

**The Development of Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a Religious Observance
In Israel and in the USA, 1948-2005**

SENIOR PROJECT

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Dorit Edut

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I. Introduction and Historical Beginnings

When the *Declaration of Israel's Statehood* was read by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in 1948, Jews everywhere recognized this as a unique historic moment that was filled with great emotion and spirit. Many declared it a miracle, after two thousand years of Exile, after the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, and after the numerous battles fought against tremendous odds by the soldiers and pioneers in Israel during the previous 60 years. Some 200 religious leaders of those times, including the venerable Rabbis Shlomo Goren and Moshe Tzvi Neriah, signed a document in which they publicly declared the establishment of the State of Israel as “the beginning of our Redemption, as foretold by the prophets of Israel –“גְּאֻלַּתְנוּ צְמִיחַת רַאִישֵׁי זְמִינֵנוּ.”¹ The government and the Rabbinate established the 5th of Iyar as a commemoration of this great event, thus giving it both civic and religious recognition. While the secular government of Israel saw this as a chance to celebrate the historic events and reinforce identity with the national symbols and institutions, the Rabbinate and religious groups saw this event as filled with religious meaning and an occasion that merited offering thanks to God. From the outset then, there were two different approaches to Yom Ha’Atzmaut and a certain tension between them which was most evident in the first decades of statehood. This was already hinted at in the signatures on the Declaration of Statehood in which there is no clear mention of any Divine role in the establishment of Israel, except for the wording “*m’toch bitachon ba-Tzur Yisrael*”; yet at least two rabbis signed their names on this document with the inscription “*B’ezrat HaShem Yitbarach.*”² While this paper will mainly focus on the religious approach to Yom Ha’Atzmaut, which itself has many variations, it will also look at the secular approach and how these two are no longer mutually exclusive.

First it is necessary to give a brief description of how Yom Ha’Atzmaut has generally been celebrated in Israel since its inception. There were early attempts to find a model for Yom Ha’Atzmaut in other Jewish holidays and historic events, and one of the first civil laws passed by the Temporary National Council on June 3, 1948 declared Yom Ha’Atzmaut as a *Yom Shabbaton*³. The holiday is preceded immediately by Yom HaZikaron, the Memorial Day for Israel’s Fallen Soldiers, with a siren sounding at sundown to mark the change between the two. The Israeli flag is raised from half-staff to full-staff on Mt. Herzl, where many government officials, military leaders, and various dignitaries are assembled. The President of Israel speaks about the country’s achievements in the past year and a parade of flags from all the branches of the Armed Forces takes place. During the 1950’s and 60’s there were also military parades during the daytime. Then there are twelve torches lit as twelve winners of the Israel Prize are announced, each with an outstanding achievement in a different field of

¹ Arend, Aaron, *Prikey Mehkar L’Yom Ha’Atzmaut*, Bar-Ilan U.Press, 1998, pg.14.

² Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 8

³ Azaryahu, Maoz, *Pulchanei Medina: Hagigat Ha’atzmaut Ve’Hantzachat HaNoflim, 1948-56*, Ben-Gurion University, 1995, pg.93.

endeavor. Outdoor stages in the large cities become the sites for songfests, while people everywhere fill the streets and break out into Israeli folkdances; fireworks flame overhead and festivities continue until late at night. The following day, families generally go on day trips, make picnics and barbecues in the parks, and the Israeli Bible Contest is also held. In the early years, this was also the time when new buildings, streets, and parks were dedicated, and there was a great emphasis on the participation of new immigrants and youth in the formal ceremonies.⁴

Several writers have suggested that the secular formation of the holiday has many elements that derive from Biblical and Jewish religious practices, and can be viewed as part of a civil religion in Israel.⁵ This civil religion, called “statism” by Prof. Eliezer Don-Yehiya, was designed to “imbue the general public with a consciousness of the centrality of the state, and a sense of identification with its goals.”⁶ Yet in designing the rituals for celebration Yom Ha’Atzmaut, government officials could not completely divorce themselves from their Judaic backgrounds. The torch-lighting ceremony in Jerusalem, as well as the mountaintop torch-lighting elsewhere in the country, recall the Biblical custom of announcing the new month this way, and fire and light are considered symbols of renewal and rebirth in Judaism.⁷ The twelve Israel Prize winners find their parallel in the heads of the twelve tribes that Moses assembled often during the Exodus from Egypt, as recounted in the Torah. The Israeli flag itself is designed after the white and blue sections of the traditional *tallit*. The dances and dedications certainly have parallels with Biblical expressions of joy and religious fervor, connected also with other Jewish holidays. Often the connections with other holidays, particularly Pesach and Hanukah, have been clearly made in the speeches which emphasize both the newness of this era as well as its continuity with past Jewish history.⁸ Even the more spontaneous forms of observance, such as the family picnics and trips to the country or historic sites, can be seen as a symbolic reaffirmation of ownership of the land, while the foods chosen often represent a harvest celebration, very much in keeping with Jewish tradition and Biblical practices.

According to Martin Laskin, civil religion shares with traditional religion a belief in transcendence and the emotional power of certain ideas, but its source of authority is that of a governmental or corporate authority, rather than a supernatural power.⁹ Its practices are similar to religious rituals, serving as “reminders” of the power of the central authority and emphasizing loyalty to it. Three stages have been defined in the development of Israel’s civil religion, according to Don-Yehiya and Laskin:¹⁰

⁴ Don-Yehiya, Eliezer, “Festivals and Political Culture: Israel Independence Day Celebrations”, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 1988, pg. 72.

⁵ See Don-Yehiya, E. *op.cit.*, as well as Laskin, Martin, “Secular Holidays in Modern Israel”, *Conservative Judaism*, 46,1,1993.

⁶ Don-Yehiya, E., *op.cit.*, pg. 62.

⁷ Don-Yehiya, E., *op.cit.*, pg. 68-69.

⁸ Don-Yehiya, E., *op.cit.*, pg. 64.

⁹ Laskin, Martin, *op.cit.*, pg. 45.

¹⁰ Laskin, Martin, *op.cit.*, pgs. 47-53

1) The **Zionist Socialist Era**, from 1919-1945, in which the central values were pioneering, manual labor, strict separation of religion and politics, military heroism, asceticism, and nationalism; during this period no major ceremonies or symbols became official ones;

2) The **Statism Era**, from 1948-56, in which the mass immigrations of European Jewish Holocaust survivors and Jews from the Arab countries, as well as the establishment of the State of Israel, led to a decline in Zionist Socialism, replacing it with “statism”; the main values of this period were allegiance to the State instead of to God as traditional Judaism emphasized, a sanctifying of redemption from Exile and from the destruction of the Holocaust, Messianic views of the establishment of Israel as the beginning of the fulfillment of this promised era, negation of the Diaspora, love of the Land and its origins, and the honor accorded any work that strengthened the State. In this period the symbols of the flag, the star of David, and the Menorah became prominent and Yom Ha’Atzmaut became the central holiday, as a secular kind of Rosh HaShana. Other Jewish holidays were also secularized, with the government emphasizing their nationalist themes, and becoming work holidays when families would hold picnics, watch sporting events, visit friends and family or do home improvements, much like the secular holidays in the USA.

3) The **New Civil Religion Era**, from 1956-present, a result of the previous period’s offering symbols and a civil religion with which many could not identify, especially Jews from the Arab countries who generally refused to replace traditional Jewish religious symbols and beliefs with statist ones. The values of this era are the unity of the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora, the importance of preserving Jewish tradition, Israel’s isolation among the nations of the world, and justification of the Zionist claim to the Land especially following the horrific experience and losses during the Holocaust. In this era an addition to the ceremonial celebrations of Yom Ha’Atzmaut was created: the Israel Song Festival. There have also been more attempts to add religious elements to the general observance of the holiday, such as the blowing of the shofar and the reciting of Hallel, but these will be discussed separately in the section on liturgical developments.

During the second developmental period of Israel’s civil religion, the government tried to strengthen the bonds of identification with the State and to unify the different groups. Officials tried to determine just how Yom Ha’Atzmaut would be celebrated, and did not recognize the spontaneous expressions which developed independently among the masses. Some of the government-proclaimed practices became standard, such as hanging flags and decorating building facades; but others, such as the emphasis on the military’s role as demonstrated through exhibits and a military-based parade, became largely obsolete. At the same time, it seems that the public majority did not accept the Rabbinat’s effort to make Yom Ha’Atzmaut into an important religious day and even to create a ceremonial festive meal.¹¹ Halachic debates have arisen over the day’s status as a “holiday,” especially in the first two decades of statehood. Small religious groups, such as the Niturei Karta, live in Israel yet refuse to recognize it as a legitimate Jewish

¹¹ Arend, A. *op.cit.*, pg. 20.

state or homeland because they believe that this will only be fulfilled when the Messiah comes. They have been vigorously opposed to the establishment of the secular State of Israel and at times have openly supported the Arab groups who call for Israel's destruction.

Despite all this, Israel has now survived and prospered as an independent Jewish state for more than 50 years. It has faced crises and wars during this short time, but also many amazing developments. As the second largest center of Jewish population worldwide, it has become a vibrant source for the development of Jewish culture and religion in our times. Therefore, it seems appropriate to take a deeper look at the observance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut: How is it a unique and formative moment in the Jewish people's development? How can Jewish religious practice express deep feelings about this event and the Jewish people's relationship with the Eternal One?

This senior project examines the 56-year development of Yom Ha'Atzmaut's religious observance, both in Israel and in the USA (the largest center of Diasporan Jewry today), and between the various movements in Judaism. A description and an analysis of the liturgy that has been adopted by Jews in Israel and in the USA will pinpoint changes and what these reflect about current attitudes towards Israel. Several halachic issues have emerged from discussions around selecting the appropriate prayers and observances for this day, such as whether or not *Hallel* should be recited, whether other prayers such as *Al Ha-Nissim* or *Shehecheyanu* should be included, which Torah and Haftarah readings if any should be chanted, and whether weddings and other *Sefirah*-prohibited events could be permitted on this day. Rabbinic responsa on these issues are summarized and explained. Since the majority of the Israeli population identifies as secular and does not observe Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a religious or spiritual holiday, it is also important to understand the reasons for this attitude and note if it has changed. A small survey of Israelis— of various ages living both in Israel and in the USA—as well as results from published studies, illuminate this subject.

II. The Development of the Liturgy of Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Historical Influences from 1948-2005

The development of liturgy for Yom Ha'Atzmaut began with individual prayers, then moved into adapting existing worship formats to include special poems and prayers for this day, and finally evolved into the creation of new rituals and religious observances that were entirely devoted to this theme. This process is still ongoing and allows for the different religious groups in Israel and the different movements in Judaism to select the level of observance that suits them best, from a limited to an expansive observance of this holiday.

The first prayer for Yom Ha'Atzmaut was that issued by the Chief Rabbinate in Sept. 1948.¹² It was written for the Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora, and was to be read on Shabbat and Festivals, following the Torah reading. Its authors were originally thought to have been the Chief Rabbis Herzog and Uzziel, but later the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* interviewed the daughter of the famous author and Nobel Prize winner Y. Agnon who had found a manuscript in his handwriting of the entire prayer that was almost identical to the official version. The reason for this interest in its origins is because of the startling line which has caused problems for some religious Jews:

“Bless the State of Israel, the first flowering of our Redemption.”

(*In Hebrew: “גְּאֻלַּתנוּ צְמִיחַת רַאשִׁיטַּת -Raisheet Tzmichat Geulateynu.”*)

In other words, there was a clear attempt here to link the historic event of the establishment of the State with the Messianic expectations held by observant Jews and expressed in the words of our Prophets. This bold move was the subject of much controversy, yet the prayer remains as the main one still used in Israel today, with a modification that was made as follows:

“And send us speedily the son of David, Messiah of Your Righteousness, to eternally redeem us.”

This addition clearly delineated the idea that the State of Israel was not considered as a substitute for a personal Messiah.

