**“Like a Sacrifice Ascending from the Flames”: Hadar Goldin’s *Mesilat Yesharim* in Israeli Religious Nationalist Thought**

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**Abstract**

This article tracks how the *Mesilat Yesharim*, an 18th century devotional work of pietistic-ascetism has become transformed by Jewish religious Zionists in Israel and the West Bank into an experience of military and civic duty. It specifically focuses on a contemporary popular commentary on the text authored by Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, a religious Zionist casualty of Israel’s 2014 conflict with the Hamas controlled Gaza Strip. I argue that the study and interpretation of the *Mesilat Yesharim* on the part of religious Zionists in Israel, ultimately functions as a sacred and textual medium through which these communities are able to better navigate between the competing obligations that characterize their social, political, and theological position within Israeli society. When seen through this lens the *Mesilat Yesharim* serves as a sacred literary vehicle through which young men and women, facing years of national service, work through some of the conflicting fidelities of their own moral worlds.

**Introduction**

What role does the study and interpretation of sacred texts play in mediating the often-insoluble dilemmas of the modern social and political experience? The current popularity of the *Mesilat Yesharim* (commonly translated as the Path of the Just), an 18th century pietistic text authored by the early modern Italian kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato,[[1]](#endnote-1) within Israeli religious Zionist communities, offers one interesting direction towards addressing this question. The *Mesilat Yesharim* presents a teleological work of pietistic and ethical perfection that urges its readers to refine their own personal spiritual characteristics. The text ultimately highlights how that work of personal refinement, leads the world itself closer to ultimate salvation.[[2]](#endnote-2)

By focusing on a contemporary popular commentary of the text, authored by Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, a religious Zionist casualty of Israel’s 2014 conflict with the Hamas controlled Gaza Strip, I argue that the *Mesilat Yesharim* serves as a sacred and textual medium through which Jewish religious Zionists are able navigate between the differing and competing obligations that characterize their social, political, and theological position within Israeli society. Hadar’s edited commentary guides young religious nationalist readers as they navigate a sense of sacred ‘responsibility’ for the broader statist structures of Jewish sovereignty on the one hand, with their own desire for personal piety and self-exploration on the other.[[3]](#endnote-3) Between the lines of the commentary an unmistakable tension is drawn surrounding a cosmic drama of redemption, that echoes larger nationalist and historical overtones, while also reflecting the simple and personal grief of a father for his fallen son.

This article will demonstrate how this particular commentary of the *Mesilat Yesharim* functions as a medium through which these overlapping and competing, cultural impulses are mediated - yet never entirely reconciled - by Jewish religious nationalists throughout Israel and the West Bank. I argue that the *Mesilat Yesharim’s* dual message of individual salvation and collective redemption becomes the perfect textual medium through which religious Zionists are able to work through what Chares Taylor has described as the “struggle to hold onto a vision of the incomparably higher, while being true to the central modern insights about the value of ordinary life”. [[4]](#endnote-4) While for Taylor this question serves as the quintessential dilemma of modernity, for young religious Zionists reading Hadar Goldin’s Mesilat Yesharim, it aptly highlights their experience of service and sacrifice to a national and theological cause.

**The *Mesilat Yesharim* under the Tunnels of the Gaza Strip**

On the morning of August 1, 2014 - during the waning weeks of Operation Protective Edge - the military conflict between Israel and the Hamas controlled Gaza Strip - an elite IDF reconnaissance unit was attacked by a Hamas force which emerged out of one of their many tunnel complexes. The skirmish resulted in the deaths of three Israeli servicemen along with the abduction of Second Lieutenant Hadar Goldin. During the attack, Lieutenant Eitan Fund, the deputy company commander at the scene, requested permission from his superiors to enter the tunnel shaft in an attempt to retrieve the abducted soldier. Fund advanced several hundred meters alone into the shaft, although was ultimately unable to locate any substantive sign of Second Lt. Goldin. After several subsequent entries into the tunnel under the authority of the Brigade Commander, Colonel Ofer Winter, enough bloodied remains and equipment were discovered to officially declare Goldin’s death.[[5]](#endnote-5) As of the Spring of 2022 his body has yet to be returned to Israeli authorities.

Both Second Lt. Hadar Goldin, Lt. Eitan Fund, along with Col. Ofer Winter were past graduates of the Bnei David premilitary academy located in the West Bank settlement of Eli. These pre-military rabbinic academies are popular among Israel’s National Religious youth in the year or two following their completion of high school and before their mandatory induction into the Israel Defense Forces (Rosman-Stollman. 2014).[[6]](#endnote-6) For religious Zionists, otherwise known as the ‘National Religious’ sector of Israeli society - Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel bears political as well as sacred meaning. For them the civic responsibilities of Israeli citizenship – most notably military service – are also sacred callings.[[7]](#endnote-7) Premilitary rabbinic academies are then designed to both spiritually and physically prepare these youngsters for what they term as ‘meaningful’ service in both combat and command positions within the IDF.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Among Goldin’s belongings was found a hardcover edition of the *Mesilat Yesharim*. Along the margins of the text were over a hundred explanatory notes that Hadar wrote himself while a student in the Bnei David premilitary rabbinic seminary. Hadar had closely studied the text along with most other students in Bnei David-Eli, under the tutelage of Eliezer Kashtiel, a noted rabbinic scholar and pietistic personality in the seminary. During interviews, friends remarked how they recalled Hadar writing notes in the text late into the night.

Partnering with Maggid Books a major religious Israeli publishing house, Hadar’s friends and family collated his many marginal glosses into a unique edition of the classical text, now titled, “*How to Build a Life: Studying the Mesilat Yesharim with Hadar Goldin*”.[[9]](#endnote-9) The book quickly became a popular item in religious bookstores across Israel. Learning groups sprouted up that were centered around the text, and educators in Israel’s various high school and post high school-seminaries focused on it. In Bnei David-Eli itself the book was ubiquitous on desks, bookshelves and tables. With the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic some of these sessions were moved to Zoom and then subsequently were uploaded to YouTube.

**The *Mesilat Yesharim*: An ‘Intimate’ Religious Zionist Spiritual Diary**

*The Commentary*

*How to Build a Life: Studying the Mesilat Yesharim with Hadar Goldin* follows in the style of the many medieval rabbinic commentaries to the Biblical scriptures. Here the original 18th century text takes up the top portion of the page, while the bottom consists of Hadar’s interpretive commentary [Figure 1]. The commentary was first read, extracted, and then edited by members of Hadar’s immediate family and close friends. This version was later, edited further by Maggid Publishing House which set about dividing Hadar’s glosses into two general categories.



