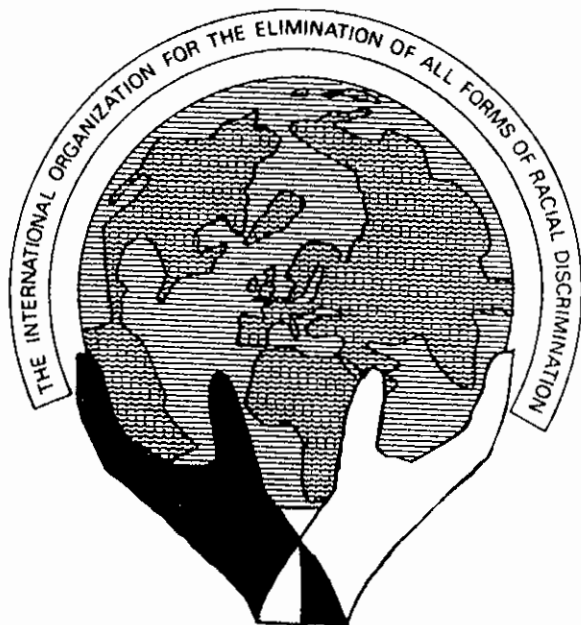


THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION  
FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF  
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION  
(EAFORD)



THE TORAH AND POLITICAL ZIONISM

by

Rabbi Josef Becher

Presented at EAFORD/AJAZ Conference for  
Peace and Understanding

“Judaism or Zionism: What Difference for the Middle East?”  
Washington D.C. 6 - 7 May 1983

**Published by  
The International Organisation for the Elimination  
of All Forms of Racial Discrimination  
(EAFORD)  
February 1984**

Graphic Mark Ltd. (U.K.)

The views expressed in this Bulletin are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of EAFORD.

**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

## NOTE OF EXPLANATION

At the request of Rabbi Becher, his paper which was presented at a symposium sponsored by EAFORD and AJAZ (American Jewish Alternative to Zionism) convened in Washington DC 6-7 May 1983, is published separately and not included in the volume of the Symposium papers\*. We believe a brief explanation of his reasons provides an important clarification of the important subject he addressed.

Rabbi Becher's paper reflects the purist, theological principles of a segment of Jews, the Neturei Karta, who not only profess strict adherence to tradition, but who live by it, day-to-day. The entire question of Zion and the Holy Land, for them, is strictly a religious matter. The State of Israel, established through the mundane efforts and ordinary political activities of mortal men is a secular matter, violating their vision of how Zion, as a sacrament, shall be redeemed. For Rabbi Becher and his colleagues, the true Zion will be restored by the Almighty God when the Holy One determines Jews have redeemed themselves by observing, to the letter, every one of the stipulated 613 commandments ordained by the Almighty God. Human usurpation of this Divine judgment by regarding the State of Israel as sacred to and central in Judaism cannot be countenanced as consistent with Judaism's tradition, according to the Neturei Karta. Therefore, in their view, the State of Israel exists contrary to the Divine will.

The Neturei Karta is committed to the uniqueness of their faith. On principle, they reject even an apparent dilution of their conviction. To avoid any risk of transgressing this principle, Rabbi Becher asked for separation of his paper from those of other participants reflecting different theological views.

We believe the separation dramatizes the dedication and piety of this group of traditionalists in Judaism and, accordingly, adds greater force to the authenticity of Rabbi Becher's rejection of national/political Zionism as a profanation of the "Divine promise".

\* The remaining papers are included in "Judaism or Zionism: What Difference for the Middle East" published by EAFORD & ZED BOOKS LTD, London, 1985

# The Torah and Political Zionism

## Rabbi Josef Becher

It is customary among Orthodox Jews that before speaking one should say a verse from the Torah, scripture or the Talmud. That is how I also begin.

The tractate Sanhedrin in the Babylonian Talmud mentions, in folio 106, that when Pharaoh decreed all new-born Jewish male children be thrown into the Nile, he turned to three wise men for their opinions. These men were Yisro (Jethro), Billom, and Job. Rather than give his opinion, Jethro ran away from Egypt; Billom advised throwing the children in the Nile; Job remained silent.

The Talmud then relates their fate. Billom, because of his decision and cruel advice, was killed.

Jethro, who ran away, was fortunate to have his descendants sit as the Sanhedrin.

Job, who was silent, received pain, so much pain, that he cursed the day he was born. His children passed away, his sons, his daughters, his wife, everything was taken from him.

The Talmud relates why this happened. When he heard Pharaoh's plan to throw the children into the Nile, he remained silent. Silence bespeaks indifference. So the Almighty brought upon Job various troubles, calamities, and pain. He was not silent when he had personal pain. Because Pharaoh's evil decree evoked no reaction in him because it did not personally affect him, he was fully capable of emotions about his personal experiences.

