

## Democracy and Power

### I Prayers against the government

#### 1) Rosh Hashanah Musaf service

וּבָכְן צְדִיקִים יִרְאוּ וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ וַיִּשְׂרִים יַעֲלִזוּ  
וַחֲסִידִים בְּרָנָה יִגִּילוּ וְעוֹלָתָה תִּקְפָּץ פִּיהָ.  
יְכַל הַרְשָׁעָה כְּלָה כְּעָשָׁן תִּכְלָה כִּי תֵעָבֵר  
מִמְשַׁלֵּת זָדוֹן מִן הָאָרֶץ: . . .

**And then** the righteous will see [this] and rejoice, and the upright will be jubilant, and the pious will exult with joyous song; injustice will close its mouth, and all the wickedness will vanish like smoke, when You remove the rule of evil (or the evil government) from the earth. . .

וְתִמְלֹךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה לְבַדְּךָ עַל כָּל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ  
בְּהַר צִיּוֹן מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ וּבִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר  
קִדְשֶׁךָ. כִּכְתוּב בְּדַבְרֵי קִדְשֶׁךָ יְמֹלֵךְ יְהוָה  
לְעוֹלָם אֱלֹהֶיךָ צִיּוֹן לְדָר וְדָר הַלְלוּהָ:

**And You** Adonai will reign alone over all Your works on Mount Zion, dwelling place of Your glory, and in Jerusalem, city of Your Sanctuary, as it is written in Your holy words, “Adonai will reign forever; Your God, Zion, throughout all generations. Praise God.”

*Why is this prayer part of the Rosh Hashanah service?*

*Some commentators have understood this as a prayer against a particular government (like the Roman empire, the paradigm of evil in the eyes of classical Jewish text), and some have read it as referring to all human governments. What is the difference for you? How do you read it? What do you think about when you recite these words?*

*What is the vision of what might replace the memshelet zaton?*

## II Judaism and Democracy?

### 1) Rosh Hashanah Musaf (Malkhuyot)

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. מְלוּךְ עַל כָּל  
הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ בְּכְבוֹדְךָ וְהִנְשֵׂא עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ  
בִּיקְרָךְ וְהוֹפֵעַ בְּהַדָּר גָּאוֹן עִנְךָ עַל כָּל  
יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל אֲרֶץְךָ. וְיָדַע כָּל פְּעוּל כִּי  
אֵתָה פְעַלְתָּ וְיָבִין כָּל יְצוּר כִּי אֵתָה  
יְצַרְתָּ וַיֹּאמֶר כָּל אִשׁר נִשְׁמָה בְּאִפּוֹ  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלֶךְ וּמְלֻכוֹתָיִם בְּכָל  
מְשָׁלָה:

**Our God** and God of our ancestors, reign over the entire world with Your glory, and be uplifted over all the earth with Your honor, and appear in the splendor of Your majestic might over all who dwell in the inhabited world of Your earth; so everything that has been made will know that You have made it, and it will be understood by everything that was formed that You have formed it. And everyone who has breath in their nostrils will say, “Adonay, God of Yisrael is Sovereign and God’s sovereignty rules over all.

### 2) Deuteronomy 17:14-20

כִּי תֵבֵא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן  
לְךָ וַיִּרְשָׁתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבְּתָהּ בָּהּ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲשִׁימָה  
עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי:  
שׁוּם תִּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקִּרְבֵּי אַחֲיֶיךָ תִּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ  
לֹא תוּכַל לָתֵת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא-  
אַחֲיֶיךָ הוּא:  
רַק לֹא-יִרְבֶּה-לּוֹ סוּסִים וְלֹא-יִשֵּׁב אֶת-הָעַם  
מִצְרַיִמָה לְמַעַן הַרְבּוֹת סוּס וַיְהוֶה אָמַר  
לָכֶם לֹא תִסְפּוּן לָשׁוּב בְּדָרְךָ הַזֶּה עוֹד:  
וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה-לּוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יָסוּר לְבָבוֹ וְכָסֶף  
וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְבֶּה-לּוֹ מְאֹד:  
וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לוֹ  
אֶת-מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל-סֵפֶר מַלְפָּנָי  
הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:  
וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל-יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן  
יִלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-  
כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת-הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה  
לְעֹשֶׂתָם:  
לְבַלְתִּי רוּם לְבָבוֹ מֵאַחֲיוֹ וּלְבַלְתִּי סוּר מִן-  
הַמִּצְוָה יְמִינוֹ וּשְׂמֹאוֹל לְמַעַן יֵאָרֶיךָ יָמִים  
עַל-מַמְלַכְתּוֹ הוּא וּבְנָיו בְּקִרְבֵּי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל: { ס }

If, after you have entered the land that Adonai your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, “I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me,” you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by Adonai your God. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kin. Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since God has warned you, “You must not go back that way again.” And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess. When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere Adonai his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

### 3) Samuel 8:4-20

וַיִּתְקַבְּצוּ כָּל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל  
הַרְמָתָה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הִנֵּה אַתָּה זָקֵן  
וּבְנֶיךָ לֹא הִלְכוּ בְדַרְכֶיךָ עֲתָה שְׂיִמָּה-לָנוּ  
מֶלֶךְ לְשִׁפְטֵנוּ כְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם:  
וַיִּרַע הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי שְׁמוּאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר  
וַתְּנַהֲלֵנוּ מֶלֶךְ לְשִׁפְטֵנוּ וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-  
יְהוָה: {פ}

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל הָעָם  
לְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֶיךָ כִּי לֹא אֲתָדָּ מְאַסִּי  
כִּי-אֲתִי מְאַסִּי מִמֶּלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם:  
...

