

Aspects in the Thought of Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal and a Study of New Documents

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Introduction

Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal (1885–1945)² was one of the greatest rabbis in Slovakia. He was born in Hungary but served as rabbi and chief rabbinical judge for the Jewish community of Piešťany, Slovakia, in the inter-war years (from 1920 to the summer of 1942). In October 1942, he fled to Hungary and spent the next year and a half in Budapest as a refugee. On March 19, 1944, after the Nazis invaded Hungary, he returned to Slovakia, where he was captured and deported to Auschwitz. According to his family's testimony, he was murdered on January 24, 1945.³ His rise to fame was the result of the momentous transformation he underwent with respect to his worldview and religious doctrine concerning both *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel) and non-observant Jews. This was articulated in his book *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, published in Budapest on December 23, 1943.⁴

- 1 This study was carried out in the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, with the assistance of the Claims Conference Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies.
- 2 In Hebrew: הרב ישכר שלמה טייכטהאל. See his signature below in the photos from his manuscript. In this article I refer to him as R. Teichtal for reasons of brevity.
- 3 For concise biographical background information about him, see Esther Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives on Faith, Halachah and Leadership during the Holocaust* (2 vols.) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2007), p. 104, n. 129; idem, *In the Hiding Places on the Mountainside: Orthodox Jewry in Hungary in View of the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2013), pp. 133, 189, 326–333; Isaac Hershkowitz, *The Vision of Redemption in the Writings of Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal: Changes in His Messianic Approach During the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2009), pp. 1–4, and see also the copious bibliographical literature in the references.
- 4 On the various stages in the writing of this book, the dates, and significance, see Hershkowitz, *Vision of Redemption*. The version of the book used in this article

The book has attracted much research attention and features prominently in a controversy among scholars over the question of the author's Zionism. Some consider R. Teichtal a quondam anti-Zionist who became a Zionist and portray the turnabout in his thinking as a move toward religious Zionism.⁵ Others disapprove of labeling the man and his political affiliation.⁶ All, however, admit that his religious

is *Em ha-Banim Semeha* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Machon Pri HaAretz, 1983). For English translations see *Em Ha-Banim Semeha: Restoration of Zion as a Response during the Holocaust*, translated by Pesach Schindler (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1999); *Eim Habanim Semeichah: On Eretz Yisrael, Redemption and Unity*, translated by Moshe Lichtman (Mevaseret Tzion: Kol Mevaser Publications, 2000).

- 5 Those who attribute Zionist outlooks and religious-Zionist thinking to R. Teichtal include Shmuel Hacoheh Weingarten, "From *Yeven Metsula* to the Celestial Jerusalem" (Hebrew), *Or ha-Mizrah*, 19 (1970), pp. 235–245; Rivka Schatz-Oppenheimer, "Confession on the Brink of the Crematoria and 'Afterword,' a Haredi Rabbi Regrets" (Hebrew), *Kivunim*, 23 (1984), pp. 49–62; Pesach Schindler: "Tikkun as a Response to Tragedy: *Em Habanim Smeha* of Rabbi Yissakhar Shlomo Teichtal, Budapest, 1943," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 4:4 (1989), pp. 413–433; Eliezer Schweid, *Between Destruction and Deliverance* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1994), pp. 89–104; idem, *Simhat em ha-banim: Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal's Zionist Justification of God* (Hebrew), in Moshe Idel et al., eds., *Minha le-Sara: Studies in Kabbala and Jewish Philosophy Dedicated to Sara Heller-Wilensky* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), pp. 380–398; idem, "The Turn to Historical Activism: The Dispute Between Rabbis Teichtal and Rokeach in the Belz Hasidic Court on the Attitude Toward Zionism" (Hebrew), in idem, *History of the Philosophy of the Jewish Religion in the Modern Era* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006), pp. 280–295; Mendel Piekarz, *Ideological Trends of Hasidism in Poland during the Interwar Period and the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1990), pp. 418–424. In English, see Immanuel Jakobovits, "Faith, Ethics and the Holocaust: Some Personal Theological and Religious Responses to the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3:4 (1988), pp. 371–381; Irving Greenberg, "Theology after the Shoah: The Transformation of the Core Paradigm," *Modern Judaism*, 26:3 (2006), pp. 213–239; Gershon Greenberg, "Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Thought about the Holocaust since World War II: The Radicalized Aspect," in Steven T. Katz, ed., *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 136–137; idem, "Yissakhar Taykhtahl," in Steven T. Katz et al., eds., *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 75.
- 6 Those who do not find Zionist outlooks in R. Teichtal's writings include Chaim Menachem Teichtal (R. Teichtal's son), Foreword to *Em ha-Banim Semeha* (Hebrew), pp. 17–12; Yehuda Friedlander, "R. Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal's Attitude Toward Zionism and the Holocaust" (Hebrew), *Religious Zionism*, 5 (2002), pp. 80–86; idem, *Thought and Deed: Zionists and Anti-Zionists Among the Rabbis of Hungary from the First Zionist Congress (1897) to the 1950s* (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2008); Aliza Levanon, "Rabbinical Sermons in the Holocaust in Nazi-Occupied Countries 1939–1945" (Hebrew) (M.A. thesis, Touro

doctrine underwent major, if not revolutionary, changes. The first studies tended to view him as an out-and-out Zionist; later research challenged the identification of R. Teichtal with religious Zionism and attempted to show that the portrayal is different, broader, and more complex. I wish to argue that the complexity evinced in the more recent studies dulls if not blurs R. Teichtal's Zionism in general and his views – which approximate those of the messianic Zionism of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoen Kook – in particular. I demonstrate this below.

The Transformation

Rabbi Teichtal took vehement exception to the Zionist project in writing and evidently verbally as well. His written censure of Zionism appeared in 1936, in a letter to the Munkács newspaper *Yiddishe Tsaytung*, which was subsequently published in *Tikkun 'Olam*, a collection of letters and articles initiated by the Munkacser *Rebbe*, R. Chaim Elazar Shapira (1871–1937), head of the anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox camp.⁷ The collection challenged both the Mizrachi (religious-Zionist) movement and Agudas Yisroel.⁸ R. Teichtal's letter is, in fact, one of the most extreme contributions in the collection:

Our rabbi the Ba"r'h [Joel Sirkis, author of *Bayit Hadash*]...wrote that the sanctity of the earthly Eretz [Israel] emanates from the sanctity of the heavenly Eretz Israel and this sanctity enters its fruit. Thus, by eating its fruit, we are nourished on the sanctity and purity of the *Shekhinah* [the Divine presence or abode]. The opposite also obtains, Heaven forbid: If Eretz Israel is defiled, this impurity is also drawn into its fruit and, by eating fruit that draws its nourishment from the impurity of Eretz Israel, the impurity penetrates the innards of the Jews, may the Merciful One

College, 1992), p. 47; Farbstein, *In the Hiding Places*, p. 578, n. 46. A third perspective, mentioned below, is that of Isaac Hershkowitz, *Vision of Redemption*, "Em ha-Banim Semeha: From Canon to Dialectic" (Hebrew), *Alei Sefer*, 22 (2012), pp. 115–127.

7 Moshe Goldstein, ed., *Tikkun 'Olam* (Hebrew) (Munkacs: np, 1936), pp. 104–107. About the Munkacser *Rebbe*, see Levi-Izhak Cooper, *The Admor Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira of Munkács: The Hasidic Posek – Image and Approach* (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2011).

8 See title page of *Tikkun 'Olam*.

spare us, and the sanctity leaves them and the *Shekhinah* among the Jews vanishes. So says the Ba”h....After all, it is known that the heavenly Eretz Israel is the foundation [*sod*] of Zion and Jerusalem; the evil forces [*kelipot*] surround [them] and are called *arelim* [uncircumcised/as-yet-unfit for consumption] because Mount Zion is surrounded by Esau and Amalek. Now that the building of the Land of Israel is at issue, every Jew should learn this in order to gain some grasp of what the true Eretz Israel is....The [verse fragment] *erets okhelet yoshveha hi* [“a land that consumes its inhabitants”; Numbers 13:32] indicates this: [Eretz Israel] consumes those who wish to settle there serenely and high-handedly merely to consume its fruit....The aforementioned remarks of the Ba”h invite another allusion: The impurity enters via its fruit and Jews who consume it force the sanctity out of their bodies and [the fruit] turns into thorns in their bodies. Thus it is stated, *mi-dor dor* [“from generation to generation”; Exodus 17:16], in a diminishing from the wording *qots ve-dardar tatsmi’ah* [“thorns and thistles shall (the land) bring forth”; Genesis 3:18]. For this is the essence of what Amalek does: defile the Land and make its fruit *qots ve-dardar* for the Jews....In truth, no human deed and act will be of any use whatsoever in raising the fortunes of Zion and Jerusalem until God observes from Heaven and basks us in an all-embracing spirit of celestial purity to immerse us in new luminescence from the six days of Creation in the revelation of the hidden light upon Zion....Until such time as God renews the hidden light, we have no vocation other than Torah by gathering and teaching pupils in *chadarim* [singular, *cheder*, religious school for young boys] and *yeshivot* [singular, *yeshivah*, religious academy for older males] on the path that we received from our forebears...namely, only by study of the Holy Torah in the old and accepted guileless way will we merit the redemption.⁹

Shmuel Weingarten and later Isaac Hershkowitz¹⁰ claimed that the contents of this letter should not be considered a rejection of *aliyah* and evidence of an outlook that counsels passive waiting for Divine

9 *Tikkun ‘Olam*, pp. 104–107.

10 Weingarten, “From *Yeven Metsula* to the Celestial Jerusalem,” p. 236; Hershkowitz, *Vision of Redemption*, pp. 51–57.

action in bringing about the redemption, thus ruling out all human effort. Hershkowitz explains:

The letter offers no rationale that would rule out *aliyah* by the pious Orthodox. R. Teichtal's concerns originate in the non-religious identity of the settlers in Eretz Israel; they give no conceptual backing to the ideological views of the editors of the collection and many of its contributors, for whom the very attempt to establish Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Israel clashes with the Torah's commandment.... This assessment becomes clear given that Rabbi Teichtal did not share the views that categorically dismiss all human exertion to bring [about] the redemption.¹¹

However, in order to get to the heart of R. Teichtal's radical remarks in this missive and his sanctification of passivity in regard to the redemption, a brief preface concerning one of the fundamentals of Kabbalah is critical. According to kabbalistic doctrine there are two main systems: that of *kedushah*, sanctity, and that of its contrast, the *sitra akhra*, the other side. The *kedushah* system is composed of ten *sephirot* (singular, *sephirah*), the ten different emanations or attributes of the Deity. The minutiae of this system need not occupy us here, except for the fact that the lowest *sephirah* is the *Shekhinah*, God's abode, a place that has presence and existence; whereas the *sitra akhra* — the other side — is the place where God's presence is not revealed.

Kabbalistic teachings, however, show that nothing can be disconnected from Godliness, and everything derives its "vitality" from God. If so, how can the *sitra akhra* exist at all? After all, *leit atar panui mineh*,¹² "no place is vacant of Him"; i.e., vacant of God's presence, including the *sitra akhra*. If so, in what sense is the "other side" other? The kabbalistic answer is complex: it asserts that, yes, the *sitra akhra* is not vacant of Godliness since, after all, no place is vacant of Godliness. The Godliness of the *sitra akhra*, however, is imperceptible to the eye and undisclosed to mortal beings. Furthermore, it has no inherent existence; it

11 Hershkowitz, *Vision of Redemption*, pp. 53–54. R. Teichtal, however, referred to this letter in *Em ha-banim semecha* (p. 302), noting that it does rule out *aliyah*: "In a letter of mine, reprinted in the book *Tikkun 'Olam* published by the holy Munkacser *Rebbe* of blessed memory, I expressed my opinion against *aliyah*. Now I state the opposite of what I said in the letter.... I was wrong."

12 *Tikkunei Zohar* 122b.

draws its strength from the system of *kedushah* by circumventing the *Shekhinah*.

Kabbalists are wont to liken the *sitra ahara* to the peel (*kelipah*) of a fruit. The peel derives its vitality from the fruit even though it is not the essence of the fruit and we human beings find no “vitality” in it. Similarly, the *sitra akhra* lacks Divine vitality in the positive sense; instead, it draws its vitality from the *Shekhinah*. Hence, the *sitra akhra* is a peel that affixes itself to the *Shekhinah* as if by glue. Wherever holiness exists, a *sitra akhra* exists as well. This kabbalistic premise is based on a consistent and sensitive contemplation of material reality that illuminates the complexity and multifacetedness of all things and shows that all that is good accommodates evil as well. Thus, every life-saving medicine has side effects, a computer may have a virus, and reality metamorphoses in an intertwining of good and evil.¹³

With these matters in hand, we may understand the deep meaning of R. Teichtal’s letter. *Kelipot* are attracted specifically to holy venues, because evil exists in adherence to good. Impurity has no inherent existence; what existence it has is owed to its ambient sanctity, just as a peel encases its fruit. Therefore, the holy Eretz Israel is surrounded by *kelipot*, i.e., forces of impurity, also known as “Esau” and “Amalek.” “The Mount of Zion,” and no other land “is surrounded by Esau and Amalek.” Eretz Israel in its devastated state is likened to a dead human being. The Temple has been destroyed; the land is bereft of its Jewish multitudes. In this state of “death,” the impurity that surrounds Eretz Israel adheres to the land and dominates it.¹⁴ Consequently, it “consumes” those who wish to settle there, and the only cure is to wait for God to banish the impurity and bathe the Land in pure spirit.

