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Living with Contradiction: Examining the Worldview of the Jewish Settlers in Hebron

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In the West Bank city of Hebron the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still overshadows all activities. Despite the tension, friction, and violence that have become integral to the city's everyday life, the Jewish Community of Hebron is expanding in numbers and geographical extent. Since the Six Day War, the community has attracted some of the most militant groups among the settlers in the West Bank, responsible for severe violence against Palestinians, including harassment, car bombs, and attempts to blow up the Dome of the Rock mosque itself. Why do the members of the Jewish Community of Hebron wish to live and raise their children in such a violent setting? Using a series of interviews with members of the Jewish Community of Hebron and related settler communities in the period 2000–05, the article examines the ways the Jewish Community legitimizes its disputed presence. It reveals a deep religious belief, blended with intense distrust of and hatred toward the Palestinian population.

1. Introduction

In the midst of the West Bank city of Hebron, surrounded by more than 140,000 Palestinians, a group of some 450 Jewish settlers have established their homes in the heart of the Old City. Divided into four separate enclaves, the settler community is regularly accused of transforming the Hebron from being a vibrant Palestinian city into the present state where the streets are deserted of any Palestinian activity and the armed Jewish settlers thus can have the streets to themselves.

Since the Six Day War, the state of Israel has officially stated its right to these areas, asserting that settlements are an outcome of a Jewish right to establish homes there. This claim requires the Israeli authorities to safeguard Israeli citizens residing in these territories until their final status is determined.[1] Consequently there is a heavy presence of IDF soldiers present 24/7 in Hebron's so-called H2 area.

The division of Hebron into two zones, one Palestinian and one Israeli security zone (H1 and H2 respectively), is a result of the Hebron Protocol for Redeployment signed on January 15, 1997, by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Likud government, at the time led by Benyamin Netanyahu. The protocol was in turn a diplomatic outcome of the incident on February 25, 1994, when Baruch Goldstein, an American-born settler and member of the illegal ultra-right Kach party, opened fire on Muslim worshipers in the Tomb of Abraham in the heart of Hebron, killing twenty-nine before being bludgeoned to death by the survivors.[2] By dividing Hebron into two zones, the Hebron Protocol for Redeployment placed the Tomb of Abraham, as well as Hebron's Old City and thus the Jewish settlements, under Israeli security control in the H2 area. It also divided the Tomb of Abraham into two parts: one Muslim and one Jewish.[3] Moreover, the protocol committed the state of Israel to three further redeployments over the next

1 See e.g. www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAHodgjo (accessed August 19, 2007).

2 See e.g. www.hebron.co.il and Shlaim (2001, 524).

3 www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAHooqlo (accessed August 19, 2007).

eighteen months (Shlaim 2001, 580). The protocol has not been ratified by its signing parties, nor, perhaps most importantly, has any member of the Jewish Community of Hebron either signed or recognized it. Instead, the settlers repeatedly reiterate that they are not withdrawing from one single inch of the city – rather the contrary, as Noam Arnon states (1999, 32):

> The mission of Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, the first to settle in Hebron, has not been completed. Our work must continue despite all adversity. The Hebron Community is fulfilling this mission on behalf of the entire Jewish People.

Today, the Jewish Community of Hebron is engaged in a daily and at times lethal struggle to maintain – and increase – its presence. The question, then, arises: Why does a group of Jews wish to establish their homes in the midst of Palestinian population, in a highly contested territory, and live a life that the international community claims is in contradiction to international law?

This article will examine how the Jewish Community of Hebron itself legitimizes its disputed presence. The article will show how any withdrawal from the occupied territories is considered a violation of divine law, and how violence towards their opponents is considered a means for coping with the opposition. Thus, in an attempt to expose the religious aspects integral to the worldview of this group of settlers – an aspect rarely emphasized as a primary explanatory approach – the article leaves aside the larger, and already widely elaborated, political context of which settlements are part. The worldview of the Jewish Community of Hebron is highly complex, so the following discussion necessarily has to focus on the primary traits.

1.2 Material

The article is built on a wide set of material. The basis of the article is formed by thirty-two in-depth interviews carried out in the period 2000–05. Eighteen of these are with people who were or still are members of the Jewish community of Hebron. The last fourteen are with other radical settlers who are not living in Hebron, but are part of the same network as the community in Hebron. Most of the interviewees were interviewed twice.

Among the interviewees, the gender division is equally balanced, with a slight excess of men due to the relatively sharp division in gender roles in these religious communities; women are responsible for the home, whereas men are both more active outside of the confines of the home and family, and also dominate the leadership positions. The interviews were conducted by the author in the interviewees' native language – English, Hebrew, or German. All interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes or settlements, and took the form of open conversations without a rigid format.

The primary written sources used are the elaborate websites of the Jewish Community of Hebron in Hebrew and English, which were followed closely in the period 1998–2005, a number of publications by the community, and other relevant settler organs.

The Jewish Community of Hebron and its supporters publish a number of leaflets as well as the bimonthly magazine *Hebron Today* where much information regarding the community's activities can be found. Information online can be accessed on the community's two websites, in Hebrew and English respectively.[4] Although commentaries on political issues on a regional and national level are published on the website, the many theological references on these websites are more prominent and it is these that comprise the basis for the analysis in this article.

To respect informants' wish to remain anonymous, they have been given fictitious names. Fictitious names appear in quotes.

4 See www.hebron.com for the English version and www.hebron.co.il for the Hebrew version (both accessed August 19, 2007). Though there have been major discrepancies between these two versions over the years, they are now coordinated and the information on both sites is similar.

2. The Theology

In an interview on July 26, 2000, spokesperson David Wilder stated:

> Everything that happens now is written in the Tanakh [the Hebrew Bible]… . God decides everything. Hebron is where it all started and where it all continues. It is not a coincidence that the Jewish Community of Hebron exists today or that people do as they do there. History proves us right.

The statement spells out two central dimensions in the worldview of the Jewish community of Hebron: Firstly, the *literal* understanding of the sacred texts. Secondly, the understanding of themselves as *active and decisive parts* in the cosmic puzzle called "contemporary history."

