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Politics and Religion in the Warsaw Ghetto: Beyond the Labor Zionist Narrative

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Abstract

The Jewish uprising against the Nazis in April 1943 in the Warsaw Ghetto has achieved legendary status in the remembrance of the Holocaust. But how has the revolt been portrayed and interpreted by historians both Jewish and non-Jewish? In Israel—where Labor Zionism under David Ben-Gurion dominated the society and politics of the first thirty years of the Jewish State—the ideology of the founders has been selective in its understanding of the Holocaust, specifically the revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto. Political ideology has distorted the understanding of past events. Both Revisionist Zionism and the Jewish religion played a major role in the life and fiery end of the ghetto, yet the Labor Zionists have ignored both phenomena in their telling of the story of the Holocaust. With the rise of post-Zionists in Israel, the triumph of right-wing Zionists in the political realm, and the religious revival of Judaism in the Jewish State, new narratives that have been ignored are now coming to the fore. The roles of Revisionist Zionism and Orthodox Judaism are finally being explored in an attempt to overcome the skewing of the past by the dominant political ideology in the State of Israel. The Revisionist followers of Jabotinsky were bold fighters against the Nazis in Warsaw—their role in the rebellion deserves to be investigated and revealed. As well, religious Jews rebelled against the Nazis through their commitment to their faith. Menachem Ziemba, the last rabbi in the Warsaw Ghetto, overturned centuries of martyrdom, advocating military resistance as a demand of Jewish law. This essay explores new narratives that deserve to see the light of day, providing a more accurate picture of the events of the Shoah and the role of religion in the modern world.

Keywords: Labor Zionism, Revisionist Zionism, Post-Zionism, Martyrdom, *Halachah* (Jewish Law)

Introduction: Beyond Labor Zionism—The Search for New Narratives

On March 3, 1957, a few minutes after midnight, three men shot to death Reszo Kasztner in Tel Aviv. Kasztner—a Hungarian Jew who immigrated to Israel after the Second World War and

served as a journalist and as an important figure in various ministries of Labor Zionist governments—died of his wounds two weeks later. The issues surrounding his controversial life and career continue to haunt Israel and the Jewish people.[1)]

Toward the end of World War II, Reszo Kasztner spearheaded attempts to save the Jews of Hungary from the Nazi genocide.[2)] By bargaining in the spring and summer of 1944 with Adolf Eichmann, the Gestapo officer who coordinated the transport of Jews from all parts of Europe to death in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Kasztner was able to rescue 1,684 Hungarian Jews. This remnant of Hungarian Jewry was made up of industrialists, intellectuals, Orthodox rabbis, Kasztner's Zionist colleagues and his anti-Zionist enemies, and Polish and Slovak Jews who served as slave labor in concentration camps. The price for the rescue to Switzerland was $1,500 for each family. The wealthy Jews of Budapest collected the money.[3)]

In August 1952, another Hungarian Jew who survived the Nazi genocide wrote a pamphlet in Israel attacking Kasztner. Malchiel Grunwald blamed the Labor Zionist[4)] official for saving his friends in the Zionist movement, as well as his family, and leaving the rest of Hungarian Jewry to their horrible fate. Kasztner took Grunwald to an Israeli court and sued him for libel. The trial opened on January 1, 1954.[5)] It was the first time that Revisionist Zionists[6)] in Menachem Begin's Herut Party would challenge Labor Zionism's narrative of the events of the Nazi genocide in World War II.

Grunwald's lawyer, Shmuel Tamir, was a thirty-one year old Herut activist who saw the libel trial as an opportunity to accuse Israel's Labor Zionist establishment for being partners with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews.[7)] If Kasztner could be found to have collaborated with the Nazis, this would sully the reputation of David Ben-Gurion and his Mapai Party. For Tamir, a defense of Grunwald could open the door to the much more ambitious goals of condemning the Labor Zionist establishment in Israel and bringing down the Mapai-led government. In the end, Grunwald was exonerated and Kastzner condemned as a collaborator. Tamir did not drag down Labor Zionism. But twenty years after Kasztner's assassination, Menachem Begin would lead Israel as Prime Minister. For the first time, the Revisionists in the Zionist movement could begin to tell their side of the story of the history of the yishuv, the State of Israel, and the Holocaust. The Kasztner Trial was the first attempt to establish a Holocaust narrative not dominated by Israel's Labor establishment. Whether the trial was fair to the Hungarian Jew who saved more than 1,500 of his fellow Jews—this is another issue for another essay.

In his valuable and penetrating study of the legacy of Vladimir Jabotinsky and Revisionist Zionism, Eran Kaplan explores the possibility of a new right-wing narrative within the parameters of "Post-Zionism." The "post-Zionists" are "a group of Israeli intellectuals

(historians, sociologists, cultural critics, artists) who posit a paradigm shift in the perception of Israeli culture and history."[8] The post-Zionist goal is to break the hegemony of Labor Zionist ideology in Israel and retrieve the voices of those Israelis not heard in the first 30 years of the State of Israel's existence. While Israeli Arabs, religious Jews, and Jews from Arab and Islamic lands have been ignored by Labor Zionist ideology, Revisionist Zionism has the most to gain from the 20-year-old post-Zionist critique of Israel's founders. While some post-Zionists engage in this critique in order to rob Israel of its legitimacy as a Jewish State, this critique does open the way for new narratives in Israel that have not been explored before. As Kaplan, an Israeli from a family of Jabotinsky's followers and a professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati, states in his introduction:

> In 1977 Menachem Begin led the Likud Party to a surprising win in the polls, and decades of Labor dominance of the Zionist movement came to an abrupt end. Today, after years of being marginalized by the Zionist Left, Revisionists have become the leading party in Israeli politics. Thus the history of the movement is no longer a secondary, though vocal, chapter in the annals of Jewish nationalism but a critical part of the history of Zionism and modern Israel.[9]

While Kaplan's study does not focus on Revisionist Zionism's Holocaust narrative, there is little doubt that with the rise of the Likud to power in Israel there have arrived new voices that have previously been ignored in the Labor Zionist understanding and historiography of the Shoah. These voices deserved to be heard and can give us a more complete, less mythologized understanding of Jewish behavior in Europe during the years of the Second World War.

