

Enemy of the State: An Interview with Rabbi Israel Meir Hirsch

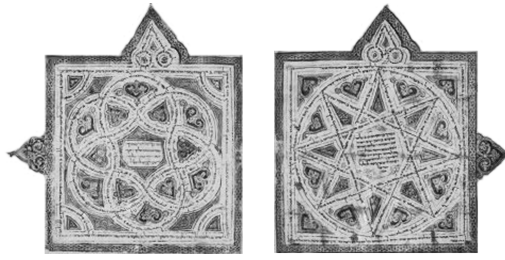
Uriya Shavit

Abstract: Rabbi Israeli Meir Hirsch is the current leader of Neturei Karta, the most radical anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox group in Israel. They not only regard Israel as illegal state in a religious sense, but also cooperate with the “enemy” of Israel (Palestine Liberation Organization and Iran). In April, 2021, Prof. Shavit had an interview with Rabbi Israeli Meir Hirsch who directly explained the ideologies, social structure of that religious groups and the future of Israel.

Key Words: Neturei Karta, Ultra-Orthodox, Anti-Zionism

Rabbi Israeli Meir Hirsch is the current leader of Neturei Karta, the most radical anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox group in Israel. Neturei Karta not only holds Israel to be a religiously illegitimate and criminal state and refrains from any engagement with state institutions, but also cooperates with Israel’s enemies (On the historical and ideological roots of the movement, see Tal Cohen’s article in this issue).

Rabbi Hirsch became Neturei Karta’s leader in 2010 following the death of his father, Rabbi Moshe Hirsch. The elder Hirsch was born in New York and was married to the daughter of Rabbi Aharon Katzenelbogen, one of Neturei Karta’s founders. He was close to Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), acted as his advisor on Jewish affairs, and considered Israel as occupied Palestinian territory. In 2006, Neturei Karta sent a delegation to Tehran to a Holocaust-denying and distorting conference hosted by the Iranian regime, a move considered extreme even for some in the movement’s ranks.



The younger Hirsch follows in his father's ideological footsteps, albeit in a somewhat less public manner.

While Neturei Karta is not averse to open contacts with Israeli Zionists, including academic scholars of ultra-Orthodox society, their leadership has given very few in-depth interviews throughout its century of existence. In April 2021, ahead of the first annual conference of the Shandon-Tel Aviv Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, which explored Haredi society, Rabbi Hirsch granted a lengthy recorded interview to Prof. Uriya Shavit. In the interview, at times in shockingly candid terms, he addressed his community's ideology, social structure, and vision for the future of Israel. Excerpts from the interview, edited for clarity, are published here.

The door of Rabbi Hirsch's modest home in the Mea Shearim neighborhood in Jerusalem bears a sign in Hebrew, Arabic, and English: "A Jew, Not a Zionist." Israel Meir Hirsch is a gracious, soft-spoken host who serves his guests Coca-Cola and cakes. He is also a religious leader who does not believe in the language of moderation or ambivalence.

Prof. Shavit: I would like to start, with your permission, with the entrance to your home, with the door. It bears a sign that says: "A Jew, Not a Zionist."

Rabbi Hirsch: That's right.

Prof. Shavit: Can the Rabbi explain what this means?

Rabbi Hirsch: We have been living here under Zionist occupation for more than 70 years, and the Zionists took over this land by force and with weapons. We try in every moment and take every opportunity to clarify to whomever we can that Zionism and Judaism are two completely opposite terms.

Zionism actually aimed to eradicate the Jewish roots of the Jewish people, to establish a new people with no ties to its heritage. This declaration [the sign at the door] started, in fact, with the late Rabbi [Amram] Blau, the leader of Neturei Karta, who died in the year 5734; you can calculate when that was [1974]. He decided at one point... He attached that sign to his clothes and wore it... in his final years. It is a declaration that we are simply Jews and unrelated to Zionism. That is basically the point of hanging the sign on the door.