As was mentioned earlier, the government took the initiative in designing liturgy and rituals for the citizens to use in the early years, both in order to prevent less substantive forms of observance that might develop among the people from becoming the norm, and to help develop the nationalist spirit, allegiance to the State and unification of the diverse populace. In 1956 the Ministry of Education and Culture published a collection of prayers, readings, songs, and even a special menu for observing Yom Ha'Atzmaut, composed by Yom Tov Levinsky and entitled *Holiday Readings*. It was to be read at a festive meal in the home, and some even called for legislating this into a family holiday, but both the concept and the booklet were not widely accepted.¹³ In an earlier attempt to give expression to the values of Zionism, the government in 1952 commissioned the writing of a *Haggadah* by noted author Aharon Megged, that was originally designed as a project of the Israel Defense Forces Educational and

¹² Schwartz, Barry L., “Praying for Israel: The Liturgical Imbroglia”, *CCAR Journal*, 38,3, 1991, pg. 43.

¹³ Kamen, Charles S., “Affirmation or Enjoyment? The Commemoration of Independence in Israel”, *Jewish Journal of Sociobiology*, 19, 1977, pg. 16

Cultural Branch, and portions of this *Haggadah* were printed in the April 30, 1952 edition of the daily newspaper *Ma'ariv*.¹⁴ While it is formulated like the Pesach *Haggadah*, it was not meant as a means of placating the traditional religious circles because God is hardly mentioned in its pages, and instead the State, the Haganah and Israel Defense Forces are depicted as the heroes and redeemers to whom our thanks and praise are due. It was thus highly criticized by the religious groups and was also considered problematic for those war heroes who did not serve in the Haganah or IDF (such as members of the Irgun who were not mentioned) so it was never promoted any further.

Many *siddurim* and *sidrai tefilot* have been produced in Israel for Yom Ha'Atzmaut religious observances by individual rabbis, by the religious kibbutzim, by individual synagogues, and by the different movements in Judaism. The common theme between all of these is Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a day to remember how the Jews have been redeemed from living under the yoke of non-Jewish oppressive governments, and to rejoice now that they have been able to return to Israel and set up their own independent country. There are clear parallels to other holidays, such as Purim and Pesach, often mentioned or whose liturgy has been adopted. Several examples of these *siddurim* will be given below to illustrate this development.

The special Yom Ha'Atzmaut *siddur* published by the congregation of The Great Synagogue (*Beit Knesset Ha-Gadol*) in Tel-Aviv has a service similar to that of Simchat Torah. In both the evening and morning services all the Torah scrolls are taken out from the Ark and a procession around the synagogue occurs similar to the *Hakafot*. A prayer for the government of the country that is also used in the Diaspora, “*HaNoteyn Teshua L'Malchut*,” is recited in the morning service in this *siddur*, with the additional line:

הַנוֹתֵן תְּשׁוּעָה...הוּא יְבָרֵךְ וַיִּשְׁמֹר... אֶת אֲדוֹנֵינוּ נְשִׂיא מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֵת רֹאשׁ הַמְּמִשְׁלָה _____ יְרוּם הַיּוֹם.

“*HaNoteyn Teshua*..... *Hu Y'varech V'Yishmor.. Et Adoneynu Nasi Medinat Yisrael _____ v'Et Rosh HaMemshalla _____ Y'rom Hodam*” (translation: May the One Who Grants Salvation ..Bless and Watch Over The Honorable President of the State of Israel _____ and Prime Minister _____)¹⁵

The Ministry of Religion published a *Seder Tefillot V'Hodayot LeYom Ha'Atzmaut* which often had prayers composed by the Chief Rabbis, such as Rabbi Herzog, Yisraeli, and Uzziel. Their compositions and editing often were much debated, reflecting struggles with finding the appropriate way to offer blessings for Yom Ha'Atzmaut. Such was the case with the introductory formulation for the *Shehecheyanu* prayer in their *Seder Tefillot* of 1950, composed by Rabbi Herzog:

¹⁴ Don-Yehiya, E. *op.cit.*, pgs. 75-76

¹⁵ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 24

”ויברך דוד את ה' לעיני כל הקהל ויאמר דוד ברוך אתה ה' אלוהי ישראל מן העולם ועד העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.
“*Va'yivarech David et Adonai l'eyney kol hakahal va-yomer David 'Baruch Ata Adonai Elohai Yisrael meen ha-olam v'ad ha-olam shecheheyanu'...*”(translation: “And David blessed the Lord in front of all the assemblage; David said, ‘Blessed are You, Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity, who has kept us alive’.....”)

This version, considered a kind of compromise according to Rabbi Yisraeli, appears as if it is a blessing, but it is actually a quote from I Chronicles 29:10 which precedes the *Shehecheyanu* blessing, and not the typical formulation for a standard blessing which usually requires the wording *melech ha'olam*.¹⁶

Some synagogues kept their regular prayerbooks and just inserted a page of directions from the Rabbinate. Such was the practice of the Ramban Synagogue in Jerusalem as well as several religious kibbutzim with the following directives for the year 1974:

“Recite the *Emet Ve'Emunah* responsively with the hazan (at the Ma'ariv); in the morning services, if it falls on Monday or Thursday, read from the weekly Torah portion; when removing the Torah from the Ark say ‘*Shma, Echad, and Gadlu*’ just as on Shabbat.”¹⁷

In the *siddur* composed by Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neriah, and published by the Israeli Rabbinate, Rabbi Neriah cites rabbinical sources in his introduction to illustrate the importance of the Land of Israel, the obligation to express thanks to God for miracles done for the Jewish people, and even suggests that the uniqueness of the day is hinted in the Hebrew date itself—the year *taf-shin-chet*, the month of Iyar, and the 5th of that month—which was thought to hint at a deeper, mystical meaning.

This mystical meaning can be understood as implicitly referring to the rebuilding of the Temple for the purpose of enabling the Divine Presence to reside in Israel. This can be seen first in the abbreviation for the year of Israel's new statehood which is *taf shin chet*—corresponding to the rabbinical abbreviation for “*t'shuot chen*,” referring to Zechariah 4:7, wherein the prophet Zechariah has a vision of the rebuilding of the Temple atop a mountain. (This is also the portion which is read on Shabbat Hanukah, a holiday which is considered to have many parallels with the establishment of the modern State of Israel.) The name of the month Iyar is connected to the idea of “light” or in the Hebrew “*or*”—possibly referring to some enlightening event or idea; Iyar is also called “*ziv*,” meaning “splendor” (I Kings 6:1). In addition, it is the month wherein the greater part of the *Sefirat Ha'Omer* (the countdown between Pesach and Shavuot) occurs, thus linking the Exodus from Egypt with the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Finally, the day of Yom Ha'Atzmaut is symbolized by the letter “*hey*,” equivalent both to the number five and a common abbreviation for God's Name. Thus the date has significance of a mystical reference to the Divine Presence, to splendor and light,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Arend, *op.cit.*, pg. 25

to the remembered spiritually momentous time of preparation for Revelation, and added to all these, a reference to the rebuilding of the Temple.

Rabbi Neriah also offers some guidelines for how to properly observe this day. He says it should be a joyful 24-hour period: one should stop working before sunset and lock up one's place of business, refraining from any work that is not related to the needs of the holiday; one should wash and dress in holiday attire; one's thoughts should be focused on giving thanks to God for this wondrous event which is commemorated on this day; one should give *tzedaka* so as to hasten the Redemption; one should study Torah sections and other Jewish sources which are appropriate for this day, such as those suggested by Rambam dealing with the holiness of the Land, the Temple, and the *mitzvot* whose fulfillment are dependent on living in the Land of Israel.¹⁸

This *siddur* also has various ritual practices, such as unfurling the flag and holding a festive meal, a *seudat mitzvah*, following the evening prayers. Prior to displaying the flag, Rabbi Neriah suggests that one should say verses that joyfully praise the flag and the miracle which it symbolizes. Candles should be lit first in the synagogue before Ma'ariv. The services should resemble Kabbalat Shabbat with the recitation of Psalms and *L'cha Dodi*. There should also be elements from the High Holy Day services so that the services would conclude with reciting *Adonai Hu HaElohim* and *Adonai Melech*, blowing the shofar, and saying *L'Shana HaBa'ah B'Yerushalayim HaBinuyah*. Also *Shir HaMaalot* and *Ani Ma'amin* should be sung. At the very end each one is to bless the person next to him/her with the words "*Moadim L'Simcha L'Alter L'Geulah Sheleyma*" (translation: "Happy Holidays and May Complete Redemption Be Coming Forthwith.") At the festive meal candles are again lit, the discussion is about God's salvation, and the *Shehecheyanu* blessing is made over new fruit or clothes (which is a suggested resolution to the halachic debate over saying this prayer for the day itself). Texts from the Sages and from the Zohar are to be studied which are about the security of the Land and the Redemption, similar to what the Kabbalists study on Tikkun Leyl Shavuot.

The Shacharit service in this *siddur* has the addition of several Shabbat *Zmirot* to the *P'sukei D'Zimra* section. *Hallel* without a blessing is recited and the Haftarah suggested is "*Od HaYom B'Nov*" (Isaiah 10:32 -11). At the meal following Shacharit, Rabbi Neriah suggests using three matzot that have been saved from Pesach to add to the leavened bread, as "a remembrance for the breads of thanksgiving which included three kinds of matzah and some chametz."¹⁹ He explains that this idea is based on a common custom of combining parts of two different *mitzvot*, as for example, when the lulav of Succot is saved to be used as a kind of broom to sweep up the *chametz* on Erev Pesach. Then in the afternoon, Rabbi Neriah mentions in his *siddur* that it is customary to walk at least a distance of "*arba amot*" (corresponding to approximately four cubits or about six feet) in the Land of Israel, especially to visit new neighborhoods and settlements. Also included in this *siddur* are verses from the *Tanach* to be said when watching a military parade, relating to the different branches of the military.

¹⁸ Arend, *op.cit*, pgs.25-26.

¹⁹ Neriah, Rabbi M.T., *Tikkun Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, quoted in Arend, A., *op.cit*, pg. 26.

In order to compare in more detail the *siddurim* and *sidrai tefilot* which have been produced over the years in Israel, a comparative chart of the contents of each of seventeen such liturgical collections, dating from 1955 to 1997, is included at the end of this paper. (*Appendix A*) A short discussion of the main differences noted among these and the historical implications is also included. (*Appendix B*)

It has been harder to get the general population to observe Yom Ha'Atzmaut in a religious format than to observe the immediately preceding Yom HaZikaron (Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers)—and this may be due to both the more solemn nature of the latter and its stronger connection to religious practices.²⁰ Yet, the government has tried again to encourage more family-oriented or home-based observances of this day. In 1979, for example, Chief Rabbi Goren was commissioned by the UJA to create a *haggadah* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut. This was the first Hebrew-English *haggadah* and there was a definite change from the earlier *haggadah* previously mentioned which avoided any references to Divine power. In this version, Rabbi Goren emphasized God's direct intervention in modern history as a step towards Israel's ultimate Redemption. The establishment of the State of Israel is described as a definite stage in this process. Rabbi Goren even outlined five steps that will lead to the ultimate Redemption:²¹

- 1) Return to the Land and rebuild it
- 2) Establish Israel's sovereignty
- 3) Gather in the exiles
- 4) Restore peace
- 5) Rebuild the Temple

Many kibbutzim in Israel also used a *haggadah* created by the Committee on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, formed by representatives from various kibbutzim. Here, too, the Passover Seder was the model. This committee also produced a booklet entitled *Alei Chag* for use by families at home, containing stories, important dates, memorials for relatives, songs, and riddles.

Even more recently, in 1997, another *haggadah* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut was produced by the Fraenkel Center for Judaic Studies, affiliated with the TALJ Schools in Israel, with an English edition published in 2002. Etti Serok, the Director of the Fraenkel Center, is quoted as stating that there is no agreed-upon national ritual for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, despite its historical and political significance, even after more than 50 years of the State of Israel's existence.²² Serok adds that, in her opinion, previous *haggadot* failed to be widely accepted because they were too narrowly focused; here the attempt is made to take all the elements—religious, national, gastronomic—and combine them into a “fun and contemporary” format, using songs, stories, and even jokes.²³ The rituals are

²⁰ Laskin, M., *op.cit.*, pg. 57.

