

Article

Work as a Value in the Writings of Rabbi Y.Y. Reines

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Abstract: Religious texts in the Jewish tradition uphold a notion of work as an existential need. It follows that work is of no religious significance in itself. Torah study has traditionally put it at the top of the hierarchy of Jewish values. The approach most clearly discernible throughout Jewish history has seen work as a prerequisite to be satisfied in order for the real essentials of life to be addressed; this approach became dominant almost to the exclusion of any other. *Nota bene:* seen in this way, work is a must, but not a religious value in itself. R. Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (1839–1915), one of the greatest Torah¹ scholars of Lithuania, founded the Mizrachi religious Zionist movement in 1902². The movement upheld the notion of work as a religious value, not only as an existential need. Bnei Akiva, the youth movement associated with the Mizrachi, emblazoned the motto of “Torah and Labor” upon its banner. The present article sets out to trace R. Reines’ thought and the idea of labor in his theological teaching. His thought continues to have a significant impact on religious Zionists in the State of Israel and throughout the world.

Keywords: religious Zionism; R. Reines; work; labor; productivity; Judaism; activeness

A near tautology reverberates in the argument that performing work that others find useful or worth paying for makes it possible to earn a living; it is much less obvious what status work—and especially physical labor—may have within the framework of a system of religious values. Is work as such endowed with value from the point of religious thought? Or is it a *sine qua non*, a prerequisite for physical survival, but not of religious significance in itself?

The Christian Middle Ages did not typically regard manual labor as a religious value. On the contrary, Catholicism saw work as part of involvement with the physical, part of the “flesh,” which stands in opposition to the “spirit.” People may need to work in order to make a living, but the activity this involves results from economic necessity; it is of no value in itself from the point of view of religion. Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, argued against this approach.³ Luther maintained a deterministic outlook, and saw the calling according to which one works as a divine command imposed upon man, as a decree from On High that must be obeyed. This made work take on a religious significance in his thought.

Luther’s approach was elaborated upon in different ways by later Protestant thinkers.⁴ Calvin, for instance, argued for predestination, but as per his view, man can know whether he is destined for Paradise or for Hell. Proof of this can be success in work in which one engages, with prosperity providing an indication of God’s satisfaction with one’s deeds. Work and prosperity will show a person whether he is one of the “elect”—whether he is desired. Hence Weber’s conclusion that work and effort in America, and capitalism along with them, were born of the Protestant ethic.⁵

¹ “Torah” (lit., “teaching”) as a term refers to a way of life within the framework of the Jewish religious tradition or Halakha (Jewish Law), which is based on Biblical texts and rabbinic writings. See (Weber 1930).

² Religious Zionism is an ideology that combines the political aspirations of Zionism with Orthodox Judaism. See: (Schwartz 2009).

³ For a treatment of Luther, see (Weber 1930).

⁴ For work in Protestant sects, especially among the Calvinists, see (Weber 1930, pp. 102–25).

⁵ See Anthony (1977).

Jewish religious texts encompass a number of different approaches toward work.⁶ Some opinions confer upon it the status of a religious value, as in: “Great is skilled labor, for just as the Jewish People have been commanded about the Sabbath, so have they been commanded about labor, as it is said, ‘Six days shall you work and accomplish all your labor concerns’ (Exodus 20:8).”⁷ It follows that just as there is a commandment to abstain from work on the Sabbath, so is there a commandment to work during the week. There are some approaches that would claim that work is an existential need and nothing but, so that no religious value can be associated with it. Such is the view voiced in the statement about a father’s obligation to teach his son a trade: “Anyone who does not teach his son a craft teaches him [thereby] to be a robber.” This is so insofar as “Having no craft and lacking [a means of earning his] bread, he will head for the crossroads, [whence] he will ambush and plunder simple folk.”⁸ In itself, work is thus of no religious significance. It was evident to all sides that Torah study stands at the top of the hierarchy of Jewish values: “Torah study is of equal stature to them all.”⁹ That is, considered alone against all other Jewish values, the study of Torah carries the day.¹⁰ Hence the recommendation, “Limit your involvement in business and involve yourself in Torah,”¹¹ insofar as Torah is the principal focus; all other concerns are subordinate to it. Accordingly, this has been the approach most clearly discernible throughout Jewish history: a notion of work as a prerequisite that must be satisfied in order for the real essentials of life to be addressed; the approach became dominant, almost to the exclusion of any other. Thus, R. Joseph Caro, a giant among Halakhic arbitrators, ruled that one must work, the reason being that poverty is capable of leading to apostasy.¹² *Nota bene*: work is a must, but not a religious value in itself.

The renewal of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel led to intensified concern with work and increasing labor productivity. The principle of this latter had a great impact on the Hovevei Zion, from the movement’s regular members to its ideologues and rabbinic leaders.¹³ The idea, which had its beginnings in the European Enlightenment of the 1700s, had left a deep impression on both European and Jewish thought of the 19th century.¹⁴ There had been criticism of the Halukkah [organized collection of funds for the Jews living in the Land of Israel. *Translator’s note*], along with exhortation in favor of earning a livelihood by means of manual labor, primarily agriculture. This was also a window of opportunity, with the Emancipation opening before the Jews the option of engaging in different sectors of the economy that had previously not been accessible to them. The principle of increasing labor productivity led the First Aliyah to found new communities and to provide for new ways of earning a living.¹⁵ This aim, which was part of both European and Jewish discourse of the times, also left its mark on the Zionist movement and—what is of particular importance in the context of the present article—on religious Zionism. Yet here, too, the principle of productivity was seen as a need, not a point of religious significance in itself. R. Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (1839–1915), one of the greatest Torah scholars of Lithuania, founded the Mizrachi religious Zionist movement in

⁶ For work in Jewish religious texts, see Noybert (2015), pp. 4–28). Note that “work,” “skilled labor,” “craft,” and “the way of the land” are all terms that refer to physical labor. Judaism, a monotheistic faith, sees itself as the expression of the covenant between God and the Children of Israel. See Jacobs (2007).