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת כָּל-דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֶל-הָעָם  
הַשְּׂאֵלִים מֵאֵתוֹ מֶלֶךְ: {ס}  
וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה יִהְיֶה מִשְׁפַּט הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹךְ  
עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם יִקַּח וְשָׂם לוֹ בְּמָרְכָבָתוֹ  
וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו וְרָצוּ לִפְנֵי מָרְכָבָתוֹ:  
וְלָשׂוּם לוֹ שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי חֲמֻשִׁים  
וְלַחֲרֹשׁ חֲרִישׁוֹ וְלִקְצָר קְצִירוֹ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כְּלֵי-  
מִלְחָמָתוֹ וְכָלֵי רִכְבּוֹ:  
וְאֶת-בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם יִקַּח לְרֻקְחָוֹת וְלִטְבָּחוֹת  
וְלֵאֲפוֹת: . . . צֹאנֵכֶם יַעֲשֶׂר וְאֶתֶם תִּהְיוּ-לוֹ  
לְעַבְדִּים:

וַיַּעֲקֹתֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא מִלִּפְנֵי מִלְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר  
בְּחַרְתֶּם לָכֶם וְלֹא-יַעֲנֶה יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בַּיּוֹם  
הַהוּא:  
וַיִּמְאַנּוּ הָעָם לְשָׁמַע בְּקוֹל שְׁמוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
לֹא כִּי אִם-מֶלֶךְ יִהְיֶה עֲלֵינוּ:  
וְהֵינּוּ גַם-אֲנַחְנוּ כְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם וּשְׁפָטֵנוּ מִלְּכָנוּ  
וְיֵצֵא לִפְנֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם אֶת-מִלְחָמֹתֵנוּ:

All the elders of Israel assembled and came to Samuel at Ramah, and they said to him, "You have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations." Samuel was displeased that they said "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to God.

And God replied to Samuel, "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king. . .

Samuel reported all the words of God to the people, who were asking him for a king. He said, "This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots. He will appoint them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. . .He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves.

The day will come when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and God will not answer you on that day." But the people would not listen to Samuel's warning. "No," they said. "We must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles."

#### 4) Netziv, *Ha'amek Davar* on Deuteronomy 17:14

R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, Russian Empire 1816-1893

ואמרת וגו'. . . אין זה מצוה במוחלט למנות מלך אלא רשות כמו ואמרת אוכלה בשר וגו'. והרי ידוע בדברי חז"ל דמצוה למנות מלך וא"כ למאי כתיב ואמרת וגו'. ונראה דמשום דהנהגת המדינה משתנה אם מתנהג עפ"י דעת מלוכה או עפ"י דעת העם ונבחריהם. ויש מדינה שאינה יכולה לסבול דעת מלוכה. ויש מדינה שבלא מלך הרי היא כספינה בלי קברניט. . . לא אפשר לצוות בהחלט למנות מלך כ"ז שלא עלה בהסכמת העם לסבול עול מלך עפ"י שרואים מדינות אשר סביבותיהם מתנהגים בסדר יותר נכון. או אז מ"ע לסנהדרין למנות מלך. . . ומש"ה כל משך שלש מאות שנה שהיה המשכן נבחר בשילה לא היה מלך והיינו משום שלא היה בזה הסכמת העם:

And you shall say, etc.: . . . it is not an absolute commandment to appoint a king, but rather optional, as in the case of "and if you shall say, 'I want to eat meat,' etc." But behold, we know from the words of the sages that it is a commandment to appoint a king. If so, why is it written, "and you shall say, etc.?" It seems that this is because the conduct of a state changes according to whether it is a monarchy, or whether it is based on the opinion of the people and their representatives. There are states that cannot stand a monarchy and there are states that without a king are like a ship without a captain. . . It is impossible to absolutely command the appointment of king as long as the people do not consent to the yoke of a king as a result of seeing the states around them functioning more properly [with a king]. Only then is it a positive commandment for the Sanhedrin to appoint a king. . . And it is for this reason that for all of the three hundred years that the Tabernacle was in Shiloh, there was no king; because the people had not agreed to such.

#### 5) Psalm 72

לְשִׁלְמָה | אֱלֹהִים מְשַׁפֵּטֶיךָ לְמֶלֶךְ תָּנוּ  
וְצִדְקָתֶךָ לְבָרְמֶלֶךְ: | יְדִי עֲמִידָה בְּצִדְקָה וְעֲנִיִּים  
בְּמִשְׁפָּט:  
יִשְׂאוּ הָרִים שְׂלֹם לְעַם וְגִבְעוֹת בְּצִדְקָה:  
יִשְׁפֹּט | עֲנִיִּים וְיִשְׁיַע לְבָנֵי אֲבִיוֹ וְיִדְכֵּא  
עוֹשֵׂק: . . .

A psalm of Solomon: O God, endow the king with Your judgments, the king's son with Your righteousness; that he may judge Your people rightly, Your lowly ones, justly. Let the mountains produce well-being for the people, the hills, the reward of justice. Let him champion the lowly among the people, deliver the needy folk, and crush those who wrong them. .

כִּי יִצִּיל אֲבִיוֹן מִשֹּׁעַ וְעֲנִי וְאִירֵעָר לוֹ:  
יָחַס עַל-דָּל וְאֲבִיוֹן וְנַפְשׁוֹת אֲבִיוֹנִים יוֹשִׁיעַ:  
מִתְרוֹף וּמִחָמָס וְגָאֵל נַפְשָׁם וְיִיקָר דָּמָם  
בְּעֵינָיו:

For he saves the needy who cry out, the lowly who have no helper. He redeems them from fraud and lawlessness; the shedding of their blood weighs heavily upon him.

*The image of God as a sovereign/king appears over and over in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy. What is attractive about describing God in this way? What is difficult?*

*What is the attraction of appointing a human king? What are the dangers? How do these texts balance between the ideal of monarchy and the dangers?*

## 6) Talmud Brakhot 55a

אמר רבי יצחק: אין מעמידין פרנס על הצבור אלא אם כן נמלכים בצבור, שנאמר: "ראו קרא ה' בשם בצלאל", אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: משה, הגון עליך בצלאל? אמר לו: רבונו של עולם, אם לפניך הגון — לפני לא כל שכן! אמר לו: אף על פי כן, לך אמור להם. הלך ואמר להם לישאל: הגון עליכם בצלאל? אמרו לו: אם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולפניך הוא הגון, לפנינו לא כל שכן!

