

Zionism as a Transformed Messianic Movement and its Influence on Albanian Nationalism

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Abstract

This essay explores the reciprocal influence between Jewish messianism and the Albanian nationalist movement. It posits that Zionism, despite its commonly perceived secular origins and political aspirations, operates fundamentally as a modern messianic movement. Influenced by Albanian-speaking dervishes, Zionism experienced a significant reorientation of traditional Jewish messianic and mystical sanctity, shifting its primary focus from an individual messianic figure or a purely spiritual realm of redemption to the physical Land of Israel itself. Within this transformed framework, national revival, settlement, and state-building become direct, tangible pathways to collective redemption.

The apparent secularism of early Zionism can be understood as a strategic adaptation of messianic aspirations to modernity. Though outwardly secular, Zionism's underlying motivations remained deeply religious. By adopting the language of nationalism and self-determination, Zionism appealed to a broader audience, including secular Jews and international powers, in an era increasingly defined by nation-states. This adaptation enabled Zionism to harness the deep religious longing for the Land of Israel while navigating modern political discourse. It transcended the limitations of traditional messianic figures, many of whom failed, and offered a concrete, collective, and achievable path to redemption in the physical world, aligning with the spirit of modern political movements. Conversely, this transformation influenced the Albanian nationalist movement through the Bektashi order.

1. Introduction: The Messianic Undercurrent of Zionism

Although frequently portrayed as a secular nationalist response to 19th-century European anti-semitism, Zionism draws deeply from Jewish messianic and mystical traditions. A pivotal yet frequently overlooked episode in this tradition is the rise of the **Sabbatean movement** under

Shabbatai Zevi in the 17th century. Zevi's self-declaration as the Messiah in 1665 galvanized Jewish communities across Europe and the Ottoman Empire. When he converted to Islam under Ottoman pressure in 1666, many followers reinterpreted this apostasy as a *mystical descent into impurity*, a necessary stage in the redemption process according to **Lurianic Kabbalah**.

Zevi was exiled to **Ulcinj (Dulcigno)**—a coastal town in present-day Montenegro, historically part of the **Albanian-speaking Ottoman Balkans**. This region's complex religious landscape—including **Sufi mysticism**, **Catholic saint veneration**, and **residual paganism**—provided fertile ground for the reinterpretation and absorption of Sabbatean ideas. There is compelling, though speculative, evidence that **Albanian Bektashi dervishes** and **self-taught imams** sought to synthesize Sabbatean theology with **Bektashi Sufism**, **Christian hagiography**, and local traditions.

The **Bektashi Order**, in particular, shared core features with Sabbateanism: charismatic leadership, *ritual antinomianism*, and the **veneration of holy men and their tombs**. Like Catholic and Orthodox traditions of saint worship, Bektashi shrines—sites of *baraka* (spiritual blessing)—offered believers access to divine presence through pilgrimage and devotion. Similar reverence surrounded the memory and possible gravesite of Shabbatai Zevi in Ulcinj, where his legend persisted as that of a mysterious holy man.

This syncretic moment in the Balkans highlights the *interreligious permeability of mystical ideas* and underscores how messianic energies—far from extinguished by Zevi's fall—were redirected, reimagined, and embedded in broader mystical cultures. Rather than vanishing, the messianic impulse shifted form, merging with surrounding traditions and laying a conceptual foundation for future reconfigurations of redemption.

It is within this *continuum of mystical reinterpretation* that **modern Zionism** emerges—not as a rupture from Jewish messianism, but as its *transformation*. Like Sabbateanism before it, Zionism redefined the object of redemption: no longer an individual Messiah or a spiritual realm, but the **Land of Israel** itself. Shabbatai Zevi's paradoxical messiahship and exile foreshadowed a broader theological shift—culminating in the Zionist belief that national revival and territorial sovereignty were not merely political goals but **manifestations of collective redemption**.

2. Balkan Parallels: The Bektashi Order and Albanian National Awakening

The resonance of Jewish mystical messianism in the Balkans finds a striking parallel in the development of **Albanian nationalism**, particularly through the **Bektashi Order**, which played a foundational role in shaping national consciousness in late Ottoman Albania. Just as Zionism redirected Jewish religious longing into a nationalist movement, the **Albanian Rilindja (National Awakening)** was similarly infused with a mystical and religious undercurrent, often

expressed through Bektashi spiritual and cultural networks.¹⁵

Prominent Albanian nationalist leaders—**Sami Frashëri**, **Abdyl Frashëri**, and **Ismail Qemali**—emerged from intellectual circles in **Istanbul**, **Saloniki**, and **France**, where Jewish and Bektashi thinkers interacted in shared student associations, reformist journals, and anti-Ottoman debates. The **Bektashi tekke** functioned not just as a spiritual center but also as a hub for national consciousness, printing presses, and revolutionary planning. The order’s **syncretic tolerance**, its **emphasis on inner truth over rigid law**, and its **veneration of martyrs and saints** provided a symbolic grammar well-suited to national myth-making.