⁷ Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, version B, 21.

⁸ Kiddushin 29b and Rashi’s commentary ad loc.

⁹ Mishnah Peah 1:1.

¹⁰ The Mishnah enumerates a list of values, but work is not included among the items listed.

¹¹ Mishnah, *Pirke Avot [Ethics of the Fathers]*, 4:10.

¹² *Shulchan ‘Arukh, Orach Chaim* 156:1.

¹³ For the Hovevei Zion, emancipation, and increasing productivity, see Goldstein (2015).

¹⁴ See Levin (1975); for increasing labor productivity, agriculture, and work, see pp. 170–86, 211–32. For the ideational struggles and workers’ movements among Russian Jews, see: Mendelsohn (1970); Frankel (1981), especially pp. 134–70, 258–87, 366–452.

¹⁵ See Ettinger and Bartal (1982). The ideal of increasing labor productivity had a profound impact on the Second Aliyah, as well.

1902.¹⁶ The movement upheld the notion of work as a religious value, not only as an existential need. Bnei Akiva, the youth movement to this day associated with the Mizrachi, later emblazoned the motto of “Torah and Labor” upon its banner.¹⁷

The present article sets out to trace R. Reines’ thought and the role the idea of work and colonizing the land played in his theology. His thought continues to have a significant impact on religious Zionists in the State of Israel and throughout the world.

In studying the notion of work as it unfolds in early religious Zionism and in R. Reines’ thought, it is essential to appreciate the context in which the various ideas were being propounded. Building upon what we have indicated thus far, two conceptual approaches need to be kept in mind in connection with Eastern European Jewry. One of these approaches predominated in the Jewish mindset; the other was prominent in the European. The Jews were swayed by the views of Yitzhak Ber Levinsohn, who also took up the attempt to entrench Jewish Enlightenment and work values among the Jews, basing his efforts on a notion of work that he infused with ideational significance.¹⁸ Though a Maskil and a harbinger of secularizing change, and thus seen in a negative light by the observant public and the rabbinic leadership, Levinsohn was nevertheless successful in making his ideas resonate among the Jews. R. Reines was faced with the challenge of countering his impact. He never mentions Levinsohn explicitly in his writings; even so, it becomes transparent that his arguments are addressed to Levinsohn’s followers, whom R. Reines aims to provide with a theological reply, taking on both the issue of general education and the question of productive labor.

A further challenge was embodied by the impact of the ideas of Karl Marx. Here, too, the name of the opponent he is taking on is never explicitly invoked, nor even hinted at, in R. Reines’ writings, but his extensive discussion of work could not proceed disconnected from the mood prevalent in the 1800s in Europe as a result of Marxist teaching.¹⁹ The present study does not aim to deal exhaustively or even to describe Marx’s thought; for our purposes here, it is essential to appreciate the fact that work takes on enormous significance in Marx’s thought. In connection with his view of work, Marx argued that the human being is by nature creative (*homo faber*). By working, humanity establishes ties with nature and with the world beyond itself, thus shaping them. Doing this allows human beings to bring to the fore the abilities they have been outfitted with. At the same time, human beings are shaped by the work in which they engage, thus developing the special abilities with which they have been blessed. However, work conditions in the capitalist world prevent them from realizing these abilities, causing people to be alienated from their work and the results of their productivity, from themselves and from nature. The worker is thus himself reduced to the condition of merchandise. Henceforth, society divides into two classes: those who possess property and the workers, who possess no property. Based on this, Marx assumes the view that work has a liberating capacity: it liberates from poverty and from lack, from the struggle for existence, and from wearying toil. As per Marx’s view, work liberates

¹⁶ On R. Reines, see: [Bat-Yehudah \(1985\)](#); [Shapira \(2002\)](#); [Helinger \(2005\)](#); for his relationship with the Land of Israel, see [Schwartz \(1997\)](#).

¹⁷ Note: in R. Reines’ milieu in Eastern Europe, the prevalent rabbinic attitude was that steeping oneself in Torah and the Commandments is the only way to fill the life of a Jew with meaningful content. This went hand in hand with the assumption that involvement in the world of matter is external to the Torah and largely opposed to it. In the present article I will consider work as inclusive of involvement in the world of matter, such as—inter alia—involvement in secular studies. I should add that R. Reines was not the first to endow work with spiritual significance. He was preceded in this both by Maskilim [proponents of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment], such as Yitzhak Ber Levinsohn, and by Rabbis, such as R. Shmuel Mohilever, the Rabbi of the Hovevei Zion movement. R. Reines was the first Rabbi to make material labor part of systematized theological teaching, associating it with religious meaning, while at the same time founding an ideological movement centered on Torah and work bound together in a conceptual union. It should also be emphasized that most of the readings offered here are focused readings of the primary sources from within, poring over passages from R. Reines’ own writings. What he says will speak for itself.

¹⁸ See [Ber Levinsohn \(1977\)](#), and see the introduction by Immanuel Etkes, *ibid.*, pp. 3–19; for more on the stance assumed by the Maskilim on the issue of work, see Levin, note 14 above; on Jews’ economics and livelihood in Europe and the connection to Jewish identity, see [Penslar \(2001\)](#), especially pp. 205–54; [Karp \(2008\)](#), especially pp. 201–70.

¹⁹ On Marx and Marxism, see: [Sowell \(1985\)](#); [Poston \(1993\)](#); [Holt \(2015\)](#).

only when it liberates us from the very subjection that enslaves us to work.²⁰ It was not long before these notions and their ramifications became the object of focused attention among the Jews of Eastern Europe, as well. They found their expression in the ideology propounded by the leaders of the Second and the Third Aliyah, who upheld socialism and work values, to the point that they were dubbed the proponents of a “religion of labor.”²¹

When discussing the Second Aliyah movement and its activists’ belief in the virtue of work, one must mention their long struggle with the earlier movement, the First Aliyah. Members of the latter preferred employing Arab workers rather than Jewish ones, in what is known as the ‘Hebrew work’ (*Avoda Ivrit*) controversy or the ‘conquest of work’ (*Kibush Ha’avoda*).