[Figure 1: Sample image of the commentary. Note the original text above, and the commentary below separated into black typed font, and blue Hebrew script.]

The first, are printed in a square black Hebrew font, beneath the original text of the *Mesilat Yesharim*, and are based -according to interviews with the editors - on Hadar’s summaries that he wrote separately while studying in Rabbi Kashtiel’s class in Bnei David-Eli. The second category are the glosses that were found written along the margins of the hardcover original text. These were seen by the editors interviewed as more authentically representing Hadar’s own personal reflections on the pietistic tract itself and were printed within the volume at the bottom of each page in blue Hebrew script.

Taken together this collection of class summaries and personal notes are meant to be read as a kind of intimate spiritual diary. As Hadar’s father wrote in his introduction to the volume, “The book is the personal grappling of a young man, with his own soul, consciousness, and values… [it is both] intimate and planned and certainly never meant for publication”.[[10]](#endnote-10) The intimacy of this spiritual diary however is complicated by the many editorial layers that characterize the text. Between the silent editors at the Maggid publishing house, Hadar’s summaries of Rabbi Kashtiel’s well-known class, Hadar’s own musings, and the editorial work of Hadar’s family, one finds emerging a many layered theological accounting of Israeli religious nationalism.

*The Intimacy of Sacred Texts*

In recent years scholars have turned to the power of sacred texts to negotiate social experience.[[11]](#endnote-11) As Guzmen Carmeli notes (specifically within the Jewish canonical tradition), “text[s are] a tool through which dialogue is maintained between individuals and their culture”[[12]](#endnote-12). In that sense sacred texts are not just the sole preserve of “elite” religious figures but are rather seen as existing within the social parameters of everyday experience.[[13]](#endnote-13) Following this paradigm, the anthropology of textual engagements have generally focused on the social, performative, and gendered dimensions of ‘reading’ or ‘studying’ within synagogue groups,[[14]](#endnote-14) religious seminaries, ,[[15]](#endnote-15) alongside anthropologist\*s,[[16]](#endnote-16) or as part of spiritual healing sessions.[[17]](#endnote-17) These studies are useful in that they demonstrate how textual hermeneutics can often serve as the social matrix through which everyday engagements around sacred texts can construct common feelings and expressions of communal interactions. At the same time however, this corpus has tended to elide not just the distinct theological content of sacred literature, but also their interpretive social afterlives that can both so easily exceed struct textual boundaries and which also routinely interact with larger political and historical dimensions.

Methodologically, this article grounds the study of Jewish religious literature in their contemporary social and ethnographic contexts. Following Patrick Koch’s readings of early modern Jewish pietism, this article theoretically looks to the literary modalities through which elements of “intimacy” connect between texts, readers, and surrounding social and political contexts.[[18]](#endnote-18) Borrowing from recent scholarship in literary theory, “textual intimacy” (Kort. 2012, Newman, 2009) refers to the imminent “closeness” that is generated between readers, writers and the texts that connect the two.[[19]](#endnote-19) Here, the willingness of both sides to disclose aspects of themselves finds unique expression in the space that lies between the “public and private”.[[20]](#endnote-20) The intimacy inherent in Hadar Goldin’s edited commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* operates on various levels. For one, the text reveals the spiritually intimate thoughts of its author, while also highlighting the close relationship between a father and his lost son. At the same time by focusing on competing national and personal obligations, the text also underscores the intimate dilemmas and concerns of the religious Zionist polity in general, concerns that rarely find public expression in academic or popular accountings of the confluence between religion and nationalism within Israel and the West Bank.

**The *Mesilat Yesharim* within the Context of Jewish Thought**

While the publication of Hadar Goldin’s version of the *Mesilat Yesharim* was the product of a violent encounter in the tunnels under the Gaza Strip, the commentary itself – along with its multiple editorial layers – is also intimately enmeshed in the overlapping theological, historical, and social trends of pietistic and modern Jewish thought. The current popular version of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto’s *Mesilat Yesharim* is based on a Talmudic text quoting Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair that leads adherents through a ladder of eleven ever increasing levels of ethical and spiritual perfection.

From here Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair said, Torah leads to watchfulness / Watchfulness leads to zeal / Zeal leads to cleanliness / Cleanliness leads to separation / Separation leads to purity / Purity leads to piety / Piety leads to humility / Humility leads to fear of sin / Fear of sin brings to holiness / Holiness brings to the holy spirit / The holy spirit brings to the resurrection of the dead.[[21]](#endnote-21)

For the Ramchal the cultivation of these pietistic attributes in a precise and defined order, contributes to the broader work of spiritual and divine redemption. As the Ramchal clarified,

If a man is drawn towards the world and is distanced from his creator he spoils [himself], and the world is spoiled with him. But if he controls himself and cleaves to his creator, then the world helps him to serve his creator. He ascends, and the world itself ascends with him

Overall however, the Ramchal’s tract falls short of the pietistic ecstasy inherent in many other forms of Jewish eschatological and messianic thinking.[[22]](#endnote-22) As a young rabbinic scholar, the Ramchal gained notoriety as an accused Sabbatian heretic for his interest in Lurianic mysticism, his alleged recourse to magic, and Sabbatian fidelities of his teacher Rabbi Binyamin HaCohen Vitali.[[23]](#endnote-23) Yet far from being a purely theoretical tract that focuses on messianic transcendence, the *Mesilat Yesharim* offers a “sober and restrained” avoidance of mystical language in favor of highlighting the role of the everyday, almost banal work, of ethical cultivation in ushering in divine redemption.[[24]](#endnote-24) The *Mesilat Yesharim*’s avoidance of any overt Lurianic (and thus suspected Sabbatian) mysticism may have been the Ramchal’s way of “retaining and refining his own purity” as he waited for the proper moment to once again reveal his more mystical interests.[[25]](#endnote-25)

