Messianic Religious Zionism and the Reintroduction of Sacrifice: The Case of the Temple Institute

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RETHINKING
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IN JUDAISM

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Messianic Religious Zionism and the Reintroduction of Sacrifice: The Case of the Temple Institute

Motti Inbari

This chapter discusses the establishment and the activities of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem. This institution is the product of a messianic crisis that developed in Israel after the Six-Day War (1967), in which Israel captured territories described in the Hebrew Bible as the core of the ancient Land of Israel. While the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent territorial expansion opened the door to an outburst of messianic speculations, the following stage involved disappointment and the possibility of prophetic failure.

The Temple Institute is an educational institution located in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem that runs various Jewish religious enterprises, including a college preparatory school, a museum, a publishing house, a yeshiva for young adults, a yeshiva for youth, and a project that seeks to produce and re-create the objects used in the Temple. The Institute was established in 1984 by Israel Ariel, and over the past three decades its activities have become an influential force. The Institute is recognized as an official institution by the Israel Ministry of Education, which sends thousands of students from state-religious schools to its programs; soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) often visit the Institute in organized groups; dozens of young religious women volunteer in its programs; and the Israeli Chief Rabbinate has even organized at the Institute religious conferences about the Temple. Thousands of Christian evangelists also visit the Institute each year.

This flourishing and officially recognized body has clearly positioned itself to appeal to the Israeli public. The Institute has straddled the boundary between “legitimate” academic study of the Temple, which focuses on theoretical studies and folkloristic models, and practical actions intended to promote the imminent construction of the “Third Temple”—a religious program that is considered taboo in most sectors of contemporary Judaism.

The Temple Institute is committed to an underlying provocative agenda that challenges the Religious Zionist mainstream and undermines the ban on Jewish presence on the Temple Mount. According to halakhah, a Jew is considered ritually impure with “corpus impuritatis” with the dead or with others who have sunder the Temple Period (536 BCE–70 CE) by the universally applicable “corporate impurity” by the “sacrifice” heifer mixed in water. Since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the slaughter of red heifers has been impure. Moreover, the precise dimension of the location of the Kodesh Kodash site—identified as the dwelling place of the holy vessels in the Temple Mount—has been disputed, and the area is known to be larger than the Temple Mount area itself (the divinely imposed death penalty). Entering the Temple Mount has been sup

Zionism and Messianism

Although secular and Religious Zionism share some language, they harbor divergent understandings of the Temple Mount. In its early stages, secular Zionism viewed messianic language to describe national enterprise as a realization of biblical and humanistic frameworks. Religious Zionism renovate the biblical myth, blending narratives of national renewal with biblical prophecy, and conflict.

Zionism is commonly acknowledged by previous Jewish political and religious communities in Europe and the Middle East. They governed their life in accord with the Bible, even though they did not affect their government within their own confines. However, the masses in Eastern Europe. To these people, revolutionary: it was a rebellion against Jewish exile, with its observant way of life, the newly created Zionist movement, Jewish identity, and not by religion. Whereas the tzniut involved keeping the Torah and its compli
Cred ritually impure with "corpse impurity" if he or she comes into bodily contact with the dead or with others who have at some point been in such contact. During the Temple Period (536 BCE–70 CE), Jews were cleansed from this virtually universal "corpse impurity" by the "sin water"—the ashes of a sacrificed red heifer mixed in water. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews have not performed the slaughter of red heifers, and thus all Jews are considered ritually impure. Moreover, the precise dimensions of the Temple have been lost, including the location of the Kodesh Kodashim (Holy of Holies)—the most sacred site—identified as the dwelling place of the Shekhinah, the divine presence. Entry into this section was absolutely prohibited, with the exception of the High Priest (who was cleansed with the "sin water" before performing his sacred duties) on the Day of Atonement. Since practically all Jews today are considered ritually impure, and since the location of the Temple is no longer known, it was ruled that Jews are prohibited from entering the entire Temple Mount area, even though this area is known to be larger than that of the Temple itself. Accordingly, a person who enters the Temple Mount area incurs the (theoretical) penalty of karet (the divinely imposed death penalty). This position that prohibits Jews from entering the Temple Mount has been supported in numerous halakhic rulings.¹

Zionism and Messianism

Although secular and Religious Zionists live in the same state and speak the same language, they harbor divergent understandings of shared national symbols. In its early stages, secular Zionists were fascinated by the Bible and employed messianic language to describe their actions. They spoke about the national enterprise as a realization of biblical myth, but did so within a universal and humanistic framework.² Religious Zionists, on the other hand, worked to renovate the biblical myth, blending nationalism and religiosity.³ These differences fuel divisions in Israeli society to this day and affect too the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Zionism is commonly acknowledged as a movement that rebelled against previous Jewish political and religious behavior. The pre-modern Jewish communities in Europe and the Middle East were generally faith-based and observant. They governed their life in accordance with the religious law and were passive to politics that did not affect their own communities. Jews enjoyed self-government within their own confines.⁴ Modernity was late to arrive to the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe. To these people, the Zionist message was shockingly revolutionary: it was a rebellion against political passivity and against Jewish exile, with its observant way of life. For the first time, according to the newly created Zionist movement, Jewish identity was to be framed by nationality, and not by religion. Whereas the traditional Jewish model of self-identity involved keeping the Torah and its commandments as interpreted by the Oral
Law, the Zionist message aimed to present a more holistic model: a return to the homeland, a return to power, a return to a "healthy" way of life, and a return to normality. These returns were all perceived as a substitute for religious law.¹

