

## The Problem of Mourning in Jewish History

AVNER FALK

The ethnic groups known as Hebrews, Israelites and Jews suffered heavy losses and group-narcissistic injuries throughout their history. They lost their Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians in 722-721 B.C.E. They lost their Kingdom of Judah along with their sovereignty, their language, their Holy City of Jerusalem, and their Temple of Yahweh to the Babylonians in 587-586 B.C.E. They lost their Second Temple along with their Holy City to the Romans in 70 C.E. Half a million Jews were slaughtered by the Romans during the tragic Bar-Kochba revolt of 132-135 C.E. For eighteen centuries thereafter, with few notable exceptions, the Jews lived as a hated, despised, persecuted minority everywhere.

For many centuries the Jews lived in a kind of ahistoric time bubble. They lived more in fantasy than in reality, more in the past than in the present. They developed the myth of Jewish Election, the myth of Jerusalem as the center of the world, and the myth of the ten lost tribes of Israel living in a faraway land beyond the raging river *Sambation* (symbolizing the rage of the Jews at their own fate). The psychological function of these myths was to deny the unbearable Jewish reality. For 1,500 years, from Flavius Josephus in the first century to Bonaiuto (Azariah) de' Rossi in the 16th, there was no scientific chronological Jewish historiography (Yerushalmi, 1982). On the other hand there was a vast body of fantastic, mystical, mythical, and Messianic Jewish literature. The medieval Jews gave the nations and countries with which they came in contact obscure, anachronistic Biblical names that had nothing to do with these peoples and places: thus Rome was called *Edom*, Byzantium *Yavan*, Germany *Ashkenaz*, France *Zarephath*, Spain

---

Work on this chapter was begun during the author's Resident Scholarship at the Rockefeller Foundation's Study and Conference Center in the Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio (Como), Italy, in 1987. The author wishes to thank the trustees and officers of the Rockefeller Foundation for inviting him to their unique Center.

*Sepharad*, and Turkey *Togarmah*. The River Rhine was often called the Jordan River. This was a striking refusal to live in harsh reality; it was an escape into a glorified past.

The target of unconscious projections and externalizations everywhere, the Jews suffered from the perennial hatred of their host societies, from ritual murder and host desecration libels to executions, persecutions, discriminations, and massacres in Christian Europe throughout the Middle Ages. They were massacred by the Crusaders in 1096, expelled from several countries, and murdered by the Ukrainian Cossacks in 1648–1649. They were persecuted all over Europe. The Jewish self suffered severe damage. Finally, six million Jewish men, women, and children were slaughtered by the Nazis in the unprecedented Holocaust of the Second World War.

These losses were impossible to mourn properly. The psychological reactions included denial, viewing the present in terms of the past, and longing for Messianic redemption. Political Zionism sought to turn back the wheel of history, to restore the losses rather than to mourn them, and to mend the damaged Jewish self. It denied the demographic Arab reality of Palestine, proclaiming “a land without a people for a people without a land.” The tragic Arab–Israeli conflict is one result (Falk, 1992). The “Land of Israel” is imagined by Zionist Jews as high above all other countries. Hence the Zionist terms *aliyah* (ascent) for immigration to Israel and *yeridah* (descent) for emigration from it. These terms are sheer psychogeographical fantasy. Other notions Israeli Jews swear by, such as The Jewish People, the Nation of Israel, the Land of Israel, the Chosen People, the Holy Land, the Holy City, the Diaspora, the Exile, are anachronistic myths based on a *denial* of the harsh reality of a small Jewish nation living in a sea of hostile Arabs. Like other nationalisms, Israeli nationalism is a defensive group narcissism.

The thesis of this chapter is that the Jews have not been able to mourn their historical losses and injuries. Instead, the defensive unconscious processes of denial, projection, externalization, and splitting have operated collectively. The Israeli Jews have not mourned their group losses properly, above all that of the six million Jews massacred by the Nazis during the Holocaust of 1941–1945, as well as the thousands of soldiers killed in their wars with the Arabs. This is seen in the very way the Israeli Jews commemorate their losses. The Hebrew ninth of Ab is a day of fast and mourning for both the First and Second Temples, as if they were both destroyed on the same date. Some Israelis wish to restore the losses by building the Third Temple on the site of the Muslim Dome of the Rock. The Nazi Holocaust is remembered on the Israeli “Memorial

Day for the Holocaust and Heroism," which commemorates the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the partisans, and the other Jews who resisted the Nazis along with their six million Jewish victims, seeking to deny the unbearable fact that the masses of the European Jews were led like lambs to the slaughter. The "Memorial Day for the Fallen Israeli Soldiers" devotes only a few minutes to an actual silent commemoration, and is followed immediately by the very joyous celebration of the Israeli Day of Independence.

Psychogeographical fantasies and the refusal to mourn losses are common everywhere, but the special and tragic history of the Jews has made them key features of the Jewish mind. Whether or not group mourning is possible is a major question dealt with below.

### PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

We tend to view our earth anthropomorphically. The word *Geography* derives from the name of the Greek goddess *Gaia* (Earth). The Greek myth of *Kronos* (Harvest), who saved his mother-earth *Gaia* from her cruel husband *Uranos* (Heaven) by castrating *Uranos* with a *harpe* (sickle or curved sword) and throwing his phallus into the sea, from whose *aphros* (foam) *Aphrodite* was born, can be viewed as a *psychogeographical fantasy*. The myth of the giant *Atlas* carrying the Earth upon his shoulders begins with Perseus petrifying Atlas with the sight of Medusa's terrible snake-infested head, transforming Atlas' beard and hair into forests, his head into a mountain peak, his arms and shoulders into cliffs, his bones into rocks, indeed, his entire body into geographical entities.

We also tend to glorify and idealize our environment. Some people have lived on little islands but thought they occupied the whole world. Some Israelis firmly believe that their tiny country is the greatest, most beautiful, and most important of all and that Jerusalem is the center of the entire world. Medieval and Renaissance cartographers drew maps of California as a golden island. Explorers discovered America but believed they had discovered India.

Eliade (1959) discussed sacred space and sacred centers from the religious studies viewpoint. The term *psychogeography* has been used by Niederland (Stein and Niederland, 1989), Volkan (1979, 1988), and Stein (1984, 1987) to designate our unconscious emotional transference relationships to geographical entities. A group of people may be said to live in psychogeographical fantasy if they live in one place but act and feel as if they were living in another, if they believe in nonexistent countries and

lost continents at the bottom of the sea, like Arcadia, Atlantis, El Dorado, and paradise islands, or wondrous tribes in faraway regions. The Hebrew myth of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3) is one of the best-known psychogeographical fantasies. The unconscious process underlying such fantasies is the regressive displacement of our feelings about our Early Mother's body to the wonders of our Earth.

Yet, whereas some psychogeographical fantasies may be regressive, they also have an adaptive function (Róheim, 1943). Fantasy in general serves constructive, adaptive, and creative functions as well as defensive and maladaptive ones. Theodor Herzl's dictum, *Wenn ihr wollt, ist es kein Märchen* (If you wish, it is no fairy tale) is often erroneously rendered "If you will it, it is no dream." Herzl did convert his feverish fantasies into political Zionist reality (Falk, 1993). Whether or not Zionism and the creation of Israel were adaptive, or led to further tragedy, has yet to be determined.

## LIVING IN THE PAST

A group of people may be said to live in psychohistorical fantasy if they live in a certain time but act and feel as if they were living in another. The rulers of the medieval "Holy Roman Empire" were acting as if the old Roman Empire had never been destroyed. As Voltaire put it, theirs was neither an empire, nor Roman, nor holy. The Temple Mount Faithful in Israel wish to destroy the Dome of the Rock on Jerusalem's Temple Mount and rebuild Solomon's Temple on its site. Some fanatical Muslim Arabs wish to restore the medieval glory of *Dar al-Islam*. Psychogeographical and psychohistorical fantasies may be benign, but they may also lead to great destruction, as was the case with the medieval Crusaders, or with Hitler's Third *Reich*. The Jews, with their often tragic history, have had more than their share of psychogeographical fantasies. In this chapter I shall attempt to trace the psychogeographical and psychohistorical fantasies that have characterized much of Jewish history.

## THE JEWISH DENIAL OF HISTORY

Patai (1976), Yerushalmi (1982), Roskies (1984), and Ebel (1986) have pointed out the dramatic denial of painful history underlying the almost total absence of scholarly, chronological Jewish historiography over a period of 15 centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. Reality had become too painful for the Jews. It

consisted mainly of disaster, death, catastrophe, destruction, loss, persecution, massacre, and torture. Their denial of reality helped the Jews live in fantasy. They created for themselves an anachronistic, ahistorical, and timeless bubble, living in their idealized, glorified past rather than in their painful, humiliating, unhappy present. Throughout the Middle Ages the Jews lived in psychohistorical fantasies.

The Jews also lived in psychogeographical fantasies. After the fall of the Kingdom in Israel in 721 B.C.E., the Ten Tribes of Israel were exiled by the Assyrians and eventually assimilated by the various peoples of the Assyrian empire. This meant that 10/12 of the Hebrew people had been lost. The Jews could not reconcile themselves to this loss. Many centuries later they developed the fantasy that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were still living as Jews beyond a mythical river named *Sambation*. In the ninth century a deranged Jew calling himself Eldad the Danite showed up in Jewish North Africa and Spain, spreading tales about the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel that he had found in the heart of Africa and Asia. The Jews believed him fervently. In the 17th century Rabbi Manassas ben Israel of Amsterdam claimed that the Indians of North America were the ten lost tribes of Israel. It was a refusal to mourn and to give up the great loss.

The Hebrew name *Sambation* derives from the Greek *Sabbateion*, meaning "of the Sabbath." The myth had it that the River Sambation kept roaring and throwing up huge rocks and was impassable on every day of the week except the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday). Jews were forbidden to cross the Sambation. The Jews firmly believed in the mythical River Sambation. The "Sons of Moses" were said to dwell beyond it, in the "Land of the Blessed" (Ginzberg, 1967-1969, 4:317, 5:111, 6:407-409). Flavius Josephus placed the Sambation in Syria. The Jewish sages located it "beyond the Mountains of Darkness." The Roman historian Pliny placed it in Judea. The medieval Jewish scholar Nahmanides identified it with the River Habor (II Kings 17:6). Throughout Jewish history, despite the injunction, Jews fervently sought the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Psychologically, the roaring, raging river was an externalization of the roaring rage of the Jews at their defeat, destruction, and loss.