The Second and Third Aliyah thinkers wished to invent a ‘New Jew’, an independent person accustomed to physical work, as opposed to the exilic Jew, who mostly dealt with spiritual and religious rituals.

They believed hard work redeems the individual and the collective Jewish community in the Land, since it also helps achieve spiritual perfection (especially agriculture), by refining the sole in toil. Additionally, they viewed the Land of Israel as earned not by blood or money, but rather by a rigorous attachment to its clods.²²

R. Reines did not confront this issue explicitly, yet I believe he was aware of it and acted accordingly.

R. Reines was evidently aware of the spread of the ideational fervor of his times; the approach he put forth was a theological reply intended for the observant religious community. I should note that in the context of the present research, “work” refers to material labor. “Work” as a term in texts associated with the religious tradition typically denotes “the service of God.” However, in this paper the meaning is work quite literally understood, as in the life of people who get up in the morning and go to “work.”²³

1. The Yeshiva of “Torah V’Da’at [and Knowledge]”

In order to begin to appreciate R. Reines’ approach to labor, we must turn to one of his earliest projects: establishing a special Torah academy where secular studies were to be pursued side by side with the sacred.²⁴

R. Reines recognized the fact that many young Jews were interested in general studies as the gateway to economic opportunity. General studies were not pursued in the traditional yeshiva world; they remained the prerogative of the gymnasia and the universities. The problem from the point of view of the traditional community and the Rabbis was that many of the young people heading for these institutions of higher education abandoned Torah observance. In their eyes, the traditional Torah world appeared archaic, by contrast with the Enlightenment and the Haskalah movement, which stood for progress and openness. The traditional Jewish world and the surrounding milieu seemed to many minds to be mutually exclusive and in conflict with each other. Young Jews were faced with making an Either–Or choice. The option of holding onto both was not available. R. Reines was of the opinion that

²⁰ See Marx (1935); idem, *Capital* (Chicago, 1952); Avineri (1965); *Kitve yad kalkaliyim-filosofiyim [Philosophical-Economic Manuscripts]*.

²¹ For the Second Aliyah, see Bartal et al. (1997). This notional framework eventually became significant for the ideology espoused by the kibbutz movement in Israel. See Tufal and Rosner (1993).

²² See: Shapira (1977).

²³ “Labor,” “skilled work,” and “travail” in the present paper refer to material work. “Travail” means physical effort aimed at achieving a goal. I will use the term to refer to manual labor or actively engaging in physical work. There is, in fact, a theological [It’s fine. It comes from the word Theurgy] approach, according to which a person engaged in Torah and the Commandments in this world is thereby taking part in the construction of supernal worlds. Such, for instance, is the position of R. Chaim from Volozhin in his *Nefesh ha-chaim [Soul of Life]*. The present article does not address spiritual construction of this type; my focus is rather on material work.

²⁴ The present article refers to the notion of the sacred in the sense of all elements bound up with the Jewish religious tradition and its values as accepted among people observing the Torah and the Commandments, particularly within the framework of the religious and rabbinic worldview of 19th-century Eastern Europe.

the study of Torah and secular knowledge complement each other; he accordingly planned to found a yeshiva within whose walls both secular studies and sacred Jewish subjects would be taught.²⁵

In 1881, R. Reines published a book called *Chotem tokhnit [Sealing a Program]*, in which he leveled severe criticism at the teaching and learning methods of the traditional yeshivas and the way of life in ultra-Orthodox society.²⁶ In his view, these were the factors responsible for the religious crisis of Eastern Europe. He proposed setting up a yeshiva with a new curriculum of study as a response to the Enlightenment and as a means of social improvement. With this aim, he met with prominent rabbinic leaders, such as R. Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor, R. Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, and R. Joseph Dov Halevi Soloveitchik, working to persuade them to lend their support to the initiative of introducing the study of language and general subjects into the yeshiva establishment, propounding putting the pursuit of secular and sacred studies side by side. He expected this to make the yeshiva establishment attractive to the young men seeking qualification in “external types of wisdom” so as to earn a living.²⁷

The proposal was rejected. The ultra-Orthodox leadership wielded considerable power, and thwarted any move that went counter to its values. The opposition notwithstanding, R. Reines established his yeshiva in Svintsyán (Švenčionys today)²⁸; the yeshiva closed a short time later. In 1905, R. Reines repeated the attempt, establishing a yeshiva along similar lines in the town of Lida, in what is today Belarus; the yeshiva operated until 1920. It bore the name of “*Torah va-da’at*” [“Torah and Knowledge”], a symbolic reference to the innovation it heralded in contrast to the traditional academies of learning. In his “Presentation of Issues Concerning the New Yeshiva,” R. Reines explained its purpose in this way:

A new yeshiva needs to be founded! A yeshiva which will show young people their path in life, which will set a determinate and clear objective before itself, which will prepare young people to be members of the Yishuv [settled community] . . . which will provide them with an honorable and easily sufficient means of procuring a living, and will make them into complete human beings who know where they are going . . . and the value which their work bears.²⁹

This needs to be taken note of: the yeshiva would prepare its students for a life of work and earning a living, making them into “complete human beings.” Elsewhere R. Reines defines secular studies as “comprehensive studies which are required for a human being insofar as one is human, Reines (1913)” so that they should be included in the very core of the curriculum of study in a traditional academy of learning. A complete human being, then, as per R. Reines’ approach, must not only steep himself in Torah, but also in work.