Prof. Shavit: Well, before I ask about your historical and theological perception, about what were the origins of the objection to Zionism, I would

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first like to ask something about the present and the future. What do you wish would happen? What are you praying for? There is a given situation—the State of Israel exists. What do you wish for?

Rabbi Hirsch: We wish the people would return to its roots, of course, and know where they came from because Zionism managed to separate all the people who live here in this state from their Jewish roots.

This means that [currently] the House of Israel is like all the other non-Jewish nations, and we are not connected to any heritage or something that obligates us. What we wish is for the day described in the book of *Prophet Malachi*, at the end of the prophecy: “He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers,” which means that we hope that the entire nation will return to its roots. This is what we hope and pray for.

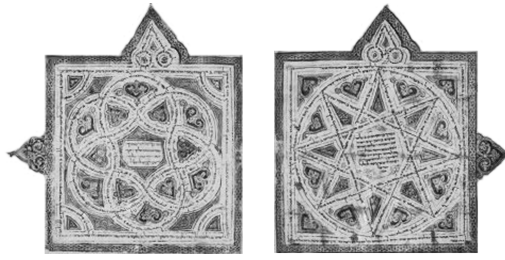
Prof. Shavit: But in practical political terms, until the arrival of the Messiah...Well, the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist, and so has the British Mandate. In pragmatic political terms, if the State of Israel ceased to exist as a Zionist state, then the only possible way to reach your desired outcome is for the Palestinian Authority or Hamas to take over. Is that something you hope for?

Rabbi Hirsch: So long as the redemption does not come from God, we would prefer any Arab-Muslim regime in order to live our religious life in peace and with no wars, and each can live his life in any way he chooses.

Prof. Shavit: But ultimately, when we look, for instance, at the situation of Christians in the Palestinian Authority, if the Zionist enterprise would collapse, the chance that Jews would live here in peace is not a real one, is not a realistic one.

Rabbi Hirsch: The real solution—without deluding ourselves that things will go one way or another—is to return the entire land to its rightful owners, which is, at present, the Palestinian people, and through them, we can live under a regime that does not intend to destroy the faith.

Even [Yasser] Arafat himself, in his first speech at the United Nations (UN) in 1973, said unequivocally that our [the Palestinian people’s] battle is also for the Jewish people. This implied [that from Arafat’s point of view, the Palestinians also fight for] the Jewish people that are under Zionist occupation,



and [the Palestinians] will make sure that everyone can live under our rule with no discrimination, meaning that [the Palestinians] respect the Jewish religion. Anyone can watch that speech and see what he said.

Prof. Shavit: If I understand correctly, from a theological standpoint, the source of your objection to Zionism is not only or not even primarily the reality of a state that is not based on Rabbinical Law. Your fundamental problem with Zionism is the notion of the “Three Oaths” [a *midrash* in which God instructed the Jewish people not to reclaim the Land of Israel forcefully and not to rebel against the other nations] that by realizing Jewish sovereignty, Zionism is “ascending as a wall” [i.e., leading a return to the land of Israel in an organized political fashion prior to the arrival of the Messiah and thus rebelling against God]. This means that from your point of view, there is nothing that the Zionist state can do that can correct the distortion it represents.

Rabbi Hirsch: Of course not. Because we completely deny any possibility of a Jewish regime, whether by Haredim or by Jews who have already become separated from their roots. We are forbidden to establish any regime before the arrival of the Messiah, no matter the form.

And, of course, we also object to...let’s say there was a state [that was] managed according to the laws of the Torah, to Jewish law. We also strongly object to this idea. Fundamentally, we support the concept of separation between church and state because this mixture of church and state is the source of all these outbursts.

Prof. Shavit: Tell me, where lies the difference between you and Agudath Israel? Because they, too, are not Zionist. They are not among Herzl’s fans; they don’t support the Zionist idea.

Rabbi Hirsch: As far as I see it, Agudath Israel are Reform Jews for all purposes; they are a reform movement for all purposes.

Prof. Shavit: Why is that?