R. Teichtal’s letter explicitly rules out any attempt to settle Eretz Israel. It demonizes Eretz Israel in a manner that is virtually unparalleled even in *Tikkun ‘Olam*. It is a place where impurity rules and sanctity has died. Hence one can only wait for a future time when the heavenly forces will bask Eretz Israel in a spirit of purity, upending the balance of impurity now regnant there. R. Teichtal’s conclusion — “Truly, no

13 On the concept of the *sitra akhra*, see Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1976), pp. 187–212. On the struggle between the *Shekhinah* and the *sitra akhra* and between the fruit and its peel, see Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar Part A* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1949), pp. 220–226, 230–231, 290, 300–301, 305–306.

14 *Zohar*, Part B, 140a.

human deed and action will help” — is a corollary of the theology that he developed and presented at the beginning of his remarks. The practical and political implication of this theology is the negation of human effort and the sanctification of passivity. Eretz Israel is dead for the time being; one must wait for the miracle of its resurrection. Until then no action should be taken; on the contrary, any human effort to build Eretz Israel is lethal to the builders. Any human endeavor undertaken is impaired by the impurity that now blankets the country. This defilement penetrates the fruit, drains those who consume it of their sanctity, and metamorphoses into thorns in their bodies — “*dar-dar le-Yisrael*.”

R. Teichtal also expressed verbal criticism of Zionism and its pioneers, as evidenced in both his own writings and in external sources. R. Teichtal describes himself, sadly and regretfully, as having trenchantly criticized Zionism and its pioneers both in writing and orally: “Be mindful of everything that I **wrote** about the builders of [Eretz Israel] and I **called** them evildoers.”¹⁵ Since no written document in which R. Teichtal calls the Zionist pioneers “evildoers” has come to light thus far, he was probably referring to remarks made orally. One may derive clearer evidence of oral criticism from an approbation that R. Teichtal received for his book *Tov Yigal*, published in 1926. The author of the approbation, R. Yehoshua Bucksbaum the Galanter,¹⁶ states that R. Teichtal regularly criticized Zionism and, to be more specific, religious Zionism, “in pleasant discourse and pure, crisp argumentation.” The criticism relates to those among the Orthodox who consort with sinners, i.e., “wrongdoers,” and allow the national idea to infiltrate their religious thinking:

His brilliant eminence, in pleasant discourse and pure, crisp argumentation, demonstrated the error of ways of many of our generation, who think of themselves and call themselves Orthodox but consort and befriend wrongdoers who toss the word of our Sages behind their backs, build themselves an altar, follow vanity

15 *Em ha-Banim Semecha*, p. 127. He expressed his sorrow and regret in the ensuing remarks: “Let this be a moral for the many who blithely make a Jew into an evildoer and call him an evildoer. Heaven forbid that this be done, because all are beloved seed in the eyes of the Omnipresent, blessed be He” (emphasis here and throughout the article is mine unless otherwise stated — D.R.).

16 R. Yehoshua Bucksbaum (1877–1944), head of Yeshivat Galant in Slovakia.

and are rendered vain, and make animal sacrifices and burn incense to the “national” idol so as to be known as national Jews. Verily their outcome proves their outset because their sole wish, desire, and intention is to cast aside the yoke of the words of the Sages, of Torah, and of the faith.¹⁷

R. Teichtal makes no reference whatsoever to the national idea and its adherents in *Tov Yigal*. Therefore, the approbation, instead of remarking on the contents of the book, speaks of its author’s success in “demonstrat[ing] the error of ways of many of our generation.” In view of the contents of the approbation, one may assume that on several opportunities R. Teichtal spoke publicly, or before the students of his *yeshivah*, on current issues and referred directly, critically, and vehemently to supporters of the Zionist movement — i.e., “national Jews” — and the Orthodox among them, i.e., members of the Mizrachi movement.

Further important evidence that R. Teichtal inveighed publicly against the building of Eretz Israel and activism — instead urging passive waiting until the Messiah comes and delivers the Jewish people to its land miraculously — is a story in his book *Em ha-Banim Semeha* about “a great rabbi [who] preached publicly in this manner.” By focusing on the words and reading between the lines, one realizes that this anonymous rabbi is none other than the author himself:

Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit [cf. Ecclesiastes 7:9] to discuss and decide that we should do nothing to bring on the redemption and merely sit passively and wait for the Messiah to come and deliver us on eagle’s wings to our land and our possession, when many among our people and even rabbis and giants of Torah think and imagine that the matter of our redemption is such, and when a great rabbi preached publicly in this manner — that nothing about this should be done, not even building and settling the Land, but instead we should wait for the Messiah to come so that a cloud will billow and carry us to Eretz Israel. It happened to him because he failed to grasp the profundity of this *Halakhah*, one of the deepest and most opaque *Halakhot*...and he who does not fathom it has no concept of it.¹⁸

17 Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, *Tov Yigal* (Hebrew) (Bardejov: 1926), p. 4.

18 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 173.

Who, however, is this rabbi who erred in his Halakhic teaching, “because he failed to grasp the profundity of this *Halakhah*”? It is none other than the author, who wrote about himself: “I have already written in the introduction to this book of mine that **I never grasped the profundity of this** *Halakhah*, but now that I have probed it in depth, I realize that I was truly in error.”¹⁹

Then, however, the war broke out, and the troubles began. R. Teichtal’s *yeshivah* in Piešťany was closed in 1942. The students were deported, and R. Teichtal fled to Hungary. The shock that struck Slovakia and the incoming reports about the destruction of Jewish communities in Poland — of which, surprisingly, R. Teichtal was aware — gave him no rest. In a letter dated April 22, 1942, kept in the archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary,²⁰ R. Teichtal describes the dispossession and looting of the Jews of Piešťany and Slovakia and their deportation to Poland. In this document, published here for the first time, he describes where and with whom he deposited his collection of books and his Halakhic *oeuvre*, which was still in handwriting:

For everlasting memory I will record in pen, metal, and lead that in the year “Your Messiah, do not turn away” [1942], as God poured out His wrath upon the Daughter of Zion, a grave decree of total deportation was pronounced on the Jews of the communities here in the state of Slovakia, including those of our community, Pishtian [Piešťany]. May God observe from Heaven the evil and violence that are being wrought against us. They have taken our wealth and deported us all, the young, the elderly, and even tender children, with such immense cruelty that the mouth tires to recount it, and in hardship, to the ruined land of Poland, may God have mercy on us quickly, and tell our woes, “Enough.” I grieve for my collection of all manner of precious books, Responsa that I placed in the loft of the great house of study, and I grieve most of all for all of my religious writings, ten books of Responsa and sermons in handwriting. God summoned to me a

19 Ibid., p. 302. On p. 173, R. Teichtal refers to the second introduction to his book and to sources in the Talmud and the midrashic compilation *Tanna de-vei Eliyahu*. Indeed, at the beginning of the second introduction (pp. 31–33), he states, basing himself on these sources, that he had not fully fathomed the question of the rebuilding of Eretz Israel and the redemption. See his apology and admission of error, *ibid.*, p. 21.

20 Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), Ms. 10633, p. 5.

loyal and trustworthy Gentile with whom I concealed all of my manuscripts along with manuscripts by other great [rabbis], such as that of my mentor and father-in-law, the holy and brilliant R. Menachem Katz of Tzelem [Deutschkreutz]. May God help me so that He will return us to placid and safe waters and privilege us with returning to our holy land. Then I will come back to this place to reclaim my manuscripts from the aforementioned Gentile.

The name of the Gentile with whom my manuscripts were placed is Michal Lehota, of 498 Žilinská Street. May God grant me the merit of witnessing the imminent redemption of Israel and God's return to Zion speedily and in our days, Amen. The fourth day of the [combined Torah portion] *Aharei* [and] *Kedoshim*, the twentieth (by the Jewish count),²¹ [the year] 702 according to the abbreviated count [April 22, 1942], Pishtian, may it be built soon, Amen. Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, head of rabbinical court in this holy community and author of *Responsa Mishne Sahir*, in several parts (see Appendix 1).

If so, then R. Teichtal was more aware, by early 1942, of the events in Poland than research has surmised thus far.²² The letter also indicates that his thinking changed at this early stage. Now he placed his trust and desire on the Jews' return to Eretz Israel: "and privilege us with returning to our holy land." In fact, in *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, he testifies to this epiphany, brought on by the disasters that befell Slovakian Jewry. It was manifested by an intensive reexamination of the Jewish question in general, which he had largely dismissed and disregarded until the Holocaust: "I took no interest whatsoever in this because I was occupied with teaching and writing."²³

Now that we have encountered unwanted days, my mind is pre-occupied with the troubles of the generation. Therefore, I am unable to delve into ordinary Halakhic matters as has been my wont since youth, since such study requires clarity. Moreover, the storms of exile that have battered us have driven the *yeshivah* out

21 The twentieth day of the counting of the Omer.

22 See Levanon, "Sermons," pp. 45–46; Hershkowitz, "*Em ha-Banim Semeha*: From Canon to Dialectic," p. 125, n. 48.

23 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 21.

of my house of study. On that bitter day when the pogroms spread among the people and trampled all that was holy, *yeshivah* students were banished from their halls of study. I remained alone, isolated with my thoughts on the present-day destruction of the people and communities of Israel. Why has the Lord done this? What is the meaning of His terrible rage?

Thus, I decided to examine the history of our people during its two millennia in the tumultuous pit of destruction and exile in the lands of the nations.²⁴

Interpreting the Transformation

In 1983, Machon Pri ha-Arets republished *Em ha-Banim Semeha* after an earlier printing had run out. Machon Pri ha-Arets was founded by disciples of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook — head of *Yeshivat Merkaz Harav*, son of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, and a leading luminary of religious Zionism. In a foreword to the book, the publisher captures its conceptual thrust and its conclusions. However, Rabbi Chaim Menachem Teichtal, son of R. Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, responded angrily to this foreword, faulting the connection between the book and the prevalent school of thought at *Yeshivat Merkaz Harav*.

My revered father's love for the Land, his fervent desire to intensify its settlement with Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and his joy at its building were exhibited publicly at every possible opportunity. Alas, his fiery words...have been distorted more than once. Various groups have misrepresented his views intentionally, for various reasons.²⁵

In the main, R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal contends that his father's thinking should not be construed as religious Zionist but as representative of the Agudas Yisroel stream, which favored the creation of an Orthodox presence in Eretz Israel. The leading personality in this ideological current, the Gerrer *Rebbe*, R. Avraham Mordechai Alter, is cited in *Em ha-Banim Semeha*.

At this time [wrote R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal], upon the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁵ Ibid., Foreword by R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal, p. 19.

publication of the book by Machon Pri ha-Arets, I wish to refute the sundry views that were attributed to the author by those who took his words out of context, so that it be known that the purpose of this work is to enhance the glory of Heaven and promote the settlement of Eretz Israel through the mass *aliyah* of Orthodox Jews, as he said in the name of the Gerrer *Rebbe*.²⁶

The meaning of R. Teichtal's transformation is disputed among scholars as well. The first generation of researchers, such as Rivka Schatz-Oppenheimer, Pesach Schindler, and Eliezer Schweid, interpreted the turnabout as an ideological one: R. Teichtal lamented his opposition to Zionism and instead adopted religious-Zionist thinking.²⁷

The second generation challenged this thesis. Aliza Levanon draws a distinction between favoring *aliyah* and empathizing with the Zionist movement, especially religious Zionism. She detects in R. Teichtal's views a doctrine similar to what she calls that of the "Yishuvniks," i.e., the sector of the Orthodox Old Yishuv in pre-Israel Palestine that was represented by people such as R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld.²⁸ Esther Farbstein, like R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal, finds some affinity between the outlook of R. Teichtal *père* and that of Agudas Yisroel and R. Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer *Rebbe*. "In certain respects," Farbstein writes, "R. Teichtal's thinking reflects a perception that had spread to Agudas Yisroel in its attitude toward Eretz Israel, one that found expression in the Gerrer *Rebbe's* letters and references to Eretz Israel."²⁹ Yehuda Friedlander scoffs at the possibility that R. Teichtal identified with Zionism, claiming that he "dealt sparingly with the ideological aspects of Zionism and religious Zionism"³⁰ and "refrained from taking a stance."³¹ Friedlander also shares R. Chaim Menachem

26 Ibid., pp. 19–21.

27 Schatz-Oppenheimer, "Confession on the Brink of the Crematoria"; Schindler, "Tikkun as a Response to Tragedy"; Schweid, *Between Destruction and Deliverance*, pp. 89–104.

28 Levanon, "Sermons," p. 47. Distinguishing between R. Teichtal and religious Zionism, Levanon contends that R. Teichtal did not accept the non-religious *ab initio*, but even religious-Zionist circles did not accept secularism *ab initio*. See Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads — A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 159–160, 175–187.

29 Farbstein, *In the Hiding Places*, p. 578, n. 46.

30 Friedlander, "Thought and Deed," p. 174.

31 Yehuda Friedlander, "Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal: From Anti-Zionist to Pro-Zionist" (Hebrew) (M.A. thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 1999), pp. 24–25, 110–114.

