

A critical investigation into Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli's views on the phenomenon of labour

**Author:**Amir Mashiach¹ **Affiliation:**

¹The Israel Heritage Department and the School of Education, Ariel University, Ariel, Israel

Corresponding author:

Amir Mashiach,
amirma@ariel.ac.il

Dates:

Received: 17 Dec. 2018

Accepted: 31 May 2019

Published: 23 Oct. 2019

How to cite this article:

Mashiach, A., 2019, 'A critical investigation into Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli's views on the phenomenon of labour', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(3), a5365. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5365>

Copyright:

© 2019. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli (1909–1995) was one of religious Zionism's greatest rabbis and adjudicators. He served for many years as the rabbi of Moshav Kfar Haroeh, sat as a judge in the supreme Rabbinical Court and was head of the Merkaz Harav yeshiva. The purpose of this study is to shed light on Yisraeli's attitude towards work. Did he see work as a basic human obligation spelled out by the physical need for survival? Did he associate an ideological value with work, as part of a worldview integrating religious values with extra-religious ones, similar to socialism? Or did he see work as a religious value, one that stemmed from his theology?

Keywords: Rabbi Yisraeli; Religious Zionism; Rabbi Kook; Work; Labour; Mizrachi; Ha-poel Ha-Mizrchi; Activism.

This article seeks to understand the concept of work in the teachings of Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli (1909–1995). Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli was one of religious Zionism's greatest rabbis and adjudicators (ed. Sharir 1999; Roness 2012). He was born in Belarus, and only at the age of 24, he made Aliyah to the land of Israel. In Israel, he learnt Torah at Merkaz Harav yeshiva.¹ In time, he served for many years as the rabbi of Moshav Kfar Haroeh,² sat as a judge in the supreme Rabbinical Court and was head of the Merkaz Harav yeshiva.

As an important figure who had a significance impact on the religious Zionist sector with its guiding principle of Torah va'avodah, meaning Torah and work, it is necessary to clarify his attitude to work. Did he perceive work as a necessity, part of one's duty to support the members of the household, or perhaps also as an ideological value, part of a worldview that combines religious values with extra-religious values, or then again maybe he perceived work as a religious value.

Background

In this short introduction,³ we find several references to work in Jewish literature (Menahem 1985; Neuwirth 2015).⁴ The biblical attitude to work is ambivalent. On the one hand, '[t]he Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Gn 2:15). Namely, Adam's job was also to work, and work bears religious meaning of carrying out a Divine commandment and designation. Then again, once Adam sinned, he was punished. 'Cursed is the ground because of you ... by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food' (Gn 3:17–19). Therefore, work is part of the curse and has no religious value; rather, it is an outcome of the sin. In rabbinical literature also, the attitude to work is ambivalent. According to some views, work has religious value, for instance:

Great is labor, as just as Israel were commanded to keep the Sabbath, thus they were commanded to perform labor, as it is said: 'Six days you shall do labor and do all your work'. (Avot de Rabbi Nathan, Version B, 21)

Therefore, just as it is a religious precept to cease from work on the Sabbath, it is also a religious precept to work on weekdays.⁵ Then again, some claim that work is only an existential need and

1. Merkaz Harav yeshiva [Torah academy] 'The Center of the Rabbi [i.e. Rabbi Kook] – the Central Universal Yeshiva' is a religious Zionist yeshiva in Jerusalem, founded in 1924 by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. It has become the most prominent religious Zionist yeshiva in the world and is still considered to be a very influential establishment in the religious Zionist sector.

2. A religious moshav belonging to Hapoel Hamizrachi, named after Rabbi Kook.

3. I have written short, as this topic is lengthy and complex, and the current study is interested in Rabbi Yisraeli's attitude to the issue.

4. The terms 'work' (*avoda*), 'labor' (*melakha*) and 'trade' (*umanut*) are used in this study to describe tangible work.

5. The meaning of 'work' as mentioned in the Mishna, '[t]he world stands on three things: Torah, the service of God (*Work*), and deeds of kindness' (Avot 1:2) is disputed. Some interpret it as actual work, and then labour has religious value, and some interpret it as meaning prayer or work in the temple.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

has no religious value, for example, the father's obligation to teach his son a profession, stating that '[a]nyone who does not teach his son a trade is as though he trains him to be a gangster', as 'if he [*the son*] shall have no trade and he shall lack for bread, he will go to the crossroads and rob people' (Bavli, Qiddushin 29b, and Rashi ad loc). Therefore, work is a means of subsistence, but has no religious meaning. It was obvious to all that the Jewish scale of ethics is headed by the study of Torah, 'But the study of Torah is equal to them all' (Mishna, Peah 1:1; Arzi 1964).

