GUSH EMUNIM—FAITH AND HOPE

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written and even more said about Gush Emunim—which I will choose to translate as Group of the Faithful. These various and many evaluations cover the spectrum from sheer adulation to outright antagonism. Gush Emunim has been pondered, studied, analyzed, dissected and digested from the points of view of halakhah, politics, sociology, psychology and morality. As is usual with a movement that evokes so much discussion, there are fact and fiction in all points of view. One thing is certain, however: very few people who are concerned with Erets Yisrael and its future, resident and non-resident, are indifferent to or ignore Gush Emunim. In this article, Part I presents an overview of some recent essays about Gush Emunim. Part II discusses the contribution Gush Emunim makes to the survival of Erets Yisrael.

I

The Halakhah

The question whether there is an halakhic imperative to settle Judah and Samaria is composed of two basic elements. First, is there a mitsvah of yishuv haarets (settlement of the Land of Israel) today? If yes, is it a mitsvah d'oraitah (biblical commandment) and does settlement in and of the land by itself constitute the fulfillment of the mitsvah of yishuv? An adjunct to these questions is whether it is permissible to return any of these territories to the Arabs once they have been settled by Jews. Secondly, is the mitsvah of yishuv haarets to be fulfilled even if there is a risk of a loss of human life, and to what extent are we required to endanger human life for the sake of the settlement of the land?
Whether the mitsvah of yishuv haarets applies today is a question which has received a great deal of attention and discussion since the Six Day War when once again the territories of the West Bank came into Israel’s possession.\(^2\) Invariably, the discussions of the mitsvah of yishuv haarets begin with an exposition of the positions of Ramban and Rambam. It is well known that Ramban considers yishuv haarets to be a positive commandment applicable in our time.\(^3\) Rambam, on the other hand, omits the mitsvah of yishuv haarets from his enumeration of the 613 commandments in his Sefer Hamitsvot. Some scholars regard this omission as an indication that Rambam does not regard yishuv haarets as a positive commandment applicable today.\(^4\) Others, however, disagree; they do not consider the omission as a denial by the Rambam that yishuv haarets is a mitsvah, but rather that it represents a mitsvah that does not require enumeration because it is included in another mitsvah.\(^5\) It should be noted that even those who do believe that Rambam does not consider yishuv haarets a mitsvah, nevertheless agree that if one does settle the land, he performs a mitsvah.\(^6\)

Does yishuv without conquest constitute fulfilling the mitsvah of yishuv haarets? It would appear from a study of the literature on the subject that it does.\(^7\) But even assuming that it does not, is it permissible to return the land to non-Jews once it has been settled by Jews? This is no longer a question of the mitsvah of yishuv haarets but of the prohibition of lo tehonem.\(^8\) Here again there has been much discussion and the general opinion is that one is not permitted to return the land once a Jew has possessed it.\(^9\)

Given all of the above, do any of these halakhic criteria apply if there is a question of pikuakh nefesh—a possible loss of human life? On this question there is by no means unanimity of opinion. Rabbi J. David Bleich states:

> On the basis of this analysis, there is, in our day, no obligation to wage war for conquest of Erets Yisrael or for retention of sanctified territories, even according to the opinion of Ramban. Moreover, were such an obligation to exist it would not require futile military action. Thus, there is no question that, at least under certain circumstances, refusal to engage in military action in order to retain the liberated territories can be certainly justified, even in accordance with the position of Ramban. Delineation of a precise set of conditions which would constitute an unacceptable and unjustifiable risk is a matter requiring military and political expertise.\(^10\)

However, in his notes he cites halakhic scholars whose contrary opinions cannot be regarded lightly.\(^11\)