The *Mesilat Yesharim*’s real-world piety might account for its positive reception within the various subsections of modern Jewish thought and practice. As Yeshayahu Leibowitz (2000: 23) observed, the *Mesilat Yesharim* is the only early modern theological work of Jewish thought that has subsequently been accepted by most major streams of Judaism. [[26]](#endnote-26) The text has been a popular component of the mitnagdic (anti-Hasidic) Lithuanian Yeshiva system at least since the 18th century.[[27]](#endnote-27) Subsequently it has become a canonical text of the Mussar movement, a 19th century eastern European pietistic response to esoteric Hasidic mysticism.[[28]](#endnote-28)

Ramchal himself was a popular figure within the early secular Zionist movement, who saw in his more literary poetry and prose an early example of the revitalization of the Hebrew language.[[29]](#endnote-29) As the secular Zionist writer, Hayim Nachman Bialik, wrote in his well-known poem *The Man from Padua*,

Just two hundred years separate our generation from the time of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, the master of words…he is the one that began in his days to learn the language and to speak it, true and present like it was in the days of old.[[30]](#endnote-30)

 Likewise, the Ramchal’s writings were central texts for some of religious Zionism’s foundational rabbinic thinkers. Yosef Avivi for example has noted how Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine and forefather contemporary religious Zionism, borrowed the Ramchal’s redemptive focus to produce his own pantheistic conception of divine unity and Jewish history.[[31]](#endnote-31) Indeed, The Mesilat Yesharim’s focus on worldly ascension towards divinity through personal pietistic virtues, became a rallying slogan for Rabbi Kook and his theological disciples as they developed a collectivist and progressive vision of Jewish nationalism.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Rabbi David HaCohen (popularly called the ‘Nazir’ for the ascetic Nazirite customs he practiced), one of Rabbi Abraham Kook’s main students, and a religious Zionist luminary in his own right, expressed this sentiment within his theological magnum opus, Kol Hanevuah (the Voice of Prophecy),

In this period the nation of Israel has had three movements. The Hasidic Movement, founded by Rabbi Israel Besh”t, the Mussar Movement founded by Rabbi Israel of Salant, and the Haskalah [Enlightenment] Movement, and these were all hostile to each other. All of these [however] put at their head the Ramchal.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Aside from being an example of the unifying nature of Jewish thought, the Nazir also saw the Ramchal and his writings as anticipating their own national, spiritual, and emancipatory project. As he went on to write,

The spirit of the Ramchal saturates our latest period in Israel ... The spirit of our Rabbi, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto appears over us, and over all the wise of Israel who think and view the light of his Torah, and rise up with the power of his holiness. The spirit of prophecy, the beginnings of Israel’s wisdom, which will be renewed and appear in the complete redemption of Israel, both externally and internally.[[34]](#endnote-34)

For religious Zionists, an emphasis on this “spirit of prophecy” which emerges through the process of redemption, is read within the very personal and individualistic approach taken within his *Mesilat Yesharim*. Yet, in a wider sense, the religious Zionist reading public has been influenced by the broader “spirit” of the Ramchal and the centuries of study around his literary oeuvre. For them the Ramchal’s tripartite focus on personal piety (*mussar*), proto-secular Zionism (in his emphasis on literary Hebrew), alongside a progressive redemptive vision that is unmistakably echoed within the works of Rabbi Kook, come together to form a complete hermeneutic religious-national system.

This holistic view is also related to the reliance of contemporary Israeli religious nationalism on the teachings and figure of the 18th century Lithuanian Rabbinic luminary, Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, known popularly as the Vilna Gaon (the Genius of Vilna), and by his acronym the Gr”a. In the first decade of the 19th century 511 Lithuanian disciples of the Gr”a immigrated to the Land of Israel, spurned on by what some historians have seen as a nascent redemptive drive to hasten the messianic era through natural socio-political processes.[[35]](#endnote-35) While other historians have disagreed with this interpretation,[[36]](#endnote-36) from a theological perspective most scholars have seen the Vilna Gaon’s focus on naturalistic mysticism, alongside practical socio-political action, as representing the “missing link” between the Ramchal’s style of Jewish piety and contemporary messianic Zionism.[[37]](#endnote-37)

Ethnographically, this intellectual intuition is certainly shared by religious Zionist rabbinic figures and their disciples. For example, one religious Zionist commentary on the Mesilat Yesharim authored by the students of the late Rabbi Eli Horowitz, - who was murdered alongside his wife Dina in a 2003 terror attack in the Settlement of Kiryat Arba - quoted an array of hagiographic sources noting the importance the Gr”a placed on the study of the text.

It was well known among the students of the Gra the he was particularly fond of the book Mesilat Yesharim, and reviewed it himself many times…when Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, a student of the Gr”a was asked which mussar text was appropriate to deal with he answered, “every mussar text is good to study, but the book Mesilat Yesharim is chief among them.[[38]](#endnote-38)

As with, Hadar Goldin’s commentary, Rabbi Horowitz’s students at the local premilitary seminary posthumously published his many lectures on the first few chapters of the Mesilat Yesharim. This apparent genre of contemporary sacred literature highlights the ways in which Jewish philosophical history converges with the very contemporary overlapping issues of piety, redemptive nationalism, personal loss and self-expression that are at stake within modern Israeli religious Zionism.

**Elkana’s Method: National Religious Pedagogy and the *Mesilat Yesharim***

Traditionally, rabbinic seminaries have focused mainly on the first twelve chapters of the text. These primarily concern the proper cultivation of individual attributes and are seen as being most relevant to the everyday lives and experiences of the young adults and rabbinic seminarians who regularly engage with the text. Contemporary Religious Zionist seminaries -who devote hours of the day to studying the text- also tend to draw out national and collectivist as well as distinct military significance out of this 18th century work of personal piety.

Some seminaries publish their own versions of the text. The religious preparatory academy in the settlement of Eli for example has published small soft cover three volume pocket editions of the *Mesilat Yesharim* meant to be distributed to (and certainly carried by) their actively serving soldiers. This version, which is based on the class lectures of Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel, includes on its cover an image of soldiers in the field dressed in combat gear marching in file, as if to underscore the sacrifices religious Zionist soldiers make as they themselves march along the ‘path of the just’ [Figure 2].



[Figure 2: Cover photograph of Bnei David-Eli’s pocket version of the *Mesilat Yesharim*]

The prefatory chapter of this more military focused version of the *Mesilat Yesharim* directly connects the pietistic text to the broader work of collective redemption.