²¹ Schwartz, B., *op.cit.*, pg.45

²² Lichtman, Gail, “Israel Independence Day *Haggadah*- Putting the Family Component into the Holiday”, www.jafi.org.il/ars/2002/april/index.htm.pg. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

based on the Passover Seder, using a special plate shaped like a Magen David, with symbolic ancient and modern foods of Israel—figs, almonds, dates, raisins, oranges, olives, and *hummous*. Four cups of wine are each designated for a chapter in the history of Zionism: the Zionist Dream, the Pioneering Spirit and the Rebirth of Hebrew, the Ingathering of the Exiles, the Quest for Peace and Hopes for the Future. It relates the story of the Zionist struggles, the ingathering of those masses who made *aliyah* as refugees, and the formation and building of the independent State. There is a cup for Herzl, filled with milk and honey. Short biographies of famous people are interspersed with prayers, blessings, the Declaration of Statehood, songs, photos, ideas for family activities, and humorous anecdotes. An activity entitled “The Zionist Suitcase” encourages personal connections to be made to this holiday and to Jewish history by having family members share their own photos, certificates, stories and other memorabilia. This *haggadah* has recently also been printed in French and Spanish for distribution worldwide.²⁴

In addition to these forms of liturgy, there have been various sermons and religious poems written for Yom Ha’Atzmaut in Israel, though there is no major collection to date of these works. Some have been published in the newspaper *HaTzofeh* or other religious Zionist publications. For example, the poems of Menachem Bar Yasshar emphasize the dream of return to the Land and the victory in the Independence War with Divine assistance. Another poem that is used in the services in some of the Oriental synagogues in Jerusalem and Haifa is one written by Rabbi Yosef of the *Sha’as* political movement; it celebrates the end of the British rule and the victory over the Arab nations.²⁵ Some of the sermons or inter-rabbinical discussions, such as that between Rabbis Lichtenstein and Amital of Yeshivat Har-Tzion in Alon HaShvut, relate to more recent historical and political developments, such as the evacuation of Yamit and the Sinai, Rabin’s assassination, and the Jewish underground. While acknowledging the problems, the sermons tend to emphasize the positive aspects of the State of Israel’s history, and view its overall existence and development as God’s Hand in our history and the gradual establishment of the prophetic vision—all for which we are to offer thanks to God.²⁶

We can see then in the general liturgical developments over the course of the State of Israel’s existence that there has been a process of searching for appropriate forms of expression to recognize the history-making event of the establishment of a Jewish state after two thousand years of Exile. The earliest efforts by the government to develop observances that attributed this miraculous event entirely to the Zionist pioneers and the Israeli Army was not something that was accepted by a majority of those who sought a spiritual outlet for their feelings. The failure of these early attempts by the government may have had to do both with their decision not to include any mention of Divine intervention in the establishment of the State, as well as their heavy-handedness in trying to dictate how Yom Ha’Atzmaut was to be celebrated. Over time, the government

²⁴ Lichtman, G., *op.cit.*, pg. 5.

²⁵ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg.35

²⁶ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 34.

and the Rabbinate seems to have become more sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of the general public and the desire to find connections with traditional Jewish observances and religious expression. Rabbis and synagogues began also to develop their own worship formats, including prayers adapted from Shabbat, Pesach, Simchat Torah and even the High Holy Days. Poems and sermons addressed the theological issues of the process of Redemption, the Ingathering of the Exiles, and the Messianic hopes now that Israel had become a sovereign Jewish state once again. In the most recent years, a Jewish organization, devoted to helping Jewish families strengthen their sense of belonging to the Jewish people, has developed a family service using a creative *haggadah* to educate and help give expression to feelings about the creation and existence of a modern Jewish state. The intention here is also to appeal to Jews of all different religious orientations, including those who have been least willing to identify with any religious expression of Judaism, and to offer a pleasurable experience on many different levels while also reinforcing their emotional ties to the Land and the Jewish people.

III. A Comparison/Contrast of the Yom Ha'Atzmaut Liturgy and Rituals Between the Movements and Religious Groups in Israel

Since the government was unsuccessful in designing a single, unified form of religious observance, various liturgies and rituals have been developed and distributed among the different Jewish groups and movements in Israel. Two of the more commonly used works are the *Siddur Rinat Yisrael*, edited by Shlomo Tal, and one printed by Korn Publishers,²⁷ but there is truly no one *siddur* that is used by the majority of those who observe Yom Ha'Atzmaut through religious worship. It is interesting to look at the different *siddurim* and rituals produced by various groups to note what they have in common and where they differ. A representative sample of these is offered below.

With the assistance of Rabbi E. Bar-Shaul of Rehovot and Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the Religious Kibbutz Movement produced their own *seder tfillot* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut. It includes *Hallel* to be recited in the morning and evening with the blessings. Like the Pesach *Haggadah*, it includes the phrase “*Asher Ga'alnu*” in the *Kiddush* on the eve of the holiday. When the flag is unfurled, the congregation sings *Shir HaMa'alot* followed by a song entitled “*Oleh HaDegel*.” At the morning services, the Torah portion of *Parshat Ekev* (Deut.7:12-12:25) is chanted with three *aliyot*. *Al-HaNissim* is sung to a special *nusach* which is also used later for the *Birkat HaMazon*. This *nusach* was created by Rabbi Prof. Ezra Tzion Melamed, and published in full-length in the 3rd edition of the prayerbook in 1968, but later in the 4th edition it was deleted after Rabbi Goren expressed his objections.²⁸ Over the years this *seder tfillot* has been edited and republished several times, due to further clarifications and rulings. In the introduction to the 4th edition, editor Dov Rafel states: “This edition takes into account the changes in the customs of different congregations of the religious kibbutzim and other groups; it has deleted those ideas which were not accepted by the congregations and kept a broad variety of those which have been accepted.”²⁹ It should be noted that some non-kibbutz synagogues also use this *seder tfillot* of the Religious Kibbutz Movement.

The Oriental communities use a *siddur* composed by Menachem Yadid, entitled *Siddur Ge'ulat Yisrael LeYom HaZikaron U'Lyom Ha'Atzmaut*. Here at the end of the Shacharit service there is a prayer for the peace of the State of Israel and a *MiShebeyrach* for the soldiers; also a prayer for the welfare of the President of the State, based on the formulation cited earlier “*HaNoteyn Teshua L'M'lachim*.” Songs and popular melodies included “Jerusalem of Gold” and “*M'al Pisgah Har HaTzofim*”, as well as the national anthem *HaTikvah* with the closing line being similar to its original:

²⁷ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 32.

²⁸ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg.27

²⁹ *Ibid.*

“Hatikvah-התקוה הנושנה לשוב לארץ אבותינו ארץ ציון וירושלים”
“HaNoshana LaShuv L’Eretz Avoteynu Eretz Zion Yerushalayim”.³⁰

The *Birkat HaMazon* in this *siddur* has an additional line:

”הרחמן הוא יחינו ויזכנו ויקרבנו לימות המשיח ולבנין
בית המקדש ולחיי העולם הבא...”

“HaRahaman Hu Yihyeynu v’Yiskeynu v’Yikraveynu L’Yimot HaMashiach
u’Lvinyan Beit Ha Mikdash u’Lchayei HaOlam HaBah”.³¹

This line clearly expresses the hope for the rebuilding of the Temple and the idea that the Messianic times could be approaching even in our lifetime if HaShem so deems it. It reflects the combined nationalistic and the deeply religious perspectives of the Oriental Jews who have after centuries been able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *aliyah*. They have some hope or expectation that this *is* the Redemption of the Jewish people spoken of in the Bible and that it will culminate in the building of the Third Temple.

Two examples of the *siddurim* used by the Sephardic communities are the one used by the Italian Synagogue in Jerusalem, prepared in 1977 by three of its congregants (and based on what the Religious Kibbutzim had standardized), and one by Rabbi Uri Amos Sharaki of the Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav. The Italian Synagogue’s *siddur* calls for reading from the Torah and Haftarah with blessings, and also reciting the *Al Ha-Nissim* prayer; it explains in the introduction that these are not contrary to rabbinical directives since there are differing views among the current rabbinic authorities about these issues, and other congregations have already used these even in the presence of some of these rabbis. They also cite halachic arguments for these additions. They have added some *piyyutim* to the Amidah and a special *Yotzer* blessing for the morning service, which is called “*Reuh Tovot*” to be recited at the end of *Psukei D’Zimra*, prior to *Barchu*. This blessing is attributed to Rabbi Menachem Hartum, a congregant. The Torah reading is Chapter 30 of Deuteronomy, from *Parshat Nitzavim*. Another blessing is added after the *Magen David* blessing following the Haftarah reading which goes as follows:

”על התורה ועל ההעבודה ועל הנביאים ועל הארץ
ועל התחלת הגאולה שנתת לנו...ברוך מקדש
ישראל וגואל עמו”

“*Al HaTorah V’Al Ha-Avodah V’Al HaN’vi-eem V’Al Ha’Aretz V’Al
Hatchalat Ha-Ge’ula Sh’Natata Lanu...Baruch M’Kadesh Yisrael V’Goel
Amo.*”³²

The mention here of “*hatchalat hage’ula sh’natata lanu*”— “the beginning of Redemption which You have granted us”—seems to echo the words

³⁰ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg.30

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

which the Rabbinat contributed to the Declaration of Statehood—“*reisheet zmee'chat Geulateynu*”—“the beginning of the growth of our Redemption.” In other words, the idea incorporated here is that the State of Israel represents the beginning stage of the final Redemption—given to the people of Israel to develop—and ultimately culminating in the coming of the Messianic times. The blessing also expresses this by praising God Who Redeems His People—*i.e.*, with Divine Guidance the Jewish people in Israel will help to fulfill the goals of the Redemption.

There is also a special version of the *Al Ha-Nissim* prayer which is to be said in the Amidah and with the *Birkat HaMazon*. One of its lines is as follows:

"ואתה ברחמיך הרבים... מסרת חמושים ביד חלשים
ורבים ביד מעטים...וכשם שעשית עמנו גם כן עשה
עמנו ה' אלקינו פלא וניסים בעת הזאת ובעתיד"

*"V'Ata B'Rachamecha Ha-rabim... Masarta Chamushim B'yad
Chalashim V'Rabim B'Yad M'Ateem.. U'Kshem Sh'Aseeta Emanu Gam
Keyn Asah Emanu Adonai Elokeynu Peleh V'Nissim B'eyt Hazot
U'Batid."*³³

The change from the traditional “*giborim*” (“the strong”) to “*chamushim*” (“the well-armed”) seems to refer to the military advantage that the Arab armies appeared to yield over the Israeli forces, outnumbering them not only in men but also being better equipped; yet the message here is like that of Hanukah, not trusting in might alone but in God’s saving power. Also, the closing line is a petition that God will perform wonders and miracles for these times and for the future, just as God has done in the past for our ancestors. Again, there is an awareness of the very special potential that living in Israel has for all its modern inhabitants, that there may yet be new miracles or Divine occurrences that this generation or the next will witness in Israel, such as the rebuilding of the Temple and the coming of the Messiah.

The *siddur* of Rav Sharaki has, in addition to the prayers, an “Order of Study” with sources on the issue of Redemption of the Land, an extensive discussion of halachic sources about the reciting of the prayers *Shehcheyanu* and *Hallel*. Some consider this work really a link between a *tikkun* and a *siddur*.³⁴

In regards to the Sephardic practice, there was a responsum written by Rabbi Nissim HaKohen, answering a question about how Sephardic Jews were to observe Yom Ha’Atzmaut. He replied that the ruling of the Chief Sephardic Rabbi Ovadia Yosef should be followed in this matter; Ovadia Yosef had previously ruled that Yom Ha’Atzmaut was to be considered a holiday, and therefore *Tachanun* was not to be recited but *Hallel* was, though without a blessing.³⁵

It is also to be noted that the ultra-Orthodox Haredi groups in Israel do not recognize Yom Ha’Atzmaut at all. One of their well-known halachists, Rabbi Yitzhak Yakov Weiss, stated that saying any new blessings is done in vain or reciting the *Hallel* without blessing is “insulting and blasphemy”; he adds that one

³³ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 29.

³⁴ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg.30.

