

And yet, there is something so endearing and hopeful about Keret's vigorous imagination and unflagging sense of humor. One after another, his postmodern stories depict an Israeli embrace of the Yiddish image of the *schlemiel*; they suggest an enduring, exilic Jewish hope that dreams are ever-dying, therefore never

actually dead, therefore very much alive and rising. By the end of the story, the tube of "stuff" no longer works at all, even on them; "It might as well have been *hummus*." Somehow, it's being *hummus* seems good enough for us readers — reason enough to continue hoping and laughing along.



Reclaiming Zionism: Rebuilding the 'Jerusalem of Below'

ELISHEVA GOLDBERG

Why Is Jerusalem Always in Twos?¹

*Why is Jerusalem always in twos, one of Above
And the other Below
And I want to live in a Jerusalem of the middle
Without turning my head above and without
Wounding my legs below.
And why is Jerusalem in the language of
pairs, like hands
And legs,
I only want to be in one Jerusalem
Because I am only one, there are no more.*
—Yehudah Amichai

Miriam-Webster defines "Zion" as "a dwelling place of perfect happiness for the soul after death," and gives it synonyms such as "above," "bliss," and "paradise," and antonyms such as "Gehenna," "pandemonium," and "perdition." Zionism, then, is almost by definition an ideal — either a dream of national liberation or a mode of redemption.

Zionism has unearthly origins. For centuries, it held a mystical place in the minds of Jews. And it maintains a sense of that original unearthly quality. Aharon Appelfeld, one of Israel's most famous authors, talks about the first time he saw the Jewish Brigade after the Holocaust — that it was a "messianic revelation." And historian Zeev Sternhell, an outspoken secular leftist and expert on fascism, has said that the establishment of the State of Israel produced in him an "almost religious exaltation."

I grew up with that same notion of Zionism as a "messianic revelation" and a "religious exaltation." I attended a religious Zionist summer camp where we simulated Israeli military actions and lived the sort of collectivist identity promoted by Israel's first kibbutzim. When we said the *Birkat Hamazon*, I included (and still do) the words, "*Harachaman hu yivarech et medinat Yisrael, reishit tzmichat geulatenu*," for which a feeble English rendering might be: "May the Merciful

One bless the State of Israel, the beginning of our redemption." I subscribed to Rav Abraham Isaac Kook's teaching in the first chapter of *Orot HaKodesh* (titled *Eretz Yisrael*) that the Land of Israel is tied in its very lifeblood to the "*uma*," the "nation" of Israel. According to the author Micah Goodman, this is Kook's version of the Hegelian dialectic: The *uma* is a living, creative organism with Body and Soul. Its Soul is Jewish culture, religion, being, and its Body is the land of Israel. This makes the Diaspora effectively a soul without a body. Bringing the soul back to the body — Judaism to Israel, or Zionism — is *t'chivat ha-metim*, or the resurrection of the dead, rebirth. I so loved that idea then (perhaps differently from the way I love it now), that when I was 18 years old and living in a settlement, I believed that I was on a redemptive journey, seeking an ethereal Zion by connecting to the land.

Slowly — and painfully — I discovered that Israel, though it has a soul, is not just a vessel for a religious people — in other words, for me. It is a place, and it contains multitudes. It produces both excellence and suffering. It is a reality of flesh and blood.

Today, many who take the term "Zionism" for their battle cry tend to find their political home on the radical right — both in Israel and America. In growing numbers, they are proponents of the Greater Land of Israel — willing participants in the internationally condemned occupation of a people, funders and actors in projects that essentially steal property and deny civil liberties. Often, these are the same people who allow the otherworldly to enter into their political discourse. They speak of the redemptive powers of nationalism; they insist that God is in their political camp. But this insertion of otherworldliness is inappropriate and dangerous. In fact, it makes me want to fight against Israel, against a perverted Zionism.

