

# *Melilah*

MANCHESTER JOURNAL  
OF JEWISH STUDIES

EDITORS

Daniel R. Langton and Renate Smithuis

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Simon Mayers

Title: 'The Simple Jew': The 'Price Tag' Phenomenon, Vigilantism, and Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh's Political Kabbalah

Author(s): TESSA SATHERLEY

Source: *Melilah*, Vol. 10 (2013), pp. 57-91

Published by: University of Manchester and Gorgias Press

URL: <http://www.melilahjournal.org/p/2013.html>

ISBN: 978-1-4632-0282-8

ISSN: 1759-1953

A publication of the Centre for Jewish Studies,  
University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

Co-published by



‘THE SIMPLE JEW’:  
THE ‘PRICE TAG’ PHENOMENON, VIGILANTISM, AND  
RABBI YITZCHAK GINSBURGH’S POLITICAL KABBALAH

Tessa Satherley\*

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the Kabbalistic theosophy of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, and allegations of links between his yeshiva and violent political activism and vigilantism. Ginsburgh is head of the yeshiva *Od Yosef Chai* (Joseph Still Lives) in Samaria/the northern West Bank. His students and colleagues have been accused by the authorities of violence and vandalism against Arabs in the context of ‘price tag’ actions and vigilante attacks, while publications by Ginsburgh and his yeshiva colleagues such as *Barukh HaGever* (Barukh the Man/Blessed is the Man) and *Torat HaMelekh* (The King’s Torah) have been accused of inciting racist violence. This paper sketches the yeshiva’s history in the public spotlight and describes the esoteric, Kabbalistic framework behind Ginsburgh’s politics, focusing on his political readings of Zoharic Kabbalah and teachings about the mystical value of spontaneous revenge attacks by ‘the simple Jew’, who acts upon his feelings of righteous indignation without prior reflection. The conclusion explores and attempts to delimit the explanatory power of such mystical teachings in light of the sociological characteristics of the Hilltop Youth most often implicated as price tag ‘operatives’ and existing scholarly models of vigilantism. It also points to aspects of the mystical teachings with potential for special potency in this context.

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh (1944-) is a Chabad rabbi and head of the *Od Yosef Chai* (Joseph Still Lives) yeshiva in the Yitzhar settlement, near the major Palestinian population centre of Nablus (biblical Shechem). The yeshiva occupies an unusual discursive space – neither mainstream religious Zionist (though some of its teaching staff were educated in this tradition) nor formally affiliated with the Hasidic movement, despite Ginsburgh’s own affiliation with Chabad and despite his teachings being steeped in its Kabbalistic inheritance. *Od Yosef Chai* is no stranger to negative publicity: its rabbis have drawn flak from all quarters for allegedly inciting racist and/or vigilante violence. The police and Shin Bet claim yeshiva students have directly participated in such violence and have imposed both administrative detentions and travel bans, backed by unpublished confidential intelligence.

This paper presents an analysis of the political Kabbalah of the yeshiva’s president and spiritual father (Ginsburgh) and explores the nature of its connections to a brand of settler activism led by Hilltop Youth that has polarized the Israeli public: the so-called ‘price tag’ acts. It commences by situating price tagging in the context of extant studies of settler vigilantism. It then presents a historical overview of public controversies around the yeshiva and the claimed links with price tagging specifically and vigilante violence

---

\* PhD Candidate in Jewish Society and Culture, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, Australia. Email: tessa.satherley@unimelb.edu.au I wish to thank Dr Dvir Abramovich and Dr Ziva Shavitsky for their helpful feedback during the early stages of the research, and Dr Alick Isaacs for fruitful discussions. I especially thank Dr Eliezer Shore for careful reading and insightful criticism of an earlier version of the manuscript.

generally. This is followed by text-based analysis of the Kabbalistic framework used by Ginsburgh to articulate his teachings on Gentile inferiority, the illegitimacy of Gentile presence in *Eretz Yisrael*,<sup>1</sup> and the positive nature of revenge – especially the virtue of hot-blooded revenge by ‘the simple Jew’ who is not overburdened by Halakhic reflection. By exploring the Kabbalistic underpinnings of Ginsburgh’s political and Halakhic opinions, the analysis hopes to build on the excellent work by Don Seeman<sup>2</sup> and Motti Inbari<sup>3</sup> on this subject. The conclusion critiques and delimits the usefulness of the textual-analytic approach for understanding price tagging, but simultaneously identifies concerning synergies between Ginsburgh’s political Kabbalah (especially his spiritualization of impulsive revenge), the sociological profile of price taggers, and extant patterns of vigilantism.

### *Price Tagging, Vigilantism, and the Hilltop Youth*

In the years since the 10-month settlement construction freeze announced in late 2009, price tag attacks have become a signature tactic of anti-bourgeois, counter-cultural fringes of settler youth opposed to territorial concessions. Activists try to deter the Israeli government from construction freezes in the settlements and/or demolitions of unauthorized outposts by retaliating with vandalism and sometimes violence against various targets: most often Palestinians or their property, but also the homes of Jewish public figures who advocate or implement such policies, and even Israel Defence Force (IDF) facilities. Though rare, the latter has raised exceptional ire in Israel. Even mainstream settler leaders have been threatened, if they are viewed as complicit in policies to ‘uproot’ Jews from *Eretz Yisrael* (e.g., by enforcing the construction freeze locally). The graffiti *tag mechir* (תג מחיר), ‘price tag’, is commonly left as a signature and warning at vandalized sites, to indicate that the act is the price to be paid for the government’s transgressions; hence the appellation.

Demographically and organizationally, price taggers stand on ‘the fringe of the fringe’ of the settler world. Estimates suggest they number in the mere hundreds. The coordination (if any) of attacks is informal and spontaneous. Passionate, angry teenagers with mobile phones can quickly and quietly organize a response to perceived provocations; there need not be a central architect, and no operational ‘hub’ has been persuasively identified – no ‘Price Tag Regional Council’, as remarked sarcastically by one right-wing

---

<sup>1</sup> The relationship between Ginsburgh’s ideas and mainstream Hasidism is a fascinating question in its own right. However, a detailed treatment is beyond the scope of the present paper. The genealogy of Ginsburgh’s ideas is explored at more length in other work under preparation.

<sup>2</sup> Don Seeman, ‘Violence, Ethics, and Divine Honor in Modern Jewish Thought’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73:4 (2005): 1015-1048. The paper presents an analysis of Ginsburgh’s use of the concepts of ‘divine honour’ and ‘sanctification of the divine name’ in justifying the 1994 massacre in Hebron (and compares their interpretation with those of Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook and Emmanuel Levinas).

<sup>3</sup> Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?*, trans. Shaul Vardi (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2009). The chapter on Ginsburgh focuses on his teachings calling for restoration of the Sanhedrin and building of the Third Temple. It also includes discussion of Ginsburgh’s thought on the Halakhic status of zealotry in contemporary times. In contrast to both Seeman and Inbari, the textual analysis in this article grounds Ginsburgh’s permissive approach to anti-Arab violence in an analysis of his elaborate Kabbalistic theosophy, which is articulated through Zoharic and Lurianic concepts.

activist<sup>4</sup> – although the researches of the security agencies have concentrated heavily on Samaritan Hilltop Youth and *Od Yosef Chai*.

Despite the fringe status of the phenomenon, it has sparked firestorms in both the Israeli and Palestinian media arenas; the price taggers’ impact on Israeli-Palestinian intercommunal relations and public discourse has been disproportionate to their demographic and ideological marginality. They have been lambasted by the mainstream settler rabbinical and lay leadership<sup>5</sup> – though the condemnations flow more freely when the price taggers target fellow Jews<sup>6</sup> – not least because of concern that the price taggers’ alienation of mainstream Israelis threatens public support for settlers *per se*, as transpired after Rabin’s assassination by the religious Zionist law student Yigal Amir.<sup>7</sup> An attack on an IDF base in 2011 stunned the nation, and the Hilltop Youth behind it were publically shamed by defence minister Ehud Barak in the harshest language Israeli discourse could offer: ‘there is no doubt that we’re talking about terrorists’.<sup>8</sup>

Though the price tag slogan and targeting of the IDF are novel features, there is substantial continuity between price tagging as a mode of vigilante-style intimidation and prior vigilante acts in a similar vein, dating to periods well before such ‘obvious’ political triggers as the Gaza Disengagement and 2009 building freeze.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, it is difficult to draw a clean line between, on the one hand, price tag attacks against Arabs as a ‘performance’ of violence whose intended ‘audience’ is nominally the Jewish authorities and, on the other, historical patterns of vigilante revenge attacks and collective punishment by settlers.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Itamar Ben-Gvir, quoted by Maayana Miskin, ‘Attorney: Price Tag “Terror” Label a Joke’, *Arutz Sheva*, May 26, 2013. Ben-Gvir is a right-wing activist, parliamentary consultant, and public relations expert affiliated with the Kahanist movement. He is respected as a highly professional and effective spin doctor. See, e.g., Amichai Atali, ‘Omedim LiYeminam: Kach Nitzach HaYamin BeParshat Perlman’ [Standing by their right hand: Thus the Right prevailed in the Perlman episode], *Maariv*, August 17, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., ‘Yesha Leadership Condemns Price Tag Extremists’, *The Yeshiva World*, June 25, 2012; Ali Waked, ‘Rabbis Visit Torched Mosque, Condemn Attack’, *Yedioth Achronoth*, October 5, 2010; [Yesha Council Head] Danny Dayan Condemns ‘Price Tag’ Attack’, *Yedioth Achronoth*, September 7, 2011; Kobi Nachshoni, ‘HaRav Ronsky Al Tag Mechir: BeDerech Le-“Milchemet Achim”’ [Rabbi Ronsky on Price Tag: On the way to ‘fraternal war’], *Yedioth Achronoth*, December 13, 2011. In the same article, published shortly after an attack on IDF representatives by about 300 youths on Route 55, the chief military rabbi Rafi Peretz declared that price tagging was against Halakhah, and Rabbi Eliyakim Levanon called the youths involved ‘extremists’, though also criticizing government ‘aggression’ against peaceful settlers.

<sup>6</sup> [Yesha Council head Danny] Dayan admits that when attacks were perpetrated against Arabs, motions put before his council to release a statement condemning such attacks were defeated, with a policy position set in place that the council would remain silent in the face of price tag attacks against Arabs’, quoted in ‘Yesha Leadership Condemns Price Tag Extremists.’

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Michael Karpin and Ina Friedman, *Murder in the Name of God: The Plot to Kill Yitzhak Rabin* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 102-130.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Barak: Consider “Hilltop Youth” a Terror Group’, *Jerusalem Post*, December 14, 2011. With regard to the legal utility of applying the label ‘terrorism’ to characterize these acts, see Daniel Byman and Natan Sachs, ‘The Rise of Settler Terrorism’, *Foreign Affairs*, August 14, 2012; and theoretical frameworks can plausibly be drawn from Ehud Sprinzak, ‘Right-wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegitimization’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no. 1 (1995): 17-43. However, establishing this case is not the goal of the present exploration.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. the section ‘The Strong Stony Land’ in Chapter 8 of Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel’s Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007*, trans. Vivian Eden (New York: Nation Books, 2007), which describes (among other events) how Adi Mintz, secretary general of the Yesha Council, had his tires slashed in 2002 for criticizing Hilltop Youth as ‘criminals’.

<sup>10</sup> The phenomenon of vigilantism beyond the green line has a long history – as testified by the 1983 Karp Commission Report. See, e.g., chapters 2 and 3 of Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*; Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, ‘The Causes of Vigilante Political Violence: The Case of Jewish Settlers’, *Civil Wars* 6, no. 3 (2003): 9-30; David Weisburd, ‘Vigilantism as Community Social Control: Developing a Quantitative Criminological Model’, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 4, no. 2 (1988): 137-53; and David Weisburd, *Jewish Settler Violence: Deviance as Social Reaction* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989). See too the various works by Ehud Sprinzak: *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin*

Vigilante acts against Arabs were a ubiquitous feature of life in the territories during the 1970s and 1980s, enjoying broad support among the Gush Emunim settlers. David Weisburd's pioneering criminological study of settler vigilantism identified it as 'a community-supported strategy of control in which a large number of settlers participated'; he found the vast majority of settlers supported vigilantism, and about one third of males participated in it.<sup>11</sup> Supporters framed the settlers' extra- but not anti-legal 'independent action' (there is no Hebrew word for vigilantism) as a simple necessity to ensure deterrence and security, because the IDF and police could not protect settlers fully from Palestinian terrorism; it was also a means to cement Jewish control of *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>12</sup> Unofficial road blocks were the mildest (and most common) form of vigilante retaliation for Arab violence, but participants also reported revenge raids on Arab villages, in which windows and cars were smashed.

As the major settlement blocs have become institutionalized and suburbanized, the mantle has passed to the Hilltop Youth residing in relatively remote outposts, and acts in this classic vigilante mould have adopted the 'price tag' signature. The triple goals of revenge/deterrence against Arabs, cementing Jewish control and Arab obedience in the territories, and persuading the ruling regime to change its policies are seen as complimentary.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore possible to situate price tagging within the typology of vigilante political violence outlined by Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger<sup>14</sup> in their 2003 overview of settler vigilantism, which in turn was based on the scholarship of Joseph Rosenbaum and Peter Sederberg<sup>15</sup> and of Ted Gurr<sup>16</sup> in the American context, and Ehud Sprinzak<sup>17</sup> in the Israeli context. Vigilante violence is defined in this tradition as action beyond the formal rule of law that is nonetheless aimed at preventing the subversion of the normative socio-political regime underpinning the law. This distinguishes vigilantes from revolutionaries, who aim to destroy rather than rectify the ruling regime. To borrow Sprinzak's lucid explanation: 'what characterizes the vigilante state of mind is the profound conviction that the government or some of its agencies have failed to enforce their own order in an area under their jurisdiction. Backed by the fundamental norm of self-defence and speaking in the name of what they believe to be the valid law of the land, vigilantes, in effect, enforce the law and execute justice.'<sup>18</sup>

Pedahzur and Perliger follow Rosenbaum and Sederberg in applying a three-way typology of vigilantism.<sup>19</sup> The first type, 'crime control vigilantism', characterizes revenge

*Assassination* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 145-285; *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); 'From Messianic Pioneering to Vigilante Terrorism – The Case of the Gush Emunim Underground', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 194-216.

<sup>11</sup> Weisburd, *Jewish Settler Violence*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, 68-76.

<sup>13</sup> This thinking is elucidated below, where I discuss the newsletter article by Rabbi Elitzur (one of Ginsburgh's students and a teacher at *Od Yosef Chai*) that appears to lay out a manifesto for the price tag campaign.

<sup>14</sup> Pedahzur and Perliger, 'Causes of Vigilante Political Violence'.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Rosenbaum and Peter Sederberg, 'Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence', *Comparative Politics* 6, no. 4 (1974): 54-70; Joseph Rosenbaum and Peter Sederberg, eds., *Vigilante Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> Ted R. Gurr, *Violence in America* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> See the citations in note 10.

<sup>18</sup> Sprinzak, 'From Messianic Pioneering', 211n9. Weisburd's analysis identified similar coordinates, characterizing vigilantism as 'behavior defined as unacceptable in the general society, yet which is organized and developed by a subcommunity to control and sanction behavior that the subcommunity has defined as deviant' with respect to the normative order (i.e., the norms the subcommunity projects onto the regime); see Weisburd, *Jewish Settler Violence*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Pedahzur and Perliger, 'Causes of Vigilante Political Violence', 11-13.

attacks aimed at deterring Arab violence (e.g., stone throwing and terrorism). The second, ‘social group control vigilantism’, reflects the additional benefit of such acts in demonstrating Jewish control over the land.<sup>20</sup> Price tag attacks on government targets can be described by the third type, ‘regime control vigilantism’, in which violence is directed against Israeli officials in order to alter regime functioning. A similar idea is conveyed by Weisburd’s characterization of settler violations of government rulings (e.g., constructing outpost settlements against government orders) as socially co-ordinated efforts to control state conduct perceived by the settlers as deviant with respect to norms drawn from national-religious ideology; e.g., the norm of ‘unyielding commitment to the territories’.<sup>21</sup> These ideas seem at least superficially compatible with the intimidation mode of price tagging, which punishes ‘wrongful’ government policies by intimidating the leaders involved, in order to frighten them from repeating the exercise.