Clinging to the hem of the cloak of the pious Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto…one leaves a life of enslavement to one’s passions and desires and into a world of greatness and freedom.[[39]](#endnote-39)

In utilizing the phrase, ‘*clinging to the hem of the cloak*’, the seminary, linguistically ties their focus on national service to the broader redemptive vision of Rabbis Kook and the Nazir. As the Nazir in Kol Hanevuah described the importance of the Ramchal to his teacher,

Even the movement of the revitalization of sanctity of our Rabbi [Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook], takes the Ramchal’s message. As Rabbi Kook wrote in a letter, “Even I, as little as I am, desire to cling to the hem of the Ramchal’s cloak, and to walk in his path”.[[40]](#endnote-40)

For those studying and teaching in the premilitary academy at Eli the *Mesilat Yesharim* is meant to be read as a guiding text accompanying students through the social trials of lengthy and meaningful terms of military service among fellow secular soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces.[[41]](#endnote-41) As Hadar hints in a personal comment meant to sum up the broader themes of ‘fear’, ‘love’, and ‘purity’ as it relates to personal action,

To actuate [oneself] in purity’, [meaning] that one’s actions should be performed with all one’s heart, completely. …A personal example of heroism, Elkanah’s method. To demand of myself to pave a path. When will my own activities become like the actions of my forefathers?.[[42]](#endnote-42)

‘Elkana’s method’ signifies a common pedagogical motif in Hadar’s premilitary academy of Bnei-David- Eli. The phrase refers to the Biblical figure of Elkana who – according to the headmaster of the academy – customarily visited Israelite settlements urging proper behavior through his own individual example.[[43]](#endnote-43) Within this textual passage, piety is an attribute that ought to be disseminated to others through personal example rather than force. By extension for religious Zionists – and specifically within Hadar’s seminary, ‘Elkana’s Method’, becomes a textual metaphor for how military service on the part of religious Zionists functions to transform Israeli society. Here, the religious soldier is seen as passively influencing his secular comrades through his own personal example brought out through the intimate confines of military life.[[44]](#endnote-44)

**“I Owe This to Hadar”: Between the Personal and the Political**

So, what is it about this specific early modern rabbinic and pietistic text that has made it so popular within religious Zionist circles, and specifically within premilitary rabbinic academies, such as Hadar’s at Bnei David-Eli? Though a simple question, the answer is complex and highlights the various political and theological vectors of contemporary religious Zionism.

*Theology*

On a theological level, the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s focus on a teleological progression towards spiritual redemption mirrors religious Zionism’s mystical and political experience of that same phenomenon. For Israeli religious Zionists, history moves along in stages where a utopian end stage of mystic and universal unity is predicated upon Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. In this sense, the political State and all its secular institutions become sacred elements of redemption. The state itself along with its mundane bureaucratic institutions becomes – as many religious Zionists like to say – “the foundation of God’s throne in the world”.[[45]](#endnote-45)

The religious Zionist vision of divinity residing within a corporeal nation-state can be mapped onto the final stages of the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s ladder of virtues. For the Ramchal man cannot actually experience ultimate unity with the divine. As a result, a “sanctified” individual who is approaching the end stages of the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s redemptive ladder, “is considered *as if* he is walking before God in the world of eternal life, while he is still *in this world*” (Goldin. 2018: 290 Emphasis added).[[46]](#endnote-46) The mystical significance Israeli religious Zionists place on Jewish sovereignty as being primarily played out in corporeal contexts (specifically through military service), echoes the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s focus on the corporeal context of spiritual and ethical perfection.

It is likewise important to note how the spiritual message of the Ramchal overlaps with certain military virtues that have become centrally important within Israeli religious Zionist communities. As a pietistic tract the *Mesilat Yesharim* specifically underscores both the desire and the responsibility of man to cleave to the Creator. For the Ramchal, man’s purpose in the world is to,

fulfill the commandments, to work [in God’s service], and to stand up to [spiritual] tests…he should have no other purpose in all his actions whether large or small than getting closer to the blessed one and to break all the barriers that separate him from his creator… (Goldin. 2018: 39-40).

For the Ramchal, man has spiritual obligations that must be satisfied through discipline and persistence. On this section, the editors of the volume bring in a personal note from Hadar typed in blue Hebrew script, which describes how an individual can choose to ‘escape’ from these spiritual obligations.

The most natural escape is man’s escape from himself. Against himself, against his own nature…therefore I must post the divine virtues in front of me, that is my purpose (Goldin. 2018: 40).

For Hadar, and his readers, these divine virtues are not just spiritual and theoretical. Within the context of the military, they often take on very practical significance. The same virtues propounded by the Mesilat Yesharim, such as watchfulness, zealousness and cleanliness are seen by some readers as virtues critical for military life. As one of Hadar’s friends and an editor of the text noted in an interview, “if one is zealous about the commandments, one will also be zealous about cleaning one’s weapon, or watchful on guard duty”.

 *Politics*

Certainly, the pull of Hadar’s commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* rests in how the personal intimacy of the text as a spiritual diary becomes refracted against the broader overlapping stories of political struggle and personal loss. Currently, Hadar’s body (along with the remains of anther fallen soldier, and one civilian, are still being held by Hamas. Missing soldiers – as well as soldiers whose remains have not been recovered – hold a unique place within Israel’s long developed culture of conflict-based bereavement and commemoration. As Danny Kaplan has noted, missing servicemen and women within Israeli society “signify a strong presence and the prospect of returning to everyday life. On the other hand, they signify heroic sacrifice similar to that of fallen soldiers” (Kaplan. 2008: 414). Very strong levels of popular public pressure are placed on state authorities to return captured soldiers, or their remains, sometimes at immense strategic and national costs.

Hadar’s version of the *Mesilat Yesharim* functions as a sacred textual marker through which popular pressure might be placed on government officials to actively work for the release of Hadar’s body from Hamas captivity. As Hadar’s father Simcha, noted in the text’s introduction,

As of the writing of these lines, Hadar has been in Hamas captivity for four years and has not merited being brought to a Jewish burial… This obligation of ours to walk in the path of the just, …is something that will not be realized so long as we have not fulfilled our obligation to bring Hadar from the hands of the enemy to a Jewish burial in strength and in humility. Because that is the obligation of Hadar in this world. (Goldin. 2018: 12).