Rabbi Hirsch: Because they became separated from their roots. I mean, initially, Agudath Israel fought against the Zionist idea. [Yet later] they simply distorted the path, became part of the [Zionist] establishment, and involved the Haredi public in the Zionist turmoil. This means they are a bridge for recruiting people from the Haredi community to the Zionist

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community.

Prof. Shavit: Where lies the difference between you and groups that are widely referred to as the Eda Haredit, such as the Toldot Aharon Hasidic sect?

Rabbi Hirsch: In fact, all of these Hasidic groups — the Eda Haredit, Toldot Aharon, Toldot Avraham Yitzhak — basically have the same view as us. They are not as extreme as going to the Arabs, but in principle, they do not accept government funds, do not study in Hebrew, and are not connected at all to any Zionist establishment in any way. This [Eda Haredit] is a very large group of 50,000 families that are practically separated from the state.

Prof. Shavit: But, after all, you do not have common leadership institutions, so what are the ideological and practical differences between you and Toldot Aharon, for example?

Rabbi Hirsch: Ideologically, it's the same. We differ in our attitude of appealing to the Arabs [which we do, and they do not] because people don't like the matter of appealing to the Arabs. In the general public, people see it as if we are collaborating with murderers, etc.; still, we [and the other Eda Haredit groups] share the same principles.

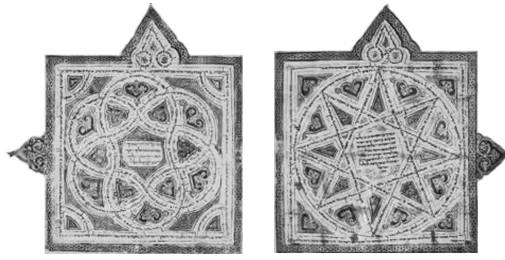
Prof. Shavit: When interacting with members of the PLO, with members of Hamas, did you honestly feel that you would be comfortable and safe living under their rule?

Rabbi Hirsch: I feel very comfortable when I go to Ramallah and to all kinds of places in the territories [the West Bank and Gaza] or in the world, whether in Egypt, Qatar, or any other state. We don't sense any inkling indicating that living together will not be possible.

Prof. Shavit: You have no connections with the state. Not only do you not vote in national or local elections, but if I remember correctly, you don't pay social security or health insurance. So, on the practical level, how do you manage? I mean...

Rabbi Hirsch: We manage. It's very hard, and, of course, we have to constantly send people to fundraise abroad to raise money for our institutions. We can't really live without those donations, but this is the path we chose, and we persevere on it.

Prof. Shavit: From a certain respect, I estimate that many from the secular and also the traditional sectors would say: there is something we



appreciate here. Here are people who object to Zionism but are fully committed to this objection; they don't live at my expense.

Rabbi Hirsch: Indeed.

Prof. Shavit: But if a member of Neturei Karta is, God forbid, sick and needs to go to the hospital, how is this covered?

Rabbi Hirsch: It's very hard. For example, my late father was hospitalized for a lengthy time, and we had to pay for it ourselves. We asked for donations to do so. But it is definitely very hard.

Prof. Shavit: And what are the sources of income? What jobs do people have?

Rabbi Hirsch: Usually, the men study in the Kollel; we call it a Kollel [a college for studying Torah]. Some women work from home in various jobs that generate some income. But it's very hard, of course; daily life is not simple at all.

Prof. Shavit: Do people have jobs in the general employment market? I mean, do they go out and work in factories, for example?

Rabbi Hirsch: They don't have formal jobs, but there are all kinds of religiously-related jobs that do provide a substantial income for those who work in that area, and through this, each person earns a living one way or another.

Prof. Shavit: And there are donors.

Rabbi Hirsch: Of course. All the time.

Prof. Shavit: Who are the donors? Where do they live?

Rabbi Hirsch: Mostly the Satmar congregations in the United States and Europe. The Satmar Rebbe reinforced the idea of financially supporting people living in the Holy Land who do not take anything and who decisively avoid any support, and that's the foundation of our existence here in the Holy Land.