The demographic most saliently involved in price tag acts, including attacks on IDF bases in September and December 2011, has been the ‘Hilltop Youth’<sup>22</sup> – a grass-roots movement (with no formal membership) of ‘tweenage’ Israelis, mostly second-generation settlers, who found outpost communities outside the major settlement blocs. They are generally independent of the settler establishment (the Yesha Council and Amana) and founded without permits.<sup>23</sup> The lifestyle is frugal, but their guiding hope is that the rough-and-ready outposts will eventually become permanent settlements that can never be handed over to a future Palestinian state.<sup>24</sup> Hilltop Youth often see their activities as a revival of the tradition of Gush Emunim in its heyday of pioneering *chutzpah* (the late 1960s and 1970s).<sup>25</sup> However, unlike Gush Emunim, no formal organizational structure coordinates or directs the Hilltop movement.<sup>26</sup>

The youth are idealists and seekers, after their own fashion, sacrificing affluence and security for meaning. Further, many come to the outposts seeking belonging after failing to ‘fit in’ at formal educational institutions.<sup>27</sup> Socio-psychological investigations identify a

---

<sup>20</sup> Pedahzur and Perliger point to two main motivations for settler violence: crime control vigilantism, and the ‘need to maintain their superior civilian status in the territories’, i.e., social group control vigilantism (ibid., 28). This assertion is in agreement with Weisburd, ‘Vigilantism as Community Social Control’, 141.

<sup>21</sup> Weisburd, *Jewish Settler Violence*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> The following brief sociological portrait of the Hilltop Youth is drawn from: Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories* (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 234-46; Shlomo Kaniel, *Heibetim Psychologi'im Shel Mityashvei Hagiva'ot* [Psychological aspects of the hilltop settlers] (Ariel: Ariel College, 2003); Kaniel’s contribution to the panel discussion ‘Religious and Ideological Dimensions of the Israeli Settlements Issue: Reframing the Narrative?’, *Negotiation Journal* 21, no. 2 (2005): 177-91; Hadas Weiss, ‘Volatile Investments and Unruly Youth in a West Bank Settlement’, *Journal of Youth Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 17-33; Miriam Imesch, ‘The Hilltop Settlers: The Construction of Identity Among Radical Second-generation Settlers in the West Bank’ (Master’s thesis, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2009). This group is also treated briefly in Lilly Weissbrod, ‘Coping with the Failure of a Prophecy’, *Journal of Religion & Society* 10 (2008).

<sup>23</sup> On the distinction between Hilltop Youth and the settlers of outposts founded in cooperation with the settler establishment, see Kaniel, *Heibetim Psychologi'im*, 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Feige, *Settling in the Hearts*, 234-5.

<sup>25</sup> For historical overviews, see e.g. Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006); Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*. For the ideological history, see e.g. Gideon Aran, *Kookism: Shoreshei Gush Emunim, Tarbut HaMitnachim, Teologia Tzionit, Meshichiut BiZmanenu* [Kookism: The roots of Gush Emunim, settler culture, Zionist theology, and contemporary messianism] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Eti Borstein, ‘Noar HaGeva’ot Bein Hemshekiut LeMered’ [The Hilltop Youth between continuity and rebellion], August 30, 2006, [www.reader.co.il/article/481/למרהד בין המשכיית למרהד](http://www.reader.co.il/article/481/למרהד בין המשכיית למרהד) (accessed September 9, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> See Borstein, ‘Noar HaGeva’ot’; and Weiss, ‘Volatile Investments’. For instance, those struggling with the extremely demanding schedule of an elite yeshiva education can be attracted to the outposts as an earthier and less cerebral mode of religious service, and a respected alternative to ongoing educational disengagement and failure.

perpetual sense of friction and insecurity with respect to death and terrorism (ubiquitous during the formative experience of the Second Intifada), and in many cases a history of social and family problems.

These youth generally feel betrayed by the secular state. Even in the early 2000s, trust for Israeli law enforcement institutions was minimal,<sup>28</sup> and it was further eroded by the Gaza Disengagement.<sup>29</sup> In the hilltop outposts, 'Israeli law is considered little more than a courteous recommendation, and respect for state institutions is practically nonexistent'.<sup>30</sup> The uprooting of Gush Katif is remembered as a horrific 'betrayal' of Zionism and Judaism by the state and as a betrayal specifically of the country's most loyal citizens (in their view) – the settlers, who had risked their lives by serving in dangerous, elite combat units in disproportionate numbers and living on the wild frontier, bearing the brunt of Palestinian terrorism. Many express a profound sense of victimization vis-à-vis both the uprooting at the hands of the state and the routine loss of friends and family to Palestinian terrorist attacks.<sup>31</sup> Whereas Kook's *Merkaz HaRav* circle (the core of Gush Emunim) deified the state and army as the vehicles of messianic redemption – even when its policies were temporarily loathsome and had to be fought by the faithful<sup>32</sup> – many Hilltop Youth believe the secular state has exhausted this moral and spiritual capital.

They are also disenchanted with the 'bourgeois' leadership of the Yesha Council and Amana, calling to replace their materialism with a simple lifestyle in connection with the land,<sup>33</sup> and their political passivity with spirited resistance – indeed in evidence in clashes with the IDF during the 2006 evacuation of Amona.<sup>34</sup> The youths reject the restraint shown by the settler establishment during the Gaza Disengagement, allegedly for the sake of protecting the cash flow to the main settlement blocs at the price of betraying the core value of settling all of *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, they reject the authority of the mainstream *mamlachti* rabbis who called for calm,<sup>36</sup> and are attracted instead to more militant voices.<sup>37</sup>

---

See Kaniel, *Heibetim Psychologi'im*, 25 on the hilltop settlers' order of priorities, which place *avodah* (work, especially manual work) before *Torah* in the *Torah VeAvodah* scheme. Among Gush Emunim settlers, Torah study was considered more important, and yeshiva education was highly valued (though not to the extent of denigrating secular work). Furthermore, Gush settlers tended to be white-collar workers, commuting to office jobs in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, rather than farming the land. By contrast, agricultural work is regarded with great pride on the hilltop outposts.

<sup>28</sup> See Kaniel, *Heibetim Psychologi'im*, 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Weissbrod, 'Coping with the Failure.'

<sup>30</sup> Feige, *Settling in the Hearts*, 237; see further Imesch, 'The Hilltop Settlers', 17-21, on these youths' alienation from the state.

<sup>31</sup> Feige, *Settling in the Hearts*, 7-9; see too Joyce Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza: Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 127-8.

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent discussion of the continuation of this *mamlachti/statist* thread in religious Zionist rabbinic thought (as well as its erosion), see Avinoam Rosenak, *Sedakim: Al Achdut HaHefechim, HaPoliti VeTalmidei HaRav Kook* [Cracks: On the unity of opposites, the political, and Rabbi Kook's disciples] (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2013). Overviews of Tzvi Yehuda's statism can also be found in Aran, *Kookism*; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and the works by Sprinzak cited in note 10.

<sup>33</sup> See note 27.

<sup>34</sup> Weissbrod, 'Coping with the Failure', 7.

<sup>35</sup> Feige, *Settling in the Hearts*, 239.

<sup>36</sup> In the words of one young settler, a hilltop youth is someone who experienced the Disengagement and learned not to trust the rabbis because of their contradictory pronouncements; he is someone who believed the rabbis' promises that a miracle would take place and the evacuation order would be cancelled – any minute now, just be patient – and saw this prophecy fail. See Ariel Shalem (a pseudonym), 'Mi Atah, Na'ar HaGeva'ot? Yedioth Achronoth, December 15, 2011. Also: Imesch, 'The Hilltop Settlers', 20; Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza*, 74-83; Weissbrod, 'Coping with the Failure.' On religious Zionist rabbis' responses to the Disengagement, see Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 68-73, 143-53.

Two religio-ideological streams began to fill this void among the Hilltop Youth after the Disengagement: i) the *Od Yosef Chai* yeshiva and Ginsburgh’s brand of Hasidism, and ii) the community dedicated to the legacy of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane (leader of the Kach movement and Jewish Defense League, both of which are officially terrorist organizations).<sup>38</sup> Rabbis, yeshiva students, and right-wing activists attached to these two spheres have been the outposts’ most constant sources of solidarity, religious legitimation, and practical assistance (e.g., arranging legal aid when youths are apprehended for attacking Arabs or damaging IDF property). According to Borstein’s analysis, the rabbis and yeshiva students provided youths with ‘a listening ear’ for their inner doubts, and the youths took on their new mentors’ world-view. They helped endow the youths with a sense of purpose, and inspired them towards active participation in the expansionist settlement programme as a positive outlet for their frustrations. Most of these mentors were themselves outpost dwellers, and they provided logistical continuity for the outposts and role modelling for the troubled youths from the main settlement blocks, who ‘plugged in’ to this source of welcome and pastoral care.

One example is the *Od Yosef Chai* graduate Ariel Groner,<sup>39</sup> a long-time resident of the hilltop outposts neighbouring Yitzhar.<sup>40</sup> Groner is a key player in Chonenu,<sup>41</sup> a solidarity organization founded during the Second Intifada by (Kahanist) Shmuel Meidad, that coordinates legal aid for right-wing civilians accused of violence or damaging IDF property, including alleged price tag operatives, and assists both civilians and soldiers accused by security agencies of injuring or killing Arabs. Chonenu subsidizes the legal aid and provides intensive emotional and psychological support: Groner attends the court hearings, and Chonenu’s team provides coaching on how to withstand police pressure during interviews.

It is unclear to what extent this supportive relationship confers authority upon the rabbis (and their students) among this milieu, or gives them a commanding sway over the content of the youths’ ideology. Rabbi David Dudkovitz, former head of *Doreshei Yechudkha* (the yeshiva ketana attached to *Od Yosef Chai*) and the rabbi of Yitzhar, stated in an interview that some of the local Hilltop Youth accepted his Halakhic authority, but others

---

<sup>37</sup> This parallels a more general trend among second-generation settlers of the decentralization or ‘privatization’ of spiritual-ideological authority. Parents and educators have expressed their inability to impress upon their charges an authoritative ideological or religious framework through which to channel (and limit) their rambunctious political activities. If youths are frustrated with the pacifism of the leading *mamlachti* rabbis, they simply seek out someone more militant. See especially Weiss, ‘Volatile Investments’; Imesh, ‘The Hilltop Settlers.’ Furthermore, Kaniel explains: ‘The Gush Emunim generation accepted non-religious Zionist leaders, as well as the authority of both the Israeli government and of the chief rabbis. The Hilltop Settlers accept neither, deferring to local rabbis who are highly heterogeneous in their ideology’. See Shlomo Kaniel’s contribution to the panel discussion ‘Religious and Ideological Dimensions of the Israeli Settlements’, 186.

<sup>38</sup> See Borstein, ‘Noar HaGeva’ot.’ The earlier work (2003) by Kaniel, *Heibetim Psychologi’im*, instead found that the religious world-view of the hilltop settlers had not yet crystallized (pp. 23-4). He described it as ‘intuitive’ rather than grounded firmly in a particular ‘Mishnah’, noting that settlers borrowed from different streams (one of which was Ginsburgh’s Hasidism – p. 23). However, the rabbinical influences were not Kaniel’s main analytic focus, and the pilot study was conducted more than a decade ago, before the upheavals of 2005 and 2006.

<sup>39</sup> On Groner, see ‘Ha’Acheen Shel HaRav Groner, Oseh Ke’ev Rosh LeShabak’ [The nephew of Rabbi Groner, giving the Shin Bet a headache], *Shtetlem.net*, August 16, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> He was convicted of obstructing an officer in the course of his duty during the clearing of the outpost Havat Gilad in 2002.

<sup>41</sup> The organization is reported to have helped some 15,000 civilians and soldiers, including some 1,000 during the Gaza Disengagement alone; Atali, ‘Omedim LiYeminam.’ Chonenu also conducted an effective legal and media campaign to secure the release (to house arrest) of Haim Perlman, who was accused of involvement in a string of murders of Arabs.



did not. Even among those who tended to seek out his opinion, he asserted that it was not a formal arrangement of supervision and authority. (This milieu does not accord rabbis unconditional authority.)

On the other hand, Israel Ariel (one of Ginsburgh's close associates) claimed that 'After the Gaza disengagement ... Ginsburgh became an inspirational beacon for disaffected national-religious youth, particularly in the outposts'.<sup>42</sup> There are indications of substantial religious and ideological influence. In contrast to their religious Zionist parents, Borstein's analysis noted that most youths identified as Hasids or 'Hardalim' (national Haredis) – a change she attributes to youths' attachment to Ginsburgh, Dudkovitz, and others. She found that this religious framework was typically twinned with a complementary nationalist ideology, articulated through an identification with Kahane's political thought.<sup>43</sup>

She noted that the meaningful figures in the lives of Hilltop Youth were the local leaders of their outpost (i.e., their founders and logistical anchors, such as Avri Ran<sup>44</sup>) and the rabbis who supported the outposts' endeavour. Where such leadership figures were present, she discerned an intensification and crystallization of the youths' religio-nationalist ideology around the mentors' world-view. She described a 'monolithic' ideological conformity within this milieu, which she attributed to this leadership influence, together with socialization processes in the small community context of the outposts and what might be termed a 'selection bias' (the choice to move to the hills entails a rebellion against government policies).

### *The Controversial History of Rabbi Ginsburgh and Od Yosef Chai*

Prosecutions of Hilltop Youth involved in price tag operations – or the leadership figures who allegedly incite them – have been extremely rare, and most attempts either fail or are resolved by a plea bargain.<sup>45</sup> However, it is clear nonetheless that the Shin Bet's eye has been trained on *Od Yosef Chai* for many years. This section sketches a historical overview of the controversies surrounding Ginsburgh, *Od Yosef Chai*, and price tag-style vigilantism.

Ginsburgh was born in St Louis, Missouri, in 1944 and immigrated to Israel in 1965. After the Six Day War of 1967, he began serious study of Chabad (Lubavitcher)

<sup>42</sup> International Crisis Group, *Israel's Religious Right and the Question of Settlements*, Middle East Report No. 89 (Jerusalem and Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2009), 9n81.

<sup>43</sup> The textual analysis will point to some of the points of contact, although the focus here is on Ginsburgh. The research, however, suggests significant interfusion of the *Od Yosef Chai* and Kahanist communities and world-views, and this represents an important focus for further research.

<sup>44</sup> NB: Ran is not connected to the *Od Yosef Chai* sphere, to my knowledge. He stresses the need for firmness with regard to Arab provocations and seems to view himself as a peace-keeping Jewish patriarch who oversees security in the area, including with regard to internal Arab disputes. (See e.g. Haim Lewinson, 'LeToshavei HaMeachazim Nim'as MiPlishot HaKarka Shel Avi Noar HaGeva'ot' [Outpost residents are sick of incursions onto the land of the father of the Hilltop Youth], *Haaretz*, January 31, 2013.)

<sup>45</sup> There have been very few successful indictments: see, e.g., Itamar Fleishman, "'Price Tag' Vandals Consistently Escape Prosecution', *Yedioth Achronoth*, September 4, 2012; Don Futterman, 'Israel's Apathetic Hunt for "Price Tag" Attackers', *Haaretz*, July 1, 2013; Nadav Shragai, 'The Rising Cost of Price-Tag Attacks', *Israel Hayom*, October 14, 2011. Price tagging is a loosely organized and semi-spontaneous activity. Groups of friends typically co-ordinate price tag attacks discretely, e.g., by sms and word of mouth, with little advance planning, which complicates prevention and prosecution. As noted, Chonenu also provides coaching on how to remain silent under police questioning, to avoid incriminating oneself or others.

Hasidism,<sup>46</sup> and studied briefly with the venerable late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (the ‘Lubavitcher Rebbe’). In 1982, Ginsburgh established a yeshiva at the site of Joseph’s Tomb in the West Bank city of Nablus, or biblical Shechem. The yeshiva was relocated to its current site in the nearby settlement of Yitzhar after the IDF withdrew from Joseph’s Tomb in October 2000 under Oslo Accord provisions – to Ginsburgh’s chagrin.