³⁵ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg.22.

can only bless on an “unnatural miracle” while the victory of the Israeli forces that helped to establish the State is a “natural miracle.”³⁶

Of all the religious movements in Israel, ironically it is the Reform Movement, which once was anti-Zionist, that today has the most emphatic liturgical language in its Yom Ha’Atzmaut *siddurim*, such as *Ha’Avoda She BaLev*.³⁷ It includes a special Hallel, as well as *Al Ha-Nissim*, special Torah and Haftarah readings with blessings, the Declaration of Statehood, and a *kiddush* which contains a blessing that God sanctify Israel and this Independence Day. The Covenant is clearly depicted as continuous from Abraham to our days, and verses which state that God stood with the IDF in the War of Liberation and delivered the wicked into the hands of the righteous. It not only adopts the line from the official Prayer for the State that Israel’s creation is the “beginning of our Redemption” but also adds a petition that God grant us the privilege of seeing its fulfillment.

As can be seen from the above examples there are some significant differences in these *siddurim* and ritual practices. These relate to debates over halachic issues which will be discussed in another section of this paper. There are differences as to what prayers are to be said, whether Hallel is recited with or without a blessing, and there is even a difference between the communities as to what Torah and Haftarah portions are to be read. However, one can see that the different groups have been inspired to write their own prayers or additions to the existing prayers so that one can conclude that Yom Ha’Atzmaut has stimulated much creative writing and expression. It has opened the door for reformulating prayers that have been considered standardized for years, and adds new understandings to these prayers while allowing the worshipper to reconnect to them in meaningful ways.

³⁶ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 23.

³⁷ Schwartz, B., *op.cit.*, pg. 46

IV. Comparison/Contrast of Liturgy and Rituals Between the Movements in the USA

Celebration of Yom Ha'Atzmaut in the USA has often been communal, where the various religious movements and all kinds of Jewish organizations get together to demonstrate their solidarity with the State of Israel and enjoy a day of non-religious entertainment. This might entail an Israeli fair, a parade, concert, or a group of events which might include songs, dances, Israeli foods, sale of Israeli crafts or artistic works, a collection of funds for Israel Bonds or social welfare causes, political or intellectual speakers, representatives from settlements or from the IDF, Israeli films, fireworks, flags, and the singing of Hatikvah. Sometimes these programs are preceded by a short ceremony for Israel's Yom HaZikaron, somewhat similar to the practice in Israel where Yom Ha'Atzmaut begins as the sirens sound at sunset to announce the end of Yom HaZikaron. But Jews in the USA have not always followed Israel's lead or used similar rituals or prayers to commemorate Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

For example, when the Chief Rabbinate in September 1948 issued the official Prayer for the State of Israel, it was not well received in the Diaspora, especially with its emphasis on the State rather than on the Land of Israel, and on the State's importance for the Jewish people everywhere. It was also not accepted because of classical Zionism's assertion that all Jews should return to Israel from the lands of Dispersion.³⁸

It also has taken a few years for the development of religious observances among American Jewry. In 1964, the Conservative Movement's Committee of Jewish Law and Standards issued a statement to encourage the display of the Israeli flag on the synagogue *bimah* alongside that of the American flag. The statement went on to say that the establishment of the State of Israel was to be recognized as a greatly significant event in our history—"an incident in the providential ordering of Jewish destiny, and as a step towards the Messianic fulfillment which is a part of our faith."³⁹ It encouraged synagogues and rabbis to create their own observances, especially by using liturgical material created by Rabbi Isaac Klein in his "Service For Yom Ha'Atzmaut." However, more telling was the closing comment which said that the Committee was not yet ready to adopt or formalize a religious rite for this holiday. More time had to pass before the Committee would be ready to clearly assess how the American Jewish public related to Israel and how Israel itself would develop so that religious expressions would evolve naturally from this.

Creating new observances for Yom Ha'Atzmaut was still a problem for religious leaders in this country even a decade later. Addressing this issue in 1977, Rabbi Jonathan Porath pointed to several underlying reasons for this

³⁸ Schwartz, B., *op.cit.*, pg. 44.

³⁹ Bokser, Rabbi Ben-Zion, "Summary of Response of Committee on Jewish Law and Standards About Religious Ceremony for Yom Ha'Atzmaut and the Use of Isaac Klein's Service," Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 28, 1964, pg. 239.

difficulty. First of all, congregations often hear their rabbis speaking about Israel during the rest of the year, so Yom Ha'Atzmaut demanded something different. Second of all, holiday programming for this day was generally without a religious dimension, as was also true in much of Israel, so introducing a religious observance had to somehow flow naturally from this if it was to be successful. Third of all, there was the difficulty of separating politically ambivalent or critical attitudes towards Israel's government and politics from that of an appreciation and love for the Land of Israel and the Jewish homeland itself. Finally, Rabbi Porath said it would be important to create a service that was cohesive and authentic, and not just a string of adapted rituals.⁴⁰

Each of the major movements in the USA has debated the issue of Yom Ha'Atzmaut religious observances and come up with its own way of instituting this. They have, of course, been influenced by their compatriots in Israel, though they have had to also view things from the lens of life in the Diaspora. This has meant a certain distancing or different emphasis which has caused concern in the eyes of some rabbis in Israel. In an attempt to minimize this distancing and maintain a clear image of the importance of Israel for all Jews, Rabbi Akiva Glanzer, in a 1978 article about Yom Ha'Atzmaut, appealed to Jews in the Diaspora to think what their status and situation would be like if the Arabs had won the Independence War in 1948 and there would be no State of Israel.⁴¹

The Orthodox movement discussed the issue of what prayers to include for Israel and Yom Ha'Atzmaut. Today the main *siddurim* of the Orthodox movement in the USA—the ArtScroll, Birnbaum, and deSolaPool editions—include a prayer for the State of Israel and its soldiers, but do not have any special service for Yom Ha'Atzmaut. According to David Ellenson, in his article “Envisioning Israel in the Liturgies of North American Liberal Judaism,” this does not signify a disinterest or indifference to the Jewish state, but is based more on an aversion to alter anything in the traditional, transmitted liturgy.⁴² In most Orthodox congregations in the USA today *Hallel* is said on Yom Ha'Atzmaut (some recite the blessing with it while others omit it), but *Tahanun* is not said, except among Chabad Hassidim, despite their support of Israel.

The Conservative movement which uses *Siddur Sim Shalom* also has no special festive service for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, but does recite the Pesukei D'Zimra for a holiday, *Hallel* with the blessings, the *Al Ha-Nissim* prayer, and does read a designated Haftarah for this special day. Also, the Prayer for the State of Israel is included, though the phrase about “the first growth of our Redemption” has been translated as: “Bless the State of Israel with its promise of Redemption.”⁴³

The Reform movement in the USA is the only one that has a full service specially dedicated to the observance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut included in its weekday *siddur*, *The Gates of Prayer*. (In the prototype version of the new

⁴⁰ Porath, Jonathan D, “Programming New Holidays”, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 39, 1977, pgs 87-88.

⁴¹ Glanzer, Rabbi Akiva, “Hagigat Yom Ha'atzmaut BaMedina U'BaGolah”, *HaDarom*, 1978, pg. 24.

⁴² Ellenson, David, “Envisioning Israel in the Liturgies of North American Liberal Judaism”, in *Envisioning Israel – The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jewry*, edit. Gal, Alon, Magnes Press, 1996, pg. 122.

⁴³ Schwartz, B., *op.cit.*, pg.47.

Reform *siddur Mishkan Tefilla*, however, there is no special service for Yom Ha'Atzmaut.) It is an evening service, with provisions made for morning services for both weekdays and Shabbat. It begins with a candle-lighting, selections from Psalm 107, and singing of *Me'al Pisgat Har HaTzofim*. Additional lines are added to the *Amidah* in the *Gvurot* section and in *Ya'aleh* specifically mentioning God's judgment on tyrants and remembering the Jewish people on this day; also several lines from the High Holy Day *Amidah* are included, asking God to be mindful of the Jewish people on this day. Following this, *Hallel* is recited and the Torah is read as for other holidays. A "supplement" section includes readings from the Psalms which include references to the Exile, the Messiah and to Redemption, including *Shir Ha Ma'alot*, and finally the singing of *Am Yisrael Chai*.

In all fairness, it must be noted that the Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements all include mention of the Land of Israel and the modern State of Israel in various prayers included in the weekday and Shabbat *siddurim* of each movement. Even the Orthodox movement includes a prayer for the State of Israel in both the Birnbaum and Art Scroll *siddurim*. Thus, the absence or limited number of prayers developed for Yom Ha'Atzmaut in these American Jewish movements is not meant to imply that they do not relate to the Land or State of Israel in their worship.⁴⁴ As David Ellenson has said, Israel embodies a religious reality for American Jews who identify with the religious movements. At the same time life in the Diaspora is seen as viable as that in Israel, and therefore American Jews have rejected the idea of classical Zionism, of "*shlilat ha-Golah*," that only living in the Land of Israel was the way for Jews to survive and thrive.⁴⁵ Instead, the *siddurim* express the idea for American Jews that "Israel is seen as an ultimate expression of the religious and moral hopes of the Jewish people."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ For an interesting article comparing the Israel-based content of these *siddurim*, see Ellenson, David, *op.cit.*, pgs 121-147.

⁴⁵ Ellenson, David, *op.cit.*, pg. 147.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

V. Halachic Issues Related to the Observance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut

There are a number of halachic questions connected to Yom Ha'Atzmaut which have been discussed among rabbinic authorities in Israel since the State's establishment. Opponents and proponents of each issue have found a halachic basis for their reasoning which has been the underpinning for the Israeli Rabbinate's instructions and pronouncements. This paper will attempt to clearly explain the different positions and how they find textual support from rabbinic and Biblical sources. While there is some overlap in the discussion of these issues and their sources, the main topics delineated in the writings of modern halachic scholars are:

- A. Can Yom Ha'Atzmaut Be Legitimately Established As a Holiday (“*Yom Tov*”)?
- B. Should *Hallel* Be Recited on Yom Ha'Atzmaut and If So, Does One Include the Blessings for *Hallel*?
- C. Is the *Shehecheyanu* Prayer to Be Recited on Yom Ha'Atzmaut?
- D. Are The Prayers *Al-Hanissim* and *Mi She'Asa Nissim* To Be Recited?
- E. Should Torah and/or Haftara Be Read and If So What Portions Are Appropriate For Yom Ha'Atzmaut?
- F. What Happens If Yom Ha'Atzmaut Falls On A Shabbat?
- G. Are All Sefirah-Prohibited Activities Permitted on Yom Ha'Atzmaut?

A. Establishment of the Day as a “*Yom Tov*” (Holiday)

The issue of establishing Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a “*yom tov*” is based on several concerns. First, can we add a holiday to our calendar without violating the Torahitic prohibition (Deut. 4:2) of adding *mitzvot* (“*lo toseefu*”)? Furthermore, are we obliged to hold an observance when a miraculous event, especially being saved from an enemy, occurs—and if so, what precedent is there for this? Finally, what is the status of this day exactly—what kind of a holiday is it and what then is permitted and forbidden on this day?

Those who object to observing Yom Ha'Atzmaut altogether, such as members of the Neturei Karta, point to the “*lo toseefu*” prohibition—that one can not add holidays to those enumerated in the Torah plus the two that have been established by the Rabbis, Hanukah and Purim. About these latter two holidays there is discussion in the Talmud and among the commentators as to the basis for establishing these, and some of the arguments are related to the question of establishing Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a “*yom tov*.” In Megillah 14a, there is a discussion about the *Megillah* of Purim being seen as an addition to the Torah or actually having a basis that is hinted at in the Torah. The Gemara asks why the *Megillah* is important and why one is obliged to read it on Purim. The answer given is that it is based on a *kal v'chomer* principle: that if on Pesach we celebrate our going from slavery to freedom with God's Providence, as recounted in the Torah, all the more so should we celebrate going from a death sentence to life on Purim —

“ קל וחמר ומה מעבדות לחרות אומרים שירה
ממתה לחיים לא כל שכן”

Kal v'chomer u'ma mey-avdut l'cherut omrim shira, mi-meta l'chayim lo kol sh'chen..” (BTMeg.14a).

This miraculous salvation is clearly evident when one reads the *Megillah* and so it is to be done publicly on Purim. This also establishes that Purim is a holiday with as much validity as Pesach, especially in regards to our thankfulness to God.

