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VIEWPOINT

By Zvi Yaron

'Gush Emunim undermining religious morality'

IT IS a mistake to treat Gush Emunim as a purely political movement which holds out for a maximalist position. What distinguishes it from the other political parties is not its opposition to any particular agreement with Egypt or the United States. These agreements have always been (and will undoubtedly be in the future) subject to divisive arguments. Gush Emunim is unique in its fervent promotion of a "messianic" policy, guided by the belief that the messianic vision is now in the process of fulfilment. We are therefore urged to ignore all realistic evaluations of our complex international difficulties. Realism is condemned as lack of faith in the redemption of Israel.

This religious-political ideology has its roots in the euphoria that the Six-Day War induced in many Israelis. But whilst the Yom Kippur War caused most Israelis to become aware of the dangers inherent in pseudo-messianic hallucinations, a large number of religious people have been lending their ardent support to Gush Emunim.

It is not easy to pursue a rational argument with Gush Emunim's highly emotional ideology. But the evidence of their prolific pronouncements shows that the movement's leaders are convinced that if Israel's government would adopt a "messianic" policy, we should be able to dispense with the need to take account of the empirical facts of our political and military situation. And this is the basic difference between them and the other parties and politicians who oppose the government's policy. Opposition party leaders know that they must present cogent reasons for rejecting a policy and recommending an alternative. For Gush Emunim there is first and last the indomitable and fervent faith. They have no doubts and have no interest in a close scrutiny of the issues.

A typical example of their ideology is the following statement: "The present borders, all these kilometres, are ours and they are hallowed with divine sanctity, and we have no right to give them up."



One of many Gush Emunim demonstrations, this time outside the Prime Minister's Office. (Barzilay)

This pithy *ex cathedra* pronouncement was made in 1974 about the withdrawal from Kuneitra on the Syrian border and it was applied again to the recent agreement with Egypt about withdrawal in Sinai. When pressed about the danger that their "messianic" policy will cause bloodshed, their answer is that preserving intact the territory of the Land of Israel is a religious duty, a *mitzva*, for which Jews are commanded to lay down their lives. But leading religious authorities, including Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, have pointed out that there is no *mitzva* and no sanction in *halakha* or tradition to shed blood for the sanctity of "these kilometres"

and that there is no ground whatever to set up a so-called religious duty to oppose negotiations. On the contrary, they argue, the issue of the survival of the Jewish people should be the overriding consideration.

Gush Emunim have implanted in the public the idea that its ideology is a contemporary application of the late Chief Rabbi Kook's philosophy (who died in 1935). The fact, however, is that there is no reference in Rabbi Kook's writings which could produce any inference about policy in 1975. The Gush Emunim publications abound with quotations from traditional literature. But not a single quotation has any kind of

relationship with today's political and military issues. All these quotations deal with religious Zionism and with the Jewish rights to Eretz Israel. But those of us who oppose Gush Emunim do so precisely because we are religious Zionists and because we are convinced that Gush Emunim constitutes an utter falsification of religious Zionism.

The late Rabbi Kook taught that the Zionist revival in our time has ushered in the *atchalta dige'oola*, "the beginning of the process of messianic redemption." Some religious Zionist thinkers prefer to think of *atchalta dige'oola* as a hope and prayer. But even Rabbi Kook

wrote only of the religious-historical significance of Zionism. There is nothing in his teaching to suggest that at a time of *atchalta dige'oola* the Jewish state should be guided by "messianic" policy.

One of the most serious aspects of the "messianic" policy is Gush Emunim's lack of religious-moral sensitivity on the problem of the million Arabs who live in the territories outside the "green line." The question is after all very simple and clear-cut: What kind of a society shall we have in a state which will include one million and a half Arabs (within and outside the "green line") and three million Jews? If we shall have full democracy, it obviously will not be a Jewish state — and if not, we shall have something like Rhodesia. This is an agonizing question, and all we get in reply from Gush Emunim is a vague pseudo-mystical and pseudo-prophetic promise that we need not worry and that all will be well.

There is something ominous in a religious movement that is so exclusively nationalistic that it entirely discounts a fateful moral problem which involves the lives of numerous human beings. What is at stake here is not only a political attitude but the danger that the Gush Emunim movement, which counts many young people in its ranks, is undermining religious morality.

In Israel we are constantly called upon to decide on intricate issues. The religious Jew's contribution should not be Gush Emunim's version of religious Zionism but to encourage the search for policies which shall enable our nation to live in peace and security, guided by the principles of the Jewish tradition of religion and morality. From a religious point of view it is a sin to endanger the security of the Jewish state and the people's survival by opposing all negotiations which involve compromises and territorial withdrawals. The "messianic" policy, in ignoring both moral and realistic considerations, endangers the future of religion and morality and the survival of the Jewish nation.

(The writer of this article is the author of *Mishnato Shel Harav Kook*, a study on the philosophy of the late Rabbi Kook.)