

RELIGIOUS KIBBUTZIM IN ISRAEL: AN EXPERIMENT IN JEWISH COMMUNITY LIFE

The practice of Judaism is centered largely within communities, rather than being primarily an expression of the individual. Some of the main prayers within the Jewish liturgy require a quorum of ten for their recitation. Most prayer — even when said by individuals — is said in the plural.” To know and be inspired by the sacred, a community is required.”¹

“...the *Shekhinah*² can dwell in the world in a fixed way, not in the hearts of individuals, however pure and sublime their thoughts and consciousness may be, but only in a congregation. Interestingly, this attitude is diametrically opposed to a widespread attitude in Western culture, powerfully resurgent in the present *Zeitgeist* that was best expressed by Alfred North Whitehead in saying that “Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness.”³

Perhaps the most powerful form of a Jewish community is a religious *kibbutz*. Although in the last few decades, several non-Orthodox religious *kibbutzim* (plural of *kibbutz*) have been established in Israel, the present essay will focus on the movement known as *HaKibbutz HaDati*, the religious or Orthodox *kibbutz*, going back to 1935.⁴ Not only a praying community, it was also a working community. As on all *kibbutzim*, each member contributed to the best of his/her ability in terms of labor; they had their needs met through housing and food, education and health care and so on. There was no monetary incentive for working harder, and the community came to the aid of its members in need.

“The religious pioneering groups in the 1920’s and 1930’s lacked a precedent in Jewish religious life to legitimate the communal system. While the monastic-like Essenes of the Second temple period did live a shared life, within Jewish historical tradition there was only a marginal awareness of this group. Accordingly, the first religious *kibbutzim* followed the model of the secular *kibbutz* in taking form and shaping their new life pattern.”⁵ For them, a religious community was in which not only the ritual commandments between people and God would be observed scrupulously, but also the interpersonal commandments, as an attempt to perfect individuals and society, morally and spiritually. At the same time, these utopian or at least semi-utopian communities would be part of the Jewish people’s national effort to rebuild its homeland in the Land of Israel.

¹ Neil E. Hirsch, “If God Is To Be in the Palace, People Are Required,” Reform Voices of Torah, www.urj.org, February 21, 2011.

² This is a Jewish mystical term for God’s Indwelling or immanent Presence in the world.

³ Chipman, *Hitzei Yehonatan: Year XII: Vayakhel*, accessed February 25, 2011 (see footnote 2 for full reference.)

⁴ There have also been two more traditionally Orthodox *kibbutzim*, of the *Poalei Agudat Yisrael* movement. They have not identified officially as Zionist nor have they affiliated with the secular *kibbutz* movement. But on a day-to-day basis, they developed similarly to what will be described in this article.

⁵ Aryei Fishman, *Judaism and Collective Life: Self and community in the religious kibbutz*, Routledge: 2002, p. 4.

Zionisms and Kibbutzim

The Israeli author Amos Oz once suggested that “Zionism” is like a family surname, while each member of the family has his or her own given name.⁶ Historically, there were many Zionisms: Socialist, Revisionist, Political, Cultural, etc. It is only in the last few years that an attempt has been made to limit the legitimacy of Zionist pluralism.⁷

A central factor within traditional Judaism has been longing for return to the Land of Israel, also called Ingathering of the Exiles.⁸ This return is often associated with the Messianic redemption. Throughout much of Jewish history, Jews waited and prayed, believing that God would send a Messianic figure who would lead them back to their homeland. 19th century modernity brought not only secularization, but also the rise of European nationalist movements and the increasing ferocity of antisemitism. In the present context, we will consider Zionism as a modern political movement, which served as a form of translating the traditional Jewish hope for redemption into human agency, through the assumption of responsibility for the Jewish people’s destiny.