Prof. Shavit: If I remember correctly, your criticism of the Zionist movement is much broader than the theological issue of "ascending as a wall," of compromising an important principle. In your view, the Zionist movement is responsible for a large-scale historical crime—[You hold that the Zionists] collaborated with the Nazis.

Rabbi Hirsch: Without a doubt. But we see the spiritual holocaust that

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Zionism brought upon the Jewish people as much worse than the Holocaust that occurred 80 years ago. From our perspective, from the Torah's perspective, from the Torah's outlook, the sages say in the Talmud: "Whoever causes a person to sin is worse than one who kills him," which means that from our perspective, causing a Jew to sin is worse than killing him. Zionism is, in fact, guilty of this spiritual holocaust of the Jewish people.

Prof. Shavit: But if I understand correctly, in your view, it bears some responsibility for the Holocaust itself.

Rabbi Hirsch: Without a doubt. Those who are familiar with history can see the undeniable connection between the Zionist leaders and the Nazis. It is well documented, so it is not something that I am inventing. And whoever reads some history knows that they played a very big role in the crime of the Holocaust, which took place 80 years ago.

Prof. Shavit: If there had been no Zionist movement and if there hadn't already been hundreds of thousands of Jews here [in Israel] in the 1930s, they would have been murdered.

Rabbi Hirsch: By whom?

Prof. Shavit: By the Nazis.

Rabbi Hirsch: By the Nazis?

Prof. Shavit: And their collaborators, yes.

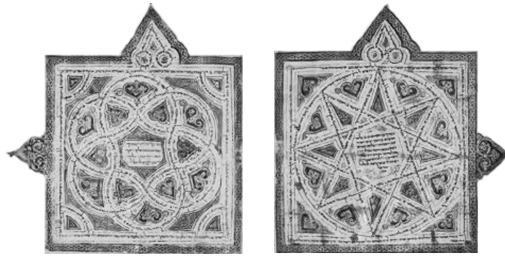
Rabbi Hirsch: Look, the Zionists declared a financial boycott of Germany, which inflamed Hitler, and only then did he decide and say that he would take a terrible revenge against the Jews.

If the Zionists hadn't provoked the German people, it would never have come to those things. This is a fact; I'm not making this up, that the Zionists upset Hitler greatly, and only then did he decide as he did. But initially, his purpose and his plan were only to deport the Jews, not to kill them, not to murder them. This happened as a result of the Zionist provocation.

Prof. Shavit: Well, one can say these things in Israel, but you know it's considered a criminal offense in Germany or Austria. It's an interesting point to think about.

Rabbi Hirsch: Holocaust deniers.

Prof. Shavit: But, and I say this not as a provocation but rather as a historical fact that should be considered, Zionism won, and your group lost.



Today there are nine million people in the State of Israel and you, Neturei Karta, are no more than 400-500 families. Maybe this is something else that should be considered?

Rabbi Hirsch: I always say that Herzl succeeded with his vision...Herzl writes in his diary that once when he was walking on the street in Paris, a Gentile yelled at him, "Jewish pig," which annoyed him very much. So he wrote in his diary that he had a brilliant idea right after [he was yelled at]. What was the idea? To take some Jews and convert them to Christianity, they would go on a Sunday openly to a monastery, and then people would stop hating us.

But actually, in practice, Herzl had good connections with August Rohling, if you've heard of him, who was the father of modern antisemitism before and during Hitler's time, and Hitler based his hatred on his findings. Herzl writes in his diary that antisemitism is his best friend because, through antisemitism, he would be able to achieve his goals. But what did Zionism actually want from the Jewish people? Just like Herzl writes, it wants to generate a new nation unconnected to Jewish heritage.

Prof. Shavit: But the question is: If you represent God's will, why did Herzl succeed?

Rabbi Hirsch: It is written: "The way of the wicked prospers."