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that **early Zionist ideas**—especially the model of a diasporic people reclaiming its historic land—influenced Albanian intellectuals through shared exposure in cosmopolitan cities. The student and journalistic networks of **Saloniki**, where **Jewish**, **Greek**, **Bulgarian**, and **Albanian** students debated ideas of autonomy, identity, and collective memory, were especially vibrant.¹⁶ **Sami Frashëri’s** writings in particular echo elements of **Zionist restorationism**, with an emphasis on language revival, cultural unity, and the moral justification for national statehood.

The Bektashi Order’s **reverence for sacred space**, especially **tombs of holy men** and **mountain sanctuaries**, paralleled the **Zionist sacralization of the Land of Israel**. In both traditions, *territory becomes sanctified*, not merely as ancestral land, but as a *spiritual vessel* that channels redemption. The messianic grammar—whether centered on the Jewish Messiah or on Skanderbeg-like national saints—provided both traditions with the imaginative tools to envision redemption in political terms.

This unexpected affinity between **Jewish messianic Zionism** and **Albanian mystical nationalism** reveals a broader *Balkan religious-political syncretism*, in which mystical movements, sacred geographies, and nationalist aspirations converged. Far from being isolated phenomena, both Zionism and Albanian nationalism illustrate how **religious imagination** can be reconfigured to serve the **modern nation-state project**.

3. Jewish Messianism

Jewish messianism, a deeply ingrained concept within Jewish thought, traces its origins to the Hebrew Bible. Initially, the term *mashiah* (Messiah) referred to individuals anointed for significant offices such as king, priest, or prophet, with the idea of kingship becoming its most prominent association. During periods of exile and subjugation, the aspiration for a powerful messianic king to redeem Israel gained centrality, eventually encompassing the return of all Jews, including the “lost” northern Israelite tribes. This early vision often carried a sense of military and political immediacy, reflecting a longing for restored sovereignty.

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A profound transformation in this messianic idea occurred following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the subsequent loss of Jewish sovereignty in Judea. The messianic figure gradually evolved, shedding its immediate military and political focus to become an increasingly spiritual and miraculous concept.¹ The emergence of Kabbalah in the 13th century proved pivotal in this evolution, providing an intricate ideological framework for messianic hopes. Kabbalah integrated powerful symbols and terms, thereby inextricably binding messianism and mysticism for centuries.¹ This mystical lens offered a spiritualized redemption scenario, envisioning God's actions in the "end of days" primarily within the realm of the spirit. This perspective paradoxically empowered Jews, who were increasingly disempowered in the physical world, by positioning them as "masters of the future" through their esoteric knowledge of the divine realm.¹

In stark contrast, Zionism emerged in late 19th-century Europe as a seemingly modern, secular nationalist movement.² It arose as a direct response to escalating antisemitism and the broader currents of ethnic nationalism prevalent across Europe.² The movement advocated for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a claim deeply rooted in the historical connection of the Jewish people to their ancestral land. Theodor Herzl, widely regarded as the founder of modern political Zionism, articulated this vision in his 1896 pamphlet *Der Judenstaat*. His efforts led to the First Zionist Congress in 1897 and the formalization of the movement's objective: "to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law". Early Zionist endeavors concentrated on promoting Jewish immigration to Palestine, culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.⁴

4. The Evolution of Jewish Messianism and its Mystical Embrace

The historical trajectory of Jewish messianism reveals a dynamic evolution, particularly in its relationship with mystical thought. The earliest concept of the Jewish Messiah, as found in the Hebrew Bible, referred to anointed individuals holding offices such as king, priest, or prophet, with kingship becoming its primary association.¹ During periods of exile and subjugation, the fervent prayer for God to send a powerful messianic king to redeem the Israelites became central. This idea evolved to incorporate the return of all Jews, including the ten northern Israelite tribes who were "lost" in the Babylonian exile.¹ This early phase of messianism was often characterized by a military and political immediacy, reflecting a desire for tangible, earthly

liberation.

