

Not far into the body of his letter, Kalischer proclaims the foundational principle of his unorthodox outlook:

The redemption of Israel and the righteous messiah! [*sic*] whom we constantly await—do not imagine that God, blessed be his name, will suddenly descend from on high and say to his people ‘Go forth’, or that he will send his messiah without warning from heaven to blow the great shofar and gather the scattered of Israel and surround [Jerusalem] with a wall of fire, as he promised through his servants the prophets. Not so . . . [indecipherable] certainly all the promises of the prophets will be fulfilled in the end of days as the redemption is completed, but we will not go swiftly or hastily in one day. The redemption of Israel will come gradually, salvation will slowly flower, until finally Israel will wax strong and flourish, and all signs and promises of the holy prophets will come to pass. All this I will clarify for you, with God’s help, through proof texts from the prophets . . . and reason.<sup>7</sup>

Here Kalischer describes a redemption that unfolds in a gradual process, not like the sudden event imagined by most pious Jews. He imagines the redemption’s beginning as a quiet affair, similar to the organic process of a flower blossoming. Only in its later stage would miracles and wonders appear. His conception does not require a suspension of reason or any change in the natural order of things. These traits, he implies, strengthen the veracity of his interpretation.

Kalischer continues with a messianic scenario that is orderly, with each event unfolding in turn. The sequence is as follows: God prompts gentile kings to permit Jews to move to Palestine, the Jewish population of Palestine and Jerusalem swells, the Jews rebuild the altar in Jerusalem and resume sacrificial worship, and then God is roused to respond with more manifest signs of redemption: wars, the appearance of the messiah, eternal happiness. According to Kalischer’s scenario, the redemptive process is actually a two-stage phenomenon:

Redemption will begin through natural causes, through human actions, and through the will of the kings to bring together a few of the scattered of Israel to the Holy Land . . . like Cyrus did, and so too in the future redemption will occur when God stirs the gentile kings to send out the Jews. . . . When a larger number of the remnants of Israel accumulate in the Holy Land and Jerusalem, and they repair the destroyed altar and offer a sacrifice as a savoury smell to God, then the Lord will be pleased to send the light of his countenance to descend upon his people. . . . For certainly when we appeal to God

<sup>7</sup> *Zionist Writings*, 3. Note the oratorical mode of writing, especially in the staccato phrases at the opening. This paragraph was modified very slightly when it was included in *Derishat Tsiyon* (*Zionist Writings*, 38). The *Derishat Tsiyon* version is perhaps one of the best-known passages from Kalischer’s writings, as it is included in the selection of his writings in Arthur Hertzberg’s *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (New York, 1960), 111. My translation differs slightly from Hertzberg’s.

through a sacrifice, we become cleansed of all our sins, and God will once again be merciful to us and bring the complete redemption and eternal happiness. At that time the wars over the Land of Israel will occur, the wars of Gog and Magog mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel, and then God’s messiah and all his holy minions and God will rejoice in his creation and alone rule over all humanity.<sup>8</sup>

The first stage of redemption—the events leading up to and including the sacrificial offering—is fully in accordance with natural law and comports with the way of the world. It echoes the return to Zion that occurred at the end of the biblical era. Just as God had orchestrated the end of the first exile by inspiring the Persian King Cyrus to assist the Jews, he would today wish world rulers to encourage the flow of Jews to Palestine. Their decrees would enable a small number of Jews actually to settle the land. The returning Jews would farm the land, Kalischer implies later in the letter when he notes that ‘the land will be joyous in its cities and the desert will turn into a fruitful field’.<sup>9</sup> In the letter itself, however, Kalischer pays scant attention to the agricultural revitalization of the land. Instead, he focuses on the importance of following the ancient Judeans’ example of rebuilding Jerusalem and re-establishing sacrificial worship. He emphasizes that the offering of sacrifices is the goal and the climax of this first, natural phase of redemption. It would trigger the second, supernatural phase, and only then would all the prophesied miracles and wonders occur and the messiah arrive.<sup>10</sup>

According to Kalischer’s schema, the entire process is a chain reaction, a dynamic of human initiative and divine response, in which sacrificial offerings play a crucial role. The sacrifices are central because they expiate the Jews’ sins and allow them to stand in purity before God, and God would then listen to their prayers for redemption. His understanding of the sacrifices bears a considerable resemblance to that which appears in Lorbeerbaum’s letters in *Eleh divrei haberit*. For Kalischer as for Lorbeerbaum, sacrificial worship is a powerful, theurgical ritual that profoundly influences God and has an extraordinary effect on the human condition. Verbal prayer is a poor substitute. In contrast to his elders, however, Kalischer foresees the actual offering of sacrifices in his own time. Rather than sit helplessly and hope for God to reintroduce the sacrificial system, Kalischer believes that he and others should reinstate the ancient cult themselves—such, he believed, was God’s will. Also in marked contrast to his teachers, his discussion of the sacrifices in the