Early controversies included Ginsburgh’s defence of one of the yeshiva’s students, who had fired indiscriminately on Palestinian labourers by a Tel Aviv highway in 1993.<sup>47</sup> His proposed defence was that Jewish and Gentile blood were inherently unequal. It was not the first time. Ginsburgh had testified previously in an Israeli court after 30 of his yeshiva students went on a rampage in Nablus in July 1989 and shot a 13-year-old Palestinian girl, declaring: ‘It should be recognized that Jewish blood and a *goy*’s blood are not the same ... Any trial that assumes that Jews and *goyim* are equal is a travesty of justice’.<sup>48</sup>

In 1994, Ginsburgh authored the now-infamous *Barukh HaGever* (Barukh the Man/Blessed is the Man), a pamphlet praising the perpetrator of the Hebron massacre, the settler and former Jewish Defense League activist Dr Barukh Goldstein, who murdered 29 and wounded 125 Muslim worshipers in the Cave of the Patriarchs on February 25, 1994.<sup>49</sup> Therein, Ginsburgh explored the possible Halakhic, moral, and mystical virtues of the massacre and its ‘blessed’ perpetrator. He was detained by police over this publication and was warned but never indicted.<sup>50</sup> Such events prompted Rabbi Joel Bin-Nun – a dovish voice within the religious Zionist leadership<sup>51</sup> – to warn the Yesha Council in early 1996 of the ‘potential for murder in the yeshiva in Shechem. Do not accord it your protection. ... I have no doubt that Rabbi Ginzburg and his doctrine are a threat to our entire enterprise: to settlement activity, yeshivas, society, the state as a whole’.<sup>52</sup>

The media firestorms continued into the new millennium. The IDF’s withdrawal from Joseph’s Tomb in 2000 prompted Ginsburgh to call publicly, not for the last time, for ‘a revolution’ to replace the Israeli government with a Halakhic theocracy ruled by a Sanhedrin: ‘The secular basis of Israel must be changed, he emphasized, calling for a “new Jewish country” under which halacha (Jewish religious law) and specifically the Hoshen Mishpat of the Shulchan Arukh would replace Israeli civil law.’<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Note that while Ginsburgh is affiliated with Chabad, *Od Yosef Chai* is not. For a brief and accessible overview of Chabad Hasidism see, e.g., Adam J. Szubin, ‘Why Lubavitch Wants the Messiah Now: Religious Immigration as a Cause of Millenarianism’, in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten (Leiden; Boston; and Cologne: Brill. 2000), 216-7.

<sup>47</sup> Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Robert Friedman, *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel’s West Bank Settlement Movement* (New York: Random House, 1992), xxvii.

<sup>49</sup> The pamphlet was later incorporated as a chapter in the book of the same name memorializing Goldstein. Regarding dissociation from and criticism of Goldstein’s act (to varying degrees) by most of the religious right, see e.g. Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 66n11.

<sup>50</sup> Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 136-9.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 104-6.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 11. Rabbi Bin-Nun was sensitized to the dangers of hyper- and antinomian interpretations of mystical Judaism (tied to political praxis) by the revelation in the 1980s that one of his own students had become a leader of the terrorist cell, nicknamed the Jewish Underground by the press, that carried out revenge attacks against Arab civilians and plotted to blow up the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount; the revelation was painful and confronting. (This plan was grounded in a messianist, Kabbalistic approach that has some obvious parallels with Ginsburgh’s thought, though I make no attempt here to probe the extent of the affinity.)

<sup>53</sup> Gil Zohar, ‘Noted Kabbalist and Dean of Destroyed Nablus Yeshiva Calls for “Revolution” in Israel’, *Jewish Tribune*, May 9, 2002. The IDF had deemed the yeshiva a security liability; most troops had withdrawn from Nablus under Oslo provisions in 1996, and the isolated yeshiva now required special provisions. After the 2000 withdrawal,

In 2003, Israeli attorney-general Elyakim Rubinstein indicted Ginsburgh for incitement to racism in his 2001 book *Tzav HaSha'ah: Tipul Shoresh*, which stated that Arab citizens of Israel had no right to live there, shared the 'licentious and unbridled character' of Ishmael, and were a 'cancer' within the Jewish state.<sup>54</sup> The matter was settled by a plea bargain requiring Ginsburgh to issue a written apology.<sup>55</sup>

A fresh controversy<sup>56</sup> erupted after the publication of *Torat HaMelekh* ('The King's Torah')<sup>57</sup> in 2009 by two of Ginsburgh's students, rabbis Yitzchak Shapira<sup>58</sup> and Yosef Elitzur, both senior teachers at *Od Yosef Chai*. It discussed circumstances under which the Halakhah may permit or even mandate the pre-emptive killing of Gentiles, including women and children. As paraphrased by one disgusted reporter, "The prohibition "Thou Shalt Not Murder" applies only "to a Jew who kills a Jew". ... Non-Jews are "uncompassionate by nature" and attacks on them "curb their evil inclination" while babies and children of Israel's enemies may be killed since "it is clear that they will grow to harm us."<sup>59</sup> Shapira later explained this stance in an interview on Haredi radio station Kol Hai: 'Let's assume that to win a war I have to kill children, otherwise my soldiers will die, then surely killing the enemies' children is more correct than having my soldiers killed.'<sup>60</sup> This relates to an objection to the IDF protocol of 'purity of arms' (forbidding pre-emptive use of live fire), which is seen by Ginsburgh and his disciples as being based on 'perverse ideas and would-be ethical doctrines' imported from the (Gentile) West rather than on the Torah,<sup>61</sup> and as criminally endangering Jewish soldiers' lives.<sup>62</sup>

In connection to this book, police raided Shapira's home and arrested him in July 2010 'on suspicion of incitement to racial violence, possession of racist text, and and [*sic*] possession of material that incites to violence'.<sup>63</sup> He was released within hours.<sup>64</sup> They also

the Tomb site was vandalized by a Palestinian mob (though the sarcophagus itself was left untouched), which Ginsburgh saw as an addition to a long list of the sins of the 'Ishmaelites', warranting their expulsion from the Land of Life 'quickly in our days, amen!' Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 3: Sha'ar Revi'i, Milchemot haShem; Sha'ar Chamishi, Mikdash haShem* [Dominion of Israel, volume 3: Gate 4, the wars of God; gate 5, the temple of God] (Kfar Chabad, Israel: Gal Eini, 2005), v.

<sup>54</sup> Baruch Kra, 'Rabbi Charged with Racist Incitement', *Ha'aretz*, July 4, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Yuval Yoaz, 'Judge Proposes Rabbi Ginsburgh Retract Inciteful Statements', *Haaretz*, November 5, 2003. Ginsburgh's lawyer – and the religious right generally – cried foul, claiming a conspiracy by the prime minister and justice ministry to 'crush any sign of resistance' ('Suspicious Incitement Charges', *Arutz Sheva*, June 3, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> E.g., *Jerusalem Post*, June 27 and July 4, 2011; *Ha'aretz*, November 17, 2009, and January 22 and July 29, 2010; *Arutz Sheva*, July 26, 2010, and June 30 and July 4, 2011; and *Yedioth Achronoth*, July 26 and August 1, 2010.

<sup>57</sup> It is now quite difficult for those outside the community to access copies of the book; however, a substantial summary and collection of related essays and analyses can be downloaded from the *Od Yosef Chai* website: <http://www.odyosefchai.org.il/TextHome/TextInfo/389> (accessed February 6, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> In contrast to Ginsburgh's background in Hasidism, Shapira's education is classic religious Zionism of the Kook school: he studied at the *Merkaz HaRav* yeshiva ketana and gedola.

<sup>59</sup> *The Forward* and Daniel Estrin, 'The King's Torah: A Rabbinic Text or a Call to Terror?' *Haaretz*, January 22, 2010. Similarly harsh Halakhic opinions can be found on the militant fringe of the religious Zionist fold: see, e.g., Haim Lewinson, 'HaRav HaTzeva'i LeSheAvar: Lirot Et Hashudim BeTerror BeMitoteihem' [The former military rabbi: Shoot terror suspects in their beds], *Haaretz*, October 17, 2011 (referring to Rabbi Avichai Ronsky's opinion); Efrat Weiss, 'HaRav Dov Lior: Mutar Lirot BeChafim MePasha' [Rabbi Dov Lior: It is permitted to shoot innocents], *Yedioth Achronoth*, May 19, 2004. However, this paper does not explore the details of the ongoing Halakhic debate about limits to the appropriate use of force. See note 167.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Jonah Mandel, 'Author of "Torat Hamelech" Speaks Out', *Jerusalem Post*, July 4, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying the State of Israel: A Political Platform Based on Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, New York, and Los Angeles: Gal Einai, 2003), 91.

<sup>62</sup> Ginsburgh's Halakhic opinion on the matter is as follows: 'If [Jewish] soldiers and civilians are ordered not to shoot [Arabs] first in self-defence, the order must be disobeyed'. Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Eli Senyor, 'Rabbi Yitzhak Shapira suspected of incitement against non-Jews', *Yedioth Achronoth*, July 26, 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Chaim Levinson, 'Police Release Rabbi Arrested for Inciting to Kill Non-Jews', *Haaretz*, July 27, 2010.

raided *Od Yosef Chai*, confiscating about 30 copies of the book. Days later, Ginsburgh was detained by the Unit of International Crime Investigation and questioned over his *haskamah*<sup>65</sup> for the book, but was released promptly.<sup>66</sup>

Leading religious Zionist rabbis denounced the book’s conclusions as Halakhically fallacious and morally blind.<sup>67</sup> Head of the *Har Etzion* yeshiva, Rabbi Yaakov Meidan, said that although it did not *incite* murder, it should still ‘be burned ... from a fear that someone will read the book and do something’; he also worried that Shapira’s teachings would lead hilltop youths to spend their lives in gaol.<sup>68</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Aviner of Beit El, head of the *Ateret Yerushalayim* yeshiva (and a leading voice in the *mamlachti* tradition), claimed the cheapening of Gentile blood implied in the book had no basis in Halakhah.<sup>69</sup> There were many more such criticisms.<sup>70</sup>

The yeshiva has more recently attracted controversy in connection to its alleged sponsorship of price tag activism. Rabbi Elitzur, in conjunction with Groner and other yeshiva graduates, has been credited by some with authoring the so-called ‘price tag manifesto’<sup>71</sup> in the form of a newsletter article<sup>72</sup> that outlines a programme of vigilante retaliation for policies curbing settlement expansion. The article was published on December 4, 2009, in response to the 10-month building freeze announced that November. He called the strategy ‘mutual guarantee’ or *arevut hadadit* (ערבות הדדית – the term also preferred by Groner to describe price tag operations<sup>73</sup>), and its three prongs were as follows.<sup>74</sup>

First, *indiscriminate attacks against Arabs in response to anti-settlement government policies*: if the Arabs are ‘winning’ the war for *Eretz Yisrael* by their aggression and violence, they’ll get the same treatment every time Jewish settlements are blocked. Elitzur boasted that Yitzhar was ‘safe’ from the officials enforcing the building freeze because no one dared to come near except with significant armed back-up, and because the IDF knew the visit would end with damage to army property – and even more damage to Arab property ‘and bodies’, in an ‘inflammation’ that would last for days.

Second, *focused attacks on Israeli political leaders who directly implemented the policies (including settler leaders)*: those who truly cared for Jews, *Eretz Yisrael*, and Torah had to disrupt the safe and comfortable lives of people like state prosecutor Shai Nitzan (who has been at the forefront of legal action against incitement and settler violence)<sup>75</sup> as well as

---

<sup>65</sup> An endorsement of its Halakhic coherence and accuracy, though not necessarily expressing agreement with the book’s conclusions.

<sup>66</sup> Chaim Levinson, ‘Book Condoning Murder Has Another Rabbi in Hot Water’, *Haaretz*, July 29, 2010.

<sup>67</sup> See Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 166-173. This provides an excellent précis of the Halakhic debate around the book within religious Zionist circles.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-2.

<sup>71</sup> Yosef Elitzur, ‘Arevut Hadadit: Ha’Estrategia’ [Mutual guarantee: The strategy], *HaKol HaYehudi*, December 4, 2009; see too the criticism of Gadi Gvaryahu, ‘HaChazon Hitgashem: Mismakh haHora’ut le-“Tag Mechir” [The vision realized: The instruction manual for price tagging], *Yedioth Achronoth*, November 20, 2011.

<sup>72</sup> It appeared in *HaKol HaYehudi*, a Yitzhar-based newsletter and website associated with *Od Yosef Chai* students and edited by Groner.

<sup>73</sup> See the interview in Aral Segel, ‘Mi Yachol Lehalot Al HaDa’at Yeri Al Chayyalim’ [Who could conceive of shooting soldiers], *Maariv*, July 27, 2011. The Hebrew term connotes mutual responsibility and accountability.

<sup>74</sup> I have tried to capture the tone of the article in the following English summary.

<sup>75</sup> See, e.g., Aviad Glickman, ‘Deputy Prosecutor Fears Rightist Attacks: Law Enforcement Source says Shai Nitzan’s Family Living in Fear of Retaliation for Rabbi’s Arrest’, *Yedioth Achronoth*, June 28, 2011. Right-wing protestors who gathered outside his house raised the cry ‘Eichmann’; see Segel, ‘Mi Yachol Lehalot Al HaDa’at.’

their families behind the green line. Collaborators within the mainstream settler movement should also be targeted – *especially*, Elitzur underlined, those who were Torah observant but who still co-operated with vile policies to limit the settlements. He suggested targeting the Yesha Council offices in Beit El: if they bulldoze our homes, we'll bulldoze their office. That corrupt body, he said, must be revealed for what it is: an aggressive, conquering force.<sup>76</sup>

The third tactic proposed was to encourage IDF soldiers to hurt Arabs, tip off settlers about planned army movements, and damage any army property used to damage settler property.

Beyond this ideological guidance, yeshiva staff have also been apprehended on suspicion – though, it must be stressed, not convicted – of personal involvement in revenge attacks. In 2008, Shapira 'was suspected of involvement in a crude rocket attack directed at a Palestinian village. Israeli police investigated but made no arrests'.<sup>77</sup> Claims have been made that he authorized and participated in revenge attacks on Palestinian villages by Yitzhar settlers, including one conducted on the Sabbath during which the participants are said to have set fire to a house and stabbed a child.<sup>78</sup> In January 2010, more than 100 Israeli security officials raided *Od Yosef Chai*, arresting 10 settlers, among them Shapira and his students, on suspicion of involvement in the December 2009 arson attack and vandalizing of the Yasuf mosque; he was released days later.<sup>79</sup>

The wider yeshiva and Yitzhar community have also been associated with vigilante violence. Ariel Groner was among 19 settlers banned from the territories in late 2006, on the grounds of Shin Bet recommendations that they had the means and intention to perpetrate anti-Arab attacks. Among the other four *Od Yosef Chai* students in this group was Yehuda Meir, son-in-law of the Kahanist politician Baruch Marzel.<sup>80</sup> In October 2009, three Yitzhar residents (including Ariel Groner again) received a six-month ban from entering the territories on suspicion of involvement in illegal violence against Arabs.<sup>81</sup> On Israel's Independence Day in April 2010, Yitzhar settlers rioted and threw stones at IDF soldiers blocking the route of their march to the neighbouring Palestinian village of Madama to 'protest' the 10-month building freeze.<sup>82</sup> And later that month, police raided Yitzhar, arresting seven residents suspected of participating in price tag attacks on Palestinians. The arrests provoked residents to march on the neighbouring Palestinian village of Hawara and throw rocks at a private home.<sup>83</sup> In November 2010, two *Od Yosef Chai* students were caught in possession of a knife and a mask,<sup>84</sup> and in August 2011, police acted on a Shin Bet recommendation to issue restraining orders against 12 Yitzhar

<sup>76</sup> To avoid possible confusion: he means it is aggressive towards the outposts, not Palestinians.

<sup>77</sup> *The Forward* and Estrin, 'The King's Torah.'

<sup>78</sup> The National Religious Party organ *HaTzofeh* was deeply critical of Shapira, suggesting that he had forfeited his right to be considered a rabbi. See Shmuel Kopper, "'HaRav" Yitzik Shapira – MeManhigei No'ar HaGeva'ot' [The 'rabbi' Yitzhak Shapira – a leader of the Hilltop Youth], *HaTzofeh*, July 26, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Efrat Weiss, '10 Detained in Yitzhar Over Mosque Arson', *Yedioth Achronoth*, January 18, 2010; Chaim Levinson, 'Settler Rabbi Arrested over West Bank Mosque Arson', *Haaretz*, January 26, 2010.