That's what this conference is all about, peace and understanding. The people that have come here are all peace-loving. There are no belligerents, no military men. The generals and the politicians are responsible for the events in the Middle East, in the Holy Land.

We can do only one thing; we can be eloquent in showing our anguish. That is why I am here.

I want to provide a brief explanation of the Neturei Karta. The name Neturei Karta derives from a Talmudic saying. Rebbe, the Jerusalem Talmud says, in tractate Chagiga (1.7) and in the Midrash,\* the Agodas of Talmud, Rebbe sent Reb Ami and Reb Asi, two rabbis, to check the towns of the Holy Land to see if each town had an institution, a school, and a house of worship where children were being taught the holy law, the Torah.\*\*

\* Midrash Eicha RABAH, Preface

\*\* Midrash Shochor Tov (Psalms) 127

Reb Ami and Reb Asi went into one town and they did not find anyone teaching the children. No one was educating the youth about Torah. They asked the townspeople: Where are the Neturei Karta? Neturei Karta is an Aramaic term meaning "the guardians of the city". The townspeople brought them the soldiers and the police. Reb Ami and Reb Asi answered: These are not the Neturei Karta; these are the Machrivei Karta, the destroyers of the city.

The townspeople then stood dumbstruck, and asked who then are the Neturei Karta? So Reb Ami and Reb Asi said, they are the people who pray in the houses of worship and study and teach the children Torah. These are the true guardians of the city.

We of Neturei Karta do not consider ourselves a political organization or any organization at all. We consider ourselves first and foremost Jews. The phenomenon in the last 100 years or so that began with the reformation in Germany and later with Zionism resulted in the newfangled concept that one could be a Jew and yet not keep the precepts of the Torah. This is a new phenomenon and a very grave danger to the Jewish people and to the Jewish faith. The State of Israel is a product of this belief, that one could be a Jew without keeping the Torah.

Those who subscribe to this belief pick and choose among the 613 precepts given us by the Almighty, observing and violating commandments at will. A secular parallel would be that of a citizen of the United States choosing to obey certain laws and regulations and violating others. Yet this is graver, for the Almighty gave the Jews the Torah and told them that they must observe His commandments. By doing so, they serve the Creator and thereby serve mankind in a special way. If a Jew selects certain commandments and refuses to do others, he has no right to call himself a Jew.

The nations of the world have given legitimacy to the Zionist movement by dealing with it as though it was representative of all Jews. Recently, there was a big conference of Holocaust survivors in Washington. Upon my arrival in Washington, I passed a big building with a sign "U.S. Holocaust Museum". The American people consider it a symbol of compassion for the Jewish people. But it is not so.

Americans revere Elie Weisel for his passionate writings. For this he merited the chairmanship of the Holocaust Commission. Religious Jews do not share the reverence, for Elie Weisel's works are blasphemous. He alternately denounces G-d for "allowing" the Holocaust to occur and denying His existence. We wonder then, how people of his ilk merit such official recognition? Zionism, too, has become a legitimate movement in the eyes of the world.

Had the nations of the world recognized the true authentic Jewish people, many of the problems created by Zionism wouldn't exist. By

Neturei Karta standards “the Jewish people” are those who do not dabble in politics. They are Jews who serve the Creator, who live in their own communities, study the holy law, and worship the Almighty. Their concerns lie in their daily chores, not in international affairs and politics.

But the nations of the world recognized the Zionists as the spokesmen of the Jewish people. This official recognition by the world bestows a certain legitimacy on them in Jewish eyes also. If President Reagan continues to accord recognition to them only, and no consideration is given to Orthodox Jews, we Jews feel that the situation will not improve.

I would like to mention some of the details of the destruction of the first and second Temples as described in the Torah, the Talmud and the prophets. The similarities to our present situation are noteworthy.

The end of Deuteronomy (32.7) contains the “Song of Haazinew” where Moses gave the word of the Almighty. He called upon the earth and sky to be his witnesses and instructs the Jewish people to “Remember the annals of history, remember each and every generation what happens. If you don’t know, ask your father or ask your grandfather”.

What does this mean for us? The Talmud<sup>o</sup> says that only forty-eight prophets are mentioned in the Torah. Those prophecies are mentioned because they were meant for all generations. A literal rendition of the Prophets will not enable one to understand fully their meaning. The Torah is the written law and the Talmud is the oral law. The oral law enables one to understand the written law. It says, “An eye for an eye”.<sup>\*\*</sup> But G-d forbid, heaven forbid, it does not mean an eye for an eye literally.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> It means the money to compensate for what the eye was worth.