The ancient Jews gave the Roman Empire, and later Christian Europe itself, the collective name of *Edom*, the ancient Semitic people east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea who had been traditional enemies of the Biblical Israelites. Later every Christian became known in Hebrew writings as an *Edomite*. The Greek word *christos* is equivalent to the Hebrew word *mashiah* (Messiah): both mean "anointed." The Christians, however, whose name would properly translate into Hebrew as

*meshihyim* (Messianics), are called *notzrim* (Nazarenes), an obvious denial of their key belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

The Byzantine Empire, which actively persecuted the Jews, was known among the medieval Jews as *Yavan*, the Hebrew name for Greece, which came from *Ionia*, and was itself a misnomer. France is still called in Hebrew *Zarephath* (I Kings 17:9, Obadiah 20), the name of a Biblical city near Sidon, in present-day Lebanon. Spain is still called *Sepharad* (Obadiah 20), an obscure Biblical place name which may refer to Sardis in Asia Minor. Germany was called *Ashkenaz* (Genesis 10:3), the Biblical name of a great-grandson of Noah, a grandson of Japheth. Turkey was called *Togarma* (Genesis 10:3), a Biblical brother of Ashkenaz.

Mesopotamia (Iraq), whether under Persian, Parthian, Neo-Persian, Byzantine, or Muslim Arab rule, was always called by the Jews *Babel*, the name of the ancient Biblical kingdom of Babylonia. The Babylonian Empire had ceased to exist in 538 B.C.E. with the Persian conquest of Cyrus the Great. The city of Babylon on the Euphrates River had ended in 275 B.C.E. when its inhabitants were moved to the new Seleucid Greek capital of Seleucia on the River Tigris. Yet the Jews of the Persian empire who lived in Mesopotamia continued to call themselves "Babylonian."

For 2,500 years, while The Land Between the Rivers (Mesopotamia) successively became Persian, Greek, Roman, Parthian, Neo-Persian, Arab, Ottoman, and British, the Jews clung to the anachronistic epithet of "Babylonian." Their great early medieval literary production, written in Aramaic and Hebrew, is known as the "Babylonian Talmud." The misnomer does not seem to have disturbed anyone. To this very day, organized Iraqi Jewry in Israel calls itself "the Babylonian Jewish community." This is a striking psychohistorical and psychogeographical fantasy. People are living in fantasy more than in reality, in the past more than in the present.

Similarly, the Palestinian Talmud, not a word of which was written in Jerusalem, is known in Hebrew as *Talmud Yerushalmi* or "The Jerusalem Talmud." The Jews were expelled from Jerusalem by the Romans after the disastrous Bar-Kochba revolt of 132-135 C.E. The city was renamed *Aelia Capitolina* and became a pagan Roman city forbidden to the Jews. The entire Palestinian Talmud was written outside Jerusalem, yet the Jews clung to the fantasy and named it after their lost city. This illustrates the great emotional power of psychogeographical fantasies.

When the Roman emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus (Julian the Apostate) fought the Sassanid Neo-Persian empire of Shahpur II and seized its capital of Ctesiphon in 363, destroying the nearby Jewish city of Mahoza as well, the Jews took the side of their Persian rulers and

called the "Edomite" Julian their worst enemy. The Romans were soon defeated and Julian was killed. His successor, Flavius Claudius Jovianus (Jovian), was forced to conclude a humiliating treaty of surrender with Shahpur II, ceding Armenia and several Jewish cities to the Persians. The Jews rejoiced at the defeat of the hated "Edomites." This was pure psychogeographic and psychohistorical fantasy.

Jews still call their worst enemies *Amalek* (Genesis 14:7, 36:12; Exodus 17:8-16), a bitter ancient Biblical enemy of the Israelites. The epithet "Amalek" was given by the Jews to every major enemy in their history, from the Assyrians and the Babylonians through Haman the Persian in the Book of Esther to Adolf Hitler in our own time. The classical Hebrew saying "Remember what hath done to thee Amalek!" (Deuteronomy 25:17) still inspires hatred of the enemy. *Amalek* has become a Hebrew term for hated enemy and persecutor.

## THE JEWISH INABILITY TO MOURN

What possible reasons could there be for such anachronisms? Why did the Jews cling for so many centuries to geopolitical entities that no longer existed? Why did they live in psychohistorical fantasy? Why did they live in the past rather than in the present, in fantasy rather than in reality?

Volkan (1979, 1988), Koenigsberg (1977), Mack (1983), Boyer (1986), Stein (1984, 1987), Stein and Niederland (1989) and myself (Falk 1974, 1982, 1983, 1987) have suggested that the powerful emotions evoked by borders, cities, countries, islands, oceans, rivers and other geographical entities, and their unconscious meaning in our minds, are derived from our very early perceptions of and feelings about our own body and that of our mother. Winnicott (1971) and Mahler et al. (1975) have studied the process of the infant's separation and individuation from its initial fusion with the mother. As the child is often unable to let go of its mother during this early process, so an entire people could not separate from its mother land.