Teichtal's umbrage, asserting that R. Kook's disciples appropriated R. Teichtal *père* as their own. Although he is right about this, his efforts to explain it venture into quasi-psychological and seemingly speculative factors that have nothing in common with serious historical research:

After the Holocaust, many sought to view him as a spiritual mentor and philosophical successor to R. A.I. Kook. [R. Teichtal] was a good fit for their desires and requirements. It was convenient to ascribe to him a worldview that defined Eretz Israel as the crux of Zionism. From there it was a short leap to characterizing him as a religious-Zionist rabbi....Myths are created when their subject is molded to suit an additional goal....The need for a "rabbi" who treated Eretz Israel as his highest religious and practical priority made him fit for mythification.³²

Isaac Hershkowitz takes a different approach relative to both the proponents and the opponents of the view of R. Teichtal's teachings as Zionist. Analyzing the editing of *Em ha-Banim Semeha* and pointing out its different historical strata, he claims that the work is not monolithic and, for this reason, not unequivocal. He characterizes it as a dialectic that converses with the reader:

While R. Teichtal remains consistent throughout the book about the importance and value of Eretz [Israel], on the other core issues in the book, e.g., the tools to be used in bringing the redemption, the theological standing of the Jewish redemption in the modern era, the Eretz Israel settlement project, and the attitude toward those who abandon observance in the Diaspora and in Eretz Israel – the book makes a broad range of contradictory references....Therefore, I would think it not far-fetched to regard *Em ha-Banim Semeha* as a sophisticated dialectic that converses with its readers more than it preaches the path of truth to them.³³

Given the diverse approaches in research toward R. Teichtal's thinking,

32 Friedlander, "R. Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal's Attitude Toward Zionism and the Holocaust," pp. 85–86.

33 Hershkowitz, "Em ha-Banim Semeha: From Canon to Dialectic," p. 127; idem, *The Vision of Redemption in Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal's Writings: Changes in His Messianic Approach During the Holocaust*, p. 263. This article does not follow in the footsteps of Hershkowitz's study, despite its importance, and attempts instead to demonstrate the existence of a systematic philosophical line in the book.

I wish to reexamine it on the basis of his writings and the introduction of new documents and show that R. Teichtal not only favored the ideas of religious Zionism, but that his writings also displayed many parallels to the redemptionist Zionist teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoen Kook.³⁴

Main Parameters Distinguishing Between “Religious Zionism” and “Haredi Judaism”

The main problem in researching R. Teichtal’s teachings is the use of the words “Zionism” and “nationalism.” Various scholars use these terms in different ways, and, as a result, semantic dissimilarities may have created pointless disputes in the case at hand. R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal defines the Zionist movement as “emblematic, as is known, of the jettisoning of the yoke of the commandments and all values sacred to the Jewish people,”³⁵ the antithesis of fear of God and Jewish integrity. Thus, he considers it self-evident that his father made no reference to the Zionist movement in his book.³⁶ Friedlander presents R. Teichtal as a pragmatist who sided with the Zionist enterprise, because it offered a place of refuge for the Jews but took no stance on the Zionist idea, “which has nothing to do with religious faith.”³⁷

The very word “Zionism” is charged. It seems that researchers who invest it with anti-religious meaning and find it intimidating refrain from identifying R. Teichtal as a Zionist. In contrast, scholars who are not deterred by the concept of “Zionism” and find no intrinsic anti-religious essence within it do tend to ascribe it to R. Teichtal.

In order to avoid semantic disputation and blurry distinctions, I will use clear parameters to distinguish between religious Zionism and

34 An ideological kinship between the two has been noted several times (see Schatz-Oppenheimer, “Confession on the Brink of the Crematoria,” pp. 50, 62; Schindler, “Tikkun,” note 6; Schweid, *Between Destruction and Deliverance*,” p. 98; idem, *Simhat Em ha-Banim*, pp. 382–383). This proximity, however, has never been proven and has been mentioned in general ways only, without exact references, quotations, and parallels that would demonstrate its existence.

35 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, Hebrew edition, p. 20, n. 11.

36 Ibid., pp. 20–21. However, see R. Teichtal’s explicit references to the secular Zionist movement: *ibid.*, pp. 135, 158, 163; see also *ibid.*, p. 126, where R. Teichtal explains, using original reasoning, why the Zionist movement must be specifically a secular one at its outset.

37 Friedlander, “Thought and Deed,” p. 174.

Agudas Yisroel. I do not intend to enlist R. Teichtal into “the Agudah,” “the Mizrachi,” or any other ideological current, nor to label him with a political affiliation or squeeze him into a shallow box. On the contrary, it seems to me that the investigation of R. Teichtal’s teachings on the basis of these parameters will elucidate his convictions and explicate his attitude toward the Zionist movement.

The Redemption

The predominant Orthodox opinion before the Holocaust, even among those who favored settling Eretz Israel, was that the hoped-for Jewish redemption would be engineered by God in the form of a miraculous spiritual event. Any human effort to bring about the redemption is seen as inadequate and inconsistent with this outcome.³⁸ In contrast, Rabbis Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer and Judah Alkalai, who are known as the forerunners of Zionism, argued that the redemption would occur by natural means, driven by human action, and unequivocally defined passive redemption as heresy.³⁹

The Gerrer *Rebbe*, R. Avraham Mordechai Alter, head of Agudas Yisroel and a critic of Zionism, also saw benefit in *aliyah*, and R. Teichtal quotes his encouragement of mass *aliyah* by the Orthodox.⁴⁰ **The Gerrer *Rebbe*’s outlook, however, plainly has nothing to do with the redemption.** It does not advocate mass Orthodox *aliyah* in order to bring on the redemption but so as to discharge the fundamental duty of settling Eretz Israel. Furthermore, it certainly has nothing to do with the Zionist movement. Indeed, the *Rebbe*’s father, R. Yehudah

38 Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 17–19. On Agudas Yisroel’s attitude toward the redemption question after the Holocaust, see Gershon Greenberg, “History and Redemption: Manifestations of Orthodox Jewish Messianism at the End of World War II,” in Dan Michman, ed., *The Holocaust in Jewish History: Historiography, Historical Consciousness and Interpretations* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), pp. 537–578; idem, “From Hurban to Redemption: Orthodox Jewish Thought in the Munich Area, 1945–1948,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, 6 (1989), pp. 81–112; and idem, “Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Thought About the Holocaust Since World War II,” pp. 132–160.

39 Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, pp. 26–32; see *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 174–175.

40 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 200. The original appears in *Collection of Letters and Articles by His Holy Eminence, Our Master the Gerrer Rebbe* (Hebrew) (Warsaw: 1937), p. 63.

Aryeh Leib Alter, author of *Sefat Emet*, decried Zionism as “apostasy and heresy, God protect us, and whoever adheres to it is as if he adheres to idolatry.”⁴¹ The commonality among all ultra-Orthodox currents is the perception of the redemption as miraculous and not hastenable by any human.⁴²

Not so R. Teichtal. He found much more meaning in the Zionist *aliyah* and the rebuilding of Eretz Israel; this did not only represent observance of the commandment to settle the country, this was not only a means to religious and political influence, but it characterized effective action meant to hasten the redemption process. “Therefore,” he concluded, “we are duty-bound to rebuild our country so as **to hasten our redemption by so doing**, for our redemption depends on rebuilding the Land.”⁴³ The Orthodox should enlist in the settlement enterprise, according to R. Teichtal, in order to attain more than observance of the commandment to settle Eretz Israel: “If all Jews were to join them, an everlasting redemption would result.”⁴⁴

This view of the Eretz Israel settlement project as a process of redemption clearly sets R. Teichtal’s views apart from those of the Agudas Yisroel rabbis and even most of those associated with the Mizrachi movement, who did not necessarily identify the resurrection process as redemptive.⁴⁵ R. Teichtal’s vehement assertion of his redemptionist outlook — “Anyone with a brain in his head must admit that now is the time and the era that our prophets predicted and that the time of

41 Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, p. 175. On the evolution of Agudas Yisroel’s attitude toward the Zionist movement from the time it was founded to the establishment of the State of Israel, see Joseph Fund, *Separation or Participation: Agudat Israel Confronting Zionism and the State of Israel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999), pp. 164–193.

42 An exception in Agudas Yisroel was Rabbi Dr. Isaac Breuer, who found some messianic significance in the Zionist settlement project. Breuer, however, was alone in Agudas Yisroel in this thinking; most intellectuals in the movement saw the Zionist enterprise as devoid of spiritual meaning. See Fund, *Separation or Participation*, pp. 30–60.

43 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 102. See also, at length, pp. 40, 119–120. As for activism as a means of redemption before and after the Holocaust, and on redemption without activism, see Greenberg, “History and Redemption,” pp. 537–578, and idem, “Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Thought About the Holocaust Since World War II,” pp. 151–156.

44 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 155.

45 On the Mizrachi rabbis, see Dov Schwartz, *The Land of Reality and Imagination: The Status of the Land of Israel in Religious Zionist Thought* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), Chapter 2.

our visitation has come”⁴⁶ — traces to his view of the redemption as a natural process, as the forerunners of Zionism and Rabbi A.I. Kook believed it to be,⁴⁷ and to his encouragement of and trust in human action: “It is a great rule in all matters: first we do our [share] and then the Holy One Blessed Be He will do His.”⁴⁸

Subjective Intention — Objective Result

After his first meeting with R. Kook, the Gerrer *Rebbe*, R. Avraham Mordechai Alter, wrote a critique of the latter’s defense of the “free” (i.e., secular) Zionist:

[R. Kook’s] love of Zion crosses every red line; he pronounces the impure pure and displays an exculpatory bias.... This is where the strange sayings in his works have their origins. I remonstrated with him at length, arguing that although his intentions are desirable his actions [are not], etc. He abets transgressors even as they persist in their rebellion and their desecration of all that is holy.... His way of thinking concerning the raising of the sparks is also hazardous. As long as [the secular Zionists] do not renounce transgression, the sparks are devoid of substance. In this respect, [R. Kook] invites the risk that pure and clean souls will enlist with the transgressors by force of the beauty of Japhet.⁴⁹

The two rabbis beheld the reality in an equal manner but interpreted it differently due to a fine distinction. The Gerrer *Rebbe* judged the non-religious Zionists by their subjective intentions; R. Kook judged them

46 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 172.

47 Here R. Teichtal based himself on the writings of a Forerunner of Zionism, R. Judah Alkalai; *ibid.*, pp. 168–175. R. Teichtal, like R. Kook, predicated his doctrine of redemption on historical events: the settlement of Eretz Israel, the efflorescence of its wilderness, the ingathering of exiles, and so on. This way of thinking, which calculates the time of the redemption on the basis of historical events instead of reckonings of the End of Days, is unique to religious-Zionist rabbis, foremost R. Kook. See Schweid, *Simhat Em ha-Banim*, p. 382, and note ad loc.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 107; see also pp. 79 and 105–106. It is also noteworthy that R. Teichtal preached observance of the commandment of settling Eretz Israel differently from Agudas Yisroel rabbis such as the Gerrer *Rebbe*. For R. Teichtal the commandment is observed not only by individual *aliyah* but also by pan-Jewish *aliyah* and the establishment of a Jewish entity in Eretz Israel; see *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 20, 27, 169.

49 R. Avraham Mordechai Alter, *Collection of Letters and Articles*, pp. 66–68.

appreciatively, on the basis of the objective outcome. R. Kook sought to distinguish between the personal intention of the individual in history and the objective result of the action taken. R. Kook found religious meaning in outcomes — not on the basis of the intention and the action actually taken but in view of the contribution to the historical process of redemption. R. Alter, in contrast, judged the Zionist pioneers by their intent, values, and express breaching of religious barriers.⁵⁰ Here the outlooks of R. Teichtal and R. Kook are definitely similar. R. Teichtal distinguishes intention from outcome and lauds the latter:

It seems to me that **the simple Jew who builds Eretz Israel with no spiritual intent, merely for his own benefit, accomplishes a greater repair [tikkun] in the celestial realms than the greatest pietist** with his midnight prayers, his weeping, and the laments that he recites for the sake of the *Shekhinah* and the end of the exile. The [pietist] certainly effects great repairs, but they cannot compare with the repair effected by the simple Jew who **physically builds the Land, even if he has no godly intent**.... Thus it is clear that the Omnipresent desires the work of today's builders and accepts their efforts... even if they act sinfully and do not fulfill His will in the observance of other commandments of the Torah, God forbid.⁵¹

These remarks shift the conceptual emphasis to the objective result and imply that the Zionist pioneers should be judged on this basis. R. Teichtal does not mean to say that the pioneers should not be criticized for non-observance of the commandments,⁵² but deserve appreciation on the basis of the outcome of their endeavors. Furthermore, according to R. Teichtal, the objective result of the non-religious pioneers' life work promotes the redemption, attributing the pioneers the role of harbingers of the redemption and God's messengers, no less, even if they do not purport to be such, and even if they would surely find this role objectionable.

50 Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, p. 111.

51 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 58–59.

52 He expresses such criticism on p. 59. R. Kook also wielded the rhetorical rod when he observed desecration of the commandments. See *Iggrot ha-Re'aya* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2002), Part A, pp. 182–183 (end of Letter 144); Avinoam Rosenak, *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1997), pp. 32–34.

If it is true that the rebuilding of our Holy Land is a sign of the imminent End of Days and **the beginning of the redemption**, how could most of the builders desecrate the Sabbath and commit other sins?...The truth is as Job says, “Can you fathom the searchings of God? [Job 11:7]...Why do you involve yourself with the Merciful One’s hidden matters? [Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 10a] Most importantly, it is self-evident that **these pioneers are God’s messengers**...If you wish, I will demonstrate more clearly that the builders of the Land, whom you consider sinners among their people (God forbid) **are in fact harbingers of the redemption**.⁵³

According to this view the individual is an unwitting tool in a general historical demarche orchestrated by Divine Providence. The application of this perspective to modernity and the Zionist pioneers and the interpretation of early twentieth-century events as the work of the hand of God, Who directs the play irrespective of the actors’ wishes, is an original approach that Rabbis Teichtal and Kook adopted with amazing similarity, as the next comparison will prove.