During the course of years, the rabbis decided to put the Talmud in writing and so we have it today.

The Talmud mentions that the prophecies of the 48 prophets that appeared for the Jewish people, are forever. There were many more Jewish prophets during the years when the Jews were in the Holy Land, but their prophecies were not written down because they were not meant to be eternal.

One of the prophets who speaks at length about the destruction of the first temple is Yirmeyahu, Jeremiah. He continually warns the people of the consequences of their sinful behavior. Not all of them sinned, but one must look at the Talmud to explain things. The prophet meant that even if one bad occurrence happened, it had a terrible effect on the entire population.

\* Megilah 14A

\*\* Exodus 21.24

\*\*\* B.T. Baba Kama 84.

For example, the Book of Kings\* relates that King Menashe filled the streets of Jerusalem from one end to the other with blood. But the Talmud\*\* explains that he didn't kill masses of people. He killed one person, the prophet Isaiah, who was comparable to an entire city. So the streets of Jerusalem were filled from one side to the other with blood. Because of this murder, the Almighty caused His wrath to come on the Jewish people for being either silent or indifferent. But the majority of the Jews were faithful.

A small number of those involved in the politics of the country were corrupt. They caused the destruction. The same circumstances prevailed at the time of the second temple. The same situation exists today.

Jeremiah pleaded with the Jews, and with the King and his ministers for forty years before the destruction of the temple. He begged them to give up the political state, lay down their arms and surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. The king, Yehoyokim and his ministers refused. They wanted to have their ministries, their embassies and their glory. The ordinary religious people were not interested in the state.

Jeremiah pleaded with the people to leave the city and surrender. He kept prophesying dire consequences, but promising that if the people repented, these dire events would not occur. He was jailed so that he would be silenced.

Another king, Tzidkiyahu, came to power. The same sequence took place. Jeremiah was imprisoned again. He could no longer speak out for he could not deal with the king and with the ministers. He decided to save a remnant, at least, so that Judaism would survive, for Judaism is not nationalist in character. Judaism is a faith, a religion.

When the temple was destroyed, Jeremiah told those who listened to him, who went to Babylon, to be loyal to the country in which they resided. Till this very day the Jewish people obey these precepts laid down by Jeremiah. When they went into exile they were loyal to the nations in which they resided. They had no nationalistic aspirations or any political aspirations.

At the time of the destruction of the second temple, the Jews were totally disinterested in nationalism. They did not want to serve in any armed forces of the state. The Talmud often relates that certain Jewish kings had to hire armies from different countries and make alliances with them, so they could wage wars. The majority of Jews were against the political aspirations of these rulers. They were men of peace. Their interests lay in teaching the people, and their children, Torah, maintaining the tradition, and worshipping the Almighty and thereby

\* II Kings 2:21

\*\* B.T. Sanhedrin 103.2

serving the Creator of us all, and so working for all mankind.

The Rabbis headed by Rabbon Yochanon ben Zakai repeated Jeremiah's warning, that if they would surrender the state, everything would be peaceful, lives would not be lost. This is all related in two places: One in the Talmud in Gittin folio 56-A, and in Ovos of Rebbe Noson, the Ethics of Rebbe Noson, in Chapter 4, Mishna 5. The rabbis pleaded with the rulers of the nation to lay down their arms and make peace with the Romans.

The hoodlums in charge refused to yield. They insisted on continuing the fighting. Rabbon Yochanon ben Zakai said, "What does this Roman king want? He wants you only to put down your bow and arrow. He wants nothing else". The Kings and people said, "No! We're going to continue fighting". Rabbon Yochanon ben Zakai saw that it was pointless to try to reason with them. He then planned to save at least a remnant of the city. He wanted to save the future of Judaism, the yeshivos, the holy schools where the holy law is taught, for that is the only future of Judaism.

When the situation became intolerable, Reb Yochanon ben Zakai called his nephew Abba Sikra, the leader of the rebels. He asked him if he intended to continue fighting until all the Jews were dead. He asked for help to leave the city. Abba Sikra advised his uncle to pretend illness and ultimately death, because the rebels would allow only a corpse to be removed, because a corpse might not remain in Jerusalem overnight. And so Rabbon Yochanon ben Zakai left Jerusalem in a bier. Upon arriving in Vespasian's camp he was asked why he had not come sooner. Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakai replied bluntly that the rebels had not allowed him to leave.

This passage teaches several important lessons. First, Rabbon Yochanon ben Zakai was not afraid to be labelled a "traitor" because he went to negotiate with the enemy. He had no concern for the opinions of hoodlums who had cast aside Torah ideals and operated under the principle "might makes right". Secondly, he separated himself completely from the powers in control and went to the enemy who was seeking to destroy Jewish political control. He chose to try to preserve the spiritual future of the nation. For only a spiritual gain could secure our future; no material gain could insure salvation. Thirdly, telling the enemy that the hoodlums refused to allow him to meet with him was considered treachery and would also today, be regarded as traitorous. But informing the enemy that true Jews are those faithful to the Torah was not treachery. It was salvation.