Prof. Shavit: Well, that way, you can explain anything, but...

Rabbi Hirsch: It is a fact. It is also written: "Though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish," but what does it say after that? "...they will be destroyed forever." This means there is an upward movement, but the decline will be very dramatic. As with Haman the Wicked, where the sages say that the king elevated him and raised him above the ministers. Why? So that his downfall would be much more forceful.

Prof. Shavit: There is another point in the Zionist victory that I think is even more interesting. We are speaking in Hebrew.

Rabbi Hirsch: Correct.

Prof. Shavit: And you speak outstanding Hebrew, contemporary Hebrew. When Eliezer Ben-Yehuda [the reviver of the Hebrew language] was persecuted in Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century, very few spoke Hebrew; almost no one spoke Hebrew. So even your

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beautiful Hebrew is proof of the Zionist victory. Where did you gain this proficiency in Hebrew?

Rabbi Hirsch: With no formal studies, with no academic degree, and all those things. I simply grew up here and picked up the language.

Prof. Shavit: You know, already at this point in the conversation, some people might ask the following question: Who is forcing you to stay here? If the Zionist state is so bad for you, you are invited to pack your suitcases and move to Nablus or to New York.

Rabbi Hirsch: There is no doubt on that issue. It would, of course, have been preferable. But we think we were here before the state's establishment and have entered a state of occupation. We are actually captives here in the country.

It's not as if we live a full civil life and enjoy every moment. As a result of the circumstances, we were living here, and we continue to live here despite the occupation. It doesn't mean that one can't live under occupation. You live, but it's hard; it is not a regular life. We hope that eventually this state will disappear, and then we will be able to live just like before the state's establishment in peace, tranquility, and fraternity.

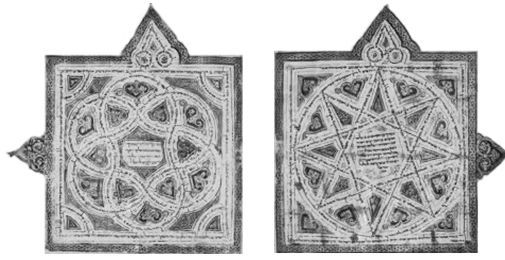
Prof. Shavit: By the way, no one is truly preventing you from living your life. The state allows the Mea Shearim neighborhood to retain its autonomy.

Rabbi Hirsch: That's not really true. If you follow the news, you'll know that groups of policemen come here every day. For instance, last night, they came to the neighborhood at 3 AM, woke up the entire neighborhood, and arrested some people. Incidents like this happen daily in our life. People don't notice this, but we live under occupation and oppression. And this happens on the ground every day; I'm not making it up.

Prof. Shavit: The state doesn't force you to send your children to its schools, and it allows you to collect donations freely. This is not to be taken for granted, considering your ideology.

Rabbi Hirsch: Of course, the Zionist country declares itself the only democracy in the Middle East, although this is not true. But they need to show the world that they let people live the life they want to, even if they object to it.

Prof. Shavit: I would like to learn a little about the daily life of Neturei



Karta, about the spiritual and cultural life of Neturei Karta, and to ask about your views also on some issues that are not political. Do the children study at your own community schools?

Rabbi Hirsch: Yes, of course. We have our own schools, for boys and for girls, yeshivas, kollels, etc., which are our spiritual base.

Prof. Shavit: Television?

Rabbi Hirsch: There is no such concept.

Prof. Shavit: No such concept? Why? Television has educational and worthy content too. You can choose what to watch and what to consume.

Rabbi Hirsch: We say that we are separated from electronic media and written media. I say that when I look at a newspaper, for instance, when I read a headline or an article in a newspaper, I immediately stop being a thinking person and start believing the tall tales of the person who wrote the editorial or the article.

It means that I need to switch my mind to the thoughts of the journalist, and then my head stops thinking completely. Once I was at a snack shop on Friday, and I saw a man buying all the newspapers, everything they had on sale. I told the salesman, his name is Dudu, I told him: “Do me a favor, put all this on the scale. I want to see how much nonsense this man is going to eat on Shabbat.” It simply drives you mad.