The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE marked a critical inflection point. This catastrophic loss of Jewish sovereignty led to the gradual spiritualization of the messianic idea, shifting its focus from immediate military and political concerns towards a more spiritual and miraculous figure.¹ While militant strains of messianism persisted in various local movements throughout the Middle Ages, such as the 8th-century Persian messiahs or David al-Ro'i in the 12th century, a new breed of spiritualist messianic thought also emerged, exemplified by some authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls and figures like John the Baptist.¹

A pivotal development occurred in the 13th century with the appearance of the ecstatic Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, who created a new paradigm of prophetic messianism that profoundly influenced subsequent Jewish messianic thought.¹ Concurrently, the Zohar, the foundational work of Spanish Kabbalah, emerged, presenting an extensive and highly mystical conception of the Messiah.¹ These two forces decisively shifted the focus of Jewish messianism away from concrete, military expectations towards a spiritual and mystical understanding.¹ This spiritual and mystical interpretation, articulated through Kabbalah's unique terminology and symbolism, became characteristic of almost all Jewish messianic movements from Abulafia's era until the 20th century.¹ Kabbalah provided a robust ideological framework for messianic hopes, presenting a spiritualized redemption scenario where God's actions in the "end of days" would occur in the realm of the spirit rather than the physical world. This perspective empowered Jews, who were increasingly disempowered in the physical world, by positioning them as "masters of the future" due to their understanding of the divine realm through Kabbalah.¹

The expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and their subsequent forced conversion in Portugal in 1497 precipitated a major crisis in the Jewish world, providing significant impetus to messianic expectations.¹ This trauma profoundly influenced the development of Lurianic Kabbalah in Safed in the 16th century, primarily through the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria. Lurianic Kabbalah introduced powerful, intricate images concerning God, creation, the human soul, and redemption, centering on the concept of

tikkun olam (cosmic repair or repairing the world). This theology posited that through the meticulous performance of commandments and mystical meditations, Jews could actively participate in the restoration process, thereby hastening the final redemption.⁶ Gershom Scholem, a leading scholar of Kabbalah, taught that Luria's deep messianism was sublimated within a theology of expulsion and redemption, directly linked to the trauma of the Spanish expulsion.¹ The pervasive atmosphere of mystical expectation, often marked by specific predictions of the Messiah's arrival (e.g., Luria's prediction for 1575 1), underscores the intense and often unfulfilled nature of these messianic impulses, which would later seek new avenues for expression.

A recurring pattern in Jewish history demonstrates how profound national traumas and periods of physical disempowerment, such as the destruction of the Second Temple or the Spanish

expulsion, did not extinguish messianic hope. Instead, these adversities acted as powerful catalysts for the intensification, spiritualization, and re-conceptualization of messianism through mystical frameworks.¹ When external, physical redemption seemed unattainable, the focus shifted to internal, spiritual mastery and cosmic repair, providing a sense of agency and meaning in seemingly hopeless situations. This historical dynamic reveals how Jewish messianism is not static but a dynamic, adaptive response to historical adversity, constantly seeking new forms of expression and agency, which ultimately paved the way for a movement like Zionism to absorb and re-direct its energies.

Furthermore, a significant conceptual evolution within Jewish messianism can be observed: from a largely passive waiting for divine intervention to an active, even proactive, role for the Jewish individual and collective in hastening redemption through mystical and religious practice (tikkun).⁶ Early messianism involved praying for a divinely sent king, implying a more passive expectation. Kabbalah's influence offered a "spiritualized, mystical redemption scenario" where Jews "learned the workings of the divine realm", suggesting a deeper engagement but still primarily spiritual. Lurianic Kabbalah, however, proclaimed an "intimate bond between the religious activity of the Jew as he performs the commandments... and the Messianic message," asserting that "almost the whole process of restoration had been completed" and redemption was "just around the corner".⁶ This shift towards human action directly influencing the messianic timeline laid the theological groundwork for the idea that human actions, even those seemingly mundane or secular, could contribute to or even force the unfolding of the messianic process. This emphasis on human agency and active participation in redemption, initially expressed in mystical terms, provides a critical conceptual bridge for Zionism to integrate physical, national actions (like settling the land and building a state) into the messianic narrative, elevating them to acts of profound spiritual significance.

