

A Man of Peace: In Memory of Hayim Katsman (1991 – 2023)

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Hayim Jeshurun Katsman, a brilliant academic, intellectual, educator, musician, mechanic, gardener, and peace activist, was born to his parents Hannah and Daniel on October 4, 1991. Tragically, his life was cut short when he was murdered in Kibbutz Holit on October 7, 2023. His loss leaves a void in the hearts of all who knew him. I had a privilege of knowing Hayim in recent years, and together we published an article in this journal. In the following lines, I would like to briefly present the character of this remarkable individual.

Engaged in political theology, sociology of religion, and modern Jewish thought, Dr. Katsman was an expert in the study of religious Zionism, the extreme right, and the ultra-Orthodox movement in Israel. He conducted extensive field research and offered several important research innovations in this rich field. His academic journey began in 2014 at the Open University of Israel, where he pursued studies in Philosophy and Political Science. He then continued his pursuit of knowledge with a Master's degree in the Department of Politics and Government at the Ben-Gurion University. Under the guidance of Neve Gordon and Dani Filc, he worked on this thesis on "Political Extremism in Israel: The case of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginzburg and Religious-Zionism." His thirst for knowledge led him to complete his Doctorate at the University of Washington's Jackson School of International Studies, where he successfully defended a dissertation, "New Trends in Religious-nationalist Politics in Israel/Palestine", under the guidance of Jim Wellman (chair), Joel Migdal, Liora Halperin, and Christian Novetzke.

Hayim's specific focus on the religious-Zionist movement in Israel showcased his dedication to highlighting its heterogeneity. He developed an innovative

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sociological framework to discuss recent social, ideological, and religious trends within the religious-Zionist sector in Israel. Through meticulous analysis of different religious-Zionist subcultures, he illuminated how the tension between religion and modernity permeates the lives of individuals and communities, offering a fresh perspective on the role of religion in public and private life. In addition to his doctoral studies, Katsman was actively involved in academia, teaching courses on politics, society, and culture. He also served as a teaching assistant for a course on the Holocaust. During this time, he played a pivotal role as the Co-Coordinator of the Israel/Palestine research group at the University of Washington.

Upon completing his doctorate, Katsman returned to Israel, choosing to settle in the southern Kibbutz Holit. At the Kibbutz Holit, he resumed his research on religious Zionism and the ultra-Orthodox movement, contributing to both academic journals and mainstream platforms such as Haaretz newspaper. Additionally, he shared his knowledge and insights as a Lecturer in the Department of Politics and Communication at the Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem.

Outside of academia, Katsman found fulfillment in gardening both in Holit, and the Bedouin town of Rahat. He was actively engaged in political activism, standing in solidarity through participation in demonstrations in Palestinian villages. His contributions to political discourse extended beyond his lifetime, with one of his articles being translated into Hebrew by Lior Sternfeld, and published posthumously by Orly Noy in *Sicha Mekomit* (Local Call).

Known in the DJ scene as "Dr.3ABass", Katsman shared his passion for music across Israel, particularly in what he affectionately referred to as the "natural stage" – towns in the South such as his beloved kibbutz, Holit, Moshav Dekel where he worked as a mechanic, Be'er Sheva, Mitzpe Ramon, and Sderot. His music was a vibrant fusion of Middle Eastern hip-hop, Palestinian electro, Syrian house, and Lebanese techno, incorporating elements of Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish to create a rich and diverse sound experience. On October 6th, he delighted attendees with his DJ skills at a birthday celebration near the Nova Festival before returning home to Kibbutz Holit.

In recent years, Katsman focused his attention on the intricate relationship between religious Zionism and the Israeli conservative movement, particularly through his research involving the "Kohelet" forum and the Tikvah Foundation. He meticulously studied the emergence of Israeli conservatism and extensively explored the significant role played by religious Zionists within its ranks. His thorough analysis of conservatism in Israel revealed that many of its key figures are affiliated with religious Zionism, with a significant portion residing

in settlements. Katsman argued that the disengagement plan from Gaza was experienced as a profound religious Zionism trauma on multiple levels. He demonstrated how this event compelled religious Zionism to adopt a newfound, militant rhetoric and to make its ideological stance more accessible to broader Israeli society. For Katsman, the disengagement lies at the core of the connection between religious Zionism and the Israeli Conservatism. Identifying three key ideological pillars in Israeli conservatism, Katsman highlighted their origins in the fusion of religious Zionism and conservative thought. The first pillar revolves around neo-liberal economics, closely aligned with American conservatism. The second and third pillars stem from Zionist-religious society, encompassing opposition to judicial activism, critiquing the Israeli judicial system's oversight of elected officials, and a commitment to the expansion of the settlement enterprise.