Over the years, the conception of work as a necessity has attained dominance. R. Yosef Karo, the greatest of all halakhic adjudicators, also pointed that it is necessary to work and to support oneself, as 'the poverty will remove from him knowledge of his Creator' (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim, siman 156, section a). Hence, work is a necessity rather than a religious value.

Modern-day ultra-Orthodox society sees Torah as a supreme and exclusive value. From their perspective, work is merely a subsistence need. This conception is supported primarily by the argument that work is a circumstantial necessity. After the Holocaust and the destruction of European Jewry, they saw an obligation to devote their lives to the study of Torah and to perform its commandments in order to rescue the Torah of Israel from complete annihilation. This was the beginning of the 'learners' society' (*hevrat halomdim*), as defined by Friedman, a society that dedicates itself to the study of Torah, whatever the intellectual level of the individual. As stated, work is merely a necessity (Brown 2017; Friedman 1991).

With regard to tangible work, the innovation introduced by the Hassidic movement and the concept of 'work (serving God) through the concrete' (*avoda begashmiyut*) are noteworthy. That is, the worship of God can also be performed by means of concrete occupations (Kauffman 2009). Buber (1945) explains that according to the Hassidic outlook, God is constantly present in the world. Therefore, 'the separation between the sacred ... and the mundane ... is a temporary separation ... God desires that everything be sanctified' (Buber 1945:37–38, 4–41, 56, 89–90, 2005). The sanctification of reality should be carried out through contact with actual existence and with the intention of acting 'for Heaven's sake'. In his opinion, the innovation introduced by Hassidism is pan-sacramentalism – the entire world is a sacrament, 'channels of benevolence' between God and human race. Thus, the world, with all its material and spiritual contents, can serve as a point of encounter between them, and this includes tangible work (Elior 1992:13–35). However, this does not mean awarding religious value to work per se, rather that work is also a way of worshipping God.

It was the religious Zionist movements Mizrahi (Don-Yehiya 1983:103–146; The Religious Zionist Movement 1902) and Hapoel Hamizrahi (Fishman 1979; The Socialist Religious Zionist Movement 1922) that introduced the innovative concept of tangible work as an inherent religious value rather

than only a necessity for the purpose of subsistence. The slogan of the religious Zionist youth movement Bnei Akiva is 'Torah ve'avoda' (Torah and work) (Mashiach 2017:85–100, 2018a).

Rabbi Yisraeli was the head of the Merkaz Harav yeshiva. Over the years, the yeshiva had been headed by three significant figures, Rabbi Kook the father (the Re'aya), Rabbi Kook the son (the Ratzia) and Rabbi Harlap, and all three perceived work as a theological value. Rabbi Kook had a clear dialectic outlook. He claimed that 'really... spirituality does not contradict materiality, nor does materiality contradict spirituality, rather the two are connected' (Kook 1984). He stated adamantly (Kook 1984):

[T]hat the salvation of Israel can only grow successfully if it involves the fundamental composition of two forces, the sacred and the mundane... they complement each other and only when joined do they fully fulfill their role. (p. 257)

Rabbi Kook strived to revive the glory of the authentic-original Torah, which does not separate and espouse duality, rather the unification of spirit and matter and of Torah and work. He defined the study of Torah as 'spiritual Torah' and work as 'practical Torah' and declared:

My greatest ambition is to connect the spiritual Torah with the practical Torah. In the early days, the days of the prophets, the two Torahs were certainly strongly connected... and now the times demand that this appearance be resumed. (Ish-Shalom 1990; Kook 2004:Part I para. 837)

Rabbi Kook the son, the Ratzia, also held dialectic views (Mashiach 2020:1–22). In his opinion, "[m]an is born to toil" – both "the toil of Torah" and the "toil of labor" (Ratzia 1998:386). Moreover, in general, 'whenever concrete labors and works are added in the Land of Israel ... eternal life [*the study of Torah*] and temporary life [*tangible work*] become connected in a strong binding' (Ratzia 2002:259). The Ratzia claimed that not only is there no distinction but rather there is a joining of the two categories in one, 'in a strong binding'. Thus, in his view, 'Israel is resuming its health, the health of its body and the health of its soul, in the army and in the yeshiva, in agriculture and in diligent studies' (Ratzia 1998:413).