Beyond the idea of human completeness, R. Reines’ words are also indicative of a pragmatic grasp of the need for entrenching secular studies in the yeshiva curriculum.³⁰ This finds its expression in the way he states the yeshiva’s objectives:

The yeshiva sets itself the goal of providing for the students’ livelihood, for “where there is no livelihood, there is no Torah.” For this it has in advance seen it right to structure the curriculum in such a way as to ensure that anyone completing the yeshiva’s program of

²⁵ Salmon (1971) [“The Beginning of Reform in Eastern European Yeshivas: The Efforts of R. Reines during the Eighties of the Last Century”], *Molad* 4 (Salmon 1971) [Heb.], pp. 161–72.

²⁶ Orthodox Judaism is the system of belief that subscribes to the belief in Sinaitic revelation to the Jewish People as a whole, and propounds observance of Torah law as interpreted by the Talmud and later rabbinic texts. The ultra-Orthodox (or Haredim), is a term referring to a broad spectrum of groups within Orthodox Judaism, all characterized by a rejection of modern culture. The Haredim regard themselves as the most religiously authentic form of Judaism. See: Brown (2017).

²⁷ *Hatsfira*, vol. 29 (1882) [Heb.], p. 229; for reform in education in the diaspora, see also: Salmon (2006).

²⁸ is the Yiddish version of the historic town’s name; the town’s population was up to half Jewish prior to WWII. The Polish, Belarussian, and Lithuanian versions of the name all differ slightly. *Translator’s note*.

²⁹ 4th of Nissan, 5665 (1905). See also: Fishman-Maimon and Leib (1946), “The Principles Guiding the Yeshiva and Its Studies.”

³⁰ For the pragmatism in his thought, his project, and his relationship with Zionism, see: (Don-Yichya 1983; Tzvi Nehorai 1985; Schwartz 2004).

study should have at his disposal the appropriate means for securing his position in life, whether in rabbinics . . . or by working as a teacher, whether in Talmudic learning or in Hebrew studies.³¹

The guiding principle is, “Where there is no livelihood, there is no Torah.” However, not only for the sake of training to become a rabbi or a teacher, but also for many other professions as well:

And similarly does the yeshiva pave the way in general studies for those who would be merchants, storekeepers, contractors, officials in commercial enterprises, and the like. For now have the times changed and the era become different, with each and every one of life’s concerns requiring some secular knowledge, knowledge of the language of the state, knowledge of arithmetic and the like, with all these types of knowledge being to a certain extent acquired by the students of this yeshiva.³²

For those interested in achieving a level up to par in commerce, the yeshiva opened a special concentration to outfit them with the necessary tools:

The yeshiva needs to open a special department for those desiring to devote themselves to commerce, that they may there study the body of Jewish traditional law needed for daily living, and that they may perfect their mastery of the language and the various kinds of knowledge requisite for them as merchants and active doers.³³

The yeshiva, then, would prepare its students for all kinds of work, in either the sacred or the secular field. This involvement with the world of matter would enable every student to earn a living, enhancing his natural ability or desire.

Beyond the pragmatism of establishing a yeshiva and its curriculum of study, there was also a guiding theology.³⁴ R. Reines believed that the Torah is not only the “Word of God,” but that it is also the “Spirit of the Holy One, Blessed Is He.”³⁵ Hence, “without the Torah, the world would be chaos.”³⁶ Following this train of thought, R. Reines articulates the claim that the human being has a double purpose in his world: one is a theoretical end, the study of Torah and “extending his knowledge of Divinity”³⁷; the other is an ethical end, meaning the achievement of human perfection, “attaining completeness by means of involvement in the Torah.”³⁸ As per R. Reines’ view, the two ends, the theoretical and the ethical, complement each other, forming a single totality, and so define the human being as ascending a ladder that “has no highest rung.”³⁹ Extending knowledge of God requires “greater worship of Him, as well,” which, in turn, intensifies the knowledge.⁴⁰ Mutual influence powers this.

This defines the purpose of the human being and the double nature of human laboring—the theoretical and the ethical—as the ultimate end of creation, insofar as “the principal and ultimately purposed creation is Man,”⁴¹ in connection with which “supernal forces” are embedded in the human being.⁴² Man can thus become “the crown of perfection” if he externalizes the potential concealed

³¹ R. Reines, *The Two Luminaries*, pp. 24–25.

³² Ibid. R. Reines, *The Two Luminaries*, pp. 24–25.

³³ Ibid. R. Reines, *The Two Luminaries*, pp. 24–25.

³⁴ See (Shapira 2003).

³⁵ K571, 9b. This is the pagination system used in the manuscripts that are housed in the R. Kook Institute’s “Yehudah” Library.

³⁶ K568, Part B, 38b. R. Reines thus adopts the traditional view, according to which the Torah quite literally maintains the universe in existence. “If it were not for the Torah, the heavens and the Earth would not abide” (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 32a).

³⁷ K571, 10b.

³⁸ Ibid. K571, 8b.

³⁹ Ibid K571, 10b.

⁴⁰ Ibid K571., 11a.

⁴¹ K595, 65.

⁴² K571, 8.

deep within him and brings it from potentiality to actuality. This potential, according to R. Reines, the human being can also externalize by means of scientific and technological achievement:

The Creator of Man and his Maker fashioned this nature in him: to strive to reveal new and inaccessible things, which is one of the supernal powers created in Man . . . This supernal power has enriched the scientific universe with great plenty . . . by means of it he has risen to the heavens . . . by means of it do they descend into the depths . . . to be of help to their contemporaries and to bring them in their wake.⁴³

These disciplines are not studied as part of the traditional yeshiva curriculum, and so they cannot be taken advantage of or even discovered. They will be able to manifest themselves in reality, according to R. Reines, precisely when a new yeshiva is established, with a curriculum of study encompassing secular studies, as well, in order to draw forth from the possible into the actual the ability latent within tradition-observing students who would have an impact on all: themselves, their people, and the entire world, whether in a physically tangible or in a spiritual way.⁴⁴ The yeshiva would not only outfit its students with the wherewithal for earning a salary, but would also equip them “with all the types of knowledge which make their possessor comely”⁴⁵ both as a Jew and as a human being, as a part of theological learning at once particularistic and universal.

