

# Redemptive Zionism in Focus

## Overview

The article examines whether Zionism has completed its role, from a religious Zionist perspective, focusing on ideology from pre-state era to the late 1980s. It analyzes debates shaped by historical crises and theological frameworks.

## Core Questions and Scope

- Ideological relevance: viability of Zionist ideals (safe haven, national, practical, spiritual).
- Institutional relevance: ongoing role of Zionist bodies (Zionist Federation, Jewish Agency).
- Critiques: whether severe criticisms warrant ending Zionist frameworks.
- Scope limited to ideology; institutional issues treated via their ideological dimensions.

## Tensions and Baselines

- Statehood paradox: Israel's establishment seems to fulfill Zionist aims, yet mass aliyah and "normalization" remain incomplete.
- Diaspora reality: most Jews remain outside Israel; assimilation persists.
- Religious Zionist constant: views events as stages in messianic redemption; cooperation with the State and Zionist institutions persists.

## Major Debates and Historical Triggers

- Holocaust: shock to political Zionism's reliance on nations; spurred theological reinterpretations.
- Ben-Gurion vs. Zionist Federation: post-1948 push to dismantle; religious Zionists defended continued roles.
- UN "Zionism is racism" (1975): prompted self-critique and reassertion of aliyah and values.

## Foundations of the Religious Zionist View

- Messianic process: historical events as redemptive stages; redemption and rescue seen as intertwined.
- Metaphysical unity: all Jews form one nation; unity is prerequisite for redemption.
- Dialectic stance: practical cooperation with institutions while demanding religious aims guide Zionism.

## Foreign and Domestic Missions

- Diaspora focus: prevent assimilation; promote Zionist identity; support welfare in exile.
- Internal focus: address religious-secular, ethnic, racial, and minority rifts; pursue social unity.

## Idea and Practice

- Crises recalibrate relevance: Holocaust, wars, UN resolution revived debates.
- Political Zionism's limits: reliance on nations questioned; ideology reframed with religious aims.

## Key Thinkers and Positions (Summary Table)

Thinker/Group	Period/Context	Core Claim	Zionism's Ongoing Role	Isaiah
<b>Aviad</b>	1942, Holocaust	Political Zionism still valid; needs religious infusion	Maintain diplomacy; deepen faith, Torah, prophecy	
<b>Moshe Krone</b>	Mid-20th c.	Rescue and redemption are one process	Continue redemptive national work	
<b>A.L. Gelman</b>	1949	Do not dismantle; organize aliyah	Immigration machinery; Hebrew, new holidays, religious culture	
<b>E.M. Genehovsky</b>	1952	Israel must be spiritual center; educate Diaspora	Formal Zionist education to prevent assimilation	
<b>S.Z. Shragai</b>	1950s	Conceptual role unfinished; state is "first spark"	Entrench nationalism; enable religious departments; advance redemption	
<b>Isaiah Bernstein</b>	1950s	No embarrassment; only religious Zionism justifies Zionism fully	Strengthen religious educational arms in Diaspora	
<b>E.E. Urbach</b>	1975–1980	Supreme goal is aliyah; negate Diaspora; build non-materialist society	Drive mass immigration; elevate Israeli ethics	
<b>R.Y.D. Soloveitchik</b>	Sermons (1974)	Secular partnerships limited; religious domains protected	State aids nationhood; religious leadership in values	
<b>Y. Amital</b>	Post-Yom Kippur War	Shift from "safe haven" to "redemptive Zionism"; faith-centered	Cultivate redeemed consciousness, praise, faith	
<b>I. Jakobovits</b>	1980s	Secular Zionism paradoxical; "solution" illusory	Ground legitimacy in religion; confront moral crisis	
<b>E.</b>				

**Berkowitz** 1970s–1980s Secular “normalization” bankrupt; need halakhic renewal Reform halakhah for state; restore Jewish uniqueness **Kook Circle (Z.Y. Kook, Waldman, Aviner, Tau, Filber, Melamed)** 1967–1990s Zionism proceeds in stages; next is faith/holiness Continue statehood; move from secular to sacred Zionism **Holocaust-Era Reframing**

- Aviad’s three justifications:
  - Historical memory drives politics; sympathy for Jewish revival persists.
  - Ideals transcend current limits; anti-Semitism passes; diplomacy returns.
  - Ethnic responsibility: Zionism prevents Diaspora complacency.
- Religious turn: infuse Zionism with faith; voluntary spiritual awakening; cautious messianic linkage.