The Zionist sense of superiority over the Jewish Diaspora was justified, in some ways, by a renewed emphasis on the Bible, which was understood as the link between the mythological past and the present. The Bible enabled the creation of a national myth and the consolidation of a distinctive Zionist ethos around the Jews' ancestral land. Any national movement requires a foundation story, and for Zionism the Bible served this function. However, the religious lesson of the Bible was sterilized: the role of God as creator and the demand for faith and observance were ignored. The Zionists used the Bible from a secular perspective, as Jewish national history was replayed in their lifetime. The Bible was viewed as a national asset, denuded of its relation to religious faith.⁶

Although Socialist, secularist, and verging on the anti-religious, Zionism came to be seen by its supporters as a fulfillment of biblical messianic prophecies. Jewish collective memory carries a strong messianic message. From the rabbinic standpoint, the destruction of the Second Temple represents the beginning of the Jews' exile. Rabbinic commentary argues that the exile was imposed on the nation due to its sins, and only after the nation's complete repentance can redemption, and the Messiah, arrive. Thus, exile has a spiritual purpose: to prepare the Jews for their salvation.⁷ According to biblical and rabbinic writings, the end of days will bring about the national restoration of the Jews, including the ingathering of exiles, the rebuilding of a Davidic kingdom, and the reestablishment of the Temple as God's site of worship.⁸

Throughout the ages, Jewish memory kept the messianic hope alive. The desire to see the restoration of the nation in the Land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple, for example, are essential components of the Amidah (or the Eighteen Benedictions), the central prayer of all Jewish religious services. These desires also feature in the Birkat Hamazon (Grace after Meals). Maimonides, the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher and halakhic arbiter, devoted the last two of his Thirteen Principles of Faith to the end of days: the twelfth principle is belief in the coming of the Messiah, and the thirteenth principle is belief in the resurrection of the dead.⁹

Recurrent failures of messianic expectations led the rabbis to become very cautious about nurturing hopes for imminent salvation. Barriers were constructed to constrain acute messianism, and the common rabbinic understating was that it is the role of God to send the Messiah; all people can do to hasten the Messiah's arrival is to perfect their religious observance. Redemption and repentance were interlinked.¹⁰

Many early Zionist thinkers, most notably David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), the leader of political Zionism and Israel's first prime minister, regarded Zionists' actions as part of messianic fulfillment. They reimagined the biblical story of the Land of Israel; they were building a new kingdom. They were also reviving the glories of the Hebrew nation that had been forced into exile. Zionism as a "light unto the nations"—a movement that could set standards for the creation of a secular messianism that blended into a modern national identity, it was the ancient model for national revival and contemporary society.¹¹

It might be expected that the attachment to the Bible was intensified in the wake of the conquest of the Land of Israel. This success with the rhetoric of miracles and the sense of amazement diminished as large the Palestinian problem and found it difficult to act in accordance with its assumptions. Zionism diminished, tension was growing.

Almost from its emergence, Religious perspectives that seek to imbue messianic significance. These approaches are philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1872–1935), many Orthodox Jews found it difficult to act in accordance with its assumptions. Zionism was described as being "to be the end of all these definitions is incoherent with the idea of a distinction between Israel and the other nations. Israel has a unique theological function, to see a religious purpose in the Zionist idea.

Religious Zionist thinkers used the techniques of peshat and derash (the literal meaning to describe the Zionist act. While its original purpose (its peshat), Religious Z religious meaning (its derash), the reimagining of the messianic context of a theocratic national framework, but its innermost core aspira...
actions as part of messianic fulfillment. They were re-gathering the Jewish exiles into the Land of Israel; they were building a Jewish state (parallel to the Davidic kingdom); they were redeeming the land from its Gentile occupants; they were reviving Hebrew as the Jewish language; and they were defending their national enterprise when forced into military conflicts. Ben-Gurion envisioned Zionism as a “light unto the nations”—a moral and universalist national movement that could set standards for the creation of a perfect society. His was therefore a secular messianism that blended humanism and nationalism. The Bible was the ancient model for national revival, the words of the prophets a guide for a contemporary society. 11

It might be expected that the attachment to the Bible and its prophetic message were intensified in the wake of the Israeli victory in 1967 and the successful conquest of the biblical Land of Israel. Many secular Israelis indeed explained this success with the rhetoric of miracles and divine intervention. However, the sense of amazement diminished as large sections of the Israeli elites confronted the Palestinian problem and found it increasingly difficult to reconcile occupation with humanism and universalism. As the narrative grew more complex, traditional Zionism declined as post-Zionism, with its harsh critique of the occupation, ascended. The need for a foundation myth associated with the Bible waned, a waning encouraged by other transformations in Israeli society, such as the growth of individualism and capitalism. 12 Yet as the messianic tension of secular Zionism diminished, tension was growing within Religious Zionist circles.

Almost from its emergence, Religious Zionism has had to consider conflicting perspectives that seek to imbue the Zionist enterprise with covert messianic significance. These approaches are identified largely with the religious philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935). According to Dov Schwartz, many Orthodox Jews found it difficult to identify with the Zionist movement and to act in accord with its assumptions. Zionist rhetoric spoke of the need to “normalize” the Jewish people and make it “a nation like all the others.” The essence of Zionism was described as being “to build a safe haven for the Jewish people.”