5. Zionism: A Secular Movement with a Religious "Id"

Political Zionism emerged in the late 19th century in Central and Eastern Europe as a self-proclaimed secular nationalist movement.² It arose in reaction to new waves of antisemitism and in response to the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), advocating for Jewish self-determination and the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.² Theodor Herzl's vision, formalized at the 1897 First Zionist Congress, aimed to create a "home in Palestine secured by public law".⁵ The movement gained momentum by promoting Jewish immigration to Palestine, ultimately leading to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Fundamental to Zionism is the belief that Jews constitute a single nation with a moral and historic right to self-determination in Palestine.² This nationalistic claim represented a departure from the traditional Judaic sense of nationhood, which was rooted in religious beliefs of unique chosenness and divine providence. This redefinition was often contested by segments of the

Jewish community, such as the American Reform movement, which viewed Jews solely as a religious community.² The Zionist claim to Palestine was predicated on a perceived historical right to the land.² A central goal was the establishment of a Jewish demographic majority in Palestine, which implicitly required "annulling the majority status of the Arabs".² Early Zionism openly described itself as a project of colonization, a term later replaced by euphemisms.²

Moshé Machover argues that while early political Zionism presented itself as "thoroughly secular," its "ego was secular, its id has always been religious".³ This suggests that despite the modern, secular language employed, the deep underlying motivations and justifications for Zionism were rooted in religious myths. The core tenets of Zionism—the idea of a single Jewish national collectivity and the claim of ownership over

Eretz Yisrael—are explicitly described as "rooted in religious myths".² The concept of a "world-wide Jewish people" is fundamentally religion-based, as exemplified by Sa'adia Ga'on's statement: "Our people is a people only because of the Torah (religious law)".³ This inherent religious foundation was a point of contention within Jewish communities, with some Western European Jews viewing the claim of Jewish nationhood as dangerously similar to antisemitic rhetoric.³

The underlying "religious id" of Zionism, despite its "secular ego," suggests that the movement's profound legitimacy and driving force derived from its deep connection to ancient religious narratives and beliefs.² This means Zionism was not merely a new political idea but a re-articulation and re-channeling of long-standing religious aspirations into a contemporary, actionable framework. This inherent connection to religious myths, even when unacknowledged or downplayed by secularists, provided the fertile ground for the transfer of sanctity to the land. The Land of Israel was already imbued with profound religious significance,⁹ making it a natural recipient for transferred messianic sanctity within this newly articulated national project.

When the sanctity and mysticism are transferred to the land, and its acquisition becomes a messianic imperative, the land's status transcends mere political negotiation. It becomes a divine mandate. This elevation inevitably creates an existential conflict when the land is already inhabited by another people, such as the Palestinian Arabs.¹¹ The Zionist aim to create a Jewish state with a Jewish majority necessitated "annulling the majority status of the Arabs".² The "iron wall" concept, articulated by Jabotinsky, and the historical trajectory of colonization can be seen as a direct, albeit tragic, consequence of prioritizing this messianically-infused claim to the land over the rights or presence of the indigenous population.² If the land is sacred and its acquisition and settlement constitute a messianic act, then any perceived obstacle to this act can be viewed as an impediment to divine will, potentially justifying forceful and uncompromising measures. This reveals a critical, often contentious, implication: the re-sacralization of the land within a messianic framework can contribute to an uncompromising stance on territorial con-

trol and potentially lead to sustained conflict, as evidenced by the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷

6. The Land of Israel: The New Vessel of Messianic Sanctity

The Land of Israel (ha-arets) has consistently occupied a central and revered position in Jewish thought, extending beyond mere geography to become an intrinsic element of the Jewish religious ethos, reflected in numerous commandments, customs, ideas, and prayers.⁹ Its sanctity, rooted in biblical thought, intensified significantly after the Bar Kokhba rebellion in the 2nd century CE, particularly as the land "slipped out of the nation's hands".⁹ Rabbinic literature, especially post-Bar Kokhba, extensively praised the land, emphasizing the importance of dwelling within it and prohibiting emigration.⁹ Jerusalem, too, held immense sanctity as the "city of God," with prayers for its rebuilding and the future Temple.⁹

The mechanism by which this inherent sanctity became the new vessel for messianic aspirations within Zionism is largely attributable to the theological synthesis provided by figures like Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), who served as the Chief Rabbi of Palestine.³ Kook is central to understanding how secular Zionism was integrated into a divine redemptive process. He posited an intrinsic connection between Zionism, religion, and Jewish culture, asserting that "The divine, the moral, the religious, and the national ideals...are in the Jewish perception in a state of integration" and that "everything Jewish is inherently holy".¹³ Kook "expanded" the scope of traditional Judaism to sanctify modern national elements such as the land, language, settlement, and sovereignty, thereby rooting secular Zionism within religious tradition as a legitimate and necessary stage of redemption.¹³ He viewed the seemingly secular efforts of Zionist pioneers as the "footsteps" or "birthpangs" of the Messiah, a theologically necessary corrective to the long exilic existence, describing it as "destruction for the sake of construction".