R. Kook wrote:

So it was in the days of Ezra: so many giants and worthies did not wish to [re]establish the community in Eretz Israel and remained in Babylonia. The ones whom Ezra took with him were the dregs, those of foul deeds. The world should have been upended into a hill of salt on their account; they desecrated the Sabbath even in Eretz Israel. The outcome, however, was that this deliverance brought the Second Temple into being, through which we were privileged with the revelation of the Oral Law....So will it be in our times, with the help of blessed God, that as we strengthen the increasingly radiant community with God’s help and as more and more of our fellow *olim* settle the Land of Holiness, the light of redemption and deliverance will grow.⁵⁴

And R. Teichtal wrote:

Our sages in the Midrash testify about such people that even

⁵³ *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 121–122.

⁵⁴ *Iggrot ha-Re’aya*, Part A, p. 348. In regard to this text, see Rosenak, *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook*, pp. 35–36.

though their names were ugly, their deeds were becoming.... We surely know that those who ascended from exile in the days of Ezra committed grievous and egregious sins...married non-Jewish women...and heedlessly desecrated the Sabbath....Their actions resembled those of Sodom, which was transformed into a mound of salt....So how can one say of that generation that its actions were becoming? You must say that the act of *aliyah* itself was their becomingness...because most of them were not virtuous but vile and very sinful people....Therefore, [the virtuous] were loath to participate with them. And you must admit that this was unbecoming on their part because, by not returning to Eretz Israel, they thwarted the full redemption.⁵⁵

Although these *olim* did not consider it their goal to amplify the light of redemption, God directs the march of history precisely by people whose actions “resemble those of Sodom,” without our knowing why. It is in this attitude toward the Zionist pioneers that one finds the following difference between Haredi rabbis who favored the resettlement of Eretz Israel and rabbis who supported Zionism.

Participating with the Non-religious Zionists

It is important to note that the ultra-Orthodox who favored the resettlement of Eretz Israel opposed the Zionist movement and cooperation with “transgressors” concurrently and heatedly. So acute was their fear of secular influence that they accused the entire Zionist movement of heresy and the eradication of the Jewish religion as its true covert goal, and not the establishment of Jewish statehood.⁵⁶ As noted above, R. Teichtal’s son describes his father as having opposed the Zionist

55 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 189–191. Note also the similarity between R. Kook’s remarks and those of R. Teichtal in regard to King Omri of Israel. R. Kook, *Vision of Redemption* (Jerusalem: The Association for the Publication of the Books of Rav Kook, 1941), p. 4; cf. R. Teichtal, *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 57. Jews are not the only instruments in the hand of Divine Providence; Gentiles whose deeds benefit the Jewish people and the development of Eretz Israel may play the same role. On this matter see the amazingly similar remarks of R. Kook and R. Teichtal about King Cyrus of Persia: *Ma’amarei ha-Re’aya* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: HaRav Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook Institute of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav, 1984), p. 171; *Vision of Redemption*, p. 148; *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 132.

56 Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, p. 177.

movement for being “emblematic...of the jettisoning of the yoke of the commandments and all values sacred to the Jewish people.”⁵⁷

Did R. Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal truly revile the Zionist movement? In several places in *Em ha-Banim Semeha* in which he refers to it, there is no doubt that he was ill at ease with its secular nature and even criticized it.⁵⁸ This, however, did not deter him from urging cooperation with the Zionist pioneers:

Now, who is liable for this worthy blood that has been spilled in our times, due to our many sins? [Those guilty are,] it seems to me, all those leaders who prevented the Jews from going and **participating with the builders**; they cannot atone for what they did and say “Our hands did not shed this blood” [cf. Deuteronomy 21:7].⁵⁹

After all this, let us avoid all sophistry. Instead, let us do our share in returning to our Land **and participating with the Jews at large**, who are resettling the land of our possession, **whoever they may be**; and, as happened in the *aliyah* of Ezra’s time, the Holy One will do His [share].⁶⁰

R. Teichtal, as stated, contemplated the Zionist pioneers from the perspective of their objective successes and not their subjective intentions. Therefore, it is difficult to state that he dismissed them altogether, as his son says he did. As for concern about the adverse influence of the Zionist “transgressors,” R. Teichtal replied, “The argument that some of them are transgressors is not an argument; are there not [transgressors] here in the Diaspora?”⁶¹ Here he draws a clear distinction between Zionism and “transgression.” Secularism had already sunk deep roots throughout Europe, irrespective of Zionism. Zionism has no ulterior motive of uprooting the Jewish faith; therefore, cooperation with it should not be feared: “This ingathering and integration will do the Orthodox no harm.”⁶²

If so, R. Teichtal spurns the teachings of the two Gerrer *rebbe*s and the other Orthodox who favor the resettlement of Eretz Israel but

57 R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal, Foreword to *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 20, n. 11.

58 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 55, 59.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 113; see also pp. 158–160.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 266.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 221–222.

flinch from cooperating with secular Zionism.⁶³ R. Teichtal finds pragmatic and even religious value in such engagement: “The [God-] fearing should not shun the rebuilding project; on the contrary, it is their **sacred duty** to contribute to this holy enterprise now and in the future, and to bring together all forces and follow the pioneers together, arm-in-arm, in this exalted venture.”⁶⁴

The Religious Value of the Zionist Pioneers

I would be guilty of an injustice if I presented R. Teichtal’s appreciation of the pioneers solely in terms of the results of their actions. R. Teichtal developed a radical concept that is unparalleled among religious-Zionist thinkers, with the exception of R. Kook in his later thought – one that endows even the intentions of the non-religious pioneers with sanctity. This outlook distinguishes between the conscious and subconscious levels of the psyche. Consciously, the non-religious Zionist pioneer had no religious goals; subconsciously, however, he was driven by a religious urge. The pioneers’ powerful yearnings and longings for Eretz Israel are emotions that originate at the highest level of sanctity. The Divine spirit throbs inside them, whether they wish it or not. Joseph Trumpeldor’s words, according to R. Teichtal, prove it:

This, apart from [the fact that] they love the Land, desire no land save that of our Patriarchs, and pledge their lives to it; as is known, so many [of them] died for the sake of the Land...[and] said before their souls expired, “It is nothing; it is good to die for our Land.”...Is this not clear proof that even though they are unaware of [their religious motivation], their Jewish soul is aware of it⁶⁵ and yearns to return to its source?...That is, even if they do

63 On changes and developments in Agudas Yisroel with regard to cooperating with Zionism after the Nazis’ rise to power and particularly after the Holocaust, to the extent of joining the Knesset after the declaration of Israeli statehood, see Fund, *Separation or Participation*, pp. 213–241; Haim Shalem, “Time to Rescue Israel” *Agudat Yisrael in Palestine in View of the Holocaust 1942–1945* (Hebrew) (Beer-sheva: Ben-Gurion Institute, 1999), pp. 271–291; Mali Eisenberg, *From Personal Experience to Life Work: The Holocaust as a Constitutive Motive in the Private and Public Career of Moshe Prager – a Key Haredi Figure in the Yishuv and in Israel* (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2010), pp. 88–117.

64 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 159–160.

65 Based on Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 93b–94a.

not know and understand how to seek God in words, in their inner souls they sense the need to do so.⁶⁶

What we find here is an internal reckoning of the individual's emotional mechanisms. I know of no thinker other than R. Kook who had the audacity to make such a judgment.⁶⁷ R. Teichtal construes the psychological craving for *aliyah* as a yearning of the psyche to return to its origin — i.e., to God — and the awakening for the rebuilding of Eretz Israel and the immense self-sacrifice inherent thereof⁶⁸ as the Divine spirit within their souls. Furthermore, this reckoning expands steadily into the public — i.e. — the national, sphere. Everything the Zionist movement has undertaken, R. Teichtal teaches, constitutes a return to the source and an unconscious act of religious repentance:

Now, it is well known that the commandment to settle Eretz Israel is great and equal to the entire Torah [Sifrei, *Re'eh* 28]. It is also well known that masses of Jews are ascending to Eretz Israel at this time and are observing this commandment with genuine effort and literal self-sacrifice. It is further known that Jews who perform one of the commandments of high value are considered repenters and merit the redemption on this account. Therefore, the Rambam's statement — "Israel will be redeemed only through repentance, and the Torah has already promised that Israel will repent...and immediately be redeemed" — has been fulfilled. **That is to say, the very fact of the Jews' yearning to return to Eretz Israel, which is a commandment of high value, is itself their repentance.**⁶⁹

R. Kook also expresses such an outlook, positing religious repentance in the act of *aliyah* per se: **"The dawning light of repentance exists among Israel! The arousal of the entire nation's desire to return to its Land, to its essence, its spirit, and its innateness — in fact, has the light of [repentance] within it."**⁷⁰

66 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 112; see also pp. 166–169.

67 Rosenak, *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoheh Kook*, pp. 36–38.

68 As the pioneers displayed by withstanding the Arab marauders. See *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 112.

69 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 169.

70 R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *The Lights of Repentance* (Hebrew) (Merkaz Shapira: Or Etsiyon, 1992), p. 136 (17:2).

The Value of Labor

From the onset of the Jewish exile to the modern return to Zion, issues related to working the soil and material fulfillment in Eretz Israel were never as immediate as at the dawn of the Zionist influx. One can, of course, find individual references and diverse outlooks on this topic in centuries of extensive Jewish literature, but most of them retained a theoretical level and dealt with the principles involved. Now the Zionist *aliyot* amplified the practical aspect.⁷¹ The Zionist movement immeasurably boosted land purchases and cultivation; from its advent Jews turned to raising crops, sowing and reaping, and harvesting olives and grapes in Eretz Israel. How did the religious literature relate to this novelty?

Here I will focus only on differences between Zionist and non-Zionist rabbis who favored the settlement of Eretz Israel. In contrast to the Hasidic literature, most of which deals mainly with the personal and psychological aspects of the individual, and unlike the kabbalistic literature, which concerns itself chiefly with the cosmic aspect of reality, R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, the Gerrer *Rebbe*, also addressed himself to the historiosophic facet, foremost relating to Eretz Israel.⁷² As a philosopher who drew most of his inspiration from the world of Hasidism, the Gerrer *Rebbe* viewed Eretz Israel as a springboard for the service of God, a place where any deed receives validity and a boost heavenward. Dedication is the supreme value, and the most praiseworthy way of attaining it is by taking action of whatever kind in Eretz Israel. R. Kook, in contrast, invested the action itself with importance and intrinsic virtue, as opposed to a mere means to an end. Such action in his thinking is not a springboard to the service of God but something possessed of a Divine spirituality that is revealed by its venue, Eretz Israel.⁷³ R. Teichtal also saw intrinsic virtue in each and every action performed in Eretz Israel, defining any corporeal act undertaken

71 For practical queries concerning agriculture that preceded Zionism, see, for example, a question that a vintner in Hebron submitted to Rabbi Mordecai Rubio, a leading rabbi in Hebron in the eighteenth century, on how to treat his vineyard during the sabbatical year; R. Mordecai Rubio, *Shemen ha-Mor Responsa* (Livorno: 1993), *Yore De'a* 4.

72 Yoram Jacobson, "Exile and Redemption in Gur Hasidism," *Da'at*, 2–3 (1978–1979), pp. 190–203.

73 Shlomo Schock, *Sweet Figs: Collections in Hasidism* (Hebrew) (Efrat: Yeshivat Si'ah Yitzhak, 2002), pp. 98–99.

there as sacred and expressive of Divine spirituality. Basing himself on novel insights by R. Moshe Sofer (Hatam Sofer, 1762–1839),⁷⁴ R. Teichtal wrote:

Do not think that cultivating and settling the Land of Holiness are mere material labors, as are the cultivation and settlement of other lands....For these labors, to which we were accustomed outside Eretz Israel, where they are considered mere material toil, are considered **spiritual labor** in the Land of Holiness, because every form of work and action that is performed and acted upon in working the Land, e.g., ploughing, seeding, planting fruit trees, building houses, building roads, and similar actions that are needed for the settlement of the Land, are considered *mitzvot*. It is analogous to one who makes *tefillin*, a *lulav*, a *sukkah*, and other *mitzvah* implements....In any event, those who cultivate the soil in Eretz Israel should realize from this that their labor is not material but spiritual, and that **in the work of their hands sanctity and Divine spirituality exist in each and every thing that they do in settling the Land.**⁷⁵

R. Kook also likens agriculture in Eretz Israel to spiritual work and finds an element of sanctity in it. Jewish agriculture in Eretz Israel, he writes, is “pervaded with sanctity”:

The main fundamental in the building of Eretz Israel, **agriculture**, is only a simple if vital **economic** element when practiced by all nations. But for the nation in which all things are holy of holies, and for which its land, its language, and all its values are holy... its agriculture is also pervaded with sanctity through and through. This underlying sanctity of the farmer is emphasized by the elevation of the celebration of the **first of the grain harvest**, the *omer*, to the highest level of the holy service. The sacrifice ordained for it is a **public sacrifice, one that overrides the Sabbath** (emphasis in the original).⁷⁶

Notably, both R. Teichtal and R. Kook extend the sanctity of labor from farming to all productive work in Eretz Israel that enhances settlement

⁷⁴ See discussion below on receptiveness to science.