All these definitions are in consonant with Jewish tradition, which emphasizes a distinction between Israel and the other nations, and proclaims that the Land of Israel has a unique theological function. Accordingly, many Religious Zionists see a religious purpose in the Zionist idea.

Religious Zionist thinkers used the traditional rabbinic exegetical techniques of peshat and derash (the literal meaning and the interpretative meaning) to describe the Zionist act. While ostensibly agreeing with the movement’s original purpose (its peshat), Religious Zionists endowed Zionism with specific religious meaning (its derash): the reinstatement of divine worship within the context of a theocratic national framework. The Zionist body acts in the material realm, but its innermost core aspires to eternal spiritual life, and this consti-
tutes the "real" foundation for its operations and aims, even if the general Zionist body itself is unaware of this. The long-awaited theocracy is about to arrive, and it will be realized once secular Zionism chooses the true path, that is, the complete worship of God. Zionism will then advance to its second phase: the revival of the monarchy, the restitution of the sacrifices on the Temple Mount, and the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin.

This dogma was present within Religious Zionist circles almost from their inception, but it occupied a marginal position. The Israeli victory in the Six-Day War led to the strengthening of the activist wing of Religious Zionism, which was dominated mainly by the younger generation of the National Religious Party. In the course of the war, the IDF occupied areas of the biblical homeland. These dramatic events created a groundswell of opinion that would later fuel the establishment of the Gush Emunim settlement movement. Although the movement was established only in 1974, it quickly became the dominant stream of Religious Zionism.

Composed of Orthodox youth and the graduates of Orthodox Zionist yeshivas, Gush Emunim presented a much sharper version of the Religious Zionist position. Claiming to know God's will, the group argued that settling all the parts of the biblical Land of Israel conquered in the 1967 war would expedite the end of days and redemption. Although the reconstruction of the Temple was understood as a central part of the messianic process, the followers of Gush Emunim remained silent on that topic and explained that the rebuilding of the Temple should be at the end of the messianic process. Therefore, according to their understanding, despite the 1967 victory, the State of Israel has not yet attained a spiritual level permitting Jews to enter the area of Mount Moriah and build the Temple there. Only after the state has been built in the spirit of the Torah, in both the practical and spiritual realms, will it be possible to construct and enter the holy Temple.

Since the 1980s, however, this position has been challenged. In 1984 the Israeli secret service caught the Jewish Underground, a group of leading figures of the Gush Emunim movement. The Underground carried out several terrorist revenge attacks against Palestinians, including one against three Palestinian officials and one killing three students at the Islamic College of Hebron. They also planned to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount in order to hasten the redemption, but their plans were foiled after they were discovered. After the Underground was caught, the Temple Institute was established, partly in order to support their activities.

Israel's Occupation of the Temple Mount

During the Six-Day War, Israel captured the Temple Mount, returning it to Jewish hands. Until that war, the question of Jews entering the Temple Mount was purely theoretical. Since the thirteenth entered the Temple Mount, both because those controlling the site, particularly the Jews to enter. After Israel's War of Independence, left under Jordanian control, until it was.

The Temple Mount is the most sacred site of Islam, after Mecca and Medina, of the site has made it one of the foci of the war, the Israeli government has always this subject, allowing the Muslim Waqf to Mount. The status quo on the Temple Mount, place of worship, while the Western Wall, unfor- ingly, Jewish prayer is forbidden on the activity possible on the Temple Mount.

The Temple Institute

Israel Ariel, the central figure and institute, is the youngest son of a respected brother, Yaakov Ariel, is considered one of Harav, among the most important Zionism motivations behind the establishment of the Temple Institute, in interviews in the newsletter of Manhigut Yehudit ("Jewish party. Ariel tells of his experience as a guard for Jerusalem. On the first night after IDF posted as a guard by the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Many of the journalists who have written this description as no more than a picture of their article. I contend that Ariel describes the importance in his life, and so offers an opportunity to have motivated his practical and political experiences during the Six-Day War and given them, constitute a classic case of an ex- he underwent a process of radicalization and messianic faith.

An interview with Or Chazer, a journalist offers a particularly frank and detailed ex-
was purely theoretical. Since the thirteenth century, Jews had not, on the whole, entered the Temple Mount, both because of the rabbinic prohibition and because those controlling the site, particularly the Muslim authorities, did not permit Jews to enter. After Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, the Temple Mount was left under Jordanian control, until it was taken by the IDF in June 1967. The Temple Mount is the most sacred site of Judaism and the third most sacred site of Islam, after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. The sacred nature of the site has made it one of the foci of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since the 1967 war, the Israeli government has always sought to mitigate the tension raised by this subject, allowing the Muslim Waqf to maintain its control of the Temple Mount. The status quo on the Temple Mount dictates that the Mount is a Muslim place of worship, while the Western Wall is a Jewish place of worship. Accordingly, Jewish prayer is forbidden on the Temple Mount. The only Jewish ritual activity possible on the Temple Mount is silent, solitary prayer.

The Temple Institute

Israel Ariel, the central figure and moving spirit behind the Temple Institute, is the youngest son of a respected Religious Zionist family. His elder brother, Yaakov Ariel, is considered one of the outstanding graduates of Mercaz Harav, among the most important Zionist yeshivas. In order to understand the motivations behind the establishment of the Temple Institute, it is worth considering the historical background of its founder.

