The Jewish, Zionist Satan
by Peter Hadar

In *In the Heart of the Seas*, Agnon makes the case that Satan, the benevolent tempter, uses Jewish values to create Zionist values; in promoting Jewish introspection of the evil inclination through doubt in the men, Satan encourages the value of Zionist self-reliance through questioning. In the Jewish Hasidic view, Satan is a benevolent obstacle, in that by testing the men he is able to strengthen their resolve in their pursuit of good deeds. The evil inclination, as described by Agnon, is the anti-Zionist mentality that Satan promotes to lead travelers to be drawn to remaining in the Diaspora. In the introspection of these doubts, the men reinforce their desire to make Aliyah. Satan also promotes Zionist self-reliance in the men by encouraging the questioning of the feasibility of living in Israel, such that they discover greater support for their value. By describing the introspection of the evil inclination as the predecessor to Zionist self-reliance, Satan is able to demonstrate that Jewish principles beget Zionist tenets.

Contrary to the popular belief of Satan as a demonic figure who seeks to destroy humanity, Judaism interprets Satan as a prosecutor for God who tests humanity with the purpose of strengthening the resolve for doing good deeds. In the Book of Job, when God asked Satan where he had been, the subservient Satan replied that he had come from “wandering and walking about the earth” as an adversary, evaluating the deeds of mankind (*The Stone Edition Tanach*, Job 1:7). This evaluation is a temptation, that determines the extent of the victim’s resolve; it is seen throughout the Book of Job in Satan’s attempts to show that Job is worthy of God’s praise.
The Zohar, the major source text for Kabbalah, the mystical tradition largely adopted by Hasidic Judaism, builds upon this Biblical viewpoint of Satan. It does so by presenting the evil inclination as an embodiment of Satan that acts like a "prostitute sent by the king to seduce his son" (Volozhiner 228). Although this is interpreted by some as a mark of Satan’s cruelty, this does not fit with the narrative in the Book of Job. In fact, Satan remains subservient to God and acts as his Chief Prosecutor in Heavenly Court; although the prosecutor tempts the defendant, deep down the “evil inclination does not want to succeed in seducing man” so as to reveal God’s faith in humanity as well-founded (Volozhiner 228). Satan, through tempting people to lead them astray, is secretly supporting the accused by strengthening their resolve.

Heavily influenced by the Hasidic culture of Eastern Europe, Agnon uses this concept of Satan as a benevolent tempter to depict Satan as promoting the evil inclination in the men through doubt, so as to force its introspection in order to strengthen the men’s resolve in their journey to the Land of Israel. Initially, when the men first set upon their journey, “Satan came along and stood in the way and asked them, where are you traveling?” (Agnon 30). In acting as an obstacle and questioning the destination the men are travelling towards, Satan is encouraging doubt as to the true desire of the voyage. However, this can be interpreted more innocently, simply as Satan representing “wanting to live on good terms with the evil inclination” through asking a friendly question and not the evil inclination of remaining in the Diaspora. Yet this is not the case, since it is known that if a “Jew wishes to go up to the Land if Israel, Satan immediately gets in his way and does not permit him to do so,” confirming Satan as the harbinger of the evil inclination of remaining in the Diaspora and not of good
tidings to make Aliyah (Agnon 34, 32). Satan presents himself as an obstacle in their way and seeks to sow the first doubts, acting as an evil inclination, to their desire to journey to the Land of Israel.