Israeli journalist Tom Segev discusses in detail another ignored voice emerging in Israel in the aftermath of Labor Zionism's decline: the voice of religious Jews. In his *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*, Segev highlights the failure of Israel's Socialist founders to "produce a real secular culture" as an alternative to Judaism.[10] Segev writes that "the conflict over religion's place in the state has been resolved for the most part through practical compromises of one sort or another, by means of political negotiations. All these arrangements indicate that Israeli culture has not succeeded in formulating a relevant alternative to Jewish culture."[11] David Ben-Gurion might have thought that Jewish religion would be a fossil in a modern Socialist state. But, in fact, the opposite has occurred. With each passing year, ultra-Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism gain greater strength in the social and political arena. The voices of the religious ignored for years—subservient to the needs of Labor Zionism—are now being heard. Since the Likud victory in 1977, Judaism has been playing an increased and activist role in Israeli society. In the world of "Post-Zionism"—I believe it should be correctly called "Post-Labor Zionism"—the narrative of the religious Jew will come to the fore. That includes

the religious understanding of the Shoah.

This essay will explore the emerging Shoah narrative of both the Zionist Revisionists and Israel's religious Jews by focusing on Jewish life in the Warsaw Ghetto and the way it has been understood. I will briefly explore the Labor Zionist understanding of ghetto life and the heroic Jewish uprising against the Nazi overlords. During Israel's first fifty years of existence, the role of the follower's of Jabotinsky's followers in the ghetto was, for the most part, ignored. Was this simply a matter of ideology or were there other reasons that the Revisionist narrative has, until recently, not been emphasized? And what of the religious Jews of the ghetto—why is so little known about them? What were the attitudes of the ghetto's rabbis—many of them Chassidic—to resisting the Nazi genocide of the Jews? Who were these rabbis and how did they cling to their belief in God in such terrible times in overt defiance of reality? In the following pages, I will attempt to answer these questions by probing primary and secondary sources and shed new light on narratives that have been unexplored but now need to be brought to light.

A Narrative Ignored: Revisionist Zionists in the Warsaw Ghetto

In the popular imagination—in literature, film, and in Jewish memory—the Warsaw Ghetto revolt is an heroic chapter in the history of Jewish defiance of repression and a rejection of the notion that Jews "went like sheep to the slaughter" during World War II. While this perception is partially correct, the facts are more complex. The rebellion in the Warsaw Ghetto was not a unified effort by young Jews to die with dignity rather than in the gas chambers of Treblinka. The young Jews of Warsaw who led the rebellion were divided by political ideology and had a long, bitter past of rivalry behind them. On the one hand stood the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB), a group that was comprised of representatives of left-wing Zionist pioneering youth movements such as Hashomer Hatzair, Dror, and Akiva. The ZOB—which later also included representatives of the Jewish Socialist Workers Bund—first met on July 28, 1942, at the height of the Nazi deportation of Warsaw's Jews to death in Treblinka.[12)] On the other hand, the Zionist Revisionists formed The Jewish Military Union (ZZW) at an earlier date, although the founding of this group is shrouded in mystery.

At first glance, one might think that it would be logical and practical for Jews to unify under one banner in the fight against as formidable a foe as the Nazis. But the reality of Jewish history and the reality of human nature is that even when confronted with the worst persecution in Jewish history Jews would be divided by political ideologies. There was never any love lost between the left-wing of Zionism and the Revisionist radical Right led by Vladimir Jabotinsky. The bitter rivalry between Labor Zionism and Revisionism had its roots in the events of the 1920's. It came to a head, however, in the summer of 1933 with the assassination on a Tel Aviv beach of

Chaim Arlosoroff. Arlosoroff, an architect of Mapai economic policy and one of Labor's young rising stars, had been before his murder negotiating with Nazi Germany to try to encourage the Hitler regime to allow German Jews to immigrate to Israel. This attempt aroused the anger of Jabotinsky's followers who were later implicated in the assassination.[13] David Ben-Gurion and the Labor Zionists never forgave the Revisionists for the Arlosoroff murder. Ben-Gurion's hate for Jabotinsky was so great that he called the Revisionist leader "Vladimir Hitler."[14] Perhaps Jabotinsky was partly to blame for the epithet: his Betar youth movement paraded in military maneuvers wearing brown uniforms and training with weapons. Jabotinsky's emphasis was certainly not on the pioneering aspects of Zionism but rather on preparing Europe's Jews and the Jews in Israel's yishuv to face the coming onslaught (although even Jabotinsky could not foresee the extent of the disaster before his death in 1940). To have expected Labor Zionists and Revisionists to unify as one force in the face of the Nazi onslaught would be unrealistic, considering the enmity between the two groups.