The process of separation and individuation involves our earliest mourning of a lost object, our Early Mother. Every subsequent loss in our lives involves separation and must be mourned to be mastered. The problem of why, whether, and how people mourn their losses was first tackled psychoanalytically by Freud (1917). Pollock (1961, 1975, 1977, 1989), Rochlin (1973), Mitscherlitsch and Mitscherlich (1975), and Volkan (1981, 1988) have expanded his work. Dietrich and Shabad (1989) have pointed out the adaptive, creative, and regenerative role of

mourning in our lives. Mourning occurs not only on the individual but also on the group level. The issue of lost objects, such as territory and sovereignty, in an ethnic group's history is passed on from one generation to the next. Each child learns about its people's great victories and great losses. *Nations often cannot mourn their historical losses, preferring to entertain fantasies of their recovery.* For each of us, the lost objects of our ethnic history become unconsciously fused with the lost objects of our personal history, beginning with our Early Mother.

Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich (1975) have shown the tragic consequences of the Germans' inability to mourn their great losses after the Second World War. I interpret the anachronistic attitude of Jewish literature and the almost total absence of chronological Jewish historiography between the first century and the 16th century as evidence of the Jewish inability to mourn. The Jews lived in the past. To them the fifth-century Sassanid Neo-Persian empire was identical with that of Cyrus the Great a thousand years earlier, and the Romans were identical with the traditional Edomite enemies of the Israelites.

As Ebel (1986) has written, time had been standing still for the Jews. They were psychologically protected by a timeless bubble. Current world events were viewed through the prism of Biblical heroics. They idealized their Persian rulers and denigrated their Roman enemies. When the Orthodox Byzantine emperor Theodosius II (401-450) persecuted the Jews of his realm, the Jews bitterly complained of the "Greek" tyrant. They fled Palestine and other Byzantine lands to Persia, where the tolerant Shah Yazdegerd I reigned (399-420). This monarch resisted the fanatical priests of the Zarathushtra religion. Persian Jewish tradition, or fantasy, has Yazdegerd marry the daughter of the "Babylonian" Jewish exilarch, known in Aramaic as *Resh Galuta*.

Neo-Persian (Sassanian) Shah Yazdegerd II (reigned 438-457), influenced by the Zoroastrian Magi, began to persecute the Jews, Christians, and other heretics in his realm. The Roman rule of *cuius regio eius religio*, meaning "he who rules, his is the religion," now became enforced upon the Jews. They were forbidden to recite major prayers like the *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel) and to light their Sabbath candles. In 540 Sassanid Shah Khosru I Nushirvan (531-579), who is called by many historians "the greatest monarch of the Sassanid dynasty," captured the great Seleucid-Byzantine city of Antioch and deported many of its Jews to his capital of Ctesiphon on the Tigris. The exiles, unable to mourn their loss, built a new city near Mahoza, which they called "New Antioch."

By 629 the victorious Muslim Arabs were invading the Neo-Persian empire, and by 642 the Byzantines had lost all of their erstwhile

territories in the east. During the last decade of Neo-Persian (Sassanid) rule (628–637) there was great disorder and confusion in Persia. From 633 to 638 the Muslim Arab warrior Khalid ibn-al-Walid conquered Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Persia for Islam. He was known as *Saif-Allah* (Sword of God). Finally the Neo-Persian empire was no more. The “Babylonian” Jews were now under Islamic Arab rule. The Umayyad Caliphs of Damascus ruled the great new Dar al-Islam (House of Islam).

The Hebrew word *Gaon* originally meant “The pride of Jacob and of Israel” (Nahum 2:2). It later came to designate the medieval “Babylonian” Jewish academy heads. Rabbi Saadiah ben Yoseph al-Fayumi *Gaon* (882–942) was the “Babylonian” head of the Jewish *yeshivah* (academy) at Sura. He was born in Upper Egypt. The Egyptian Jews had been thoroughly Arabized. Their names, language, and culture were Arabic. The use of the term “Babylonian” to denote Arabic-speaking Jews was sheer fantasy. As I have pointed out earlier, from Flavius Josephus in the first century to Azariah de’ Rossi in the 16th century there was no scholarly, scientific or chronological Jewish historiography. For 15 centuries the Jews refused to live in external reality.

Some Jews still cannot mourn their ancient losses of land, holy city, temple, sovereignty, and territory. For many complicated reasons the Jews are still unable to mourn the Nazi Holocaust, and the psychological problems of modern Israel are partly derived from this tragic fact. The Israeli day commemorating the Holocaust is officially called “Memorial Day for the Holocaust and Heroism.” *The heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and other resistance movements against the Nazis is used to mitigate the need to mourn.* I shall give further examples of this tragic inability to mourn below.

## BIBLICAL NAMES FOR MODERN LANDS

After their terrible losses of land, holy city, temple, sovereignty, and nationhood in the first and second centuries, the Jews made up for their group narcissistic injuries with grandiose fantasies. One *Midrash*, or myth, developed during the time of the Talmud (third to fifth century) said that the Land of Israel was the Center of the World, Jerusalem was the Center of the Land of Israel, the Temple was the Center of Jerusalem, and the Shrine, or the Holy of Holies, was in the middle of the Temple (Ginzberg, 1967–1969, 1:12). This *ethnogeocentrism* was a form of psychogeographical fantasy. It helped the Jews survive their great losses without actually having to mourn them.