Zionist leaders, from Herzl onward, employed multiple strategies for achieving the Zionist dream of a return to the homeland: diplomatic, educational-cultural and, largely, practical. Agricultural settlements as well as towns and villages began to spring up in the Land of Israel from the 1870’s. Zionism held out a promise of hope for the Jewish people, particularly during the period when they most needed it, the Holocaust. Zionism also—at least in its mainstream sub-movements—held out a promise of hope for the general human future, as well. Except for certain fringe groups—which have of late come to the fore—Zionists generally saw no inherent contradiction between the particular and the universal, and Herzl is quoted as having said that once he sees the redemption of the Jewish people, he would like to support the redemption of the Africans.⁹

Probably the most influential of the Zionisms, before the State and in its first few decades, was the movement called Socialist or Labor Zionism. Labor Zionists did not believe that a Jewish state would be created simply by appealing to the international community or to a powerful nation such as Britain, Germany or the Ottoman Empire. Rather, Labor Zionists believed that a Jewish state could be created only through the efforts of the Jewish working class settling in Palestine and constructing a state through the creation of a progressive Jewish society with rural *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* and an urban Jewish proletariat. The *kibbutzim* started in 1909 as collective agricultural settlements and the *moshavim* in 1921, as cooperative agricultural

⁶ As quoted in Richard Oestermann, *Every Second Counts: True Stories from Israel*, Gefen: 2006, p. 46.

⁷ In 2006, an organization was started in Israel called *Im Tirtzu* (If you will it...) The name is taken from a well-known quotation by Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, (1860-1904) who said, “If you will it, it is no dream.” In 2010, this group began an attack on the New Israel Fund and many human rights organizations within Israel, for being anti-Zionist. PM Netanyahu stepped up the attack in 2018.

⁸ The phrase is Biblical in origin, as in Isaiah 11:12.

⁹ Theodor Herzl, *Zionist Writings, Vol. One*, Herzl Press: New York, 1973, pp. 127-8

communities. Many of the *moshavim* were established through government initiative, for the re-settlement of new immigrants. However, the *kibbutz* movement had strong ideological roots and the settlements were set up voluntarily. They were founded on principles of equality, the dignity of labor, community, mutual aid and participatory democracy. At its height, the *kibbutz* movement numbered about 270 settlements, some of which had become industrialized. The movement never comprised more than about 7 or 8 % of the Israeli Jewish population—and the percentage has decreased to under 2%. But until recent years, members of *kibbutzim* were an elite in Israel, disproportionately serving as officers in the Army, members of the *Knesset*, cabinet ministers, etc.

The term *kibbutz* which means, literally, “gathering,” comes from the annual spiritual meetings of the mystical *Bratzlaver Hasidim*.¹⁰ This is somewhat surprising, in that the overwhelming majority of *kibbutzim* were secular, abandoning Jewish religious traditions. This does not mean, however, that they were unspiritual. For decades, the *kibbutzim* were centers of the arts and culture, as well as secular Jewish thought and progressive educational ideas. They developed new approaches to celebrating the traditional Jewish festivals, including, most famously, *Pesach Haggadot* that did not mention God but focused on secular themes of spring and human liberation.

For the first 29 years of the State’s existence, the ruling party was Labor Zionist and was closely identified with the secular *kibbutz* movement. David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s main “Founding Father” who served longer as Prime Minister than anyone until the present,¹¹ lived on a *kibbutz* in the South. But with the election of Revisionist Zionist Menachem Begin (1913-1992) in 1977, the decline in the importance and influence of the *kibbutz* movement began. Israel’s economic crisis of the 1980’s deeply affected the movement and by the 1990’s, when Communism and even Socialism were discredited as world-wide movements, privatization of the *kibbutzim* was underway. The move towards privatization had actually begun in the late 1970’s, when more and more *kibbutzim* began to re-organize their children’s homes and allow the children to sleep in the apartments of their parents. The *kibbutzim* had all begun with children’s houses, in which children of a particular cohort would sleep, dress, etc. together, rather than in their parents’ homes. Over many years, all of the *kibbutzim*, both secular and religious, have gone over to more conventional patterns of family living. But privatization of family sleeping arrangements on the religious *kibbutzim* occurred earlier and faster than in the secular communities, probably due to the central role played by the nuclear family in religious Judaism. It should be noted that on both religious and secular *kibbutzim*, special arrangements are made for caring for members and their families in their old age. A colleague of mine once joked that he wanted at least one of his children to join a *kibbutz*, so he could live there in his later years.

The religious *kibbutz* movement has been economically more successful than its secular counterparts, despite such apparent “handicaps” as adherence to strict observance of the Sabbath

¹⁰ See: Eli Avrahami, editor, *Lexicon of the Kibbutz* (Hebrew,) Yad Tabenkin: 1998, p. 269.