Kook assigned secular Zionists an instrumental role in his ultimate vision of spiritual rebirth and messianic redemption. He argued that the initial redemptive process requires external and secular elements—language, land, history, and even culture—before leading to a deeper spiritual reawakening among secular nationalists.¹³ His rhetoric effectively presented nationalism as a divine means to re-animate traditional religion and trigger an ultimate utopia, seeing Jewish nationalism as a prerequisite for the revival of Jewish religion and an indispensable step towards "a condition of moral perfection".

Furthermore, the Lurianic concept of *tikkun olam* (cosmic repair), originally a mystical process of cosmic restoration and spiritual rectification, was profoundly adapted and reinterpreted within the nationalist context of Zionism. The establishment of Israel was thus seen "not merely as a territorial project but as a rectification of Jewish exile".⁷ This meant that the physical acts of settling the land, building infrastructure, and establishing a state became direct, tangible manifestations of the mystical process of *tikkun*, actively contributing to and hastening collective

redemption.

This re-imagining of the land's role signifies a profound shift: the Land of Israel is no longer merely a passive stage upon which redemption will unfold, but becomes an active agent or a necessary medium through which the messianic process is enacted and accelerated. The very act of building, settling, and asserting sovereignty over the land becomes the tikkun itself. The land is imbued with an active, transformative power, making its physical control and development paramount to achieving redemption. This elevates the collective's physical engagement with the sacred territory to a central, divinely mandated act, moving beyond the individual's spiritual state. This re-imagining of the land's role imbues political and territorial actions with deep religious imperative, providing a powerful justification for expansionist policies and an uncompromising stance on land issues, as exemplified by movements like Gush Emunim.

Kook's "dialectical approach" represents a sophisticated theological innovation that goes beyond mere tolerance of secularism. It actively integrates secular national endeavors into a divinely ordained, albeit imperfect, stage of the messianic process. This means that seemingly non-religious acts of nation-building—like draining swamps, building kibbutzim, or developing a national language—are imbued with sacred meaning and contribute directly to the ultimate spiritual goal. This provides religious legitimacy and purpose to secular endeavors, effectively sanctifying the mundane and incorporating them into a larger redemptive narrative. This intellectual framework allowed religious Zionism to embrace and even champion secular political action, blurring the traditional lines between religious and national identity. It fostered a powerful sense of collective destiny where all actions, whether overtly religious or seemingly secular, contribute to the unfolding messianic future, thereby unifying diverse segments of the Jewish population under a shared, albeit transformed, messianic vision.

7. Manifestations of Messianic Zionism in Practice

The 1967 Six-Day War, with Israel's swift victory and the capture of significant biblical territories, profoundly impacted the messianic undercurrents of Zionism, causing them to become "supercharged". This event was widely interpreted by many religious Zionists as a clear sign of divine intervention and an acceleration of the redemptive process. Following the war, a younger generation of National Religious Party (NRP) members and supporters, deeply influenced by Rabbi Kook's doctrine (particularly as transmitted by his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook), gained prominence.³ These religious zealots immediately began establishing Jewish outposts and settlements in the newly occupied Palestinian territories, driven by an explicitly religious-messianic ideology.³ This provided a compelling, albeit "irrational rationale," for continued Zionist colonization and territorial expansion. This period marked a progression from "pragmatic" to "halakhic" to "redemptive Zionism," with radical religious messianism emerging as a dominant form of religious nationalism, explicitly aiming for the "establishment of a messianic

kingdom in Israel".

A critical dynamic unfolded where significant geopolitical successes, particularly territorial gains perceived as divinely ordained, acted as powerful accelerators for messianic beliefs. They transformed latent or "undercurrent" messianic impulses into overt, politically active forces. The acquisition of historically significant land was interpreted as a direct sign of divine favor and an unfolding of the redemptive process, thereby further solidifying the land as the central focus of messianic sanctity. This demonstrates a reciprocal relationship where political action is driven by messianism, and political success, in turn, validates and intensifies that messianism. This dynamic explains the radicalization of certain segments of religious Zionism post-1967 and their uncompromising stance on territorial issues, as these are viewed not as mere political matters but as divinely mandated steps towards ultimate redemption, making negotiation or compromise difficult.