2.1. The Theopolitical Heritage

The theopolitical religious Zionism taught at the Merkaz haRav Yeshiva (Talmudic academy) in Jerusalem is fundamental in any understanding of the mindset of the national/religious settler movement, and accordingly also for the members of the Jewish community of Hebron. This *religious* Zionism considered *secular* Zionism as deriving from religious roots, and thus the actions of secular political Zionists as leading towards a religious destination (Aran 1987, 8). Consequently, although the secular Zionists instigated immigration to the territories of the Land of Israel with the secular hope of establishing a home for the Jews, these religious Zionists associated this hope with redemption, claiming it was essentially religious. Thus, religion was Zionist and Zionism was religious.

Following the Six Day War, Israeli civil society was struck by what Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak called "imperial conviction"; a sense of having returned to the cradle of Jewish civilization blended with a sense of "wanting more" (Sprinzak, 1991). The land was conquered, now it needed to be settled. The students of the Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav set about their task with sincerity. As an example of *messirut ha-nefesh,* a "complete devotion to the holy cause," student Rabbi Moshe Levinger saw the Jewish territorial expansion as implying an obligation to ensure that the Land of Israel would again be settled by Jews. And, already in 1968 Rabbi Levinger headed for Hebron to establish a Jewish enclave in the city.[5]

Drawing heavily on the theological education given at the Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav and led by Rabbi Levinger, the students later established the influential Gush Emunim (Block of the Faithful) movement in 1974.[6] Gush Emunim was a redemptive movement, giving new life to the Zionist spirit of Jewish state-building, with the aim of settling and cultivating the Land of Israel, thus claiming that its members were the true heirs of Zionism, following up the work of the early pioneers who settled inside what in 1948 turned into the state of Israel (Aran 1987).

The worldview of Gush Emunim, and thus also the theological basis of the Jewish Community of Hebron, was created by the head of the Merkaz haRav, namely Rabbi Avraham Kook, and later developed further by Rabbi Tsvi.[7] The worldview can be summed up in three primary postulates: Firstly, the Land of Israel in its entirety is holy. Secondly, the People of Israel are holy, having a latent sacred "spark." And thirdly, we now live in the Age in Redemption, signaled by the gradual return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel throughout the twentieth century, and the consolidation of its territorial possessions in milestones such as the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 or the Six Day War of 1967.

This last point is crucial. In the times of redemption, the Land and the People must be united in order for the Jewish People to fulfill their religious Commandments and live as proper Jews. There is, in other words, an intrinsic,

5 The establishment of the Jewish Community of Hebron and of Gush Emunim have already been widely elaborated upon, for example by Sprinzak (1991), Aran (1987), and Lustick (1988).

6 Gush Emunim was not formally established until 1974, triggered by the outcome of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. With the territorial concessions Israel faced after the war, the Gush Emunim founders "felt it their duty to set up a barrier capable of stopping unnecessary territorial concessions" (Sprinzak 1991, 29).

7 The significance of these two rabbis cannot be overestimated. As "Zhira" said in an interview in October 2002: "Rabbi Kook set the state of what we see today. His son, a righteous man, followed up and showed us where to go. And we have walked from there."

sacred link between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel that cannot be compared to that of other nations and their states. But, perhaps more importantly, it implied that Jews must create settlements in the Occupied Territories in order to further the redemption process. In practice, this meant that the young generation of religious Zionist activists equated the extent of redemption with the borders of the State of Israel – in other words, the state of Israel represents a sacred unit, being a primary element in the process of redemption (see e.g. Sprinzak 1991; Aran 1987; Ravitzky 1990, 1996; Lustick 1988; Røislien 2002, 2006).

Added to this, and in consequence also radicalizing the worldview further, were Rabbi Avraham Kook's teachings on war. He wrote that "even through the destruction of war, the light of *Mashiach* appears. The power of *Mashiach* is released when a great war grips the world. In fact, the greater the magnitude and force of the war, the greater the revelation of *Mashiach* which follows" (Samson and Fisherman 1997, 38–39). To Rabbi Kook, the Messiah is not the idealized Jewish King, but a *process* that will evolve over time, triggered by a massive war. Rabbi Tsvi reinterpreted his father's views on war by contextualizing them. Encouragement to settle in the West Bank left the Jewish settlers with a problem; they came into open conflict with the Arabs living there. But instead of condemning violence, they condoned it, believing that the very fabric of the Land of Israel had been spun as a web of conflict that would usher the coming of the Messiah. Thus, conflict is considered as a positive element.

Just as the old pioneers had managed to create a state, a new effort was now required to settle in the West Bank, in the Biblical Judea and Samaria. The Israeli state borders were strangling the Jewish right to these lands, they said. The spiritual leader of Gush Emunim in its early days, Rabbi Tsvi Yehuda ha-Cohen Kook, even went as far as referring to the pre-1967 borders as "Auschwitz borders" (Hoch 1994, 27). This reflects the essential radicalizations of the theology of land that Gush Emunim represented, emphasizing the borders of the state as the key to redemption. This has contributed to drawing Israeli politics into the religious sphere, also adding religious value to human participation in politics (see Friedman 1992, 18; Aran 1987; Sprinzak 1991, among others).

2.2 Biblical Tenets

Two fundamental elements of the Hebrew Bible storyline are emphasized in the worldview of the Jewish Community of Hebron.[8] Firstly, the clear understanding that the Land of Israel was given to the Jewish People for eternity. Secondly, Hebron features in central events of the Hebrew Bible; according to the Jewish community Hebron is mentioned eighty-seven times in the Torah while Jerusalem is only mentioned once. The Community has only existed in the city for some thirty-five years, and its religious outlook is clearly influenced by historical and political events occurring in the twentieth century.[9] Nonetheless, one finds in its teaching numerous Biblical references with a clear understanding of the history outlined in the Tanakh as being the literal history of the Jewish People.
A cardinal motif in the Tanakh is how God makes a territorial covenant with a representative of the chosen tribe. There is no doubt that land, with its associated rights and privileges, was and is a factor of great historical, ideological, and theological significance for the life and faith of the People of Israel. Professor of theology James Parker even goes as far as saying that Judaism per se is "tied to the history of a single people and the geographical actuality of a single land" (Blum 1987, 105).

The divine connection between God and the People of Israel, later narrated as the Jewish People, finds its roots already in Genesis 12 and 13. In this text, God makes what is in sacred territorial terms the most significant – the covenant with Abraham – which makes Abraham leave his father's house and settle in Hebron (Gen. 13:18). The covenant between God and Abraham and the subsequent

8 Several of the central elements found in the worldview of the Jewish Community of Hebron are similar to those of previous Gush Emunim leaders. The Chief Rabbi of the Jews in Hebron, Rabbi Moshe Levinger, was among the founders of Gush Emunim, and thus highly influential in the development of the national/religious Zionist settler movement and its ideology.