Prof. Shavit: And mobile telephones are also banned from the home? Smartphones, on which you could watch videos?

Rabbi Hirsch: Absolutely. We are absolutely separated from all that.

Prof. Shavit: In the last two decades, what is known as “Haredi cinema” has been flourishing, kosher cinema with moral narratives. Do you find it legitimate?

Rabbi Hirsch: Absolutely not. It brings in the secular cinema through the back door. It means they are bringing the Haredi community’s point of view closer to the style of secular cinema. We are against...Not only us, but also the entire traditional Haredi public is against this, against bringing these ideas into the Haredi market.

Prof. Shavit: What about sports? A healthy mind in a healthy body...

Rabbi Hirsch: This is no different. You can exercise at home; you don’t have to exercise elsewhere. Every person can exercise at home.

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Prof. Shavit: So gyms and things like that, swimming in pools, are not permitted.

Rabbi Hirsch: They are not permitted.

Prof. Shavit: So I'll ask a question a little bluntly and naively: How do you have fun? What do you do when you want to have some fun? To rest?

Rabbi Hirsch: So sometimes, during the intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot, people take trips to the beach or somewhere to take the children, to amuse them, etc. But during the year, we don't have those things, meaning that there are no breaks—no summer break and no other break.

Prof. Shavit: It's not an easy life. Very demanding.

Rabbi Hirsch: Not easy at all.

Prof. Shavit: What is the proportion of those who defect? Those who leave the community?

Rabbi Hirsch: That is more common among the general [Haredi] public.

Prof. Shavit: But if a child from Neturei Karta would...okay, not even leave the faith but “desert” to a Litvak Yeshiva or a Hasidic group. Would you exclude him, or would you continue to respect him?

Rabbi Hirsch: No, absolutely not. So long as he doesn't leave the faith, he is still within our framework.

Prof. Shavit: What about if someone from Neturei Karta married someone from a different group? For instance, a Hasidic or Litvak group, which, so to speak, collaborates with the Zionists. Is that acceptable?

Rabbi Hirsch: Absolutely not.

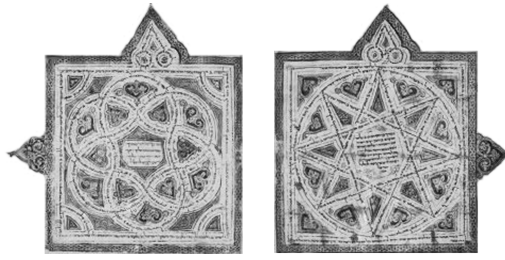
Prof. Shavit: Not acceptable? How come? Love is the most important.

Rabbi Hirsch: It depends on who is involved. Since it would mean changing the entire path, the entire heritage, it is fiercely resisted. We try in any way possible to prevent those things.

Prof. Shavit: And you succeed?

Rabbi Hirsch: Yes, in general.

Prof. Shavit: I'm curious to know how is it possible, and to what degree is it possible in a 21st-century society, to keep the walls high and protective [the boundaries separating the community from secular society]. I am asking you about two to three well-known figures familiar to the Israeli public. I'm



just curious if you might have heard about them and what is your attitude toward them. For example, Amos Oz [a well-known Israeli author]. Does that name mean anything to you?

Rabbi Hirsch: Yes, I've heard a lot about him. Of course.

Prof. Shavit: But you were never curious enough to read one of his books.

Rabbi Hirsch: I've heard some things he said, but reading a book is not in our scope because we have our own history books, and we are not looking for new stars to receive ideas from them.

Prof. Shavit: And let's say — ShlomoArzti [a well-known Israeli singer]. Are you familiar with that name?

Rabbi Hirsch: He's also familiar, yes.

Prof. Shavit: And what do you think about him? Maybe you've heard something...?