There is also precedent found for establishing new holidays from a scroll called *Megillat Ta'anit* which is mentioned in the Talmud, in Rosh HaShana 18b. This scroll lists other holidays which had existed during the Temple times but were not mentioned in the Torah, and were nullified after the Destruction of the Second Temple. In a Baraita on Shabbat 13b, the Sages again mention this *Megillat Ta'anit*, attributing it to Hananiah ben Hezekiah, and stating that these were holidays to commemorate miraculous salvation from enemies or other troubles. It was also forbidden to fast or mourn on these days. The Sages then commented that the record of all these days in this *megillah* seemed to show a propensity for recalling these difficult times—

מהבבין את הצרות שנגאלין מהן

“*M'havivin et hatzarot sh'negalin mihen.*”

Rashi, however, counters that it was not so much the crises that they wanted to recall but rather their miraculous deliverance from these situations, whereby they could express their thanks and praise to God. They described these days as “*y'mei nes*” —“days of miracles,” qualifying them to have the status of a “*yom tov.*” Also, as Rabbi Sholomo Goren has pointed out in his responsum on this issue, the holidays listed in *Megillat Ta'anit* mostly recalled conquests of the Land of Israel during the Second Temple period, and therefore it seems that the Men of the Great Assembly permitted the establishment of such holidays when crucial victories over enemy forces occurred.⁴⁷

However, the difficulty with relying on the precedent of *Megillat Ta'anit* is that after the Destruction of the Second Temple the Sages abolished the observance of these non-Torahitic holidays, except for Hanukah and Purim. Was this to mean then that no further holidays should be established for public miracles which might occur after the Destruction of the Second Temple? To answer this, the later commentators looked into why Hanukah and Purim were preserved by the Sages. Rashi, in commenting on the discussion about Hanukah in Rosh Hashanah 18b, sv. “*d'mifarsim nissah,*” notes that one must publicize a miracle that is experienced or clearly known to all Israel by observing the *mitzvot* of this holiday, just as one would observe the holidays mentioned in the Torah. If Hanukah was already being observed by the people because of its commemoration of a miracle then, Rashi says, it was our Sages' intention that this continue.

Hatam Sofer (*Orach Hayim, 191*) lends support to the idea that since the Destruction of the Temple, the public does have the right to establish new holidays to remember their miraculous salvation from death. He discusses the dispute between two other commentators, the *Pri HeChadash* and the *Maharam*, about this issue; *Pri HeChadash* holds that no new holidays can be added because the Sages abolished the observance of the holidays mentioned in *Megillat Ta'anit* after the Destruction of the Temple, while the *Maharam* holds that the community has the right to establish holidays for themselves to recall miraculous events in current and future history. Hatam Sofer sides with the *Maharam*, and says that only the holidays which were directly connected to the Temple worship that were listed in the *Megillat Ta'anit* were the ones cancelled by the Sages after the Temple's destruction.

⁴⁷ Goren, Rabbi Shlomo, “*Hasamchut l'kviat yom tov b'zman ha-zeh,*” in Rakover, N., *op.cit.*, pg.47.

Ibn Ezra, commenting on Numbers 10:10, says that there is actually an obligation to establish a holiday when one is saved from an enemy—just as on Purim and Hanukah. Support for Ibn Ezra’s position is found in the Talmud, Pesachim 117a, which relates to Deborah’s song in Judges 5, and says that one must sing a song (*shira*) when God makes a miracle for humans. In fact, in BT Sanhedrin 94a, King Hezekiah is scolded by the Sages for not having created a song upon the occasion of the downfall of Sennacherib, the Babylonian king who had earlier destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Magen Avraham (Orach Chayim 686) stated that an individual or a community may proclaim a festival to commemorate a miracle. In the responsum of Hatam Sofer, (Orach Chayim 191) he even says it is an obligation to do so.⁴⁷ Rabbi Nahum Rakover says that there are other examples in Jewish history and even in the Talmud⁴⁸ of holidays having been set to commemorate a miracle for a community, such as the many Purims for different Jewish communities rescued from disasters during the Middle Ages. So it seems that there is a basis in our tradition and our halacha for establishing holidays to commemorate miraculous salvation from death at the hands of an enemy.

The question about the status of the holiday is somewhat more difficult to resolve. There are two categories of holidays, set by the Rabbis. The first category which includes the High Holy Days, the Festivals, and Rosh Hodesh, are all those mentioned in the Torah. Most of these days are considered “*s’machot*”—“joyous occasions”—and work is prohibited on them. The second category of holidays is post-Biblical, including Hanukah and Purim which commemorate miracles; one is not prohibited from work on these days but one does have the obligation for being joyful, saying Hallel and prayers of thanks, and having a festive meal. It seems that Yom Ha’Atzmaut would fall into this category with Purim and Hanukah.

There are those who dispute this comparison, saying that on Purim and Hanukah miracles *did* occur, while on Yom Ha’Atzmaut war broke out; also they claim that there were other events prior to Yom Ha’Atzmaut that were signposts along the way so that one can not really see this as an extraordinary miracle. Some would yet argue that there is actually a third category- that of “semi-holidays”—such as the minor fast days or Tu B’Shvat, which have no special blessings or observances officially established—and that Yom Ha’Atzmaut really belongs to this category.⁴⁹

However, as Rabbi Goren points out, the miracles of Israel’s War of Independence are different from those which the Jewish people experienced previously in Exile because they included more than just being rescued from death. Instead they include the miracles mentioned in the Messianic prophecies—the Conquest of the Land, the beginning of the Ingathering of the Exiles, and the establishment of the Jewish government of Israel. These, Rabbi Goren says, establish the status of the State of Israel as “*Shlichut Shamymit Rishona B’Ma’alah*”—*Divine Representation of the Highest Order*. It is this realization that led Rabbi Goren and the other governmental rabbis to declare the establishment of the State of Israel in the Declaration of Statehood as “*Reishit Z’michat Geulateynu*”—The First Stage in the Growth of Our Redemption. (He adds that

⁴⁷ Karlin, Rabbi Dr. Meyer, *op.cit.*, pg.1

⁴⁸ Rabbi Rakover mentions the holiday of the 15th of Av which R.Shimeon ben Gamliel mentions in BT Taanit 26b.

⁴⁹ See mention of some of the opposition arguments of R. Yoel Teitelbaum and R. Grosovsky mentioned in Arend, A., *op.cit*, pgs.15-16.

this is conditional upon the acceptance of Torah and halacha as guides to the behavior of the people and the government.) Rabbi Goren finds that in BT Rosh HaShana 18b if a holiday was shown to be connected to our final Redemption it was not to be ignored, and fixed times for the festivities were to be observed. Thus Rabbi Goren concludes that the public does have the permission and the obligation to establish Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a *Yom Tov* for the miraculous events which have occurred in our times. What the specific observances of this joyous day are will be discussed in the sections below, regarding saying *Hallel*, reading from the Torah and Haftarah, etc.

In conclusion then, it appears that there is enough precedent to say that Yom Ha'Atzmaut can legitimately be added to our calendar as a "*yom tov*," since it is a commemoration of the miracle of being saved from destruction from the seven Arab armies who simultaneously attacked Israel, and which miraculously resulted in the creation of the State of Israel, two thousand years after the Destruction of the Temple. It is to be a day of joyous celebration, in the same category of such holidays as Purim and Hanukah, although perhaps it is in a third and new category—of holidays that are directly related to our final Redemption.

B. Reciting Hallel, With and Without A Blessing

The Israeli Rabbinat issued the opinion that one should say *Hallel* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut like on other holidays, although there are some who disagree with this altogether, or others who think *Hallel* should not be recited in full or should omit the blessings attached to it. The Rabbinat's decision was reached after much discussion of the basis for reciting *Hallel* on other holidays and festive occasions and if Yom Ha'Atzmaut met the criteria used for this. Some of the discussion on this issue referred back to the previous halachic discussion of whether or not Yom Ha'Atzmaut is considered a holiday that commemorates a miraculous deliverance or not. Below we will first examine the halachic basis for reciting *Hallel* on holidays in general, then see how this relates to Yom Ha'Atzmaut, and finally present various views on reciting *Hallel* on Yom Ha'Atzmaut .

The Talmud, in Pesachim 118a, explains why *Hallel* is to be said for holidays which recall miracles. The reason given is because its contents refer to five major miraculous events that designate the stages of Jewish life in the past and in the future: The Exodus, The Crossing of the Red Sea, The Giving of the Torah, Redemption , and The Coming of the Messiah. In several other portions of the Talmud (Taanit 28b, and Arachin 10a) it also specifies on which holidays one is to recite *Hallel*: the eight days of Sukkot, the eight days of Hanukah, the first day and night of Pesach, and the day of Shemini Atzeret. Additionally , in Pesachim 117a, the Sages give examples of other occasions when *Hallel* was said to commemorate a miracle of salvation—

"ולכשנגאלין אומרים על גאולתן"
 "v'le-k'shenigalin omrim al ge'ulatan"

In this same section, the Sages state that the Prophets ordained that Am Yisrael should recite it at every important era and when they are redeemed from any major misfortune :

"והלל זה מי אמרו. נביאים שביניהם תקנו להן
 לישראל שיהיו אומרים אותו על כל פרק ופרק
 ועל כל צרה וצרה שלא תבוא עליהן "

"V'Hallel zeh mi amaro? N'vi'im she'baynayhen tiknu lahen l'Yisrael sh'yihu
 omrim oto al kol perek oo'verek v'al kol tzarah v'tzarah she'lo tavo aleyhen."

Rashi commented on this in a somewhat cryptic way by saying “Like Hanukah.” This, in turn, has been understood in various ways. Some say that Rashi was trying to say that *Hallel* is not said for every misfortune but for extraordinary conditions. Others say that Rashi was pointing to the idea that the miracle had to be for all of the Jewish people and not just for one group who lived in only one place. Additionally, here are those who see Rashi as referring to miracles which are evident to all, like the jar of oil on Hanukah, and not some “hidden” miracles known only by an individual or a select few. In other words, *Hallel* is to be recited for a miracle in extraordinary conditions, where the entire Jewish people are affected and where it is clearly known to them.

On the other hand, a limit to saying *Hallel* was also set. That *Hallel* was not to be used everyday or for every occasion is clearly stated in the Talmud, Shabbat 118b, where such practice is called “blasphemous”.

”הקורא הלל בכל יום - הרי זה מחרף ומגדף”

“*Hakoreh Hallel b'chol yom—harei zeh m'charef oo'mgadef.*” Commenting on this section, the Maharsha adds that if we don't differentiate between the natural and the supernatural, then we are actually questioning God's power to transform and transcend Nature.

Another major Talmud portion which deals with *Hallel* is Megillah 14a. It begins with a discussion of why one must read the *Megillah* on Purim, giving the basis for the *kal v' homer* principle cited earlier about establishing Purim as a holiday (*i.e.*, because we celebrate a miracle on Pesach of going from slavery to freedom, thus all the more so on Purim when we celebrate going from death to life) But then the question arises as to why we don't say *Hallel* on Purim. Rabbi Yitzhak answers that, first of all, *Hallel* is not to be said for miracles that occur outside of the Land of Israel; and, second of all, unlike Pesach, the Jews were not really totally free of serving King Ahashuerus at the end of the Purim events. Finally, the Sages view the reading of the *Megillah* as a form of praise in itself, and therefore, the *Hallel* is not needed. Only as the *Meiri* has said in commenting on this portion, if one does not have access to a *Megillah* to use for Purim, then one is to recite *Hallel* in place of reading the *Megillah*.

These are the halachic sources on which modern day rabbis rely in ruling on whether or not *Hallel* should be said for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, and whether this is done with or without a blessing. Some of questions that they must try to answer for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, based on the points emphasized in the preceding halachic sources are:

- a) Is Yom Ha'Atzmaut a miraculous event for the entire Jewish people, not only those who live in Israel? And is it recognized as such?
- b) Did our status change so that now we are “free” in some significant way as a result of Yom Ha'Atzmaut?
- c) Do we have something which is equivalent to the *Megillah* of Purim that we would substitute for saying *Hallel* or are we to recite *Hallel* on Yom Ha'Atzmaut?