9 Setting a clear date is difficult, as its founding date is disputed. The first attempt to set up a settlement was made in 1968, the second in 1979, although the presence of the community in the city was not formally recognized by the Israeli government until 1980.

settlement in Hebron, has for the settlers today evolved into a conductive element where settlement in Hebron equals the reaffirmation of the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham.[10]

God's promise of the Land to Abraham is reaffirmed with Moses (Exod. 6:5–8). The covenant with Moses differs from the covenant with Abraham in the fundamental aspect of whether the Land is given to the people *with* or *without* conditions: The covenant with Moses, eschatological in character, is dependent on the People of Israel fulfilling the commandments for the promises of the covenant to be accomplished (Davies 1991, 8). The Jewish Community of Hebron interprets the legends of Moses as saying that Moses was first shown the Tomb of Abraham in Hebron:

> Prior to Moses' death, G-d showed him the entire land of Israel. Scholars emphasize the fact that Moses was shown the Cave of the Machpelah [Tomb of Abraham]: "And G-d showed him the entire land and the Negev *(southern region)*" (34:1,3). This verse teaches us that He showed him the Machpelah Cave where the patriarchs are buried.[11]

The covenants with Abraham and Moses are interpreted as giving the People of Israel *inalienable rights of possession to the land.* The promise has been restated and reconstructed through the generations in such a way that it has become a driving force in the life of the people. Possessing the land is an eternal task, and living there is a divine promise (Davies 1991). For the religious Zionists, the promise implies that attaining total religious integrity also includes the desire to return to the Land of Israel. Consequently, it has been a defining element in the idea that Jewish civilization outside of the Land of Israel is *exiled.* But, for the Jews of Hebron, exile ended in 1967.

The revival of contemporary religious Zionism, messianic in its aspirations, must be seen in relation to this: the time had come to re-establish the Divine Kingdom. Rabbi Eliezer Waldman, who was among the group that first came to settle in Hebron in 1968, refers to the endeavor as a *return,* saying: "The prophets warned of two exiles and two returns. Just read Jeremiah – he predicted the exile. But there was not warning of a third exile. Now we have returned and we have come to stay."[12]

Among the members of the Jewish Community of Hebron, then, Hebron is given particular significance in the "cosmic drama":[13] The city is considered second in line in terms of sanctity, only exceeded by Jerusalem, reflecting the hierarchical interpretation of geography within Judaism (Kunin 1998). The Jewish settlers in Hebron express a literal understanding of the Hebrew scriptures, as "Dorit" clearly shows in her explanation of why she has chosen to settle in Hebron: "I can quote it to you – it is all here in the Torah. Read Genesis 23 and you will understand."[14]

The most emphasized narrative amongst the Jews of Hebron concerns Abraham, who in Judaism is considered to be the Jewish Patriarch – and among the Jewish Community of Hebron, considered to be the first Jew in Hebron. But other Biblical figures and their ties with Hebron are also given considerable attention, including as Sarah, Jacob, Leah, and Rebecca. The overall effect is to identify Hebron as a sacred, *Jewish* city.

Jewish mythology is seen as the vehicle of God's presence in the world (Lancaster 1998, 13–14). Jewish religious history is defined in relation to Israel, and aspiring to settle in the Land of Israel when conditions permit. Returning to Israel is understood within the context of a purpose of history, as a forerunner to the coming of the Messiah.

10 E.g. with Isaac (Gen. 26:3) and with Jacob at Beth-El (Gen. 28:3–4, 28:12–15, 35:11–12.

11 From the Jewish Community of Hebron's website; original emphasis.

12 Rabbi Eliezer Waldman refers to two mythical exiles in the Bible to verify this claim: In about 921 BCE the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, with Judah in the south and Israel in the north. The northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BCE. The southern kingdom fell to Babylon in 586 BCE and a large part of the population living in the Land of Israel was brought to Babylonia. In 538 BCE, King Cyrus of Persia permitted the Jews to return to their land, where they also were allowed to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4, 6:3–5), earlier destroyed by the Babylonians. In 70 CE, the Temple was once again destroyed, this time by the Romans. Interview with Rabbi Eliezer Waldman August 1, 2000.

13 See the Jewish Community of Hebron's websites for elaboration.

14 Interview with "Dorit" August 3, 2000. In Genesis 23:2 Kiryat Arba is also called Hebron, and thus living in Kiryat Arba is living at the site of Biblical Hebron.

The precise delineation of the exact borders to the Promised Land is disputed. The maximum extent of the promised territory is given in Genesis 15:18, corresponding to the Land of Canaan: "On that day, God made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates'" (Gen. 15:18).[15]

The settler movement today has a maximalist interpretation and a gradualist approach to action. A former leader of the settler movement's Yesha Council (the representative body for the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza), Yehudit Tayar, said that although the ultimate aim is to settle the entire Land of Israel in its widest definition, one has to take one step at the time.[16] Therefore, today's generation struggles for the most imminent settlement issues and leaves settling the remaining parts of the Land of Israel to generations to come. Consequently, the Jewish Community of Hebron has taken on the task of settling in the core area of the Land of Israel, close to the roots of the Jewish People, in order to secure a safe stronghold in the Land. It is thus the settling in the land that secures possession, and this is therefore significant in its own right (Schweid 1985, 20).

To the Jewish community, Hebron plays a crucial role in Jews' maintenance of the intrinsic and unbreakable link with the Land of Israel, as the very roots of the Jewish People are located in Hebron, which is a determining factor in designating the sanctity of Hebron.[17]

2.3 The Sanctity of Hebron

The sanctity of Hebron is inseparably linked to the Tomb of Abraham, which is where Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Leah, and Isaac and Rebecca are all mythically believed to be buried, and a place with crucial religious significance.[18] It is thus through the Tomb of Abraham that Hebron attains its significance as the place containing the roots of the Jewish People. We can identify three primary factors that together constitute the religious sanctity of the city:

Firstly, Abraham resided in Hebron where he purchased a cave in which he was buried, "The Tomb of Abraham." Genesis, primarily Genesis 23, combines the story of Sarah's death and burial in Hebron with a fuller description of Abraham's purchase of the cave from the Hittites. Although it is Sarah's death that triggers the purchase of the cave, her death has little place in the narrative. Rather, it is the *purchase* that is the central issue, as it underscores how Hebron was the first place a Jew – Abraham – acquired land in the Promised Land.