Rabbi Hirsch: It does not interest us at all. The secular public defines its own stars, and this [music] receives significant attention from the Israeli public. But we don't have these things in our community. We don't have the concept of highly appreciating...

Prof. Shavit: Do you have music?

Rabbi Hirsch: There is music, of course, but during the year, we hardly listen to music. Only during the intermediate days of Sukkot do we have music in the synagogues and people play music at home, but generally speaking, music doesn't have a significant role in our community.

Prof. Shavit: Do you listen to the radio?

Rabbi Hirsch: Definitely not.

Prof. Shavit: Not that either. So how do you know what's happening in the world?

Rabbi Hirsch: I hear from friends who are more connected, who listen to the news. I'm informed about what is happening.

Prof. Shavit: If, let's say, tomorrow there is a successful military operation, Israel somehow manages to neutralize the Iranian nuclear project, would it not give you any satisfaction?

Rabbi Hirsch: It [Israel] is constantly succeeding. It has had very substantial successes. But as we see it, it doesn't make us feel that we're living in a state that could protect us. In other words, the state is an

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existential hazard to the Jewish nation due to its provocations aimed at other nations. What we are saying is that if this obstacle weren't here, we wouldn't need protection. They create the problem, and they save us from the problem.

Prof. Shavit: Millions of people in our world were saved thanks to scientists who dedicated their lives to research and who developed a vaccine for Covid-19. And what do all of these scientists have in common? None of them is Haredi. None of them could have been Haredi since you cannot become an esteemed researcher, certainly not in the life sciences and in the exact sciences, without studying certain core subjects.

Rabbi Hirsch: Indeed.

Prof. Shavit: But the Haredim benefit from these medicines. They benefit from a world with a life expectancy — in the Western world — that has risen from around 70 and is already reaching around 85.

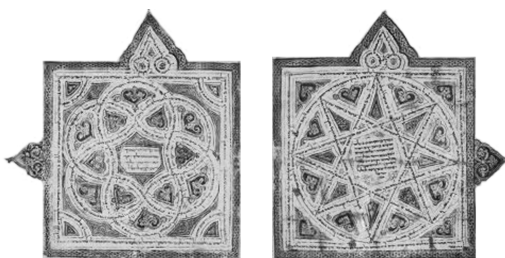
Rabbi Hirsch: Look, the Sages taught us that “wisdom in the Gentiles — Believe it.” If you recognize wisdom in the Gentiles — believe it. What does it mean to “believe”? It means that you should believe that they made an important achievement for humanity. But it doesn't mean that we need to be part of science. God has enough representatives in the entire world who take care of the universe's existence.

Prof. Shavit: But there is a logical contradiction in this position. Because the aspiration of your group is that everyone should accept its position, that everyone should see the light that it sees. But if everyone saw the light your group sees, there will be no scientists to develop medicines.

Rabbi Hirsch: There is no contradiction. The Gentiles can continue with their science, keep contributing to humanity at large, and we will continue in our ways [and] we don't have to take part in this issue. We can continue. It's no obstacle, and it's not a factor that can put people at any risk. We agree that “wisdom in the Gentiles — believe it.”

Prof. Shavit: How does one become a leader of Neturei Karta? Is there an election process, a council, or some other process?

Rabbi Hirsch: No, not at all. It simply continues over the generations. My late grandfather founded the movement, my father continued it, and I continued after my late father.



Prof. Shavit: But it is not based on a Hasidic principle.

Rabbi Hirsch: Not at all. Basically, we are Litvaks.

Prof. Shavit: So, it derives from the fact that the community accepts your authority.

Rabbi Hirsch: It's just a succession of the leadership. It's not some title to which you are elected. It's simply a continuation.

Prof. Shavit: Is it taken for granted that one of your sons will be your successor many years from now?

Rabbi Hirsch: I haven't even thought about it.

Prof. Shavit: No, but in terms of how the group works, is it taken for granted that one of your sons will be your successor?

Rabbi Hirsch: It usually works that way, but it doesn't have to. Not at all.

