

An Overview of the Chabad Attitude to Zionism and the State of Israel

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Prepared for JLI's Machon Shmuel
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Abstract

The objective of this article is to (a) identify the views of the early Zionist intelligentsia, (2) Explain the objections of *Gedolei Yisroel* to their ideology, (3) Document the Rebbe Rashab's opposition to the Zionist movement and the rationale he provided, (4) Understand the response of Torah leadership to the Partition Plan, (5) Explore the stance of the Lubavitcher Rebbeim (and many other *Gedolei Yisroel*), to the establishment of the State of Israel, (6) Provide some practical applications of these principles.

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Roots of Zionism

The inherent tension of living as a Jew in the modern world is not a new phenomenon. The advent of the European Enlightenment sparked a fundamental reassessment of the meaning of Jewish identity, and saw the emergence of widely divergent views throughout the Jewish community, many of which gave way to powerful trends of assimilation by some, the embrace of socialism by others, and for those who clung to their faith in the face of the onslaught of modernity – the painful disengagement from their enlightened Jewish bretheren in the hopes of maintaining their own religious integrity.

In the words of Rabbi Jonathon Sacks¹:

“Modernity struck European Jewry with shattering force in the form of civil emancipation. Hitherto Jews had been excluded from the mainstream of European society. That fact . . . had at least served to reinforce Jewish identity. Jews were, and were conscious of being, a people apart . . . External circumstance matched internal self-definition. Jews, scattered and dispersed, saw themselves as a nation in exile . . . Their persecutions and expulsion, their strange isolation, all served to confirm their religious self-understanding.

Emancipation changed that fundamentally . . . The cost of emancipation was that Jews would have to undergo that most characteristic change of modernity: *the privatization of faith*. . . Jews would speak, dress and act like

1 Rabbi Jonathon Sacks, *Persistence of Faith: Religion, Morality & Society in a Secular Age* (London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), pp. 3-4