Secondly, King David was anointed king in Hebron.

Thirdly, the Tomb of Abraham covers the entrance to the Garden of Eden. This authoritative narrative is found in the primary holy scripture of the Jewish mystics, the Zohar.[19] Hence, the narratives of the Tanakh and the Zohar together outline the sanctity of Hebron, also pointing at the kabbalistic elements that the Jewish Community of Hebron embraces. Redemption will be fulfilled when the masculine and feminine aspects of God are united in the Tomb of Abraham.[20] The Jewish Community of Hebron explains:

> Ma'arat HaMachpela is the threshold to the Garden of Eden, the place where our prayers ascend On High, and the place where our souls ascend to the celestial realm. According to the Midrash, it was Adam who discovered the secret of the place. Moreover, it was he who dug out the cave and buried Eve in it. Later on, Adam himself was buried there. We can thus understand why Abraham wanted precisely this place.[21]

15 Other delineations are also given in the Torah though they all centre on the designated area given in Genesis 15:18. See e.g. Deut. 11:24–25. The citations are taken from The King James Study Bible: King James Version (Nashville, 1988: Thomas Nelson Publishers).

16 Interview with Yehudit Tayar, January 20, 2000.

17 See www.hebron.org (accessed August 19, 2007). This was underscored by all interviewees. E.g. interview with "Dorit," August 25, 2000: "In the beginning God created the world. And since God created the world, then he also knew who to give the land to. He gave the Land of Israel to the Jewish People. So this is why we are here, and why we stay."

18 See www.hebron.co.il, www.hebron.com.

19 The Zohar is a mystical, i.e. kabbalist, commentary on the Torah (the Pentateuch) and much of Nevi'im (the Hagiographia).

20 See the Jewish Community of Hebron's websites for more details.

21 www.hebron.com

What we see here is that there were not only the three couples Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah who are buried in Hebron. Adam and Eve were too. In other words, there are *four* couples buried in Hebron, nourishing the mystic emphasis on numbers and the explanation of the name Kiryat Arba as meaning the "City of Four," i.e. four hallowed couples.

In addition to these elements – the purchase of Hebron and the Cave of Machpelah by Abraham, the burial place for the patriarchs and the matriarchs, the entrance to the Garden of Eden, the place at which David was anointed – the Jewish religious tradition in which the Jewish Community of Hebron stands also tells of Hebron as being the location of other sites of sacred value. For example, according to tradition the Tomb of Ruth and Jesse is located in the Tel Rumeida settlement enclave, and the Terebinths of Mamre, the *Alonei Mamre* (mentioned in Genesis 18:1 as the place where God appeared to Abraham before he went to Hebron to purchase the cave) are situated on the outskirts of Hebron.

Furthermore, Jewish tradition says that King David's Pool referred to in the Book of Samuel (2 Samuel 4:12) is located in the center of Hebron (and today known locally as the Sultan's Pool). This also goes for the first judge, Otniel Ben Knaz (Judges 3:9–11), and the Tomb of Abner, who was the general of King David and Saul, both located in Hebron. The Book of Joshua also states that Joshua assigned Hebron to Caleb from the tribe of Judah (Joshua 14:13–14).

Even though not all of these places necessarily are decisive individually, they add up to form an understanding of Hebron as being a sacred, Jewish city.

2.4 Reunifying God

Hebron is viewed as representing the source of the Jewish realm, and can thus be expected to have a fundamental role in the culmination of the Messianic era when all Jews are again gathered in the Land of Israel. This understanding, however, has repeatedly caused rabbis and Jewish theologians trouble. Ideally, God dwells with His chosen people in the Land of Israel, i.e. the triangle is "complete" when the Jews are living in their Promised Land. However, if the Jewish People live in exile – does it affect the relationship between God and the Land, and God and the Jewish People? In other words, does God have a location?

Traditional rabbinic Judaism emphasizes the unity and oneness of God. However, the religious outlook of the Jewish Community of Hebron is influenced by the Jewish mysticism of *Kabbalah,* which relates the question of a location of God to the two religious epithets *Maqom* (literally "place") and *Shekhinah* (literally "dwelling").[22] *Maqom* is understood as signifying omnipresence rather than pointing at a particular place, but also designates God's nearness; it refers to the God who reveals Himself in whatever place He wishes (Urbach 1979, 72). *Maqom,* therefore, signifies an inherent tension in God's omnipresence, implying that God also resides in every place.

Bridging the gap between omnipresence and place, between heaven and earth, is the concept of *Shekhinah.* Shekhinah is a Talmudic epithet expressing the presence of God in a place though *not limited* to this place (Urbach 1979, 66). In rabbinical literature *Shekhinah* is literally translated as "God's divine presence." However, in Kabbalah, the concept of *Shekhinah* is defined differently. A mystic-messianic interpretation of the *Shekhinah* views it in duality, with a feminine and masculine aspect, where the feminine aspect shares in the exile of the Jewish People.

Redemption implies reuniting God's feminine and masculine aspects. The Kabbalist interpretation of redemption gives Hebron high symbolic value. This must be seen in light of the Hebrew name of the Tomb of Abraham, the *Ma'arat HaMachpelah.* "Ma'arah" means "cave" in Hebrew, and "Machpelah" means "double". The most common religious interpretation of the cave's name reflects the perception of it as being the burial place of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish People, i.e. husband and wife; a "doublet."[23] In addition to the significance the Cave acquires by being such a burial place, it is implied that there is both a feminine and a masculine aspect represented in the Cave.