With regard to Bezalel's appointment, Rabbi Yitzhak said: One may only appoint a leader over a community after consulting with the community, as it is stated: "See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah" (Exodus 35:30). The Lord said to Moses: Moses, is Bezalel a suitable appointment in your eyes? Moses said to God: Master of the universe, if he is a suitable appointment in Your eyes, then all the more so in my eyes. The Holy Blessed One, said to him: Nevertheless, go and tell [the people]. Moses went and said to Israel: Is Bezalel suitable in your eyes? They said to him: If he is suitable in the eyes of the Holy Blessed One, and in your eyes, all the more so he is suitable in our eyes.

## 7) Shulchan Arukh, Choshen Mishpat 163:1 (Rema)

הגה [...] כל צרכי ציבור שאינן יכולין להשוות עצמן יש להושיב כל בע"ב הנותנים מס ויקבלו עליהם שכל אחד יאמר דעתו לשם שמים וילכו אחר הרוב ואם המיעוט ימאנו הרוב יכולין לכופ אותן אפילו בדיני עכו"ם ולהוציא ממון על זה והם צריכין לתת חלקם והמסרב מלומר דעתו ע"פ החרם בטילה דעתו ואזלי' בתר רוב הנשארים האומרים דעתו.

Rema: For any community need on which they cannot find common ground, they should convene all taxpayers, and they should agree that each will voice their view *l'shem shamayim* and they will follow the majority. But if a minority refuses [to follow] the majority, it is permissible to force them, even via secular law, to extract money for this, and they need to pay their share. If one boycotts and refuses to offer one's opinion, then they forfeit their opinion and the opinion of the remaining majority decide the matter.

## **8) Rachel Elijor, “Judaism and Democracy – The Private Domain and Public Responsibility” (2012)**

I believe unreservedly in the life force of the historical and national legacy of the Jewish People, in all its diversity and vitality. I have faith in the life force of millennia-old Jewish culture, and the new forces with which it has been imbued since its historical return to national life and territorial sovereignty. . . . The more Judaism confronts the test of freedom and choice, and the less it engages in coercion, the more it will grow, thus ensuring creative development through continuity and change. On the other hand, I fear for the existence of the State of Israel as a democratic state belonging to all its citizens, a democracy based upon a multiplicity of opinions, the essence of which is ensuring the rights of both the majority and the minority – the majority right to make decisions, and the minority right to self determination and freedom. . . .

We people of the twentieth century should bear in mind that we cannot rely only on secular rationalism and the deterministic optimism inherent to the idea of progress in democratic societies. The violence and cruelty manifested in the Holocaust, Stalinism, McCarthyism, two World Wars and the dropping of the atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, were not the product of religious thinking. The “people’s democratic republics” did not commit murder in the name of a particular religion, but rather in the name of one secular ideological tyranny or another. On the other hand, religions throughout history, from ancient times to the twentieth century, not only often sinned and committed crimes in the name of their respective gods, but also safeguarded, preserved, created, acted, educated and progressed. We must constantly remind ourselves that the whole truth does not reside in any one place, and that criticism of religion must be accompanied by criticism of modern rationalism. Human culture is not arranged on a single shelf. It comprises, side by side, the tangible and the abstract, the rational and the irrational, intellect and faith, science and religion, the normative and the exception, various hegemonic values and dominant sources of authority, alongside the silenced voices on the margins of society, art and law, as well as the relative and absolute truths that are constantly redefined in the depths of human experience and the vagaries of history.

9) Hayyim David HaLevy, *Mekor Chayyim* 3:52

(Israel, 1924-1999)

אין בכונת כותב מאמר זה לגנות את  
הדימוקרטיה כדרך שלטון הטובה  
ביותר בזמנינו בתנאי חיינו, כי ברור  
שאינן כל דרך אחרת טובה הימנה,  
אבל הכונה היא לתאר את השלטון  
עפ"י התורה בחברה המאמינה  
בתורת האלקים ושומרת מצוותיה,  
כטוב ורצוי אף שאינו דימוקרטי כל  
עיקר. וכמו"כ לתאר במקביל לשלטון עפ  
"י התורה את המגרעות שיש  
למעשה לשלטון הבנוי על יסודות  
דימוקרטיים. ואעפ"י המסקנה היא שאי  
ן בזמנינו אלטרנטיבה אחרת טובה יותר  
משלטון דימוקרטי.

"לא יסור שבט מיהודה ומחוקק מבין  
" (בראשית מט:א) . . .

כלומר שגם אחרי החרבן נמשך שלטון שב  
ט יהודה בישראל ע"י ראש-  
גולה שבבבל ונשיא הסנהדרין שבארץ יש  
ראל. . .

מעל לכל ספק שבכל אופן שנרצה  
לפרש ולהגדיר את הדמוקרטיה,  
מעולם לא יהיה ניתן לקבוע שחיי  
חברה יהודית עפ"י ההלכה היא  
דמוקרטיית לפי כל המבואר לעיל.

אלא שכאשר אין לנו חברה שמאמינה כול  
ה בתורה מן השמים, ואין לנו  
סנהדרין כנ"ל, הרי שלא נותר לנו אלא ל  
פעול בחיינו הצבוריים באורח  
דמוקרטי לפי מושגי זמנינו, ותפלתנו  
לה' שנוכח בקרוב לשיבת שופטנו  
כבראשונה ויועצנו כבתחלה, כי תמלא ה  
ארץ דעת את ה' כמים לים מכסים.

It is not my intention to disparage democracy as the best form of government in our time, given the conditions of our lives, as it is clear that there is no better way than this. Rather, my intention is to describe government according to Torah, for a community that believes in divine law and observes its *mitzvot*, as good and desirable even if it is not democracy at all. And, at the same time, to describe by way of comparison with government according to the Torah the deficiencies of government built on the foundations of democracy. Even so, the conclusion is that in our time, there is no better alternative to democratic rule.

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah; or the ruler's staff from between his feet". (Genesis 59:10). . .