<sup>8</sup> *Zionist Writings*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 3–4. Historians intent on showing that Kalischer was a proto-Zionist, like Israel Klausner, have overlooked the relative unimportance of agriculture in his early writings. In the letter to Rothschild, there are only two references to the blossoming of the land (Ezek. 38: 12, p. 4, and Isa. 27: 6, p. 5). Kalischer also interpreted Isa. 27 (‘in days to come, Jacob shall strike root / Israel shall sprout and blossom’) as a metaphor of a naturalistic redemption.

thought he was seeing miracles of a non-supernatural kind. He also knew that without the appropriate human response, the potential of these everyday miracles to hasten redemption might fade. Hence it was crucial to contact Rothschild, teach him the real reason for his prominence, and inspire him to play his proper messianic role.

### KALISCHER'S PROPOSAL

Only at the end of the letter does Kalischer make a specific request of Rothschild. He opened his letter with the poetic praise and the messianic scenario described above. Because the contemporary revival of sacrificial worship was deemed to play a critical role in the redemptive process, he then engaged in a lengthy discussion of how the sacrificial cult could be restored in accordance with Jewish law (this is discussed in the next chapter). Following that, after a little flattery, he presented his plan:

perhaps God has great success in store for you. And at this time in particular, when the Land of Israel is not ruled by a powerful ruler as it was in the previous years under the Roman ruler and the government of the great Ishmaelite [Muslim] ruler (the Turkish sultan). This is not the case now, when the land is governed by the Pasha. Perhaps it would be acceptable to him if my lord, friend of the Most High, would shower him with a great fortune and buy him another country in exchange for the land presently insignificant in size but vast in quality. . . . But if that ruler does not want to sell him the entire land, then maybe he would sell Jerusalem and its surroundings. . . . (And if perchance that ruler does not want to sell the city of Jerusalem, at the very least buy from him the site of the [destroyed] Temple and a plot of land next to it, and with the condition that liberties and permission should be given to Jews to do there as they wish, to gather there from all lands without any obstacles, high taxes, or oppression from the ruler of the country, in order that we may offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. But the first way brings more honour and is worthier.)<sup>20</sup>

Kalischer is referring here to Mehemmed Ali, the ruler of Egypt since 1805 and vassal of the Turkish sultan. In 1832 Mehemmed Ali wrested control of the Sinai desert, Palestine, Lebanon, and portions of Syria from Ottoman hegemony. He then instituted reforms that significantly improved administration and law enforcement in Egypt and the provinces. The Jews of Palestine, especially those in Jerusalem, benefited considerably from the consequent reduction in violence and bribery, and they broadcast their relief by hailing Mehemmed Ali's conquest as the beginning of a better era. This situation may have sparked Kalischer's belief that he was living at a time ripe with messianic possibilities. He felt that the ruling regime in Palestine was more inclined to give up land than it had been at any time in the previous two thousand years.

<sup>20</sup> *Zionist Writings*, 13.

tion, he felt it was impossible to make the clothing required for officiating priests. Even an ordinary priest, he maintained, required a girdle (*avnet*) woven of threads dyed with four special colours. One of the colours, *tekhelet*, was derived from a sea creature that was reputedly extinct, and the exact shade of the colour known as *argaman* was also in dispute. He concluded his letter with a pessimistic pronouncement: 'We are not capable of making [the priest's tunic] until God arouses his spirit to bring the true redeemer to teach us properly.'<sup>22</sup> In other words, the entire matter was out of human hands and would have to wait until the arrival of the messiah.

Kalischer persisted. He crafted an extensive rebuttal of Eger's position on priestly status, insisting that only the High Priest required the special clothing: community sacrifices could be offered by common priests requiring simpler clothing.<sup>23</sup> Eger began his response, written within a month of his first one, with a lament that his weakness and exhaustion had hampered his ability to examine Kalischer's arguments with adequate attention. Nevertheless, he was not convinced by his student's rebuttal. He argued that the obstacles could not be overcome, the consequences of violating prohibitions were quite grave, and the hope of agreement between them was minimal. He seemed content to remain at a stand-off.<sup>24</sup>

