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(Translated by Isaac Gottlieb)

The religious meaning of the Six-Day War (see our Symposium in the Summer 1968 issue) still agitates the Jewish community. Because of the intense and sustained interest in the numerous ramifications of this problem, TRADITION presents the views of two prominent Israeli thinkers. Professor Leibowitz of the Department of Chemistry of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, is internationally renowned as one of the most original and controversial religious thinkers. The following essay is excerpted from Professor Leibowitz's contribution to the Winter 1968 issue of the Israeli publication *M.T.T.*

THE SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS MEANING OF VICTORY AND MIGHT

The conquest of the whole of *Eretz Yisrael* . . . by the army of Israel, some 2,000 years after the people of Israel lost sovereignty in its land and was exiled from it, is an event without historical precedence. Its impact is very great, even if all its practical implications have not as yet been clarified. It has undoubtedly effected a change in the reality of Jewish existence — and this change is a fact. The question remains whether there has also been a turning point in orientation, in the spiritual foundation of Jewish being and in the approach to Judaism . . . in short, a change in the realm of values. Because of the essential relation between the religion of Israel and the Jewish people throughout the generations, it seems to many religious Jews — especially to the religious members of the government and the patriotic youth — that the events of 1967 are interwoven in the progression of “the Messianic redemption,” with all the different meanings and implications which have been tied to this con-

cept . . . The victory is taken as a religious achievement, and the military bravery which brought it — as an expression of religious awakening. There are those who believe — or who spread the belief — that because of the new reality in wake of the Six-Day War and its accomplishments, a renewal of Jewish values and beliefs is in the offing, likewise a return of the nation to those values from which they were formerly alienated. The following remarks are intended to dispel this attitude.

Choosing any sort of interpretation from all the meanings which the term “spiritual” implies . . . it is not possible to attribute to the Six Day War, to the victory and to the conquests, any spiritual significance, nor can any results in the realm of the “spiritual” be expected to grow out of these events. Inasmuch as there was any “awakening” of the Jewish people in Israel and in the Diaspora, it was in the military, warlike sense — a common phenomenon in every nation, every society and every culture, and perhaps one of the inferior ones. There is nothing specifically Jewish in this trait. We have seen wartime bravery revealed in England — during the “Blitz” in London, in Russia — when the Germans stood at the gates of Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad . . . and in Hitler’s Germany, whose people and army continued to fight at the cost of their lives until the very end, when all hope was gone forever.

There is no need to be enthused by military heroism and ability to battle. These qualities are to be found, and are found even today, among the good and the bad . . . among those who fight for lofty ideals and among those who fight for evil and vanity. One need not wonder that Jews in our generation also know how to fight with bravery nor is there anything in this observation to change one’s evaluation of this generation. Heroism in battle is a universal characteristic, indifferent from the point of view of its quality, and is revealed among most nations and not only during changes of annihilation, but even in aggressive wars that are not of necessity to any nation — again, Hitler’s Germany proves this. The Jewish fanatics who defended Jerusalem at the time of its destruction as well as Titus’ Legionnaires who destroyed Jerusalem, were heroes. Bravery in battle is no proof of the intellectual, spiritual, or moral level and, need-

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less to say, of the religious level, of man. We have seen, and still do see, that men of high humanitarian standards and scoundrels alike can become heroes. There is no connection between the ability to fight heroically . . . and one's humanitarian level.

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Regarding the religious aspect of the bravery: It is true that Judaism is not pacifistic, excluding its "vision" of world peace; but in the Halakhah itself, which is active religion in its binding sense, war is recognized as a part of the human situation, and legitimate value is attached to one who fulfills his responsibilities in this area of human reality similar to the legitimacy in fulfilling any other human role. However, nowhere in any of the sources do we find a sign of high approval for the bravery of war or the enthusiasm for it, anything like the estimation of the enthusiasm accorded *talmud torah* or the observance of the *mitzvot*. Never were holidays of remembrance or thanksgiving instituted in commemoration of victories and conquests. Even the Hasmoneans — who are so often mentioned today in the current context — are cited in the sources and in the tradition solely for their *battle to preserve the Torah* and not in virtue of their military prowess (interestingly, *the Greeks* are termed "the brave ones"). Chanukah was instituted in remembrance of the saving of Torah, and not in commemoration of the military victory.

Furthermore, the whole concept of "bravery" in Judaism is not confined to physical might. "One should arise like the lion," the opening words of the *Shulchan Arukh*, are directed not towards the soldier but towards one arising to worship God. In the *Av Harachamim* prayer, the phrase "they were braver than lions" refers to Jews who never once held a weapon in their hands, but who went "as sheep to the slaughter" to sanctify God's name. It is characteristic of the confusion of values amongst the religious, that "going like sheep to the slaughter" (Isaiah, 53:7) has become a shameful concept even to them, as it touches upon the holocaust and the concentration camp experience.

Some would have it, that the Six Day War weakened the sense of purposelessness felt in the political and social community [of the State], a feeling quite rampant in the Israeli populace before the 5th of June. From a factual point of view alone, one can

deny that there has been any change in this state of affairs, and the sense of lack of purpose exists even today. Surely this is the state of affairs from a religious viewpoint where the term "purpose and meaning in life and in existence" has a specific context. This context finds expression at the close and summation of *Yom Kippur* in the *Ne'ilah* prayer: "For the superiority of man over the animals is nothing for all is vanity." But "You have separated man from the beginning and accorded him the right to stand before you." Not in human existence itself is there meaning, only in the human stance before God. In such a *Weltanschauung*, we should not expect to find the purpose of the state and [Israeli] society in nationalistic or political achievements, in military victories, or in conquests. All these are indifferent factors of existence and have no value in themselves, save in the measure that they serve as a framework for the human striving for serving God.