For Simcha, the continued captivity of his son’s body hinders the ability of the pious practitioner from rising through the Ramchal’s processual stages of perfection. To make this point, Simcha makes a slight textual emendation to the title of the first chapter of the *Mesilat Yesharim*, titled *B’Biur Klal Chovat Ha’adam b’olamo* [The General Rule of Man’s Obligation in His World].

By altering the phrase ‘Man’s obligation’ to ‘the obligation of Hadar in this world’ his father’s introductory comment is subtly reframing the moral focus of the text from the individual to the political obligations of the State. The implication here is that, while it might be convenient for the Israeli government to ‘escape their obligation’ to release Hadar’s body from Hamas captivity, doing so would negate the State’s own moral obligation to its servicemen and women.

Simcha reiterated this point in an article he authored in the summer of 2021 within the right leaning Israeli newspaper, Yisrael Hayom. Turning to his son’s commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* to critique what he viewed to be the government’s lackluster attempts to return Israel’s fallen soldiers, Simcha notes, .

In his commentary on the Ramchal’s *Mesilat Yesharim*, Hadar wrote that one needs three things to be successful; preparation, capability and will. The situation today is clear, fear of Hamas blurs one’s understanding, bends our will, and so everyone just focuses on capability. But without understanding, and certainly without will, capability works against us.

Simcha concluded his opinion piece with a personal plea.

We work to repair the world…. I owe this to Hadar. That is how it always is. If something breaks down we have to fix it. This [Israel’s stance towards its perceived enemies] we have to fix, and the repair begins with the return of Hadar and Oron from the battlefield. Simply put. When there is understanding, capability, and will.

For Simcha, whose fallen son’s remains have yet to be returned, the *Mesilat Yesharim* presents as a moral guide for both pietistic as well as political action. The dual function of the text is meant to repair, not just individual behavior, but rather the moral, political, and strategic outlook of Israeli society.

 *Military Service*

This focus is strongly echoed within the premilitary academy Bnei David-Eli. As Rabbi Kashtiel, Hadar’s teacher in the *Mesilat Yesharim*, noted on the same introductory verses in the seminary’s own annotated edition of the pietistic tract,

If we remember that our goal is not to earn profit but to reach the next world the proportions of what we take from this world will be balanced. We won’t litter, or become great hunters, or have extraordinary appetites. We will ascend and the world will ascend with us” (Kashtiel. 2016: 100).

Here, the *Mesilat Yesharim* is more than just a personal spiritual guide, it provides a practical blueprint for a broader kind of social redemption of Israeli society. For Rabbi Kashtiel in Bnei David, this phenomenon is uniquely reflected through Israel’s system of mandatory military service. Hadar’s father, Simcha, also noted this relationship when he recalled during an interview, how for Hadar the military was a place where citizenship was made and cultivated, and where people are trained to become good citizens. In this sense, preparing for the military by studying the *Mesilat Yesharim* is one medium through which a religious Zionist can become a responsible citizen.

The 18th century text itself mobilizes certain military metaphors as a means of persuasion. Thus, for example within the 9th chapter on zealousness, exhorts the individual to always be willing to perform the arduous labor of self-perfection, “like those military men who go out to their wars, they eat in haste, their sleep is irregular, and they are always prepared for battle”.[[47]](#endnote-47) On this passage, Hadar’s personal note printed in blue script, goes further in generating a contemporary spiritual meaning to the Ramchal’s 18th century military metaphor.

We have to remember that we are soldiers, and we have a mission. We have God’s kingdom, God’s army. Blessed be he, Master of the Universe, and we belong to his holy name, God’s army….I have to be ready and alert, prepare yourself to not search for physical rest, but rather activity…[[48]](#endnote-48)

Here the Ramchal metaphorically provides the military architecture through which Hadar’s religious Zionist commentary can build a spiritual experience of constant alertness and preparedness to do God’s will.

In another instance the *Mesilat Yesharim* describes the extent to which one must be punctilious in the performance of the commandments. Citing from the Shulchan Aruch, a 15th century Jewish-legal (Halachic) text, the Ramchal writes, “And so it is said, whoever talks between Yishtabach and Yotzer,[[49]](#endnote-49) has committed a transgression, [one which requires him] to leave the battlefield”.[[50]](#endnote-50) Hadar’s class notes printed in black square font, focuses in on this relationship between the morning prayers and the phenomena of national war.

The morning prayers are organized such that after congregating together in the synagogue the prayers begin with the liturgical praise of God. Through praising God we enter into an obligation, we take upon ourselves the kingdom of heaven….War is a national cultural conversation, an act of the nation. War is not an individual act, something personal. [And so] even in the Jewish laws of war, one must be punctilious in the commandments, [it is] a social matter. When the nation fights it is a national event, if the honor of heaven is amongst us, we are victorious in war.[[51]](#endnote-51)

The focus Hadar’s commentary places on the spiritual and social aspects of war emerges naturally out of the military metaphors employed by the Ramchal in the original text of the *Mesilat Yesharim*. This vector seems to directly follow the pedagogical approach taken within the premilitary academy in Bnei David-Eli. There Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel concentrates less on the violence inherent in military conflicts, but rather on the collective, and national meaning of warfare.

While observing an afternoon lecture given in Bnei David-Eli on the *Mesilat Yesharim*, I heard Rabbi Kashtiel comment on these very passages when he contrasted between the national and collective importance of war and personal vengeance. Standing behind the seminary’s lectern and speaking without notes, Rabbi Kashtiel reminded those listening that,

Vengeance [*nekama* -Hebrew] cannot be exacted personally, it is not a personal matter. Vengeance can only be taken as part of a larger system”.

The example that Rabbi Kashtiel offered to explicate this point was a military one, related to guard duty. Though banal, it was something that most of the people listening could personally relate to. “It’s three in the morning in the guard tower”. Rabbi Kashtiel explained,

You are standing there for eight hours, and every minute feels like an eternity. All you want to do is sleep. Finally, when it’s the end of your shift, the person switching you is late. Your first instinct is to be late switching him in return, but this is personal vengeance, and it is not permissible.