<sup>80</sup> See Roie Sharon, 'Al HaKavenet Shel Sherut HaBitachon HaKlali' [In the cross-hairs of the General Security Service], *Maariv*, November 2, 2006. I will allude subsequently to connections between the Kahanist and *Od Yosef Chai* circles. Elucidating the relationship fully merits separate analysis.

<sup>81</sup> Roie Sharon, 'LeRegel HaMasik: Pe'ilei Yemin Hurchaku MeHaShetachim' [In honour of the harvest: Right-wing activists banned from the Territories], *Maariv*, October 12, 2009.

<sup>82</sup> 'Yitzhar Settlers Clash with Soldiers', *Jerusalem Post*, April 20, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Shmulik Grossman, 'Yitzhar Settlers Vandalize Palestinian Homes', *Yedioth Achronoth*, April 29, 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Yair Altman, 'Government Closes Down Yitzhar Yeshiva', *Yedioth Achronoth*, November 1, 2011.

(and nearby) settlers, one of whom was an *Od Yosef Chai* student, plus another student who was not himself a settler. They were barred from entering the Yitzhar area on suspicion of attacking Palestinians.<sup>85</sup> The latter student, Efi Haikin, had previously been arrested ‘for allegedly torching the car of the [Israeli] Binyamin police chief during the evacuation of the outpost of Alei Ayin’.<sup>86</sup>

Such tensions with the Israeli authorities passed a tipping point of sorts in late 2011, when the Shin Bet recommended that the education ministry should cut *Od Yosef Chai*’s state funding. It claimed to hold ‘a lot of information about the involvement of students at *Od Yosef Hai* and *Dorshei Yehudcha* [the yeshiva high school] in illegal, subversive and violent activities against Arabs and the security forces. The information indicates that the yeshiva’s rabbis and leaders are aware of some of these activities, but do not prevent them, and even enable students to take part in them.’<sup>87</sup> In November 2011, the director general of the education ministry, Dr Shimon Shoshani, axed *Od Yosef Chai*’s government funds and ordered that *Doreshei Yechudkha* be shut down. Such censure of a yeshiva was an exceptional step in the context of normal Israeli educational politics, in which yeshivas traditionally enjoy full government funding, autonomy in setting the curriculum, and minimal oversight.<sup>88</sup> Shoshani’s rationale was that ‘students are involved in many violent acts against Palestinian residents and security forces, including during yeshiva study hours. Prominent rabbis in the yeshiva support and/or are involved in this violent activity and go as far as to incite the students to this sort of activity.’<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, Shoshani held that ‘*Torat Hamelech* and other such publications cannot be consistent with educational principles and with the influence that an educator in general and specifically a rabbi has on his students.’<sup>90</sup> However, *Od Yosef Chai* continues to operate (without the yeshiva ketanah), thanks to private donors.

This track record of friction over texts and acts alike raises questions about the links between alleged violent practices and the religio-political thought of the yeshiva’s spiritual father, Rabbi Ginsburgh, to which this paper now turns. The following sections present an

<sup>85</sup> Yaakov Lappin, ‘“Extreme Right-wing Activists” Banned from Yitzhar’, *Jerusalem Post*, August 2, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Chaim Levinson, ‘13 People Ordered Out of Yitzhar Settlement for Allegedly Attacking Palestinians’, *Haaretz*, August 3, 2011. Note that spokesmen of the Israeli far right claim that the police, Shin Bet, and mainstream media misrepresent the nature of such events and engage in provocation and distortion. MK Michael Ben-Ari (affiliated with the Kahanist movement) described the eviction orders of October 2009 as evidence of ‘discrimination’ on the part of the Shin Bet; Itamar Ben-Gvir called it a ‘witch hunt’; and others described it as a brutal violation of the settlers’ democratic and human rights. See Roie Sharon, ‘LeRegel HaMasik.’ Others have claimed the authorities and media exaggerate their aggression in order to sway public opinion in favour of uprooting the settlement, and that some price tag incidents are staged by the security forces. See, e.g., the comments by Yehuda Liebman and Ariel Groner in Aral Segel, ‘Mi Yachol Lehalot Al HaDa’at.’

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Amos Harel, ‘Shin Bet Urges Israeli Government to Halt Funding of West Bank Yeshiva’, *Haaretz*, September 27, 2011.

<sup>88</sup> Past funding has been substantial. In an article titled ‘Who is Funding the Rabbi who Endorses Killing Gentile Babies?’ in *Haaretz*, November 17, 2009, Akiva Eldar reported a finding by the Yesh Din human rights organization that ‘in 2006-2007, the Ministry of Education department of Torah institutions transferred over a million shekels to the *Od Yosef Hai* yeshiva’. Further, in 2009, ‘the Education Ministry gave it NIS 468,000 for the yeshiva high school and NIS 847,000 for the yeshiva gedola. The yeshiva also got money from the Social Affairs Ministry for a project to rehabilitate ultra-Orthodox drop-outs (NIS 707,000 in 2009), plus NIS 156,000 to operate a dormitory’ (Amos Harel, ‘Shin Bet’). Funding had been suspended since early 2011, following complaints from progressive Jewish movements, but the permanence of this move had been ambiguous prior to Shoshani’s decision (the yeshiva had received a letter saying funding would be restored). In any case, demolition orders had been hanging over the yeshiva since May 2010, based on claims it was built without a valid permit. See ‘Yitzhar Yeshiva Demolition Planned’, *Jerusalem Post*, July 28, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Altman, ‘Government Closes Down.’ See too Chaim Levinson, ‘Israel Closes Down Yitzhar Yeshiva due to Violent Acts against Palestinians’, *Haaretz*, November 1, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Elad Benari, ‘Ministry of Education Stops Funding to Yitzhar Yeshiva’, *Arutz Sheva*, Nov. 2, 2011.

analysis of Ginsburgh's Kabbalistic teachings on relations between Jews and Gentiles, the mystical meaning of settlement, and the positive character of revenge, with a view to elucidating in particular the yeshiva's sympathy and (arguably) advocacy for price tag-style vigilantism against Arabs.

Three caveats are in order. Firstly, I do not attempt to present a full and nuanced discussion of Ginsburgh's Halakhic opinions but rather to elucidate the broader Kabbalistic framework that underpins them, and to explore how it may operate to normalize and even sanctify indiscriminate anti-Arab violence. Secondly, the task of contextualizing Ginsburgh relative to mainstream Chabad Hasidism, the Kahanist movement, and the more militant voices on the edges of the religious Zionist camp is pointed to in the footnotes, but full analysis is deferred for more lengthy treatment elsewhere.<sup>91</sup> Thirdly, Ginsburgh's calls for a theocratic revolution may challenge the conception of anti-state price tag attacks as an instance of vigilantism (i.e., as establishment violence), and this should also be explored in future work.<sup>92</sup>

### *The Superior Nature and Spiritual Purpose of Jews*

Ginsburgh's writings emphasize Jews' 'supernatural'<sup>93</sup> character vis-à-vis Gentiles – an essential, ontological superiority that stems from the anchoring of the Jewish soul in a higher Kabbalistic plane.<sup>94</sup> This metaphysical ontology underpins his Halakhic opinions, such as the permissibility of killing Gentiles: in his own words, the Halakhic definition of Jewishness (and, as we shall see, humanity) requires both Jews and Gentiles to *feel* the 'essential/innate difference' between Jew and *goy*,<sup>95</sup> which stems from Jews' status as God's chosen people.<sup>96</sup>

To elaborate the content of this scheme: while Gentiles occupy the highest of four ranks of nature in Kabbalah (these being inanimate objects, plants, animals, and speaking creatures), Jews transcend this hierarchy entirely, as they contain a spark of true divinity

---

<sup>91</sup> This is a subtle issue that merits its own dedicated analysis, as it cannot be assumed *a priori* that the diverse mystical speculations, political prescriptions, Halakhic opinions, and violent acts associated with each of these quite distinct ideological streams are part of a common thought system and have similar political consequences.

<sup>92</sup> There is an excellent overview in Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*. Careful investigation of his case for theocracy and its relationship (if any) with actual militant conduct towards agents of state authority is needed to delineate whether symbolic violence and threats against politicians or the IDF depart from the framework of vigilantism outlined in the previous section (i.e., by targeting the regime's normative democratic foundations rather than merely its policies), or whether the two programmes are functionally and ideologically separate.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-5.

<sup>94</sup> Though this paper does not undertake a systematic comparison with rabbinical thought on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in religious Zionism (mainstream and fringe), it should be noted that similarly exclusivist pronouncements (although not articulated based on Kabbalistic 'truths') can be found in some religious Zionist teachings as well, as attested by the quotations scattered through Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 95-8, 100, 105, 113. Examples include calls for 'separation' from Gentiles not dissimilar to those made by Ginsburgh (discussed below). The points of commonality and difference require careful discussion, since the ideological genealogies are in many respects distinct (in particular, Rav Avraham Kook's own Kabbalistic ideas were profoundly monistic rather than dualistic); this task is left for a separate, focused analysis.

<sup>95</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1: Sha'ar Rishon, Mitzvot ha'Tzibur; Sha'ar Sheni, ha'Am v'ha'Aratz* [Dominion of Israel, volume 1: Gate 1, the public commandments; gate 2, the people and the land], second printing (amended) (Kfar Chabad, Israel: Gal Eini, 2005), תח.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, שפז.

that is completely above nature.<sup>97</sup> This divine aspect of the Jews stems from *Atzilut* (אצילות), he writes, the highest of four metaphysical ‘worlds’ or planes of reality according to Kabbalah.<sup>98</sup> In the realm of *Atzilut*, no separation from divinity is experienced. The metaphysical origin of Gentiles is only in *Beri’ah* (בריאה), the next-lowest of the four worlds, where separation of the divine and earthly begins. Strictly, he places only righteous Gentiles in the framework of *ger toshav* (גר תושב) – a resident alien who accepts the yoke of Jewish rule) at this rank; followers of the seven Noachide commandments correspond to a rank one step down, *Yetzirah* (יצירה); and all remaining Gentiles stem from *Asiyah* (עשייה) – the basest of the four worlds.<sup>99</sup> Thus, while Jews are identified with the refined plane of pure divinity, Gentiles are identified with increasingly dense and coarse layers of existence, associated with the material and animalistic.<sup>100</sup>

This spiritual (and, for Ginsburgh, physical) hierarchy can be traced to Zoharic and Lurianic Kabbalah.<sup>101</sup> The *Zohar* describes *Am Yisrael* (עם ישראל), the people of Israel, as occupying a higher metaphysical plane than Gentiles, often framing the purpose of creation itself as the making of the Chosen People, not of humanity as a whole.<sup>102</sup> Some analysts argue that the *Zohar* restricts the functional definition of a ‘human being’ to Jews only.<sup>103</sup> For example, the *Zohar* states: ‘as it is written, “for you are *adam* [man]” (Ezekiel 34:31), you [Jews] are called men but not the rest of the nations, for they are idolaters. ... The spirit that emanates upon the rest of the idolatrous nations, which derives from the

<sup>97</sup> Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 2: Sha’ar Shlishi, Malkhut Melekh uSanhedrin* [Dominion of Israel, volume 2: Dominion of the king and Sanhedrin], second printing (amended) (Kfar Chabad, Israel: Gal Eini, 2005), 76.

<sup>98</sup> In ascending order, the worlds are *Asiyah*, *Beri’ah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Atzilut*; see, e.g., Gershon Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, reprint of 3rd edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 272-3. First published 1941.

<sup>99</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, שפא שפז.

<sup>100</sup> This conditions Ginsburgh’s opinion that Gentile culture is the source of sin and separation from divinity, and that it is therefore Halakhically forbidden for Jews to praise or even enjoy the smallest element thereof. *Ibid.*, שפז שסז. This is based on his Kabbalistic reading of *Deut.* 7:2 (‘לא תהום’) as ‘thou shalt not pronounce them [pagans] as graceful’; see Moshe Halbertal, ‘Coexisting with the Enemy: Jews and Pagans in the Mishnah’, in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 165. Ginsburgh allows some caveats pertaining to the messianic age, in which ‘Gentile wisdom’ (e.g., the natural sciences) will be purified and refined through the light of the Torah (see Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 2*, מה; *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, שפז שפז, and *Rectifying*, 111-6). However, Jews must not be unduly influenced by Gentile ideas during this process: the Jew must strictly give insight and the Gentile receive it, in adherence to their respective creative and passive metaphysical natures. No reciprocal relationship of equals is envisaged (Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 2*, מה). See too the discussion in Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 148.

<sup>101</sup> See Moshe Hallamish, ‘HaYachas le’Umot ha’Olam be’Olamam shel haMekubbalim’ [The relationship to the nations of the world in the world of the Kabbalists], in *MeRomi leYerushalayim* [From Rome to Jerusalem], ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 289-311; and Scholem, *Major Trends*, 205-43, 244-86.

<sup>102</sup> See Micah Goodman, ‘Al haYachas le’Umot ha’Olam be’Haguto shel Ramban’ [On the relation to the nations of the world in the Ramban’s thought], *Tarbitz* 73, no. 3 (2004): 459, 469-70; for a detailed exposition, see especially Elliot Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17-185.

<sup>103</sup> See Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 5n15, 46-57. Note that ontological distinctions between Jew and Gentile are not an innovation of the Kabbalists. Antecedents can be found in Talmudic and Mishnaic, and indeed biblical, tradition (see generally Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 28-41). Various rabbinic texts claim that the term *adam* applies only to Jews (*ibid.*, 42-44). However, Zoharic Kabbalah ignores the parallel tradition in these texts that considers Gentiles equal as human beings, deserving of respect and legal rights; it neglects to appropriate the discursive context in which inclusivist positions balance the exclusivist ones. On the treatment of Gentiles in biblical and rabbinic literature (both inclusive and exclusionary) see, e.g., Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006); Robert Eisen, *The Peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible to Modern Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15-110; and Robert Goldenberg, *The Nations That Know Thee Not: Ancient Jewish Attitudes Towards Other Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 1998). For discussion of the inclusive tradition relating to Gentiles in Halakhic and Jewish philosophical frameworks, see especially David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noachide Law*, 2nd ed., ed. Matthew Lagrone (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011).



side that is not holy, is not considered *adam* [man].<sup>104</sup> The cheapening of Gentile blood implied by Ginsburgh's statements in court (and arguably *Torat HaMelekh*) can thus be clarified by the underlying (and unstated) Zoharic assumption that only Jews are fully human. Various Zoharic tracts also describe the exceptional quality of Jews as descendants of Abraham and Yitzchak, and conversely the impurity of Gentiles.<sup>105</sup> (The footnotes herein point to opposing rabbinic traditions emphasizing common humanity.)

The Arizal (Rabbi Isaac Luria) and his followers further developed and complexified these ideas of an ontological hierarchy, and Lurianic Kabbalah was in turn an influence on Schneur Zalman's opus, the *Tanya*, and thence on Chabad Hasidism.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, Ginsburgh's political teachings often refer to Lurianic ideas, including those establishing Jews' special status.

He also often poses and resolves political dilemmas in the language of the Lurianic doctrine *shevirat hakelim* (שבירת הכלים – the breaking of the vessels) and the need for *tikkun ha'olam* (תיקון העולם – repairing the world), as shown shortly.<sup>107</sup> In extremely brief (and simplified) format, this is a Kabbalistic narrative of cosmogeny and eschatology in which the existence of evil in the world is explained by a rupture in the original metaphysical order of creation, and in which ultimate messianic redemption will arise from the repair (*tikkun*) of this rupture. Zoharic and Lurianic Kabbalah understands creation as unfolding through progressive divine emanations and differentiations (*sefirot*) of the original, boundless source of pure divinity – a process that takes place, metaphysically, *within* the Godhead. But in Luria's thought, before the dawn of time, the light of the emanations shattered the immature vessels (*kelim*) that had been prepared to give them material form. The lost sparks (the *Shekhinah*, associated with the divine feminine, and which Kabbalah identifies with Ecclesia Israel – the metaphysical counterpart of the Jewish people) became trapped within the impure shards or 'shells' (*kelipot*) of the broken vessels. Repair or *tikkun* is understood as liberating the hidden sparks, to allow them to return to their root in the divine. Though some Kabbalistic interpretations posit a constructive role for the *kelipot*, Ginsburgh generally associates them with evil and with the Gentile world, and – as discussed below – uses this scheme to justify revenge attacks on Gentiles and the expulsion of Arabs from Israel as theurgic practices to separate the holy lights from the impure *kelipot*. This represents an inversion of normative Jewish understandings of *tikkun*.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Zohar I:20b, trans. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 53; see further Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 235.