R. Reines’ ideas formed a novelty against the backdrop of the rabbinic landscape of his day, considering that most rabbinic authorities in Eastern Europe maintained that the human being has one purpose, which is the study of Torah.⁴⁶ Even if one should claim that humanity has a number of purposes, it was clear to the Rabbis that these purposes would all be realized exclusively by means of the study of Torah and steeping oneself in its Commandments. Contrasting with this, as per R. Reines’ approach, man will realize his double purpose, both by means of the study of Torah and by secular study, through Torah and through work.

In short: establishing the yeshiva with the new curriculum of study that integrates the sacred with the secular, “comprehensive studies which are required for a human being insofar as one is human,” which would prepare students for a life of work and earnings, will bring students to the condition of “complete human beings,” both from the pragmatic and the theological point of view.⁴⁷

2. The Land of Israel: Conquest, Settlement, Redemption and Labor

R. Reines’ understanding of work can be further pieced together from a study of the Commandment of settling the Land of Israel in his teaching; he connects settlement of the Land with the notion of Redemption and the acceleration of this by means of working in the Land.⁴⁸ R. Reines saw the Hovevei Zion and Zionism⁴⁹ as the great annunciation of renewal for the Jewish settlement developing at the time in the Land of Israel.⁵⁰ He called for financial support for the Zionist movement and for material construction in the Land and the Jewish community living in it (Reines 1959).

R. Reines saw the conquest of the Land of Israel as a Commandment of Biblical standing, as per the approach espoused by Nachmanides.⁵¹ Hence, the Land of Israel must be taken by means of settling in it and tilling its soil.

⁴³ Ibid. K571

⁴⁴ See also his statements and his vision: *Levanon* [Lebanon], 1882, vol. 7, p. 52.

⁴⁵ *Hatsfira*, vol. 29 (1882), p. 228.

⁴⁶ Evidently, there were opinions on both sides of the divide, but this was the position assumed by most Rabbis. For other approaches to the issue, see: Levin (in note 14 above), pp. 13–38.

⁴⁷ See also: (Lindell 2009).

⁴⁸ For the Land of Israel in his teaching and the connection to the issue of Redemption, see: (Reines 1888; Harvey 2004).

⁴⁹ See: Shapira, *Hagut, halakha, ve-tziyonut—al 'olamo ha-ruchani shel ha-rav yitzhak ya'akov raynes* [Thought, Halakha, and Zionism], pp. 113–26, for the connection between Zionism and Redemption.

⁵⁰ See: R. Reines, *Shnei ha-meorot* [The Two Luminaries], p. 48.

⁵¹ Reines (1890); Nachmanides’ *Hassagot le-sefer ha-mitzvot shel ha-rambam* [Objections to the Book of the Commandments by Maimonides], Commandment 4; see also: Reines (1926), for the Commandment of Conquest of the Land and the understanding of the notion of “conquest.”

In his view, the Land of Israel is the Land of the Holy, the holiness consisting in two elements: "(A) in the sanctity of the place; (B) in the sanctity of the inhabitants." Concerning the sanctity of the place, he writes: "There are certain places in the Land of Israel which are in themselves suffused with especial holiness." For instance, only in these locations can sacrifices be offered or the heave-offering and foodstuffs which have been made sacred be partaken of. R. Reines connected between the Land and its Jewish inhabitants. In his view, the Jewish settlers are the ones imbuing the Land with sanctity, so that only in their presence do the Commandments apply to it:

For the inhabitants infuse the place with sanctity of a kind . . . the place which they hold onto and settle . . . for this reason did especial sanctity adhere to it . . . and this when Israel has control and rule over the Land, for then is the Land theirs, for then does the spirit of Israel rest upon the Land to the point where the Land becomes bound by the obligations pertaining to it (Reines 1946).

The sanctity of the Land of Israel is, in R. Reines' view, an arresting interaction of ontology and legality. It is ontological, on the one hand, for the Land is in effect sacred: "certain places . . . which are in themselves suffused with . . . holiness"; yet on the other hand, only when "does the spirit of Israel rest upon the Land," then "the Land becomes bound by the obligations pertaining to it," meaning that the Halakhic status of the Land of Israel necessarily partakes of both elements, the land itself and those living in it; it is they that till its soil and rule it. In the absence of either one of these elements, there is no "Land of Israel" in the religious–Halakhic–Torah sense.

R. Reines' statement about work in the Land of Israel can be made sense of in light of these considerations. In his view, work in the Land of Israel is capable of bringing and preparing the People of Israel for the fulfillment of its purpose and destiny as designated by the Torah:

Only this Land has the capacity for the tilling of the soil, to feed those tilling it faithfully, and therefore . . . the Children of Israel who are destined to accept the Torah built upon settling the Land and tilling the soil will achieve their goal and their purpose only in this Land of Israel, when they steep themselves in work desired and worthy, the working of the soil; and without this Land and work they will not be able to achieve the true goal and purpose . . . ⁵²

Work, then, provides the ability to earn a livelihood, "to feed those tilling it faithfully," but it also does a great deal more besides; this is a special facet of tilling the soil, which we will elaborate on in what follows and is, as per R. Reines' approach, the way to bring the Children of Israel to "their goal and their purpose." He goes so far as to stress that "without this Land and work they will not be able to achieve the true goal and purpose." Work, then, is endowed with a double significance, both utilitarian and theological, whether on the level of the individual or the level of the Jewish social whole.