Yet, it was not only Jabotinsky's admiration of Mussolini's Fascist Italy that caused the divide in the Warsaw Ghetto between the two main resistance groups. On a more practical level, negotiations conducted between the two groups before the uprising broke down over issues of authority. Historian Yisrael Gutman, citing ZOB leader Yitzhak Zuckerman, explains that negotiations between the ZOB and the ZZW were not successful because the Revisionist Betar leaders of the Jewish Military Union demanded that the commander of a unified organization come from their ranks. The Betar youth claimed that the ZZW leaders had more military experience than those in the ZOB and, therefore, should lead the rebellion against the Nazis. In the end, there never was a unified fighting organization in the ghetto.[15] The ZOB and ZZW coordinated the final defense of what was left of Jewish Warsaw. But there was, till the tragic and bitter end, no unity. Jews remember the Warsaw Ghetto revolt as a unified last stand against the Nazi oppressors. But popular Jewish memory is flawed. The Jews of the ghetto, even standing and defying the Germans in the shadow of certain death, were divided by political loyalties and by political ideologies.

For a number of reasons—some which should already be obvious to the reader—the Labor Zionist histories of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt generated after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 were dominated by the heroism of the ZOB. The Revisionist ZZW was left out of the Holocaust narrative in the first 30 years of Israel's existence. No doubt, part of the reason for this was ideological and political. The hatred of Jabotinsky evinced by Ben-Gurion in the years of the yishuv carried over into the era of statehood. Except now, the bogey man for Ben-Gurion was no longer Jabotinsky—he died in New York eight years before the founding of the State of Israel—but Menachem Begin. Begin's Herut Party hounded the Labor Zionist for a generation in Israel. Begin's opposition was almost powerless until 1977. Up until the Six-Day War in 1967,

Ben-Gurion declared he would never form a government with the Communists or with the Revisionists.[16] For the past three decades the Likud has dominated Israeli politics. We forgot today that the ideological venom of early Israel—the hatred that existed between Labor Zionism and Revisionism—was the reality of political and social life in the Jewish State. Labor Zionism—for the good and the bad—dominated Israel's first 30 years and, as a result, the Revisionist narrative and ideology were pushed aside.

Still, I do not want to be too cynical in this regard. There is another important reason why the ZOB received the most attention from historians of the ghetto uprising. The reality of the resistance was that a number of the Jewish Fighting Organization's leadership survived the rebellion, while almost every member of the Jewish Military Union was killed in the battle. ZOB fighters Yitzhak "Antek" Zuckerman, Marek Edelman, and Zivia Lubetkin survived the Shoah and later wrote of their experiences while living in Israel or Poland. David Apfelbaum, Paul Frenkel, and Leon Rodal—the commanders of the ZZW—died in the rubble of the ghetto.[17] As Yisrael Gutman writes in his history of World War II Jewish Warsaw:

> Rich and authentic documentary and personal evidence allows us to follow the debates and discussions that preceded the establishment of the ZOB…We also know which bodies joined it, who its leaders were, the kinds of institutions formed within it, and the goals they set for themselves.
>
> Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Revisionist Jewish Military Union, since we lack the kind of authoritative material that would enable us to retrace the steps in its formation. Thus we do not exactly know when it was established and how it was organized. Moreover, the few survivors who might have provided and elucidated these details have not left us with a clear picture of its early stages and development. This is the primary problem in attempting to describe the organization's course and growth in any detail.[18]

Gutman, in his 1994 study of the revolt, makes short shrift of the testimony of one of the only leaders of the ZZW, David Wdowinski. The historian devotes only three pages to this important figure in the Revisionist leadership, regarding Wdowinski's memoirs as unreliable. While it is clear that members of the Revisionist Betar youth group spent time at a farm in Hrubieszow before the deportations from Warsaw to Treblinka—these members of Betar returned to the ghetto in time to join the revolt—Gutman clearly does not trust Wdowinski's account of the formation of the ZZW and its negotiations with the ZOB.[19]

In contrast to Gutman, Reuben Ainsztein presents a much more comprehensive and detailed account of the followers of Jabotinsky in his study *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt*. In Ainzstein's

account the ZZW is portrayed as better armed than the ZOB. As well, the author stresses the fact that the Revisionists had reliable contacts with Polish resistance movements that refused to follow the Polish national Home Army in its refusal to assist the Jewish rebels of the ZOB. As early as 1939, the Revisionists established contact with Henryk Iwanski, a reserve captain in the Polish Army, a truly righteous Gentile in a Poland that was saturated with Jew hatred.[20] Iwanski's partisans supplied the ZZW with the machine guns needed to defend the ghetto during the uprising. Even after the Nazis declared victory over the last rebels in the ghetto in May 1943, Iwanski's group still smuggled arms and food to the remaining rebels by making the harrowing journey through the sewers of Warsaw. Iwanski's sons and brothers died in these attempts to assist the rebels in the ghetto.[21] It was the ZZW, not the ZOB, who had these important connections to the Polish national underground. The Warsaw Ghetto revolt could not have been fought against the Nazis without the superior firepower of the Revisionists. Perhaps one of the reasons so few ZZW leaders survived was due to the fact that the Nazis targeted their superior defenses and destroyed them because they represented the greatest threat.