The younger rabbi, however, sought a favourable resolution, and wrote to his teacher a third time. He conceded a minor point, but he complained that Eger had presented conflicting descriptions of a scholar's opinion, and in so doing had increased the difficulty of the problem from one letter to the next.<sup>25</sup> In response, Eger informed him that he was handing the question over to his son-in-law, Moses Sofer, to whose opinion he would defer. There is no record of what Eger actually asked Sofer, whether he identified the original questioner, or how much of the previous discussion he conveyed in his query. Eger's complete report of Sofer's reply, which Kalischer received in late spring, 1837, reads as follows:

I will inform you that yesterday I received a response from my honourable and learned son-in-law, and he wrote to me these words: In regard to what my teacher and father-in-law wrote, to request permission from the rulers of Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. He [the ruler] is a very strict one, and no one who is not of the Ishmaelite creed can come near

<sup>22</sup> Kalischer reprinted Eger's first letter in *Derishat tsiyon*, 79-81. Both comments appear on p. 81. Eger acknowledges that he rejects Maimonides' rulings in *Mishneh torah*, 'Laws of the Temple Vessels', 8; however, he finds more convincing the dissenting opinion of Judah ben Samuel Rosanes (1657-1727), the author of the *Mishneh torah* commentary *Mishneh lamelekh*, and the problems raised by Rabad on the matter of *argaman*.

<sup>23</sup> *Derishat tsiyon*, 82-9. The letter is undated.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 89-90. Eger's letter is dated 19 Marheshvan 5597 (30 Oct. 1836).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 90-2. The letter is undated.

this site, because their house of worship is built there, and it is said that the Foundation Stone is in the middle of the dome, and no one not of their creed can come near. Two weeks ago two faithful emissaries from there were here, and a holy congregation in Jerusalem sent me a gift, a wonderful drawing of the Temple Mount, and built on it in its centre is the dome mentioned above—it is a wondrous thing to see. At any rate, if we had permission, except for what my father-in-law wrote correctly concerning the priestly clothing [dyes] of *tekhelet* and *argaman*, it would be of use only for the *pesah* sacrifices, because individual sacrifices cannot be offered due to impurity and the [other] community sacrifices must be purchased with the shekel tax of Israel, as [Jacob] Emden wrote in [his responsum] number 89.<sup>26</sup>

According to this report, Sofer agrees that the resumption of sacrificial worship before the appearance of the rebuilt Temple is permitted. The question is a purely theoretical one, however, because of firm Muslim opposition. Sofer fully endorses Eger's opinion that the dyes are a serious obstacle, and he adds a new problem, the lack of a shekel tax. In sum, if the political situation improved, only the *pesah* sacrifices could be resumed. The lack of any additional comment by Eger indicates his agreement with Sofer. It appears that Eger was not enthusiastic about ruling favourably on the resumption of sacrificial worship, and he was trying to cool his student's ardour for it as well.

Nevertheless, Kalischer persevered and responded once again to Eger. Because of the consultation with Sofer, there now appeared to be two obstacles preventing community sacrifices, priestly clothing and the shekel tax. Kalischer chose to address only the latter. According to the Torah, all adult Jews were required to pay annually one-half shekel—a weight of silver and gold coinage of ancient Israel—towards the upkeep of the Temple and its service.<sup>27</sup> Sofer had agreed with a previous authority that shekel funds must be used to acquire the materials for community sacrifices. Kalischer took issue with this. Since funds from all the tribes of Israel had never been received for the Second Temple sacrificial rituals, he wrote, he did not understand why they were necessary now; funds from just a minority would be sufficient. Following this opinion comes a revealing statement. Obtaining funds, according to Kalischer, would not be too difficult. He wrote, 'apart from those living there [in the Yishuv], many in the Diaspora will joyously send their donations in order to merit [fulfilling the] commandment of sacrificial worship'.<sup>28</sup> This comment exposes the real nature of Kalischer's query: he believed that resuming sacrificial worship was possible, despite Muslim opposition, and he intended to pursue it. Perhaps from the beginning, Eger had been aware of Kalischer's motives or had discerned them in the course of the correspondence. He would

<sup>26</sup> *Derishat tsiyon*, 92. The letter is undated.

<sup>27</sup> Exod. 30: 11-16. Variations of the original tax were in force sporadically at the end of the Second Temple period.

<sup>28</sup> *Derishat tsiyon*, 92.