⁷⁵ *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 271.

⁷⁶ *Ma'amarei ha-Re'aya*, pp. 179–180.

in any way. Like R. Teichtal, who detects “Divine spirituality in each and every act performed for the settlement of the Land,” R. Kook links all labor in Eretz Israel to farming: “Both agriculture and construction in all their practical and land outcomes have holy content when this holy nation is settling on its holy soil.”⁷⁷

The People of Israel, the Land of Israel, and the God of Israel

R. Teichtal’s writings should not be mistaken for a systematic lecture. However, if one follows the conceptual motifs that accompany the presentation of his ideological arguments, despite their development, as Hershkowitz has shown, one may, it seems to me, fuse them into a theological doctrine on the essence of Eretz Israel, the People of Israel, the God of Israel, and, in particular, their nexus.⁷⁸ The fundamentals of R. Teichtal’s theological doctrine are kabbalistic; its conceptual development, however, approximates that of R. Kook’s teachings.

According to Kabbalah, the People of Israel and the Land of Israel are essentially one and the same. Their separate material beings are but silhouettes of a single supernal spiritual being, because *Kenesset Yisrael* (the Jewish people at large) and Eretz Israel are identical within one kabbalistic *sephirah*, that of *malkhut* (kingship).⁷⁹ Eretz Israel, R. Teichtal emphasizes, is part of the being of the People of Israel; it is not only a place designated for the People but the **core** that sustains it. As proof R. Teichtal cites Maimonides in *Sefer Hamitzvot*⁸⁰ and concludes that,

Unless [the People of Israel] settles in Eretz Israel, it will face extinction, Heaven forbid. These are matters that confound all

77 Ibid., p. 180.

78 See also Schweid, “*Simhat Em ha-Banim*,” p. 393; idem, “The Turn to Historical Activism: The Dispute between Rabbis Teichtal and Rokeach,” pp. 286–287.

79 Joseph Ibn Gikatilla, *Gates of Light* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1996), pp. 89–90 (end of Part 1). For additional kabbalistic sources, see Hershkowitz, *Vision of Redemption*, p. 204, n. 129. On Eretz Israel and the People of Israel in Kabbalah, see Eliezer Schweid, *Homeland and a Land of Promise* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1979), pp. 79–90; Moshe Idel, “On the Land of Israel in Mystical Thought” (Hebrew), in Moshe Halamish and Aviezer Ravitzky, *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), pp. 193–214.

80 Prescriptive Commandment 153, Sanctification of the Month.

human reasoning because, in my opinion, Eretz Israel is the heart of the nation....Without a heart, no creature can live. Perforce, **when the Jews are not in Eretz Israel, it is as though the[ir] heart has been excised and [their] vitality is altogether voided.**⁸¹

This concept, which views Eretz Israel as an organic bloc inseparable from the People of Israel and linked to the People in a relationship of dependency, recurs in R. Kook's conceptualization: "Eretz Israel is not an external thing, a piece of property external to the nation.... Eretz Israel is an independent entity, bound to the nation in a bond of life."⁸² This living bond is organic and inseparable, just as a heart and a body cannot live alongside each other and can exist only in the configuration of one within the other. These perceptions appear neither in the writings of the Agudas Yisroel rabbis nor of those of the Mizrachi movement. Among twentieth-century thinkers this perception of an organic relationship, based on kabbalistic literature, is almost unique to R. Kook and R. Teichtal.

In addition to the dependent relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Israel, a very powerful bond pertains to Eretz Israel and the God of Israel. According to this outlook, without Eretz Israel the People of Israel cannot maintain a full and complete relationship with God. Just as the human heart allows a person to live, Eretz Israel, likened to a heart, allows the People of Israel to connect with God, the source of its vitality. On this point R. Teichtal writes as follows:

The matter may also be explained on the basis of the Sages' remarks in Midrash Tanhuma. Said the Holy One: "Israel is My portion...and Eretz Israel is My portion....My portion should come and dwell in My portion." **That is to say Israel's entire bond with the Holy One is [manifested] specifically via Eretz Israel,** which fell into the portion of the Holy One....Therefore, [the Sages] said, "Whoever dwells outside Eretz Israel is considered to have no God."⁸³ Understand these words because they are based on the foundations of truth. Thus one may well understand

81 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 152–153.

82 Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1993), p. 9; idem, *Vision of Redemption*, p. 4.

83 Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 110b: "Whoever dwells in Eretz Israel is considered to have a God, and whoever dwells outside Eretz Israel is considered to have no God."

why Eretz Israel is the heart of the Israelite nation, for the source of [the nation's] vitality is there.⁸⁴

That is to say, according to R. Teichtal's revolutionary dictum, the Jewish people's connection with its God is sustained by Eretz Israel and it alone. If so, by returning to Eretz Israel, the People of Israel returns to the God of Israel.

As long as we are on Gentile soil, the spirit of purity that will come upon us is impeded. Therefore, it is our proper and sacred duty to strive to [return] to our holy land...Then the Holy One will keep His promise to send us from on high a spirit of purity, to circumcise our hearts, and return us to Him with all our heart and all our soul. As long as we [breathe] the air of the land of the nations, however, there is no path by which this promise can arrive, for the impurity of the land of the nations overshadows us and, as explained in [the Talmudic tractate] *Mo'ed Katan*, the *Shekhinah* does not dwell outside Eretz Israel. Similarly, the spirit of purity from on high cannot reach us; this is the plain truth.⁸⁵

These remarks deserve attention, because they are in total contradiction to what R. Teichtal published in *Tikkun 'Olam*. In the earlier compilation R. Teichtal claimed that a spirit of impurity had enveloped Eretz Israel and that Eretz Israel had been dominated by forces of impurity ever since the destruction of the Temple. The Jews must wait in exile until God blankets the Land in a spirit of Divine purity; only then may they ascend to it. In *Tikkun 'Olam* R. Teichtal concluded that the People of Israel maintains its living bond with the God of Israel in exile via Torah study and prayer. Now, in contrast, R. Teichtal argued in a similar literary style but which conveys a totally opposite meaning, that only action — *aliyah* — will induce God to bathe Eretz Israel in a spirit of purity. Here it is the Gentile lands, not Eretz Israel, that are enveloped in impurity.

This perspective, specifying the impurity of Gentile soil as an impediment and an obstacle to the People of Israel in its quest for a living and true bond with its God, is described at greater length and with greater emphasis by R. Kook. He stresses more than any of his predecessors the dichotomy of Eretz Israel and the Diaspora:

84 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 152.

85 *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

Visual Imagery [which is needed for prophecy] in Eretz Israel is lucid and clear, clean and pure, fit to accommodate the Divine truth...willing to elucidate prophecy and its lights and brighten the spirit of holiness and its splendors. But Visual Imagery in the land of the Gentiles is turgid and mingled with darkness, shadows of impurity, and filth...and is unfit as a basis for the emanation of Divine luminescence.⁸⁶

Receptiveness

For various reasons the religious-Zionist ideal is receptive to several secular domains: general education, science, culture, and appreciation of the non-religious, to name only a few.⁸⁷ Hershkowitz fascinatingly pointed out the gradual change that took place in R. Teichtal's attitude toward lapsed-observance Jews and the Neologs. In 1926, R. Teichtal referred to Sabbath-desecrators as full-fledged Gentiles in Halakhic terms and incorrigible beasts in terms of values: "[They] descended and descended from the echelon of man and resembled beasts...for they already [embody the expression] 'That which is crooked cannot be made straight' [cf. Ecclesiastes 1:15]."⁸⁸

In 1932, in contrast, he expressed a more moderate view, displaying a major change in his Halakhic regard for non-observers of the Sabbath. Hershkowitz demonstrates that this change was based not only on purely Halakhic considerations but also on social ones. In his Halakhic rulings in those years, R. Teichtal articulated his wish to reach out and not rebuff, to extend a hand to all Jews and not spurn them in knee-jerk fashion. The next stage in R. Teichtal's evolution can be found in his request to deliver a sermon at the Neolog synagogue in order to encourage men to observe the commandment of *tefillin* (phylacteries). He also sought to strengthen the observance of commandments that had national elements (based on Hershkowitz's definition; see note 90 below) and promote unity among the diverse Jewish congregations.

86 Abraham Isaac Kook, *Vision of Redemption*, p. 8. See also *Orot*, p. 108, and Schweid, *Homeland and a Land of Promise*, pp. 186–203.

87 Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads*, p. 175. Schwartz stresses that this receptiveness does not imply the legitimization of secularism and the status of the secular Zionist; see also *ibid.*, pp. 159–160, 175–187.

88 *Tov Yigal*, pp. 21–22.

This change of heart did not occur in a vacuum. As Hershkowitz shows, it took place against the backdrop of the ascent of Nazism and the Hungarian and Slovakian nationalist movements. These inspired R. Teichtal's change of approach and were central to it. His eagerness to unite the ranks was powered by a sincere fear for the future of the Jewish nation.⁸⁹

Notably, by the 1920s, the congregational split between the Orthodox and the Neologs in Hungary had been an accomplished fact for years.⁹⁰ Even the Holocaust did not prompt the movements to merge, as shown in Kinga Frojimovics' compelling account; only in the 1950s, under the pressure of Communist regulation, were they forced to unite against their will.⁹¹ Given these circumstances and the background of R. Teichtal's life and Halakhic environment, which favored congregational fragmentation in a radical way, his wish to unify them was extraordinary.

In the midst of a war-induced crisis, R. Teichtal managed to unite the congregations in Pishtian, a feat unparalleled elsewhere in Slovakia and Hungary. After most of the Jews of Pishtian were deported, the vestigial Orthodox congregation could not find a ritual slaughterer. The survivors turned to R. Teichtal and asked him to receive and train the slaughterer of the Neolog congregation. He and his rabbinical court not only assented — subject to certain conditions — but went one step farther. They capitalized on the congregation's request and the tragically propitious moment and merged the two communities under the Orthodox congregation's auspices. On April 26, 1942, R. Teichtal's rabbinical court met with the leaders and officials of the Orthodox and

89 Hershkowitz, *Vision of Redemption*, pp. 72–88. On R. Teichtal's goal of persuading and promoting the observance of commandments of a specifically national complexion, e.g., wearing *tefillin* and observing the Sabbath, see *ibid.*, pp. 88–92.

90 On the rupture between the two, see Jacob Katz, *The Unhealed Rift* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1995); Yitzhak Yosef Cohen, *The Rabbis and Torah Literature of Hungary* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1997), pp. 27–69; Kinga Frojimovics, “The Religious Streams in Hungarian Jewry 1868/9–1950: Socioeconomic, Demographic, and Organizational Indicators” (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2003); published in Hungarian as Kinga Frojimovics, *Szétszakadt történelem: zsidó vallási irányzatok Magyarországon 1868–1950* (Budapest: Balassi Kiado, 2008).

91 Kinga Frojimovics, “Religious Streams in Hungarian Jewry,” pp. 258–263, 378–381.

the Neolog congregations in Pishtian and signed off on the merger as everyone looked on:

With God's help: I copy here, letter for letter, the court ruling that we the undersigned issued here in Pishtian, on the first day of the Torah portion *Emor* in the year 5702, a time of the harsh decree of destruction of the communities here in the state of Slovakia, may God have mercy on us speedily.

With God's help: In this setting of three [i.e., the rabbinical court], convening as one, we received the officials of the two existing congregations in this location. They claimed before us that, due to the ghastly decree of deportation of the householders, very few householders remain and the ritual slaughterers and checkers have been exiled, leaving behind only one slaughterer/checker, R. Yoske, a slaughterer/checker who had served in this capacity for the new [Neolog] congregation. They asked me to allow him to be the slaughterer/checker for our Orthodox congregation as well, there being no alternative in any case. We sat as a court and reviewed the matter and, before all else, saw fit to merge the two congregations into one under the Orthodox banner. The heads and officials of the two congregations agreed. Thus henceforth all the remaining householders shall be one congregation under the Orthodox banner of the old congregation. Furthermore, we accept the aforementioned R. Yoske as slaughterer/checker for the aforementioned single congregation now that he has accepted the terms of membership and has agreed to be retrained under my authority. From this day on he is fit to be a slaughterer/checker in all [God-] fearing and Orthodox congregations everywhere. May Blessed God deliver us speedily, tell our woes "enough," and send us His messiah speedily and in our days, Amen. In witness thereof, we affix our signatures on this, the first day of [Torah portion] *Emor* in the year "Your Messiah, do not turn away" according to the abbreviated count, in Pishtian, may God save it....