While we may safely note that the majority of halakhic opinion favors Rabbi Bleich's view, there is another aspect to the problem of
pikuakh nefesh, which Rabbi Bleich does not discuss but which is quite germane to the problem of the territories. Rav Yaacov Ariel (Shtiglitz), an Israeli halakhic scholar, raises the problem of the contradiction found in the Minhat Hinukh. On the one hand, the Minhat Hinukh states that the mitsvah to wage war for the conquest of Erets Yisrael is incumbent upon the Jewish people even though there is danger to life.12 Yet elsewhere the Minhat Hinukh states that the mitsvah to wipe out the Canaanite peoples applies only where there is no danger to human life.13 To resolve the apparent contradiction Rav Ariel writes:

Scholars of the present generation14 have reconciled this difficulty by defining two separate duties, one incumbent on the individual and the other on the community as a whole. The latter statement of the Minhat Hinukh (that the mitsvah to wipe out Canaanites applies only when there is no danger to life)15 refers to the individual's duty of killing the Canaanite as a personal act only when this poses no threat to his life. This is so because the mitsvah like all other mitsvot, does not apply in situations of mortal danger. . . . However, the national duty16 of waging full scale war, remains in force despite the obvious danger. This reasoning is borne out by the authorization of the Torah to undertake a milhemet reshut (literally a voluntary war, which we are not obligated to wage) even though it is clear at the outset that casualties will be suffered.17

Rav Ariel, therefore, concludes that: according to Ramban's opinion, the duty to take possession of Erets Yisrael applies even in a situation of mortal danger.18

It could be argued that the Minhat Hinukh is referring only to the original conquest of Erets Yisrael and not to the settlement of the land per se. In fact, this could apply to all of the halakhic scholars who consider yishuv haarets a positive biblical commandment requiring fulfillment in our day. However, if we accept the premise that settlement without conquest is included in the mitsvah of yishuv haarets, as was stated above, then we can apply the principle of communal responsibility, even in the face of mortal danger to settlement of the land.

Whatever our halakhic leanings may be regarding the question of yishuv haarets, pikuakh nefesh or lo tehonim, it is quite clear that great differences of opinion among halakhic scholars on the question exist. To state, therefore, that Gush Emunim flies in the face of halakhic authority is simply not true. To consider their statement, as Dr. Glick does, that gedolei Yisrael had forbidden the return of the land under any circumstances and as an undisputed ruling as arrogance,19 is at the very least, an overstatement. Under certain conditions there are no halakhic scholars who would justify the return of
the land even in the face of mortal danger. The question then becomes one of security, politics and military strategy.

Security

There is general agreement among military strategists and security specialists that Israel must maintain some form of presence in Judea and Samaria. I was once part of a group invited by no less a military expert than General Ariel Sharon to visit Israel and to tour the settlements together with him and then to decide for ourselves whether we regarded the settlements as strategically necessary to Israel’s survival. I am aware of the argument that General Sharon is a well known “hawk” and his opinions are to be taken lightly. Nevertheless, I know of no authority in Israel—aside from the Shalom Achshov (Peace Now) adherents—who question the necessity of retaining some of the regained territories. Even many foreign diplomats and political figures, who could not understand what they considered to be Israel’s obstinacy in creating the settlements, changed their minds when they toured the settlements. Among them were many Congressmen who had spoken unfavorably concerning the settlements which were being established in opposition to the stated policy of the United States, Israel’s only true friend in the world. It is, therefore, obvious that the question is not whether to return all of Judea and Samaria but how much should be returned.

Once we accept the principle that for the sake of Israel’s security not all of the territories should or can be returned, I find it difficult to condemn Gush Emunim for wanting to implement this principle to its ultimate degree. While I might personally disagree with its views, and while there are military strategists who question the necessity of retaining all of Judea and Samaria, to accuse it of recklessly endangering the security of Israel is a non sequitur.