That is to say that even after the destruction of the Temple, the rule of *shevet Yehudah* continued in Israel, by means of the head of the community in Babylonia, and the head of the Sanhedrin in the Land of Israel. . .

It is beyond any doubt that according to any definition or explanation of democracy, it is not possible to claim that Jewish society, according to *halakha*, is a democracy, per what is explained above. . .

But when we do not have a society in which everyone believes in *Torah min HaShamayim*, and we don't have a Sanhedrin as above, there is nothing left for us to do besides organize our communal life according to the way of democracy, as conceived in our time. And our prayers to God are that we may soon merit the return of our judges and advisors as in earlier times, such that "the earth will be full of the knowledge of God as waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)

## 10) R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel, "LeNevuchiei hatekufah 2:2

(Lithuania/Palestine 1883-1946)

הצד השווה שבכל אומות העולם, שכולן סוברות, שהפרט הוא כחומר ביד היוצר אצל הכלל, שברצותו הוא מניח לו לחיות וברצותו הוא ממיתו. ובשביל כך, גם הממשלות הנאורות ביותר, המצויינות ביותר, מוצאות ליושר ולצדק בלי שום ספקספיקא להוציא את ה"פרטים" בעל כורחם לשדה הקטן, ולהרג ב"מלחמת מצוה" או ב"מלחמת רשות", במלחמת מגן או במלחמת תגרה; ומי שאינו רוצה בכך, אחת דתו – להמית! כי דבר מוסכם הוא אצלם, שפרט שאינו ממלא את חובתו לכלל, הרי מאבד הוא בזה את זכותו לחיות על פני האדמה.

היהדות מורה להיפך – כי אין בכלל אלא מה שבפרט – כי כל עניין הכלל הוא דבר מלאכותי, ומראשית בריאתו "הנה אדם יחידי נברא". ובכך – הפרט קודם לכלל; זאת אומרת, שמהפרטים נעשה כלל ולא להיפך. ולכן גדול ערכו של כל יחיד, לו גם החלש ביותר ושפל שאינו מביא שום תועלת בקיומו לכלל, אך לכל אדם יש ייחוס עצמו, כי הוא נברא בדמותו וכצלמו של א' לוהים, ועליו נאמר: "וַיִּתְחַסְּרֵהוּ מִעֵט מַאֲלֵהִים" (תהלים ח, ו) – וחייב כל אחד לומר: "בשבילי נברא העולם!". . .

The common denominator among all the nations of the world, is that they all believe that the individual within the collective is like "clay in the hands of the potter" who permits one to live, or kills, according to their will. And for this reason, even the most enlightened, the most excellent governments determine it right and just, without the slightest doubt, to force the "individuals" against their will into the field, and to kill in a "commanded war" or a "discretionary war", in a defensive war or in an offensive war; And whoever doesn't want that, "there is one law for him—to be put to death!" (Esther 4:11) Because it is an agreed upon thing among them, that an individual who does not fulfill one's duty to the collective, loses the right to live on earth. . .

Judaism teaches the opposite - because the collective contains nothing that doesn't exist in the individual - because the entire idea of the whole is a construction, from the beginning of his creation "Adam was created alone". Thus, the individual comes before the whole. That is to say, that the whole is made up of individuals and not the opposite. That is why the value of each individual is great, even that of the weakest and the lowest, whose existence does not bring any benefit to the collective. But each person has one's own lineage by virtue of being created in the likeness and image of God, and about him it is said: "You have made humanity little less than divine" (Psalms 8:6) - and everyone must say: "The world was created for me!". . .



אמנם, יש גם פרשת מלכים בתורה. אבל באותו מקום גופו מדגשת התורה, כי כל עיקרה של המלכות, שהיא סמל ההשתעבדות של הפרט לכלל, באה אצלנו רק מתוך אהבת החיקוי: "וְאָמַרְתָּ: אֲשִׁימָה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי" (דברים יז, יד), . . . ברם על ידי הגבלות רבות: "רק לא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ סוּסִים... וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ נָשִׁים... וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ מְאֹד... וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה... וְהִיָּתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו" (שם שם, טז-יט)... וכל זה מפני שבכלל לא היתה דעת התורה נוחה ממלכות, שפוגעת היא סוף־סוף בחירות האישית של היחיד.

לא רק על הפרטים מבני ישראל חסה התורה – אך גם על הפרטים משאר האומות, הבאים להסתופף תחת צל קורתנו, פרשה התורה את כנפיה, אם כי על ידי זה סבל כל הכלל הישראלי. דבר זה אפשר לראות ביותר מהלכות גרים. אמרנו – "הלכות גרים", אבל באמת, אין בתורה אלא חוק אחד והוא: "חֻקָּה אַחַת יְהִיֶּה לָכֶם וְלִגֵּר וְלֹא־זָרַח" (במדבר ט, יד). וחוק זה יקר כל כך בעיני התורה, עד שכמה וכמה פעמים כפלה אותו. התורה אינה מסתפקת בזה רק בחוקיות בלבד, אך דורשת מאיתנו גם אהבה, שנאהוב את הגר בכל לבבנו ובכל נפשנו – "וְאָהַבְתֶּם אֶת הַגֵּר" (דברים י, יט).

At the same time, the Torah also includes the passage about kings. But in that very place, the Torah emphasizes that the entire essence of monarchy, which is a symbol of the subjugation of the individual to the collective, comes only through love of imitation: "And if you say 'I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me,' (Deuteronomy 17:14) . . . however with many restrictions: "Moreover, he shall not keep many horses. . . And he shall not have many wives. . . nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess. . . he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him. . . Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life." (Deut. 17:16-19). . . this is all because in general, the Torah is not comfortable with monarchy, which eventually ends up harming the personal freedom of the individual.