¹¹ Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) served as PM for a total of 14 years. Binyamin Netanyahu (b. 1949) has been PM thus far (April 2018) for a total of 13 years, but if he serves out his full term, he will surpass that record.

and Jewish festivals, a higher birth rate and a slower rate of industrialization.¹² Moreover, the process of economic privatization has been slower. One theory is that this may reflect the central role of the synagogue in the religious *kibbutz* community.¹³ Religious *kibbutz* members remain more connected with each other than do members of the secular *kibbutzim*, especially the men, who by and large see each other daily at prayer.

Religious Zionism: A Difficult Balancing Act

The following mot has been attributed to Dr. Yosef Burg, a former Cabinet Minister and leader of the National –Religious Party (1909-1990.) When asked which was more important to him, the national or the religious, he answered, “The hyphen.” Religious Zionists for many years had hyphenated identities: *Torah Im Derech Eretz*, *Torah V’Avoda*.¹⁴ This was true especially for the members of the religious *kibbutzim*, who had loyalties both to the wider *kibbutz* movement, probably the most secular segment of Israeli society, and to the broader Orthodox community. Their integration of the *kibbutz* lifestyle, which called for at least nominal gender equality,¹⁵ with the sex-segregated demands of Orthodoxy; or their wish to balance nationalism and religious humanism, provided an intellectual and social challenge to these communities. Several key philosophers arose within the movement, who provided ideological grounding for the praxis that developed.¹⁶

The immigrants came largely from Eastern and Central Europe, with many Holocaust survivors, as well as German Jews who had fled during the rise of the Nazis. Fishman distinguishes the ethos of the Jews from Germany from that of their Eastern European counterparts. Those from Germany were deeply influenced by the “general youth movement *Gemeinschaft* (community)”¹⁷ and were more concerned with rationalizing an integration of Jewish and universal values. The Eastern

¹² See: Fishman, op. cit., p. 121. Also: Aryei Fishman and Yaaqov Goldschmidt, “The Orthodox *kibbutzim* and economic success,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 20, Number 4 (1990), p.p. 505-511.

¹³ Bradley Ruffle and Robert Solis, “Does it Pay to Pray? Costly Ritual and Cooperation,” in *The Berkeley Electronic Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, Vol. 7:1, 2007, esp. p. 29.

¹⁴ The former means Torah and secular culture—started by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in 19th century Germany; the latter means Torah and Labor, and was started by Rabbi S.Z. Shragai in the 20th. The point is that in both cases, Torah is supplemented by something else. Aryei Fishman has called them “new religious subcultures in Orthodox Judaism,” in his work, *Judaism and Modernization on the Religious Kibbutz*, Cambridge University Press: 1992, p. 22.

¹⁵ See: Aryei Fishman, *Judaism and Modernization*...pp. 61-62.

¹⁶ The list would include Moshe Unna (1903-1988,) Simha Friedman (1911-1990,) Tzuriel Admanit (1915-1973,) Eliezer Goldman (1918-2002,) Yoske Ahituv (1933-2012) and Gili Zivan (b. second half of 20th century.) Only some of their writings have been translated into English. See, for example: Mikhael Benadmon, *Rebellion and Creativity in Religious Zionist Thought: Moshe Unna and the Religious Kibbutz Revolution*, Bar –Ilan University Press: 2013; Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology*, Boston Academic Studies Press: 2009; Alan Jotkowitz, “Eliezer Goldman and Judaism without Illusion,” *Modern Judaism* Volume 35, Number 2, May 2015, pp. 134-146

¹⁷ Fishman, *Judaism and Modernization*..., p. 72

European pioneers were more affected by the charismatic Jewish Hasidic traditions.¹⁸ By the War of Independence in 1948, there were already ten religious *kibbutzim* founded in the 1930's and 40's. During that war, these settlements suffered heavy losses. Six of the ten existing settlements were destroyed-- three of them abandoned in the territory that we now know as the West Bank— five of the six were later rebuilt in other parts of the country. It took the decade of the 1950's for the movement to heal and consolidate, as the State of Israel was engaged in nation-building and the absorption of mass immigration. From 1950 until 1967, there were no new settlements established as part of the movement.