The formative moment and turning point in the life of Israel Ariel came with the conquest of the Temple Mount in 1967. Ariel has repeatedly described his memories of that day: they are documented at length in the publications of the Temple Institute, in interviews in the religious press, and in Lekhathilah, the newsletter of Manhigut Yehudit (“Jewish Leadership”), a faction of the Likud party. Ariel tells of his experience as a paratrooper who took part in the battle for Jerusalem. On the first night after IDF troops entered the Old City, Ariel was posted as a guard by the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Many of the journalists who have interviewed Ariel have tended to regard this description as no more than a picturesque anecdote that can add color to their article. I contend that Ariel describes these memories as a critical experience in his life, and so offers an opportunity to understand the inner drives that have motivated his practical and political development. In my opinion, Ariel’s personal experiences during the Six-Day War, and the interpretation he has since given them, constitute a classic case of an encounter with crisis, suggesting that he underwent a process of radicalization in reaction to the fear of the failure of messianic faith.

An interview with Or Chazer, a journal of the pre-army yeshiva students, offers a particularly frank and detailed description of these experiences and pro-
vides an appropriate starting point for our discussion. Before examining Ariel's comments in this interview, it is worth emphasizing that they constitute a personal testimony given for a specific purpose and should be examined accordingly. The experiences are not necessarily identical with the actual historical facts relating to the day on which the Temple Mount was occupied. This testimony is, however, extremely important as a source of insights into the motivations that led Ariel to establish the Temple Institute.

During the period of tension preceding the Six-Day War, Ariel was serving in the paratrooper division of the military reserves. His unit was expected to engage in combat with the Egyptian army in the Straits of Tiran, but the mission was changed and his company was sent to the Old City of Jerusalem. Ariel found himself among the forces that led the Israeli advance toward the Western Wall, and running excitedly toward the holiest sites of Judaism—the Western Wall and the Temple Mount—aroused in him profound messianic fervor. Overcome with emotions as he was entering the area in front of the Western Wall on his way to the Temple Mount, he heard some soldiers who had reached the site before him comment that they met "two old men" while they were bursting into the area: "I thought to myself: The Messiah and the Prophet Elijah must have arrived. Who else would appear here during the battle for the Temple Mount after two thousand years? That was what seemed natural at the time."24 At this point in time, as the Israeli army secured a stunning victory over the Jordanian Legion and entered the Temple Mount, Ariel indeed felt that the messianic era was arriving. He suspected that the Messiah would arrive that day and build the Temple. This elation was the product of a critical combination of the education he had received at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, which perceived the State of Israel as the "beginning of Redemption," and the powerful experience of being present at the very moment that the Temple Mount was returned to Jewish control.

No one who was privileged enough to witness this moment, and whose feet stood on the Lord's mountain after thousands of years of Jewish absence, could fail to be elated by the great moment for the Jewish people. These are the Days of Messiah—there is no other expression for it. These are the Days of Messiah!

Naturally, the two old men who should appear at this time are the Messiah and the Prophet Elijah. So I went off to meet the Messiah and the Prophet Elijah. I asked myself where I would find them. Surely on the Temple Mount—they must have come to build the Temple. But I saw everyone running toward the Western Wall. For some reason people were more moved by the Wall than by the Temple Mount. Awareness of among the people than awareness I arrived at the Western Wall men—none other than my two Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook ZTS" [David Hacohen]. We embraced our cheeks, in complete silence, in a way—it would just take another

The previous day, during the pre-Old City, Ariel met Shlomo Goren, the Museum, outside the walls of the Old steps should be taken if Israel took the Mount be confined to kohanim (priests), entering? Should the priestly garb be the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, Ariel had no Mount and the Temple and had no idea. Goren's response was that these quests was no certainty that the IDF would iriel, this response reflects the alienation relating to the Temple and their the objectives of redemption.

On the evening of the next day, with Israeli control, Ariel was stationed as a Rock: They placed me—all spots—According to my calculations then I realized that this was more or dashim [Holiest Holies]. . . .

It was at this point that I read . . . . This was not just a peak of festation of divine love for the found its true place in that hour— to its Father in heaven, and the poetry—it was reality. At a divider rendered before us, and after the erased from the board. Indeed, rior over all the peoples of the ea all came true in that hour. Wher
Temple Mount. Awareness of the Western Wall is much greater among the people than awareness of the Temple.

I arrived at the Western Wall, and below me I saw two old men—none other than my two rabbis and teachers from the yeshiva, Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook ZTS"L and the "Reclusive Rabbi" ZTS"L [David Hacohen]. We embraced and stood with tears running down our cheeks, in complete silence, sensing that Messiah was still on the way—it would just take another hour or two.

The previous day, during the preparations for the military offensive in the Old City, Ariel met Shlomo Goren, the chief rabbi of the IDF, at the Rockefeller Museum, outside the walls of the Old City. Ariel asked the rabbi what halakhic steps should be taken if Israel took the Old City. Should entry to the Temple Mount be confined to kohanim (priests)? Would ritual bathing be required before entering? Should the priestly garbs be prepared? Although he was a graduate of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, Ariel had not studied the laws relating to the Temple Mount and the Temple and had no idea how he should act. Ariel related that Goren's response was that these questions should not be examined, since there was no certainty that the IDF would indeed conquer the Temple Mount. For Ariel, this response reflects the alienation of the rabbinical authorities from discussion relating to the Temple and their lack of faith in the possibility of securing the objectives of redemption.