In recent years, the man most responsible for reappraising the role of the ZZW Revisionists in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising has been Moshe Arens. This should come as no surprise. Arens, born in Lithuania in 1925 and later educated as a mechanical and aeronautical engineer at leading American universities, made aliya to Israel and served in the Irgun, the Revisionist military wing, during the struggle for Israel's independence. After a career of teaching at the Technion in Haifa and serving as a leader of the Israel Aircraft Industries, Arens involved himself in Herut and Likud politics. Since 1977, Arens has served as minister in different capacities for various Likud-led governments. A die-hard follower of Jabotinsky, Arens was ideologically opposed to any attempt by Israel to trade land captured in the Six-Day War for peace in any sort of agreement with the Palestinians. It is logical that Arens, with a long history of involvement in the leadership of Jabotiinsky's heirs, would be an important voice to provide a new narrative that would emphasize the role played by the Revisionist Zionist resisters in the Warsaw Ghetto.[22]

In a 2005 essay, Arens focuses on the role the ZZW played in the April 1943 revolt. Arens wrote the essay to shed light on this "significant role" of the fighting organization, a role that had been ignored by the Israeli political and scholarly establishment for years.[23] Arens relies on whatever little exists of Revisionist memoirs on the ghetto, the eyewitness accounts of Iwanski and other Polish Christians who provided the ZZW with arms and support, as well as on German documents.[24] The ZZW's main area of operation during the fight against the Germans was in Muranowski Square—Arens devotes most of the essay to the Revisionist fighting in that critical base of defense in the ghetto. He differentiates between the tactics of the ZOB and those of the

ZZW. The ZOB engaged in "hit-and-run" surprise attacks on the Germans then withdrew to their bunkers. The ZZW, on the other hand, in Muranowska Square, settled in to fight the Nazis in "a prolonged battle." Arens makes clear that because of this ZZW strategy, the role of the Revisionists fighting in the ghetto was "a major role."[25] The ZZW was well armed in contrast to the ZOB. The Germans struggled to overrun the ZZW positions. It was, in the end, the firepower of the Revisionists that prolonged a rebellion that would not have lasted more than a month had it relied solely on the hit-and-run tactics of the ZOB.

The essay by Arens is an important one. Arens introduces into the historical record a new narrative that had been neglected by the dominant Labor Zionist establishment in Israel. Most histories of the Warsaw Ghetto failed to include the important role of the Revisionist Zionists and Betar in the April 1943 uprising. Reuben Ainsztein's history of the revolt—a history that included Revisionist Zionists—was the exception to the rule. While I suspect that the reason for the neglect of the ZZW narrative has had much to do with the reality of Israeli politics and the dominance of Labor Zionism in the first generation of Israel's history, there are certainly other factors involved. Much of the ZOB leadership survived to recount in detail the activities of their organization. Almost no ZZW leaders survived to tell their side of the story. What, in the end, is so fascinating about the whole issue of resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 is that even while facing the threat of genocide and extermination, young Jews did not abandon their political allegiances. This lack of unity does not distress me at all. What it tells us is that Jews were human beings, "political animals" in the words of Aristotle. Rather than paint the Warsaw resisters as "heroic martyrs" in the name of a unified Jewish people, the story of the uprising highlights a far more complex reality in which Jews held on to their humanity through their own political ideologies. The worst disaster in Jewish history—the mass murder of three million Jews in Poland—could not destroy the power of political commitment and ideology of young Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. Jewish unity is a myth today, was a myth 65 years ago, and probably never existed throughout Jewish history. By presenting the Holocaust as the mass murder of six million victims who went "like lambs to the slaughter," we degrade the memory of those Jews who died with diverse personalities, ideologies, religious beliefs, and their own commitments. With that having been said, let me move on to the second half of this essay—the role of religion and religious life in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Religious Life in the Warsaw Ghetto—Rabbi Ziemba and the Theology of Defiance

We will never know the extent of Jewish religious belief and ritual practice in the Warsaw Ghetto. No doubt, many of the Jews in Warsaw murdered by the Nazis were religious, many swearing allegiance to a particular Hassidic rebbe.[26] But their voices remain mute. There are two reasons for this: the religious Jews and their rabbinic leadership in the ghetto did not

survive the war and did not live to tell us about the nature of religious life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Of course, there is another more controversial issue which is one related to Zionism. The Zionist narrative in Israel in the years leading up to the Eichmann Trial in the early 1960's was one that painted the religious Jews as being passive victims who accepted their death as the will of God. Before the Holocaust, most Jews—many of them Orthodox—rejected the Zionist movement for violating the principle in Jewish religion by not waiting for messianic redemption to restore Jewish sovereignty to the Land of Israel. From an ideological standpoint, secular Zionism—Labor Zionism in particular—ignored the role of their ideological foes in the religious world and, therefore, had little interest in their story. But as we shall see, the role of religious Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto—and in the Shoah, as a whole—is far more complex than either the Orthodox theology that opposed Zionism or the Zionist political ideology that opposed the Orthodox. With the decline of Labor Zionism in Israel and the rise in prominence of both religious Zionists and the ultra-Orthodox, the time has come to bring the narrative of religious Jews to the fore in our understanding of the events of 1939-1945.

The first valuable resource in investigating the situation of religious Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto is the "Oneg Shabbos"[27] archive of Emanuel Ringelblum (1900-1944). Before World War II, Ringelblum worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Many individuals in the ghetto joined historian Ringelblum in chronicling the persecution ands ultimate destruction of Warsaw Jewry in the ghetto. Ringelblum and his associates collected newspapers, underground publications, letters, diaries, and German documents relating to Jewish deportations and murders, and to record the testimony of the Jews coming to Warsaw from other ghettos and labor camps.[28] In detailing Jewish life in the ghetto, Ringelblum does not devote much of the archive to religious life for Jews in the vise of the Nazis. He concentrates, for the most part, on the role of the Jewish Council and on institutional life, the day-to- day struggle for survival in the ghetto, as well as the German agenda to deport Jews to their death in Treblinka. But what he does chronicle concerning Jewish religious observance in the ghetto is illuminating.