During this period, the religious *kibbutzim* developed a unique Jewish lifestyle. The communities typically numbered hundreds of residents, with the larger ones approaching a thousand. The whole movement today encompasses about 15,000 members spread in 16 *kibbutzim* and 6 *moshavim shitufi'im*, sometimes translated as “communal farms,” that developed as a synthesis of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*. Now that most of the *kibbutzim* have privatized, the distinction is less sharp. Not all of the residents were members; many were children, outside volunteers, or candidates for membership. Membership, which was determined by democratic vote at the general community meetings, conferred both rights and obligations. The obligations began with daily work assignments. There was a daily work roster. Some tasks were done on a rotational basis—e.g., serving the Shabbat meals or doing guard duty—while others encouraged specialization and even professionalization through training. For the men, these jobs tended to be in agriculture and later in light industry; for the women, some agriculture, but largely service jobs (food preparation and service, child care, the communal laundry.) The notion of “the religion of labor” was developed by a nonobservant, but deeply spiritual Zionist philosopher called Aaron David Gordon (1856-1922.) His views actually influenced the secular *kibbutzim* more than the religious, although Moshe Unna, one of the chief ideological and political leaders of *HaKibbutz HaDati*, said that as an organic being, the human's creation in the Divine Image is realized through all of his actions, including manual labor.¹⁹ One of the dilemmas facing both secular and religious *kibbutzim*, as they became increasingly modernized and industrialized, was that of the option of hiring outside workers to help them.²⁰ With the process of privatization, many *kibbutzim*, both religious and secular, opened up an option for people to live on a *kibbutz* as a resident, without ever becoming a member. This involved the separation of the business and communal aspects of the settlement.²¹ In some ways, it even strengthened the religious and social aspects of community life, by having more people to draw upon for the synagogue and the cultural events.

¹⁸ For an in-depth comparison of these two different approaches, see Fishman's major works: *Judaism and Modernization...and Judaism and Collective Life*

¹⁹ Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: Between Idea and Deed in Religious Zionism* (Hebrew,) Am Oved: 1996, p.101.

²⁰ See, for example: Tal Simons and Paul Ingram, “Organization and Ideology: Kibbutzim and Hired Labor, 1951-1965, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Dec. 1997,) pp.784-813

²¹ Avraham Polovin, “Have we Prayed for this Child?” *Amudim*, (Hebrew,) Sivan 1997, no. 610, pp. 259-261

The men on the religious *kibbutzim* were expected to pray communally thrice daily and fulfill the other religious obligations of adult Jewish men. Women were exempt and attended the synagogue mainly on the Sabbath and Jewish festivals. In these early years, the *kibbutz* ate together daily in the communal dining hall, sometimes even three times a day. On Shabbat, families would sit together; during the week, only at the evening meal. Children would generally live together in communal children's homes and visit their parents every afternoon for tea and a snack.

Although women served largely in traditional women's occupational roles, they were involved in the governing bodies of the community and later even held managerial positions. In terms of Jewish religious practice, the *kibbutzim* innovated in a number of areas related to women: 1) boys and girls were educated together, with the same curriculum, that included Talmud study for girls (very few secondary schools in the Orthodox community were allowing this at the time;) 2) men and women sat together and interacted everywhere but in the synagogue, including in the workplaces; 3) women were encouraged to do two years of the Army, or at least, National Service (Army enlistment for girls had been proscribed by the Chief Rabbinate and is problematic even today;) 4) most of the women abandoned the traditional hair covering, and wore trousers or even sometimes shorts to work in the fields; 5) relations between the sexes were generally more open and allowed for mixed folk dancing and mixed swimming. This relaxed attitude was not reflected in the synagogue, which, from a gender perspective, resembled a typical modern Orthodox synagogue in an Israeli city. In the 1970's, a leading member of *Kibbutz Yavneh*, Tzuriel Admanit, suggested that girls celebrating their *Bat Mitzvah* be called up to the *Torah*, but his idea was not adopted.²²

The religious *kibbutzim* were also different from most other Orthodox communities in that they did not have rabbis. To be sure, the movement as a movement consulted with rabbis who identified with religious Zionism, but the individual *kibbutzim* did not have their own local authority figures. Decisions were made by the community, but always within the framework of Jewish law. Still, sometimes, the laws were interpreted more liberally, as we have seen with regard to some of the issues above and as developed with regard to certain agricultural questions on Shabbat or during the Sabbatical year.²³ Fishman called these *kibbutzim* "the cutting edge of religious Zionism."²⁴

