

Rabbi Sam Thurgood



DAWNING OF REDEMPTION OR SECOND GOLDEN CALF?

The establishment of the modern State of Israel is one of the most controversial topics in the religious Jewish world today. Whilst some see it as a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and a great step towards redemption, others see it as the greatest obstacle we have to redemption! As always, there is a third opinion somewhere in between. What makes this argument more difficult to understand is not simply the extremity of the different views, but that they are all expressed by believing Jews, who pledge their primary allegiance to G-d and Torah. How are we to understand such extreme differences?

I would like to briefly explain four perspectives on this important question from four great Torah scholars, by way of metaphors.

1. Messianic Religious Zionism – Building the Temple: Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook

When the *Beit HaMikdash* was being built, the Jewish people had a dilemma. This was to be the most sacred place in the world, the Holy of Holies, into which no unsanctified foot could tread. How was such a holy place to be built with unsanctified materials? The answer, our Sages tell us, was to build the Temple with unconsecrated materials, and to designate them as holy only afterward. The first part of the building was secular, and only then was it invested with holiness. So too, our State is built as a secular state first, but as time goes by it too will be vested with greater and greater holiness. Even those who do not identify as religious are subconsciously responding to the call of the national Jewish soul to return to our Land and

rebuild our nation in preparation for this holy revelation, and thus are themselves connected to holiness.

2. Religious Anti-Zionism – The Golden Calf: Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum

The sin of the Jewish people in the desert was that they were unwilling to wait for Moshe. Instead of trusting in G-d and expressing sufficient patience, they chose a new solution to their problem. So too, after 1,800 years of patiently waiting in exile for G-d's redemption, the non-believing elements amongst us abandoned the trust of waiting for G-d, and decided to do it themselves, to pursue a political, rather than religious, solution. This is a grievous rebellion against G-d, and just as with the Golden Calf, we must choose to stand against it and take no part of it.

3. Pragmatic Anti-Zionism – Ya'akov with Shimon and Levi: Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin

Ya'akov Avinu was opposed to the plan proposed by his sons Shimon and Levi to go to war against the city of Shechem in retribution for their crime against their sister Dina. Nonetheless, once they went ahead, Rashi tells us that Ya'akov himself girded weapons of war and stood at their defence, since blood is thicker than water, and loyalty to our fellow Jews overrides ideological considerations. So too, even though political Zionism was not a positive phenomenon and we would prefer that a secular state would not have been built, once it is an established fact, with millions of Jews living there, we must devote ourselves to supporting and helping.

4. Pragmatic Religious Zionism – Eyes Open: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

We are obliged not to shut our eyes to the miracles G-d has performed for us in Israel, nor to dream of a future that we do not see in evidence, but to take an open and honest look at all that has happened and is happening. There are incredible things that have been accomplished in the State of Israel, amazing achievements both religious and secular, and we should thank G-d for every one of those. At the same time, there are great disappointments, and we must be honest about them too. There is a great deal more good than bad, but we must approach these days for what they are, not for what we fear, or wish, them to be.

We live in confusing times – and the question of how to view these times and what to learn from them is one of the most important questions for a Jew today. I find the approaches of Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Kook most compelling – to see the miracles that we are witness to in our own times, and see within them a sign of even greater miracles to come. May G-d grant us a full redemption in these days in which we are sensitive to the need for redemption so keenly.

NEW WRITER!

Rabbi Sam Thurgood is the Rabbi of Beit Midrash Morasha in Cape Town. He studied under Rabbi Goldfein zt"l at the Yeshivah Gedolah of Johannesburg and he and his wife Aviva have four beautiful children. The first thing he'd like to do after the pandemic is to visit Israel.