On the evening of the next day, when the Temple Mount was already under Israeli control, Ariel was stationed as a guard at the entrance to the Dome of the Rock:

They placed me—of all spots—at the western entrance to the Dome. According to my calculations and my limited knowledge at the time, I realized that this was more or less the location of the Kodesh Kodashim [Holy of Holies].

It was at this point that I realized the dimensions of the victory.

This was not just a peak of conquests, but a peak of the manifestation of divine love for the people of Israel. The Song of Songs found its true place in that hour—the song of the Assembly of Israel to its Father in heaven, and the parallel divine song. This was not poetry—it was reality. At a divine moment of mercy, all nature surrendered before us, and after thousands of years of suffering, all was erased from the board. Indeed, now "the Lord has made you superior over all the peoples of the earth. All the blessings of the Torah, all came true in that hour. Where? At the Place! At the Place of divine
I was privileged to be a partner in this, and no expression I could find could illustrate this matter. 16 [Emphasis in original]

Even twenty-three years after the event, during his interview with Or Chazer, Ariel was still awestruck as he described the special day on which he felt this sense of miracle and destiny. As he guarded the site of the Temple by night, his feet on the very spot (he believed) where the Kodesh Kodashim stood, he had no doubt that at any moment he might meet the Messiah in the flesh. For Ariel, these hours were spent on the brink, in fervent expectation of a miracle that would realize the biblical prophecies of redemption. He felt privileged to have been stationed as guard on that fateful night, and he expected to witness the divinity in all its force, transcendental yet utterly real, as the Temple descended from heaven, complete and ready, directly to its rightful place on the Temple Mount. "It is so very difficult to describe the feeling that filled us during that extraordinary time in the life of the nation—the liberation of Jerusalem and of the Temple on 25 Iyar 5728 (1967). The phrase 'ringing the bells of the Messiah' expresses in a limited way what was being felt in the heart." 27

In his description of the events of that portentous day, Ariel recalls that even at this early stage he found it irritating that the Western Wall, rather than the Temple Mount, was the focus of attention. He speaks of seeing commanders and soldiers, Shlomo Goren among them, holding secret conversations. Ariel fully expected that "we would soon see soldiers appear from somewhere carrying crates with the vessels of the Temple. In my mind’s eye I saw the kohanim singing as they lit the Temple candelabrum, as in the days of the Hasmonaens." But nothing happened. Shlomo Goren blew the shofar in the area in front of the Western Wall. Ariel’s teachers from the Mercaz Harav yeshiva also passed through the Temple Mount, but they were heading for the Western Wall. "It was evident from their eyes that the tremendous achievement of the people’s return to the site of the Temple was greater and more serious than anything they could have imagined. This is presumably why they did not stay on the Mount, but descended down to the Western Wall." The return to the site of the Temple required halakhic preparations, something for which the rabbinical authorities were unprepared. "There was an expectation of more to come, of a divine event, of a miracle that would remove any question marks that had appeared." The day passed. Weeks and months followed, and the Messiah failed to appear.

Ariel was filled with messianic disappointment. The spiritual reckoning sparked by his disappointment led him to new conclusions. Evidence of his disappointment, and of the conclusions he drew from it, may be found in a poem he published in his Prayerbook for the Temple:

I turn to the left, I turn to the right / Where is our just Messiah? / Where is the messenger of the end of days...
Messianic Religious Zionism

I wonder; where is Ben Yishai? Where is his pleasant violin? Why is the sound of the news delayed? And a heavenly voice replies: How can I come when the Temple is in ruins? How the rock and build a house of glory!

The day is near! The sun rises and shines / Over a mountain and an eternal home / Here are the young priests / Building the altar! / The poets are on the podium—and the Levites shout and cheer.

All the dispersed of Israel shall gather then and come / To Jerusalem and to the Temple / All the nations and all dwellers of Earth shall recognize / That a new light has shone in Jerusalem.

Ariel depicts in colorful terms how a "heavenly voice" came to him and explained his error: the Messiah can come only when the Temple is standing. His original belief that the Messiah would bring the Temple was mistaken. The construction of the Temple is in fact a task incumbent on the public as a precursor to the coming of the Messiah.

It would take almost twenty years for Ariel to translate this personal realization into action. In the interim, he experienced the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1982, under the terms of the peace treaty with Egypt. Ariel was among the leading opponents of this withdrawal. It left him scarred and added to the questions he had been asking himself since the Six-Day War. Indeed, despite the time gap, that war and the Temple Institute are directly connected. The establishment of the Temple Institute constituted a delayed reaction to the personal crisis triggered by the non-realization of his messianic vision in 1967 and exacerbated by the withdrawal from Sinai.

The fact that the Messiah failed to appear immediately after the 1967 war did not weaken Ariel's resolve. On the contrary, his desire for redemption was only strengthened. Ariel identified a tactical solution for his messianic crisis that mandated a different course of action. His spiritual reckoning led him to identify his error in apocalyptic theological approaches that anticipate divine revelation and supernatural occurrences. He realized that this religious structure must be replaced by naturalistic messianic activism. This, then, is the emotional and personal background to the establishment of the Temple Institute. In founding the Institute, Ariel took the Religious Zionist principle of commitment to human activism to its ultimate conclusion.

Observing the Commandments Means Building the Temple

"The goal facing the members and founders of the Temple Institute is to observe the positive commandment in the Torah—to build a Temple to the Lord. Maimonides defines this commandment as one that is imposed on the public" (Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, commandment 20). This statement appears in the preamble to the constitution of the Temple Institute, listed among the Registry of Associa-
The constitution defines the Temple Institute as an operational instrument for realizing the commandment of the construction of the Temple.