Following the great Muslim conquests of the entire Middle East, North Africa, and Spain in the seventh and eighth centuries, the Jews had to adjust to the new reality, and they developed new psychogeographical fantasies. On one hand they wished to merge with the new Muslim world; on the other hand they needed to set themselves apart from it, to establish their group boundaries, as the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (1987) puts it. The Jews of Yathrib (Medina) had been calling their annual *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement and Fast) by the Arabic name of *Ashura*, meaning the Tenth Day [of the Hebrew Month of Tishri, actually a Babylonian name]. This very name, *Ashura*, is now used by Shiite Muslims to designate *their* Day of Atonement and Fast for the martyrdom of Husain ibn-Ali, on the 10th day of the Muslim month of *Muharram*. On that day Shiites flagellate themselves until they draw blood.

The psychogeographical fantasies involved in medieval Hebrew place names such as *Sepharad* for Spain, *Zarephath* for France, and *Ashkenaz* for Germany were taken from obscure verses in the Old Testament (Genesis 10:3, I Kings 17:9, I Chronicles 1:6, Jeremiah 51:27, Obadiah 1:20) and had little or nothing to do with the European countries they designated. The name *Togarma*, a Biblical brother of Ashkenaz, was given to Turkey, which certainly was no brother of Germany. It was as if the Jews lived in a Biblical fantasy world, clinging to an irretrievable past. They refused to mourn their losses and wrote no chronological history of their people, as Yerushalmi (1982) has shown.

Campbell (1959) used the term "land-taking" in discussing the way immigrants to America tended to name their new homes after their old ones in Europe—New England, New Amsterdam, New Bedford, New Albany, New Bern, New Brunswick, New Jersey, New York—in order to make their new land feel like home. Many American cities carry Old World place names—Athens, Paris, London, Toledo, Bethlehem, Cairo. This may indicate that Americans also secretly long for the Old World. Phrases like "Remember the Alamo" and "Remember Pearl Harbor" indicate the refusal to mourn underlying the longing for revenge. But Americans are usually aware that they are talking about new places: they say "Athens, Georgia" or "Cairo, Illinois." *The Jews did not use the word "new" in naming the European countries after Biblical places; they actually thought and acted as if these were the Biblical places.*

## THE KHAZARS AS JEWS

Judah Halevi (1075–1141) was one of the most famous Jewish poets of medieval Muslim Spain. He was a rabbi and an Arabic philosopher as

well. One of his most important Arabic-language works was *The Book of Proof and Evidence in Defense of the Despised Faith*, known in Hebrew as *Sefer Hakuzari* (The Book of the Khazar), in which he emphasized the value of religious truths attained through intuition and feeling over that of philosophical and speculative truths achieved through logic and reason. This work put forth a philosophy of history based on the force of divine influence on world events. The book was constructed upon the story of a great people known as "the Kuzari" who had adopted Judaism as their religion after becoming convinced of its great value.

The people Judah Halevi had in mind were the Khazars (Chazars), a Turkic people who lived in Transcaucasia by the second century and later settled in the lower Volga region. During the seventh century they became a powerful and expansionist military force. Between the eighth and tenth centuries their empire extended from the Black Sea and Caspian Sea in the south to the Ural Mountains in the east and to Kiev in the west. The Khazar *nobility* embraced Judaism in the eighth century. They defeated and subdued the Volga Bulgars, the Crimean Tatars, and the eastern Slavs, and warred with Arabs, Persians, and Armenians. During the tenth century they allied themselves with the Byzantines against the Arabs. They were defeated by Duke Sviatoslav of Kiev in 965.

The Khazars were later believed to have been the ancestors of the East European Jews, even though the masses of those Jews had migrated east from "Ashkenaz" to Poland. Judah Halevi's psychogeographical fantasies about the Kuzari were matched in the 19th century by the fantasies of Chief Rabbi Samuel Kohn of Budapest, who thought the Khazars were related to the Magyars and that therefore Jews and Magyars were brothers (Falk 1993).

## MESSIANIC YEARNINGS

Although the early Jewish Christians accepted the myth of Jesus Christ and embraced Jesus of Nazareth as their Savior, most Jews did not give up their Messianic longings. The Jews' yearning for the Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer who would lead them back to their Promised Land may be viewed as a longing for rebirth. The Messianic fervor that repeatedly gripped the Jews through the long centuries of exile and dispersion was another expression of their refusal to give up their losses, of their inability to mourn. Repeatedly throughout Jewish history, borderline and psychotic personalities proclaimed themselves to be the Messiah and were embraced by the Jewish masses as such (cf. Meissner 1990, 1992).

Jewish Messianism began with the fall of Babylon to Shah Cyrus the Great of Persia in 538 B.C.E., when the Jews viewed the Persian king as their Savior and Redeemer. Deutero-Isaiah explicitly called Cyrus "the Lord's anointed" (Isaiah 45:1), better translated as "Yahweh's Messiah." The Talmudic literature of the third to the fifth centuries invented two Messiahs, one "Messiah son of Joseph," the other "Messiah son of David." It repeatedly invoked the True Messiah, whom it called "Messiah son of David," making sure to distinguish him from Jesus of Nazareth.

In 711-718, after the Moorish conquest of Spain, the victorious and ambitious Arabs besieged Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Byzantine emperor Leo III the Isaurian (675/680-741) finally succeeded in repelling their last siege in 717-718. The Byzantine Jews were once again inspired by Messianic hopes. Many fled to Syria, which was ruled by Caliph Omar (Umar) II, denouncing the "Greek" despot. The Muslim Arabs were now viewed by the Jews as their saviors, despite the glaring discrimination against the Jews as *dhimmi* (protected people) in the *Dar al-Islam*.