I have copied the signature[s] of the heads and officials of the aforementioned from the original ruling, and in witness thereof, I affix my signature, Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, head of the local rabbinical court.⁹²

92 JTS, Ms. 10633 (p. 294).

R. Teichtal and his court seized this ghastly moment, in which only one ritual slaughterer remained, to merge the congregations — something that he had wanted to do even before the Holocaust. The very fact of the initiative that prompted the merger, even after the entrenchment of the intercommunal rift in twentieth-century Slovakia and Hungary, attests to the mental and cognitive openness and maneuverability within the community despite its dire straits. The unification, unique even during the Holocaust, marks the fulfillment of a *cri de coeur* that R. Teichtal issued after the event:

Observe, we have seen and realized that the path we have taken thus far with the prolongation of the exile, replete with discord, separatism of hearts, factionalism, and groundless hatred, has not taken us where we want to go but has done the opposite: it has led us toward extinction, God save us. Therefore, my brethren and companions! Do not believe those who would drive wedges among the adherents of Israel by saying that the Jewish branches cannot be merged into one tree because this might endanger Judaism. Even if they are right, and Heaven forbid the slightest danger were to exist, the Holy One much prefers unity over separation (see Appendix 2).⁹³

R. Kook also objected to congregational separatism, decrying it vehemently and considering it a dagger in the Jewish flesh and tantamount to idolatrous thinking:

Disagreement about the method of leading the public, if at this time of profusion of villains who high-handedly wave the standard of the abandonment of observance, should separate the nation, so that the fit, who carry the standard of God's name, would have nothing to do with the criminal forsakers of the yoke. Or should the general power of peacemaking surmount everything?...The fragmentation of [our] nation causes no end of material and spiritual harm....It is literally altogether idolatrous thinking...and like all idolatrous thinking, it sows destruction and desolation.⁹⁴

R. Teichtal also displayed openness of a different kind to secular studies. As Schwartz shows, one of the indicators that unite the diverse

93 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, pp. 311–314.

94 *Orot ha-Tehiya 20*, in *Orot*, pp. 73–74.

circles of religious Zionism is receptiveness to general culture and secular studies.⁹⁵ Irrespective of his reservations about secular culture,⁹⁶ R. Teichtal viewed the matter differently where the settlement of Eretz Israel was concerned. Following on his desire to build and develop the country, he promoted a laudatory attitude toward roadbuilding, housing construction, and economic development, and, as a result, toward secular studies such as engineering, economics, and, in fact, all science. He viewed agriculture in Eretz Israel favorably, perceiving it as a religious act. However, he did not consider this sufficient. Basing himself on R. Moshe Sofer, who wrote that the commandment of settling Eretz Israel relates not only to agriculture but also to “other occupations that have an element of settling the world,”⁹⁷ i.e., any occupation that furthers the settlement of Eretz Israel — “all of which within the general frame of the commandments” — R. Teichtal affirms the practice of any occupation as a *mitzvah* act.⁹⁸ However, unlike R. Sofer, who expressed his view theoretically, R. Teichtal wrote his in the light of conclusive historical developments. Thus, his repetition of R. Sofer’s remarks is not a mere quotation but a rabbinical ruling of immediate relevance.

As the Jewish community in Eretz Israel steadily evolved, R. Teichtal seems to have begun developing sovereign national thinking — although only in initial steps. Questions and reflections on matters such as the Jewish complexion of the future Jewish sovereign state appeared in *Em ha-Banim Semeha* only in bits and pieces;⁹⁹ the book offers no explicit program for the contours and functions of the systems of the Torah state that its author hoped to achieve. His tragic death cut off all further development of this thinking.

A similar perspective, affirming the study of science and other secular disciplines in connection with the settlement of Eretz Israel and Jewish development in the Jewish land, is found in R. Kook’s teachings:

Kenesset Yisrael’s independent color is coming into sight, its strengths are steadily developing, its wisdom steadily returning to it....Little by little the nation is being built....It is importing vast intellectual wealth and far-seeing vigor, and is adding pure

95 Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads*, pp. 140–151.

96 See his attitude toward the theater and sports: *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 175.

97 Ibid, p. 195, based on *Hiddushei Hatam Sofer* at Babylonian Talmud, *Sukka* 36b.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid, pp. 61–62, 198–199, 321–323.

external aspects to its own possession. National passion is mounting; recognition of its independence is growing. It already knows that it has a country, a language, literature, an army.¹⁰⁰

R. Kook viewed the Gentile sciences as “vast intellectual wealth” that augment the Jewish people’s “own possession,” i.e., the Torah, with “pure external aspects.” In this manner the Torah receives “far-seeing vigor” — language, literature, and more.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In this article I have presented accepted research parameters as indicators of the teachings of religious-Zionist thinkers and have distinguished between them and the policies of Agudas Yisroel with regard to the question of Eretz Israel. On the basis of these parameters, I examined R. Teichtal’s doctrine and found it proximate to the teachings of R. Abraham Isaac Kook. It was not my goal to fit R. Teichtal into any artificial slot, label him, or induct him into any particular movement or political party. Instead, my intention was to assess his teachings and their uniqueness. These include his perspective on the redemption, activism, preference of objective outcome over subjective intention, cooperation with non-religious Zionists, the value of labor, the religious value of the Zionist pioneers, the three-way nexus of the People of Israel, Eretz Israel, and the God of Israel, the spiritual quality of Eretz Israel, intercommunal unity, and openness to science. All these flowed from a vision of a sovereign Jewish entity that would arise in Eretz Israel and restore the Jewish people to a normalization that entails the economic and material development of the country.

100 *Orot*, p. 15, Section G.

101 Notably, R. Kook dealt at length with the “unity of the sacred and the profane” outside any context that is clearly related to Eretz Israel. See Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1992), Vol. 1, pp. 61–80, and *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 305–324. However, the editor of this publication, R. David Cohen (“Harav ha-Nazir”), emphasizes this context in the teachings of his mentor, R. Kook. See introductions to “*Kodesh ha-Kelali*” at the beginning of Vol. 2 (no page number noted): “The universal sanctity that elevates the profane to the holy is the holiness that exists in nature, **which is manifested in the Land of Holiness**” (emphasis mine — D.R.). It is indubitable, however, that appreciation of secular studies is much more developed in R. Kook’s thinking than in that of R. Teichtal and appears in numerous contexts apart from its being an instrument for the settlement of Eretz Israel.

Any attempt to compare R. Teichtal with Agudas Yisroel-affiliated rabbis such as R. Avraham Mordechai Alter of Gur, or to claim that he resembles R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and the “Yishuvniks” in his affection for Zion, obscures his unique teachings. The challenge that the second generation of researchers handed its predecessors was more than unhelpful; it masked the singularity of R. Teichtal’s teachings, their redemptionist focus, and their kinship with those of R. Kook. At issue is something more than mere love of Zion: it is a ramified doctrine of redemption that does not fear to be radical and to wrestle with a new and convoluted reality.

Friedlander’s assertion that R. Teichtal “dealt sparingly with the ideological aspects of Zionism and religious Zionism”¹⁰² is fundamentally groundless. *Em ha-Banim Semeha* deals with these aspects from beginning to end. Friedlander depicts R. Teichtal as a pragmatist who favored what the Zionists did but not what they thought: “As a pragmatist, R. Teichtal sided with the immediate necessity of rescue....The applied solution that Zionism offered...was amenable to him and he supported it. As for the ideology of Zionism and religious Zionism, he refrained from taking a stand.”¹⁰³

On the contrary: R. Teichtal dealt with and took a stand on a range of Zionist and religious-Zionist ideas; only some of them were discussed in this article. R. Natan Tzvi Friedman (1914–1993)¹⁰⁴ related and quoted from a heretofore unknown sermon that he had heard R. Teichtal deliver while in Budapest.¹⁰⁵ Its content plainly rules out any depiction of R. Teichtal as a pragmatic thinker who sees Eretz Israel as a place of refuge and rescue:

I recall how he thundered about the Talmudic dictum [*Megilla* 28]: “One does not behave frivolously in a synagogue and one does not enter [it] in hot weather to escape from the heat and in rainy weather to escape from the rain.” If so, one should not use holiness to protect oneself. Therefore, one should not ascend

102 Friedlander, “Thought and Deed,” p. 174.

103 Ibid.

104 Rabbi of Shikun E in Bnei Brak and member of the secretariat of the Ha-Poel ha-Mizrachi rabbinical council. Between 1936 and 1944 he served as a lecturer for the “Talmudic Society” (*Hevra Sha”s*) in Budapest. See “Rabbi Natan Tsevi Friedman,” *Encyclopedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Rishonim, 1962), vol. 12, p. 3997.

105 This sermon does not appear in *Em ha-Banim Semeha*.

to Eretz [Israel] to protect oneself from the torrential rain of the Gentiles' decrees. We should preempt the evil and ascend to Eretz Israel before the heat of the oppressor comes (see Appendix 3).¹⁰⁶

No doubt that R. Teichtal considered Eretz Israel as an anchor and rescue for the Jewish people, but the need for *aliyah*, for him, was broader than merely a "shelter." According to R. Teichtal, troubles do not furnish a reason for *aliyah*, but non-*aliyah* furnishes a reason for troubles. The troubles, in his eyes, are evidence that the Jews were wrong in not having preempted them by means of *aliyah*. The Holocaust, for him, was an incentive to reexamine his views and develop a teaching that approves of the *aliyah* project and the attempt to establish a Jewish entity, a "nation," in Eretz Israel that would be able to manage national life independently and strive for national normalization.¹⁰⁷

R. Friedman's letter sheds new light on and adds information about an event that is briefly described in *Em ha-Banim Semeha*:

On the past *Shabbat Hol Hamo'ed Pessach*, I was given the honor of delivering a sermon at the synagogue of the Orthodox Talmud society here, and there was a large crowd. I inserted into the sermon the matter of building our Land...and I spoke about it with great passion and many were angry with me.¹⁰⁸

Exactly what happened there? R. Friedman, who taught at the Budapest Talmud society at the time, describes it:

At the beginning of the Holocaust, as the German oppressor tightened his grip on Slovakia, many migrated from there to Budapest, capital of Hungary, among them the brilliant Rabbi Y.S. Teichtal. Due to his reputation as a giant in Torah and an outstanding speaker, he was given the privilege of delivering a sermon at the synagogue of the Orthodox Talmud society, then the center of Orthodoxy in Budapest, where at the time it was my privilege as

106 Letter from R. Friedman to R. Menachem Kasher, December 26, 1968, retrieved on July 7, 2015, from http://www.bhol.co.il/forums/topic.asp?whichpage=1&topic_id=2543735&forum_id=19616. I am grateful to Prof. Asa Kasher for his permission to publish this letter.

107 *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, p. 323.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 160. On additional displays of wrath and opposition to R. Teichtal, see *ibid.*, pp. 223–224. The objections interrupted his sermon and later even prevented him from leading the *Mussaf* service on the anniversary of a family member's death. See also *ibid.*, pp. 229–230.

a young man to be one of the teachers. I remember that at noon that *Shabbat*, the salt of the local Jewish community gathered and filled the synagogue to overflowing. [R. Teichtal] climbed the stairs to the pulpit and began to thunder audaciously: **But we are guilty** [emphasis in the original],¹⁰⁹ and he spoke for about an hour and a half about the sanctity of the Land [of Israel], its cultivation, and the error that we had made by standing aside and failing to heed the voice that urged us to ascend to our holy land — for which reason “this trouble has befallen us.”¹¹⁰ His words, spoken in a voice fit to hew flames, made a tremendous impression on the listeners, who stood transfixed and drank them in thirstily. The leaders of the congregation, in contrast, were flabbergasted by the powerful impact of his rhetoric. They were followers of the German Agudah, but the speaker’s words exceeded [the Agudah’s stance] by far and were stated in full psychological identification with everything being done in Eretz Israel, at all levels, including the non-religious pioneers who pledged their lives to the sanctity of conquering the Land. His sermon was like the “loud voice that added no more”¹¹¹ because he spoke no more there; they denied him the floor and there he remained, shunned and distanced from the official leadership. To create opposite public opinion, the official board of the congregation went out of its way to honor in Tiferet Bahurim Synagogue — a group of young people associated with Agudas Yisroel — a young talented rabbi, an excellent speaker, a son-in-law of that belligerent fanatic Hasidic *rebbe* who opposed Eretz Israel, and gave him the honor of delivering a counter-sermon. [The speaker] based himself on the *Gemara* (*Berakhot* 17): “The goal of wisdom is repentance and good deeds, so that a man should not study Torah and Mishnah and then despise his father and mother and teacher and his superior in wisdom and rank,” since [R. Teichtal’s] words clashed with the view of his mentor, the Munkacser *Rebbe*.¹¹²

109 Genesis 42:21.

110 Ibid.

111 Cf. Deuteronomy 5:22.

112 Letter from R. Friedman to R. Menachem Kasher. Interestingly, the opposing speaker, the son-in-law and pro tem of the Munkacser *Rebbe* — none other than Rabbi Baruch Yehoshua Yerachmiel Rabinowitz — changed his mind in the after-

R. Friedman, who was acquainted not only with R. Teichtal's writings but also with the man himself evidently had no doubts about the matter at hand. R. Teichtal's sermon, in his opinion, superseded the views of the heads of the congregation, who were considered moderate. They favored Agudas Yisroel and were not followers of the Munkacser *Rebbe*, who opposed Agudas Yisroel and disseminated mordant anti-Zionist teachings. Nevertheless, these leaders shunned R. Teichtal, deprived him of the pulpit in mid-sermon, and sent up another preacher from the young generation of Agudas Yisroel in order to counter his remarks. Even R. Teichtal's sons, R. Friedman noted, neither followed nor identified with his spiritual path: "Several times I asked his sons in Jerusalem to reprint his important book *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, but they evidently rest at the extreme pole, disclaiming the ways of their great father, and refuse to do it."¹¹³ This observation indeed explains the criticism expressed by R. Teichtal's son, R. Chaim Menachem Teichtal, and his apologetic attempt, which was later supported by several scholars, to dissociate his father from religious-Zionist thinking and portray him in a different light.

R. Kook's disciples correctly detected the proximity of R. Teichtal's teachings to those of their mentor and swiftly embraced this book — prompted not by an interest in appropriating him, as Friedlander alleges,¹¹⁴ but by profound and justified understanding of his teachings.