HaKibbutz HaDati always saw itself as an integral part of the overall *Kibbutz* movement, trying to serve as a bridge between religious and secular Jews in Israel. They established educational programs and institutions in which religious and secular Jews study Jewish texts together. They even forged alliances with the movement of the *Bruderhof* abroad, a Christian community of the Anabaptist tradition, with whom the religious *kibbutznikim* felt a connection. From the

²² An anthology of articles by important figures in *HaKibbutz HaDati*, published in 1957, contained four brief references to women (and no articles by a woman.) The first was an admission that the roles or status of women are a topic lacking in the book. Aryei Fishman (ed.), *The Religious Kibbutz Movement: The Revival of the Jewish Religious Community*, Jewish Agency: Jerusalem, p. 22. For girls' Army conscription, see the footnote on p. 50. For women in the synagogue, see p.59. For the *Bat Mitzvah*, see p. 118.

²³ Fishman, *Modernization...*, pp.119-130.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

establishment of the State, until the second half of the 1970's, there was a strong political alliance between Labor Zionism and religious Zionism, reflected in the government coalitions.

Criticism was leveled at the *kibbutzim* that they were educating for intellectual and cultural openness more than for religious fervor. To some extent, we can see what Max Weber characterized as the “routinization of charisma.” Some critics charged them with cultivating religious mediocrity. The second or third generation internalized many of the values of their communities—most notably, Zionism, the work ethic and the dedication to challenges in their Army service—with many of the boys volunteering for combat units. But an alarmingly high percentage of the youngsters abandoned their religious commitments, especially during their period of Army service.

Later, as we shall see, young people started to abandon the religious *kibbutzim* not because they were becoming less religious than their parents but, in some cases, more. Or, at least, religious in different ways.²⁵

Messianism “on the Back Burner”

One of the main differences between the traditional Jewish belief in waiting for the Messiah and what Arthur Hertzberg characterized as “secular Messianism”²⁶ was precisely that Zionists took Jewish destiny into their own hands. Simply waiting and praying were not enough; there had to be practical human action, whether in the diplomatic, philanthropic, agricultural, or educational realms (or sometimes in a combination of the above.) Even the religious Zionists predicated their involvement in the Zionist movement on a certain acceptance of human autonomy. If they were not actually bringing the Messiah, they were, at least, paving the way for his coming.²⁷

It is worth noting that one of the leading religious Zionists was Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines, (1839-1915), who was a Lithuanian rabbi and the founder of the *Mizrachi* religious Zionist movement. One of the differences between Rabbi Reines and some of his successors within the religious Zionist movement is that he did not associate Zionism with the Messianic redemption. He saw Zionism largely as a movement to solve the problem of Jews persecuted in the Diaspora. But later, the mainstream of religious Zionism became imbued with Messianic fervor. This was due primarily to the contribution of the single most important figure in the history of the movement—Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook (1865-1935.) Only in his work was there: “a systematic

²⁵ Very little quantitative research has been done in this area. The key researcher who, unfortunately, died in 1996 at a young age (54) was Professor Mordecai Bar-Lev of Bar-Ilan University. See his “Secondary Education on the Religious Kibbutz, Between Collectivism and Individualism”(Hebrew,) in *Iyunim Bitekumat Yisrael* , A Research Annual on the Problems of Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel, Volume 6, Ben-Gurion University Press: 1996, pp. 402-425, esp. footnote no. 3 on 403 and p. 423.