Politics

Politically the situation is even more confused and obfuscated. Moshe Kohn, the noted Jerusalem Post columnist, did a study of Gush Emunim for one of the Post’s “topic” series several years ago. The following quotes from his article should serve as adequate examples of the wide divergence of opinion concerning the politics of the settlements:

Dr. Ehud Sprinzak, senior lecturer in Political Science at the Hebrew University, is opposed to Gush Emunim, defining himself as a dove in Israel's political aviary. . . . “They don’t scare me in terms of their views and intentions,” he
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told me. “Their political ideas don’t worry me, even though their zeal and the religious mystical fanaticism of some of them scare me.”

Having studied their literature and interviewed some of their leaders, he believes “they are very responsible people.” Their interpretation of Rav Kook is very much in terms of the common, national good and not sectorial. Even though they act on an extra-parliamentary plane (which is one of the characteristics of what Dr. Sprinzak defines as extreme politics) and are anti-establishment, they are non-fascistic—as many people who loosely use the term contend—and they share great respect for the Government, the Israel Defense Forces and the law. They show real devotion, have a highly qualitative, excellent leadership, and they are not materialistic. What is more, they practice what they preach! Many of their people are actually settlers or would be settlers.

Mr. Kohn goes on to present Dr. Sprinzak’s objections to Gush Emunim, stating that its extreme views could lead to eventual violence if the time should ever come when some of the territories would have to be returned.

Another objection to Gush Emunim, quoted by Mr. Kohn, is voiced by Rabbi Menachem Hacohen, Labour M.K. and Rabbi of the Histadrut and the Moshavim Movement. He states:

It is hard to shake the feeling that Gush Emunim’s ostentatious and raucous settlement style is intended more as extremist political demonstration than as authentic settlement. The purpose of this demonstration is to torpedo the Government’s policy, which more than ever is based on a democratic majority of Israel’s citizens and consists of a coalitional consensus of Zionist parties.

There are others who object and disagree with Gush Emunim. Included among them are people who are leaders in the national religious movements, such as Yair Cherlow, a Bnai Akiva leader, Abraham Melamed, Chairman of the NRP’s Knesset faction and Zvi Yaron, one of the founding leaders of the Oz Veshalom (Strength and Peace) movement. Mr. Yaron’s criticism is especially effective since he is the author of Mishnato Shel Harav Kook, which is a study of the thought of the late Chief Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook z’l. He bases his criticism of Gush Emunim on the fact that its members have and are presently distorting the teachings of Rav Kook z’l. On the other hand, there are any number of leading political figures who agree with Gush Emunim and who applaud its efforts. An immediate source of support was Tenuat Erets Yisrael Hashlema (The Land of Israel Movement) which was created in 1967 by a group of university people, writers, politicians, former professional soldiers and kibbutz and moshav people of all political shades. The Land of Israel Movement called for the immediate annexation to the State of Israel and the immediate beginning of Jewish settlements in all the
areas which Syria, Egypt and Jordan had lost in the war they had launched. This is exactly what Gush Emumim is trying to accomplish.

According to Mr. Kohn there was a strong, though small, Ahдут Ha'avoda-Hakibbutz Hame'uhad contingent at the April 24th rally at Moshav Ein Vered of 1000 Labour-Settlement Activists for Judea and Samaria. Kohn quotes Moshe Tabenkin of Kibbuts Ein Harod Me'uhad, son of the late Yitzhak Tabenkin (who was the spiritual leader of Ahдут Ha'avoda):

I'm afraid that too many successive years in power have caused the Labour Movement to forget its real content and purpose—the settlement of Erets Yisrael. It is almost 10 year since the Government expropriated Judea and Samaria—expropriated them, that is, from any right to and attempt at Jewish settlement. This is a terrible mistake, one that endangers the very existence of the State.

Even Aluf (Res.) Dan Laner, who condemned Gush Emumim for what he called its “illegal actions,” praised it for having done what others—the settlement movements—should have done: raise the issue of settlements.