It should then come as no surprise that in a sermon delivered in the summer of 1883, "when a messenger arrived from the committee established for the settlement of the Holy Land," R. Reines spoke to the congregation about "future Redemption," appealing to the Talmudic statement that connects the Messiah with agricultural produce in the Land of Israel: "Said R. Abba: You have no end of days more obviously revealed than this, as it is said: 'But you, O mountains of Israel, your branches will you shoot forth and your fruit will you bear for my people Israel, for they have drawn near to come.'"⁵³ That is, when it is apparent that the Land of Israel is bearing its fruit, no sign more explicit than this is possible of the Messiah's imminent arrival. R. Reines argues that the Land of Israel is producing fruit before our very eyes, a sign of the imminence of Redemption after centuries of desolation. "The Land was only waiting for its children, for until that time it did not yield its produce, as if forcibly restraining all its forces within itself, so as not to let strangers enjoy them."⁵⁴

⁵² R. Reines, *Netzach yisrael [The Eternal of Israel]*, p. 46.

⁵³ Bavli, Sanhedrin 98a.

⁵⁴ MS K 585 Part B, Sheets 25 26.

In sum, the Jewish Yishuv working in the Land of Israel halakhically fashions the Land, provides a living for the working Jew, and is an expression of the Redemption of Israel and the Messiah.

3. Activeness

To track his views on work more closely, we need to examine R. Reines' position vis-à-vis the *via activa* as such. This is because for R. Reines, the issue of work as an individual concern is bound up with the question of Redemption for the People as a whole, with human activeness taking on a special significance in this connection.

A stance based on activeness was a rarity in the rabbinic setting of the day. Following nearly two millennia of exile, passivity had perforce become part of the Jewish mindset, to the point where it was granted a theological status by Orthodox leaders.

To make the daring and the innovativeness of R. Reines' call for activism more evident, let us consider the words of R. Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth rabbinic head and spiritual leader of Lubavitch Chassidism and a contemporary of R. Reines, as well as the key proponent of passivity. According to R. Schneersohn, any active human undertaking aimed at achieving deliverance, regardless of the identity of the initiator, is destined to fail. This is due to the fact that all Redemption through human effort, even if successful, is bound to be partial and temporary, incomplete, and barred from eternity. This is true, in R. Schneersohn's view, even when the people spearheading the deliverance are Moses and Aharon themselves:

For even the deliverance which was brought about by Moses and Aharon was not complete; once again they resumed [the Jewish People were subjected by Babylon], and all the more so the deliverance at the hands of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah⁵⁵ [when the Jews were subjected to Greek rule], even though they acted upon the words of Jeremiah and the latter prophets who were then with them. And in this exile we must look forward to our Redemption and our Salvation only by the Holy One Blessed Is He Himself, not by flesh and blood, and our deliverance will be complete (Landa and Rabinowitz 1900).

Now if this was the case with the first redemption from Egypt, led by Moses and Aharon, and with the second, when the return to Zion was led by the later prophets, who—asks R. Schneersohn—would dare attempt a third human-propelled deliverance? As per his approach, we must do nothing but await the complete Redemption, the one that will be brought about only by the “Holy One Blessed Is He Himself,” with no human interference. Then will “our deliverance be complete.” It thus becomes evident that activism of any kind will not only be of no use, but is negative and damaging.

R. Schneersohn was not content with simply ruling out practical activism; he went so far as to issue a severe prohibition against earnestly praying for the coming of the Messiah, for an element of “hastening the end” is part of earnest entreaties for the Redeemer's arrival. “It is also impermissible to hasten the end—to multiply entreaties for this,⁵⁶ and all the more so by tangible powers and stratagems.”⁵⁷ No less. These ideas, published in 1900, were very influential among rabbis and spiritual rabbinic leaders, who subsequently saw human-initiated action—Zionism in particular—as a severe theological problem.

R. Reines, by contrast, upheld activism, both of the collective kind, aiming to achieve the deliverance of Israel, and individualistic, such as the obligation of the human being to take initiative in order to sustain one's family; he went so far as to connect Redemption of the collective kind with

⁵⁵ It is unclear why R. Schneersohn brings up Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in this discussion, considering that they were not part of the return to Zion. The connection that he establishes between them and Jeremiah the Prophet is also hard to understand. Perhaps he meant Haggai, Malachi, and Zechariah. Be that as it may, his overall message is clear: perfect passivity.

⁵⁶ Based on Rashi's commentary on Ketubbot 111a, s.v. “that they should not make distant the end.”

⁵⁷ Landa and Rabinowitz, p. 57.

the duty of ensuring personal sustenance. As per his view, there is, indeed, a binding “obligation to believe in Redemption, which is incumbent upon the Jew,” yet

This notion . . . does nothing to release him from some action to achieve . . . that in matters of human needs and wants . . . there is, besides, a moral duty to seek one’s sustenance by natural effort and human designs . . . it is hence self-understood that similar to the hope of Redemption . . . there is no doing away with natural designs which appear capable of hastening it (Reines 1899).

If this is the case, then just as man is obligated to be active to provide food for his household, with nobody even raising the specter of the possibility of decrying the effort and active endeavor that this involves, so, too, in connection with Redemption of the collective kind, according to R. Reines; this runs perfectly counter to the passive ideology widespread among the rabbinic leadership of Eastern Europe during this period. In R. Reines’ words, a Jew must trust in Redemption (Reines 1999), but this faith does not compel him to passivity. The possibility is real—and even obligatory—as per R. Reines’ approach, to take action in all possible ways in order to attain the Redemption Judaism believes in. “The hope for deliverance should not obstruct the way of searching and endeavoring.”⁵⁸

To sum up, R. Reines calls for activism as an essential element bound up with the conquest of the Land of Israel; he calls for political activism to advance the creation of a Jewish homeland; he calls for activism with regard to national deliverance; and he calls for activism in connection with work and making a living on the level of the individual.

4. Agricultural Work vis-à-vis Commerce

While R. Reines ascribes great significance to labor overall, there are, from his point of view, some types of work that are superior compared with others he sweepingly rejects.