In his capacity as editor of *Halevanon*, Brill was the spokesman for the Ashkenazi non-hasidic rabbinic leaders of Jerusalem. His comments reflect the hostility these men felt towards the prospect of the efforts to re-establish sacrificial worship:

Whoever told his honour the rabbi this story lied when he said that the Jerusalemites are considering making 'gaily patched altars' [Ezek. 16: 6] in order to sacrifice *zevachim* and *olot* [sacrifices and burnt offerings] without a divine altar as God's law teaches. When the book *Derishat tsiyon* by Rabbi Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer, may God protect and preserve him, arrived here, the masses heard and concluded wrongly that the law had been decided according to him and that the *pesah* sacrifice had been permitted here in our state of impurity, but God forbid that anyone should think this.<sup>142</sup>

Brill's derision of the Jewish masses and their enthusiasm for the renewal of sacrifices is obvious in his comparison of a new altar with the 'gaily patched altars'—these were the many illegitimate altars built by errant Jews in ancient times. Brill carefully differentiated between Kalischer and the rumour, and in a continuation of the editorial note, he explained that this differentiation was why the rabbis had not made any public statements about all the speculation:

The rabbis and the great rabbinical court here in the holy city, may it be speedily rebuilt, have not hurried to respond to the above-mentioned book. Its author is a great man, a rabbi brilliant in Torah, piety, and wisdom. They have concluded that he only wrote his words to fulfil the saying, 'We offer the bullocks of our lips' [Hos. 14: 3]—his piety and love are 'flashes of fire from a divine flame' [S. of S. 8: 6] that burn in him to ten levels of holiness—pursue Torah and reap a reward.<sup>143</sup>

According to Brill, the rabbis believed that Kalischer never intended to suggest the actual restoration of the cult; he studied the possibility only as an act of piety, and he argued the legal issues for their own sake and not for their practical application. In fact, the rabbis knew that the author was quite serious about the practical application of his halakhic study. Brill's statement was a gracious attempt to allow Kalischer to retract his proposal and save face.

This dismissal of Kalischer's intent was also an attempt to dispel the public enthusiasm. Guttmacher had loyal followers in the city among the hasidim, and they certainly recognized that his words were not merely pious sentiments. The 1862 uproar was connected with the earlier, 1857 rumour that grew out of Kalischer and Guttmacher's collaboration. Since that time, support for the re-establishment of the sacrificial cult had grown. Indeed, the chief rabbi of the Sephardi community in Palestine, Rabbi Hayim David Hazan, endorsed in early 1863 the message of *Derishat tsiyon*, including the renewal of sacrifices.

<sup>142</sup> *Halevanon*, 6 (1863), 37.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* This interpretation of Hosea 14: 3, taken from BT *Yoma* 86b (see also Rashi's comment), is discussed above in Ch. 2.

## *Preface*

**I**N DOZENS of Jewish households dotting the West Bank landscape, religious parents tuck their children into bed with the following story:

Long, long ago, in a faraway land in the heart of the Exile, the great rabbi Tsevi Kalischer, a distinguished scholar and teacher, dreamt of a home such as ours in the hills of Judah. God's spirit burned within him and he saw clearly the Torah's commandment that every Jew should move to the Holy Land and work to possess it as his own. The lovers of Exile ridiculed and denounced Rabbi Kalischer, but he persisted in his teachings and did many great deeds to hasten the redemption of Israel. . . . On his deathbed he knew in his heart that the Messianic Era had begun. And we, today, know how right he was, for all around us we see clear evidence that God's promises are being fulfilled. Soon the signs will be so manifest that no one, not even fools, will be able to deny that the redemption has come. (oral communication, courtesy of Mark R. Levy)

Unfortunately, daily realities in the isolated settlements contrast harshly with traditional messianic dreams. Settlers routinely carry arms, pass through numerous military checkpoints as they drive to work and home again, and must cope with the legacy of death and grief that currently accompanies Jewish residence in predominantly Arab lands. Religious Zionists such as these are increasingly disheartened by the possibility of relinquishing Israeli sovereignty over territory they believe is theirs by divine command, and by the reality of violence that such possession entails. Telling stories about courageous forerunners like Kalischer boosts morale and inspires the next generation to stay the course.

Outside these circles, however, Kalischer's name is not as well known. The later proponents of Religious Zionism, men who absorbed, adapted, and expanded his teachings, are more familiar. Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer lived from 1795 to 1874, and while he was not the only one in his day to advocate the rebuilding of a Jewish polity in Palestine, he was one of the first impeccably Orthodox rabbis to argue that the Torah itself sanctioned such activist efforts. His writings contain a substantial collection of approving references to messianic activism scattered throughout talmudic and medieval rabbinic literature. He also presented his own, novel interpretations of biblical and post-biblical texts promoting human initiatives to hasten redemption. In addition, he designed his rhetoric to win wide support, constructing appealing metaphors and coining slogans that evoked nostalgia and inspired activism. He promoted the agricultural development of Palestine with arguments that appealed to religious Jews as well as to the newly emancipated Jews of western Europe who,