Ringelblum's archive, in an entry from October 1940—a time when the Germans forced Jews into the ghetto—mentions that "the finest public institutions in Warsaw have been ruined" and "eight hundred Torah scrolls desecrated."[29] In an entry for the month that followed, Ringelblum devotes a few lines to the persecution of Orthodox Jews in the ghetto:

> I marvel at the pious Jews who sacrifice themselves by wearing beards and the traditional frock coats. They are subjected to physical abuse.[30]

Obviously, there were still Jews in the ghetto who did not abandon their traditional Hassidic

dress despite being tormented by the German. The Oneg Shabbos archive in December 1940 chronicles that "the rabbi of Praga was badly beaten because, though he did take his hat off, he left the skullcap on underneath it."[31] It seems that the Nazi tormenting of religious Jews was a common occurrence, even in the early period of the ghetto's formation. By maintaining their traditional dress, religious Jews defied the Nazis and declared their continuing faith in God.

As the situation in the Warsaw Ghetto became more desperate for the Jews, Ringelblum's archive still records the defiance of religious Jews in the face of Nazi terror. On February 19, 1941, the Oneg Shabbos records the following:

> In the prayer house of the Pietists from Braclow on Nowolipie Street there is a large sign: "Jews, Never Despair!" The Pietists dance there with the same religious fervor as they did before the war. After prayers one day, a Jew danced there whose daughter had died the day before.[32]

A month later, Ringelblum's archive records the celebration of Purim[33] in the ghetto. The entry for March 10, 1941 records the following:

> There were assemblies in celebration of Purim this year. People hope for a new Purim—to celebrate the downfall of the modern Haman, Hitler—that will be commemorated as long as the Jewish people exist. The new Purim would surpass all previous Purims in Jewish history.[34]

Ringelblum records that before Passover of 1941, "there were fearful scenes in the office of the refugee organization" as Jews waited for holiday matzah and packages.[35] Even in the face of Nazi terror, Jews still prepared for the Passover holiday, ate the unleavened "bread of affliction" and hoped for better times and redemption. The Oneg Shabbos archive, however, is critical of the rabbis of the ghetto for not resisting the Nazi tormentors in some way. Out of fear of the Nazis murdering masses of Jews because of the defiant act of one Jew, Ringelblum records that the rabbis show "no evidences of a martyr's spirit" but, instead, stamp on Torah scrolls with their feet because the Nazi threatened them and all Jews if they would not participate in the desecration.[36] Whether Ringelblum's condemnation is a fair analysis of the situation is an issue that can be debated. There were rabbis in the ghetto who called for armed resistance to German oppression. But it must be remembered—the traditional Jewish way of dealing with non-Jewish authority through the centuries had been one of compliance and negotiation. This strategy worked for almost two thousand years. During the Shoah, the Jews were facing a new, far more menacing enemy, and the traditional responses no longer worked. The religious Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, like all the Jews of the ghetto, were dealing with the situation of Nazi tyranny

in the only way they knew how. Can we, looking back 65 years later, condemn them for not rebelling before the mass deportations to death in the summer of 1942?

I would like to cite another item from the Ringelblum archive regarding religious Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. In October of 1941, the chronicle notes the following:

> This Rosh Hashana,[37)] people were seized for forced labor. Jewish informers took soldiers with them to the prayer quorums during services, and there—in the prayer room—people were able to buy their way out of forced labor service.[38)]

While Ringelblum is obviously critical of Jews paying off the Germans to avoid slave labor at a synagogue during the High Holy Days, I find it quite amazing that only months before the mass deportations to Treblinka, after a year of suffering from disease and starvation in the ghetto, there would still be Jews praying to God in a synagogue for the Jewish New Year. It is quite remarkable.

Finally, here is a most poignant account from the archive of the celebration of the minor Jewish holiday of Lag Ba'Omer[39)] in the Warsaw Ghetto in May of 1942:

> The children's Lag B'Omer celebrations were very impressive this year. A large children's program was presented in the big Femina Theater hall. Children from all the schools performed. They were rewarded with sweets. Procession after procession of school children marched through the streets toward the Femina.[40)]

While the armed rebellion in Warsaw should always be remembered in our collective consciousness as a people, we must never forget the spiritual resistance of young schoolchildren in the horror of the ghetto celebrating a Jewish holiday. This form of spiritual and cultural resistance is inspiring and should never be forgotten. We can glean enough material from Emanuel Ringelbum's Oneg Shabbos archive to understand the importance of Judaism and the Jewish calendar in the life of hell Jews lived in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Another important set of resources that can tell us about the religious life of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto are the diary and memoirs of Hillel Seidman.[41)] Seidman, an Orthodox Jew affiliated with ultra-Orthodox Agudas Israel organization, served as the Director of Archives of the Warsaw Jewish community (the Kehillah). During the ghetto period, the Kehillah became part of the ghetto's Jewish Council. Seidman knew many of the leaders of Warsaw Jewish life both before and during the war. Especially important for the investigation of this essay is the fact that the community archivist befriended many of the rabbis who led the Warsaw community.

Seidman survived the Shoah. His diaries and his memoirs should be studied in more depth since they reveal much more information concerning Jewish religious life in the ghetto than does the Ringelblum archive.