The Torah is concerned not only with individual Jews, but also with individuals from among the other nations, who take cover under our roof, the Torah spreads its wings, even if by virtue of this, the Jewish people as a whole suffer. We can see this particularly in the laws of *gerim*. We have said "the laws of *gerim*" but in actuality, there is in the Torah only one law, and it is: "You should have one law for the citizen and the *ger*." (Numbers 9:14). And this law is so dear in the eyes of the Torah that it repeats it over and over. The Torah is not satisfied with legal measures alone, but also demands love from us, that we should love the *ger* with all our heart and all our soul—"Love the *ger*!" (Deuteronomy 10:19)

וכמה היה יכול חוק כזה להזיק לענייני המדינה, מדינת היהודים, בכלל?! הן מדינת היהודים, אפילו בימיה הטובים ביותר, היתה קטנה וחלשה. היא היתה מוקפת שונאים ומתנגדים מכל העברים, ומפני טעמים מדיניים ודתיים חשבו מתנגדיה תמיד להחריבה ולהכריתה. ואם מדינה קטנה ומוקפת אויבים מכל העברים מחוקקת חוקים שווים לגר ולאזרח – הרי היא עצמה חותרת בזה חתירה גדולה תחת בניינה. ואף על פי כן נתנה התורה מקום לחתירה הגדולה תחת כל קיומה של המדינה – מפני חירות הפרטים הזרים, שבחרו להתיישב במדינה קטנה זו, מדינת היהדות.

And how much could such a law harm the affairs of the state, the state of the Jews, in general?! The state of the Jews, even in its best days, was small and weak. It was surrounded by enemies and opponents from all directions, and for political and religious reasons, its opponents always wished to destroy and cut it down. And if a small country surrounded by enemies from all sides enacts equal laws for *ger* and citizen – then it is undermining itself from below. Even so, the Torah made room for this great undermining beneath the very foundation of the state for the sake of the freedom of foreign individuals who chose to settle in this small state, the Jewish state.

*It's clear that classical Jewish texts do not imagine a democracy as we have it today. What can we learn from the assumption of monarchy that might still be relevant to us today? How can and should we talk about democracy in a Jewish framework?*

### III On Power and resisting misuse of power

#### 1) Exodus 23:2

לֹא־תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי־רָבִים לְרַעַת וְלֹא־תִעֲנֶה עַל־  
רֵב לְנִטְוֹת אַחֲרֵי רָבִים לְהִטּוֹת:

You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong—you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty.

#### 2) Rashbam on Exodus 23:2

(R' Samuel Ben Meir, France 1085-1158)

לא תהיה אחרי רבים לרעות - אם הם  
דנים שלא כדין לפי דעתך ואף על פי שלא  
יאמינו לך כי אם למרובים.

"You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong." If in your opinion, they are making a judgment not in accordance with the law [do not side with them], even though they will not pay attention to you, but will follow the majority.

#### 3) Talmud Avodah Zarah 4a

דבר אחר מה דגים שבים כל הגדול  
מחבירו בולע את חבירו אף בני אדם  
אלמלא מוראה של מלכות כל הגדול  
מחבירו בולע את חבירו והיינו דתנן רבי  
חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר הוי מתפלל  
בשלומה של מלכות שאלמלא מוראה של  
מלכות איש את רעהו חיים בלעו

Just as in the case of fish of the sea, any fish that is bigger than another swallows the other, so too in the case of people, were it not for the fear of the government, anyone who is bigger than another would swallow the other. And this is as we learned Rabbi Ḥanina, the deputy High Priest, says: One should pray for the continued welfare of the government, as were it not for the fear of the government, every person would swallow their neighbor alive. (Pirkei Avot 3:2)

#### 4) Rabbeinu Yonah on Pirkei Avot 3:2

(R' Yonah Gerondi, Spain 13<sup>th</sup> century)

(ב) איש את רעהו חיים בלעו. זה הענין  
ר"ל שיש לאדם להתפלל על שלום כל  
העולם ולהצטער על צער של אחרים. וכן  
דרכן של צדיקים כמו שאמר דוד ע"ה  
(תהלים ל"ה י"ג) 'ואני בחלותם לבושי  
שק עניתי בצום נפשי' - שאין לאדם  
לעשות תחנוניו ובקשתו לצרכיו לבד אך  
להתפלל על כל בני אדם שיעמדו בשלום  
ובשלומה של מלכות יש שלום לעולם:

"A person would swallow the other alive" – This means to say that a person should pray for the welfare of the entire world, and be suffer over the pain of others. So is the ways of the righteous, as David (of blessed memory) said: "As they were ill, my clothing was sackcloth, I suffered through a fast." (Psalms 35:13) - A person should not only make personal supplications and requests, but should pray for all people that they remain in peace. And through the peace (and stability) of the government, there will be peace throughout the world.

## 5) Shabbat 54b

כָּל מִי שֶׁאֶפְשֶׁר לְמַחֹת לְאִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא  
מִיחָה — נִתְפָּס עַל אִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ. בְּאִנְשֵׁי  
עִירוֹ — נִתְפָּס עַל אִנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ. בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם  
כּוֹלֵוֹ — נִתְפָּס עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלֵוֹ.

Anyone who is able to protest the conduct of the members of his household and did not protest, is held responsible for the sins of the members of their household. One who can protest the conduct of the people of one's town, is held responsible for the sins of the people of his town. One who can protest the conduct of the whole world is held responsible for the sins of the whole world.

## 6) Noa Landau, “This Is the Trap of Whataboutism in the Fight for Israel's Democracy” Haaretz, July 16, 2023

The Israeli discourse is addicted to whataboutism, to deflecting the argument by using a shallow comparison to some other instance. . .

This phenomenon has recently become much more widespread and dangerous, with a proliferation of the mendacious comparison between the protest against the judicial overhaul and the protest against the Gaza disengagement. This comparison is rapidly becoming accepted as an axiomatic narrative, which will come back to haunt us big time.

- Israel's judicial overhaul is the right's revenge for the Gaza withdrawal . . .

This comparison completely ignores the serious violence, including acts of terror embraced by some of the opponents of the disengagement. . .

But beyond the misinformation, the bigger problem lies in ignoring the essence: What are these protests about? During the disengagement, many people protested against the implementation of a government decision. It was their right to do so, and many people defended this, including so-called leftists from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. In the current protest, demonstrators are protesting the change in the system of government itself. The objective of the overhaul is to destroy the remaining delicate balance between the “Jewish” and “democratic” aspects of this country. This is a profound change in the character of the state which will persist for generations, a change in the shared rules on the basis of which any further protests could take place. This is not just one more protest against some policy, it's a struggle meant to defend the democratic underpinnings which enable any protest.