Using these questions and the preceding halachic material, various opinions have developed on the subject of reciting *Hallel* on Yom Ha'Atzmaut. A few examples of some of the current rabbinical opinions are presented below:

- 1) Rabbi Nahum Rakover feels that we are obliged to say *Hallel* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut since none of the limiting factors aforementioned in the Rabbinic sources apply here: Yom Ha'Atzmaut commemorates a miracle for the entire Jewish people, the event itself occurred in the Land of Israel, and it resulted in the Jewish people becoming free from an oppressed condition. However, because this redemption was not complete, or was not really The Redemption foretold by our Prophets, as far as we can presently perceive, Rakover reasons that no blessing should be said with this *Hallel*.⁵⁰

- 2) Rabbi Meshullam Roth refers to the Ritva's reasoning of using the *kal v'homer* from Pesach to Purim, to show that Yom Ha'Atzmaut can definitely be seen as going from oppression to freedom, if not also from death (the Holocaust) to life. He also mentions the Hatam Sofer's use of the *kal v'homer* to show that permission is granted for fixing observances to thank God for being rescued from danger, and thus for saying *Hallel*. In addition, he relies on a line of reasoning from Pri Chadash, responding to the Beit Yosef's question of why eight Hanukah candles are lit instead of only seven when there was really only enough oil for the first day; Pri Chadash answered that the light on the first night is really for the miraculous military victory (not for the menorah) which God providentially enabled; therefore, using the principle of *kal v'homer*, Roth reasons that *Hallel* should be said on the first day. Roth finds that this could also apply to Yom Ha'Atzmaut when we are thankful for the amazing military victories of 1948 and 1967 which were accomplished through God's grace. From the Turei Even, Roth gathers more support for saying *Hallel* for events that rescue life from death; Turei Even disagrees with Rashi about the word "*shirah*" in Megillah 14, contending that it refers to the *Hallel* rather than the Song of Moses, and that this was said on the first day of the Exodus, recognizing the life-saving event of leaving Egypt. Finally, Roth also looks at Hida's discussion of individual vs. communal obligations in the event of a miraculous deliverance; Hida understands that the *Hallel* is meant for the community, without a blessing, but adds that this does not preclude an individual from reciting it, even with a blessing. Roth uses all these supporting arguments for saying *Hallel* on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, though he has not decided on whether it should be with or without a blessing.⁵¹

- 3) Rabbi I.Y. Unterman says that the Chief Rabbinate's decision to approve of *Hallel* being recited (without a blessing) for Yom Ha'Atzmaut is based on the ruling of the Meiri that if a person did not have a *Megillah* to read from on Purim, he should recite *Hallel* instead

⁵⁰ Rakover, Rabbi Nahum, *op.cit.*, pg.16

⁵¹ Pelcovitz,,Rabbi Ralph, *op.cit.*, pgs.13-15

as a way of praising and thanking God. Also, Rabbi Unterman cites Brachot 14a where *Hallel* is designated as a way of publicizing a miracle.

"מי אמרין קל וחומר קריאת שמע דאורייתא
פוסק הלל דרבנן מבעיא, או דילמא פרסומא
ניסא עדיף"

“*Mi amrinan kal v'chomer: K'riat Shema d'oraita posek, Hallel d'rabanam m'bayeh oh dilma pirsumey nissah adif?*”

Therefore, Rabbi Unterman says, in the absence of a *Megillah* and with the need to publicize the miraculous events leading up to Yom Ha'Atzmaut, *Hallel* should be recited.⁵²

- 4) Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neriah finds much difficulty in deciding this issue. Before giving his answer about the recitation of *Hallel*, he poses three questions for consideration, which also relate to the status of Yom Ha'Atzmaut.⁵³ These are summarized below.

- a) Must an act of salvation be accompanied by a *nes niglah*, an openly recognized miracle?

Neriah says that whenever the Talmud refers to a miracle, it means a miracle of salvation (as in Pesachim 117a) Yet Rabbi Neriah cites Rava who said that no obvious miracle took place on Purim since the Jews remained servants of the king even though they were saved from death. He then mentions Rambam's explanation that the *Megillah* reading generally replaces reciting the *Hallel* for the salvation of Purim, unless one does not have a *Megillah*. From this, Neriah concludes that *Hallel* can be said even for miracles which are not openly recognized. So *Hallel* could be said for Yom Ha'Atzmaut even though there are those who question whether it was an openly recognized “miracle.”

- b) Must an act of salvation involve the entire nation of Israel in order for it to qualify for reciting *Hallel*?

Neriah first cites Rabbenu Tam (on Pesachim 117a) to say that although the prophets established that *Hallel* was to be said for every act of redemption, this refers only to those done for the entire nation; they said nothing about acts of salvation of individuals. In this same Talmudic portion, the Meiri said that each person can make their own commemoration of a life-saving miracle and say *Hallel* for it, without a blessing. Neriah, brings in Tosafot (Sukkah 44b) and SeMaG (Hilkhot Hanukah) to show that the idea that *Hallel* could only apply to miracles experienced by the entire nation is obsolete since the Jewish people no longer live in one geographic location. He also suggests that Rambam did not address the issue of *Hallel* because reciting it was really a voluntary act. He finds other support for this in the Talmudic discussions in

⁵² Pelcovitz, Rabbi Ralph, *op.cit.*, p.12

⁵³ Neriah, Rabbi Moshe Tzvi, “*Kviat HeHallel B'Yom Ha'Atzmaut*” in Rakover, N., *op.cit.*, pg.172-187.

Sanhedrin 94a. From this Neriah derives that an act of salvation did not necessarily have to involve the entire nation of Israel in order for *Hallel* to be said, and that it can be done voluntarily. *Hallel* could be said on Yom Ha'Atzmaut even though the act(s) of salvation did not directly involve the Jews who live outside of Israel.

c) Should Yom Ha'Atzmaut be considered a day of salvation?

A material act of redemption, even a political one, does not, according to Rabbi Neriah, obligate one to express thanks in a fixed way. It is only when physical redemption brings about spiritual freedom and an elevated awareness that such thanks are required. To support this, Neriah turns to Midrash Pesikta de Rav Kahana, Chap.2 where it says that Moses' voice overcame Pharaoh's voice in the ears of the people only after forty days journey from Egypt, when they were told that they were no longer the servants of Pharaoh but of God. Therefore, Neriah reasons, only with a rededication to the teachings of Torah following a miracle, as for example what happened on Hanukah, does the *Hallel* have any significance. Otherwise, it is like praising God for an incomplete miracle.

Neriah thus feels that the miracle of Yom Ha'Atzmaut has not yet led the majority of the nation to a new spiritual freedom and a rededication to Torah, though the potential is there; yet for some individuals this spiritual rededication did follow Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

From all this Rabbi Neriah has concluded that *Hallel* can be said voluntarily by individuals on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, but without a blessing.⁵⁴

Thus, the discussions about reciting the *Hallel* focus on the fact that Yom Ha'Atzmaut is recognized as a miraculous, redeeming event for a large segment of the Jewish people, involving an extraordinary military victory like that of Hanukah; however, some doubts remain about the full significance of this day—the potential for it being the start of The Redemption and a great spiritual awakening for our people is still unrealized—and therefore some rabbinical authorities suggest saying the *Hallel* without a blessing.

C. Reciting the *Shehecheyanu* Blessing

In reciting the *Shehecheyanu* blessing on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, one has to clarify if this is permissible, if there is precedent for this. While this blessing is usually said on the occasion of eating a new fruit or wearing new clothes, it is often said on the first day of a holiday. What is the halachic basis for saying it to sanctify time and to relate it to a particular holiday? Since Yom Ha'Atzmaut is not a holiday mentioned in the Torah or established by the Sages, what basis is there for saying this blessing on such a day?

The starting point for the halachic discussions of saying the *Shehecheyanu* prayer is in the Talmud, Eruvim 40b, where the Sages question whether it can be said on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur since these holidays occur annually but are not part of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals. The Sages conclude that this blessing is to be said on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur because these days are considered "*Mikra'ei Kodesh*"—

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

specially sanctified occasions—for which one must recognize the time set for them as mentioned in the Torah.

But what about other holidays not mentioned in the Torah? The discussion in the Baraitot of Pesachim 102b focuses on saying the *Shehecheyanu* for rabbinically established holidays vs. Torahically established ones. Here it appears at first that the *Shehecheyanu* is not to be said for rabbinically established holidays; however, then R. Tanhuma in the Jerusalem Talmud (Pesachim 10:5) adds the comment that it is to be said for first fruits in order to recognize the season of their harvesting. In this same section in the Babylonian Talmud, (Pesachim 102b) the idea arises that this blessing can be said for other recurring occasions, especially if one feels a certain joy for this—just as when eating a new squash or a fresh fig:

”שהרי אינם פחותים מן השמחה שבדלעת חדשה
ושבתאנה בכורה”

“*She-harei aynam p’chuteem meen ha-simcha she-b’dla-at chadasha v’she-b’tte-ayna b’chora.*”

Thus rabbinically-ordained holidays were to be blessed since they were not considered less enjoyable than Torahically-ordained holidays.

Yom Ha’Atzmaut has been previously compared to Hanukah and Purim in its status, though it is not really a rabbinically-established holiday. Therefore, one can look at what the halacha has said about Hanukah and Purim in regards to saying the *Shehecheyanu* blessing. On other holidays where work is prohibited, there is a natural reason to bless the day itself; but on Hanukah and Purim, when work is allowed, one needs a special ritual (*i.e.*, lighting the Menorah or reading the *Megillah*) in order to say this blessing. However, the Meiri (Shabbat 23a) comments that one can bless Hanukah for the day itself, even when not lighting the candles or if one is unable to light them. Since there is no required *mitzvah* for Yom Ha’Atzmaut, one can find support in the Meiri’s position that one can bless the day of Yom Ha’ Atzmaut itself. Especially if one truly feels a sense of joy, it seems that it is permissible, though not obligatory, to recite the *Shehecheyanu* for Yom Ha’ Atzmaut.⁵⁵

In the Talmudic tractate Berachot, whenever there is a dispute about saying or not saying a certain blessing, the Sages usually rule not to say this in order that no blessing be recited in vain. But, as Rabbi Nahum Rakover points out, the Rishonim have said that in the case of the *Shehecheyanu* it is permissible to say this prayer because it expresses the joy of one’s heart. Therefore one does not violate the commandment of taking God’s name in vain if one is joyful⁵⁶ when saying the *Shehecheyanu* blessing on Yom Ha’Atzmaut, even though this is not obligatory.

Thus one can recite the *Shehecheyanu* blessing on Yom Ha’Atzmaut since it marks a special season which arouses much joy in recalling the miraculous events of this time. If said as an expression of the happiness one feels about the significance of this day, then saying the *Shehecheyanu* blessing on Yom Ha’Atzmaut is not a blessing done in vain.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Rakover, Rabbi Nahum, *op.cit.*, pg. 17.

D. Reciting the *Al-Haniseem* Prayer and the *Mi She'Asa Niseem* Blessing

Although the Kibbutz Ha-Dati, the Masorti and the Reform movements in Israel all use a version of *Al Ha-niseem* prayer added to the *Amidah*, as on Hanukah and Purim, this has not been approved by the Chief Rabbinate. However, the Rabbinate has developed a blessing for the miracles of Yom Ha'Atzmaut which is similar to the *Mi She'Asa Niseem* formulation.

The halachic issues on this prayer and this blessing are somewhat similar to those of reciting the *Hallel*—that they are to be said to recall a miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people. A question arises: What are the reasons to oblige someone to say this prayer, especially if one is not at the site or even in the country where this miracle occurred? Does the miracle of salvation of an individual also require this prayer and blessing? Are there parameters for determining miraculous events included in the obligation to say this prayer and blessing? Does Yom Ha'Atzmaut fit into these parameters?

The Mishna (Berachot 9, Mishna 1) established that this prayer is to be said when one comes to a place where a miracle occurred. The Gemara in Berachot 54a seeks the source of this blessing, and quotes Rabbi Yohanan who refers to Ex.18:10 where Jethro blesses God for having saved the Jews from Pharaoh and from Egypt. The Gemara and the Meiri's comments explain that Jethro did not see the place where the miracles happened. However, when he saw Moses, he was so happy that it was *as if* he saw these places of the miracles.