In the diaries—Seidman started his chronicle at the height of the deportations of Jews to Treblinka in July of 1942—he describes the existence in the ghetto of underground yeshivas where young men studied the holy texts of Judaism. Suffering from the pangs of starvation, these students emerged in the earliest hours of the morning to forage for food in order to stay alive. Seidman encounters the yeshiva students and is moved by their dedication to Torah in the face of the Nazi onslaught.[42)]

Seidman describes in a September 21 entry how the religious Jews were able to pray on the Yom Kippur holiday despite the Nazi demand that the Jews work. In a tightly packed room, in one workshop, the famous *chazzan*, Gershon Sirota, led the prayers.[43)] His congregation listened in surprise and wonder as the talented but aged *chazzan*, surpassed all his previous performances, and many an eye ran with tears.[44)]

Seidman continues describing in his moving diary entry how the Jews chanted with the cantor the solemn words of the prayer *Avinu Malkeinu*.[45)] How Jews found the fortitude after the mass deportations of only a few weeks before to praise God—this is an amazing chapter in the spiritual and religious life and resistance of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto.

In a diary entry during the holiday of Sukkot,[46)] Seidman describes how, in one workshop in the ghetto, Rabbi Avraham Hendel was able to sneak in rabbis and yeshiva students. As they worked, they recited the holiday prayers and afterwards reviewed their Talmudic lessons of texts that they knew from memory. They did so despite the danger of being caught by the German overseers in the workshop. Seidman admired these pious and daring men.

The defiance Seidman describes was embodied in the life and death of a great Warsaw rabbi, Menachem Ziemba. During the Sukkot holiday of 1942, Seidman recounts how, despite the danger, Rabbi Ziemba broke open the roof of his apartment to construct a primitive *sukkah*! Hundreds of Chasidim and yeshivah students streamed into Ziemba's apartment to fulfill the mitzvah of sitting in the makeshift booth. A number of Jewish policemen lived in the rabbi's building. They betrayed Ziemba to the Jewish Council authorities. Ziemba escaped punishment but was then forced to move to new living quarters.[47)]

Menachem Ziemba was one of the last rabbis to survive in the Warsaw Ghetto up until the April 1943 rebellion. His heroism in the face of the Nazis is inspiring, remarkable, and has not

yet been acknowledged in the proper manner. Born in 1883 to a poor Hasidic family, Ziemba struggled most of his life to make a living. In 1935, as an important figure in the Agudas Israel in Poland, he came to prominence as a member of the Warsaw rabbinical council. As the Nazis murdered more authoritative and well-known rabbis in the ghetto, Ziemba's stature rose. Ziemba was the voice of the conscience of the ghetto. He never carried a rifle or a grenade but his spirit inspired the Jews of the ghetto to fight back against the Nazi oppressor.[48)]

For Ziemba, the traditional pious Jewish response of martyrdom in the face of the enemy was no longer valid. The Nazi genocide demanded a new response, that of armed resistance. Ziemba defended this transformation as grounded in halachah, Jewish law.[49)] At a meeting of the remnant of the leadership of Warsaw Jewry on January 14, 1943—only months before the rebellion—Ziemba spoke out as a staunch advocate of armed resistance. His words transfixed the Warsaw Jewish leadership:

> Henceforth, we must refuse to wend our way to the *Umschlag-platz*,[50)] which is but a blind and a snare—a veritable stepping-stone on the road to mass annihilation…Had we lived up to our presumed status of a "people endowed with wisdom and understanding," we would have discerned *ab initio* the enemy's plot to destroy us as a whole, root and branch, and would have put into operation all media of information in order to arouse the conscience of the world. As it is now, we have no choice but to resist. We are prohibited by Jewish law from betraying others, nor may we deliver ourselves into the hands of the arch-enemy…[51)]

The discussion continued after Ziemba spoke. Fearing that the Jewish leadership would not support resistance, Ziemba spoke again more emphatically about the need for Jews to adopt a new strategy—not traditional martyrdom—in the face of an overwhelming oppression and murder they had not faced before in their long history:

> Sanctification of the Divine Name manifests itself in varied ways….In the past, during religious persecution, we were required by the law "to give up our lives even for the least essential practice." In the present, however, we are faced by an arch foe, whose unparalleled ruthlessness and total annihilation purposes know no bounds. Halachah demands that we fight and resist to the very end with unequaled determination and valor for the sake of Sanctification of the Divine Name.[52)]

The meeting ended with those words of "the Gaon of Praga," Rabbi Ziemba. I find Ziemba's January 1943 proclamation fascinating for two reasons. First, that Ziemba was not only performing mitzvoth in the ghetto—such as building a Sukkah at the risk of his own life. He was also doing something even more daring—Ziemba recalibrated the contours of Jewish law in the

face of the terrifying reality of the Shoah. The rabbi cited halachah to respond to a totally new situation in the history of the Jewish people. His understanding of Jewish law in the case of martyrdom was molded by the terrible world and experience around him. The traditional understanding of martyrdom and sanctifying the Divine Name was an inadequate response in the face of Nazi genocide. God and Jewish law demanded a new response. Although Ziemba cited halachah, he daringly transformed the nature of Jewish response to disaster in history. This, in my mind, is remarkable and heroic.

The second element of Ziemba's words in January 1943 was the fact that he based resistance to the Nazis based on halachah. Why did he need to do so? Was not the fact of mass murder in Treblinka enough of a justification for Jewish armed rebellion? Indeed, it was—but for Ziemba as a religious Jew, even in the face of extreme oppression and cruelty, all actions that were done had to be performed based on Jewish law. Years of starvation and disease in the ghetto did not blunt Menachem Ziemba's love of Torah and Judaism. His story is an inspiring one that should never be forgotten.