The military metaphors that are found within the *Mesilat Yesharim* speak to young religious Zionists for whom long term military service in combat units is a natural part of their lived experiences. This emphasis entails its own ethical and political reverberations which are themselves contested among certain religious Zionist communities. Rabbi Kashtiel for example was speaking within the context of a spate of ‘price tag’ attacks perpetrated by Jews against local Palestinians as well as some Israeli left-wing activists. In his lecture that day on the Mesilat Yesharim, Rabbi Kashtiel was criticizing those individual actions of vengeance, by implying how military service provides a more collective (and thus ethical response) to Palestinian violence.[[52]](#endnote-52) By contrast, as Don Seeman[[53]](#endnote-53) has noted, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, one influential Hasidic figure among price tag activists,[[54]](#endnote-54) has utilized the same verses within the Mesilat Yesharim to praise -and perhaps justify - individualistic violent against Palestinians, most notably the 1994 Goldstein Massacre in Hebron’s Cave of the Patriarchs. The social afterlife of the 18th century Mesilat Yesharim includes within it a deeper conversation over not just the nature of piety, but also the ethics of violence within a modern Jewish nation-state.

The *Mesilat Yesharim*’s focus on individual perfection alongside cosmological redemption becomes a foil through which religious Zionists are able to talk about the military virtues that become such an important part of their lives. As Hadar himself wrote in the tenth chapter on cleanliness,

In war, there are many urges that suddenly emerge, there is a flow of life, the power of life, and a man has to use that energy properly, even anger…. Specifically in war when a person is excited and he doesn’t take note of the small things. At that time he is occupied with a “big thing” and in theory is not supposed to notice the particulars…specifically then you need to be on guard…that is why David builds his military security on cleanliness.[[55]](#endnote-55)

 Within Hadar’s commentary, the Biblical figure of King David becomes the hero of the pietistic text. As he wrote

Everyone must place in front of them a figure. King David – the goal to be a poet, [who was] filled with longings of the soul, belonging, loved by his God, his entire service was filled with love of God. My request – guidance, a path. King David – to demand of myself.[[56]](#endnote-56)

David the commander, king, and poet who lusts after the physical pleasures of life as he also seeks out it’s spiritual meaning in contrite penitence, becomes the “ideal image of whom one should strive to emulate”.[[57]](#endnote-57) Although not specifically mentioned within the text, one cannot help but notice how the contradictory ethical aspects of David’s biblical character echo how religious Zionists grapple with some of the contradictory ethical aspects of warfare.

For Hadar’s religious Zionist commentary the concept of war has both positive and negative connotations. On the on the one hand for religious Zionists there is a certain power to war that can enliven both the national life of a collective. As Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, the spiritual father of Israeli religious Zionism wrote concerning the First World War,

When there is a great war in the world, messianic forces are aroused. The time of song has arrived, the scything of tyrants, the wicket perish from the world, and the world is invigorated, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land (Orot Hamilchama, Ben-Pazi. 2017, 271-272).[[58]](#endnote-58)

On the other hand, the chaos, the uncertainty, and the raw emotions that emerge in war make military conflict a locus of spiritual and emotional danger. When soldiers are swept up both in “large” national causes, alongside the powerful emotions of combat, they can also forget the everyday discipline of ethical life. In this way, within the pages of Hadar’s commentary, following the Ramchal’s path of personal perfection serves to regulate the everyday habitus – both ethically and personally – of military conflict.

**The Great and the Small: Between Individual Desire and National Obligation**

The force of Hadar’s running commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* rests in the ability of the text -when placed within its social context – to touch upon deeper tensions within religious Zionist life and practice. Here the *Mesilat Yesharim* also serves as a medium through which individuals can balance between national obligation and individual expression. One central theme running through the commentary is a call on the part of Hadar to do what he terms “Gadlut” or greatness. As an early editor of the manuscript and a family friend defined the concept, “greatness or great things”, refers to actions of collective and national import in the practical as well as spiritual and mystical sense. Or as Hadar himself wrote,

Fear of heaven is standing in front of greatness. To wake up in the morning and to remember that there is greatness in the world. A man who thinks this way builds a great personality….to be awestruck is to be fearful of being small. Against something so great, there is no such thing as difficulty. In every one of my movements the world moves towards greatness.[[59]](#endnote-59)

Throughout the text one can read Hadar focusing in on this concept of Gadlut or with the desire to perform great and momentous acts on behalf of his people, nation, as well as his God. As Hadar commented in his class notes on a verse in the *Mesilat Yesharim* that cites from Psalms 27:4, “*One thing I ask of the LORD, only that do I seek: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD, to frequent His temple*”.

Man asks himself throughout his life many questions, and his big question is “what will happen with my life”? Many times a man walks round and round, yet he never reaches the issue itself, the central question of his life. You want to associate your life to something supernal, and what do you do [instead]? Minor repairs that just distract you from the big question, from the great wish.[[60]](#endnote-60)

Within the mystical messianism of religious Zionist thought, man’s goal in life is to achieve ultimate unity with the Divine. This unity is likewise reflected in religious Zionist political thought wherein a return to Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel would serve to unify first the nation of Israel, and then finally, the world as a whole. Borrowing from the *Mesilat Yesharim*, this spiritual and political program begins with an individual desire to connect to something “great”. Relating this thought to King David, Hadar continues,

King David felt that there was just one wish “to dwell in God’s house all the days of my life”’ that life should be Great. All of the minor wishes are just distractions. I want to act with God’s help. Please my God, make me a vessel for your will, in divine virtues,[through] repairing myself, [I will] repair the world.[[61]](#endnote-61)

Seeking to associate his own wishes with divine desires, Hadar’s commentary stresses a longing for meaning and responsibility in actions that are greater than oneself. “Our souls constantly call upon us” Hadar, writes to himself, “do not reduce your world solely to your own private life. Expand! Do not shut yourself up, open yourself to “the greatness”.[[62]](#endnote-62)

This personal desire for “greatness” with all its theological implications is intimately linked with what is termed among religious Zionists – specifically within the Bnei David-Eli seminary – “responsibility”. The clerical head of the Seminary [Rosh Yeshiva -Hebrew], Rabbi Eli Sadan, referenced this paradigm in his description of the rationale behind the founding of the seminary in the 1980s. For Sadan, while there were many rabbinic seminaries [Yeshivot] in Israel at the time, there were few rabbinic institutions that prepared an individual to take on meaningful and leading roles within Israeli society. He termed the latter kind of institution a *mechina* (preparatory academy). As he described,

Yet the new insight here [the creation of the preparatory academy] is that there is an ideal. **A great ideal of holiness to leave the house of study and to “take responsibility”.** To activate the sanctity that is hidden in secular life. First and foremost in the secular life of the nation: [Which are] the public systems of the military and the state.[[63]](#endnote-63)