Although Rabbi Yisraeli was strongly affected by the three of them, he did not embrace their attitude to work, or at least not the route they took to justify tangible work from a theological viewpoint. This study seeks to explore Rabbi Yisraeli's attitude to work.⁶

Fundamental principles

R. Yisraeli claimed that the religious commandment to imitate God's ways, 'walk in his ways' (Dt 30:16; Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvot*: 8; Rosenberg 1983:72–91), includes tangible work, as God himself worked when creating the world. 'In

6.Two notes: firstly, Rabbi Yisraeli did not grow up in religious Zionist circles. Until immigrating to Israel, he studied under ultra-Orthodox rabbis such as Rabbi Yehezkel Avramsky, Rabbi Yehoshua Zimbalist and Rabbi Avraham Eliahu Maizes. Secondly, although he was one of the Hapoel Hamizrahi rabbis who advocated 'Torah and work', some of them supported this concept based on Kabbalah, while others on Aggadah, and yet others on Halakha. Therefore, it is important to identify the underpinnings of Rabbi Yisraeli's views with regard to work.

order to walk in the ways of God, it is necessary... to engage in inhabiting the world, to plant and to work' (Yisraeli 2009:12). In this way, he who engages in work becomes God's partner in the Creation (Yisraeli 2009):

We have been commanded to labor and to work and to be occupied. But these embody our partnership with God in the acts of creation, which we should engage in inhabiting the world. (p. 266)

As stated above, some see work as a necessity, and consequently, he who needs to support himself should work. In contrast, Rabbi Yisraeli saw work as decreed from the outset, part of the Divine plan for developing the world (Ariel 1957):

The need for people of toil, soldiers and scientists, is decreed from the outset ... as it is clear that all the various professions ... are essential for the world. And obviously, the existence of those who engage in this follows the Divine plan of developing the world. (p. 7)

Rabbi Yisraeli (2009:544) stated: '[i]nterpreting the Torah is Torah as well, and how Torah is realized in life is Torah too'. In these words, he reflected those of Rabbi Kook, by whom he was strongly influenced (Kook 2004):

Once it was time to build the nation in its land, and the practical need of the political and social arrangements became part of the overall plan of action, then these became actual Torah entities (*gufey Torah*). (Part 3, para. 266)

Therefore, the act of organising society and the state was defined by Rabbi Kook as 'Torah entities'. Rabbi Yisraeli repeatedly cited these words of Rabbi Kook, particularly after the establishment of the state. He contended that (Yisraeli 2005):

The foundation of the Land of Israel is that it must contain all types, all professions ... It is possible to build a spiritual life together with concrete reality, and sanctity is latent not only in distancing oneself from life, rather in life itself. I shall remind you of what the late Maran the Rabbi [*Rabbi Kook*] wrote on this matter in one of his books (*Orot Hatehiya* chapter 28): '...sanctity that struggles against nature is not full sanctity'... In the Land of Israel it is necessary to build a varied and diverse general life. (p. 247)

With such a conception of sanctity, one that includes material aspects, it was only fitting for Rabbi Yisraeli to grasp Judaism in its whole form as including two levels: the level of spirit and that of matter. 'The two levels together constitute an image of the complete level of the Israelite people' (Yisraeli 2005:62).

Based on this conception, Rabbi Yisraeli (2005) was in favour of carrying out active deeds to facilitate the arrival of the redeemer, rather than waiting passively for his arrival:

We must direct ourselves ... to strengthen the recognition embodied by religious Zionism ... that does not merely wait for a sign from Heaven, a clear sign, our righteous Messiah [*the redeemer*] who shall arrive expeditiously ... we take the path toward which we are directed by our faith ... to go and establish the Land of Israel in its correct form so that it will be worthy of

the complete redemption, of the arrival of our righteous Messiah ... we must ourselves do what we can ... rather than wait for a miracle from Heaven. (p. 507)

Torah and work

Based on these conceptions, we shall see Rabbi Yisraeli's approach to the combination of Torah and work.

To identify the authentic and full Judaism, Rabbi Yisraeli turned to the nation's forefathers. In his view, Abraham endeavoured to spread the recognition of God in the world. Isaac added work to this. Rabbi Yisraeli (2005) identifies Isaac as the role model:

What is Isaac's strength? In the Bible he is described as a regular person occupied with inhabiting the world. A farmer engaged in sowing, digging wells ... this is what we learn from Isaac ... to continue in the ways of the forefathers, to engage in inhabiting the world, to plow and sow, while also proudly bearing the Divine vision and passion. (pp. 72-73)

He further describes Isaac's way, as one who not only works in the material world but also is connected to spirituality, combining Torah and work (Yisraeli 2009):

[*Isaac was*] the first realizer, the first Jew to stand on the ground ... sowing the land ... not only Judaism as an abstract idea, rather Judaism ... that deals with mule manure, with the challenges of sowing ... agricultural work ... creating a type of Israeli farmer ... of the joint existence of these things side by side ... in manual labor and in the blessing of this labor the Name of God is recited and the Name of God is sanctified ... Just as it is necessary to attain Abraham's deeds, so it is also necessary to strive to attain Isaac's deeds. (pp. 74-75)

