteristics for recognizing anti-Semitic statements:<sup>67</sup>

1. **Fabrication** – Accusing Jews of crimes/sins they never committed (the “Blood Libel” being one of most infamous examples).
2. **Generalization** – Holding all Jews responsible for the acts of an individual.
3. **Judaization** – Asserting that only Jews commit crimes/sins that are regularly committed by non-Jews.
4. **Discriminatory harshness** – Acts not considered to be crimes when performed by non-Jews are considered to be crimes when performed by Jews.<sup>68</sup>

The major example of the first criterion mentioned above indicative of Post-Zionist works is their assertion that famous Hebrew writers and historians were commissioned agents of the Zionist Organization. That assertion is pure fabrication, as we argued earlier in this essay.

The second criterion of anti-Semitism attributable to Post-Zionist works (point 3, above) is their negation of the meaning that Jews in general and Zionists in particular attribute to Jewish history as a rationale and/or explanation for their contemporary behavior. For the Post-Zionists, Zionism created a myth of historical continuity to “justify” or explain its current policies.

Thirdly, the Post-Zionists’ ideology is anti-Semitic not because it advocates animosity toward Jews as individuals, which is the meaning commonly attributed to the term “anti-Semitism”, and not because they claim that the Jewish people is different from other peoples in religion, language, culture and behavior, which is no revelation to anyone because each nation differs from all others in some or all of these characteristics. The Post-Zionists’ negativism is directed toward Jewry as a collectivity and is embodied in their view that *Jews differ from other nations in terms of what they may think and do!* For the Post-Zionists, the efforts made by Jews, including those of the Zionist enterprise, to transmit a sense of historical continuity and responsibility to the youth of Palestine/Israel and elsewhere for the fate of the Jewish people as an ethnic-national group constitutes an invasion by a collective ideology into the life of the individual. It also testifies to the ethno-centrism of Jews and Judaism. It matters not that teaching the public, young and old, about their historical heritage as part of the effort to transmit its messages to future generations is accepted as the unassailable right and duty of each and every nation or group. That is the very essence of the term universalism, not global uniformity! Would the Post-Zionists condemn the entire world for what is universally agreed to be a positive, necessary and highly valued practice that lies at the heart of civilization itself? There can be no clearer indication of the Post-Zionists’ anti-Semitic orientation than its defamation of Zionism by accusing it of this universal act as if it were a crime.

The PZ authors have led themselves into the swamp of anti-Semitism common among some academic groups in Western universities. The Post-Zionists’ approach to Zionism should be strongly repudiated not because they take issue with Zionism but because they explain their objections to Judaism and Zionism with indefensible and prejudicial ideas that lack intellectual integrity, and all in the name of the very values they blatantly disregard.

It is transparent that the Post-Zionists wish to disseminate a myth of their own, the myth of anti-Zionism woven out of the strands of deconstructionist nihilism and academic anti-Semitism. The negation of Judaic and Zionist history, culture, aspirations and vision, as preached by the Post-Zionists, would effectively deprive Israel of its soul and leave it an aimless, haphazard mass of immigrants that the PZ writers claim it is. Whatever inroads Post-

Zionist thinking has made in Israel or elsewhere, the more impoverished Judaic culture has become.

The super-liberal eschatologist Francis Fukuyama, for whom the democratic liberal state is the *summum bonum* of human accomplishment and the end of the need for additional political conflict, admitted that his own logic led to the conclusion that post-modern liberal individualism was socially bankrupt. Societies without faith in their identity founded on their collective past, without aspirations for a collective future as a historical culture, (not as a commercial enterprise, regardless of how successful), had little prospect of social survival.<sup>69</sup>

### **Zionism's Reconstruction of Jewish Life and History**

Zionism viewed through the Post-Zionist prism is bound to focus on death and destruction. Nihilism cannot conceivably concede the vast constructive Zionist enterprise in all walks of life: in the unique and unprecedented assemblage of Jews from all the countries of their dispersion and the enormous steps taken toward the reconstruction of Jewish life following its unfathomable decimation and degradation. Zionist Israel accomplished that, however incompletely, in a remarkably short span of time and in the face of relentless harassment, both from within and from outside the country. The Post-Zionists, and other Jewish groups who believe they thrive on pure spirituality (the extremists among the ultra-Orthodox *Haredim*, some fringe Reform or even Conservative religious groups scattered in the United States, some Jewish academics in Western universities, and the remnant Marxian materialists), would prefer that Jewry remain encased in the clouds of ancient myth. Israel should not "dirty its hands" by tinkering with the real world so obviously over-laden with huge impediments and bitter disappointments.<sup>70</sup>

Remember! The very first Hebrew myth about human kind that dates from over 3000 years ago teaches that once people mature and emerge from Paradise into the light of the real world, there is no return to the protection of our childhood dreams. All human societies have no choice but to cover their shame and build their life into the future the best they can. Myths continue to flourish only in our unrequited aspirations.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Nachum Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

**Note:** This article was written originally in Hebrew. Therefore, the author concentrates primarily on the volume written by Oz Almog, *The Sabra – A Profile*, Tel Aviv Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997, (Hebrew) which is readily available to Hebrew readers, while other works of the Post-Zionist writers are mainly in English and not easily available to readers in Israel. This fact is not intended to indicate any special significance of the volume by Almog compared to other books by Post-Zionist writers.