Drawing inspiration from Gramsci, Katsman posited that religious Zionism, by embracing conservatism, is engaged in a struggle to establish an alternative hegemony. He observed efforts to solidify its influence in centers of power and forge political alliances among various social groups, particularly the ultra-Orthodox and secular Israelis. Contrary to initial expectations, Katsman believed the judicial revolution was meant to unfold gradually. While conservative movements initially sought to influence politicians, they ultimately found themselves being influenced by the politicians instead. This unexpected dynamic led the right-wing camp into a struggle that provoked a more potent backlash than anticipated.

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Despite his alignment with the left-wing in Israel and the fact that much of his research focused on subjects associated with the religious right, Hayim earned widespread respect. He embodied a unique blend of firm political convictions alongside a profound understanding of the right-wing milieu from which he emerged, all without diminishing its significance. Guy Ben-Porat, a collaborator on two articles with Hayim, reflected on his approach (my translation):

”As someone raised within this camp (the religious right) who chose a different path, Hayim offers (...) a nuanced perspective on religious Zionism. On one hand, there is critical reflection, both ethically and politically. Yet, on the other hand, there is also a deep comprehension and, notably, respect for the unwavering determination of religious Zionism to lead, and its steadfast refusal to succumb to despair.”

Indeed, it was Hayim's innate humanism that facilitated meaningful interactions with individuals across the spectrum, making his fieldwork particularly exceptional. His research subjects felt genuinely heard and understood, as he endeavored to delve into the essence of their beliefs and emotions. Even in instances of strong disagreement, he had a remarkable ability to resonate with their inner worlds through his research. Moshe Koppel, a leading figure in the "Kohelet" forum and advocate for the Israeli judicial reform, shared his impressions of Hayim (my translation):

"While Hayim's viewpoints often diverged from mine, he consistently offered fair and balanced critiques. When I raised several points of contention, he responded thoughtfully. Our exchanges were always respectful and fruitful. This week, a new volume of the *Shofar* journal was released, featuring Hayim's incisive critique of my writings on Zionism and conservatism. True to his brilliance as a writer, the article is both comprehensive and insightful. Oh, how I wish we could have discussed his awaited piece over a cup of coffee, exploring our common ground and our differences (...) Hayim, we planned to meet, but sadly, it never came to pass. My deepest regrets."

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In a seamless integration of diverse areas of expertise and professions, as well as in his interactions with various communities – Israelis and Palestinians, left-wing and right-wing individuals – Hayim saw no inherent contradiction. Rather, his endeavors were consistently guided by principles of humanism and liberalism. Motivated by curiosity and a profound love for humanity, he endeavored to import elements of Arab culture into Israel through music, acting as a conduit between different worlds. Even in his passing, Hayim embodied the essence of his name, which signifies "life" in Hebrew. During the terrorist attack on Holit, he courageously sought to assist others in escaping harm, ultimately sacrificing himself while shielding his neighbor and two other children from Hamas gunfire.

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In the early months of 2021, while immersed in my research on Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburg, I reached out to Katsman via email, given his thesis focused on Ginsburg. His immediate response and subsequent proposal to meet filled me

with joy. And indeed, we met. Our initial *rendezvous* took place at *Hillel Cafe* on Jaffa Street in Jerusalem, and later, a few weeks on, our dialogue continued at *Bastet Cafe* on Heleni HaMalka Street. I was struck by his intimate knowledge of the key figures in his research and his eagerness to support my own inquiries in any way he could. He facilitated introductions, shared resources, scrupulously reviewed my work, and graciously offered insights from his own research. When an opportunity arose to contribute to *Politics and Religion Journal*, it was evident to us both that a joint article was the natural next step.

During the writing process, as I toiled away on our joint project from my home base in Singapore, Hayim and I maintained our connection through regular Zoom meetings and frequent message exchanges. Hayim had already envisioned our next move, proposing that once our article was published in the *Politics and Religion Journal*, we join forces again to craft another piece expanding on our research, aiming for publication in *Haaretz*. In the weeks leading up to his untimely passing, Hayim embarked on a journey to India, a land he had long dreamed of exploring, and generously shared breathtaking photos of its landscapes with me. Those turned out to be our final exchanges. My message to him "Are you okay?", on the afternoon of October 7, still awaits a response. Despite the shier evil of October 7, I am confident that Hayim would have urged us to cling to hope for peace, even in the face of adversity and the passage of time.

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At the Yarkon Cemetery rests Hayim, his grave marked by an inscribed stone bearing the words: "A Man of Peace."