The idea of combining Torah and work led Rabbi Israel to devote a great deal of attention to halakhic matters, particularly the religious precepts pertaining to the land, for shaping a multidimensional Jewish identity (Yisraeli1999):

The connection between the Torah and the Land of Israel is most significantly manifested in the commandments dependent on the land ... these commandments are aimed at forming the image of the people as an agricultural nation that lives its life in nature, that plows, sows, and reaps but nonetheless is not affected by corporeality rather influences it ... such that the concrete things with which the people are occupied are transformed into tools for spirituality. (Introduction)

Furthermore, he wrote that the Torah as a whole refers to work as well, and only by means of work is it possible to fully practise the Torah (Yisraeli 1999):

The Torah and the commandments were not given only to those who devote themselves to the study of Torah ... those commandments that involve the practical life of plowing and reaping and so on, can only be practiced by those who engage in practical life. 'To work it and take care of it' (Gn 2-15) - 'To work it' - work in the simple meaning, and 'take care of it' - literally take care ... this is the secret of the true Torah's greatness, that it encompasses all forms of life ... transforming the entire people into a unique nation. (Introduction)

The combination of Torah and work is the full Torah and it is what transforms the Jewish people into a unique nation. However, according to the Torah, human is not enslaved by matter; on the contrary, engaging in work is that which redeems humans and brings them into a state of spiritual uplifting (Yisraeli 1999):

The Torah of the Land of Israel ... does not rule out the contents of the patterns that exist among all nations and languages. It requires a state and an army and physical labor and artistry and working the land. But it redeems them ... it transforms these very contents, instead of enslaving man to corporeality, it facilitates spiritual ascension. (Introduction)

In his view, the inability to understand that integration is the way of the Torah is what caused the crucial disagreement between Joseph and his brothers:

They [*the brothers*] did not understand that the heart of the Israelite kingdom must be the unification of vision with practice, the unification of spirit with matter ... they saw before them two separate domains. (Gn 37–45)

In his opinion, once the Jewish people will come to understand the multidimensional integration, this will be the occasion of 'a double redemption, the redemption of both body and spirit' (Yisraeli 2009:145). Moreover, this, in his view, was Jacob's call to his sons (Yisraeli 2009):

To join forces around the content that is unique to the Jewish people, to call upon the name of God, to display a true model of Torah life, of complete Judaism, Judaism that unites Torah with work, theory with practice. (p. 146)

Criticism

Based on his belief in combining Torah and work, Rabbi Yisraeli strongly criticised those who separate the two, that is, ultra-Orthodox society and the secular public who advocate the value of work.

The ultra-Orthodox people engage only in the spiritual Torah, with the study of Torah being the supreme and only aim. Hence, work lacks religious meaning and is merely a necessity. Rabbi Yisraeli strongly objected this concept. He explained the dispute between Joseph and his brothers as stemming from their conflict over multidimensionality and unidimensionality, with Joseph reflecting the religious Zionist and the brothers the ultra-Orthodox. 'And the result was exile' (Yisraeli 2009:31).

Rabbi Yisraeli's criticism is also evident in his commentary on the sin of the spies (Nm 13) who stated, '[w]e seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them' (Nm 13:verse 13):

That was the sin! The self-deprecation, the lack of appreciation of the Israelite uniqueness, of the incredible mental forces inherent in this nation ... that was what generated the panic that they would not be able to hold their ground when they would come into contact with the problems of a state ... that the normal life of a nation in its land would necessarily lead to relinquishing the yoke of Torah. (Yisraeli 2009:377)

In his view, the negative occurrences that befell our forefathers stemmed from a lack of understanding that the full Torah requires integration of spirit and matter. Moreover, his words hint to a great extent at the political circumstances of his own times.

Rabbi Yisraeli's criticism was also aimed at those who emphasise work at the expense of Torah life: both the materialistic and those who hold an ideology of work, that is, the socialists. Against the former, he claimed that they worship 'the idol of work' (Yisraeli 2009:293). And against those who adhere to the 'religion of work', the socialists (Bartal, Kaniel & Tzahor 1997; Eisenstadt & Azmon 1975; Mishkinsky 2004), Rabbi Yisraeli claimed that their values are at the base of Torah values but these were imported from foreign sources (Yisraeli 2009:71):

There was another movement ... The labor movement, the socialist movement ... and from where did they take this? This too came from a Jewish source... The labor movement could have been a very nice movement, if they had only joined it to faith-related contents ... by means of the Torah. (Yisraeli 2005:239)