In April of 1943, before the ghetto uprising, Menachem Ziemba, David Szapiro, and Samson Stockhammer—Warsaw's last surviving rabbis—were offered sanctuary in the "Aryan" section of the city. They refused. They could not abandon the Jews of the ghetto. The Germans shot Ziemba a few days later in the streets of the ghetto. Szapiro was the sole survivor among the three rabbis. Their refusal to leave the Warsaw Ghetto was an example of spiritual resistance at its most inspiring. While we should always remember with pride the armed resistance of the ZOB, ZZW, and other Jews in the ghetto, the heroism of Menachem Ziemba and his colleagues should also be forefront in our minds.

Post-Zionism—The Rediscovery of Hidden Voices?

This review of the role of the Revisionists Zionists and religious Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto is, of course, not simply an academic exercise. For the first thirty years of its history, Labor Zionism dominated the political and ideological landscape of Israel. David Ben-Gurion and Mapai provided a coherent and inspiring message and rallying point to a nation and people besieged. In its early years, Israel was able to absorb millions of immigrants because Labor Zionist ideology served as the basis of the unity of all Jews, from wherever they may have come. The combination of socialism and the secularization of Judaism and the Hebrew calendar provided a potent formula to inspire the Jewish State to great achievements both before the founding in 1948 and for many years afterwards. Labor ideology was the engine that drove the country. There was little room for other narratives to emerge because the needs of the Jewish State demanded that there be only one narrative to unite a nation that needed to be united. The

Revisionists were vocal in their opposition but were a marginal element in the Knesset. The religious parties, Jews from Islamic and Arab lands, as well as Israeli Arab citizens, basically kept their mouth shut and lived in the shadow of Labor Zionist governments. For the first generation of the State of Israel only one narrative dominated—that of Ben-Gurion and Labor Zionism.

Thirty years ago, however, the scenario changed dramatically. With the coming to power of the Likud—with the support of both the religious parties and the community of Israel's Jews from Arab and Islamic lands—Labor Zionist hegemony came to a dramatic end. Groups in Israel that had never been heard before now began to flex their muscles in Israeli politics and society. Israelis realized that Labor Zionist ideology had become a relic and no longer answered their needs. As a result new narratives are emerging slowly but surely in the Jewish State. The emergence of these new narratives does not deprive Labor Zionism of the credit for founding and building up the State of Israel. But what it does is to allow those on the margins to come to the fore and speak out. The decline of Labor Zionism can serve as a liberating force for the Jews—and Arabs—of Israel. There is an ideological void that has yet to be filled in Israel in the era after Labor Zionism. New narratives are beginning to emerge to fill the void—but this is a slow process.

I do not want to paint a too rosy picture concerning the emergence of new narratives. There is a downside to the decline of Labor Zionism—some of the new narratives that are emerging are simply anti-Zionist. The first community that has always opposed the legitimacy of the Zionist project has been different Hasidic sects among the Ultra-Orthodox. In Israel today, there has been an ultra-Orthodox population boom and a revival of Hasidic communities that only 65 years ago faced extinction. Their revival and recovery is a remarkable story. But extremist groups like Neturei Karta have become more and more vocal in the past generation. As well, non-Zionist religious parties in the Knesset are no longer the timid followers of Labor Zionist governments. They are now the linchpin in the formation of governments in the muddled world of Israeli coalition politics. The success of Shas—a strange hybrid of Lithuanian ultra-Orthodoxy and an anti-establishment Sephardic protest movement—is indicative of what can happen when the central narrative that binds a nation falls into decline. Certainly, the narrative of Jews from Arab and Islamic lands must be a part of the warp and woof of Israeli society. However, the proliferation of anti-Zionist and non-Zionist religious communities in Israel is a cause for great concern. The void left by Labor Zionism needs to be filled. But should groups that have no stake in the Zionist project beside their own self-interest be the ones to fill this void?

At the other end of the ideological spectrum from the Ultra-Orthodox in Israel are the "Post-Zionists." Israel historian of Zionism Ehud Luz, in his 2003 study on power and Jewish identity

in Israel and Jewish history, explains the role of the "Post-Zionists":

> In recent years there has been a tendency among a group of Israeli historians and sociologists referred to as "Post-Zionists" to subject Israel's myths to historical and moral criticism. This group, identified with the political left, is calling for revision of our understanding of the Zionist past and consequently of Zionist identity. One of the principal concerns of these scholars is to reassess the degree of Zionist guilt in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. In their view, the Zionist narrative gives a distorted account. There is a profound discrepancy between the rhetoric and self-image of a peace-loving people that is in the right and has been subject to repeated attack and its own purportedly use of force. The critics are trying to demolish the myths underlying this image and prove that Zionism intended from the outset to take over the country and systematically evict its Arab inhabitants. What is more, they say, Israel's territorial ambitions have caused it to pass up chances for peace and given rise to a nationalistic, militaristic society indifferent to humane, liberal values.[53)]

Luz defends Zionism against the self-destructive nature of the "Post-Zionist" argument. In the void left by the decline of Labor Zionist ideology in Israel, there was bound to be challenges by Israelis to the narrative established by Labor Zionism. It is a sign of maturity in a society when citizens begin to question the mythologies of a nation's founding fathers. But why is there this need by the "Post-Zionists" to rob the Zionist enterprise of its legitimacy? Cannot we question aspects of Labor Zionism's ideological hegemony in the first Israeli generation without dismantling much of the great work and achievements of Labor Zionism? A true sign of maturity is not a misguided iconoclasm. Rather, we should be attempting to weave new narratives into the fabric of Israeli society and ideology, thereby creating a mosaic of different voices already heard and not yet heard.