The question is whether one can say this prayer also for the time of a miracle, and not just for the place. Achai Gaon in *Seder Vayishlach (Sheilta 26)* uses Jethro's blessing as support of this and says that if the sages of a particular generation agree to establish a holiday in the year in which a public miracle happened, then that is the date when the holiday should be observed in the future.⁵⁷ He refers to Hanukah and Purim as examples of *times* when miracles occurred, when one is to say this prayer and blessing. Nachmanides' comments (on Berachot 54a) on lighting the Hanukah candles and reading the Purim *Megillah*, indicate that the blessing for a miracle includes both the concept of the time and the place of occurrence. If one says the *Al-Haniseem* prayer and attendant blessing on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, regardless if one is in Israel or not, it is then *as if* one is recalling the actual place(s) and time(s) that the miracles happened related to this holiday.

The Talmud (Berachot 89a) establishes that the Mishna (Berachot 9, Mishna 1) refers to the "miracles of Israel" as not being private or individual ones but for all the nation when one says "*Al Haniseem.*" If the *Kahal* or "community" of Israel can be shown to be equal to the entire Jewish people, then one can say that a miracle for the inhabitants of the Land of Israel is really a miracle for all of Israel, i.e., for Jews everywhere. On this basis then a Jewish person should say *Al Ha-niseem*⁵⁸ on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, regardless if one lives in Israel or not.

Our commentators have tried to set some parameters around the kind of miracles which qualify for saying the *Al-Haniseem* prayer and the *Mi She'Asa Niseem* blessing, and have distinguished between major and minor miracles. The Meiri, in Berachot 54a, disputes this distinction when it comes to individuals being saved from life-threatening

⁵⁷ Goren, Rabbi Shlomo, "*Birchat She'Asa Niseem B'Yom Ha'Atzmaut*", in Rakover, N., *op.cit.*, pg.281.

⁵⁸ Rakover, Rabbi Nahum, *op.cit.*, pgs.19-20.

situations, saying that this would be considered a major miracle for that person and consequently they would be justified in saying the blessing for a miracle. When it comes to victories in battle when the odds are clearly against one side, do these qualify for the reciting of the *Al-Haniseem* prayer? Support for this comes from Rambam (MT, Chap.3, Hilchot Hanukah, Halacha 1) who disagrees with the Rabbis that the blessing for the miracle of Hanukah is not just about the jar of oil for the Temple's menorah but also for the military victory. The holidays mentioned in Megillat Ta'anit (BT, Rosh HaShana 18b) also are examples of military conquests for when the blessings for miraculous deliverance were offered. A Baraita on Megillat Ta'anit says that the Jewish people have a reason for reciting *Hallel*, and offering words of blessing and praise for every Divine act of national salvation, quoting Ezra 3:11 as a proof-text:

"ויצענו בהלל ובהודת לה' כי טוב כי-לעולם חסדו
על ישראל וכל-העם...."

"V'ya-anu b'Hallel u'bhodot laShem ki tov ki l'olam chasdo al Yisrael v' kol ha'am ."

Rabbi Shlomo Goren points out that the Sages did not permanently set the exact wording of the *Mi She'Asa Niseem* blessing, thus allowing for it to be used for various times and types of miracles. Among the formulations that Rabbi Goren gives for examples are: for a miracle that happened in a particular place for the members of one family, group or the whole nation.

"מי שעשה נסים לאבותינו במקום הזה"

"Mi she-asa nisseem la-avoteynu bamakom hazeh",
or for a miracle that occurred to an individual—

"ברוך שעשה לי נס בערבות ובגמל...."

"

"Baruch she'asa li nes b'arvut u've-gomel".⁵⁹

On this basis the Rabbinat in Israel has developed a blessing for the miracles of Yom Ha'Atzmaut which includes both time, place, and the Divine Name as the source of this miracle, going in accordance with what the Talmud set as standards for such a blessing. It reads as follows:

"ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם
שעשה לנו ניסים בארץ ישראל
בזמן הזה"

"Baruch Atah Adonai Elokeynh Melech HaOlam, She'Asa Lanu Nissim B'Eretz Yisrael Baz'man Hazeh".⁶⁰

This blessing and the *Al-Haniseem* prayer then can be said for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, even if one lives in the Diaspora since the words of the prayer help recall the time and the place of the miraculous events. The military victories of Yom Ha'Atzmaut, where the troops were heavily outnumbered and greatly under-equipped in most battles, certainly can be considered miraculous. And the resulting establishment of the State of Israel is a miracle that does affect all Jews, regardless of where they live. Therefore, it is proper to

⁵⁹ Goren, Rabbi Shlomo, "*Birchat She-Asa Nissim B'Yom Ha'atzmaut*", in Rakover, N. .*op.cit.*, pg. 280.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

recite the *Al-Haniseem* prayer and the blessing formulated by the Rabbinat for Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

E. Reading Torah and Haftarah Portions on Yom Ha'Atzmaut

In looking at the issue of reading Torah and Haftarah on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, one must look at how the Torah reading was established by Ezra and Nehemiah and the discussion of this in the Talmud, Babba Kama 82a. While the regular times for reading the Torah were on the mornings of Monday, Thursday, and Shabbat, the Sages did allow for reading at other times, such as on Hanukah, Purim, Rosh Hodesh, the Festivals and other holidays, as Rambam notes (MT, Hilchot Tefilla 5,2). Rabbi Avraham HaLevi (in *Ginat V'radim*) mentions other times that people began reading the Torah, such as on Simchat Torah. The Sages said that whenever ten men assembled and agreed to read the Torah, it was praiseworthy. Since, however, the Sages did not want to overburden the community, it was established for the three aforementioned times, but this did not exclude the possibility of other times. Thus there is a basis for permitting the Torah to be read on Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

As for reading the Haftarah, Rambam said this was to originally be read on Shabbat, Festivals, High Holy Days and on Tisha B'av, though people have added to this practice, such as reading it at the Mincha service on a public fast day. While this does seem to allow for the Haftara to be read on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, it does create one problem in that it then makes Yom Ha'Atzmaut unlike the other major category of holidays which includes Purim and Hanukah; on those days the Haftarah is not read.⁶¹ Having both Torah and Haftarah read on Yom Ha'Atzmaut likens this day more to a Torahically-established holiday which is problematic. Perhaps Yom Ha'Atzmaut is in a category of its own, as Rabbi Goren has previously suggested.

⁶¹ Rakover, Rabbi Nahum, *op.cit.*, pgs.20-21.

There has been discussion of whether a special Torah reading for Yom Ha'Atzmaut should supplant the regular Torah reading if the holiday falls on a Monday, Thursday or Shabbat. In practice, congregations in Israel have chosen to either add the special Torah reading following the regular weekly portion, but without any blessings, or to omit this special reading altogether.

The Israeli Rabbinate has not issued any directives about the specific Torah portion to be read on Yom Ha'Atzmaut and thus different selections have been made by various congregations. The two most frequently chosen portions are from *Parshat Ekev* (Deut.7:12-11:25) and *Parshat Nitzavim* (Deut.29:9-30:20). The reason for the choice of *Ekev* on Yom Ha'atzmaut is due to the following verses:⁶²

8:7—

כי ה' אלהיך מביאך אל־ארץ טובה
ארץ נחלי מים עינות ותהמות יצאים
בבקעה ובהר

“For the Lord thy God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing from the valleys and hills.”;

8:11—

השמר לך פְּרִתְשַׁכַּח אֶת־ה' אלהיך
בלבתי שמר מצותיו ומשפטיו וחקתיו
אשר אנכי מצוך היום

“Beware lest you forget the Lord thy God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances, and His statutes, which I command you this day;”

8:18—

וזכרת אֶת־ה' אלהיך כי הוא הנתן
לך כח לעשות חיל למען הקים
אֶת־בריתו אשר־נשבע לאבתך
ביום הזה

“But you shall remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that gives you power to get wealth, so that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”

The verses from *Nitzavim* which are thought to be most relevant for Yom Ha'atzmaut are as follows:

30:1-2—

והיה כִּי־יבאו עליך כל־הדברים האלה
הברכה והקללה אשר נתתי לפניך
והשבת אל־לבבך בכל־הגוים אשר
הדיחך ה' אלהיך שמה. ושבת עֲדֵה'
אלהיך ושמעת בקלו ככל אשר־אנכי

⁶² Elinar, Rabbi A., “*Al Minhagei Keriat HaTorah v'HaHaftarah B'Aretz U'BaGolah V'Yom Ha'Atzmaut*”
Shana B'Shana, (1965) pg.93

מצוך היום אתה ובניך בכל-לבבך
ובכל-נפשך.

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things have happened to you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you take them to heart amidst the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you will return to the Lord your God and listen to Him in accordance with all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul.”

30:3—

ושב ה' אלהיך את-שבותך ורחמך
ושב וקבצך מכל העמים אשר
הפיצך ה' אלהיך שמה

“Then the Lord your God will turn around your captivity and will have compassion on you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, where the Lord your God has scattered you.”

29:9-10—

אתם נצבים היום כלכם
לפני ה' אלהיכם ראשיכם
שבטיכם זקניכם ושטריכם
כל איש ישראל. טפכם
נשיכם וגרך אשר בקרב
מחניך מחטב עציק עד
שאב מימך לעברך בברית
ה' אלהיך ובאלתו אשר
ה' אלהיך כרת עמך היום.

“You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God—your tribal heads, your elders, your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer—to enter into the covenant of the Lord your God which the Lord your God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions;”

When the Haftarah is read immediately following the three *aliyot* to the Torah, as on Tisha B'Av, so that there is no pause between these readings, then no blessings are said. This practice has also been adopted for the reading of the Haftarah on Yom Ha'Atzmaut in many congregations. The Haftara portion chosen most often to be read on Yom Ha'Atzmaut is the same as that read on the last day of Pesach, Isaiah 10:32- 12:6—“*Od HaYom b'Nov* . Rabbi A. Eliner suggests that this portion was chosen both because it would be familiar to the congregation and conveniently found in their *siddurim*, and also because of the significance of its contents. It describes the fall of the Assyrian attacker prior to the Coming of the Messiah and the Ingathering of the Exiles.⁶³

⁶³ Eliner, Rabbi A., *op.cit.*, pg. 96.

F. What Happens If Yom Ha'atzmaut Falls On Shabbat?

Halachic problems occur with celebrating Yom Ha'Atzmaut on a Shabbat. Certainly holding parades, lighting torches, and traveling around the country—all part of the regular festivities of the day—would be prohibited, as would preparing food for a festive meal. On the other hand, *Hallel* is to be recited on the actual day of the holiday to commemorate the miracle, and this could not be done if the holiday was postponed because of its occurring on Shabbat.

Rabbi Shlomo Goren wrote that the Rabbinat in Israel had to make a ruling about this once when Yom Ha'Atzmaut coincided with Shabbat and the government first planned to postpone the celebration to Sunday, the 6th of Iyar. The Rabbinat asked that the festivities be changed to Thursday, the 3rd of Iyar so as to avoid any violations of Shabbat which might occur if preparations for any of the festivities had to be made on Shabbat for a Sunday observance. In regard to the issue of *Hallel*, the rabbinical authorities explained that the miracle of the War of Independence was something which occurred repeatedly during this whole period and not just on one day. The date that the government had chosen to commemorate this miracle was thus not the only date that could have been chosen, but it was significant in that it was the day of the Declaration of Israel's Statehood, and this had been decided by the representatives of the majority of the public. Thus the 5th of Iyar was the date selected for this holiday, and it was to be a day of feasting, drinking, joy, and praise to God as other such "*yamim tovim*"; however, when it coincided with Shabbat, it was temporarily to be celebrated two days earlier.⁶⁴

G. *Sefirah*-Prohibited Activities and Yom Ha'Atzmaut

Since Yom Ha'Atzmaut is regarded as a day of rejoicing, even though it, like L'Ag B'Omer, falls in the middle of the *Sefirah* mourning period, most *Sefirah* prohibitions are suspended. Not very much has been written on this. Generally in practice *Tahanun* prayers are not recited and eulogies at funerals are abbreviated or omitted. The issues of haircuts and of weddings have generated some halachic discourse. Haircuts have been permitted by some rabbis, such as Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank, Rabbi of Jerusalem, who says if one is rejoicing on this day, then this is allowed.⁶⁵ Also the Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in 1949 permitted marriages on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, as well as on L'Ag B'Omer.⁶⁶

Rabbi Ovadiah Hadai discusses the issue of *Sefirah* prohibitions by first looking at the date of the holiday itself. While recognizing the status of Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a holiday on which a miracle of salvation occurred, he contends that the date of observance was not the day on which the miracle occurred. Instead, he suggests that the date of observance should not have been when independence was declared but rather after the cessation of military action, closer to the date of the UN's recognition in February 1949. Rabbi Hadai says that on that day, one could truly say that "the few were rescued from the many," that great odds were overcome with Divine help, and that Jerusalem was saved from enemy hands. This would have obviated the problems coinciding with the

⁶⁴ Goren, Rabbi Shlomo, "Yom Ha-atzmaut she chal b'Shabbat", in Rakover, N. *op.cit.*, pg. 319-327.