Religious socialism, which in time established Hapoel Hamizrahi and Moshav Kfar Haroeh, where Rabbi Yisraeli served as a rabbi, is not identical to general socialism and they differ in several points (Salmon 1990:340–352). It was designated 'Jewish socialism' and it objected, for instance, to the policy of nationalising property by the public and ruled out the war of the classes (Mordechai 1923:6–9); it did not see tangible work as the ultimate value, as did general socialism. Jewish socialism joined the value of work with the Torah commandments and the 'spirit of Judaism'. Its slogan was 'Torah and work'; Jewish socialism does not hold a socialist conception with universal implications, rather one with particularist implications: '[w]e wish to change our life to fit the Jewish spirit' (Gardy 1923:30). The aspiration of its proponents was to revive ancient Judaism, as in the days of the Bible or the Second Temple, since following the 2000 years of exile, and as a result of them, Judaism was invaded by elements that are mere faults. In their opinion, ancient Judaism was compatible with socialist values. And overall, the Torah itself is a socialist and it preceded the ideology of Marx and Engels by millennia (Engel 1923:12). In contrast to the Marxist outlook that espouses a dialectics and synthesis, they declared, '[r]eligion and work as we see them are not two separate things that must be synthesised, rather one' (Gardy 1923:30). Hence, they called for 'a life that is purified of all those deficiencies and faults that appeared within us in the course of our lengthy exile' (Gardy 1923:30).

Rabbi Yisraeli (2005) spoke about the movement, while emphasising the integration of Torah and work, in comparison to the secular labour movement:

Hapoel Hamizrahi ... its slogan is – 'Torah and work' ... a life based on physical labor ... these foundations have indeed been sufficiently recognized in groups and secular kibbutzim. However, while they drew from foreign sources, from the socialist outlook ... Hapoel Hamizrahi came and said ... at their basis these ideas were stolen by others from the Torah of Israel,

stolen and distorted by them. Let's return to the source, see things in their pure form. (p. 222)

He also wrote (Yisraeli 2005):

The secular labor movement derived and is still deriving its energies from foreign doctrines ... part of the global movement of the working class ... The 'Torah and work' movement saw the positive aspects of the general movement, of returning to a life of work and physical labor ... Hence, externally there is a similarity to the general labor movement, but internally they are distant ... the general idea of labor has lost its justification ... since the labor movement in Israel was not based on the prophetic vision. (pp. 497–498)

Rabbi Yisraeli's criticism applied to religious Zionism as well, although it lived a life that combines Torah and work. In his opinion, sometimes, religious Zionism forgets about the integrative aspects and focuses only on work and matter (Yisraeli 2009):

The mistake is that sometimes people make do with the blue *tallit* instead of adding the fringes ... they live a life of work in the Land of Israel, of which the Hatam Sofer (Kahana 2015)⁷ (Innovations on Bavli, Sukah 36a) said that it is the equivalent of putting on phylacteries ... sometimes their thoughts are blinded by the idea that here, we are all blue and why do we need another special value that involves the fringes ... That is a mistake ... and if a life of work in the Land of Israel is holy, this means that those values that were sacred when in exile are transformed here into the holiest of holies ... and if this is not taken to heart the result is ... elimination and desecration of that which is holy. (pp. 402–403)

In his words, he referred to the writings of Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the Hatam Sofer: '[w]orking the land itself – is a religious precept, to inhabit the Land of Israel and to produce its holy fruit', and '[a]nd perhaps even other trades that facilitate the world's habitation, these are all to be considered a religious precept' (Sofer 1974:36a). The Hatam Sofer linked these types of work, and agriculture in particular, to the religious precept of inhabiting the Land of Israel and inhabiting the world, even saying that the fruit of the Land of Israel is 'holy' and we are commanded to produce it – through work. But Rabbi Yisraeli warns that sometimes preoccupation with work causes us to forget Torah. There is a need for a multidimensional Judaism and we must be aware of the sin of unidimensionality.

In summary, Rabbi Yisraeli's criticism was directed both at ultra-Orthodox society, which lives a solely spiritual life, and at Zionist-socialist society that lives a solely material life, as well as at religious Zionism, which, sometimes, in its preoccupation with work, forgets to integrate Torah.

Conclusion and discussion

It is evident from the above discussion that work, in the teachings of Rabbi Yisraeli, has religious meaning and is not performed only for purposes of subsistence.

⁷1762–1839, Hungary, an eminent rabbinic leader of the modern period, also known as the 'father of Jewish Orthodoxy'.