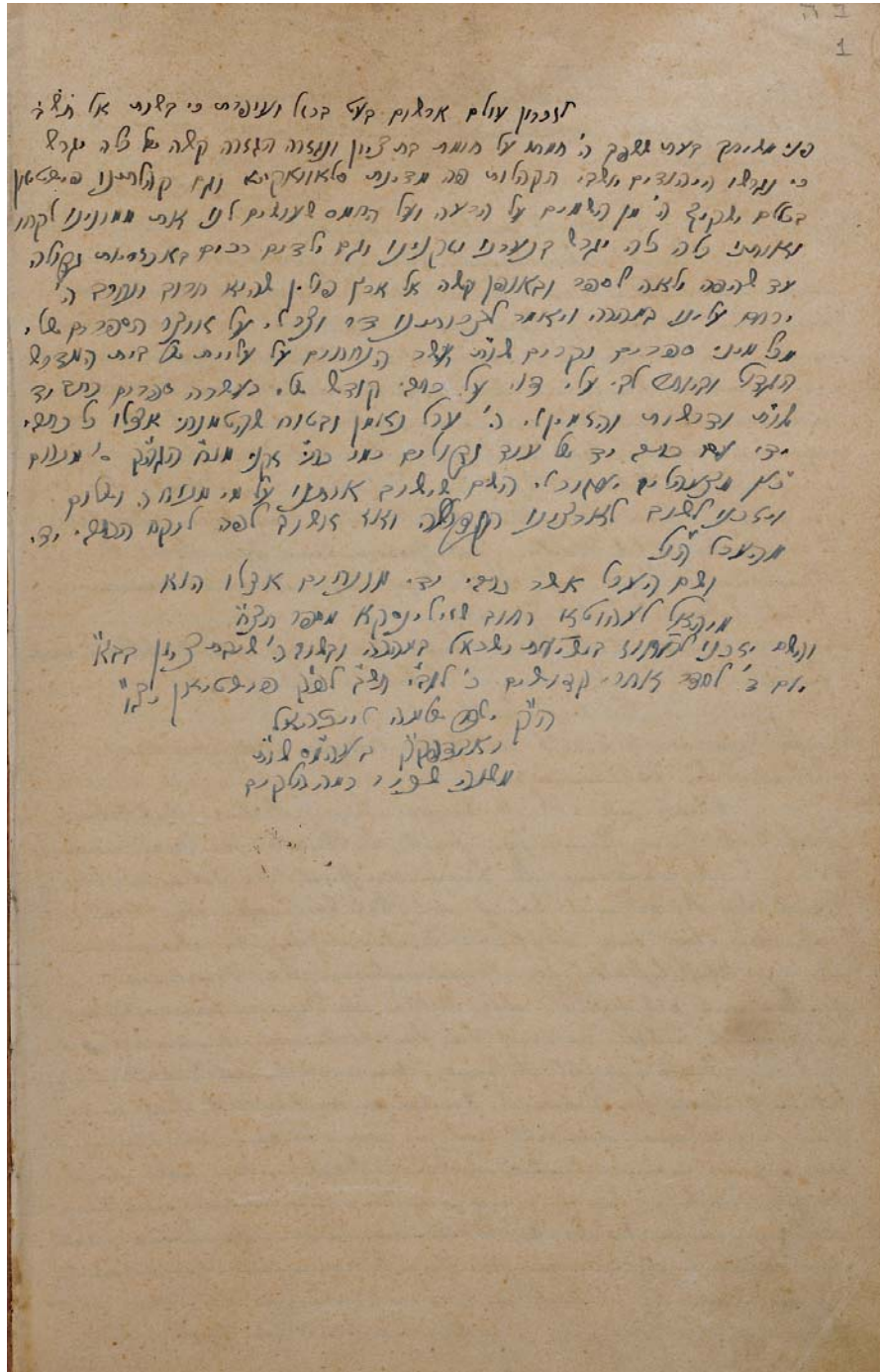


math of the Holocaust, abandoned his post of *rebbe*, distanced himself from his father-in-law's teachings, and drew close to the Mizrahi perspective.

113 Ibid.

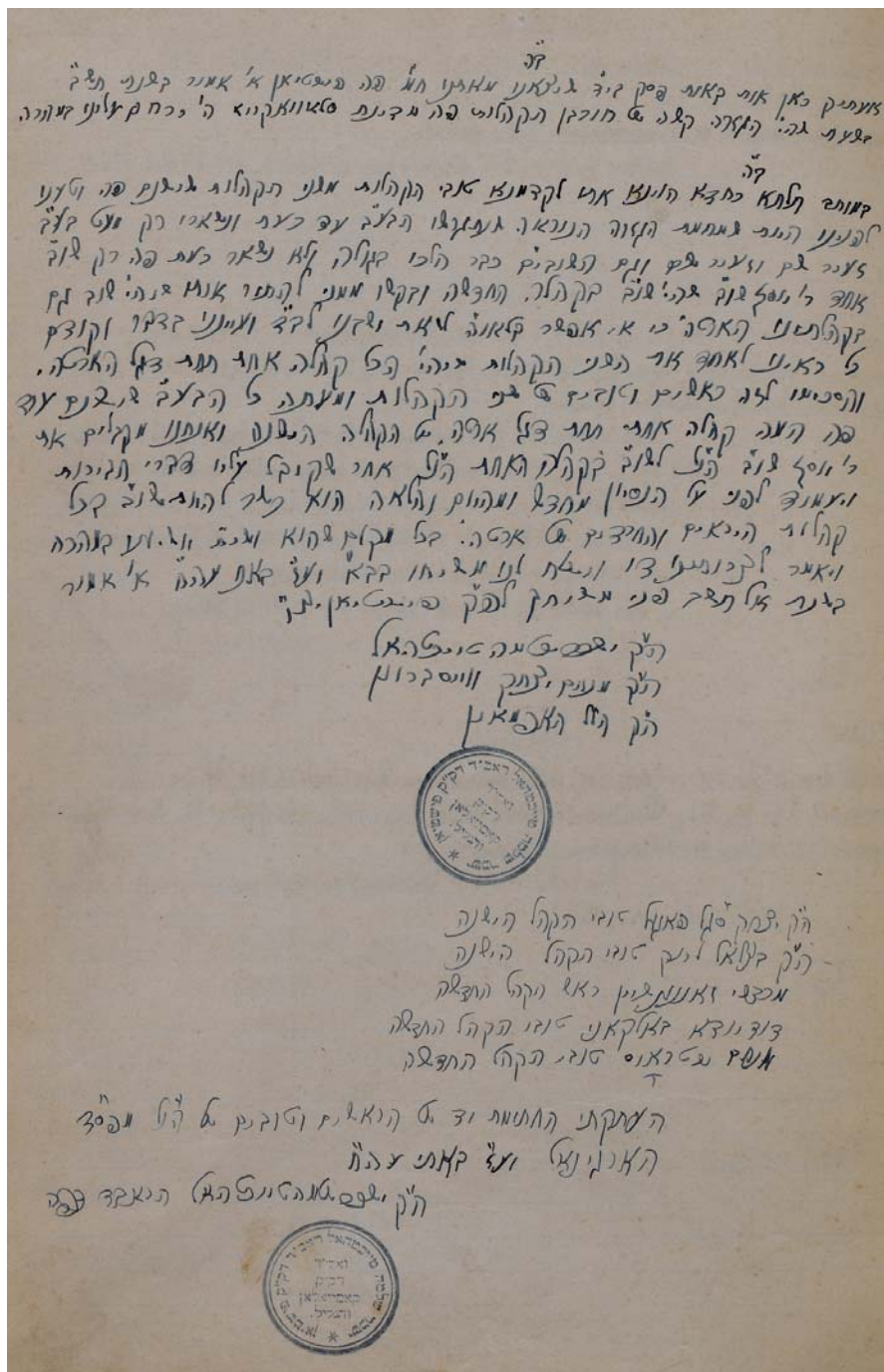
114 Friedlander, "R. Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal's Attitude Toward Zionism and the Holocaust," pp. 85–86.

Appendix 1



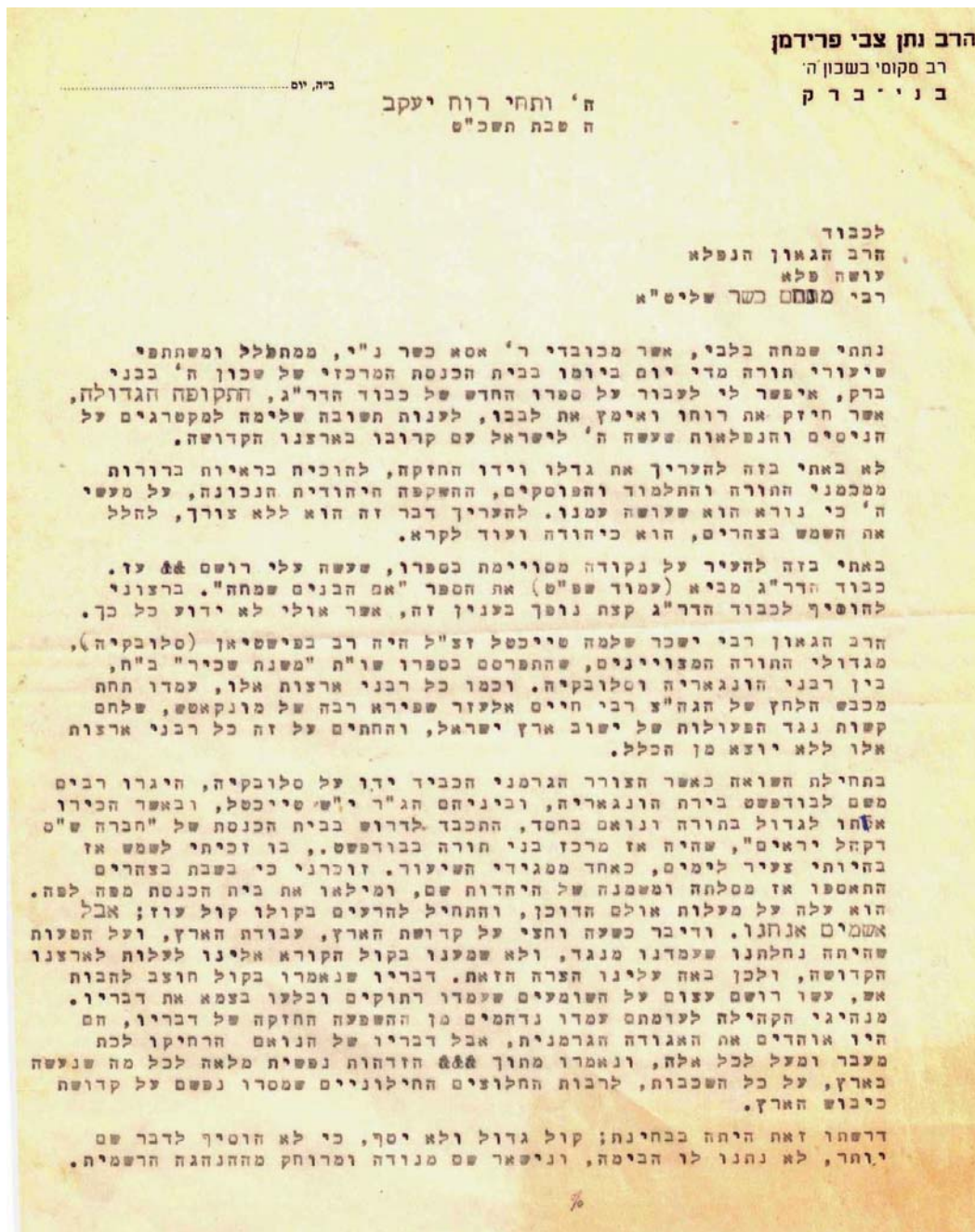
Teichtal letter, April 22, 1942, JTSL MS 10633, ff 1v. Image provided by the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