<sup>105</sup> E.g., on Jews' essential superiority, see Zohar I:95a, 99b; II:6a, 78b, 88b, 124a, 125a; and III:152b, 237a; on Gentile impurity, see Zohar I:28b, 79b; II:25b, 86a, 131b, 120a, 275b; III:125a, 219a, 238b; Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 24; Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 27. The context of Christian persecution of Jews is relevant. Emphasis on Jewish metaphysical supremacy and polemics against the Gentile nations can be seen as largely reactionary; see, e.g., Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 45-6.

<sup>106</sup> See, e.g., Yitzchak Kraus, *HaShevi'i: HaMeshichut beDor haShevi'i shel Chabad* [The seventh: Messianism in the last generation of Chabad] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Achronoth, 2007); Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 231-9; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 191; David Novak, 'The Man-made Messiah', *First Things* 209 (2011): 32-6.

<sup>107</sup> There is not scope here to do justice to these ideas. For an overview of some relevant aspects of Lurianic Kabbalah, see, e.g., Sanford L. Drob, *Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Northvale NJ: J. Aronson, 2000), 294-328; Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Daphne Freedman, 'Lurianic Creation Myths', in *Imagining Creation*, Volume 5 in IJS Studies in Judaica, Conference Proceedings of the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College London, ed. Markham J. Geller and Mineke Schipper (Leiden, Belgium; and Boston: Brill, 2008), 389-415.

<sup>108</sup> See Gilbert S. Rosenthal, 'Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept.' *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005): 214-40. Also, Moshe Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*, trans. Ruth Bar-Ilan and Ora Wiskind-Elper

according to which creation can be rectified through the performance of good deeds such as Torah study, following *mitzvot* (commandments), meditation, and prayer (certainly not by aggressive violence).

Kabbalah also supposes that the earthly conduct of Jews has metaphysical, *sefirotic* effects; in particular, by raising the lowest *sefirah*, *Malkhut* (identified with the *Shekhinah*), to unite with her male counterpart, the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*. This conjugal union on the metaphysical plane ensures the purity of the ongoing emanation of creation, and is a key component of *tikkun*.

As we shall see, Ginsburgh uses both these concepts to articulate his conception of Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael* and correct relations between Jews and Gentiles therein.

### *Settlement in Ginsburgh’s Metaphysics*

The Hilltop Youth milieu in which Ginsburgh’s ideas have taken root was already opposed to territorial concessions, as described in the first section. Ginsburgh embraces the extant normative basis for this stance in Gush Emunim tradition (the emphasis on the *mitzvah* of settlement as a supreme commandment) but articulates the redemptive, messianist dimension of settlement through explicit *sefirotic* concepts, in which settlement becomes a form of divine intercourse between male and female archetypes within the Godhead.

He thus attaches a two-pronged importance to Jewish settlement of the territories: Halakhic and metaphysical. The Halakhic dimension is shared with mainstream religious Zionism (of the *Merkez HaRav* school),<sup>109</sup> which embraces Nachmanides’<sup>110</sup> elevation of settlement of the Promised Land to a ‘positive commandment’ demanding everyday action<sup>111</sup> and, indeed, a *mitzvah* to supersede all others: ‘living in *Eretz Yisrael* is equal in importance to all the commandments’.<sup>112</sup> He argued that the duty to settle *Eretz Yisrael* was a ‘practical and unambiguous commandment’ – for all Jews, and for all time.<sup>113</sup>

Kabbalistically, Ginsburgh writes that settling and developing the land on the material plane effects a cosmic union between divine archetypes of husband and wife on the metaphysical plane, and union of the upper *sefirot* with the earthly plane, *Malkhut*/the *Shekhinah*, thus promoting cosmic harmony and *tikkun*.<sup>114</sup> Every point of Jewish settlement on the Land is a point of such conjugal love,<sup>115</sup> in which the Jewish People are the groom and the Land of Israel is the bride.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, all forms of working the land are, ‘mystically, an act of marital union, of sowing seeds in the fertile soil of Israel for the sake of bearing fruit’.<sup>117</sup> This, he claims, is the esoteric meaning of *Song*. 3:10,<sup>118</sup> which he reads

---

(Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 234-41; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 130-1; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 233.

<sup>109</sup> See Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 111-8.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Maimonides’ Halakhic stance on the *mitzvah* of settling the land (Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael I*, נג).

<sup>111</sup> *Mitzvat asah*. See Nachmanides’ *Mishneh Torah* on *Deut.* 1:8 and *Num.* 33:53.

<sup>112</sup> Trans. in Aryeh Newman, ‘The Centrality of Eretz Yisrael in Nachmanides’, *Tradition* 10, no. 1 (1968): 22.

<sup>113</sup> Gedaliah Afterman, ‘Understanding the Theology of Israel’s Extreme Religious Right: “The Chosen People” and “the Land of Israel” from the Bible to the “Expulsion from Gush Katif”’ (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2007), 71.

<sup>114</sup> See generally Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael I*, רכז רמז.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, רד, ‘אֵהְבָהּ בְּתַעֲנוּגֵיךְ: ר: רד, (from the Shabbat song *מִה יִפִּית*).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, רנו, *Rectifying*, 78, 80.

<sup>117</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 81.

as a direct mandate ‘to populate the country with numerous contiguous points of settlement’.<sup>119</sup>

This exclusive marital – and, in a cosmic sense, conjugal – relationship delegitimizes existing Palestinian communities. Ginsburgh writes: ‘the taking of possession of any part of the Land of Israel by a foreigner is a betrayal of one’s beloved’.<sup>120</sup> He uses numerology in support of this claim, arguing that the numerical equivalence of *lo tin’af* (לֹא תִנְאַף), ‘thou shalt not commit adultery’, and *tziyonut* (צִיּוֹנוּת), ‘Zionism’, teaches that Torah-oriented Zionism cannot allow ‘adultery’ on the level of the land by ‘allowing foreign elements to breach our bond of love’.<sup>121</sup> Ginsburgh argues that the sacred coupling between the Jewish people and the Land, via settlement, is akin to that between Jews and the Sabbath<sup>122</sup>; just as a Gentile deserves death for Sabbath observance,<sup>123</sup> so too is it forbidden for Gentiles to settle the Land. Arab towns and villages in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), as well as those behind the green line, are thus an adulterous desecration of a cosmic marriage,<sup>124</sup> promoting chaos in the heavenly spheres.<sup>125</sup> He writes that ‘we must walk together with God, in total commitment to fulfil His will – that His chosen people inherit His chosen land and allow no adulterer to defile the holy marriage of the [Jewish] people to the land’.<sup>126</sup>

Further, based on the Kabbalistic notion that earthly circumstances reflect and influence the state of the heavens, he argues that since the Land of Israel represents one indivisible, divine ‘whole’ on the metaphysical plane – being directly connected to God and suffused with His essence – its territories must likewise be united under Jewish rule on the earthly (political) plane to effect *tikkun*. True Jewish leaders, he writes, must rally the people to devote themselves to the truth of the supernal and physical wholeness of *Eretz Yisrael*, and to see that it is impossible to compromise such a unity by ceding any of the Land to Palestinians.<sup>127</sup>

There is also a theurgic motivation for removing the Gentile presence. Redemption can arise, in Ginsburgh’s view, only with the ‘true’, full settlement of the Land, which he defines as contiguous Jewish settlement and the Land’s purification from all elements of *avodah zarah* (עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה), idolatry,<sup>128</sup> Gentile culture, sins, and defects; only then will Israel merit the expansion of the kingdom’s borders to those promised in the Torah – and

<sup>118</sup> ‘His interior is inlaid with the love of the daughters of Jerusalem’.

<sup>119</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 80. Without humor, he adds in parentheses: ‘Just as marital relations must be conducted in privacy, so did the Rebbe advise the Israeli government, in the years following the Six-Day War, to settle all of the redeemed territories as soon as possible and as quietly as possible’. Ibid. The reference is to a letter that can be found in an unedited compendium of Schneerson’s communications regarding Israeli territorial concessions: Menachem M. Schneerson, *Kavati veEin Oneh* [I called and there is no answer], last ed. July 22, 2004, [www.chabadtalk.com/SLASHU/ploadedFiles/SLASHbook.pdf](http://www.chabadtalk.com/SLASHU/ploadedFiles/SLASHbook.pdf) (accessed February 15, 2012), 148.

<sup>120</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 77; see too 83, 178-9ff.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 175-6ff.

<sup>122</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, שג שגא; *Rectifying*, 80. As Shabbat is sacred in time, he writes, *Eretz Yisrael* is sacred in space.

<sup>123</sup> Ginsburgh’s sources: *Sanh.* 28:2; *Deut. R.* 1:21.

<sup>124</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, עז.

<sup>125</sup> This of course parallels the classic metaphor of a spiritual marriage between God and Israel.

<sup>126</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 188.

<sup>127</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 2*, זב, זז. Somewhat similar statements, also drawing on the image of the land as the *Shekhinah*, have been made by the notable Hardal rabbi Moshe Tzuril (n. Weiss); see Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 130-1.

<sup>128</sup> For an analysis of tractate *A. Zar.* sensitive to historical context, see Halbertal, ‘Coexisting with the Enemy’, 165. Here, the Mishnah is interpreted as encouraging ‘an introversion of aggression from waging an open war to avoiding benefit’.

beyond, to encompass the whole earth in a realization of global redemption.<sup>129</sup> As the Land of Israel is innately holy, it mandates an exceptional level of purity among its residents, thus excluding Gentiles. He writes (of Jews), ‘if we do not live in our land in accordance with the precepts of the Torah, the land will vomit us out of it. ... How much more is this the case with regard to foreign, hostile elements; these are totally “indigestible” to the land’.<sup>130</sup>

Ginsburgh thus decries the fact that ‘strangers’ dwell among Israeli Jews (referring to the Arab citizens of Israel) and are given welfare and civic rights by the state, based on Western (i.e., Gentile) notions of equality that ‘injure and distort the truth’.<sup>131</sup> He finds it particularly offensive that Gentiles are permitted to live in Jerusalem and even, ‘God preserve us’, on the Temple Mount,<sup>132</sup> which he argues violates a commandment laid upon Jews when they entered the Land to refuse Gentiles residence therein,<sup>133</sup> and to refuse them grace, charity, and mercy.<sup>134</sup> He sees support for Jewish immigration and settlement and the expulsion of Gentiles as twin necessities: ‘two legs, in walking, must function together. Just as the right leg encourages mass Jewish immigration to Israel, the left leg expels undesirable elements from the land’.<sup>135</sup>

The above metaphysical picture, and the complementary Halakhic stance, together imply a programme of territorial maximalism. The eternal bond between Jews and the Land of Israel, Ginsburgh holds, imposes a duty on the State of Israel to cleave resolutely to any conquered territories and exercise all its might in their defence from Gentiles within and without. Similarly, it behoves Jews to disallow non-Jewish settlement in Israeli-held territory. This leads us to Ginsburgh’s critique of the land-for-peace formula at the core of past and present Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

### *Ginsburgh’s Peace Process*

Here too Ginsburgh’s approach is built on twin Halakhic and Kabbalistic pillars. Speaking on the event of the evacuation of the Chavat Maon settlement in 2004, Ginsburgh stated that any peace agreement that compromised the territorial integrity of *Eretz Yisrael* by returning biblical lands to Arabs would be disallowed by the Torah, even if it were to be endorsed by a popular referendum (in which, he protested, the Arab citizens of Israel could also participate<sup>136</sup>). Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s teachings, Ginsburgh states that ‘God has given the chosen land to the chosen people as an eternal inheritance. ... [T]he Land of Israel belongs to all the Nation of Israel, to each and every Jew, ... and no one has the authority to give it away’<sup>137</sup> – including the Knesset and indeed Israel’s citizens

<sup>129</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, קלט, מט.

<sup>130</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 107. He cites *Lev.* 8:28 and 20:22 in support; see too, e.g., *2 Kings* 17:24-41.

<sup>131</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, רטב, 2003, 107-8, 189ff; see too Schneerson, *Kavati*, 30.

<sup>132</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 173ff.

<sup>133</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, רעב; see too Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 149. ‘לא תכרת להם ברית ולא תנחם’ (*Deut.* 7:2). Ginsburgh cites Rashi, among others, for a reading of ‘לא תנחם’ that includes not allowing the Gentile nations ‘camping’ in this context, loosely) within the Land of Israel.

<sup>134</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, רעג, ששג שטר, רעג. These four interpretations of ‘לא תנחם’ correspond to letters in the tetragrammaton.

<sup>135</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 105.

<sup>136</sup> Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 147.

<sup>137</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 67; see too Schneerson, *Kavati*, 22.

themselves, via a referendum, tainted as they are by Arab MKs and Arab votes, respectively.

Ginsburgh therefore advocates civil disobedience and nonviolent protest by observant Jews when the government takes steps he considers in conflict with Halakhah, such as ceding territory to Arabs. He writes, 'it is the Torah itself that demands, in cases of conflict, that one disobey the law of the land in order to obey the law of God. If soldiers in the Israel Defence Forces are commanded to uproot Jewish settlements in the Land of Israel, the order must be disobeyed'.<sup>138</sup> The acceptable limits of such civil disobedience are discussed later.

He sees the Arab-Israeli peace process as a dangerous delusion: 'The very dream of living in peace and harmony in the Land of Israel with our Arab neighbours, not envisioned in the context of the coming of the Messiah, is in itself an illusion'.<sup>139</sup> He thus laments that the 'custodians of the state daily surrender the Jewish people's rights to the land, relinquishing vital, strategic areas to sworn enemies'.<sup>140</sup> He identifies the root of the peace process in Israeli leaders' and the secular public's 'inner darkness' of arrogance, atheism, ingratitude for God's repeated deliverance of Israel from its enemies, and prioritization of material greed over spiritual duty.<sup>141</sup> He writes: 'Often, the inner darkness, seeking to attain public acclaim, will appear in the garb of some positive, universal value. The most significant example of this in our times is the so-called "peace process"'.<sup>142</sup> Of this peace, Ginsburgh cites *Jer.* 6:14: 'They say "peace, peace," but there is no peace' – the peace process's outcome, he says, will merely be 'a peace that leads to war and bloodshed'.<sup>143</sup> Further, promoters of peace do an injustice to their fellow Jews: 'In expressing mercy to enemies and making peace treaties with them, believing them to be friends, they [Israeli leaders] become cruel to their own people [settlers], their true friends'.<sup>144</sup> The content of this criticism of the secular state and territorial compromises resonates powerfully with the complaints of the Hilltop Youth, as described in the first section.

Ginsburgh has an alternative conception of how 'true' peace can be achieved – one informed by his reading of Kabbalah and given Halakhic sanction under the rubric of a war to eradicate evil, as Ginsburgh defines it.

Ginsburgh's conception of metaphysical peace, or *tikkun*, rests on Gentile subjugation. He holds that the real *tikkun* for Gentiles is complete surrender to the yoke of the Torah's commandments, which will proceed in the following order: *hakhna'ah* (הכנעה), 'surrender' to Israel and their Torah (understood as a metaphysical conquest by which the Gentiles will discover the Torah's goodness and light); *havdalah* (הבדלה), 'differentiation/separation' between Israel and the Gentiles, including the removal of Gentiles from the Holy Land;

---

<sup>138</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 53.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-40. (He cites in support the letter of the Lubavitcher Rebbe of 13 Shevat 5741 (1981) to Mr. Pinchus M. Kalms, London.)