Here, a sense political responsibility for the day-to-day workings of the state – specifically in matters related to the military – are wrapped up in much broader spiritual and ethical paradigms. Michal Kravel-Tovi has previously explored how this sense of responsibility manifests itself in the realm of Israeli State-sponsored religious conversions to Judaism. For religious Zionist rabbis “taking responsibility” for religious state conversions, reaffirms “the movements symbiotic relationship with the state” (Kravel-Tovi. 2018: 39) by highlighting their active role in mediating a shaping a critical vector through which religion impacts the political and social fabric of Israeli life.[[64]](#endnote-64)

The focus on “greatness” within Hadar’s commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* echoes this very notion of moral and national responsibility. Through personal self-perfection and individual action one “takes responsibility” for vast social and spiritual transformations. As Hadar wrote,

Fear of heaven is standing in front of greatness. To wake up in the morning and to remember that there is greatness in the world. A man who thinks this way builds a great personality….to be awestruck is to be fearful of being small. Against something so great, there is no such thing as difficulty. In every one of my movements the world moves towards greatness (Goldin. 2018: 14-15).[[65]](#endnote-65)

The notion of greatness and “responsibility” bears its own kind of political and social significance. As Kravel-Tovi further notes, religious Zionists see themselves as the principled vanguard for an “ideological community working on its moral, collective self”, who are “shoulder[ing] the weight” of a broader national and moral transformation.[[66]](#endnote-66) Nowhere are the personal stakes of this weight felt more heavily than through military service where religious nationalist soldiers are increasingly serving in both combat and command positions.[[67]](#endnote-67) Here national obligation can easily run up against personal interests and desires. Between the lines of Hadar’s commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* one finds a rhetorical prose that explores the nuanced modes through which religious Zionist adherents experience the weight of national and spiritual responsibility.

Hadar’s (and the editors) differentiation between “great”, collective, and national activities on the one hand, and individual desires on the other certainly reflects broader debates within Jewish philosophy. In the fifth chapter of Maimonides’ 12th century Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah (The Laws of the Foundation of the Torah) for example, one finds reference to two different kinds of religious knowledge. For Maimonides the “great” knowledge (Davar Gadol) is what he terms *Ma’ase Merkava* (things of the chariot), referring to the study of mystical metaphysics.[[68]](#endnote-68) By contrast “small” knowledge (Davar Katan) refers to what he termed, the debates of Abaye and Rava, meaning the more practical and everyday contours of halachic discourse. While the latter can be studied by anyone, the former is only geared for spiritual specialists. Hadar’s edited commentary on the Mesilat Yesharim maintains this basic bifurcation yet substitutes mystical metaphysics for collective and messianic inflected nationalism.

This is certainly not to reduce the force of Hadar’s edited commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* to a straightforward teenage rendition of Kookian nationalism. Quite the opposite. Throughout this spiritual diary one can read Hadar struggling with this concept of Gadlut, vacillating between the broader national commitment’s that are commonly spoken about in the Bnei-David Eli seminary, and the push-and-pull of individual experience and desires. Should the weight of one’s spiritual focus be placed on self-perfection, or on serving the interests of one’s society and state?

 A distinct focus on individual experience for example, was highlighted in a passage in the first chapter of the *Mesilat Yesharim* “man was only created to take pleasure in God”. In this instance, the commentary printed in a black square font, signaling Hadar’s class notes, reads,

A man finds pleasure when he experiences something that fits him, that completely matches his inner world. When he experiences something that does not fit him, there is no pleasure…in our everyday lives we basically see the world around us, we taste it, experience it time after time. But the world rarely sees our true souls…the richness of experience that we see around us has within it many masks and secrets that in essence hide a man from his soul, from his personality, and from himself. If I focus on pleasures that seem to change all the time, I will miss an opportunity for a more permanent pleasure, whose meaning is self-discovery. When a man says to himself: that’s good for me.[[69]](#endnote-69)

Here Hadar’s class notes seem to subtly redirect a straightforward reading of the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s original focus on discovering pleasure in the service of God, towards a more profound critique of modern life that works to hide man from what ought to be his true vocation, namely the experience of divinity. As another version of the *Mesilat Yesharim* based more directly on Rabbi Kashtiel’s lectures in Bnei-David Eli makes this clear, “One’s inner world sometimes creates feelings of discomfort, a lack of self fulfilment, the soul desires something”.[[70]](#endnote-70) Implied by Kashtiel, is that what the soul truly desires – and what is ‘hidden’ in modern life – is service to both God and State.

Hadar’s personal notes, however to go beyond both the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s focus on divine service, and Kashtiel’s critique of modern self-fulfillment. Signaling his personal thoughts Hadar commented in blue script.

To find myself within myself, to return to one’s soul…One is obligated to find pleasure. Pleasure is the revelation of the independence of the soul. Man is obligated to find himself, within himself, to discover to reveal his soul.[[71]](#endnote-71)

For one Hadar’s personal note falls just short of assuming what the revelation of the soul would uncover. Yet more critically, this personal, almost intimate comment regarding individual pleasure resists broader calls for taking upon oneself the weight of “national responsibility”. Here we find a multilayered text that resonates with the many different spiritual, political, and individual stakes of a religious nationalist experience in Israel.

In another example, the text in the fifth chapter of the *Mesilat Yesharim*, describes the importance of formal Torah study in the process of self-reflection. Hadar’s class notes describe how an hour of Torah study that is “intensive in concentration and completely serious in focus” can raise one’s self-awareness.[[72]](#endnote-72) In his personal notes, Hadar takes this idea of formal study and extends it to the everyday and individual habitus of military life.

You have free time? If you can’t study then focus on yourself, on your life, that is self-accounting. You are guarding at night? This is the time to think about yourself, on your behavior, the needs of your environment…the goals that you have not yet focused on…this is Torah![[73]](#endnote-73)

Soldiers on guard duty experience long hours of boredom, alone, with their own thoughts. For Hadar not only is this the perfect moment for self-reflection, it also takes the place of the kind of conventional Torah study indexed by the Ramchal and described within his seminary notes. Once again here one finds a multilayered text that balances between individual agency, everyday military experiences, and the more formal expectations of pietistic practice.