During the late 1980s, the Institute began to develop its presence, guided by the requirement to observe all 613 commandments in the Torah and by the perspective that the entire Torah is to be regarded as a single entity. Many of the commandments in the Torah relate to the order of sacrifices and the Temple. It thus follows that to realize the Torah in full, it is imperative to reconstruct the Temple. The explanatory notes to the constitution emphasize that the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel imposed an obligation on the public to observe all the commandments that relate specifically to the land and to the Temple. Performing these commandments is not optional, but rather a halakhic obligation. As long as the Temple remains unbuilt, some two hundred commandments from the Torah cannot be observed: “A healthy and complete perception of Jewish life knows one thing only: the observance of the commandments of the Torah in their entirety. . . . If the Creator of the world commanded us in His Torah to observe 613 commandments, we cannot declare ourselves ‘God-fearing and complete’ while observing only a small portion thereof.” The constitution of the Temple Institute challenges the apocalyptic theological position, which anticipates the construction of the Temple as a supernatural and miraculous act. In order to prove that this expectation is mistaken, the constitution includes a form of “historical evidence”: the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon devoted themselves to the task of building the Second Temple despite the difficult situation they faced materially, politically, socially, and economically. “What was right for forty thousand immigrants from Exile is also right for over three million Jews who now live in Israel (almost one hundred times as many),” the constitution argues.

Moreover, the public is required to resolve by itself the halakhic issues relating to the Temple, such as the precise location of the tabernacle and the altar, the absence of prophecy, and so on. The constitution quotes Maimonides’s ruling in his halakhic essays that the construction of the Temple is a commandment from the Torah, as well as the ruling of Nahmanides stating that it is not permissible to rely on miracles. According to the constitution, halakhah and Jewish faith reject an approach that makes the performance of the commandments dependent on transcendental powers: “Thus the construction of the Temple and the commandments performed there are also not a matter of legend and faith, but are commandments.”

Ariel proposes that the situation of the Jewish people in the State of Israel requires a revision of the halakhah. The starting point of his proposal is the recognition that the period of “subjugation by the nations,” as he puts it, has come to an end. The achievement of independence and liberty, combined with the “God-given gift” of the location of the Temple, as the Jewish people had been under “sub threat of annihilation, they had been expected to possibly observe. This is no long mercy, the people of Israel have regained the nation of Independence in 1948, the situation longer be ignored. Israel’s independence is a halakhic reality.

Ariel attaches profound religious significance to the Temple. Gur, the paratroopers’ commander in 1967, He compares this statement to the declaration of the Jews to build the Second Temple among you of all His people—his God be . . . and build the house of the Lord” (Exode 1, 6) required the Jews to leave Babylonian exile. ‘is in our hands’) but did not merely change years’ exile. The declaration put an end to nations’ and opened the period of the Thirty-five years by the Babylonian exiles, once the first Temple Mount, the people are required to there.”

Ariel argues that two thousand years want Jews to develop a fear of responsibl nore the commandments relating to the Temple. However, “the reality of the result cannot be evaded.” He believes that p observance of all 613 commandments and Temple Mount. The halakhic revision this lution aimed at establishing a theocracy.

Ariel speaks of “the firm hand of Israel reconstruction to Israel manifested through exc God’s will. He interprets the Israeli victory, reinstate worship at the Temple. This call for an uprising among the surrounding trust God and observe His commandments states categorically. For Ariel, the process its current phase demands neither caution ful, and unbridled action. He argues that d akkahah, must be the sole guide for action. i
given gift" of the location of the Temple, demands halakhic recognition. As long as the Jewish people had been under "subjugation by the nations" and faced the threat of annihilation, they had been exempt from commandments that they could not possibly observe. This is no longer the case, given that "through God's mercy, the people of Israel have regained their strength." Since Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948, the situation has changed in a manner that can no longer be ignored. Israel's independence in its own land has created a new halakhic reality.

Ariel attaches profound religious significance to the comment by Motte Gur, the paratroopers' commander in 1967: "The Temple Mount is in our hands." He compares this statement to the declaration by Cyrus the Great of Persia that allowed the Jews to build the Second Temple (begun in 535): "Whosoever there is among you of all His people—his God be with him—let him go up to Jerusalem . . . and build the house of the Lord" (Ezra 1:3). Building the Second Temple required the Jews to leave Babylonian exile. "This declaration ["The Temple Mount is in our hands"] did not merely change the Jewish history of two thousands years' exile. The declaration put an end to the period of the 'subjugation by the nations' and opened the period of the Third Temple." According to the example set by the Babylonian exiles, once the feet of an Israeli soldier have trod on the Temple Mount, the people are required to rebuild the Temple and worship God there.37

Ariel argues that two thousand years of exile have led many Torah-observant Jews to develop a fear of responsibility, as reflected in their tendency to ignore the commandments relating to the building of the Land of Israel and the Temple. However, "the reality of the resurrection of the state is a halakhic fact that cannot be evaded." He believes that political independence demands the full observance of all 613 commandments and the reinstatement of sacrifices on the Temple Mount. The halakhic revision this demands is nothing less than a revolution aimed at establishing a theocracy.