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-32.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*; see too 61.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 69; see too Schneerson, *Karati*, 1-23. Detailed study of the common ground and distinctions between Ginsburgh's teachings and mainstream Chabad remains an important target for future work.

and only lastly *hamtakah* (המתקה),<sup>145</sup> ‘sweetening’, when the entire world will praise the one God in one language.<sup>146</sup> With arguments reminiscent of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane (who also ascribed positive values to Jewish violence against Gentiles over and above the issue of mere Halakhic legitimacy; e.g., demonstrating the power of God’s might on earth through the Jews, as His earthly proxy),<sup>147</sup> Ginsburgh reasons that the Gentiles will be inspired to submit to this not by *chesed* (חסד), the *sefirah* corresponding to loving kindness, but by *gevurah* (גבורה), which corresponds to stern divine judgment: ‘With affirmativeness and boldness, the Jew will win the respect of the non-Jew’,<sup>148</sup> he says, elucidating elsewhere that this boldness implies being ‘continuously on guard and ready to fight, physically, for our right to inherit our land’.<sup>149</sup> He argues that peace among the nations depends on Jewish rulership and Gentiles’ fear of Jewish strength. Through the crushing of Israel’s surrounding enemies the power of the ‘king of kings, the *kadosh barukh hu’*, is revealed, inspiring fear and awe among the nations; he states that through such a revelation of God’s name (via the martial prowess of His earthly proxy, the Jews), Israel will achieve true peace – as indeed ‘peace is God’s name’.<sup>150</sup>

Accordingly, he reads *Eccles.* 3:8 (in which King Solomon says, ‘There is a time for war, and [then] a time for peace’ (the [‘then’] is Ginsburgh’s addition) as teaching a ‘general rule that war ... is a necessary prerequisite for peace. ... The war must be fought to the end, not ceased in the middle. Only with the total victory of good over evil can true peace ensue’.<sup>151</sup> This is expanded in Ginsburgh’s Kabbalistic argument of the need for the separation of opposites (Jews and Gentiles) before messianic unification and harmony can reign, which is discussed further below.

In this religious ideology, all political discourse that admits the possibility of a two-state solution is misguided: ‘Implied in *gevurah* is the power to break evil at its source. In our context, this means to break the very hope in the psyche of our Arab neighbours that the Land of Israel belongs or will ever belong to them. It must be made clear to them (and to the nations of the earth) that “Palestine” is a fiction. By using words such as “autonomy,” we build their hopes instead of destroying them’.<sup>152</sup>

Such views are buttressed by Ginsburgh’s adaptation of the Lurianic doctrine of *shevirat hakelim* to the contemporary political context, identifying Jews with the divine lights trapped among the broken shards or *kelipot*, which in turn are identified with the Gentiles. The lights can be liberated and purified – and global redemption achieved – only by the

<sup>145</sup> These terms are chosen to correspond to three steps in ‘God’s work’ (עבודת ה’) according to the Ba’al Shem Tov; see, e.g., Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 192ff. They are given different interpretations elsewhere (*passim* in Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, e.g., קב, קא, קב, קא, קב, קא, קב).

<sup>146</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 2*, דז; see too *Rectifying*, 66-7.

<sup>147</sup> E.g., Meir Kahane, *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews* (Secaucus NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1987) and *Our Challenge: The Chosen Land* (Radnor PA: Chilton Book Company, 1974). See too the analyses in Sprinzak, *The Ascendance*, 51-54, 211-45; *Brother Against Brother*, 180-216.

<sup>148</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 167ff.

<sup>150</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 2*, קמ, קמא. This is based on a reading of *Job* 25:2, ‘המשל ופחד עמו עשה שלום במרומו’; and *Esther* 8:17, ‘ורבים מעמי הארץ מתהדים כי נפל פחד היהודים עליהם’.

<sup>151</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 31; see too 109.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* With regard to the parallel context of religious Zionist conceptions of the status of Gentiles in *Eretz Yisrael* and the proper place of aggression/conquest, see the discussion in Rosenak, *Sedakim*, 156-62. For instance, Rabbi Aviner has published statements to the effect that the way to true peace is through war, since the Gentiles do not want and are not ready for peace (p. 160). However, Ginsburgh grounds this position in Kabbalistic discussions, whose language and logic are (on the surface of it) quite distinct from the approach underlying mainstream religious Zionist discourse on these issues, and the nature of common ground (if any) needs to be carefully assessed.

separation (*havdalah*) of the sacred and sinful, of Israel and the nations.<sup>153</sup> Ginsburgh does acknowledge that God ultimately intends the harmonious merging of light and dark to become one: ‘His desire, in the creation of humanity, [is] that the non-Jewish world and the Jewish world ultimately join together to serve God in unison’<sup>154</sup>; however, ‘Just as with regard to light and darkness, union is predicated on separation,<sup>155</sup> so it is with regard to Jews and non-Jews’, who must dwell apart until redemption.<sup>156</sup> Ginsburgh holds that the requisite metaphysical separation must also be implemented politically. For example, he claims that the building of the Third Temple depends on prior (literal) removal of Gentiles from Israel’s borders as the physical reflection or embodiment of this spiritual *havdalah*.<sup>157</sup>

These ideas explain why Ginsburgh’s disciples would view conciliatory gestures towards Arabs – especially ceding the ‘sacred’ lands of *Eretz Yisrael* and uprooting Jewish settlements – not merely as gross affronts to Jewish law, but also a form of cosmic adultery that furthermore represents a deplorable set-back in the process of earthly and heavenly *tikkun*. They may also help to explain the readiness of Hilltop Youth to target neighbouring Palestinians, even when the Israeli government is the ultimate address for the *tag mechir* message. The next section shows how these suggestive links continue in Ginsburgh’s teachings on vengeance, which drape a Kabbalistic mantle over impulsive revenge attacks against Gentiles – *especially* when perpetrated by an ill-educated and frustrated youth, or ‘simple Jew’.

### *Vengeance as Virtue*

Ginsburgh claims that Jews need to be reconciled with the concept of vengeance against Gentiles, which the Talmud<sup>158</sup> – so he says – teaches is a meritorious practice ‘in its proper context’.<sup>159</sup>

Vengeance, in contrast to violence intended to save Jewish life under the Halakhic framework of *pikuach nefesh* (פיקוח נפש), is considered by Ginsburgh to be an assertion of one’s self-identity and uprightness and that of one’s family,<sup>160</sup> without giving much thought to the enemy or his or her motivations. Allowing an insult or injury to stand undermines the basis of one’s inner confidence and strength, leading to a collapse inwards into the ‘abyss’.<sup>161</sup> The motive for vengeance is the uprightness of the ‘I/I am’; it stems not from the criticism or punishment of evil<sup>162</sup> or the enemy’s active hatred of Israel, but

<sup>153</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 2, 71.

<sup>154</sup> Based on *Zeph.* 3:9.

<sup>155</sup> This is an elaboration of Lurianic creation mythology: ‘The act of creation consists in [*sic*] the separation and reunification of the opposed polarities’. Freedman, ‘Lurianic Creation Myths’, 393.

<sup>156</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 143ff. Based on *Num.* 23:9.

<sup>157</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 1, שטו שטז.

<sup>158</sup> He cites *Ber.* 33a.

<sup>159</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 92.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. There are strong resonances here with Kahane’s thought on vengeance, which saw active retaliation as a form of therapy for the national Jewish psyche, needed to repair millennia of psycho-spiritual damage caused by Jewish passivity and helplessness in the Diaspora; see e.g. Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 183.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

rather from a need to redress the cheapening of Israel’s blood in his or her eyes.<sup>163</sup> He also sees revenge as raising morale.<sup>164</sup>

Thus, Ginsburgh praises the actions of Shimon and Levi in murdering every male in the town in which their sister Dinah was raped. They acted, he says, from an urge of the heart to restore family honour, a natural impulse of ‘blessed wrath’.<sup>165</sup> The biblical passage in question makes no reference to God, nor is it suggested that the entire town was guilty. The focus is the honour of, and devotion to, the Jewish family.<sup>166</sup> Similarly, in *Barukh HaGever*, Goldstein’s Palestinian victims are somewhat incidental to the main drama of arousing within the extended *Jewish* audience of the massacre (via media) a ‘remembrance’ of the honour of the Jewish people and of God.<sup>167</sup> The motive of redressing some prior injury, which is associated with typical conceptions of vengeance, need not be salient.<sup>168</sup>

Ginsburgh’s thought on vengeance has several Kabbalistic dimensions. For instance, he cites Rashi’s teaching concerning the ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ aspects of vengeance, which he interprets as follows. While the lower is crudely physical, the upper aspect is the liberation of the sparks of divinity trapped in the *kelipot* represented by the Gentile nations, and liberation of the natural vital force from their corpses, both of which can then return to the divine source;<sup>169</sup> i.e., he posits a positive function served by vengeance in metaphysical *tikkun* as understood by the Lurianic doctrine of *shevirat hakelim*. He therefore describes the inner, Kabbalistic character of Jewish vengeance against Gentiles as sweetness and happiness.<sup>170</sup>

Ginsburgh also utilizes Kabbalah’s framework of the *sefirot* to justify metaphysically a free license for violent revenge that may cross into antinomianism. The Kabbalistic source of the revenge urge, Ginsburgh writes in one place, lies in the *sefirah* of *Binah* (בינה – understanding)<sup>171</sup> – an innate understanding of the heart that is above ordinary rational understanding, a sort of supra-conscious holy impulse outside and above measured assessment.<sup>172</sup> Elsewhere, he describes a direct connection between vengeance, which

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., צו.

<sup>164</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 93.

<sup>165</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*, צט צז; see further Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 138.

<sup>166</sup> See further Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 3*, קלט קכח. It is possible to discern the echoes of this thought in Ginsburgh’s call for collective punishment of Palestinian villages in response to terrorism: after the brutal murder of the Fogel family in Itamar, he called for houses in the nearby Palestinian village to be demolished every half hour until the town handed over the murderers, who should then be killed on the spot; Yehoshua Briner, ‘Rabanim Kor’im: Laharos Beitim Ad SheHaRotzechim Yusgeru’ [Rabbis call: Demolish houses until the murderers are handed over], *Walla!*, March 13, 2011. For a very brief introduction to Halakhic interpretations of the Shimon and Levi episode (e.g., by the Maharal, Rambam, and Ramban and contemporary Halakhic commentators on Israeli military conduct) see e.g. Rabbi Haim Jachter, *Gray Matter: Discourses in Contemporary Halakhah. Volume 3* (Teaneck: H. Jachter, 2008), 212-15. However, the aspect of Ginsburgh’s interpretation discussed here is not anchored in the mainstream Halakhic discourse, which frames the issue around questions of legitimate retaliation in the context of wars between nations (rather than individual crimes); rather, he emphasizes the virtue of Shimon and Levi’s willingness to allow an unconstrained outpouring of indignation and rage – an unstudied and instinctive reaction that arises from an intact sense of family pride.

<sup>167</sup> Seeman, ‘Violence, Ethics’, 1023.

<sup>168</sup> See Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 44-5; Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 217-43. This has been analysed by scholars such as Sprinzak in the framework of theories concerning millenarian groups’ reactions to failed prophecies – especially that of Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

<sup>169</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 3*, קכו קכח.

<sup>170</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 3*, קקל; *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, רטב.

<sup>171</sup> See too *ibid.*, צז. Also under the framework of this *sefirotic* connotation, vengeance is further associated with the beginning of the ‘world to come’ (העולם הבא).

<sup>172</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 3*, פ.



explodes without reflection upon its future consequences, and *Keter* (כתר – crown), the highest *sefirah* and the most proximate to the divine source, whose divine light can emanate without the ‘permission’ of the lower *sefirah* of *Chokhmah* (היכמה – wisdom).<sup>173</sup>

He also describes how this mystical process is experienced in the psyche. The divine revenge urge, he writes, arises from the deepest place in the psyche<sup>174</sup> and represents a ‘fluttering of holiness’ in the hearts of Jews’,<sup>175</sup> rousing them from slumbering passivity into action. Seeman describes this psycho-mysticism as ‘terror as a mystical technique ... a tool for the attainment and expression of divine intimacy’.<sup>176</sup> In this conception, the ‘essential goal [of vengeance] is to arouse an ecstasy of holiness [התפעלות קודש] in Israelite hearts’.<sup>177</sup>

Ginsburgh delegitimizes the self-restraint associated with the intellect and of the moral revulsion aroused generally in a healthy psyche by perpetration of violence:<sup>178</sup> these reservations must be overcome in order to achieve true divine service. Whereas traditional Jewish thought views violent impulses as a base, animal instinct that one should learn to transcend – a canonical example of *yetzer hara* (יצר הרע), the evil inclination – Ginsburgh casts it instead as a means of channelling the divine, and casts moral self-restraint vis-à-vis Gentiles as an obstacle.<sup>179</sup>

These notions are buttressed by a novel interpretation of *kevod shamayim* (כבוד שמים), divine honour, and in particular *kiddush hashem* (קידוש השם), sanctification of God’s name, which *Barukh HaGever* describes as ‘the crown that sits atop the deed’ of the Goldstein massacre.<sup>180</sup> Echoing the late Kahane,<sup>181</sup> Ginsburgh argues that the spilling of Jewish blood desecrates God’s name (‘which abides in His people Israel’), and that Jews have a ‘duty to sanctify His Name by taking vengeance’.<sup>182</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, acts of vengeance that sanctify God’s name need not explicitly call upon or even mention God;<sup>183</sup> the sanctification part of the equation is satisfied automatically through Jews’ status as God’s earthly proxies. As Jews alone possess a spark of pure divinity, as outlined previously, Israel’s honour is God’s honour, and Israel’s vengeance takes on a deeper meaning as

<sup>173</sup> One can infer from this and other inconsistencies that Ginsburgh’s utilization of the *sefirot* to articulate his views on violence is not a scheme derived coherently and unambiguously from first principles of Kabbalah. Many of his applications of Kabbalistic concepts to contemporary issues appear opportunistic; some are severely strained. This assessment similarly applies to the style of his ‘political platform based on Kabbalah’ (*Rectifying*).

<sup>174</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 2, רפז רפז.

<sup>175</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 3, כב.

<sup>176</sup> Seeman, ‘Violence, Ethics’, 1017.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 1022.

<sup>179</sup> Ginsburgh is aware of how jarring this must sound to many (probably most) religious thinkers, since the observance of *mitzvot* is traditionally held to assist in training people to the *shake off* of one’s ‘natural’ evil inclinations, not to give in to them (Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 3, אב). However, Ginsburgh sees his doctrine of vengeance as the imposition of a supreme authority on humans that *stops* them from following the evil inclination. This paradox is one of many examples of the delicate line between hyper- and antinomianism in Ginsburgh’s thought.

<sup>180</sup> Page 4 of the 1994 pamphlet, trans. Seeman, ‘Violence, Ethics’, 1018.

<sup>181</sup> E.g., in a private essay circulated among Kach activists in 1976, he wrote: ‘Do you want to know how the Name of God is desecrated in the eyes of the mocking and sneering nations? It is when the Jew, His people, His chosen, is desecrated! When the Jew is beaten, God is profaned! When the Jew is humiliated God is shamed! When the Jew is attacked it is an assault upon the Name of God!’ (trans. Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 182).

<sup>182</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 92.

<sup>183</sup> See Seeman, ‘Violence, Ethics’, 1024-5.