The authentic Jewish people adhere to the Torah, which repeatedly affirms its abhorrence of bloodshed.

Let us learn a lesson from Job. Let no indifference be our hallmark. We must protest. We must entreat all people of good will, to recognize the authentic Jews as the spokesmen for the Jewish people.



Secondly, we see from the first and second destructions of the temples, from the Torah and the Talmud that at previous times there were rulers who recognized Jewish religious figures, and that this was of great benefit to the Jewish populace. And the Jewish faith continued to exist until this very day. Continuous fighting and political machinations will never ensure Jewish survival. It will rather hasten its demise.

We pray for the peaceful disappearance of this state. We don't know how this is going to come about. We have no idea. But the Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, could make everything possible. For this we pray, but we do need certain help from all men of good will.

First, do not recognize the Zionists as the sole, legitimate spokesmen of the Jewish people. There are other Jewish people, the authentic Jews. In that way, with time and with more education, something constructive will take place.

I want to mention one other thing before I conclude. Certain people have died for the cause of peace in the Middle East. The first one killed was Dr. Jacob Israel Dehaan. He was a Jew from Holland. He came to the Holy Land in 1920. He served the chief rabbis of the orthodox community who were opposed to Zionism and opposed to the British Mandate that allowed the Zionists to control the Holy Land. No one listened to these rabbis. Dr. Dehaan made it his business, because of his unique qualifications, to appear before government officials in England and the League of Nations whenever possible to state the authentic position of authentic Jews

On June 29th of 1924, as he was leaving evening prayers at the synagogue Sharei Tzedek he was cold-bloodedly murdered. He had planned to leave the next day with a delegation to England to argue against Zionism. The Zionists were well aware of this. They had repeatedly called for his murder for many years.

The Hagana murdered him. It did not acknowledge culpability. When Zionists established the state and recorded the official history of the Hagana, the history of their state, they then admitted they had murdered Dr. Dehaan. They murdered him because he was the first Jew to go into the political arena and fight against Zionism. He attempted to effect a co-existence between the Jewish people, the true Jewish people, and the Arab people, the Palestinians living in Palestine at that time. For that he was killed.

Since then many others have been killed. Recently, a Palestinian was killed because he struggled for peace. I don't know all the details, but it seems to me that Dr. Isam Sartawi was murdered just because he was talking to Israelis or to Jews. He was a man of peace.

On June 16, 1947, when the United Nations Commission on Palestine met in Jerusalem, Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Duschinsky, Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land and Rabbi Zelig Reuven Bengis personally testified against the

establishment of a Jewish State. Failing that, they appealed (to them) not to include Jerusalem in any state rather as a separate entity. They cited the age-old Talmudic prohibitions against such an action, derived from the three oaths the Almighty beswore the Jewish people. Kesubos 111A recounts them as follows: First, Jews may not go to the Holy Land en masse by means of physical force. Second, Jews may not rebel against the nations amongst whom they dwell. Third, they should not prolong the redemption by their sins. The rabbis also feared that a Jewish state would be a rallying point for the anti-semitism and thus be an actual danger to the Jewish people. The United Nations Commission did not choose to heed the requests of the Orthodox Jewish community. Had they done so, the tragedies convulsing the Holy Land today could never have occurred.

The Jewish people adhere to the Torah, which repeatedly affirms its abhorrence of bloodshed.

Let us learn a lesson from Job. Let not indifference be our hallmark. We must protest. We must entreat all people of good will, to recognize the authentic Jews as the spokesmen for the Jewish people.

We pray for the peaceful disappearance of this state. We don't know how this is going to come about. We have no idea, but the Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, could make everything possible. For this we pray, but we do need certain help from all men of good will.

Do not recognize the Zionists as the sole, legitimate spokesmen of the Jewish people. There are other Jewish people, the authentic Jews. In that way, with time and with more education, something could come about.

Today it is fashionable to keep distant from volatile issues. But if we care, and like the Talmud says, if it does truly hurt us, and if all the talking shouldn't just be sterile but rather lead to something constructive, the people should not be silenced by coercive practises. I ask the Jewish people to continue in the ways of the Torah and to keep faith with what Dr. Dehaan began.

I, of course, appeal to the Palestinians not to be thwarted by the murder of one of their people, Dr. Sartawi, but to talk of peace and try to bring some peaceful solution to this problem before an immense catastrophe, G-d forbid, comes upon us.

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