The men begin to understand that the Satan’s promotion of the evil inclination is an opportunity for introspection through their discussions about Satan, arriving at the thought that, although “the inclination to evil deserves to be hated, but [they] do not hate it; for all the merits [they] may have, come to [them] from the inclination to evil” (Agnon 33). It is through this introspection, into the nature of the evil inclination, that Satan leads them to consider a way to surpass the evil inclination to remain in the Diaspora; it is only through the examination of the evil inclination that the men are able to overcome their doubts surrounding their desire to make Aliyah and “proceed to the Land of Israel” with even greater resolve, “like they who go to synagogue, and are duty-bound to run” (Agnon 32, 32). However, it can be said that this introspection of the evil inclination was meant “only to delay them, so that while they engaged in business to make money with which to live comfortably in the Land of Israel, their souls would depart,” and is meant to promote remaining in the Diaspora at the expense of making Aliyah, an opposite function (Agnon 32). Yet this is not the case, since Jews must “prepare [themselves] on the way in order to enter the Land of Israel with a clear mind” (Agnon 58). This clear mind, free of the nagging doubts of the evil inclination, can only be achieved through introspection to achieve the merits that “come to [them] from the inclination to evil.” Satan promotes the evil inclination by forming doubts to desist from their journey to the Land of Israel with the hope that the creation of the introspection of the evil inclination will strengthen their resolve to travel.
It can also be seen that Satan, in his role as an adversary, encourages Zionist self-reliance in the men by allowing for the questioning of the feasibility of living in Israel, helping the men discover stronger support for this value. In their journey to the Land of Israel, the men are often beset with doubts as to the feasibility of their plan. However, they agree that “should not a man in Israel make preparations?” (Agnon 75). In the Zionist attempt to reach the Holy Land, the men recognize the importance of remaining self-sufficient. Yet Satan plays the role of the adversary secretly yearning for the correct path when it asks the men to “stay in [their] place and serve [their] Creator with all the other decent householders, until the time comes for [them] to go up” to Israel (Agnon 75). This opinion appears to directly contradict the value of Zionist self-reliance; by remaining in the Diaspora, the men are not in control of their own fates and must wait solely on the mercy of God to achieve their goals. The men become suspicious and question Satan as to how “now that [we] have sold [our] house[s], do you come and advise [us] not to go?” (Agnon 75). Through questioning, these men are able to recognize Satan’s secret yearning for them to succeed and gain support for their belief in self-sufficiency, since Satan had proclaimed before that “Happy is the man who dwells in the Land of Israel and does not need to be supported by the Holy Cities,” a clear support for Zionist self-sufficiency which the men accept (Agnon 31). Through the questioning of the feasibility of the Zionist value of self-sufficiency, Satan allows for the men to gain more support for their value to proceed to Israel.

In subscribing a relationship to the Jewish introspection of the evil inclination and Zionist self-sufficiency, **Satan demonstrates that Jewish values form the backbone of Zionist principles.** In a parable referencing Satan’s temptations, the men relate that
God “invites those who love him to ascend to the Land of Israel. Is there anything lacking in the house of the King?” (Agnon 33). Although it may be argued that love of God is not related to the introspection of the evil inclination, this is not the case. Love of God is generally presented in a Jewish ritual context, in the form of blessing “his great Name by the study of Torah, with songs and praise,” which are part and parcel of Jewish prayer services (Agnon 33). The word “to pray” in Hebrew, לְהַתְפַּלֵּל, is a reflexive verb which most accurately means “to judge oneself. This form of introspection, in which one’s good and bad deeds are judged, including the extent of one’s evil inclination, is a Jewish ritual that precedes Zionist self-sufficiency, indicating that introspection is a Jewish value. The primary reason, the prerequisite for making Aliyah, is described in the text as due to love of God, not due to the self-sufficiency and abundance of the Land of Israel. Although these two ideas are tied together, as indicated by the parable, those who love the Lord are like the “wise ones” who “came at once, saying does the king lack anything in his palace?” (Agnon 32). The argument for Zionist self-sufficiency builds upon the Jewish rationale for making Aliyah, based on introspection; the wise ones came at once, out of love of God (introspection) and only then mentioned the abundance of the land. The presence of the Jewish value is shown to be tied in with the appearance of the Zionist value. However, it can be argued that since “fools tarry at home until they fill their pockets with money,” Zionist self-sufficiency is ridiculed and does not provide evidence for going up to the land. (Agnon 33). Yet the fool is one who is not introspective, and therefore would be unable to express the Zionist value of self-sufficiency as well; in demonstrating the lack of the Zionist value in the absence of the Jewish value in this situation, in addition to the appearance of the Zionist value in the
presence of the Jewish one, the causal necessity of the Jewish value of introspection as a prerequisite to the Zionist value of self-sufficiency becomes clear. By linking introspection to self-sufficiency, Satan demonstrates that Jewish values, like introspection, serve as a prerequisite to Zionist tenets, like self-sufficiency.

Agnon depicts Satan as a benevolent accuser who encourages introspection of the evil inclination and Zionist self-reliance, through doubt and questioning respectively, to create a causal effect that allows for Judaism to serve as the backbone for Zionism, the stem from which Zionism grows. According to Hasidism, Satan is prosecutor who, in tempting his victims, secretly yearns for the strengthening of their resolve. In Agnon’s novel, Satan tempts the men through the evil inclination, which leads to second thoughts about their journey to the Land of Israel, in an attempt to develop the introspection of the evil inclination that can strengthen their resolve to travel. Similarly, Satan tempts the men with the infeasibility of living in Israel to encourage questioning, leading them to discover greater support for Zionist self-sufficiency. In linking both of these together, Satan demonstrates that Jewish values lead to Zionist values.

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