The Third Temple movement stands as a prominent contemporary manifestation of this land-centric messianic aspiration. Its adherents are actively working towards the construction of a third Jewish temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, a site sacred to both Jews and Muslims.³ Practical preparations include architectural designs, vestments for priests, and the breeding of unblemished red heifers for purification rituals, all seen as prerequisites for the Temple's rebuilding. This movement views the creation of the State of Israel as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecies and seeks to transform Israel into a Jewish theocracy.¹² Its transnational growth, including communities of "Children of Noah" (former Christians who now follow Jewish law), highlights the global reach and diverse alliances of this messianic vision.¹² Some religious Zionist fanatics take the biblical Book of Joshua literally, regarding it as a "positive precedent and virtually a template for their actions," including plans for Palestinians that involve surrender or deportation.³ This literal interpretation underscores the concrete, and often severe, political implications of this land-focused messianism.

When sanctity is transferred to the land and its acquisition or control becomes a messianic act, ancient sacred texts and rituals are no longer merely historical narratives, theological metaphors, or spiritual practices. Instead, they become literal blueprints and operational guides for contemporary political action and territorial claims. This is an instrumentalization of the sacred for political ends, imbuing modern geopolitical strategies with an absolute, non-negotiable character derived from divine command. This direct application of ancient narratives and rituals to modern conflict highlights the extreme and often confrontational implications of a land-centric messianism. This literal interpretation and application of biblical texts and religious practices, fueled by messianic fervor, can lead to policies that are perceived as uncompromising and potentially violent, as they are understood as fulfilling divine will rather than mere political objectives or human compromises.

Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), a preeminent scholar of Jewish mysticism and a committed

Zionist, famously warned of Judaism's "fatal attraction to messianism," asserting that "Zionism is no exception".⁸ He cautioned against a "new Sabbatianism," drawing parallels between far-right Zionists and the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi, predicting that such messianic fervor "must inevitably fail". Scholem's observations underscore the potential dangers when messianism transitions from a spiritual concept to a "very tangible political practice and theology", shaping Israeli identity and contributing to ongoing conflict.

8. Conclusion: A Reimagined Redemption

Zionism, though emerging from the secular currents of 19th-century nationalism, represents a profound re-articulation of centuries of Jewish messianic and mystical thought. It reconfigures traditional messianic aspirations by fundamentally transferring the locus of sanctity and mystical engagement. Instead of primarily focusing on an individual Messiah figure or a purely spiritual realm of redemption, Zionism centers this transformative power on the physical Land of Israel. The historical trajectory of Jewish messianism, from its initial military-political focus to its deepening spiritualization and mystical embrace through Kabbalah (particularly Lurianic Kabbalah's emphasis on *tikkun* and active human participation in redemption), laid the essential groundwork for this transformation.

Pivotal figures like Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook provided the critical theological framework, enabling the integration of seemingly secular nation-building efforts into a divine, unfolding redemptive process. Through his philosophy, the physical acts of settling the land, reviving the Hebrew language, and establishing national sovereignty became imbued with sacred meaning, interpreted as the very "footsteps of the Messiah".¹³ The Lurianic concept of *tikkun*, originally a mystical cosmic repair, was reinterpreted and applied to the physical establishment of Israel, seen as the rectification of Jewish exile and a direct act of bringing about redemption.

This reorientation has profound implications for modern Jewish identity and political action. It elevates the physical land and national sovereignty to a central, almost sacred, position, imbuing practical political endeavors with deep spiritual meaning. This fosters a powerful sense of collective destiny and divine purpose among adherents, unifying diverse segments of the Jewish population under a shared, albeit transformed, messianic vision. However, as Gershom Scholem critically observed, Judaism's "fatal attraction to messianism" means that Zionism is "no exception".⁸ This transfer of sanctity can, and has, led to radicalism and an uncompromising stance on territorial issues. When the physical acquisition and control of the land are viewed as divine imperatives, it contributes to ongoing conflicts, particularly when these aspirations clash with the presence and rights of other populations in the same territory.

The complex evolution of Jewish messianism—from ancient biblical prophecies to its mystical embrace in Kabbalah, and finally its re-imagining within the framework of Zionism—underscores the enduring human and collective need for redemption, meaning, and agency in the face of his-

torical adversity and exile. Zionism represents a powerful, multifaceted, and often contested modern chapter in this continuous narrative, where the ancient longing for a redeemed future finds its expression not only in spiritual hope but also in the concrete, lived reality of a national homeland.

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