²⁶ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, Atheneum Books: 1969, especially pp. 16-22

²⁷ See: Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* , Weidenfeld & Nicolson: 1981, pp. 52-55

attempt to integrate the normative centrality of the Land of Israel within the religious tradition into a radical and revolutionary reinterpretation of the political and practical activity of Zionism and the resettling of Palestine...Rabbi Kook is the one who finally presents a comprehensive Zionist religious-national philosophy, and thus the gap between religious Judaism and modern Jewish nationalism could be closed.”²⁸

Still, when the State was established, the War of Independence and the ensuing years of nation-building put Messianism largely “on the back burner.” A prayer was composed²⁹ for the State of Israel that used the phrase, “the beginning of the flowering of our redemption.” The religious *kibbutzim* pioneered in the celebration of Israel Independence Day as a religious festival, issuing a new prayer book for that day. Perhaps the most significant innovation liturgically was in their mandating the recitation of the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118) both on the eve of the day and in the morning, making the day into a kind of modern parallel to the first day of Passover. This would put them in a category quite different from the more traditional Orthodox, for whom the day is either, in an extreme case, a day of mourning, or just another “regular” day of the year, without liturgical markers. Secular Israeli Jews as well as many supporters of Israel in the Diaspora, mark the day as a secular political celebration, somewhat akin to the 4th of July in the US, to be celebrated with picnics, barbecues, and parades, but not specifically religious content. Years before the establishment of the state, Rabbi Kook had used the phrase “State of Israel” and had seen the future state in a utopian Messianic perspective, as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. But it was actually his son, Zvi Yehudah (1891-1981), head of the influential *Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva* in Jerusalem, who more fully developed this approach. Rabbi Kook the son saw not only the establishment of the State in 1948 but also its near-miraculous victory in the Six Days’ War in 1967. During those heady days, the Jewish world was imbued with a euphoria that had not been known in a long time. From that point on, Kook the son and his followers proclaimed the State to be “the pedestal of God’s throne in this world.”³⁰ Kook, when criticized for this Messianic fervor, justified it by saying, “...it is not we who are forcing the End,³¹ but the End that is forcing us!”³²

Thus, the war in 1967 was a major turning point for religious Zionism. Both in this war and in the war of 1973, the movement suffered significant losses of its young men on the battlefield. But more than that, the war of ’67 served as a renewed encounter with the centrality of the Land of Israel and the Messianic role of the State of Israel.³³

Changes in the 1970’s and Beyond

²⁸ Avineri, *ibid.*, p. 188

²⁹ By Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Dr. Isaac Herzog.

³⁰ Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, University of Chicago Press:1996, p. 83

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.63-66, 211-234

³² *Ibid.*, p. 80

³³ See: Mia Andersen Lof, “‘May He Speedily Come:’ The Role of the Messiah in Haredi and *Hardal* Judaism,” *Jewish Studies in the Nordic Countries Today*, Scripta Institute, 27 (216),pp. 243-263

In the 1970's, the religious *kibbutzim* began a two-decade process of introducing rabbis into their communities, as Jewish legal authority figures. By the end of the process, all of them had rabbis. Some members began to question whether the co-ed, liberal religious education they were giving the younger generation was sufficient for the challenges they would face.

Almost the entire religious Zionist community in Israel underwent major changes in the decades following the 1967 War. One of the first visible expressions of this was the founding in 1974 of a right-wing Messianic settlement movement called *Gush Emunim* (the Bloc of the Faithful,) that included some people living on the *kibbutzim*. In 1977, the National- Religious Party joined the right-wing political coalition with Prime Minister Menachem Begin. From then on, religious Zionism as a movement began to be identified with the Israeli right and sometimes even the far right. The centrality of the Land of Israel in Judaism became of prime importance, often to the exclusion of other values. The Zionist youth movement, *B'nai Akiva*, which had built many of the religious *kibbutzim*, took up the goal of settling the Greater Land of Israel. Interestingly, with the exception of three *kibbutzim* in the Etzion Bloc south of Jerusalem—that had a pre-State history as *kibbutzim*—none of the new settlements in the newly-conquered territories was collective or even cooperative. They were all either urban centers or what became known as a “community settlement.” They were concerned with settling the land, but not necessarily toiling on it.