God’s vengeance.<sup>184</sup> All of Israel, he writes, are kings and the sons of kings, and vengeance reveals the true majesty of Israel and thus of God to the world.<sup>185</sup>

Inbari and Seeman present excellent analyses of Ginsburgh’s unusual projection of the concept of *kiddush hashem*, traditionally applied to Jewish martyrs (e.g., those who chose execution rather than conversion to another faith), onto acts of vengeance against Gentiles that burst forth from the innermost recesses of the Jewish soul. Seeman explains that the major danger lies in their decoupling from the objective criterion of Halakhic obedience, because ‘it is precisely the “spontaneity” of emotional arousal that sanctifies God’s name through violence’.<sup>186</sup> While Ginsburgh also proffered justifications for the Hebron massacre on the basis of Halakhah, in Seeman’s view, these were tangential to the ‘real weight and depth of his argument’, which was founded on a conception of sanctification of divine honour as a matter of ‘extreme innerness’.<sup>187</sup> He correctly identifies the danger in this ‘subtle transformation, from objective and socially defined to subjective and introspective criteria ... [which] means that sanctification and honouring God no longer rely on the fulfilment of Jewish legal or ethical demands but may actually be aided by the disjuncture between quotidian religious or ethical obligations and the ecstatic perception of divinity that lifts a person ecstatically beyond normative boundaries’.<sup>188</sup>

Inbari concurs that these ideas amount to a *de facto* blanket endorsement of zealotry that can ‘lead individuals to commit acts of terror in the name of “Divine truth” on the basis of personal considerations’.<sup>189</sup> He places Ginsburgh’s approach ‘on the seam between hypernomism and antinomianism’, observing that although Jewish conduct must nominally still be constrained by Halakhah,<sup>190</sup> nonetheless ‘actions ... contrary to Halacha may be considered the sublime manifestation of religious faith’.<sup>191</sup>

Ginsburgh’s teachings about ‘the simple Jew’ greatly compound such concerns, in my view. When Seeman described an ‘unacknowledged devaluation of Jewish legal authority’,<sup>192</sup> he was writing about *Barukh HaGever*; I submit that the devaluation is explicit in Ginsburgh’s later publication, *Malkhut Yisrael*.<sup>193</sup> A great many passages therein laud the ‘simple Jew’ and his aggressive ‘natural reaction’ to insult or threat.<sup>194</sup> Such passages also privilege impulsive physical action over Torah study or obedience to rabbinical authority as Jewish virtues: when the name of God has been ‘desecrated’ (e.g., by a Gentile insulting

---

<sup>184</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 3, פב. This element is shared in Kahane’s thought (though the latter presents it in a less theosophically complicated format): e.g., ‘victory over the defeated Gentile on the battlefield ... is Kiddush Hashem. It is the reassertion, the proof, the testimony for the existence of God and his government’ (private letter to Kach activists, 1976; trans. Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 181). Sprinzak notes that for Kahane, ‘the vengeance the Jews are expected to take is, according to him, not simply a personal act but God’s revenge’ (p. 182). The quotation from Kahane’s essay continues: ‘A Jewish fist in the face of an astonished Gentile world that had not seen it for two millennia, this is Kiddush Hashem’ (ibid.).

<sup>185</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 3, קכז; Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 1, כבג.

<sup>186</sup> Seeman, ‘Violence, Ethics’, 1021.

<sup>187</sup> Page 4 of the 1994 pamphlet, trans. ibid., 1021.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 1021.

<sup>189</sup> Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 145.

<sup>190</sup> However, Ginsburgh allows that there may be exceptions even to this rule in the form of ‘temporary provisions’ (*Rectifying*, 156); see the lengthy analysis in Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 140-5.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 1026-7.

<sup>193</sup> However, as much of the content of *Barukh HaGever* appears to be repeated in the later publication (and thus my sources and Seeman’s overlap considerably), it is possible that I simply read a greater weight into Ginsburgh’s devaluation of rabbinical authority than does Seeman when analyzing related passages.

<sup>194</sup> E.g., Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 3, כב, פא טפ טז.

a Jew), it must be redeemed, and the emotional urge to sanctify God's name through vengeance supersedes the duty to honour and obey one's rabbi or to study Torah.<sup>195</sup> Studying Torah, Ginsburgh opines, is not synonymous with *honouring* Torah, and a learned student of Halakhah could be selfish relative to the ignorant but spirited activist or the *ba'al teshuvah* (בעל תשובה), one who returns to his faith after being 'lost'. Learning is a form of personal enrichment, he says, and honours Torah less than does the physical self-sacrifice of 'the simple Jew' willing to act on his spontaneous, God-given revenge impulses to uphold Jewish honour in Gentile eyes (through violence), rather than scurrying to his bookshelf to check whether the Halakhah permits him to act.<sup>196</sup>

Elsewhere, Ginsburgh discusses a similar distinction between the *tzadik* (צדיק), i.e., the righteous Jew, and the *ba'al teshuvah*. The *tzadik* progresses towards redemption in an orderly way, while the *ba'al teshuvah* does so in 'fits and starts, impetuously alternating between symmetric order and asymmetric divergences from logical order' and so is able to contribute to redemption in the following special way: 'Before the beginning of a rectification [*tikkun*] process, an explosive, asymmetric phenomenon is often necessary in order to set things in motion'.<sup>197</sup> The chaotic, impulsive trajectory followed by the simple Jew who follows his instincts can serve the redemptive process by providing these explosive disruptions, because he is unencumbered by crippling misgivings about his acts' legal implications or future consequences.

Such thinking is hauntingly reminiscent of the Kabbalistic mysticism that informed the plot of the Jewish Underground to detonate a bomb under the Dome of the Rock, in just such a spectacular 'jolt' to spur on messianic redemption (believed to have stalled because of the return of Sinai to the Egyptians under the Camp David Accords).<sup>198</sup> The possibility of a copy-cat attempt has been an ongoing concern of the Shin Bet and Israeli police.<sup>199</sup> Naftali Werzberger is an Israeli lawyer who has for many years represented hilltop activists, Kach figures, and members of the Jewish Underground. He has said that the idea of striking at the Temple Mount 'has been floating in the air, with ups and downs, for decades. ... These are not people whom you look for under the street lamp. ... The potential for this activity is lurking in the less political religious extreme: *newly religious people, kabbalists, the hilltop eccentrics, or someone who will be exposed for the first time to prophecies and books of apocalyptic writings*' (my emphasis).<sup>200</sup> Ginsburgh and his colleagues are 'a magnet for "born-again" Jews (non-practicing Jews who have returned to religion and become radically pious)',<sup>201</sup> and his teachings could be interpreted as sanctioning the independent pursuit of such plans, without rabbinical consultation.

With respect to members of the Hilltop Youth, already heavily involved in vigilante acts and highly sceptical of authority figures, including rabbis, sanctioning and sanctifying impulsiveness has clear incendiary potential. Werzberger told the newspaper *Israel Hayom* that 'many of them [price tag operatives] were either kicked out of school or disowned by

<sup>195</sup> There is a discernible continuity here (albeit twisted) with the original project of Hasidism to revitalize what the early Hasids saw as an excessively intellectual Orthodox Judaism that lacked in heart, e.g., by its focus on the minutiae of mitzvot to the neglect of one's spiritual intentions while performing them.

<sup>196</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael* 3, טז טז; see further Seeman, 'Violence, Ethics', 1026-8.

<sup>197</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 24.

<sup>198</sup> See, e.g., Sprinzak, 'From Messianic Pioneering', 197-8; Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 155-79.

<sup>199</sup> Nadav Shagrai, 'Mounting an Extremist Action', *Haaretz*, April 5, 2004.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 11.

their families ... They have never learned in an organized setting, and if I describe some of them as thugs, I would not be off the mark.’<sup>202</sup> Ginsburgh’s praise of revenge attacks by the ‘simple Jew’ is a dangerous ingredient in this mix. As noted by a pre-eminent scholar of the settler movement, Gideon Aran, ‘Past confrontations have already highlighted the gray areas in which ideological delinquency partially overlaps with criminal delinquency or sheer hooliganism.’<sup>203</sup> The matrix of ideological and criminological characteristics in which price tagging has arisen should thus give us pause.

Lastly, even if one concludes that Ginsburgh does not endorse outright violations of Halakhah, it is clear that deeds arising from antinomian reasoning, or even naked anger, can quite easily be given a Halakhic fig leaf. *Barukh HaGever* lauded the massacre of unarmed civilians during worship as an example of *mesirut nefesh* (מסירות נפש), devotion, and self-sacrifice born out of love and concern for the Jewish nation. Ginsburgh also argued the massacre was a case of *pikuach nefesh*, based on claims that Hebron Arabs were in fact planning a pogrom, making Goldstein’s act defensive.<sup>204</sup> In sum, Ginsburgh sees anti-Gentile violence as permissible based on an exceptionally generous application of the Halakhah, which demands no hard evidence that people targeted have committed or planned some actual crime against Jews. Somewhat similar thought processes are in evidence in justifications of contemporary settler vigilantism: for example, a spokesman for the Kida outpost (near Shiloh) justified violent clashes with Palestinian olive harvesters and left-wing activists on the grounds that the former were really Hamas terrorists, and the latter, knowing collaborators.<sup>205</sup>

Ginsburgh’s position on violence against fellow Jews, however, is harder to pin down. His extremely negative views of the secular Israeli administration may be counterbalanced by a positive theme: love and mutual responsibility for all Jews.<sup>206</sup> This doctrine of unconditional love for all Jews<sup>207</sup> – allegedly ‘the principle of principles’ for Ginsburgh<sup>208</sup> – is inherited from Hasidism, in which it is a core teaching of the Ba’al Shem Tov.<sup>209</sup> Ginsburgh writes that notwithstanding the many defects of the current secular establishment, believers in Torah *must* identify with the national community that elected this establishment: one cannot divorce oneself from the Jewish Israeli public, even in thought. He quotes: ‘although Israel sins, he is still Israel’ – God’s chosen, and thus holy.<sup>210</sup> The English version of *Rectifying the State of Israel* states explicitly in the publisher’s preface: ‘however critical the author [Ginsburgh] is of secular Zionism ... he should in no way be misconstrued as advocating the pitting of Jews against Jews (God forbid). The very opposite is true. It is the love for *all* Jews ... that has motivated him’.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, his

<sup>202</sup> Quoted in Shragai, ‘The Rising Cost.’ (His description of Groner, could not be more different: Groner, he says, is studious and spiritual, attached to the land but also to ‘spiritual literature’ – quoted in ‘Ha’Acheen Shel HaRav Groner.’) See too Gideon Aran’s contribution to the panel discussion ‘Religious and Ideological Dimensions of the Israeli Settlements Issue’, 181-4.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>204</sup> Elaborated upon in a limited translation of the book *Barukh HaGever* available at [www.angelfire.com/anime5/danilin/PodeUmatzil.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/anime5/danilin/PodeUmatzil.htm) (accessed February 15, 2012).

<sup>205</sup> See Sharon, ‘LeRegel HaMasik.’

<sup>206</sup> See, e.g., Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, קמה, קכב.

<sup>207</sup> Ginsburgh adds the caveat: after Halakhic clarification of who is a Jew.

<sup>208</sup> Ginsburgh, *Malkhut Yisrael 1*, קלא, קלז.

<sup>209</sup> As discussed in *ibid.*, קצז קצח.

<sup>210</sup> ‘ישראל אף על פי שחטא, ישראל הוא’ (*Sanh.* 44:1).

<sup>211</sup> Ginsburgh, *Rectifying*, 3.

Kabbalistic world-view frames Jews as divine. Killing fellow Jews would thus likely be a red line for Ginsburgh – even if the IDF were ordered to evacuate outlying West Bank settlements such as Yitzhar. A Yesha Council security officer interviewed in 2009 concurred: ‘We’ll protest all we can, and maybe not every soldier will accept orders, but we won’t shoot. Even Ginsburgh will not give the order to open fire.’<sup>212</sup>

However, it is prudent to recall the lessons of the Rabin assassination. While the same rabbis who had accused Rabin of being a *rodef* (רודף) or *moser* (מוסר)<sup>213</sup> subsequently condemned the assassination and claimed their views had been misconstrued, Yigal Amir (the assassin) nonetheless inferred from the public airing of those views that murdering Rabin was a Halakhic imperative. Terrorism analyst Jessica Stern has claimed Amir was also an enthusiastic reader of *Barukh HaGever*, and that he extrapolated from it a license to attack Rabin, even though Ginsburgh’s chapter only discussed violence against non-Jews.<sup>214</sup> The memorial volume was one of three books found in Amir’s room after the assassination.<sup>215</sup> Ginsburgh may not intend to endorse Jews killing Jews; however, his teachings are sufficiently abstruse that followers – particularly once unshackled from the need to consult their rabbis before following their private impulses – may reach their own conclusions. Furthermore, the rabbinic accusations that Rabin was a *rodef* or *moser* generally lacked the added gunpowder of Ginsburgh’s borderline antinomian praise of impulsive violence or the profound mystical framework. Thus, there are some grounds for speculation that Ginsburgh’s doctrines could facilitate intra-Jewish violence at least by suitably ‘primed’ individuals. Disgruntled Hilltop Youth dabbling in Ginsburgh’s works but without formal Halakhic training may fit this mould.

Arab targets, by contrast, do not appear to enjoy any substantive theological or moral shield in this ideology that could serve as a counterbalance to vigilante tendencies. Given the existence of an explicit programme of vigilantism (authored by a rabbi, no less) that legitimizes targeting Arabs in order to disrupt Israeli policies – i.e., Elitzur’s ‘mutual guarantee’ strategy – there may be more cause to fear spectacular anti-Arab violence than intra-Jewish bloodshed if this subcommunity of the religious right is ever confronted by a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority or a unilateral withdrawal from most of Judea and Samaria. This path would entail substantially less cognitive dissonance than directing violence against Jewish leaders themselves.

### Conclusions

On the face of it, the preceding analysis considerably aids in understanding the theological world of *Od Yosef Chai* and how it may normalize and sanctify vigilante practices like price tagging. However, while this research elucidates the intellectual context

<sup>212</sup> International Crisis Group, *Israel’s Religious Right*, 26n245.

<sup>213</sup> Halakhic categories of treachery against one’s fellow Jews, demanding the accused’s death preemptively in order to protect Jewish life and property. See e.g. Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 103-130; Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 244-86.

<sup>214</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 91. First published 2003.

<sup>215</sup> In another interesting link, one of Amir’s professed role models was an ideologue attached to *Od Yosef Chai*, Noam Livnat, who was in turn an associate of Yehudah Etzion (of the Jewish Underground) in the messianic group *Chai veKayam* (Alive and Enduring). See Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 10-15.

of the *Od Yosef Chai* circle, one should be cautious in extending the findings herein to all price tag incidents and their perpetrators. Werzberger has claimed, ‘These are people that have no god, ... [a]nd they certainly have no rabbis. ... The people that give them support are other guys who may have studied a bit more, but it doesn’t get to the rabbis. Even Rabbi Yitzhak Shapira, who is always the subject of rumours and is surrounded by agent provocateurs and undercover operatives, does not justify harming innocents, to the best of my knowledge.’<sup>216</sup> Further, as noted, the price tagger milieu is not especially marked by bookishness or scholastic interest, whereas much of Ginsburgh’s theosophy is woven from and expressed in the language of the Talmudic sages, the great Halakhists of the Middle Ages, and Kabbalah. It is not light reading.

On the other hand, not all his texts are so erudite; some target a popular audience and are written in accessible prose. Further, the yeshiva’s extensive pastoral outreach among Hilltop Youth is unlikely to be conducted in the abstract and citation-heavy style of the essays in *Malkhut Yisrael*. Finally, reading Ginsburgh’s writings on ‘the simple Jew’ leaves one with a disquieting impression that every disaffected young settler in his trailer could (quite reasonably) declare himself a ‘Pinchas’ based on these texts, without ever opening the Gemara. The youth need not grasp the Halakhic nuances nominally constraining the virtue of impulsive revenge in order to be impressed by the overall positive picture painted in Ginsburgh’s (and Kahane’s) works. These ideas could encourage inappropriate action without any endorsement from Ginsburgh himself of the ‘harming of innocents’ (to quote Werzberger), since his own teachings praise impulsive action taken without prior consultation with a rabbi. Ginsburgh’s teachings may therefore function as a catalyst that lowers the threshold of youths’ self-restraint – already regularly strained by tense and unpleasant contacts with Arabs and the security forces.

However, this is not to depict a unidirectional causal thread running from the yeshiva’s teachings to the reported violence. Unravelling the exact nature of the relationship is confounded by the old statistician’s adage: correlation does not imply causation. Spokesmen of the religious right laugh off the media trope of ‘the rabbinic butterfly effect’ – i.e., the notion that every time a rabbi flaps his hands, he automatically becomes responsible for the independent actions of anyone watching.<sup>217</sup> There is a suggestive *correlation* between the content of Ginsburgh’s teachings and phenomena like indiscriminate revenge attacks against Arab civilians; however, it is important to delimit the extent to which a textual and historical analysis alone can yield sound inferences about causal mechanisms, without further contributions from quantitative and ethnographic approaches. Some possible reservations are as follows.

None of the media comments by price tag sympathizers (including those associated with *Od Yosef Chai*) surveyed for this research framed either anti-Arab revenge attacks or symbolic violence against Israeli institutions in mystical terms. The proffered legitimations were drawn straight from a classic vigilante vocabulary: self-defence, failure of the

---

<sup>216</sup> Quoted in Shragai, ‘The Rising Cost.’