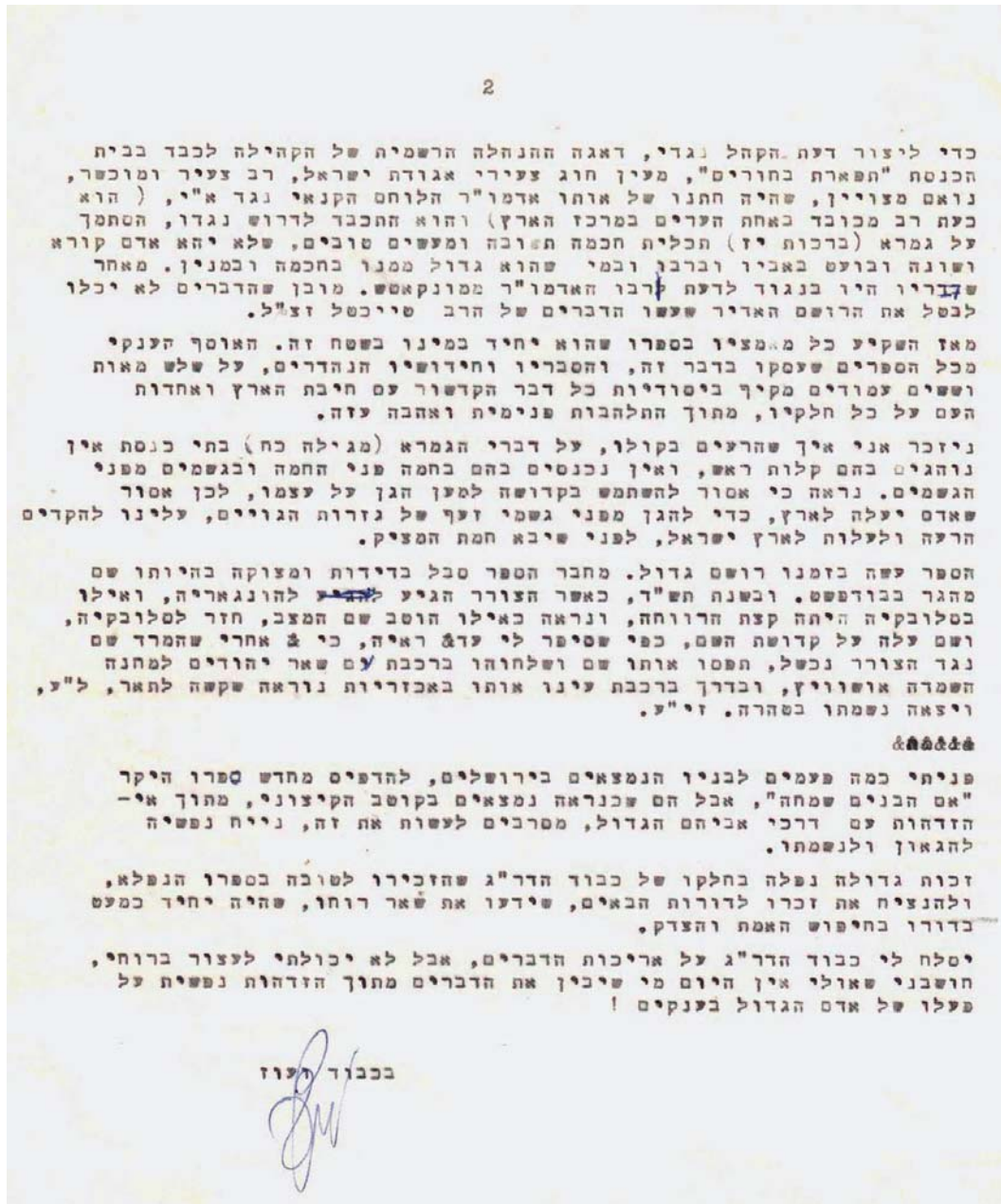
Appendix 2



Ruling by Piešťany Bet Din, headed by Rabbi Teichthal, merging the Orthodox and Neolog communities, April 26, 1942, JTSL MS 10633, ff 142v. Image provided by the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

Appendix 3





Letter from Rabbi Natan Tzvi Friedman to Rabbi Menachem Kasher,
December 26, 1968. Published with the permission of Prof. Asa Kasher.

Appendix 4

An Unknown Dedication by Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal

Aleksander Čerešnješ, librarian for the Gershom Scholem Collection at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, called my attention to the existence of a dedication that Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal had written in his book *Em ha-Banim Semeha*, published in Budapest on December 23, 1943. The dedication was inscribed on February 27, 1944, “the first day of the Torah portion *Tetsave* in the year *b.e.kh.a e.t.p.a.e.r*,”¹ about two months after the printing of the book was completed. It was made out to Rabbi Ephraim Ebert on the occasion of his emigration to the Land of Israel.²

I was unable to determine whether Rabbi Ebert actually emigrated or remained in Budapest. However, I may say with certainty that if he did “make *aliyah*,” he left the book behind. The book was deposited in the Agudas Yisroel library in Budapest (either by Ebert himself or in some roundabout way), as a stamp imprinted on the book (visible in the attached photograph) confirms and corroborates. After the war Dr. Josef Rechtman, principal of the Neolog Jewish high school in Budapest,³ sent the book from Budapest to Dr. Rivka Schatz-Oppenheim in Jerusalem. In the summer of 1970, she placed it in Gershom Scholem’s library, explaining: “After the indirect correspondence with

- 1 The overdotting of the Hebrew letters indicates that the letters are to be understood in *gematriya* (numerology). They add up to 704, corresponding to the year 5704 (1943/44).
- 2 I found no biographical details about him, but his name appears in several Hasidic works as a “rapporteur,” i.e., a reporter of credible accounts of the doings of Hasidic *tsadiqim* (“righteous persons”). See Noach Gad Weintraub, *Magnificance of Grace* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: no publisher listed, 1950), p. 8; idem, *Kindnesses of Grace* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: no publisher listed, 1951), p. 12; Eliezer Emanuel Horowitz, ed., *Teachings of the Maggid of Złoczów* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Makhon El he-Harim, 1999), p. 140; David Matityahu Rabinowitz, ed., *Teachings of Maharshal: Collection of Torah Sermons by the Late Rabbi Shlomo Yehuda Leib of Łęczna* (Hebrew) (Beit Shemesh, Israel: Makhon Shilhevet David, 2007), p. 134, with stories about R. Yehiel Michal of Złoczów, R. Zvi Elimelekh of Dynów, and the Sanzer *Rebbe*.
- 3 I thank Dr. Yitzhak Hershkowitz for providing me with information about Josef Rechtman and for helping me in my quest for sources about R. Ephraim Ebert.

Dr. Rechtman, I was privileged to receive a copy of *Em ha-Banim Semeha* that was in his library, a gift from R. Yisachar Teichtal himself. I forwarded the book that had reached me to the library of the late Prof. Gershom Scholem.”⁴ The book can now be found on the rare-books shelf of the Scholem Collection at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, where through its catalogue number, R3896, it is accessible to one and all.

Importantly, this book was presented to R. Ephraim Ebert by its author exactly three weeks before the Nazi invasion of Hungary, which caused R. Teichtal to migrate once again, until he was captured and sent to his death. Given the probability that he could not write to any great extent or certainly not systematically while on the run, the dedication must be one of his last writings.⁵ The contents of this terse document attest both to R. Teichtal’s yearnings for the land of Israel and to his prayers for salvation and rescue. The text follows:

“With God’s Help”

As an everlasting memento from me, the author, do I give this manuscript to my soul-friend, who towers in Torah and pure fear [of God], our esteemed teacher Rabbi Ebert, may his light spread, from here the capital, on the occasion of his ascent to the land of our delight. May God be with him and may he be privileged to witness the ingathering of the dispersed Jews and the hoped-for building at the forefront of the mountains.

- 4 Rivka Schatz-Oppenhimer, “Confession on the Threshold of the Crematoria: A Haredi Rabbi Regrets” (Hebrew), *Kivvunim*, 23 (1984), p. 61. See also *ibid.*, pp. 58-62, letter from Rabbi Dr. Moshe Rechtman, a Zionist leader in Budapest. Shmuel Hacoen Wiengarten mentions Moshe Rechtman in his book, *The Hatam Sofer and His Disciples: Their Attitude Toward the Land of Israel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1945), p. 14, n. 2. For more about him, see Samuel Kalmán Mirsky, ed., *Jewish Institutions of Higher Learning in Europe: Their Development and Destruction* (Hebrew) (New York: Ogen, 1956), p. 645. His name appears on a list of lecturers at the rabbinical seminary in Budapest.
- 5 Another dedication, two and a half weeks later (March 13, 1944) and addressed to the Gerrer *Rebbe*, has just been published. See *Hama’ayan*, 55:2 (2015), p. 103. See also a note there referring to the existence of the dedication published here, but without details.

I affix my signature, the first day of the Torah portion *Tetsave* in the year *b.e.kh.a e.t.p.a.e.r*, according to the abbreviated count,

I the small, Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, the author of *Mishne Sakhir*, a responsa book in several parts. I await redemption for the Jews who are suffering due to the times, and salvation is God's, Amen, may it be [His] will.

Translated from the Hebrew by Naftali Greenwood

ועל אנשים תנחמו

עזרי מעם ה' **פר** עושה שמים וארץ

אם הבנים שמחה

מיוסד על גאולתינו ועל פדות נפשינו מגלות האחרון הזה אחר שנעשה כל מה שהבורא כל עולמים אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו מבקש מאתנו ומצונו לעשות בענין קרבת הגאולה כמבואר בפנים כל דבר דבור על אופניו בשום שכל ודעת ממקורות נאמנים כולם נובעים ממעין הטהור של תורתנו הקדושה ומפי חכמינו ז"ל בש"ס בבלי וירושלמי במדרש וזהר ומשאר ספרותינו הקדושים ומבוקש מכל איש ישראל אשר כבוד ה' וכבוד אומה הקדושה וכבוד נפשו נוגע בלבו שיקח לו מועד לעבור במתינות ובדיק על כל דברי הספר הזה או אני ערב לו שבעזר הבורא יאירו עיניו ושכלו ולבבו יבין את אשר הוא חייב לעשות בעד נפשו בפרט ובעד כל אומתינו הקדושה בכלל ובעבור שמו הגדול יתברך ויתעלה בבי"א.

מחובר ממני הצעיר באלפי ישראל

ישכר שלמה טייכטהאל

מלפנים אב"ד ותופס ישיבה נכבדה וכעת פה עיר הבירה בודאפעסט בעהמ"ס שו"ת **משנה שכיר** כמה חלקים עודם בכת"י ושני חלקים כבר יצאו לאור התחלתי בסידור הכת"י של ספר הנוכחי אור ליום ג' לסדר וארא בשנת תשי"ג פה עיר הבירה הנ"ל **בעמק עכור** מצער חבלי משיח הנוראים אשר השתרגו על צווארנו במשך שנות המלחמה העולמית השנית הנוכחית וה' יוכני לגומרה בפתח תקוה לחזות במהרה בישועתן של ישראל ובהרמת קרנם ובשוב ה' את שיבת ציון בבי"א.

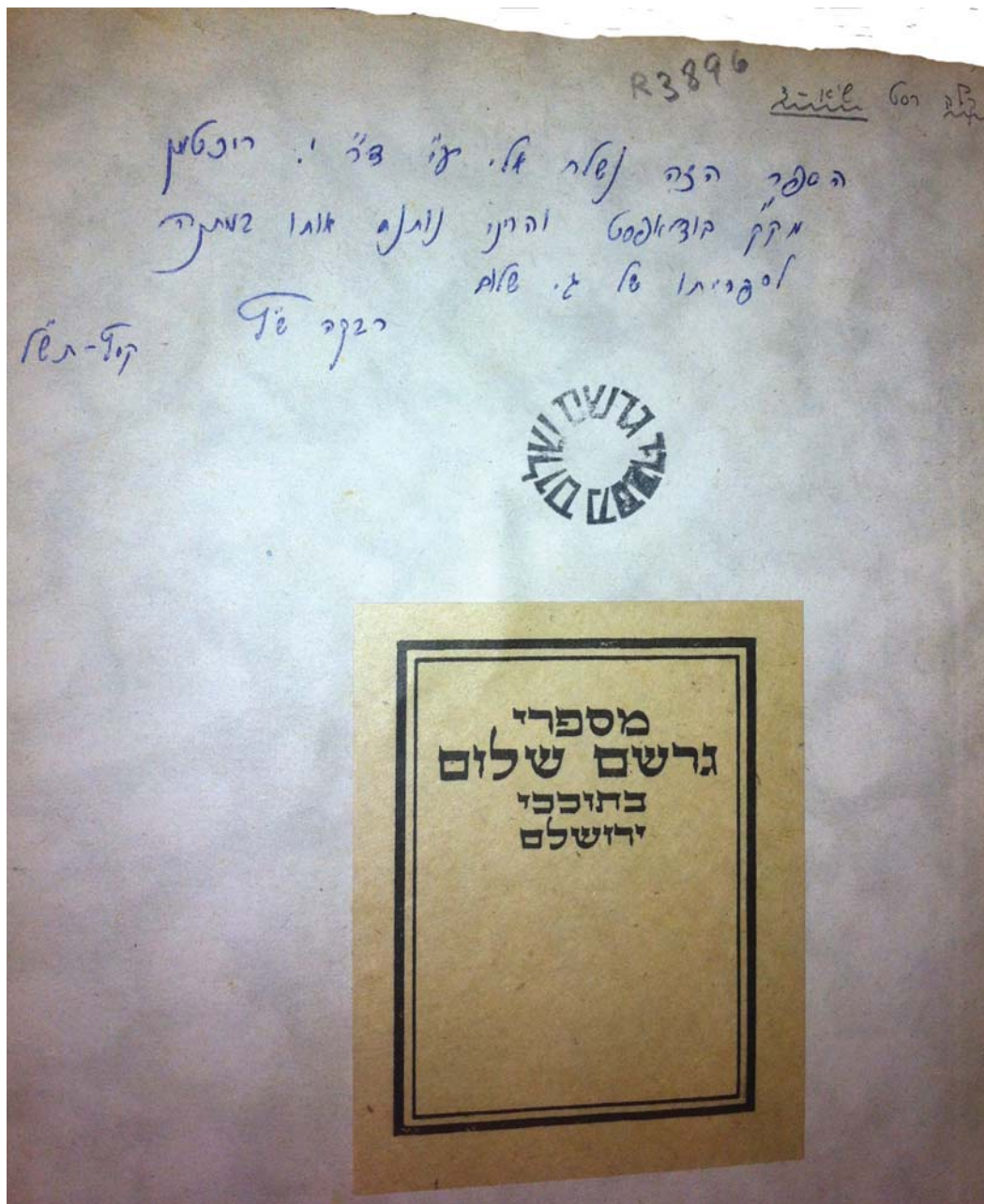
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 ונודעה יד ה' את עבדיו וזעם את אויביו (ישע"י ס"ו).



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 צדקה נ' מפה ענין הדיקה לעת עלום
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 ויזעו לכאורה קקובין, לכאן הנפשיים
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