One of the Byzantine Jewish exiles, whose name is variously given as Shirini, Sherini, Serene, Serenus, or Zonrias, proclaimed himself the new Messiah. Many desperate Jews flocked to his banner. Like Sabbatai Sevi nine centuries later, this seemingly psychotic Messiah advocated the abolition of many traditional taboos, including the incest one. There were two other Jewish Messiahs in eighth-century Persia, Abu Issa of Isphahan and Yudghan ar-Rai (the Shepherd) of Hamadan. Most of the self-styled Messiahs were seriously disturbed personalities. Their followers saw them as Redeemers and Saviors, a view which betrays the desperate need of the followers to idealize their leaders. Not all Jews followed these "Messiahs." It takes considerable emotional immaturity in the followers to cling to a delusional leader.

From 767 to 900 the great Karaite (Ananite) schism divided "Babylonian" Jewry. Anan ben David, the obsessional reformer who wished to do away with all Jewish oral tradition and law and return to the strict constructionism of the Torah, is said to have been influenced by the Messianic followers of Abu-Issa and Yudghan ar-Rai. He was rigid, ascetic, fanatical, and extremely stubborn, all of these qualities being unconscious defenses against the early feelings of helplessness. His followers were noted by their asceticism and by their longing for Zion, another display of the inability to mourn, to accept one's losses, and to adjust to the pain of life. In the 10th century a group calling itself "The Mourners of Zion" gathered in Jerusalem, mourning the destruction of the temple and praying for its restoration. Psychologically, they refused to truly mourn their losses.

Another Jewish Messiah was David Menahem Alroi (Alrohi) in 12th-century Islamic Persia, who collected around him a band of fanatical Jews in Baghdad, provoking the Persian rulers into having him assassinated. There was the 13th-century mystic Abraham Abulafia, who attempted to convert Pope Nicholas III to Judaism, was imprisoned for a month, made many attempts to establish himself as prophet and Messiah, and finally vanished. There was Isaac Sarfati of late 15th-century Turkey, who called upon the Jews of "Ashkenaz" to move to the wonderful country of "Togarma" where no one lacked for anything. Ottoman Turkey had become the Great Good Mother in the fantasy of many Jews.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottoman Turks in the mid-15th century and the great expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 there arose a fervent Messianism among the Jews of Italy. It was led by the Jewish scholar and mystic Don Isaac Abrabanel, a self-styled herald of the Messiah who wandered throughout southern Italy in 1496-1498 announcing the end of the "Holy Roman Empire" and of the Christian "Edomites." He wrote Messianic tracts and predicted the Resurrection of Zion in the year 1531. Asher Lemlein, a German-Jewish mystic, proclaimed himself the Messiah's herald in 1502. He had numerous followers.

In 1524 a delusional Jewish vagrant named David Reubeni showed up in Venice, calling himself a member of the lost Israelite tribe of Reuben. He told the Jews of Europe there was a great Jewish kingdom in the Arabian Desert ruled by the lost tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Its king, he said, was his own brother Joseph. This sick man stirred a great Messianic movement among the Jews. He was given an audience by Pope Clement VII, to whom he offered military assistance against the Ottoman Turks. The Pope gave him a letter of recommendation to King João III of Portugal, the country that had expelled the Jews in 1497.

The Spanish and Portuguese *Nuevos Cristianos* (new Christians), or *conversos*, were Jews who had been forcefully converted to Christianity. Those among them who practiced Judaism covertly were known as *Marranos*, an obscure word meaning "convert," "swine" or "accursed." In Portugal a young Marrano visionary named Diogo Pires was seized by a fervent wish to join David Reubeni in his Messianic quest. When the latter turned him down, Pires converted back to Judaism, changed his name to Solomon Molcho, and went to Palestine, where he studied with the Jewish mystics at Safed.

In 1527 the German and Spanish armies of "Holy Roman Emperor" Charles V defeated Rome, besieging Pope Clement VII. Molcho saw this defeat as a divine sign of the imminent salvation of the Jews. In 1529 Solomon Molcho returned to Italy, where he was received by the Pope.

Molcho was seized by the Inquisition, but the Pope helped him escape. He walked the streets of Rome as the Messiah, weird-looking and fanatical. In 1530 David Reubeni was expelled from Portugal and went to Rome, where he met Solomon Molcho. Reubeni attempted to reach the Holy Land but was shipwrecked and washed ashore in Spain, where he barely escaped the Inquisition. He wound up in Venice, where the authorities were astute at exposing his delusions and expelled him. Molcho and Reubeni took turns at occupying center stage. Both had been able to sway the heart of the Pope. One of Molcho's enemies had denounced him to the authorities as an enemy of Rome and of Christianity. Molcho was sentenced to death but managed to escape to Germany in 1531. Finally, in 1532, Molcho was handed back to the Inquisition, tried, condemned to death, and burned at the stake. Reubeni was imprisoned and died in jail. This was the tragic end of one of the most famous Messianic episodes in Jewish history, an episode that provoked great excitement and following among the Jews.