22 The Hebrew root *sh-kh-n,* constructing the verb *shakhan,* literally means "to dwell."

23 See www.hebron.com.

My interviewees emphasized that the redemptive phase of reuniting the aspects of God will be centered in the Cave. The Light of God is particularly strong in the Tomb of Abraham, and the Cave is a place in which God's masculine aspect dwells. The feminine aspect, the *Shekhinah,* was exiled with the Jewish People. The return from exile signifies the beginning of the Age of Redemption. Overall, these two aspects will be united with the return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel. But at a more specific level, these two aspects will be reunited in the Cave. In other words, the unity of God, the Jewish People and the Land of Israel will be embraced and founded in the Tomb of Abraham, the *Ma'arat HaMachpelah.*

3. Contextual Elements

In an interview in Hebron's Avraham Avinu settlement on July 26, 2000, spokesman David Wilder summed up the official argument for why the Jewish Community of Hebron sees the city as laden with such decisive religious and symbolic value:

> Hebron is the roots of the Jewish People. Hebron is where the Jewish People began, where all of monotheism began, where Abraham lived, the Patriarchs, the Matriarchs, King David – this is the foundation of the Jewish People, and if we don't have the right to live here, what right do we have to live in Tel Aviv or anywhere else? This place is important to us spiritually … you are talking in terms of a spiritual place … one of the most important sights of the world. And this is of course the heart of Hebron. Jews have lived here for thousands of years, up until the Arabs massacred us in 1929. And now, after Judea and Samaria was liberated in 1967, we have come back to stay again.

This statement sums up the importance of Biblical elements in the way the Jewish Community of Hebron legitimizes its presence (as described above), but it also adds another dimension, namely the contextual aspects. By bringing in sentiments towards the Arab population – the local Palestinians – the spokesman also states *who* the Jews of Hebron point out as their prime enemy and *why* they have come to the city to stay.

3.1. The 1929 *Tarpat* Trauma

Today one can read "Lo od Tarpat" ("Never Again Tarpat") on huge banners and graffiti in the H-2 area. "Tarpat" is the Hebrew name for the year 1929 (5689 in the Jewish calendar),[24] which stands for an unforgettable trauma, due to the anti-Jewish riots that occurred during the summer that year. Tensions between Muslims and Jews had increased in British Mandate Palestine and days of unrest occurred repeatedly. A major element in the dispute was access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem. On August 22, 1929, violent clashes between Jews and Arabs occurred in Jerusalem.[25]

Rumors reached Hebron the same afternoon, claiming that a bloodbath was taking place in Jerusalem, where Jews were allegedly slaughtering Arabs. Arab reactions resulted in the eruption of riots and protests against the Jews in Hebron. When the riots finally ended on the evening of August 23, fifty-nine people had been killed, and another eight died of their wounds the next day. Subsequently, the British authorities evacuated the surviving Jewish inhabitants to Jerusalem. Thirty-five of these families returned to Hebron in 1931, but the attempt to resettle was destroyed by unrest in 1936, when the British authorities, fearing new anti-Jewish uprisings, evacuated the Jewish inhabitants on April 23, 1936. From 1936 until the Jordanian conquest of the city in 1948, only one Jew lived in Hebron, and from 1948 until 1967 no Jews were present in the city at all.

The Jewish Community of Hebron today does not have any family ties with the Jewish community of 1929 – on the contrary, the relatives of Jewish families of 1929 strongly oppose the presence of the Jewish Community of Hebron (Abusway 1997). Nonetheless, the settlers today strongly

24 This also reflects the numerological influence from Kabbalah. Other similar interpreted abbreviations are e.g. the abbreviation for Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, *Yesh'a,* which literally means "salvation" in Hebrew. Written in Hebrew, the Six Day War spells the word *ko'ach,* which means "strength." Also, Kahane Chai, a splinter group from Kach, has the abbreviation *ko'ach.*

25 The exact course of events has been given relatively little attention within academic research, and there are few impartial sources. The incident is widely covered on the website of the Jewish Community of Hebron. However, outside the Community the incident is mentioned more in passing, such as in Michael Feige's works (1996 and 2001).

identify themselves with the pre-1929 Jewish community in Hebron and consequently view the Arabs with distrust: "The murderers still walk the streets," one interviewee replied to the question of why she did not buy her groceries at the local Palestinian shop but preferred to take the bus up to nearby Kiryat Arba or go all the way to Jerusalem.

The Tarpat incident thus represents a significant milestone in the collective memory of the Jewish Community of Hebron. As the Israeli anthropologist Michael Feige explains in his article "The Settlement of Hebron: The Place and the Other" (2001), the contemporary settler community initiated the narrative of *return* to the city after the massacre of Jews in the city in 1929; they have in other words returned to restore the ancient community, thus creating a discourse of legitimacy for their occupation of Palestinian homes (Feige 2001). Feige even goes so far as claiming that the collective memory of the contemporary Jewish Community of Hebron has undergone a process of *Tarpatization;* they relate so strongly to what occurred in 1929 that it both impinges on the personal relationship each member of the community has towards the Palestinian residents of the city and counts among the founding pillars of their common identity (Feige 1996). In other words, the Jewish community today projects the incident of 1929 is unto the Palestinians, creating the image of the Palestinians both being responsible for the 1929 massacre and inclined to carry it out again.

Visually, the Tarpat is commemorated by a museum in the Beit Hadassah settlement cluster. The exhibition is a collection of brutal pictures of the physical harm the members of the old Jewish community of Hebron were subjected to. But perhaps more important is the significance of Tarpat for the Community's notion of Hebron's Palestinian population today. As David Wilder said when commenting on a clash between Jewish settlers and Palestinians in May 2001: "It is all like the massacre of the Jews in Hebron in 1929. Nothing has changed. They are animals" (Quirke and MacAskill 2001).

Wilder's assumption is common within the community. "If you follow the 1929 story, it follows an ever-recurring pattern," Elyakim Haetzni said when describing the relationship with the Palestinians. Accordingly, historical injustice by the Arabs tends to result in "anti-Arabism" that occurs as an additional motif for both the community's presence and not least its actions. The exhibition at the museum can be described as "visual proof" of a historically authentic cultural heritage; it consolidates the mythical and cultural past (Hylland Eriksen 1996). Culturally normative meaning is therefore exchanged with historical descriptions of the event.

As places are culturally constructed, one cannot dismiss ties to history. Culture is identity. Thus, historicity and identity are primary components in the construction of the legitimacy of place. Emphasizing the historical significance of the place for the culture in question "verifies" the culture's right to the place. The social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains in his book *Kampen om Fortiden* (The battle for the past) (1996, 75–80) how constructing and sustaining the impression of an authoritative, heroic past that is tied to a particular place is an important underlying process in cultural identity. To establish a historic "prescriptive right" to a particular place is therefore an important constituent in the construction of a cultural identity. Thus, establishing a connection to the Tarpat becomes a significant element in the process of legitimating a rightful notion of belonging.