The primary occupation for many Jews in the diaspora was trade.⁵⁹ R. Reines understood that productive types of labor would need to be engaged in in order to build a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel, especially tilling the soil, which he saw as the preferable type of work from the point of view of the Torah. He therefore criticized commerce, decrying it in resoundingly absolute terms. R. Reines refers to commerce as “the world of falsehood,” insofar as commerce is typically connected with loans and interest. Based on the Torah’s vehement opposition to charging interest, R. Reines concludes that the Torah is opposed to engaging in trade altogether and that commerce is “a disgrace in its eyes”; even “the spirit of commerce is an abomination in its eyes.” Later in the same text he proclaims that “people committed to trade resemble idolaters!”⁶⁰

By contrast with his disparaging view of commerce, R. Reines has a very positive notion of working the soil. This is right as, per his way of thinking, both from the personal point of view of the person engaged in tilling the soil, “whose masters lead a life of delight . . . enjoyment and respite are the share of their lot,” and from the point of view of the Torah:

Would not all those knowledgeable in the Torah see that nearly all its extant statutes are constructed upon the tilling of the soil! The holidays and appointed times are bound up

⁵⁸ R. Reines, *Or chadash ‘al tziyon [New Light upon Zion]*, pp. 230–31; *Sefer ha-‘arakhim [The Book of Values]*, p. 231. For more on this topic, see Nehorai (1999).

⁵⁹ See Tratkower (1964).

⁶⁰ R. Reines, *Or chadash ‘al tziyon [New Light upon Zion]*, p. 200. As we have seen, R. Reines established a department specializing in commercial training at the yeshiva that he founded; here, by contrast, he opposes this in very strong terms. To achieve an integrated understanding of his ideas, we should note, first of all, that his position changed in the course of time. Founding his yeshiva was in response to social challenges; it was this that led to the introduction of secular studies—and the study of commerce in particular—as part of the yeshiva curriculum. Later, when he became actively involved in the project of realizing the religious Zionist ideal, R. Reines spoke out against accepting commerce as a fitting profession for Jews living in the Land of Israel. Second, at his yeshiva students were taught ways to engage in commerce in accordance with Torah law, specifically targeting those students who were interested in commerce as a profession, considering that this was extremely common among Jews in the Diaspora (see note 33 above).

and integrated with the tilling of the soil. Based on all this, it should be deemed right to decide that the Torah's extreme stringency concerning the charging of interest is only so as to distance the Children of Israel from trade and to accustom them to tilling the soil.⁶¹

To his mind, "there can be no doubt but that the Children of Israel relate to this type of labor not only in an ethical way, but also approach it in a way which is natural."⁶² That is, the Jewish People is, in his view, an agricultural people by its very nature. And if so, then the conclusion follows that "if it were not for this land and this kind of labor, they would not accomplish the goal and the true purpose." Witness here yet another statement tying together the national purpose and labor—in this case, working the land—in order to achieve perfection and realize the ultimate human objective.

5. Summary and Discussion

Let us summarize what has thus far become clear in connection with R. Reines' approach to labor. R. Reines founded a traditional Jewish yeshiva academy, the first of its kind, where secular subjects were studied side by side with the sacred, all as an integral part of the curriculum, in order to enable the yeshiva's students to earn a living "honorably and plentifully," or in the words of the Sages of the Talmud: "Where there is no livelihood, there is no Torah." Yet beyond the pragmatism, according to R. Reines, secular studies have the capacity of making students into "complete human beings,"⁶³ insofar as secular subjects are "comprehensive studies which are required for a human being insofar as one is human."⁶⁴ Not only a utilitarian purpose here, but also independent value—to attain completeness, which secular studies and the ability to go to work fulfill.

The notion of completeness is a powerful element in R. Reines' teaching. However, unlike the view current among the rabbis of his day who held that only the Torah and involvement with the spiritual can lead to perfection of the Jewish kind, in his eyes engaging in labor and in material concerns and issues of this world are essential conditions for attaining human perfection.

R. Reines divided the notion of completeness into four categories, inclusive of spiritual perfection—the intellect and morality, on the one hand; and perfection of the material kind—the body and sustenance, on the other:

When it comes to understanding completeness and what a person has undertaken to achieve the level of true development, the human being should be divided into four parts: A. Perfection of the body, such as prowess, beauty, and the like; B. Perfection of the intellect: what is to be perfected in the intellect, including mundane matters; C. Ethical perfection . . . D. Perfection of possession: to become complete even in worldly possessions, for they, too, are needed for the overall perfection of the human being.⁶⁵

The fact that R. Reines lists the elements of perfection—involvement in matters spiritual side by side with engaging with the material world—as a series: body, intellect, ethics, and possessions, is evidence of that he has no hierarchical approach, as many readers would have expected. He does not place matter below spirit, or discount the material world as a whole; instead, all elements are mutually intertwined, spirit and matter, Torah and labor. Thus his teaching.

It now becomes clear why, with enormous self-sacrifice and paying a heavy personal price, he invested such effort in founding his new yeshiva. Human and Jewish completeness, as understood by him from a Torah perspective, can only be realized in this world and through involvement in this-worldly matters.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid *Or chadash 'al tziyon* [New Light upon Zion], pp. 200–1.

⁶² Reines (1890). Moshe is R. Reines' son, who published his father's letter dated 17th of Tammuz, 5649 (1889).

⁶³ See above, note 28.

⁶⁴ R. Reines, *Shnei ha-meorot* [The Two Luminaries], p. 21.

⁶⁵ R. Reines, *or chadash 'al tziyon* [New Light upon Zion], p. 182.

⁶⁶ R. Reines, *Sefer ha-arakhim* [Book of Values], vol. I, p. 313.

We have shown above that R. Reines was of the opinion that the Jewish People, when dwelling in the Land of Israel and tilling its soil, has a foundational religious–Halakhic significance, insofar as that when laboring in the Land of Israel, the Jewish People creates the Land, halakhically speaking. This creating of the Land of Israel is a sine qua non in the process of Redemption, definitely so when the Land bears its fruit; it is testimony to that the proceeding is right and blessed by God; it is thus the clearest indication of the coming of the Messiah. All this is a direct continuation of R. Reines’ activist approach, which he preached at all times, tying together the endeavor of the individual human being to provide for his household, and the endeavor of the nation to achieve its complete Redemption.