During the late Middle Ages there were mass migrations of persecuted Jews from "Ashkenaz" to Poland. In 1648-1649 there were terrible massacres of the Polish and Ukrainian Jews by the Zaporozhian Cossacks led by *hetman* Bohdan Chmielnicki. The Eastern Orthodox Cossacks hated the Jews for being agents of the Catholic Polish lords who were enslaving them, as well as for having killed their Savior, Jesus Christ. Many Jewish survivors of the massacres became psychotic, killed themselves, or fled to other countries. Messianic longings once more overwhelmed the hearts of many Jews.

In 1665 a new Messiah appeared to the Jews by the name of Sabbatai Sevi (Shabbetai Tsevi). He was born in Turkey in 1626 and suffered from manic-depressive illness from his youth (Falk, 1982). He was a mystic who provoked the rabbis of his home town of Izmir to drive him out of town and who performed many bizarre acts, such as marrying the Book of the Torah (Holy Pentateuch). Nevertheless he was "discovered" in Palestine by Nathan of Gaza, a young hypomanic visionary and prophet, and declared to be the Messiah. By 1665 Sabbatai was known all over the Jewish world, with many thousands of disciples and hundreds of thousands of followers.

Within a year Sabbatai Sevi was seized by the Ottoman authorities, imprisoned, and forcefully converted to Islam. Still, many Jews continued to believe not only that he was their True Messiah, but that he was God Himself. The Sabbatean movement divided the Jewish world for a very long time. As Scholem (1973) has shown, it was the most important Messianic mass movement in Jewish history. Theodor Herzl, the founder

and leader of political Zionism in the late 19th century, was also hailed as the New Messiah by many of his followers.

Messianic longings and fantasies developed in Jewish life following the great historical losses and group narcissistic injuries of the Jews: the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. with the exile of the Israelites, the destruction of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and the exile of the Judaeans, the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., the dispersion of the remaining Jews all over the ancient world, their expulsion from various European countries such as England in 1290 and Spain in 1492, and their persecutions and massacres everywhere.

The Christian persecution of the Jews as a hated minority, upon which all unacceptable aspects of the group self of the host peoples were unconsciously externalized and projected, reinforced their tendency to live in fantasy. The Jews were either unable or unwilling to mourn their terrible losses adequately. The pain was too great, and they preferred to live in psychogeographical fantasy. From the first century to the 16th century they lived both in a protective psychohistorical bubble, with no chronological historiography of their own, and in psychogeographical fantasy.

### POLITICAL ZIONISM AS REBIRTH FANTASY

The name *Zion* has an interesting history. It was originally a Jebusite stronghold on a hill in Jerusalem, which David captured and renamed the City of David (II Samuel 5:7-9). Later it came to designate the entire city of Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:27), the entire Land of Israel (Isaiah 35:10, Lamentations 1:4), and the Jewish people itself (Isaiah 51:16). Like the modern Mount Scopus, the present-day Mount Zion has nothing to do with the historical one. Gonen (1975) wrote a psychohistory of Zionism, which, though somewhat simplistic and reductionistic, still captures the fantastic flavor of political Zionism. It was in many ways a psychohistorical and psychogeographical fantasy. It was an attempt to turn back the clock of history and to recover the ancient losses of land, sovereignty, and nationhood rather than to mourn these losses.

The idealized and glorified fantasies of Theodor Herzl in his books *Der Judenstaat* and *Altneuland* and those of other early Zionists, about *Eretz Yisrael* (The Land of Israel), had little to do with the reality of Ottoman Palestine. Herzl wanted to turn the clock back on history and to build a fantastic modern land at the same time. It is a testimony to the

emotional power of psychogeographical fantasies that his movement eventually led to the creation of the modern state of Israel. This state, however, is locked in a tragic violent conflict both with the Palestinian Arabs and with the Arab world at large (Falk, 1992).

The Hebrew term for immigration to Israel is *aliyah* (ascent), and the term for emigration from Israel is *yeridah* (descent). These terms betray the fantasy that Israel is a country set high above all other countries. *The Mother Land assumes the image of the Early Mother set high above the infant.* During the early days of Zionist settlement in Palestine, and especially during the Second *aliyah* of 1905–1914, the psychogeographical fantasies of the Jews about the “Land of Israel” were extended to its ancient Biblical components. The Jews of Palestine between 1905 and 1947 never called themselves Jews, only “Hebrews.” There was “Hebrew” labor, the “Hebrew” University of Jerusalem, the “Hebrew” Revolt against the British, the “Hebrew” Technion of Haifa, the General Federation of “Hebrew” Workers in the Land of Israel. . . . Only the Jewish Agency for Palestine kept the word “Jewish” in its name because it had so been set up by the terms of the 1920 Treaty of San Remo.

In 1909 the new “Hebrew” city of Tel Aviv was founded near the Arab city of Jaffa. Its name was an awkward Hebrew rendering of Herzl’s *Altneuland* (Old New Land). Because Jerusalem had a mixed Arab and Jewish population and most of the towns and villages around it were Arab, the name *Yehudah* (Judea), which in ancient times had designated the area around Jerusalem, was now given to the Jewish region surrounding Tel Aviv. This fiction persisted for over sixty years, until Israel became independent.