Much of Rabbi Yisraeli's endeavours were devoted to issuing religious rulings. His methods of ruling derived from the Lithuanian tradition (Reness 2012:3–15, 296–298). He was an outspoken and independent adjudicator who did not shy from contradicting his predecessors. Although a student of Rabbi Kook, who combined extra-halakhic sources in his rulings (Gutel 2005), Rabbi Yisraeli did not do so and his halakhic discourse contains only halakhic sources. After presenting a comprehensive study of the sources, his decisions are presented as obvious conclusions, unaffected by any ideology, at least not manifestly.

Rabbi Yisraeli's halakhic writing focused on those religious precepts that are dependent on the land, as in his opinion, there is a religious obligation to maintain a normal national life in the State of Israel in all areas of life. In this way, in his opinion, the Torah will achieve realisation of its purpose and designation, when also people engaged in matter and work will be directed by the spirit and the Torah. This is, according to him, 'the secret of the true Torah's greatness', which was not given only to a handful of unique individuals who devote themselves to studying in the 'tent of Torah', rather the purpose of the multidimensional Torah, which integrates Torah and work, is to transform 'the entire nation into a unique nation, a kingdom of priests and a holy people' (Yisraeli 1999:Introduction). This was the target of his halakhic writings.

As stated before, Rabbi Yisraeli was a disciple of Rabbi Kook and Rabbi Harlap at the Merkaz Harav yeshiva. The latter also ordained him as a rabbi. In time, he became a close friend of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who invited him to teach at the yeshiva. His closeness with these rabbis is evident in the book *Dabar Lador* (Yisraeli 2005/2), which contains eulogies and words he spoke at their annual memorial ceremonies.

Nonetheless, Rabbi Yisraeli did not embrace their ideological course. These rabbis ascribed messianic meaning to the State of Israel, and the core of their theological teachings was replete with Kabbalah and mysticism, which are completely absent from the teachings of Rabbi Yisraeli. When asked about the status of the state and whether it constitutes a 'third redemption', he answered, 'I do not want to use messianic terms, but the state certainly has a very positive value from a halakhic standpoint' (Yisraeli 2005:87). Notably, the state has halakhic value, but he declaredly avoided the inclusion of messianic elements in his response and in his philosophy in general. He saw the prophets as a source of support, and accordingly, he claimed with regard to the state that 'we have before us a realization of Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the dry bones' (Yisraeli 2005:87). In the context of the current study, we shall say that these rabbis ascribed religious meaning to tangible work, as they utilised Kabbalah and mysticism for this purpose (Mashiach 2020:1–22), while Rabbi Yisraeli based his words on the Bible, as well as on rabbinical and halakhic homilies.

Rabbi Yisraeli defined his affiliation with the Mizrahi and Hapoel Hamizrahi as follows: 'I have remained loyal to the original way of Hapoel Hamizrahi and Hamizrahi – that of

the late Rabbis Herzog, Uziel, Amiel, Berlin' (Blidstein 2002:354–360; Burgansky 2005:270–272; Yisraeli 2005:87). Notably, the names of Rabbis Kook, the father and the son, and Rabbi Harlap are absent. Instead, other rabbis are mentioned, having in common not Kabbalah but rather the practical and pragmatic ideology, and their sources were the Bible as well as rabbinical and halakhic homilies (Mashiach 2018b:197–215; Yitzhaki 2014).

Rabbi Yisraeli's attitude to work stemmed from his perception of Judaism as multidimensional, combining Torah and work, spirit and matter. Therefore, he supported the religious Zionist ideology and particularly that of Hapoel Hamizrahi, while emphasising that everything derives from the values of the Torah (Yisraeli 2005):

Hapoel Hamizrahi ... took all the revelations of life ... from the Torah and only from the Torah. Hapoel Hamizrahi declared a life of realization, a life of toil and work, not because that is what Marx wrote in his books, and not due to the global laborer movement, but rather to the eternal source of the Torah of Israel. (p. 492)

Based on these conceptions, Rabbi Yisraeli was strongly critical of both the ultra-Orthodox conception and the socialist-secular-Zionist conception:

Our slogan is 'Torah and work', we managed to connect the two. While the public is divided into two camps, one of which chose 'work' and saw it as the idol it worshipped ... and in contrast the Torah camp that could only shout 'No!' ... only wished to close itself within its private domain ... at that time a young group of people emerged and said to them both: this is not the way, rather it is the conjunctive *vav*, literally a 'hook' that joins the two together ... the constructive and creative camp, the camp of 'Torah and work'. (Yisraeli 2005:173, 494–495, 2009:92)

Rabbi Yisraeli strived to return to the pre-exilic biblical-Jewish identity (Mashiach 2014:38–68). He recognised this identity as the whole Judaism, one which contains values that combine materiality and spirituality (Yisraeli 2005):