In this argument, I often encounter protest supporters who defend their positions with their own whataboutism. For example, “harming democracy goes to the essence of our souls, just like Judaism is the essence of yours.” This argument is also risky. A comparison between the “essences” of different communities renders all values subjective, ostensibly equal. We will protest against the destruction of democracy, and you're welcome to do the same when it comes to harming your “essence.”

This is the trap the people comparing the situation to the disengagement want us to fall into, since the motive of any comparison is not the use of a past trauma, but its implications for the future. They want legitimization for when the next time there is a debate over observing Shabbat, for example, the ultra-Orthodox will shut down Ben-Gurion Airport (“what do you mean when you say that in 2023 no flights were affected? We remember differently”), or when they come to remove an illegal outpost an entire army battalion will be immobilized (“what do you mean that in 2023 pilots continued to bomb, we remember it differently”).

But the struggle over democracy is not just another subjective “essence” that can be compared to the values another group deems “essential.”

## 7) **Masha Gessen, *Surviving Autocracy*** (Riverhead Books, 2020) 199-203

We learn to think of history as something that has already happened, to other people. Our own moment, filled as it is with minutiae destined to be forgotten, always looks smaller in comparison. As for history, the bigger the event, the more mythologized it becomes. The myth becomes a caricature of sorts. . . In crafting the story of something that should never have been allowed to happen, we forge the story of something that could not possibly have happened. Or, to use a phrase only slightly out of context, something that can't happen here.

A logical fallacy becomes inevitable. If this can't happen, the the thing that *is* happening is not it. What we see in real life, or at least on television, can't possibly be the same monstrous phenomenon that we have collectively decided is unimaginable. . .

Speaking from a place of moral authority—and moral aspiration—is the strategy historically adopted by dissidents in undemocratic regimes such as totalitarian Poland, apartheid South Africa, or contemporary autocratic Belarus. . .

Autocratic power requires the degradation of moral authority—not the capture of moral high ground, not the assertion of the right to judge good and evil, but the defeat of moral principles as such. . .

In the Russian language today, the entire vocabulary of principles and ideals has, after decades of abuse, been relegated to disuse. Even in private conversation, Russians will frequently apologize for using words or concepts that they feel are marked with “pathos,” a word that has come to connote not so much suffering as earnestness and loftiness of concept. In the public sphere, the language of “pathos” does not exist at all: a word like “democracy” can be pronounced only with a smirk.

*What power does an individual person have to influence the decisions of those in power? What is the role of protest? What power(s) does protest have or not have?*

## V The Soul of Israel

### 1) R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel, "LeNevuchiei hatekufah 4:9

ציונות מתוך חיבה וציונות מתוך שנאה

Zionism out of love, and Zionism out of hatred

ציונות של חיבה – כיצד?

Zionism of love—what is this?

זוהי הציונות שתחילתה עוד בזמנו של אברהם אבינו ונמשכה בכל תקופת האבות, הנביאים, אנשי כנסת הגדולה, התנאים והאמוראים וכו' וכו'.

This is the Zionism that began in the time of Abraham Avinu and continued throughout the period of the patriarchs, the prophets, the members of the Great Assembly, the Tannaim and the Amoraim, etc., etc.

ציונות זו באה מתוך חיבה. היא ראתה בעולם הגדול והקטן רק חיבה ואהבה. אלוהי ישראל הוא זה שעליו נאמר (דברים לג, ג): "אֵף חֶבֶב עַמִּים", ובכל זאת הוא "הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה". וכשם שבחר בעמו ישראל – כך בחר בארץ ישראל, אשר עיניו "בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה", או כדברי ר' יהודה הלוי, ש"כל מי שנתנבא לא התנבא כי אם בה או בעבורה".

This Zionism comes out of love. It saw in the great and small world only love and affection. The God of Israel is the one about whom it is said (Deuteronomy 33:3): "God is a lover of nations", and simultaneously "the one who chooses God's people Israel with love." And just as God chose the people of Israel - so too God chose the Land of Israel, on which "God keeps an eye, from year's beginning to year's end." (Deuteronomy 11:12) or as Rabbi Yehuda Halevi said, "everyone who prophesied did not prophesy except in it or through it".

והבחירות של אהבה האלה אינן מביאות לזכויות יתירות, אלא אדרבא, הן מטילות עלינו חובות של אהבה לכל האומות והלשונות. ואם כי כולן שונאות אותנו – "ולמה נקרא שמו: 'הר סיני'? מפני שירדה שנאה לאומות העולם עליו" (על פי שבת פט, ב) – אין לנו להשיב להם בשנאה כנגד שנאה. אלא אדרבא, עלינו להתפלל עליהן, לדרוש שלומן וטובתן, ואף הקרבנו קורבנות עבורן. ואם התגברו הצרות עלינו עד לבלתי נשוא, עד שאמרנו: אבדנו, ומצאנו שוב ניחומים באהבה, ואמרנו: "אֵת אֲשֶׁר יִצְהַב ד' יוֹכִיחַ" (משלי ג, יב).

And these choices of love do not bring about extra rights, but on the contrary, they impose on us duties of love for all nations and languages. This is the case even if they all hate us - "And why is its name called: 'Mount Sinai'? Because hatred (*sinah*) descended upon the nations of the world on it" (according to Shabbat 89b) - we must not respond to hatred with hatred. On the contrary, it is our duty to pray for them, to seek their peace and well-being; we even offered sacrifices for them. And if the troubles overcame us to the point of being unbearable, to the point that we said: "we are lost," (Number 17:27) then we found consolation again in love, and we said: "For the one God loves, God rebukes," (Proverbs 3:12). . .