Similarly the name *Shomron* (Samaria), which had designated the area around Shechem (Nablus), was now applied to the Jewish area around Natanyah and Haderah, on the Mediterranean coast, halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa. This fiction persisted throughout the British Mandate period (1920–1948) and even through the first 19 years of Israel’s existence as a state (1948–1967). After the Six-Day War of 1967 the names Judea and Samaria were reapplied to the occupied West Bank. The psychological purpose, however, was still to deny the reality of the Palestinian Arab population and to believe that these are purely Jewish parts of *Eretz Yisrael* (The Land of Israel).

Some extreme right-wing Israelis have fantasies of expelling all Arabs from Israel and its occupied territories, which they call “The Whole Land of Israel” (Greater Israel). They refuse to call the Arab areas “occupied,” insisting on calling them “liberated.” Some dream of destroying the sacred mosques on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount and of rebuilding the

Third Temple on that very site. Other Israelis may harbor such fantasies in their subconscious minds. Nationalistic psychogeographical fantasies can easily lead to war, as we have seen throughout human history. The inability to mourn underlies this tragic process (cf. Fornari, 1976). If nations could mourn, perhaps they could study war no more.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BOYER, L. B. (1986), On man's need to have enemies: A psychoanalytic perspective. *J. Psychoanal. Anthropol.*, 9:101-120.
- CAMPBELL, J. (1959), *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. New York: Viking Press.
- DIETRICH, D. R. & SHABAD, P., eds. (1989), *The Problem of Loss and Mourning: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. Madison, WI: International Universities Press.
- EBEL, H. (1986), Adapting to annihilation: Reviews of Yerushalmi (1982) and Roskies (1984). *J. Psychoanal. Anthropol.*, 9:67-89.
- ELIADE, M. (1959), *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
- FALK, A. (1974), Border symbolism. *Psychoanal. Quart.*, 43:650-660. Reprinted in Stein, H. F. & Niederland, W. G., eds. (1989), *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- \_\_\_\_ (1982), The Messiah and the Qelipth: On the mental illness of Sabbatai Sevi. *J. Psychol. Judaism*, 7:5-29.
- \_\_\_\_ (1983), Border symbolism revisited. *Internat. Rev. Psycho-Anal.*, 10:215-220. Reprinted in Stein, H. F. & Niederland, W. G., eds. (1989), *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- \_\_\_\_ (1987), The meaning of Jerusalem: A psychohistorical inquiry. *Psychohistory Rev.*, 16:99-113. Expanded version in Stein, H. F. & Niederland, W. G., eds. (1989), *Maps From the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- \_\_\_\_ (1992), Unconscious aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society*, 17:213-247.
- \_\_\_\_ (1993), *Herzl, King of the Jews: A Psychoanalytic Biography of Theodor Herzl*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- \_\_\_\_ (in progress), *A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews*.
- FORNARI, F. (1976), *The Psychoanalysis of War*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- FREUD, S. (1917), Mourning and melancholia. *Standard Edition*, 14. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.
- GINZBERG, L. (1967-1969), *The Legends of the Jews*. 7 volumes. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- GONEN, J. Y. (1975) *A Psychohistory of Zionism*. New York: Mason/Charter.
- GROUP FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PSYCHIATRY (1987), *Us and Them*. The Psychology of Ethnonationalism. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- KOENIGSBERG, R. A. (1977), *The Psychoanalysis of Racism, Revolution, and Nationalism*. New York: Library of Social Science.
- MACK, J. (1983), Nationalism and the self. *Psychohistory Rev.*, 11(2-3):47-69.
- MAHLER, M. S., PINE, F. & BERGMAN, A. (1975), *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation*. New York: Basic Books.

- MEISSNER, W. W. (1990), Jewish messianism and the cultic process. *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society*, 15:347-370.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1992), Medieval Messianism and Sabbatianism. *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society*, 17:289-325.
- MITSCHERLICH, A. & MITSCHERLICH, M. (1975), *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*. New York: Grove Press.
- PATAI, R. (1976), Ethnohistory and inner history. *Jewish Quart. Rev.*, 67:1-15. Reprinted in Patai, R. (1977), *The Jewish Mind*. New York: Scribner's.
- POLLOCK, G. H. (1961), Mourning and adaptation. *Internat. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 42:341-361.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1975), On mourning, immortality, and utopia. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assoc.*, 23:334-362.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1977), The mourning process and creative organizational change. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assoc.*, 25:3-34.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1989), *The Mourning-Liberation Process*. 2 vols. Madison, WI: International Universities Press.
- ROCHLIN, G. (1973), *Man's Aggression: The Defense of the Self*. Boston: Gambit.
- RÓHEIM, G. (1943), *The Origin and Function of Culture*. New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co. New York: Doubleday/Anchor 1971.
- ROSKIES, D. G. (1984), *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- SCHOLEM, G. G. (1973), *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- STEIN, H. F. (1984), The scope of psycho-geography: The psychoanalytic study of spatial representation. *J. Psychoanal. Anthropol.*, 7:23-73.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1987), *Developmental Time, Cultural Space: Studies in Psychogeography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ & NIEDERLAND, W. G., eds. (1989), *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- VOLKAN, V. D. (1979), *Cyprus—War and Adaptation: A Psychoanalytic History of Two Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1981), *Linking Objects and Linking Phenomena: A Study of the Forms, Symptoms, Metapsychology, and Therapy of Complicated Mourning*. New York: International Universities Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1988), *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson.
- WINNICOTT, D. W. (1971), *Playing and Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- YERUSHALMI, Y. H. (1982), *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.