Ariel speaks of "the firm hand of Israel," which he explains as a divine instruction to Israel manifested through exceptional human successes that reflect God's will. He interprets the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War as a divine call to reestablish worship at the Temple. This call must be heeded even if it poses risks such as an uprising among the surrounding nations. "It is a commandment to trust God and observe His commandments, even if this involves danger," he states categorically. For Ariel, the process of redemption of the Jewish people in its current phase demands neither caution nor moderation, but dynamic, forceful, and unbridled action. He argues that distilled truth, as established in the halakhah, must be the sole guide for action. There is thus no need to secure authorization and permits from the authorities or to win public opinion.
According to Ariel, the Torah teaches that whenever the Jews neglected the commandment to establish the tabernacle and the Temple, they were struck by disaster. He notes that God brought a plague on the Jews during the reign of King David because of their neglect in establishing the tabernacle; seventy thousand people paid with their lives. Similarly, during the period of the prophet Samuel, when the Jews failed to bring the tabernacle of Shiloh back after it was captured by the Philistines, the result was famine. Only after they built the Temple was prosperity restored. By extension, the modern leaders of the nation bear a grave responsibility, lest a further disaster come as the result of their prevarication. Ariel even hints that the large number of Israeli casualties in the Yom Kippur War (October 1973), some six years after the 1967 war, was the result of delays in the rebuilding of the Temple.37

Ariel maintains that preparations are required for the construction of the Temple, yet fears that even if the Israeli government were to permit Jewish religious worship on the Temple Mount, it is doubtful whether halakhic figures could be found who could execute the ritual actions relating to the Temple, since their studies of this field have been neglected: "In the existing conditions, it would emerge that [the halakhic figures] are lost when it comes to the Temple and its worship, such as how to build the altar? Where should it be located? What is the order of service? Who are the kohanim? What are the priestly clothes, and how are they made? How does one inspect the animal for blemishes? What is the order of actions for the proper performance of the commandment? What of impurity and purification? And so forth."38 To prepare for worship in the new Temple, training must be provided for worthy individuals from various halakhic fields, and appropriate frameworks for study must be established. Accordingly, Ariel established the Temple Institute as an academic research base—a form of "halakhic technical college" equipped with laboratories, lecture halls, and research programs.39

In addition, the Temple Institute committed itself to preparing the groundwork in terms of gaining public favor—not a necessity, but a strategic advantage. To this end, curricula on the Temple were prepared for use in schools; a museum was opened that presented information and exhibits relating to the history of the Temple and the various types of worship; opulent prayer books for daily and festival use, including rituals related to the Temple, were prepared; and books and other written media were published that discussed the relevance of the Temple to modern life and the question of permission to enter the Temple Mount.

Ariel was well aware that his activities lay within the confines of halakhic legitimacy, since there is nothing improper in pursuing preparatory activities relating to the Temple or in preparing the Temple's ritual vessels. The constitution of the Institute emphasizes that the organization will not address the question of the specific location of the Temple. He holds that as halakhic solutions are tinate, and as the circles of those involved question will disappear, "to be replaced in its homeland to renew its days as on Strict attention to this boundary to secure widespread rabbinical support Religious Zionists, several Hailei (U. also visited the Institute. In 1994, the Council of Torah Elders of Agudat Is tradition, "during which visit he made In 1994 the Boston Rebbe also visited effect, Ariel extracted the undecor yeshiva and drew it to its 1 manifestation of the "beginning of I is the construction of the Temple an Ariel's naturalistic messianic perspec which holds as its ultimate purpose! I began this chapter by describing as a secular fulfillment of the messian neglect the spiritual dimensions of: lize a national myth, many early Israe of Jewish messianism. These scholar as Ben-Zion Dinur (1884–1973), Jose Eshkol (1901–1948). The most out Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), thou only with reserve. His concerns abou essay "Toward an Understanding of The born out of the horror and de: our generation, it is bound to h it has not given itself up totally i sh history will be able to end u without perishing in the crisis tually been conjured up—that i and dangerous past the Jew of his future. Scholem hoped that the national mc tual renewal that would not turn tov any attempt to realize messianism th
of the specific location of the Temple—an issue that Ariel defines as "political." He holds that as halakhic solutions are developed and practical preparations continue, and as the circles of those involved in the preparations widen, this political question will disappear, "to be replaced by the natural need of the Jewish people in its homeland to renew its days as of old."

Strict attention to this boundary in the Institute's activities have enabled it to secure widespread rabbinical support. While most of the support comes from Religious Zionists, several Haradim (Ultra-Orthodox) rabbinical authorities have also visited the Institute. In 1994, the Institute reported that the chairman of the Council of Torah Elders of Agudat Israel, the Sadigura Rebbe, came to the institution, "during which visit he made many extremely instructional comments." In 1994 the Boston Rebbe also visited the Institute.

In effect, Ariel extracted the underlying rationale of the position of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva and drew it to its logical conclusion. If the State of Israel is a manifestation of the "beginning of Redemption," then the end of this process is the construction of the Temple and the installment of a religious dominion. Ariel's naturalistic messianic perspective thus led him to establish the Institute, which holds as its ultimate purpose the rebuilding of the Temple.