<sup>217</sup> E.g., Racheli Melek-Bodeh, ‘HaRabanim Lo Achrai’im LeNoar HaGeva’ot’ [The rabbis are not responsible for the Hilltop Youth], *Yedioth Achronoth*, 15 December 2011. The article criticized politicians’ calls in the immediate wake of the attack on the IDF base for settler rabbis and the Yesha Council to censure the youths. She rejects the ‘automatic’ projection of links between the hand-flapping of a rabbi in his *beit midrash* and the acts of outpost youngsters who have never completed formal yeshiva study and are often considered delinquents.

state/army/police to protect Jews, weakness and confusion of the ruling regime, etc.<sup>218</sup> For instance, Groner decried the military response to the murder of the Fogel family in Itamar in March 2011 as laughable, and said it is no coincidence that people call ‘us’ for help when Arabs attack any outpost in the area. ‘If the army stands to the side and doesn’t know what to do, we’ll help Jews whom Arabs attack.’<sup>219</sup> Statements about how Arabs only understand force were also ubiquitous, and while they especially resonate with Ginsburgh’s dualistic descriptions of Gentiles’ base and animalistic nature, they are not unique in the context of Israel’s (secular and religious) far right.

Similarly, the ‘manifesto’ penned by Elitzur does not posit any mystical reference frame for the ‘mutual guarantee’ strategy. He criticizes the ruling regime as hopelessly corrupted, affirms that Jews and Arabs are in a lethal war for the fate of *Eretz Yisrael*, and lays out the anticipated benefits of the model for discouraging settlement freezes, demolitions, etc. Nothing in the vocabulary or argumentation suggests a road map to metaphysical redemption. Furthermore, each of the individual components of Elitzur’s ‘mutual guarantee’ can be matched with coordinates in Rosenbaum and Sederberg’s typology of classic vigilantism and justified by reference to the standard Gush Emunim norm emphasizing the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael* (albeit without the counterbalancing *mamlachti* norm of the sanctity of the state).

However, the conceptualization of revenge attacks against a *rival* ethno-national-religious group as a means of affecting decisions by leaders of one’s *own* ethno-national-religious group cannot be classified quite so simply. The strategy outlined by Elitzur ties ‘regime control vigilantism’ to ‘social group control vigilantism’ in an odd way. It must be admitted that the manoeuvre can be explained rationally: activists pay a much lower price for slashing tires and breaking windows in an Arab village or even inflicting bodily harm than they would for similarly vandalizing the Knesset and injuring ministers.<sup>220</sup> However, this tactic may also emerge from the logic of Ginsburgh’s Kabbalistic world-view as the path of ‘least cognitive resistance’. In this world-view, every Jew is divine. This presents a basic problem when one wishes to intimidate or persuade fellow Jews. Simply attacking them violently would challenge the cognitive commitment to Jewish holiness, whereas *threatening* them or applying low-level symbolic violence, while attacking Arabs more severely (in order to cause trouble for policy-makers indirectly), achieves the same disruptive goal without compromising the fundamental tenet of the sanctity of Jewish life. Even if one concludes that price tagging has far more in common with classic vigilantism than mystically inspired religious violence – and on the present evidence, I believe this is generally the case – it is nonetheless possible to discern the subtle influence of the religious framework on the choice of tactics. The basic Halakhic and mystical norms of Ginsburgh’s religious ideology seem to operate to increase restraint with regard to Jewish targets, such that only ‘focused’ attacks and threats are encouraged (without explicitly planning to injure people), and to decrease restraint with regard to Arab targets, such that it is

---

<sup>218</sup> Cf., however, Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza*, 73-4: she notes that Gaza settlers articulated their case against the Disengagement using secular arguments (e.g., security and humanitarian concerns) as a form of ‘disciplined’ communication, since these arguments were expected to have the most traction with the general public. Similar self-disciplining is possibly occurring here.

<sup>219</sup> See Sharon, ‘LeRegel HaMasik.’

<sup>220</sup> Indeed, during most of Gush Emunim’s history, the state turned a blind eye to settler vigilantism, although the Karp Report prompted a brief crack-down; see Weisburd, *Jewish Settler Violence*, 79-85, 91.

considered acceptable to launch indiscriminate attacks against civilians with no part in the government policy being protested (and with explicit approval for inflicting bodily harm).

Weisburd’s much earlier study hints at other problems with placing an analytical *mechitza* between the theosophical teachings and vigilante practices. His survey and statistical analysis identified ‘socialization to vigilante norms’ as the single highest predictor of settler participation in vigilante acts.<sup>221</sup> In conjunction, socio-psychological analyses of the Hilltop Youth have identified rabbis like Ginsburgh as key agents of the socialization process in the outposts, helping to crystallize the youths’ religious ideology – and as discussed, a key norm of this religious ideology is that revenge attacks against Arabs are spiritually healthy. On the hilltops, Ginsburgh’s world-view intimately co-exists with the complementary ideology of Kahanism, which also applauds revenge attacks. Together, they reinforce outpost youths’ socialization into vigilante norms, which are justified by a robust matrix of mystical, Halakhic, and political arguments.

Moreover, and finally, there is a powerful and concerning synergy between the devolution of moral authority to the private, individual Jew in Ginsburgh’s revenge teachings and the individualistic, spontaneous modes of religious and socio-political affiliation, organization, and action noted among the Hilltop Youth by sociologists. If Ginsburgh’s teachings praising the spontaneous revenge of the simple Jew are indeed being disseminated among this milieu, thus relaxing the moral-Halakhic ‘brakes’ on militant activism in an arena where respect for the rule of *secular* law has been eroded to near irrelevance, Chonenu will certainly have its hands full.

In conclusion, this paper has described the track record of associations between the *Od Yosef Chai* yeshiva and allegations of anti-Arab violence, and introduced Ginsburgh’s Kabbalistic teachings on Jewish superiority, the metaphysical importance of settling the whole of *Eretz Yisrael*, the need for Gentile subjugation as a condition for true peace, and positive aspects of vengeance. Finally, the paper considered the limitations of a textual-analytic approach for elucidating mechanisms behind price tag vigilante acts, and pointed to criminological and sociological aspects that warrant further attention. Clarifying the nature of the theosophy-violence nexus that appears to have arisen in the Samaritan hills remains an important and interesting task for scholars of the settler movement and criminologists.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### *Primary Sources*

Cohen, David, trans. ‘Baruch Podeh uMatzil. A Translation. Blessed Be the Rescuer and Redeemer’, partial translation of *Barukh HaGever*, accessed February 15, 2012, [www.angelfire.com/anime5/danilin/PodeUmatzil.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/anime5/danilin/PodeUmatzil.htm).

---

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. He did, however, acknowledge the possibility that this factor was functioning as a proxy for unknown hidden variables that the survey instrument failed to capture (p. 91, 120). Community size also had an effect, with smaller communities (in which pressure to conform to group norms is usually greater) being more likely to participate in vigilantism (p. 92). This idea seems compatible with the sociological characteristics of the hilltop outpost communities. He also found that the existence of family and social ties beyond the green line reduced the probability of vigilantism (p. 126), which may also be significant in light of outpost settlers’ relative isolation and declining enthusiasm for army service (the shared socialization process of most of Jewish Israeli society).



- Elitzur, Yosef. 'Arevut Hadadit: Ha'Estrategia' [Mutual guarantee: The strategy], *HaKol HaYehudi*, December 4, 2009.
- Ginsburgh, Yitzchak. *Rectifying the State of Israel: A Political Platform Based on Kabbalah*. Jerusalem, New York, and Los Angeles: Gal Einai, 2003.
- . *Malkhut Yisrael 1: Sha'ar Rishon, Mitzvot haTzibur; Sha'ar Sheni, ha'Am vecha'aretz* [Dominion of Israel, volume 1: Gate 1, the public commandments; gate 2, the people and the land]. Second printing (amended). Kfar Chabad, Israel: Gal Eini, 2005. First published 1999.
- . *Malkhut Yisrael 2: Sha'ar Shlishi, Malkhut Melekh uSanhedrin* [Dominion of Israel, volume 2: Dominion of the king and Sanhedrin]. Second printing (amended). Kfar Chabad, Israel: Gal Eini, 2005. First published 2000.
- . *Malkhut Yisrael 3: Sha'ar Revi'i, Milchemot haShem; Sha'ar Chamishi, Mikdash haShem* [Dominion of Israel, volume 3: Gate 4, the wars of God; gate 5, the temple of God]. Kfar Chabad, Israel: Gal Eini, 2005.
- Kahane, Meir. *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews*. Secaucus NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1987.
- . *Our Challenge: The Chosen Land*. Radnor PA: Chilton Book Company, 1974.
- Schneerson, Menachem Mendel. *Karati veEin Oneh*. Unedited compendium of Schneerson's communications regarding Israeli territorial concessions, last edited July 22, 2004, accessed January 19, 2012, [www.chabadtalk.comSLASHUploadedFilesSLASHbook.pdf](http://www.chabadtalk.comSLASHUploadedFilesSLASHbook.pdf) (in Hebrew).
- Selected news articles from *Arutz Sheva (Israel National News)*, *Haaretz*, the *Jerusalem Post*, *Yedioth Achroth*, the *Jewish Tribune*, and *The Yeshiva World*.
- Website of *Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva*, accessed January-August 2012, [www.odyosefchai.org.il](http://www.odyosefchai.org.il).

### Secondary Sources

- Afterman, Gedaliah. 'Understanding the Theology of Israel's Extreme Religious Right: "The Chosen People" and "the Land of Israel" from the Bible to the "Expulsion from Gush Katif."' PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2007.
- Aran, Gideon. *Kookism: Shoreshei Gush Emunim, Tarbut HaMitnachlim, Teologia Tzionit, Meshichiut Bizmanenu* [Kookism: The roots of Gush Emunim, settler culture, Zionist theology, and contemporary messianism]. Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013.
- Bakhos, Carol. *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Borstein, Eti. 'Noar HaGeva'ot Bein Hemshekhiut LeMered' [The Hilltop Youth between continuity and rebellion], August 30, 2006, <http://www.reader.co.il/article/481/מרד-בין-המשכיות> (accessed September 9, 2013).
- Byman, Daniel, and Natan Sachs. 'The Rise of Settler Terrorism.' *Foreign Affairs*, August 14, 2012.
- Dalsheim, Joyce. *Unsettling Gaza: Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Drob, Sanford L. *Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Northvale NJ: J. Aronson, 2000.

- Eisen, Robert. *The Peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible to Modern Zionism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Feige, Michael. *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*. Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 2009.
- Festinger, Leon, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter. *When Prophecy Fails*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956.
- Fine, Lawrence. *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Freedman, Daphne. ‘Lurianic Creation Myths’. *Imagining Creation*. Volume 5 in IJS Studies in Judaica, Conference Proceedings of the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College London, edited by Markham J. Geller & Mineke Schipper, 389-415. Leiden, Belgium; and Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Friedman, Robert. *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel’s West Bank Settlement Movement*. New York: Random House, 1992.
- Goldenberg, Robert. *The Nations That Know Thee Not: Ancient Jewish Attitudes Towards Other Religions*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Goodman, Micah. ‘Al haYachas le’umot ha’Olam beHaguto shel Ramban’ [On the relation to the nations of the world in the Ramban’s thought], *Tarbitz* 73, no. 3 (2004): 459-478.
- Gorenberg, Gershom. *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*. New York: Times Books, 2006.
- Halbental, Moshe. ‘Coexisting with the Enemy: Jews and Pagans in the Mishnah’. In *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, edited by Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa, 159-172. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Hallamish, Moshe. ‘HaYachas le’Umot ha’Olam be’Olamam shel haMekubbalim’ [The relationship to the nations of the world in the world of the Kabbalists]. In *MeRoma liYerushalayim* [From Rome to Jerusalem], edited by Aviezer Ravitzky, 289-311. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998.
- . *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*. Translated by Ruth Bar-Ilan and Ora Wiskind-Elper. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Idel, Moshe. *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Imesch, Miriam. ‘The Hilltop Settlers: The Construction of Identity Among Radical Second-generation Settlers in the West Bank.’ Master’s thesis, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2011.
- Inbari, Motti. *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?* Translated by Shaul Vardi. Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2009.
- International Crisis Group. *Israel’s Religious Right and the Question of Settlements*. Middle East Report No. 89. Jerusalem and Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2009.
- Jachter, Haim. *Gray Matter: Discourses in Contemporary Halakhah. Volume 3*. Teaneck: H. Jachter, 2008.
- Kaniel, Shlomo. *Heibetim Psychologi’im Shel Mityashvei haGeva’ot* [Psychological aspects of the hilltop settlers]. Ariel: Ariel College, 2003.
- Karpin, Michael, and Ina Friedman. *Murder in the Name of God: The Plot to Kill Yitzhak Rabin*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998.

- Katz, Steven T. *Jewish Philosophers*. Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1975.
- Kraus, Yitzchak. *HaShevi'i: HaMeshichut beDor haShevi'i shel Chabad* [The seventh: Messianism in the last generation of Chabad]. Tel Aviv: Yedioth Achronoth, 2007.
- Newman, Aryeh. 'The Centrality of Eretz Yisrael in Nachmanides.' *Tradition* 10, no. 1 (1968): 21-30.
- Novak, David. *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noachide Law*. 2nd edition. Edited by Matthew Lagrone. Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011.
- . 'The Man-made Messiah.' *First Things* 209 (2011): 32-6.
- Pedahzur, Ami, and Arie Perliger, 'The Causes of Vigilante Political Violence: The Case of Jewish Settlers', *Civil Wars* 6, no. 3 (2003): 9-30.
- Ravitzky, Aviezer. *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*. Translated by Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Rosenak, Avinoam. *Sedakim: Al Achdut HaHefechim, HaPoliti VeTalmidei HaRav Kook* [Cracks: On the unity of opposites, the political, and Rabbi Kook's disciples]. Tel Aviv: Resling, 2013.
- Rosenbaum, Joseph, and Peter Sederberg, 'Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence'. *Comparative Politics* 6, no. 4 (1974): 54-70.
- Rosenbaum, Joseph, and Peter Sederberg, eds., *Vigilante Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976.
- Rosenthal, Gilbert S. 'Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept.' *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005): 214-40.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Reprint of 3rd edition. New York: Schocken Books, 1960. First published 1941.
- Seeman, Don. 'Violence, Ethics, and Divine Honor in Modern Jewish Thought.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 4 (2005): 1015-1048.
- Sprinzak, Ehud. *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics From Altalena to the Rabin Assassination*. New York: Free Press, 1999.
- . 'Right-wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The case of Split Delegitimization', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no. 1 (1995): 17-43.
- . 'From Pioneering to Terrorism: Gush Emunim and the Underground.' In *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics From Altalena to the Rabin Assassination*, 145-179. New York: Random House, 1992.
- . *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- . 'From Messianic Pioneering to Vigilante Terrorism: The Case of the Gush Emunim Underground.' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 194-216.
- Stern, Jessica. *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004. First published 2003.
- Susskind, Lawrence, Hillel Levine, Gideon Aran, Shlomo Kaniel, Yair Sheleg, and Moshe Halbertal. 'Religious and Ideological Dimensions of the Israeli Settlements Issue: Reframing the Narrative?'. *Negotiation Journal* 21, no. 2 (2005): 177-91.
- Szubin, Adam Jacob. 'Why Lubavitch Wants the Messiah Now: Religious Immigration as a Cause of Millenarianism.' In *Apocalyptic Time*, edited by Albert I. Baumgarten, 215-240. Leiden, Netherlands; Boston; and Cologne, Germany: Brill, 2000.

- Taub, Gadi. *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Weisburd, David. ‘Vigilantism as Community Social Control: Developing a Quantitative Criminological Model’. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 4, no. 2 (1988): 137-53.
- . *Jewish Settler Violence: Deviance as Social Reaction*. University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989.
- Weiss, Hadas. ‘Volatile Investments and Unruly Youth in a West Bank Settlement’. *Journal of Youth Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 17-33.
- Weissbrod, Lilly. ‘Coping with the Failure of a Prophecy.’ *Journal of Religion & Society* 10 (2008).
- Wolfson, Elliot R. *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- . *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Zertal, Idith, and Akiva Eldar. *Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel’s Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007*. Translated by Vivian Eden. New York: Nation Books, 2008.