R. Reines’ complex notions were not uttered in a vacuum, but took shape as part of his standing up to the mindset current among Eastern European rabbinic leaders in his day, who upheld passivity; for instance, R. Sholom Dovber Schneerson, who maintained that any activism, even if it should bring about a deliverance of sorts, would be temporary and partial—and thus be something undesirable for us. In R. Schneerson’s opinion, a Jew must await the Messiah, doing nothing to hasten his coming. This leads to the point where R. Schneerson forbids intensive prayer for the coming of the Messiah, because it is impermissible “to hasten the end”—absolute theological passivity. R. Reines, by contrast, preaches activism, which he endows with religious, halakhic, and messianic meaning.

We have also shown that R. Reines saw tilling the soil in particular as the preferable type of labor for the Jew in the Land of Israel, as opposed to engaging in trade. In his opinion, commerce is regarded with total and sweeping negation in the eyes of the Torah, to the point where it is “an abomination in its eyes” and “people committed to trade resemble idolaters!” By contrast, of tillers of the soil he writes, “whose masters lead a life of delight and serenity.”⁶⁷ Beyond the personal benefits that result for the worker of the soil, when lived up to in reality this vision will, according to R. Reines, also benefit the nation as a whole. The people dwelling in Zion will become economically more robust, thus becoming a stronger group among the nations of the world, and so better able to attain other national goals.⁶⁸ He saw the success of the agricultural settlements in the Land of Israel as a divine message and as proof that, in fact, this is the way of the Torah and this the special capacity of the Jewish People.⁶⁹

The thought of R. Reines, who was one of the molders of religious Zionist theology, needs to be understood as an approach that was formulated against the backdrop of modern Orthodoxy⁷⁰ as initiated by R. Samson Raphael Hirsch in Germany. R. Reines was very impressed by the practical measures and achievements of R. Hirsch,⁷¹ who, in order to save Germany’s Jews from abandoning Jewish tradition, articulated the teaching of “Torah together with the way of the land,”—“to confirm religion with life, for he showed them that one can be a faithful Jew, even be considered ultra-Orthodox, and at the same time fulfill all the requirements of life.”⁷² Yet R. Reines was of the opinion that this attitude was not fitting for the Jews of Eastern Europe. R. Reines took it upon himself to fit Torah together with life, even enabling the fit with the characteristic features of Eastern European Jewry. He did not discuss modernity or advise attending an academy; instead, he introduced a clear theology that upheld integrating matter with spirit and Torah with labor, all while cooperating with the Zionist movement and its enterprises in the Land of Israel.

It was evident to R. Reines that he needed to measure up to the challenge of the criticism that had been leveled at him in connection with the idea of collaborating with secular Zionists. He argued in response, “I saw that departing [from the Zionist movement] would not only fail to bring about any benefit of a religious nature, but would also cause religious damage . . . and there is hope that the

⁶⁷ R. Reines, *Or chadash ‘al tziyon [New Light upon Zion]*, p. 200–1.

⁶⁸ See Bat-Yehudah, p. 206.

⁶⁹ R. Reines, *Netzach yisrael [The Eternal of Israel]*, p. 45.

⁷⁰ Modern Orthodoxy is a movement within Orthodox Judaism that seeks to integrate Jewish values and observance of Jewish law with active acceptance of the changes and the challenges associated with living in the modern world. See: Gordon (2012).

⁷¹ See R. Reines, *Shnei ha-meorot [The Two Luminaries]*, pp. 45–50.

⁷² Ibid. *Shnei ha-meorot [The Two Luminaries]*, p. 47.

Mizrachi will yet manage to improve a number of things.⁷³ Fashioning the religious Zionist theology, a material–spiritual theology embracing the integration of Torah and labor, enabled R. Reines to meet objections; he thus gave a theological answer to the challenges and the criticisms directed at him by the Orthodox world.

To sum up: R. Reines' positive attitude to work and making the wasteland fit for tilling and habitation addresses a number of issues on a number of planes: benefit for the individual—the ability of man to provide for his family; Halakha (Jewish traditional law)⁷⁴—labor provides a foundation for the existence of the Land of Israel in both Halakha and practice; and theology—an approach that sees in the Torah and in divine revelation a complex union involving matter and spirit, rather than spirit alone, thus making it incumbent upon a Jew to engage in work in order to achieve human and Torah completeness. In addition, as R. Reines would argue, through work we assist and even cause Redemption to be achieved in this world, as part of a religious obligation and as part of uniting with God in bettering the condition of the Jewish People.⁷⁵

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⁷³ Ibid. *Shnei ha-meorot [The Two Luminaries]*, p. 19.

⁷⁴ "Halakha" is the accepted term for Jewish religious law derived from the Written Torah and Talmudic and rabbinic texts.

⁷⁵ I must note one point. In this article we were introduced to R. Reines' positive attitude towards work, and especially in the Land of Israel. One might ask how this position conforms to his support of Herzl's 'Uganda Plan', to establish a Jewish state in Africa (Theodor Herzl was the founder of the Zionist movement)? Schwartz asserts that R. Reines' opinion on Uganda is an example of his pragmatic stance (Schwartz, *Land of Reality and Imagination*, pp. 24–44). As far as R. Reines was concerned, Uganda was meant to be a temporary solution, which should not negate the long-lasting hope to return to the Land of Israel. As Reines wrote: "When we agreed to the African deal we didn't mean, God forbid, to distract our thoughts from Zion, our holy city. On the contrary, we agreed to Africa, thereby we hope to save a decent part of our people and to perfect it both physically and spiritually" (Bat-Yehudah, *Man of Illuminations*, p. 209).

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