I began this chapter by describing the early Zionist vision of the Jewish state as a secular fulfillment of the messianic idea in Judaism, a vision that deliberately neglected the spiritual dimensions of redemption. Partly in an attempt to crystalize a national myth, many early Israeli scholars devoted themselves to the study of Jewish messianism. These scholars include such prominent Zionist activists as Ben-Zion Dinur (1884–1973), Joseph Klausner (1874–1958), and Aaron Zeev Eshkol (1901–1948). The most outstanding scholar of Jewish messianism was Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), though he identified Zionism with messianism only with reserve. His concerns about the State of Israel conclude his landmark essay "Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism":

Born out of the horror and destruction that was Jewish history in our generation, it is bound to history itself and not to meta-history; it has not given itself up totally to Messianism. Whether or not Jewish history will be able to endure this entry into the concrete realm without perishing in the crisis of the Messianic claim which has virtually been conjured up—that is the question which out of his great and dangerous past the Jew of this age poses to his present and to his future.

Scholem hoped that the national movement would be able to develop a spiritual renewal that would not turn toward apocalyptic visions. He argued that any attempt to realize messianism through human action will never feel com-
plete, since "there is nothing concrete which can be accomplished by the unredeemed."

As Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has shown, Scholem completely omitted the question of the Temple Mount from his papers on Jewish messianism. In many traditional texts, the peak of the redemptive process comes with the construction of the Third Temple. Raz-Krakotzkin argues that Scholem deliberately ignored the Temple Mount out of fear of the ramifications of the construction of a Zionist Temple at the expense of the Mount's mosques. 49 Scholem argued that Jewish messianism is a theory of catastrophe. 46 It may well be that the apocalyptical sting inherent in Jewish renewal in the Land of Israel that so concerned Scholem can be summed up as fear of a total war with Islam.10

The obscuring of the question of the Temple Mount by early Zionist messianists, both Religious and secular, invited challenges to the Zionist establishment. Scholem wanted the Zionist messianic myth to develop without a yearning for a Third Temple as part of the end of days. Yet Scholem's conscious denial of the historical desire could not quash the desire. The growing trend of Jewish prayers on the Temple Mount 49 and the vigorous activities of the Temple Institute, discussed above, suggest that the vision of the Third Temple has emerged as a widely accepted component of contemporary Israeli Jewish messianism.

Notes


5. Shapira, "The Bible and Israeli Identity."

9. On Maimonides's messianism, see also I in an Age of Despair (New York: Cambridge Un
10. An extreme interpretation of this dogm Yoel Teitellbaum, who identified secular Zior messianism. See David Soroza, Orthodox a Jewish Tradition in Europe in Modern Times (in H 2011), 378–420.
18. For example, see Shlomo Aviner, Lemi. 2000).
20. Shmuel Berkowitz, The Wars of the Holy P Sites in Israel, Judea, Samaria and the Gaza S (21. This was illustrated dramatically in the erupted after the visit by Ariel Sharon to the Te: the demonstrations were probably planned at 22. Shmuel Berkowitz, The Temple Mount (J Studies, 2001).

10. An extreme interpretation of this dogma is associated with the teachings of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, who identified secular Zionism with false and therefore illegitimate messianism. See David Sorenszon, Orthodoxy and Modern Disciplining: The Production of Jewish Tradition in Europe in Modern Times [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2011), 378–420.


18. For example, see Shlomo Aviner, Lenikdiashita Tov (Jerusalem: Sifriyat Chava, 2000).


21. This was illustrated dramatically in the outbreak of the second Intifada, which erupted after the visit by Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount in September 2000, although the demonstrations were probably planned at an earlier stage.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Lekhatihilah 47 (5759/1999) [in Hebrew].

28. Israel Ariel, Prayerbook for the Temple (Sefarad Ritual) [in Hebrew], vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Karta, 1996), 524–25. In a memorandum he prepared for the Chief Rabbinate, Rabbi Zalman Koren stated that Rabbis Zvi Yehudah Kook and David Hacohen were taken to the Western Wall through the Lions' Gate and the Temple Mount without their knowledge. See Zalman Koren, "Memorandum regarding the Position of the Chief Rabbinate over the Generations on the Temple Mount Question" [in Hebrew], Iturei Kohanim 201 (5761/2001), 27–32.

29. According to the Jewish tradition, the Messiah should come from the Davidic dynasty. Therefore the poem mentions King David as "Ben Yishai," the son of Yishai, who was also known for his violin playing.


33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.


37. Ibid., 529.


39. Ibid.

40. Ariel's characterization of this particular aspect as "political" is presumably due to the presence of divergent positions regarding the location of the Kodesh Kodashim. The generally accepted location is the Foundation Stone in the Dome of the Rock, where the divine spirit resides. However, the architect Tuvya Sagiv argues, based on his own examination, that the location of the Kodesh Kodashim is actually in the plaza between the Mosque of Omar and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. See Tuvya Sagiv, "The Place Is to the South" [in Hebrew], Tekumin 14 (5754/1984), 437–72. The advantage of Sagiv's approach, from the perspective of the Temple Mount activists, is that it does not require demolishing the mosques on the Temple Mount in order to rebuild the Temple. It may be assumed that this is the "political question" to which Ariel alludes.


47. Ibid., 35.


49. Scholem, "Toward an Understanding

50. It is interesting to note that the Jewish mosques on the Temple Mount in 1984, int Islam. See Motti Inbari, Jewish Fundamental Third Temple (Albany: State University of N 51. Ibid., 17–30.
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45. Aharon Zeev Eshkoli, Messianic Movements in Israel (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1957).


47. Ibid., 35.


50. It is interesting to note that the Jewish Underground, which plotted to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount in 1984, intended to trigger an apocalyptic war with Islam. See Motti Inbari, Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple? (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 51–78.

51. Ibid., 17–30.