Conclusion: "Post-Labor Zionism"—The Emergence of New Narratives

The recounting of the history of the Warsaw Ghetto and the April 1943 revolt provides us with the perfect opportunity to present a narrative that takes into account the many voices of different Jewish communities and political groups. Certainly, the Labor Zionist role in the life of the ghetto is critical to our understanding of Jewish history and the Shoah. Yet, that narrative alone will not suffice to provide us with a complete picture of life and death in the ghettos of Poland. I call today for a "New Zionism" that will synthesize different narratives into a whole that includes the voices of all Jews, a Zionism that will neither devalue the vision of the Zionist Revisionists nor the spiritual tenacity and heroism of religious Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. If today we are not in the "Post-Zionist" era and Zionism is still a legitimate and viable project, I can say

with confidence that we are certainly in an era of "Post-Labor Zionism." That does not mean that we should dismantle the legacy of David Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, and Golda Meir. What it does mean is that for Israel to have a long future as both a Jewish State and a democracy, the voices of all its citizens must contribute to the continuing narrative of the fascinating and meaningful story of the history of the Jewish people.

Notes

1) Anna Porter, *Kasztner's Train* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007), pp. 354-355.
2) The Nazi genocide of Jews during the Second World War is known as "The Holocaust." I prefer to use the Hebrew term "Shoah" instead. "Holocaust" has the religious meaning of a sacrifice that is totally consumed on the altar. The Hebrew term "Shoah" means "tragedy." It is a neutral word that avoids theological overtones that are not always appropriate in the discussion of the murder of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators.
3) Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
4) Labor Zionism, as represented by David Ben-Gurion's "Mapai" party, synthesized Socialism and Zionism. The Labor Zionists effectively created an economic and political infrastructure for a future Jewish State during the British mandate period in Palestine. Ben-Gurion and Mapai dominated the first 30 years of Israel's statehood—fighting wars, building up the country's economy and absorbing immigrants from Europe, as well as many Jews from Arab and Islamic lands.
5) Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-326.
6) Revisionist Zionism was founded by Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), a Russian Jew and prolific speaker, journalist, translator and Zionist propagandist. Revisionist Zionism rejected Ben-Gurion's synthesis of Socialism and Zionism. Instead, Jabotinsky advocated a Jewish State on both sides of the Jordan River and he completely opposed any attempt to inject the class struggle into the Zionist project. He agitated for the mass immigration of millions of Europe's persecuted Jews to Palestine, rather than focus on Labor's project to build up Israel one settlement at a time.
7) Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
8) Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 167.
9) *Ibid.*, p. viii.
10) Tom Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), p. 89.
11) *Ibid.*
12) Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), p.152.
13) Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.71.
14) Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), p. 368.

15) Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw: 1939-1943* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 294-295.
16) Gilbert, p. 250.
17) Descriptions of ZZW commanders' fate in Reuben Ainsztein, *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt* (New York, Holocaust Library), 1979.
18) Y. Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, p. 293.
19) Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, pp. 168-9. Wdowinski's memoir was published in English in 1963 under the title *And We Are Not Saved*.
20) Reuben Ainsztein, *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), p. 19.
21) *Ibid*., pp. 157-8.
22) Biographical information on Moshe Arens provided by Answers.com on the Internet—"Biography: Moshe Arens."
23) Moshe Arens, "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: A Reappraisal," in *Yad Vashem Studies* XXXIII (2005), p. 101.
24) Ibid., pp. 107-108.
25) Ibid., p. 142.
26) The "rebbe" is the rabbi in the world of Hasidism. The Hasidic movement was founded by the Ba'al Shem Tov in the early 18th century. It was a populist movement in Eastern Europe that challenged the elite scholars who led the communities.
27) "Oneg Shabbos" is the Yiddish phrase that means "enjoyment of the Sabbath."
28) Walter Laqueur (ed.), *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 457.
29) Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958), p. 80.
30) *Ibid*., p. 83.
31) *Ibid*., p. 111.
32) *Ibid*., p. 125.
33) Purim is the spring holiday celebrating the Jewish attempt to foil Haman's attempt to destroy the Jews in ancient Persia.
34) Ringelblum, *op. cit*., p. 139.
35) *Ibid*., p. 154.
36) *Ibid*., p. 174.
37) The Jewish New Year.
38) Ringelblum, *op. cit*., p. 224
39) A minor Jewish holiday in the period between Passover and Shavuot.
40) Ringelblum, *op. cit*., p. 287.
41) Hillel Seidman, *The Warsaw Ghetto Diaries*, trans. Yosef Israel (Southfield, Michigan: Targum Press, 1997).
42) *Ibid*., pp. 97-100.
43) "Chazzan" is Hebrew for the Cantor.

44) Seidman, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
45) A traditional prayer recited on Yom Kippur.
46) Sukkot is the fall pilgrimage festival in which Jews sit in a "sukkah" or booth to commemorate the wandering of the ancient Israelites in the wilderness.
47) Seidman, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-8.
48) "Menahem Zemba" in *The Encyclopaedia Judaica*, First Ed. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), Vol. 16, p. 986.
49) Ehud Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity*, translated by Michael Swirsky (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 59.
50) The train siding from which Jews were deported from Warsaw to the death camp in Treblinka.
51) "Menahem Ziemba of Praga" by Rabbi Israel Elfenbein in *Guardians of Our Heritage (1724-1953)*, edited be Leo Jung (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1958), p. 611.
52) Ibid., pp. 611-12.
53) Ehud Luz, *op. cit.*, p. 264