Most of Hadar’s commentary is focused on the first 12 chapter of the original text of the *Mesilat Yesharim*. These are the chapter most closely associated with the pragmatic features of self-perfection and are also the ones most studied in rabbinic pedagogical settings. Yet we do know from his personal comments that Hadar was also reading some of the later- more mystical – sections of the text. Indeed, in its description of the attribute of sanctity, the very last chapter of the *Mesilat Yesharim* offers a poignant example of how this pietistic text encapsulates the social, personal, and political stakes of Israeli religious nationalism.

A sanctified one, cleaves to God and his soul strolls with the true wise ones in love and fear of his creator….this man is himself considered like a tabernacle, like a temple and an altar…the divine presence hovers over them like it did over the Temple… The food that they eat is like a sacrifice ascending from the flames.[[74]](#endnote-74)

Through the hard personal labor of self-perfection, one ultimately reaches one of the final stages of ‘sanctity’. Here the Ramchal equates one who has ultimately attained this level of sanctity, to the Jewish temple whose primary ritual function was to offer animal sacrifices. The food such a sanctified individual consumes is considered as if it has “literally” been offered as a sacrifice on the altar itself.[[75]](#endnote-75) In a personal comment on this passage, Hadar writes, “a complete connection between the physical and the spiritual”.[[76]](#endnote-76) While it is unclear what this gloss is specifically referring to, the comment does hint at the various conflicts that must be grappled with by religious Zionist adherents. Relationships between the physical and the spiritual, the personal and the collective, the great and the small, serve not just as a commentary on an 18th century pietistic tract, but also echo larger tensions within the experience of Jewish religious Zionism in Israel.

Yonatan, one of the early editors of the text, intuited these same tensions. During a conversation he showed me a volume of the Talmud that was owned by Hadar himself. This version of the Talmud was published under the Hebrew title Oz Ve’Hadar (Strength and Beauty). Under this title Hadar wrote “Ha’Ritalin Me’Lublin” (the Ritalin of Lublin), a play off the moniker of a popular late 18th century Hasidic master, commonly known as the “Seer of Lublin”. “This was a joke” Yonatan said, “Hadar was funny, he was effervescent”.

Reading the text, for Yonatan, elicited contradictory emotions. On the one hand he knew this young man who had a funny, mischievous side to him, yet he was also reading this serious pietistic commentary that put such a stress on service and sacrifice. Yonatan went on to note how this intimate personal diary was a unique reflection of Hadar’s personal struggle with his own individualistic identity set against what he felt were his obligations as a soldier, a citizen, and a Jew. “At times” Yonatan said carefully and with a note of sadness in his voice, “while editing, it almost seemed like Hadar was preparing himself for death”. For some religious Zionists one wonders if - along with being a hero - Hadar also became the sacrifice that represents the Ramchal’s final stages of piety? While one cannot answer this question for an entire community, this intimate commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* only highlights the kinds of personal sacrifices that Israeli religious Zionism tends to demand from its adherents.

Within Hadar’s commentary on the *Mesilat Yesharim* one finds this focus on personal expression overlapping with a struct send of duty and piety. The pull of Hadar’s commentary and the renewed interest in the *Mesilat Yesharim* rests in this very tension. Such a commentary offers a unique medium for young men and women to better grapple with the sacrifices and responsibilities that religious Zionist society is asking them to take upon themselves. This pietistic, personal, and national experience is played out against the backdrop of sacred textual study.

**“To Caress his Handwriting”: Between the Political and the Personal**

In 2014 under the tunnels of the southern Gaza Strip an 18th century Jewish-Italian pietistic tract became the vehicle through which national fidelity, military duty, and personal expression are mediated by religious Zionists in Israel and the West Bank. Between the lines of Hadar Goldin’s edited commentary of the *Mesilat Yesharim*, the simple intimate love between father and son become intermingled with the fears and desires of religious nationalists, set against the backdrop of some of the major the broader trends of Jewish history.

A look at Hadar’s commentary with all its layers of religious Zionist exegesis, reminds scholars of religion and society how deeply intertwined the nationalistic imagination can be with the pietistic production and interpretation of sacred texts. The ideological contours of nationalism and religious conflict do not exist in a vacuum of political tension, but are rather intertwined, in a deeply intimate way, with the study, and the hermeneutic history of communal engagements with sacred texts. As Simcha Goldin described the editorial process in his introduction,

I want to thank…Hadar’s friends who granted me the opportunity…to study the *Mesilat Yesharim* with Hadar, to caress his handwriting, to talk with my son on values, to deepen my understanding of his soul.[[77]](#endnote-77)

While the deeply personal connection between father (and deceased) son was recreated through the study of the *Mesilat Yesharim*, Hadar’s commentary on the text intimately reflects the broader pietistic fears and desires of its relatively young readership. In this sense the sacred text itself becomes a category of ethnographic investigation by working to reflect the social tensions and cultural desires of its readers. The *Mesilat Yesharim*’s own focus on progressive development and its military metaphors speaks to individuals who are undergoing (or about to undergo), their own kind of personal development into adulthood through military service. Likewise, Hadar’s edited commentary functions as an intimate spiritual diary that serves to mediate between the tensions that these individuals experience between their own personal desires set against the more transcendental obligations and responsibilities placed upon them by their religious Zionist communities. Ultimately however, sacred texts are not just academically significant for their pietistic content, or for their performative power in constructing a sense of community, but are rather inescapable testaments to the personal and intimate conflicts of identity and experience that are often faced by pietistic communities within broader historical and political contexts. Scholars of religion and society would do well to consider the ways in which sacred textual traditions shape the experiences of religion, piety and nationalism within societies where hermeneutics form part of the foundation of social and religious life.

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3. Michal Kravel‐Tovi. "Shouldering the Weight of the State: Religious Zionist Citizenship, National Responsibility, and Jewish Conversion in Israel." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 41.S1 (2018): 35-50; Shlomo Fischer. *Self-expression and democracy in radical religious Zionist ideology*. (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007). 19 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Charles Taylor. "Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity." *Cambridge, MA: Harvard* (1989). 24 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
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20. Kort. *Textual Intimacy*. 7 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
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24. Elisheva Carlebach. "Redemption and Persecution in the Eyes of Moses Hayim Luzzatto and His Circle." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*. Vol. 54. American Academy for Jewish Research, 1987. 28 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. 29 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
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37. Mirsky. *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity*. 140 [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
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48. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Two sections of the morning payers where one is forbidden from talking [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
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