If there was no purpose in society and state in Israel before the six days, no sense of purpose was rendered by the war. It was a battle that was not for Torah and which did not stem from the power of Torah nor from its direction; but simply a great national-patriotic act of State, which is neutral in the purview of religion.

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A fanfare is made by some of the "hand of God" and the "Providence" which were revealed in our victory and in the liberation of Jerusalem and other territories. Herein is revealed strange selectivity in the application of concepts like "Providence," the Will of God, etc., to an interpretation of historical events. The province of Providence is everything and all is the Will of God — therefore, the Will of God reflects nothing insofar as evaluating these events. Not only is the liberation of the Temple Mount the Will of God, but so too every act of evil and sin performed in Eretz . . . Nevertheless, we are commanded to relate to some events in a positive manner, and to others — though they, too, are expressions of "Providence" — in a negative way.

Best that we should not resort to the use of such concepts in our historical estimations, so that we do not arbitrarily choose between that which is pleasing to us — and see in it the revela-

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tion of Providence — and that which is not, and deny to such events the same revelation.

Which way will you have it? Either you accept the concept of Providence in its popular expression (“A man doesn’t bend his finger unless it is so decreed from above.” [*Chulin* 76]) in which case Providence is a neutral concept and says nothing about evaluating events . . . or you don’t accept it thus (but in the more profound religious sense, that a person has “Providence” in the degree that he recognizes God) in which case you cannot utilize the concept of Providence at all when judging history and its happenings.

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. . . One should also oppose any changes made in the traditional liturgy to accord to the new national situation, as if prayer were a function to satisfy man’s needs, whether physical or spiritual. The *mitzvah* of prayer in Judaism is the commandment to serve God in a positive way as delineated in the Halakhah. It is not a vehicle of expression for man’s emotions, which constantly change with time and circumstance. Prayer in time of need, or in accord with a particular situation or emotion is not worship of the Almighty but self-worship through the venting of one’s feelings. True, such prayer is not *pasul* (invalid) but neither does it fulfill the *mitzvah of tefilah*. Prayer is in place of sacrifice — the set obligatory service. Worship is not dependent upon or conditional with man’s circumstances and his consciousness [of happenings and circumstances].

Regarding “the end of days” and the Messianic redemption — matters likewise being brought up in present discussions — and if [we speak] only of “the beginnings of Redemption”: In such matters only one who has communication with what is “on the other side of the curtain” has authority to speak. But we have no such communication, and no man is thus authorized to declare that we are going forth to meet the redemption. The connotation of the concept of redemption at the end of days is an existence which is after all days, e.g., a reality which is always *beyond that which is* and one never reaches it, but man is ever obligated to strive towards it. The Messiah is eternally in the role of “he who is destined to come.” The Messiah that appears

in actuality is the false messiah. These are the implications of Christianity and Sabbatianism for the history of the Jewish people and Judaism.

The return of the Jewish people to the reverence of God and to fulfillment of the Torah: Regarding these objectives, successful statesmanship and military victories have no meaning. Historical events lack educational religious influence. From all of Scripture and Jewish history we learn of the futility of miracles and even of miraculous revelation insofar as establishing the religious personality of the person who is a witness to these events.

The generation that beheld the ten plagues in Egypt and witnessed the splitting of the sea — they lacked faith and were destroyed in the desert. Those that saw revelation on Mount Sinai made the Golden Calf forty days later. But the experience of thousands of years testifies that tens of generations of Jewish men, women, and children were educated to love God and to revere Him to the point of martyrdom for the Sanctity of His name (*Kiddush Hashem*). God's presence never revealed itself to them, nor were miracles performed for them, nor was there salvation from their enemies and no prophets appeared in their midst . . . but they were educated in Torah and *mitzvot*.

History and its events do not bring one closer to achieving either love or fear of God. Let us not forget who was the king that "restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the Sea of the plain," the thoroughly evil Jeroboam ben Yoash . . . But Hezekiah the righteous king, who restored the crown of Torah to its proper place in Israel, was killed in youth in military defeat and the independent kingdom of Judah was lost.

The education of fear and love of God requires teaching Torah for its own sake (*lishmah*) without any connection to historical success. There must be an understanding that the world of God functions "as is its established custom," and man is unique and "recognized — to stand before you," not to be a success in history, statesmanship, or battle.

Some try to give religious significance to the War by means of halakhic expressions. Since we have been commanded to cap-

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ture the land, the soldiers who did so fulfilled religious imperatives, though they themselves have shed the yoke of Torah and *mitzvot*. In opposition to this, let it be said most forcefully, that the selective use of halakhic categories for those events that please us, in the framework of a state and society that do not recognize the authority of the Halakhah, is a perversion and falsification of religion. It betrays, in no small measure, a hypocritical stance. The main problem of halakhic Judaism today is that one is not able to make use of traditional halakhic categories with regard to a reality that the Halakhah never dreamt possible—the reality of the greater part of the Jewish people abandoning the Torah. One cannot properly combine the commandment of conquering Israel . . . together with disbelief and desecration of the Sabbath, and present all this as the realization of Torah.

In summation: There are no spiritual or educational implications to the Six Day War, the capture of Jerusalem, the “Whole Israel.” One cannot reveal in these events religious meaning. The pressing problems which Israel and Judaism encountered prior to the fifth of June are still encountered today.