לא נעלמה מאיתנו גם אז המציאות המרה כמות שהיא. ידענו כי המלכות הרשעה, או יותר נכון – המלכויות הרשעיות מתגברות מיום ליום, אבל זה כוחה של האהבה, שהיא מביאה לידי אופטימיות יתירה, ואמונתנו היתה חזקה, שסוף־סוף "עולתה תקפץ פיה וכל הרשעה כולה כעשן תכלה וממשלת זדון תעביר מן הארץ". . .

Even then, we were not ignorant of the bitter reality as it was. We knew that the evil empire, or more accurately—the evil empires—were becoming stronger from day to day, but this is the power of love, that it brings about great optimism, and our faith was strong, that at last, "injustice will close its mouth, and all the wickedness will vanish like smoke, when You remove the rule of evil (or the evil government) from the earth" . . .

בקיצור, למרות כל האכזבות שהיו לנו לא התייאשנו אף לרגע מנצחונו העתידי של הצדק המוחלט, ולמרות כל השנאה הכבושה ששררה נגדנו לא הסחנו דעתינו אף לרגע מתעודת האהבה שלנו.

עד כאן הציונות מתוך חיבה, שאומנם לא תמיד התגשמה בפעולות ומעשים ונשארה לפעמים רק בתור אידיאה חבויה וטמונה בלבבות שקשה היה להוציאה מכוח אל הפועל מפני חמת המציק. אבל ציונות זו כמעט שאין רשומה ניכר עתה, ועל מקומה באה הציונות מתוך שנאה, שאינה רואה בעולמה אלא שנאה לבד. הכוח המניע שלה בא לא מארבעים ושמנה נביאים ושבע נביאות אלא מהמינים למיניהם ו"הסרת הטבעת" שלהם. צוררי ישראל שבתקופת דרייפוס היו מחולליה הראשונים, הפוגרומים, המלחמה העולמית, גרבסקי בפולין, היטלר באשכנז ודומיהם הם עורקי החיים שלה. "מדינת היהודים" נכתבה תחת השפעת צוררי ישראל בצרפת שחפצו לעשות את דרייפוס בתור שעיר לעזאזל, וכל הצוררים שקמו אחריהם מסייעים – אם מעט ואם הרבה – בהתגשמותה של "מדינת היהודים" הני"ל.

יסוד היסודות בציונות של שנאה הוא שמלחמת לאומים זה בזה הוא דבר טבעי והכרחי וכך תשאר לעולם, ונוסף על מלחמת לאומים יש גם "מלחמת מעמדות" שכל מעמד נלחם בחבירו. הכוח הוא המושל בעולם, והצדק הוא רק עניין שהבטלנים מתגדרים בו, ומי שיש לו הכוח – לו הצדק. ואם רוצים אנו להתקיים בעולם – די לנו שנהיה גם אנחנו לכוח בעולם וכוח כפשוטו, ולא רק כמשמעו. כי גם זהו כלל גדול שהחזק שונא את החלש, ועל כן שונאות אומות העולם אותנו, וממילא כשגם לנו תהיה ארץ יתחשבו גם הן איתנו. לשיטה זו, כל מושג הצדק הוא רק עניין של גומלין: "שמור לי ואשמור לך". ואם רוצים אנו שהעולם יתייחס אלינו בצדק – צריכים אנחנו להיות במדרגה שאחרים יכולים לפנות גם אלינו בבקשה של "שמור לי..." ובה בלבד די. . . .

In short, despite all of our disappointments, we never for a moment despaired of the future triumph of absolute justice, and despite all the overwhelming hatred that prevailed against us, we never for a moment became distracted from our seal of love.

Until this point, we have spoken of the Zionism of love, which, admittedly, has not always been fulfilled in actions and deeds and which sometimes remained only as a hidden ideal buried in our hearts, and which was difficult to activate as a result of the nagging anger. But this Zionism makes almost no noticeable impression now, and in its place came Zionism out of hatred, which sees in its world nothing but hatred alone. Its driving force comes not from forty-eight male prophets and seven female prophets but from the various blasphemers and their "removal of the ring [of Ahasueros to seal Haman's decree]". The oppressors of Israel during the time of Dreyfus were among its first perpetrators, the pogroms, the world war, Grabski in Poland, Hitler in Germany and their ilk are its lifeblood. "The Jewish State" [by Herzl] was written under the influence of the oppressors of the Jews in France, who wanted to turn Dreyfus into a scapegoat, and all the oppressors who arose after them helped - whether a little or a lot - in the realization of the aforementioned "Jewish State" . . .

The basic foundation of the Zionism of hatred is that the war of nations against each other is a natural and necessary thing and will remain so forever, and that in addition to the war of nations there is also a "war of classes" in which each class fights the other. Power rules the world, and justice is only a matter for idlers to identify with, and justice lies with whoever has power. And if we want to survive in the world - it is sufficient for us too to be a power within the world—a power in its literal sense and not only its deeper meaning. Because it is also an overriding principle that the strong hate the weak, and therefore the nations of the world hate us, but nevertheless when we too have a land they too will have to take account of us. In this approach, the whole concept of justice is only a matter of reciprocity: "Protect me and I'll protect you." And if we want the world to deal with us justly - we need to be at a level by which others can also turn to us with the request of "Protect me..." and that alone is enough. . . .

הרושם המתקבל מהציונות ממין השני הוא כאילו התייאשנו מכל משא ונפשנו מראשית היותנו בתור אומה שהיתה מיועדת "לתקן עולם במלכות שדי" ולהביא לידי ניצחון את יצר הטוב שבאדם על יצר הרע שבקרבו. . .

אם מתפלאים לפעמים מדוע הביאה הציונות ממין זה לשאיפה של "ככל הגויים בית ישראל" גם בדברים שאינם נוגעים כלל ליהודים לעצם הציונות אף לשיטתה – הנה באמת אין זו פליאה כלל, כי כל אלו המה דברים מסתעפים מעצם עצמותה, ממקור יניקתה המרכזית שהם אלילי השנאה והאיבה, אלילי המלחמה, אם מלחמת הגזעים או מלחמת המעמדות, והאלילים האלה המה יצורי רוחם של הגויים, שבהכרח הננו נעשים מושפעים מהם בכל. . .

