

Faith Matters: Religious perspectives on the creation of the state of Israel

David Ben Gurion became country's first prime minister on May 14, 1948, writes Moshe Meirovich

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On Nov. 29, 1947, the United Nations voted to partition the historic Land of Israel into Jewish and Arab states.

On May 14, 1948, with the end of the British mandate, the first prime minister of the Jewish state, David Ben Gurion, declared the establishment of the State of Israel after nearly 2,000 years. Since that auspicious moment, Jews have articulated at least two distinct theological perspectives in determining the spiritual foundations of this Zionist enterprise.

From the writings of the 11th century philosopher Yehuda Halevi we read a viewpoint that formulated a messianic belief that the God of history who liberated the Israelites from Egyptian bondage is the same God who will ultimately establish the messianic redemption for all mankind. We can label this as the 'Exodus Model.'

It is this potent, religious perspective that served as the cornerstone of messianism for so many religious Zionists especially following the Six Day War in June 1967 when the Old City of Jerusalem was liberated after 19 years. As Rabbi David Hartman (1931-2013) confirmed: "In Israel today... religious nationalists regard Halevi ... as the spiritual precursor of religious Zionism."

A second ideology focuses on the writings of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) who taught that from the Creation narrative we learned that humanity received the gift of intellect, that is the ability to reason.

It was this unique quality to reason and not historical, miraculous events that can truly account for Jewish survival. How so? Because Maimonides emphasized that to truly comprehend the biblical narrative, one had to shift the emphasis from an event-based theology to a text-centred paradigm where we see the gradual implementation of a new doctrine of national salvation: 'Human initiative.' We can label this as the 'Sinai Model.'

Thus, Maimonides cites the opening words of the Decalogue: "*Anochi Adonay Elohechah.* (I am the Lord your God.)" Period.

Here God is portrayed in a dialogue with his Chosen nation, a people who can help shape their own destiny. Simply put: The Exodus Model relies upon God to actively intervene in the course of human affairs; the 'Sinai Model' underscores the Jewish people taking the 'bull by the horns' using human intellect to take their destiny into their own hands.

Yet, most interestingly, in the final analysis, Hartman makes a bold and unifying statement: "The tradition was wise in allowing many different voices to speak within it ... and any attempt by scholars to decide whether Halevi or Maimonides truly reflects the Jewish tradition becomes in the end a confused and misguided undertaking."

It's this concept that embraces the rabbinic declaration: "*Eilu V'eilu Divrei Elohim Chayim* (Both perspectives are the words of the Living God)."