3.2 Pioneers for the Divine

Needless to say, the settlement endeavor has turned into a highly controversial political issue, resulting in continuing clashes and eruptions of violence between the settlers and local Palestinians in the West Bank. However, despite meeting resistance, the religious Zionists are not ending their settlement endeavor. In accordance with the theological significance of Hebron, the very act of settling in Hebron is considered both "a right and an obligation," as all interviewees said, using the Hebrew terms *zkhot* and *chova* to explain this perspective, irrespective of their native tongue. In other words, they have a *divinely defined responsibility to take care of the Land.*

At his home in Kiryat Arba, Baruch Nachshon, who together with his wife Sarah was among the very first to come to Hebron, told me how he had practically felt God choosing him to go to Hebron: "Don't think that I only live here because I want to. I also live here because that is

what the Scriptures say that I should do."[26] Other members of the community also explained their reasons for staying in Hebron in similar terms. In an attempt to show the sincerity of her choice "Zhira" said:

> Israel, and above all Hebron, is a very uncomfortable place to be in if you don't take on the Commandments. I have friends visiting from the U.S. who wonder what I am doing here. They just look around and see how bad it all looks from the outside. Hebron is a very earthy place. Of course spiritually, but look around you – there is dust and mud everywhere. But everyone pays a rent for his flat. My rent is dirt and hostility.[27]

In other words, Hebron is not viewed in terms of its physical expression, but in *terms of the layers of significance and sanctity.* A complete Jewish life can only be lived in Hebron, and the land will wither away without the Jews.[28] Theologically, the Land needs the Jewish People, but the claim is also reinforced through historical arguments. Elyakim Haetzni emphasized that the desert in Judea and Samaria gradually began to flourish with the Jews, saying:

> I remember the day I heard a bird here for the first time. It was a total desert here until we came and built it – look around you – we built all this. It was nothing until we came. Absolutely nothing. Just dry sand. The Arabs will say that "you took all this from us," but that isn't true. We made it flourish. And if we leave, all this can be destroyed in a day.[29]

To be a Jew you have to act like a Jew and realize, and accept, the responsibilities that come with it. Thus, the settlers reassert their Jewish identity through the connection and proximity to the actual land.

As seen above, the promise of land as a defining element in the constitution of the nation is fundamental to the Jewish Community of Hebron, and distinguishes the Jews from other nations. This promise is interpreted as a redemptive *responsibility* given to the People of Israel. Hebron was the first city in which the nationalist religious Zionists tried to establish a Jewish settlement, and it has also proven to be one of the most difficult settlements to maintain due to the everlasting friction between the two populations. Consequently, a "pioneering spirit" pervades the settlement in Hebron. "We are the head of the spear" Nomi Horowitz, a resident of Beit Hadassah, said in an interview with *Time* (McGeary 1996).

However, despite both the sanctity of Hebron and the emotional attachment to the city, Hebron is hierarchically second in line after Jerusalem, so why not settle there? It was only a handful families that actually established the Community, so most of the members moved to Hebron *after* it was established and cannot be considered pioneers in the strict definition of the term. So why do they come to *stay?*

"Zhira" explained that the very fact that Hebron was a contested place was part of the reason why she came. It is a question of moving barriers. She pointed out that the most contested places were the most sacred ones, and vice versa, and this very fact explicitly shows that it is a place worth fighting for.[30] According to the Israeli sociologist Miriam Billig, the risks the Jews of Hebron are exposed to – including the threat that their homes may be taken away from them – contributes to forging a stronger emotional attachment (Billig 2006). In "Is My Home My Castle? Place Attachment, Risk Perception, and Religious Faith" (2006) she examines the sense of belonging and attachment to their homes among the (now evacuated) settlers in Gaza, and shows how the threats they were exposed to also contributed to increasing their attachment. Billig's findings also help to explain the elevated status members of the Jewish Community of Hebron have in radical settler

26 Interview with Baruch Nachshon, August 3, 2000.

27 Interview with "Zhira," August 7, 2000.

28 E.g., in an interview on August 1, 2000, Rabbi Waldman said: "In Leviticus, at the end, we are told that there will be a blessing and a curse. The curse is that God will make the Land desolate. The sages tell that the Land without Jews will dry up. A complete Jewish life can only be lived here, because the Land can only prosper with the Jews. Others can only bring destruction to the Land."

29 Interview with Elyakim Haetzni, August 3, 2000.

30 She mentioned the controversies over Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and Joseph's Tomb in Nablus and the frequent clashes that erupt outside them (interview with "Zhira," August 7, 2000). Joseph's Tomb in Nablus was among the first Jewish settlements to be destroyed when the second intifada began in the autumn of 2000.

circles. "Shlomo," an orthodox settler in Kiryat Arba, said enviously: "They make enormous sacrifices for Judea and Samaria, for salvation – for us all."[31]

This role that the Jewish Community of Hebron has in the redemptive process can also be seen in relation to the first settlement endeavor in 1968, which had a decisive impact on the perception of their significance. That *they* took the step and actually pushed forward a Jewish settlement, *their actions* proved to be fundamental in terms of reaching the goal that Jews again should reside in the Biblical Land of Israel. In other words, their settlement endeavor reaffirmed how man can affect the divine process.

The endeavor also gave the primordial link between the land and the people a new spark. It can be compared with natural laws: "You see – it is natural to be here. One can't fight nature," "Yitz" responded when asked why it was of such vital importance that Jews live in Hebron.[32] Spokesman Noam Arnon also upheld this position: "It is natural to be here. *'Am Israel* belongs to *Erets Yisra'el*. It's just the way it is. How else should it be?"[33] The "natural" in this context must be viewed as God's order: The divine imperative that the Jewish People should reside in the Land of Israel is also looked upon as a natural order. Although this link is defined in theological terms, it is also reaffirmed through what the Jewish settlers consider a *feeling* of attachment to Hebron. David Wilder explained:

> Look, one has to differentiate spiritually, religiously, between what we call *Halakhic Kdushah* [sanctity defined within Jewish law] and sanctity that isn't *halakhic* but more emotional. In terms of Jewish law, really the only place that has laws of holiness is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem… . But in terms of emotional attachment, the Jewish People has Hebron as what we've dreamt of – you know, it is considered to be very special. Unique and special. That's why we're here.[34]

The alleged natural link between the Land and the People does in its consequence favor action; or rather, the sense of belonging and ownership obliges the Jewish People to take care of their property. With ownership comes responsibility. Living in Judea and Samaria reasserts and manifests both their individual identity and unity with other Jews within this specific land and the particular spatial setting of the Land of Israel. Active settling is the divine imperative that the people have to follow in order to fulfill their obligations, as the land and the people belong to each other.