If we wish to fully realize the fundamental idea of the Mizrahi movement it appears that this can be expressed in one word – wholeness! Jewish wholeness, a concept that in time, as a result of circumstances when living in exile, was gradually reduced, gradually waned. The goal that Mizrahi set itself when it was established was – 'to renew our days as formerly' ... meaning: to revitalize the glory of Judaism! (p. 217)

At one opportunity, he declared excitedly (Yisraeli 1999):

As sparkling jewels the settlements of 'Torah and work' shine in the agricultural settlements of the Land of Israel ... as a united Torah and mitzvot observant entity and adorned by the glory of those who enjoy their labor ...⁸ Here an attempt has been made to revive the ideal type of Jewish farmer, of a 'people in the fields'. (Introduction)

The People of Israel is also a nation that works in the fields, thus reviving the ideal Jew, one who combines Torah and

8. According to the Bavli, Berachot 8a: '[o]ne who benefits from his hard labor is greater than a God-fearing person'.

work. Rabbi Yisraeli also saw the obligation to diversify careers, as only then will it be possible to realise the anticipated wholeness. 'This movement has at its foundation the principle of wholeness, the wholeness of the people, the wholeness of Judaism, and the wholeness of statehood'. Therefore (Yisraeli 2005:502):

There is obviously no option of seclusion and of adhering only to marginal professions ... there is [a] need for diversity in occupations and professions, there is [a] need for varied professionals, and in our time there is [a] need for people of science and technology, just as there is [a need] for military people and maritime people and so on. (p. 502)

Rabbi Yisraeli was aware of the fact that renewing the Israeli-biblical-Jewish identity, in contrast to the exilic-rabbinical-Jewish identity that engaged in spiritual matters and saw the Torah as the exclusive value, led to a strong criticism against practitioners of religious Zionism for renewing their identity, because the ultra-Orthodox ruled out any innovation whatsoever, as in the phrase: 'the "new" is prohibited by the Torah' (Samet 2005). Criticism was also voiced by the secular Zionist public that saw Torah values as unsuitable for the renewed state. Rabbi Yisraeli answered the critics and said that this is not a new identity rather a renewal of the multidimensional biblical-Jewish identity that is the authentic Jewish identity, which was only replaced by the rabbinical-Jewish identity as a temporary injunction in order to survive the exile.

The slogan we advocate is as follows (Yisraeli 2005):

'The Land of Israel to the People of Israel according to the Torah of Israel' has placed us from the beginning of our existence in a special situation. As viewed by the loyal Judaism [*the ultra-Orthodox*] it appeared to be a desire for something new, and the new, as we know, is prohibited by the Torah. While the circles that derived their inspiration for aspiring to national expression from the ways of an independent land [*the secular Zionists*] saw it as a barrier that prevents development ... In all truth, it was an aspiration for renewal rather than for innovation, not separation from the past but rather reviving values from which we were forcibly separated. (p. 499)

Now, according to Rabbi Yisraeli, when the People of Israel have returned to the Land of Israel after 2000 years of exile and of a unidimensional spiritual Jewish identity, it is necessary to return to the original multidimensional identity that combines spirit and matter, Torah and work. As such, he became one of the conspicuous rabbis to shape religious Zionist theology and rulings on halakhic issues.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Mrs Rachel Kessel for translating the article.

Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Authors' contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Ariel, Y., 1957, 'A Letter from 1957 to Yaakov Stieglitz (Rabbi Yaakov Ariel)', *Emunat Itecha* 23.7, [Hebrew], viewed 01 October 2018, from <https://eretzhemdah.org/content.asp?lang=he&pageid=290>.
- Arzi, A., 1964, 'Work from a rabbinical perspective', *Mahanayim* 91, viewed 01 October 2018 from <http://www.daat.ac.il/he-il/halacha/friend/arazi-avoda.htm>.
- Bartal, I., Kaniel, Y. & Tzohar, Z. (eds.), 1997, *The second aliya: Research, sources, figures*, Yad Ben Zvi, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Bliedstein, G.J., 2002, 'The doctrine of the state in the philosophy of Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli', in M. Bar On & Z. Tzameret (eds.), *Both sides of the bridge*, pp. 354–360, Yad Ben Zvi, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Brown, B., 2017, *The Haredim: A guide to their beliefs and sectors*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved [Hebrew].
- Buber, M., 1945, *In the orchard of Hassidism*, pp. 12–14, Bialik Institute, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Buber, M., 2005, *Light of the hidden*, pp. 13–15, para. 2, Tel Aviv, Shoken, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Burgansky, H., 2005, 'Community and kingdom: The halakhic attitude of Rabbi Y.I Herzog and Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli to the State of Israel', in A. Ravitzky (ed.), *Religion and state in 20th century Jewish thought*, pp. 270–272, Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Don-Yehiya, E., 1983, 'Ideology and policy in religious Zionism Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines' conception and the policy of the Mizrahi under his leadership', *Hatziyonut* 8, 103–146 [Hebrew].
- Eisenstadt, S.N. & Azmon, Y. (eds.), 1975, *Socialism and tradition*, pp. 1–18, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, NJ.
- Elior, R., 1992, 'Transformations in the concept of God in Jewish thought', *Migvan De'ot Ve'hashkafot Be'tarbut Yisrael* 2, 13–35 [Hebrew].
- Engel, J., 1923, 'Socialism with regard to religion', *Hapoel Hamizrahi* 2, 12 [Hebrew].
- Fishman, A., 1979, *Hapoel Hamizrahi 1921–1935*, Tel Aviv University Press, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].
- Friedman, M., 1991, *The Haredi ultra-Orthodox Society – Sources, trends, and processes*, Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Gardy, N., 1923, 'Our essence', *Hapoel Hamizrahi* 2, 30 [Hebrew].
- Gutel, N., 2005, *New and old*, Magnes, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Ish-Shalom, B., 1990, *Rabbi Kook between rationalism and mysticism*, p. 316, Am Oved, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].
- Kahana, M., 2015, *From the Noda Be-Yehudah to the Chatam Sofer: Halakhic writing in a changing world*, The Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem.
- Kauffman, T., 2009, *In all your ways know him*, Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan [Hebrew].
- Kook, A.Y., 1984, *Essays of the Re'aya*, pp. 234–236, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Kook, A.Y., 2004, *Eight notebooks*, Part I para. 837, Boaz Publisher, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Mashiach, A., 2014, 'From past to present – An analysis of the various sectors in modern Israel based on Jewish identities from ancient times', *Social issues in Israel* 17, 38–68. [Hebrew]
- Mashiach, A., 2017, 'Work in the teaching of Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24(1), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1628/094457017X14883764175522>
- Mashiach, A., 2018a, 'Work and trade in the teachings of Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Chai Uziel', *Pe'amim* 155–154, 197–215 [Hebrew].
- Mashiach, A., 2018b, 'Work as a value in the writings of Rabbi Y. Y. Reines', *Religions* 9, 64, viewed 01 September 2018, from <http://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/2/64/pdf>.
- Mashiach, A., 2020, 'Work in the teachings of R. Zvi Yehudah Kook', *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 2019, 14, 1–20.
- Menahem, A., 1985, *Work in Jewish sources*, Reuven Mas, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Mishkinsky, M., 2004, *Studies in Jewish socialism – A collection of articles*, Ben Gurion Institute, Beer Sheva [Hebrew].
- Mordechai, Z., 1923, 'Our way', *Hapoel Hamizrahi* 2, 6–9. [Hebrew]
- Neuwirth, O., 2015, *Why work?*, pp. 4–28 [Hebrew], viewed 15 September 2018, from <https://toravoda.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%94-%D7%9C%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%95%D7%93%D7%90%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%A0%D7%98.pdf>.
- Ratzia, 1998 – Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Talks of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda: Exodus*, p. 386, Khava, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Ratzia, 2002 – Zvi Yehuda Kook, *Lenetivot Israel*, Part I, p. 259, Khava, Beit El [Hebrew].
- Rones, Y.A., 2012, 'Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli's Halakhic teachings', PhD dissertation, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan [Hebrew].
- Rosenberg, S., 1983, 'And walk in his ways', in M. Halamish & A. Kasher (eds.), *Israeli philosophy*, pp. 72–91, Papirus, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].
- Salmon, Y., 1990, *Religion and Zionism*, pp. 340–352, Zalman Shazar Institute, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Samet, M., 2005, *The new is prohibited by the Torah*, Dinur Center, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Sharir, A.Y. (ed.), 1999, *A genius in Torah and virtues*, Erez, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Sofer, H., 1974, *Innovations on tractate Sukkah*, 36a, Makhon Hatam Sofer, Jerusalem.
- Yisraeli, S., 1999, *Eretz Hemda*, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, Introduction [Hebrew].
- Yisraeli, S., 2005, *The rabbinate and the state*, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem.
- Yisraeli, S., 2005/2, *Dabar Iador*, Erez, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Yisraeli, S., 2009, *Siach Shaul*, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem [Hebrew].
- Yitzhaki, A., 2014, 'Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan: The leader of religious Zionism in the Land of Israel, 1926–1949', PhD thesis, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, and particularly pp. 53–55, 68–75, 333–337 [Hebrew].