ואותה הציונות שהורתה ולידתה באה משנאה, אם כי מהשנאה של אחרים אלינו, לא תוכל להביא לידי אהבה גם בינינו לבין עצמנו גופא. . .

בקיצור – עלינו להחזיר שוב את העטרה ליושנה, ובמקום ציונות מתוך שנאה לחזור שוב לציונות מתוך חיבה; עלינו להוסיף שוב אותה מילה שנשמטה מתוך הציונות, השמטת אהבה וחיבה: "אהבת ציון" ו"חיבת ציון".

The impression one gets from this second type of Zionism is as if we have despaired of all our mission and essence from the beginning of our existence as a nation destined to "repair the world under the sovereignty of God" and to ensure the triumph of the *yetzer hatov* over the *yetzer hara* in human beings. . .

If we sometimes wonder why this type of Zionism has led to the aspiration that "the Jewish people are like all other nations" even in things that do not directly relate to the essence of Zionism even according to this approach – this is not surprising at all, because all of these things emerge from its very essence, from the central source from which it draws succor, which are the idols of hate and enmity, the idols of war, whether ethnic or class war, and these idols are creations of the spirit of the other nations, by whom we are inevitably influenced in everything. . .

And the same Zionism whose pregnancy and birth came out of hate, albeit from the hatred of others toward us, will not be capable of bringing about love, also between us and ourselves.

In short - we must return the crown to its former glory (Yoma 69b), and instead of Zionism of hate return again to Zionism of love; We must restore the word that was dropped from within Zionism, the omission of *ahavah* and *chibbah*: "*Ahavat Zion*" and "*Chibbat Zion*."

## 2) Dahlia Scheindlin, "Will Israel escape civil war? Even if it does, it will surely lose its soul" The Guardian, July 30, 2023

Israelis are riven by the unprecedented government programme to quash the judiciary and end constraints on executive power – which is nearly unrestrained already in Israel's political system. Since January, infuriated citizens have been on the streets weekly and more, in dizzying numbers. They fear dictatorship and worry that their own lives, and their country, will become unrecognizable.

Supporters of the judicial overhaul – who, by all polls, are only a minority of the furthest rightwing Israelis – hope the government will now have unfettered power to annex the West Bank, expand settlements, deepen the hold of strict Jewish religious observance in



Israeli life and reinstate corrupt politicians, especially one who had been ousted when the court ruled his appointment “extremely unreasonable” – the very legal reasoning that last week’s legislation will stifle. . .

I’m not optimistic, but I am sceptical that there will be a civil war. . .

But Israelis can’t let themselves be lulled into a false sense of normality – even without civil war, a dark future lies ahead. A better future *is* possible, but only if the extraordinary protest movement becomes a long-term, deep-thinking democracy movement. That movement cannot only look forward. Pro-democracy supporters will have to face uncomfortable truths about how undemocratic Israel has been for most of its history – from the military government that ruled its own Arab citizens in the first 20 years to the occupation authorities governing Palestinians which took over where the first military regime left off. These are just some examples of how Israelis have normalised warped practices, bending the meaning of democracy to suit their self-image.

But the government could also get its way, just as all 64 members voted for the legislation last Monday. Even wavering coalition lawmakers fell into line. Who needs dissent or independent thinkers in an autocracy?

What will change in that future? Israel will soon annex the West Bank and make its authoritarian military rule over Palestinians complete and permanent. Autocratic rule will slowly squeeze Israeli citizens, whose threats to flee are always exaggerated. Most will stay but lose their spark, as the government backs corruption and cronyism. Their fury at entrenched policies letting ultra-Orthodox Jews have all the funds and none of the responsibilities will be absorbed like a toxin as the vice-like grip on civil society, free expression and press tightens over time. The court won’t be able to help.

Like the people I’ve met and listened to in countries whose democratic potential is slipping away, some will remain defiant, but most will be despondent. Israel can take this route, but it will lose its soul.

### **3) Rabbi Jill Jacobs, “As Israel turns 75, we should celebrate by fighting for it to live up to its ideals” Jewish Telegraphic Agency April 21, 2023**

Why are American Jews so terrified to protest Israeli actions, even when the country is being taken over by people whose values are anathema to most of ours?

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, an influential and prophetic 20th-century Jewish thinker, warned of the danger that the nascent state of Israel would become an object of worship. “The state fulfills an essential need of the individual and the national community,” he wrote, “but it does not thereby acquire intrinsic value — except for a fascist who regards sovereignty, governmental authority, and power as supreme values.” In a 1991 lecture, he went so far as to call any religious Jews who supported occupation and settlement “descendants of the

worshippers of the Golden Calf, who proclaimed ‘this is your God, Israel.’ A calf doesn’t necessarily need to be golden; it can also be a people, a land, or a state.”

In Israel, the religious settler movement that Leibowitz disparaged three decades ago now runs the state, and — as he warned — its agenda puts the occupation of land first, and the treatment of people second.

Many Jews in the United States find it hard to see that reality because the State of Israel has become an object of worship, rather than a real country where real people live, and where fascist-leaning politicians are working to fundamentally change its government and culture into something unrecognizable and dangerous. American Jewish conversations about Israel too often become conversations about Jewish identity, a slippery slope that makes it easy for criticisms of the State of Israel — a political entity subject to international human rights standards — to be misinterpreted as attacks on Jews more generally. It is easier to celebrate a fantasy with no hard edges than deal with the reality of a beloved, but flawed state.

According to the Torah, Abraham was 75 when he left his parents’ house and set out on his own. At 75, Israel is a strong, modern country, more than able to stand on its own on the international stage and healthy enough for vibrant debate about its future. Real celebration of Israel demands fighting for it to live up to the highest ideals of democracy, dignity and human rights for all.

*How does Amiel’s critique, written before the establishment of the state, land for you today? What is/is not still relevant? How might his words respond to the current moment?*

*What does it mean to you to fight for the soul of Israel? What is your vision for the future? What are your biggest fears? How can we talk about the issues Scheindlin raises—annexation, permanent occupation, the end of democracy—in our communities today? What is the role of American Jews vis-à-vis Israel? What does it mean to love and care about Israel and its people, and to fight for its future?*