The greater Messianic fervor after 1967, coupled with a growing sense that the religious Zionist community in Israel, in general, and on the *kibbutzim*, in particular, were too lax religiously, led to the rise of a new branch of Orthodoxy in the late 1970's and early 1980's. This movement, very much influenced by *Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav* ³⁴and its graduates, is generally referred to as “*hardal*,” a word that literally means “mustard,” but is an acronym for “*Haredi Dati Leumi*.” This means “*Haredi* (or: ultra-Orthodox) religious nationalist.” A Hegelian might suggest that this movement is simply the working out of a synthesis between ultra-Orthodoxy and modern Orthodoxy. The dress code in this movement is more “modest” than in *Dati-Leumi* circles, but more colorful and “Israeli” than in the *Haredi* world. Men and women wear sandals; the women wear loose, flowing skirts and long-sleeved blouses; the men usually let their beards grow, have *peyot* ³⁵and larger skullcaps; all the married women cover their hair. They are quite meticulous in their observance of religious commandments, including fairly strict separation between the sexes until marriage. The men all serve in the Army; only some of the women do, the majority preferring the framework of National Service. There is greater emphasis on Torah education, less on secular subjects, and it is not unusual to find a young man whose career goal is to be a shepherd in the hills of Samaria.

However, on a somewhat deeper level, one can say that the *hardalim* (pl.) combine challenging or problematic features of both the *Haredim* and the *Dati'im Leumi'im*. The *Haredim* are not

³⁴ A men's institution of higher Torah study in Jerusalem, founded in 1924 by Rabbi Kook senior, but since 1967, becoming increasingly right-wing, both politically and religiously.

³⁵ These are side locks, in stringent observance of Leviticus 19: 27.

committed to pluralistic democratic values, and have generally negative attitudes towards the Other but neither are they Zionists and typically they are quietists. Thus, except for a small fringe group—mostly in Jerusalem-- that organizes violent demonstrations against the Israeli government, they tend to present few problems to the Israeli polity. The national-religious, on the other hand, are Zionists and serve in the Army, but they are committed to the democratic State of Israel. If you combine Zionist militancy with a negation of democratic values, as do most of the *Hardalim*, this can pose a serious political and societal threat. Much of the anti-Arab violence in Israel in the last few years has been done by *Hardalim*.

Within the religious *kibbutz* movement, in the 1980's and 1990's, there were some interesting educational developments. Two *Yeshivot* for Jewish higher learning for men began, one on *Kibbutz Ein Tzurim* and then, a decade later, another on Ma'aleh Gilboa. The first subsequently closed, but the second is still going strong. It is probably the most liberal Orthodox *Yeshiva* in Israel. A somewhat parallel program for girls and women started on Ein HaNetziv. A co-educational program, the Herzog Center, was started on Ein Zurim, which has set as one of its aims to bring together students of many backgrounds, religious and secular, *kibbutz* and non-*kibbutz*, right-wing and left-wing, and so on. These educational institutions represent the more liberal wing of the movement. Thus, young people who are less liberal tend to look for educational experiences outside the *kibbutz* movement.

In the 90's and beyond, there have been two opposing forces within *HaKibbutz HaDati*. One was, as noted, the growing influence of the religious and political right. This led, for example, to a growing separation of the sexes in the high school on Sdeh Eliyahu, which had always been a model of co-education.³⁶ Many discussions of “religious kibbutz education—whither?” appeared in the movement's monthly journal.³⁷ Voting patterns show the marked shift, especially in the 2013 and 2015 elections. At the same time, the commitment of the members to empowering the role and status of women has grown. Women from the movement have been actively involved in *Kolech*, (“your voice,”) the Israeli Orthodox Jewish feminist organization, since its inception in 1998. It is not unusual now for *kibbutzim* to have alternate religious services, outside their synagogues, in which women take a more active role, in what is sometimes called “a partnership *Minyan*.”³⁸

The religious *kibbutz* today represents a far more pluralistic approach to Judaism than it did in the founding decades. We might use the metaphor of “a big tent.” “Today there is a great deal of diversity and there are many sub-streams within *HaKibbutz HaDati*. All of religious Zionism

³⁶ *Amudim*, (Hebrew,) *Tammuz* 1995, no. 588, pp. 268-269

³⁷ An article by that name written by Noah Hayut appeared in *Amudim*, (Hebrew,) *Tishrei* 1998, no. 625, pp. 7-9. See also, in the same issue, “Education in the Religious *Kibbutz* and its Complexity, by Uri Yaffe, pp. 13-14

³⁸ This is a product of the 21st century, first with *Shira Chadasha* in Jerusalem and then similar groups in other parts of Israel and in the Diaspora. These are “Open” Orthodox communities in which women play a very active role in the synagogue ritual. They are not fully egalitarian, but they are “pushing the envelope” in terms of Jewish law. A helpful book may be Elana Sztokman, *The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World*, Brandeis University Press: 2012.

became more diverse and also the religious *kibbutz* movement.”³⁹ Pluralism and diversity are generally considered positive and desirable values. But we might ask, how much diversity can a community absorb or tolerate? Are there limits to ideological diversity? Behavioral diversity? Political diversity?