Also, two recent books dealt extensively with other aspects of Post-Zionist writings, such as the revisionist historians whose works was evaluated by Ephraim Karsh in his *Fabricating Israeli History*, London: Frank Cass, 1997 (2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, 2000), and the role of Socialism and of some Israeli writers in developing the Post-Zionist perspective, discussed by Amnon Lord, *The Israeli Left: From Socialism to Nihilism*, Tel Aviv: ACPR Publications and Tammuz Publishers, 2000, (Hebrew). These excellent volumes did not treat the works of Post-Zionist sociologists that are the subject of the present work. Earlier works in Hebrew by Yehezkel Kaufmann presented a scathing criticism of the ideas of Socialist Zionists in Europe and Palestine/Israel. See Kaufmann's

- Golah v'Neichar* (Exile and Alienation), vol. 2, 1932, *B'chevlei Ha-zman* (In the Throes of Time), 1936, and *Bein N'tivot* (Between Paths), 1952.
- <sup>2</sup> Oz Almog, *The Sabra – A Profile*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997, (Hebrew).
- <sup>3</sup> Zerubavel, op. cit.
- <sup>4</sup> Zerubavel, op. cit.
- <sup>5</sup> Eliezer Schweid, “Myth and Historical Memory in Modern Jewish Thought”, in: D. Ohana and R. Wistrich (Eds.), *Myth and Memory: The Transformations of Israeli Consciousness*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Van Leer Foundation and the Kibbutz Hameuchad, 1996, (Hebrew).
- <sup>6</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, *Mythical Thought*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925/1955, (translated from German).
- <sup>7</sup> Ohana and Wistrich, op. cit., Introduction, p. 13.
- <sup>8</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., pp. 11-26.
- <sup>9</sup> Matthew, 26, 26-28. The doctrine of transubstantiation was promulgated officially at the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council of 1215 and was given its final form by Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274 C.E.). Until that time the controversy over the Eucharist as substance or as symbol remained unsettled in Christianity. An extensive treatment of this subject can be found in the Encyclopedia Britannica. The term “Eucharist” means thanksgiving and is considered to be the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *baruch* (blessed).
- <sup>10</sup> Cassirer, op. cit.; Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot Ha-Emunah Hayisraelit*, (The History of Israelite Religion) vol. 1, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik and Dvir (4 volumes), 1952.
- <sup>11</sup> Henry Tudor, *Political Myth*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1972.
- <sup>12</sup> Tudor, op. cit., p. 15.
- <sup>13</sup> Tudor, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
- <sup>14</sup> Tudor, op. cit., p. 37.
- <sup>15</sup> Tudor, op. cit., p. 35. Cassirer distinguished clearly between myth and religion and warned not to confuse the two, see Cassirer, op. cit., pp 97-142. An extensive discussion of myth and religion in general, and in Judaism in particular, appears in Kaufmann, op. cit., 1952, and Schweid, op. cit., 1996.
- <sup>16</sup> Tudor, op. cit., p. 123-127.
- <sup>17</sup> Tudor, op. cit., p. 116.
- <sup>18</sup> Tudor, op. cit., p. 124
- <sup>19</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946/1993, pp. 218-219.
- <sup>20</sup> Almog, op. cit.
- <sup>21</sup> Almog, op. cit.
- <sup>22</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 72 ff.
- <sup>23</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 59.
- <sup>24</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 50.
- <sup>25</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 58.
- <sup>26</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 43.
- <sup>27</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 44.
- <sup>28</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 45.

- <sup>29</sup> Almog, op. cit. pp. 67-68.
- <sup>30</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 69.
- <sup>31</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 69.
- <sup>32</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 72.
- <sup>33</sup> Almog, op. cit.
- <sup>34</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 73. Noteworthy is the fact that the meaning of the Biblical story of the Binding of Isaac carries the distinct message that God *does not want* the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham's preparedness to comply with God's command in all of the difficult (ten) trials to which he was subjected, proved that he was worthy of being the father of his nation. His reward is God's promise of his descendents' immortality as a nation (not as individuals) in the Land (later called the Land of Israel). That promise forms the essence of Abraham's covenant with God as it appears in the book of Genesis. Of interest is the fact that modern and contemporary writers of Hebrew letters employed the Biblical story in the opposite sense of the original text, as was done with many Biblical texts.
- <sup>35</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 73.
- <sup>36</sup> Almog, op. cit., pp. 74-75.
- <sup>37</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 76.
- <sup>38</sup> Yakov Becker, (Ed), *The Teachings of David Ben-Gurion*, Tel Aviv: Yavneh Publishing Co., 1958, (Hebrew), p. 28.
- <sup>39</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 77.
- <sup>40</sup> Ephraim Shmueli, *The History of Our People in Modern Times*, Tel Aviv: Yavneh Publishing Co., 1950, (Hebrew).
- <sup>41</sup> Shmueli, op. cit. pp. 71-81.
- <sup>42</sup> Almog, op. cit. p. 77.
- <sup>43</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 78.
- <sup>44</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 79.
- <sup>45</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 80.
- <sup>46</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 81.
- <sup>47</sup> Almog, op. cit., p. 81.
- <sup>48</sup> The well-known figures (excluding politicians who held official positions in various institutions) mentioned (directly or by implication) in Almog's book, who allegedly served as commissioned agents of Zionism (just "who or what" in Zionism is not stated) include the following: Yitschak Lamdan, Sh. Shalom, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Haim Nachman Bialik, Ephraim Shmueli, Ben-Zion Dinur, Eliezer Rieger, Reuven Grossman, Eliezer Steinman, Avraham Broides, Baruch Ben-Yehudah, Sh. Ben-Zion, Z'ev Vilnai, Avraham Shlonsky, and others. (See the list of educators mentioned on page 57 of Almog's book).
- <sup>49</sup> Y. Kaufmann, *Exile and Alienation*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1930-1932, (Hebrew).
- <sup>50</sup> Y. Kaufmann, *In the Throes of Time*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1936, (Hebrew).
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