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¹ A note on translation: Some nouns in Hebrew form their plural by using a "dual" suffix. This form is often used to indicate that the noun comes in pairs, like eyes, breasts, hands, feet, or ears. The sound of the dual ending is "A-IM" just like that of the end of the Hebrew word for Jerusalem, "Yerusha**l**A-IM." Amichai is claiming that the ending of the word "Jerusalem" denotes that it is a dual noun — a pair of Jerusalem(s).

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But reclaiming Zionism may not be impossible, and perhaps a clue to how we can do so can be found in the Talmud, in Ta'anit (5b), which quotes Rabbi Yochanan who, in turn, quotes God: "I will not come to Jerusalem of above (*Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*) until I have come to Jerusalem of below (*Yerushalayim shel mata*)."

The Talmud asks the obvious question: What is "Jerusalem of above"? If we understand "Jerusalem of above" as the ideal — a romanticized, beautiful, important national liberation movement of another era — we can begin to reorient ourselves. First, God (or we, as the case may be) must go to the "Jerusalem of below," to the realm where redemption means placing one's feet ever more fervently on the ground. To reclaim a Zionism of the earth, we

need to talk about what is happening on it — the physical realities we are creating and how those realities are changing us. Because if we make the mistake of treading in "Jerusalem of above" when we should be striding through "Jerusalem of below," then we do ourselves — and our own redemptive projects — a gross disservice.

When Zionism was a dream — when it brought to mind the "Israel of above" — it was epic: heroic, powerful, and profoundly worthwhile. But now that Zion has become a reality, we must reorient ourselves. There is much we need to do in order to live in the Jerusalem of below. We can start by ending the occupation. God will come to "Israel of above" only after coming to "Israel of below." That is the Jerusalem we should be building up. 

The Perils of Hope

JAY MICHAELSON

The millennial impulse — the belief, hope, or fear that a fundamental global change is imminent — seems universal in human experience. It may be messianic (that is, focused around an individual savior) or impersonal. It may be religious or secular. But as scholars have shown, millennialism (the term refers not to the year 2000, but to the Christian notion of Christ's thousand years of future rule) appears in all cultures, and all times. The Rapture, the Xhosa cattle-killing movement, Nazism, Y2K, Zionism, the false messiah Sabbetai Zevi, the end date of the 2012 Mayan calendar, socialist utopias, UFO cults, the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo, the celibate Shakers, Jehovah's Witnesses, Chabad-Lubavitch messianism, Jesus Christ himself — all of these are instances of the same cluster of human hopes and fears. Such impulses seem essential to the human condition.

Perhaps even more interesting is what happens next. Usually (so far, always), the redemption does not arrive. What then? Beginning with the classic study *When Prophecy Fails*, by Leon Festinger, a legion of scholars — myself among them, as I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the quasi-messianic figure Jacob Frank — has traced the arcs of disappointment that inevitably follow the failure of the apocalypse to materialize. Often, the inner circle becomes more devout, rather than less, after the wider audience diminishes; this was certainly the case following Sabbetai Zevi's apostasy in 1666. And it was true more recently in 1974, when

the Jehovah's Witnesses movement predicted that the world would end. Many people left, but those inside became more ardent.

What, then, of the political messiahs we all tend to venerate? The iconic red and blue poster image of candidate Barack Obama, usually with the words 'Hope' or 'Change' written beneath his image, was quintessentially millennialist. And intrinsic to such outsized hopes is the certainty of disappointment. Of course, Obama has accomplished one of the largest transfers of wealth in American history ("Obamacare"), made history as our first African-American president, ended two terrible wars, restored some of America's global reputation, and won countless victories for progressive values — including rebalancing the federal bench and moving same-sex marriage forward. But his shortcomings have also been apparent over the past five years: too much deliberation, too little political strong-arming, blind spots on surveillance and security. He is no messiah.

And so, as Festinger and other scholars who followed in his wake would have predicted, while many believers have become disillusioned, the hard core hardens.

In Jewish tradition, the failure of millennial hopes seems inevitable. As much as Jewish traditions stoke such hopes, they also voice skepticism of their ever being fulfilled. Consider some biblical examples. Right after the parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites complain about the food.

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