## Post-1948 Institutional Debate

- Practical arguments (Gelman, Genehovsky):
  - Organize aliyah; formal Zionist education; Hebrew and national culture in Diaspora.
- Theological arguments (Shragai, Bernstein):
  - State is only initial redemption; Zionism must enable full redemption.
  - Unity of Israel mandates continued Federation; “even if he sinned, a Zionist is a Zionist.”
  - Condition: empower religious-cultural departments; do not obstruct.

## 1975 UN Resolution and Self-Examination

- Urbach’s dual mission:
  - Promote aliyah; delegitimize Diaspora permanence.
  - Build ethical, non-materialist Israeli society to attract immigrants.
- Response to dropouts and Western reluctance: critique materialism; improve societal values without blaming secularism alone.

## Crisis-Driven Reorientation (1970s–1980s)

- Amital: replace rationalist models with simple faith; praise; “redeemed person” emerges; redemptive Zionism.
- Jakobovits: secular Zionism’s paradox; biblical mandate without religion; solution to Jewish problem illusory; moral decline.
- Berkowitz: need “third history” integrating spiritual mission and state; reform halakhah; critique materialist normalization.

## Kook Circle: Zionism in Stages

- Stage model: secular activation → faith/holiness completion; continuity with original Zionism.
- Content of next stage:
  - Return to sanctity (Filber): from Herzl to Yehuda Ha-Levi's vision.
  - Awakening dormant sacred core (Aviner); secular ideas transformed in Israel (Tau).
  - Purification via crises; shallow secular Zionism erodes; faith-rooted Zionism stable (Melamed).
- Statehood principle: Israeli governance essential to redemption; institutions retain sanctity and relevance.

## Comparative Patterns

- Frameworks:
  - Mixed secular-religious discourse (Aviad, Gelman, Urbach).
  - Exclusively religious justification (Shragai, Bernstein, Kook circle).
- Emphases:
  - Outside (Diaspora/aliyah) as primary mission (Gelman, Genehovsky, Urbach).
  - Threat-based validation (Soloveitchik, Amital, Jakobovits).
  - Cultural-moral elevation (Genehovsky, Urbach, Berkowitz).
- Justification types:
  - Esoteric (hidden redemptive currents).
  - Timeless ideal (beyond context).
  - Cultural-educational (language, identity).
  - Moral (combat materialism).
  - Religious (explicit redemptive goals).
  - Process (first stage leading to sacred completion).

## Key Terms & Definitions

- Political Zionism: Diplomacy-based approach relying on international support.
- Spiritual Center: Israel as cultural-religious beacon preventing assimilation.
- Metaphysical Unity of Israel: Theological notion of a single, indivisible nation.
- Redemptive Zionism: Faith-centered framing of Zionism as part of messianic process.

- Mamlakhtiyut (Statehood): Valuing sovereign Jewish governance as redemptive.
- Normalization: Aim to normalize Jewish national life; contested in outcomes.

## Action Items / Next Steps

- Strengthen organized aliyah mechanisms and incentives aligned with ethical society-building.
- Expand religious-cultural education in Diaspora to prevent assimilation and reinforce identity.
- Empower religious departments within Zionist institutions to advance redemptive aims without coercion.
- Advance halakhic development suited to modern state needs while preserving tradition.
- Cultivate faith-driven public ethos to transition from “safe haven” to redemptive consciousness.

In the Zionist context, a “**dropout**” refers to an individual who immigrated to Israel (made aliyah) with Zionist intentions but subsequently leaves Israel to return to life in the Diaspora or to settle elsewhere. This phenomenon raises concerns within Zionist discourse because it represents a failure to fully integrate or fulfill the Zionist ideal of permanent Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel.

For example, **Ephraim Elimelech Urbach** discussed this in relation to the period when immigration from the communist bloc was permitted. Many immigrants settled initially but then dropped out, leaving Israel and thus undermining the Zionist goal of a complete ingathering of the Jewish people. Urbach saw this as a failure of both Zionism and Israeli society to provide a compelling enough environment for these immigrants to remain and build a Jewish homeland.

The “dropout” issue is tied to broader discussions about the challenges of assimilation, social and economic issues in Israel, and the strength of Zionist ideology and identity to retain immigrants long-term. It also highlights tensions between the ideal of Jewish unification in Israel and the reality of some Jews choosing to live elsewhere.