Prof. Shavit: And...who is the appointing body? How does it happen in practice? When your father died, at what moment did you become his successor?

Rabbi Hirsch: There was no one else to continue the contacts, etc., so I continued since I was already familiar with all these procedures from the experience I had gained in the years when my father was still alive. And at that time, there was no one else who could continue these contacts, so I succeeded him. It's not as if there was any election or anything like that.

Prof. Shavit: And what is the practical meaning of this leadership role? What does your daily life look like?

Rabbi Hirsch: In everyday life, we go out for prayers in the morning, then continue studying. Personally, I'm more occupied with deciphering manuscripts and prayer interpretations, some of which I have already published. And every person has their own daily occupations, for most studying in yeshivas and kollels.

Prof. Shavit: But are you, for example, more in charge of collecting donations, of their distribution?

Rabbi Hirsch: Yes, I'm in charge of many things.

Prof. Shavit: Does your group have its own court of law?

Rabbi Hirsch: A court of law? No.

Prof. Shavit: So, if a dispute arises inside the community, how do you settle it?

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Rabbi Hirsch: Usually, it's referred for arbitration. We call it "Zabla," an acronym for "this selects one and the other selects one" [each of the sides selects one arbiter, and they both select a third arbiter, constituting a three-member arbitration panel]. In this way, each person ultimately receives the ruling he hopes for, yet basically we don't have a permanent court of law. There is the court of the Eda Haredit, and anyone who wants to can appeal to it, but we ourselves prefer arbitration.

Prof. Shavit: How much of your everyday life is occupied with contact with foreign governments, with political activists in all kinds of places?

Rabbi Hirsch: It's throughout the year; it's continuous; something different every time. But of course, first and foremost, it's spreading the message that Zionism and Judaism are two completely opposite expressions. We convey this [message] one way or another to world leaders and, of course, here in our contacts with the Palestinian Authority.

Prof. Shavit: What is your attitude toward homosexuals? If a young boy were to go to his father or mother, or if a girl would, and say they are gay, how would you react?

Rabbi Hirsch: There is no such thing as someone who would say something like that. The term doesn't even exist.

Prof. Shavit: But the lack of a term doesn't imply that what the term describes doesn't exist.

Rabbi Hirsch: Yes, but there are no such terms. There is no possibility that a boy would say something like that. There is no such term; it doesn't exist.

Prof. Shavit: But you know that just because the term doesn't exist, it doesn't mean that the boy doesn't exist.

Rabbi Hirsch: Yes, but there is no such term in our lexicon. There isn't; there simply isn't.

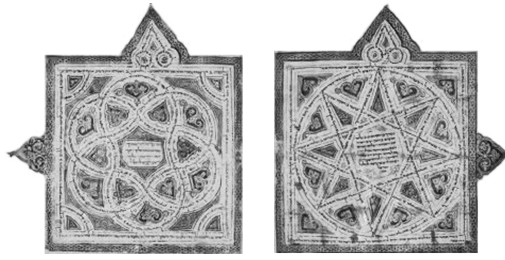
Prof. Shavit: You say that something like that never happened.

Rabbi Hirsch: Absolutely not.

Prof. Shavit: But there is no readiness to accept...

Rabbi Hirsch: Not at all. There would be no readiness. It is a red line.

Prof. Shavit: How are matches made [marriages arranged]? I mean, after all, yours is a fairly small community, and there are limited options.



Rabbi Hirsch: It's the same for most of Haredi society. The parents on both sides ask around about each other, and there's a matchmaker who takes care of all the details. Then they [the potential couple] have a meeting and decide upon the engagement and wedding, of course. But there is no concept of saying, "I want this person; he wants her." It does not work like that.

Prof. Shavit: Do you have a hunch...I'm not asking about a belief. I'm asking about a hunch: Where will we be in ten years? Where will your community be in ten years?

Rabbi Hirsch: Of course, "Prophecy was given to the fools," but we estimate Zionism is nearing its end. It will not be long, as we see it.