The religious *kibbutz* movement had an impact beyond its relatively small numbers.⁴⁰ Many people passed through these communities, as volunteers, youth movement participants, people who studied Hebrew and/or studied for conversion. But they have fallen short of the goal some of their members set for serving as a unique religious and moral voice in Israeli society. There are two different theories to account for this seeming lack of success. One approach says that the religious *kibbutzim* were so closely aligned with their secular counterparts that they failed to stand out as religious models. “...the close solidarity with the secular movement acted to attenuate the religious valence of the ideological values in RKF (Religious *Kibbutz* Federation) culture, and thereby to impede this culture’s crystallization.”⁴¹

In a different way, Eliezer Goldman, one of the movement’s leading ideologues, attributed the situation to the religious similarity of the *kibbutzim* to urban or even “bourgeois” Orthodox Jews, “The departure from the ghetto has not broadened our horizons as observant Jews. We still lack the approach to broad cultural problems...’Practical’ problems of religion are still, for most of the Orthodox public, questions of arranging the ritual bath, [kosher] slaughtering, and teaching Torah, rather than how to arrange the entire technical, economic, organizational, and theoretical complex of our society according to Torah.”⁴²

Or, perhaps, in a combination of the two factors mentioned above, carving out and sustaining a unique religious model was so challenging, together with nation-building, settlement of the land, defense, etc. that a relatively small group of actors wasn’t fully up to this daunting task.

Conclusions as a Case Study for Religious Communities

What conclusions can be drawn from this brief paper that might have bearing on religious communities other than those within *HaKibbutz HaDati*?

- 1) Other religious communities also exist within a wider context. Some are concerned only or, at least, primarily, with the spiritual and communal lives of their members; others see themselves as having tasks or “missions” to perform within the wider society. Each of the options can create tensions. Tension is not always a negative thing, and can sometimes

³⁹ Personal correspondence from Gili Zivan, *Kibbutz Sa’ad*, April 17, 2018.

⁴⁰ In the interest of full disclosure, I should indicate that my own personal religious consciousness and practice were influenced by having spent three months on *Kibbutz Sh’luchot* in the Bet Sh’an Valley in 1966. Also, our congregation in Jerusalem has emulated the *kibbutzim* in choosing not to have a rabbi and in our liturgy for Israel Independence Day. See my *Memoirs of a Hopeful Pessimist: A Life of Activism through Dialogue*, Urim/K’tav: 2017, esp. pp. 41-43, 162-163.

⁴¹ Fishman, *Modernization...*, p. 145

⁴² 1943, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 147

promote creativity and innovation. Mordecai Bar-Lev has suggested that the tension between the individual and the collective foundations on religious kibbutzim may have helped them to adapt better to changing conditions.⁴³ But clarification of the aims, from time to time, is an important process for the community to undertake.

- 2) An additional tension is brought about through Utopian and/or Messianic expectations. A Modern Hebrew saying states that “As great as the expectation, so great is the disappointment.”⁴⁴ Christians know only too well that when the Messiah doesn’t return quickly, this has far-reaching implications for his followers. For Jews, it wouldn’t be a matter of returning, but of coming for the first time. Imminent Messianic expectations may interfere with living in reality. As a Talmudic sage said, “If you are planting a tree, and you hear that the Messiah has arrived, first finish planting and then go out to meet him.”⁴⁵
- 3) Successful communities will attempt to strike a balance between individuals and the group, between ideals and reality, between special occasions and routine life, between joy and sorrow, between the intellectual and the emotional. The question of gender equality is a particular question that relates to the general goals and culture of the community, but if women are not realizing their potential, this can have negative consequences for all.

⁴³ Op. cit., pp. 424-425.

⁴⁴ There is a great deal of psychological and sociological literature on responses to disappointment with Utopian expectations.

⁴⁵ Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, 1st century, as quoted in Avot d’ Rabbi Natan 31b