The litany of praise and condemnation for or against settlement and Gush Emunim goes on and on. Again, however, one thing is clear; there is no one political point of view concerning the question of the settlement of the territories nor of returning them to the Arabs. Indeed, within the various political parties in Israel, religious and non-religious, right and left, there are differing opinions on these subjects.

Whether one views the question of the settlements from an halakhic, security or political perspective, one does not find a definitive point of view. There are differing opinions and the perspectives are closely intertwined. I might add, that this is also true, if we were to analyze the question of the settlements from an historic, psychological or sociological viewpoint—an undertaking which the space limits of this essay do not permit.

II

Faith, Hope and Dedication

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook z’l, in one of his writings, declares:

Any observer of the rise and subsequent growth of the yishuv, will realize that hitherto, every regression suffered by us, has been followed by greater
gains. . . . Indeed, we have seen with our own eyes that out of the darkness there issued forth for us a great light.\textsuperscript{20}

Fact or fiction, reality or wishful thinking, messianic hope or fanciful dreams? When Rav Kook \textit{z’l} wrote those words no one really knew or could state with certainty what they really were. But today we know that \textit{Erets Yisrael} is a Jewish State and the \textit{yishuv} has grown to proportions—compared to what it was in Rav Kook’s time—that perhaps even a Rav Kook \textit{z’l} could not have envisioned. And in the final analysis, it is because of the vision of a Rav Kook \textit{z’l}, and those who preceded and succeeded him, that the State of Israel is a reality today.

Can we, however, because the State of Israel is now a reality, abandon the visionary dreams of Rav Kook \textit{z’l}? Did the establishment of the state herald an era of political realism replacing the messianic hope that has sustained our people through 2000 years of exile? There are those who say “yes.” Yisroel Yaakov Yuval writes:

The analysis of the current situation in terms of the messianic eschatology underlies the political attitude of a growing segment of the national religious camp. Their extremist brand of nationalism and cavalier disregard of the perils threatening the very physical survival of Israel are fed by the principles that the Third Temple shall not be destroyed (first mentioned in the apocryphal Syrian apocalypse of Baruch 32.4). This has given rise to the enunciation of a national policy whose principal object is to hasten the coming of the Messiah. The halakhah’s humane and morally sensitive principle \textit{ya’avor ve’al yehareg}, placing the preservation of human lives above the commandments of the Torah, is transformed into the demand that Jews sacrifice their lives for such hazy, pseudo-historical and sentimental concepts as \textit{shelemut ha’arets}, the territorial integrity of \textit{Erets Yisrael}.\textsuperscript{21}

Yuval therefore concludes:

Our generation may justly take pride in the privilege of having revived the Jewish State, a national accomplishment of major significance. However, seeing that the roots and dynamics of the historic process culminating in statehood must be sought in the age-old ethos of messianic aspirations it is of supreme importance for us to learn the lesson of past failures and the reasons for the present success. The triumph of our enterprise is based on the very recognition of the possibility of failure. An awareness of danger is an essential prerequisite to any initiative designed to counter perilous consequences. To sum up, the “not an inch” philosophy preferring sentiment, dreams and emotions to the stubborn facts of the situation, endangers its own aspirations, as well as the physical foundations of our existence. Only a realistically based religious weltanschauung, not discounting the possibility of yet another catastrophe, is capable of ensuring our continued survival.\textsuperscript{22}
Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz of Jerusalem, who Moshe Kohn says is "perhaps the most virulent Orthodox antagonist of Gush Emunim," writes:

If the messianic bubble of Mssrs. Kook, Levinger, Porat and their comrades bursts, and it becomes clear that the majestic Kingdom of King Messiah is not to materialize now, but that a small, poor State of Israel will continue to exist, under tremendous difficulties, within the 1948-67 border, within which we will have to continue struggling for the survival of Judaism within a secular reality, those emunim (faithful) people will like Sabbatai Zvi and his followers, discover that they no longer have any interest in the continuation of the Israeli and Jewish reality. I suspect that when that happens, they will be the first to leave the country, and perhaps—owing to the messianic fever that has possessed them—even seek refuge under the wings of that "Messiah" (i.e. Jesus—M.K.).