Accordingly, if Hebron is perceived as naturally sacred and intrinsically Jewish through a divine imperative, it follows that the city is considered Jewish property, regardless of any secular protocols or agreements claiming otherwise. Nevertheless, Palestinian residents of Hebron by far outnumber the small Jewish community, whose members in consequence have to pass through Palestinian areas in order to move from one settlement cluster to another. And, it is here that another latent dimension of the ideology is exposed; the nationalism.

Tamara Neumann analyses in her doctoral thesis (2000) the social production of space in Kiryat Arba settlement adjacent to Hebron, and finds that the spatial practices of the members of the settlement reaffirm their religious claim on the place. She writes that "Hebron, as their god-given 'inheritance', is granted plausibility by virtue of particular socio-political conditions that allow the domain of religious belief to be realized in practical terms" (Neuman 2000, 8).

This position is also applicable to the way the Jewish Community of Hebron makes use of its surroundings.[35] Travel between the four settlement enclaves is done in minivans and cars that are covered with pro-Israeli and anti-Arab bumper stickers; the isolation and the hostile signals prevent any interaction between Jews and Palestinians.

Here the settlers express their feelings of ownership towards the area, and at the same time reflect an apparent indifference to the non-Jewish users of the territory. This is most explicit during the many curfews that are imposed

31 Interview with "Shlomo," October 19, 2002.

32 Interview with "Yitz," August 7, 2000.

33 Interview with Noam Arnon, August 8, 2000.

34 Interview with David Wilder, July 26, 2000.

35 Visually, it is noteworthy that the many large water tanks in the H-2 area that exclusively supply the settlements are painted with a large Israeli flag.

on the Palestinian residents of the city, and that have become almost routine during the Jewish Shabbat and on all major Jewish feasts. During the curfew one can observe heavily armed families strolling undisturbed through the streets to the Tomb of Abraham and back. They have the whole space to themselves, while Palestinians peek out from behind closed doors and windows.

One such explicit display of domination occurs on Israeli Independence Day, which is widely celebrated within the state of Israel.[36] However, Hebron is not Israeli sovereign territory and the celebration is therefore loaded with a different symbolic value to that within Israel proper. On the Israeli Independence Day, Palestinians are confined to their homes under curfew, while the Jewish Community of Hebron is permitted to roam the streets alone, along with the hordes of visitors the city attracts on such days. On Independence Day 2001, a large Israeli flag was ceremonially raised on top of the Tomb of Abraham. This clearly reflects the nationalist components of their worldview. The demand that they wanted the Israeli flag flown over the Tomb had already been raised when the settlers first came to Hebron after the Six Day War (Sprinzak 1991, 89). The Israeli flag is laden with religious symbolism. It is represents the journey of Moses, when the sea opened and split in two for the Jewish People to cross. Consequently, to these religious Zionists the flag is a nationalist symbol of the sanctity of the Jewish State, with Hebron as an integral part.

3.3 Light of the Nations

The religious Zionist movement blends the covenants and the promise of the Land with Isaiah 49:6: "I will also make you a light of nations." In other words, the promise contains a redemptive responsibility: it is the responsibility of the People of Israel, now the Jewish People, to lead the world to salvation As "Netah" put it: "We have a divine task – *one day* they will *all* thank us."[37]

By virtue of being part of a divinely chosen nation, the members of the Jewish Community of Hebron consider themselves as doing the world a favor. Theologically, this is reflected in Isaiah 49:6: "I will also make you a light of nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth." This is an imperative postulate. *Personal redemption* is bound *with collective redemption.* Seen against the background of the idea that Jewish history is a reflection of God's Will on earth, the Jewish settlement in Hebron is a religious act to reach universal redemption. By putting the Land of Israel into Jewish hands, redemption will thus be fulfilled for all.

All the interviewees reaffirmed this throughout the interviews. However, it was not asserted as an element in itself, or as a step on the way to final redemption. It was mentioned as a matter of course, as a self-evident fundamental principle. Jews are the Light of Nations, *Or la-Goyim,* the people that will lead the world through the messianic process to ultimate redemption. Settling in the Land of Israel is therefore an obligation placed upon the Jewish People not for exclusive reasons that will only bring redemption to the Jewish People. Rather, the act of settling is a righteous deed of a particular people done as a universal favor.

The reaction of "Gabi" – a mother of six in her late 30s who is a highly committed community worker in Hebron – is typical: "What do you expect us to do? *Pretend* that we are *not Or la-Goyim* – that we don't have an obligation to redeem the nations?! This place [Hebron] has moral and judicial obligations and we do what we have to do, because *we know* that we will bring all of humanity to redemption."[38]

3.4 A Local Theology to Fight Defilement of a Sacred Place

The members of the Jewish Community of Hebron also reveal a fundamental distrust in others. The claim by "Meyrav" that "history has showed us that we cannot trust anyone but ourselves," is reaffirmed by many.[39] This distrust relates above all to the people in their immediate surroundings: the Palestinians.
Violence and the use of forms of protest have become facets of the expression of the presence of the community

36 This is also treated extensively by Tamara Neumann (2000).

37 Interview with "Netah," August 8, 2000.

38 Interview with "Gabi," October 2002.

39 Interview with "Meyrav," October 2005.

in Hebron, both toward Arabs and toward others who oppose their presence in the city.[40] Rabbi Levinger, the community's influential rabbi, has been convicted of manslaughter and repeatedly charged with acts of violence against Palestinians. With the escalation of the situation in Hebron, violence has become increasingly common.[41]

Viewing the sanctity of the Land of Israel as an inherent character of the land, the Jews of Hebron consider themselves obliged to transcend secular law to protect their promised land. Rabbi Waldman therefore claims that seemingly extreme actions are simply the external expression of the land's "inner holiness."[42] In other words; secular concepts of strategy, defense, and nationalism are the external implementations of the inherent holiness.