How quickly we forget. How many times in the last 2000 years has our messianic hope been frustrated? Yet, was it not this hope which was the very inspiration of the original yishuv? Were there not political realities then, when the first pioneer Jews braved incalculable dangers to settle Erets Yisrael? Did the original builders and reclaimers of the land not face hordes of hostile neighbors, and an unfriendly world? Does not the maintaining of the Jewish state require as much messianic vision and hope as its creation?

The only answer we can or should give to such a question is a resounding yes. The messianic hope of redemption lies at the very core of Jewish peoplehood. It is the very essence of our existence and without it we are only one more nation struggling to exist in an unfriendly antagonistic world bent upon our destruction.

This, to my mind, is the essence of Gush Emunim and its signal contribution to life in Israel today. I may disagree with it—halakhically, politically, militarily, sociologically or in any way you wish, but I cannot deny its dedication and devotion to Erets Yisrael and the Jewish state. Call it misguided, if you will, call its members extremists, if you like, but recognize that its adherents, more so perhaps than any other group in Erets Yisrael, have dedicated their lives to its continued existence and to its growth and prosperity. Gush Emunim, at a time when many have become discouraged and disheartened by the tremendous burdens placed upon them, has restored the faith of many young people in the promise that is Erets Yisrael.

Avital Geva, a member of Kibbutz Ein Shemer (Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, the Mapam-Hashomer Hatza'ir Kibbutz Movement), a well known opponent of Gush Emunim, writes:

Rabbi Levinger sleeps in a sleeping bag on the floor of the Gush Emunim office. Their people work day and night without counting the hours. . . . (They)
have shown that you fight for an idea. . . . (They) have contributed to the State by revitalizing all the conventions of our life here. . . . (They) are doing educational work, pure and simple.24

She then quotes Ya'akov Hazen, the veteran Mapam-Hakibbutz Ha'artzi leader, "Gush Emunim personifies what we once were."25

And so, contrary to the accusation of Zvi Yaron, one of the founding leaders of the Oz Vesholom (Strength and Peace) movement, that Gush Emunim is "ignoring the dialectic of Rav Kook's z'l thought" by not "following in his very strong concern for other nations or in his all-embracing concern for all aspects of life," I believe that Gush Emunim has attempted to embrace those aspects of Rav Kook's z'l teachings which emphasize the importance of *Erets Yisrael* and the survival of the Jewish people. To quote once again from Rav Kook z'l:

*Erets Yisrael* is not something external to the Jewish people, a necessary framework of communal life and a basis of material or even spiritual existence. *Erets Yisrael* has an intrinsic value, vitally associated with the Jewish genius. Activating the Jewish soul in its inner recesses, the sanctity and attraction of *Erets Yisrael* cannot be accounted for in mere rationalist-humanist terms. Rather ought we consider it in the light of the divine spirit resting in Israel as a whole and its imprint on the Jewish character. Here lies the source of natural, healthy Jewish sensibility, which reflects the heavenly lustre and ideal of *Erets Yisrael*. The alien idea regarding *Erets Yisrael* as a mere instrument of national survival fortifying Jewish existence, religious faith and practice in the diaspora, will not yield lasting fruit, since it disregards the sacred character of *Erets Yisrael*. The effective regeneration of diaspora Jewry depends solely upon the degree of its involvement in *Erets Yisrael*. Only the hope generated by this land is capable of infusing life into Jewish existence. Thus, diaspora Judaism is a function of the prospect of salvation, whereas Jewish *Erets Yisrael* denotes salvation itself.26

I sincerely believe that this is what Gush Emunim is trying to teach us and while the members may be overzealous in some of their actions, the basic philosophy is one which has the potential to elevate the Jewish people to untold heights. Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the leader of Gush Emunim, in an interview with Moshe Kohn, said the following:

What Gush Emunim is about, is the Jewish national renaissance and the honour of *Erets Yisrael*. Where the government is leading us is on the path of bondage to the United States in economic and security matters. *Of course*, we are concerned with pragmatic political and security considerations, but that isn't enough. God gave us *Eretz Yisrael* not merely for the sake of borders, but for Truth, to live a certain way of life. So we must struggle for purity, idealism, the submergence of egoism in the general cause. In time, we may have to go out and fight for the moral and ethical reformation of our country. Our activity so far has created the seeds for that too.27

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To label such a movement arrogant, a dangerous "neo-Sabbatian phenomenon, an evasion of real religious values, close-minded, immoral and intolerant" is something which I find quite amazing. Its followers show hutzpah, yes, a certain degree of irreverence, yes, simple mindedness, yes, but nevertheless, they exemplify some of the highest Jewish religious ideals.

We should emulate their idealism and devotion to Erets Yisrael and the Jewish people. It would help to renew the pioneering spirit of the Jewish people and create a renaissance of the religious-Zionist ardor which helped to create the Jewish state.

I conclude with the words of Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook, shlita, who said in an interview with Moshe Kohn:

As for the people who ask those questions—in Tractate Sota (48B) Rabbi Elazar (here Kohn adds that Rabbi Kook's face broadened into a beautific smile and he said to Rabbi Fried, who was present at the interview: "Rabbi Elazar, he was an Erets Yisrael man through and through") comments on the verse (Zekhariah 4:10) Ki mi baz liyom ketanot—for who has despised the day of small things? The Hebrew root of the word despise B.z, is also the root of waste or fritter away, and the word for small things, 'ketanot' where not pointed can also be read as katnoot pettiness. So Rabbi Elazar says: "Who caused the righteous men to fritter away their future rewards? The pettiness in them that caused them not to trust in God."28

Gush Emunim, I believe, exemplifies that trust.

NOTES

1. It is interesting that Hebrew words can be translated in many ways. The word gush is defined as follows: block, group, mass, clod, clump, bulk. Emunim is defined as faithful, trustworthy, reliable. (The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary, R. Alcalay). The particular combination you choose, I imagine, depends upon your evaluation of and sympathies for or against Gush Emunim. My translation should give the reader some clue as to my sentiments.

2. Rabbi B. Zolty, Torah She'be'al Peh, 1969; Rabbi S. Raphael, Torah She'be'al Peh, 1973; Rabbi A. Soloveitchik, Torah She'be'al Peh, 1974; Rabbi Y. Yuval, Rabbi Y. Ariel (Shtiglitz), Rabbi Y.M. Ehrenberg, Contemporary Jewish Thinking in Israel, 4, Dept. for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, World Zionist Organization, Jerusalem 1978; Rabbi J.D. Bleich, "Judea and Samaria; Settlement and Return," Tradition 18, No. 1(1979) are but some of the more recent works written on the subject. Expanded lists are available.

3. Ramban Commentary on the Bible 33:53 and Commentary on Sefer Ha'mitsvot, Mitsvot Aseh, addenda No. 4.

4. Bleich, "Judea and Samaria," p. 50


11. Bleich, “Judea and Samariah,” p. 73, n. 34.
15. Parenthetical remarks mine.
16. Italics mine.
23. Y. Liebowitz letter published in *Ahudim,* organ of national religious movements, as quoted by M. Kohn, in *Jerusalem Post* “Topic” article.
24. A. Geva in June 3 issue of *Hashavua,* organ of Hakibbutz He'artsi, as quoted by M. Kohn, *Jerusalem Post* “Topic” article.
25. A. Geva as quoted by M. Kohn, in *Jerusalem Post* “Topic” article.
26. Rabbi A.I. Kook, *Orot Eretz Yisrael I.*