"Shlomo" claimed that "Jews don't *normally* initiate violence."[43] Nonetheless, it is beyond doubt that members of the Jewish Community of Hebron are responsible for aggressive and intimidating behavior, as well as more severe acts of violence towards the Palestinian residents of the city. As Aran notes (1987, 293):

> … the actual implementation of this cosmic vision has time and again demonstrated its potential for motivating and rationalizing a kind of religious violence. Activist-believers committed acts of sabotage and murder against the very Arabs who, according to [Gush Emunim's] idiosyncratic interpretation, will voluntarily lend a hand in the redemption of the Jews. Several times the Torah-centred settlers addressed the local Hebron Arabs in a seemingly conciliatory tone.

The very act of violence may forge moral understanding of their actions. Viewing their actions as morally justified may thus also further accentuate the development of various forms of "resistance" to what they perceive as insufferable oppression (Nordstrom and Robben 1995, 8). As noted above, every so often, and particularly at the time of religious feasts or other large gatherings, Palestinian homes and shops located on the routes between Jewish settlements and the Tomb of Abraham are practically raided as members of the Jewish Community and visitors from other settlements fill the streets.

In accordance with the *Tarpatization* phenomenon described above, my interviewees gave a psychological explanation of the "Arab mind"; Arabs are mendacious, vicious, self-centered, and impossible to trust.[44] These characteristics were also mentioned by those members of the Community who claimed to have Arab friends. Responding to the question on who the instigators of violence in the city were, one interviewee responded:

> Everything is a struggle in this place. How do you know if the Arab you meet is the terrorist or the one who will help you? You must always be very careful, and always carry a gun. And even though you shouldn't necessarily assume that every Arab is a terrorist, some of them are. And if you know that he will attack you – they all will – then you have to protect yourself and Hebron.[45]

In other words, a fundamental distrust in Arabs is mixed with the feeling of protecting the sacred landscape. "Myerav" explained this in relation to the Tomb of Abraham: "The Arabs turned the Cave of Machpelah into, for them, a mosque. It is not a mosque! For us it is a *Jewish* place for *Jewish* worship. The Christians pray wherever they pray, Muslims pray to the east, they pray to Mecca, which is the

40 There is an apparent difference between Kach and Gush Emunim in terms of explicitly condoning violence. Accordingly, the relationship – or non-relationship – to Arabs represents a decisive dividing line between the two groups: Gush Emunim did not explicitly advocate the use of violence towards Arabs, nor was the transfer of Arabs a necessary aim or wish. The Gush Emunim worldview opens the possibility of coexistence with Arabs in the West Bank if they agree to accept and obey Jewish authority. While Rabbi Meir Kahane was explicitly anti-Arab, Gush Emunim claimed that coexistence with Arabs was possible, and reiterated that the primary wish was not to uproot the Arabs from the West Bank (Sprinzak 1991, 88).

41 For example, on June 16, 2001, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that Jewish settlers in Hebron had clashed with both Jewish Israelis who were demonstrating against the Tel Rumeida settlement and with the IDF soldiers trying to prevent the clash (see e.g. Dudkevitch 18/06/01, Dudai 2001b, AIC 1994).

42 Interview with Rabbi Waldman, August 1, 2000.

43 Interview with "Shlomo," October 19, 2002.

44 This was clearly displayed in numerous interviews. See also the community's websites.

45 Interview with "Gabi," October 2005.

important place for them, but we, we have to pray here!"[46] The question is, how do they relate to those who, in their opinion, defile the very sanctity of Hebron?

Violent actions appear to have been reinterpreted and given normative meaning. They conceive themselves as obliged to act as they do; it is considered necessary to engage in any action that will prevent Arabs from settling in the city.

On the basis of the Rabbis Kook's view of war – that friction releases the messianic process – there are also voices within the Jewish Community of Hebron that favor the recurring clashes between Jews and Palestinians. Consequently, the presence of Arabs and the resulting eruptions of violence are part of the process of redemption – or in other words, the presence of Arabs actually brings forth redemption. Commenting on contemporary politics, Baruch Nachshon said "Arafat wants to destroy us. So there will be a great war with the Arabs. And then the Arabs have to leave. Therefore, the Arabs under Arafat's leadership are bringing the last days."[47] Though these views are not often publicly stated, the Kookist-based theology helps to integrate clashes with Palestinians into a local theology. The need to unify the Land with the Jewish People and to seek further friction to advance redemption blend well with intense anti-Palestinian sentiments. Put bluntly, actions directed against the Palestinians represent a response within the legitimacy of a localized theological framework. As "Yossi" said: "We don't want Arabs here. They are not righteous and they want to kill us. And they want to throw us out, to stop us. So they are in the way for us."[48]

4. Conclusion

The religious worldview of the Jewish Community of Hebron is based on a messianic framework with three fundamental assumptions: the intrinsic sanctity of the Land of Israel, the sanctity of the Jewish People, and the belief that the current time is the Age of Redemption. There is also a deep faith in the postulate that in the Age of Redemption man plays an active part in the divine scheme. Accordingly, the People of Israel and the Land of Israel must be united, leading to an obligation to settle the land. As a Light of Nations, where personal redemption is bound up with collective redemption, the Jewish People are acting as part of the divine scheme leading to the ultimate re-establishment of the messianic kingdom on earth.

In this messianic process, theocratic "legislation" supersedes all other jurisdictions. In a localized theology and as members of the Jewish People, the residents of Jewish Community of Hebron are obliged to aspire to be reunited with God and their Land, and thus to push forward the Age of Redemption. Therefore, all opportunities and obstacles are given their own metaphysical value. Accordingly, any obstacle preventing fulfillment of this divine scheme has to be removed in order to discharge the sacred duty that God has imposed on them.

The violence conducted by the Jewish Community of Hebron is thus a counter-cultural religious war. It is a consequence of a perception of living in sacred time on sacred ground, merged with a theological interpretation of the existence and activities of Palestinians opposing the very existence of the Jewish community, resulting in a deeply-felt hatred against Arabs integrated into a redemptive framework.

The Palestinian resistance to these religious Zionist settlers is interpreted as fitting into the divine scheme where violence and war are part of the apocalyptic vision ultimately leading to the re-establishment of God's kingdom. The ability of the community's worldview to integrate the violent context it operates in as a necessities for redemption makes the community resistant to criticism and to security risk. It responds instead by condoning arms and the use of force.

Being a Light of Nations, the Jewish Community of Hebron is leading a religious battle that is aimed at ushering the messianic process, but which in consequence is changing the political order.

46 Interview with "Meyrav," March 2004.
47 Interview with "Baruch," July 2002.
48 Interview with "Yossi," July 7, 2000.

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