⁶⁵ Arend, A., *op.cit.*, pg. 23.

⁶⁶ Klein, Rabbi Isaac, adapted from *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, "Yom Ha'atzmaut", [http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/jrpguide/10_part 1a.shtml](http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/jrpguide/10_part%201a.shtml)

Sefirah period. However, since these prohibitions of the *Sefirah* period have been observed for centuries, Rabbi Hadia feels that these traditions are not to be broken, despite the joyous feelings one has about Yom Ha'Atzmaut.⁶⁷

Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim points out that the practice of not holding wedding ceremonies or getting haircuts during the *Sefirah* period is based on custom and not on any halacha mentioned in the Talmud. He explains that these customs derive from the account in BT Yevamot 62b of the terrible death of many of Rabbi Akiva's students at the hands of the Romans. He says that these mourning customs have been perpetuated for many centuries and are mentioned in many sources, such as the *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch*. Rabbi Nissim mentions that some communities later ignored the prohibition against marriage, such as found in the responsa of *Radbaz* and some of the *Aharonim*. When there was an emergency or an important reason, such as fulfilling the *mitzvah* of procreation, and if the festivities were kept to a minimum, then marriages were allowed. Generally marriages were not permitted during the *Sefirah* period except on L'ag B'Omer.

On the issue of haircuts, Rabbi Nissim also mentions that some *poskim* felt that this should be allowed since this prohibition was also based on custom rather than on halachic rulings. Certain circumstances might necessitate haircutting, especially in the case of performing the *mitzvah* of *sandak* or *mohel* at a *brit milah* since this might cause problems of sanitation.⁶⁸

It appears then there is some precedent for allowing marriages and getting haircuts on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, but the writers of modern responsa generally do not encourage this during the *Sefirah* period, even if Yom Ha'Atzmaut is considered a joyous, national holiday.

VI. Secular Israeli Attitudes Towards Yom Ha'Atzmaut

On Yom Ha'Atzmaut in Israel the streets and parks are filled with people celebrating in the manner described in the opening section of this paper. But most of them do not observe Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a religious or spiritual holiday. A study was done in 1977 by Prof. Charles Kamen in which 1,892 adults living in four urban areas were surveyed about their activities and enjoyment levels on Yom Ha'Atzmaut. The results give some clue as to what secular Israelis feel about this holiday and where this is likely to lead in the near future.

Those who were most educated, regardless of ethnic background or level of religiosity, generally preferred private parties to the communal celebrations. Those who did participate in the communal celebrations stated that these definitely contributed to feelings of happiness, versus those who were passive spectators or those who did not

⁶⁷ Hadai, Rabbi Ovadiah, "*Tisporot V'Nisuin*" in Rakover, N. *op.cit.*, pgs. 331-333.

⁶⁸ Nissim, Rabbi Yitzhak, "*Arichat Nisuin v'Tisporot B'Yom Ha'atzmaut*", in Rakover, N. *op.cit.*, pgs. 334-340.

participate. There was also a marked difference between native-born Israelis (who preferred the private parties) and non-natives (who preferred the public celebrations). Generational differences were also noted among those few who experienced firsthand the events of the Independence War still keeping strong connections to others with whom they grew up with or fought in wars. Those born in the late 1950's and 60's no longer had ties with many friends from elementary or high school and had to find other friends as adults; the latter group's orientation to Independence Day is less satisfying now than it was when they were with their school-age friends.⁶⁹

The author notes that Israelis have become more concerned with individual issues than with national and moral ones. This he attributes in part to the 1950's mass immigration of non-Zionist and non-Socialist groups who could not be expected to observe Independence Day with the same intense feeling as veterans. In fact, he points to government programs designed to "teach" these immigrants how to celebrate this day. The author expresses his worries that the values and socialization of the generation that created the State are not being passed on to the younger generations; he wonders what their attachment to the State will be and their understanding of the meaning of Yom Ha' Atzmaut.⁷⁰

Attempts by the government to add religious aspects to the Independence Day celebrations have not been accepted by those who are from secular and Socialist Zionist backgrounds. As Prof. Eliezer Don-Yehiya has found, there is a trend to move away from symbols and ceremonies of collective significance to practices which don't have clearly defined value messages. The decline of statism has led to more individual expression and permissiveness in Israeli political culture. The feeling of national Jewish unity still exists but is not imposed from above, nor is the State the central focus but rather the feelings of peoplehood and shared culture.⁷¹

In an effort to understand the attitudes of those Israelis who are not affiliated with any Jewish religious movement today (either out of conviction, habit, or because they have not been able to identify with the practices of these movements), the author surveyed a small group (26 people) about their thoughts on the significance and observance of Yom Ha' Atzmaut. This was not a scientifically valid survey, since the group was very small and didn't represent enough of the many different Israeli groups. Yet, it does offer some interesting views of how Yom Ha' Atzmaut is viewed today by some secular Israelis. The group represented Israelis of various age groups (20-65), some living in Israel and others in the Diaspora. Their educational and socioeconomic backgrounds varied widely, but these were not taken into account as in the study by Don-Yehiya. The statistical breakdown for this small group is as follows:

Males:	<u>12</u>	Females:	<u>14</u>
Age ranges:	20-30yrs: <u>3</u>	30-40yrs: <u>5</u>	40-50 yrs: <u>3</u>
	50-60yrs: <u>11</u>	60-70yrs: <u>4</u>	

⁶⁹ Kamen, Charles S., "Affirmation of Enjoyment? The Commemoration of Independence in Israel", *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 19,1977,pgs. 5-8.

⁷⁰ Kamen, Charles S., *op.cit.*, pg. 20.

⁷¹ Don-Yehiya, E., *op.cit.*, pg.83

Currently live in Israel: 8
Attend a synagogue for holidays: 10

Currently live elsewhere: 18
Do not attend a synagogue: 16

A copy of the survey questions is attached. Participants were given the option to explain their answers, which the majority took the time to do. From this, some interesting commonalities have been noted and some insights into various attitudes are revealed. However, because of the small size of this group, it was not possible to see any definitive differences relating to age groups, gender, location or synagogue attendance. The results should therefore be taken as a kind of case study of some existing attitudes, but not the only ones. Their relative weight given in analyzing this survey is not meant to suggest that this would necessarily be true for a much larger group. The questionnaire used also attempted to get initial feedback to the idea of changing some of the format of the current public, communal Yom Ha'Atzmaut observances which have little (if any) religious or spiritual elements.

Most noticeably, the overwhelming majority (24 of 26) answered that they “very much agreed” to statement in Question #1 that read: “ I see the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as an extraordinary event in Jewish history.” The two other answers chosen were “somewhat agreed” and “neutral.” This was the only answer upon which there was almost unanimous agreement, and the reasons given for this were also fairly similar. Most remarked that the establishment of a homeland, a safe haven and an independent state for Jews, especially after the Holocaust and the 2000 years of Exile, was indeed something extraordinary in our history. Several mentioned the change in self-perception that this historic event gave to the Jewish people and to Jewish individuals, engendering a sense of pride and security, even for those who remained in the Diaspora. Two respondents added that this also has led many non-Jews to see the Jewish people in a much more respected way, accepting Israel as a state among the nations of the world. Although this question doesn't deal directly with Yom Ha'Atzmaut and its observances, it is interesting to see widespread agreement in this diverse group about the importance of the event which Yom Ha'Atzmaut commemorates.

There was less agreement on the issue of Yom Ha'Atzmaut's significance today (Question #3): 12 respondents stated that its significance has become much greater, 4 felt it had become somewhat more important, 2 felt it had not changed. Six respondents, however, felt it had become somewhat less important, and one answered that it had become much less important. Those who felt that its significance had increased either somewhat or greatly gave the following reasons:

- It is important for all of us to celebrate and keep the awareness of our Jewish homeland and Israel as an independent Jewish state in our consciousness;
- It stands as a kind of bulwark for the Jews in the Diaspora, especially with the rise of anti-Semitism in the world today, as both a safe haven and a symbol of standing up to our enemies;
- It is critical that the younger generation of Jews who were not alive when the State of Israel was established develop connections to Israel and understand its significance to the Jewish people.

On the other hand, those who saw a decrease in the significance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut today offered these reasons:

- Israel's existence as an independent state is now a fact, and is taken as a "given" by many people (taken for granted) and therefore it is not seen as important to reaffirm this every year;
- Israel's existence is not seen as "miraculous" and it does not inspire Jews today with awe and excitement, especially those who live there;
- Diaspora Jews, especially of the younger generation, do not identify Israel as "theirs" and find barriers with Israelis on emotional and cultural levels;

From these answers, it appears that both sets of respondents see challenges to how present and future generations who did not experience Israel's formation firsthand will perceive Israel's significance. Those who see the increased significance seem to feel that Yom Ha'Atzmaut is an occasion to stress Israel's importance for all Jews today, its role as a safe haven and its symbolic representation of assertiveness in the face of enmity. At the same time, those who see the decrease in Yom Ha'Atzmaut's significance base their view on reactions they have observed in both Israel and the USA. They cite people who now view Israel's existence as a normal, everyday fact, not something exciting that stimulates celebration. Indeed, for some it may remind them of differences or critical attitudes between Jewish groups in the Diaspora and in Israel, or between citizens and the government of Israel.

When asked about adding the word "redemption" to the description of modern Israel's establishment, as was done in its Declaration of Statehood, further differences arose among the respondents (Question #2). This time there were 11 who agreed strongly and 5 who agreed somewhat, while there were 7 who felt neutral about this and 3 who disagreed somewhat. Here the differences seemed to center around how the word "redemption" was interpreted by the respondents. Common explanations among those who agreed with the Declaration of Statehood's wording that Israel represents "the beginning of the flowering/growth of our Redemption" were:

- it is what is understood by the return of the Exiles to Israel after 2000 years, to a free and proud state;
- it is an idea that is only possible to fulfill when the Jews have their own free country, which the modern State of Israel represents;
- it correctly describes the feelings of that era (when the State was first established);

For those who disagreed or were neutral about this, the main interpretations given were:

- Israel can not be described this way because this is a religious term and has no meaning for those who consider themselves secular Jews;
- Redemption in a social or political sense is a potential or ideal, but has not been achieved in Israel yet because of the political problems which have become prominent since 1948, *i.e.*, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the disunity among the Jews who live in Israel.

Here we see some view "redemption" as the descriptive term for what Israel's establishment meant for Jews who made and continue to make *aliyah* there. It is not something that has been achieved entirely yet, but it is in process. It may also have been limited to the State's early era. Others, however, see it more as an ideal, but not something that they would use today to describe Israel. This is due to Israel having to fight several wars with its Arab neighbors, and not yet having settled the ongoing terror

war in a peaceful manner with the Palestinian Arabs. A redeemed Israel for these respondents seems equivalent with an Israel that has peace on its borders and within.

Evaluating the existing public ceremonies for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, in both Israel and the Diaspora, as an adequate expression of the Jewish people's spiritual needs, an even greater variety of answers were given (Question #4). Eight agreed strongly that the current mode of expression is sufficient, 6 agreed somewhat, 8 others were neutral; two disagreed somewhat and 2 disagreed greatly. Here, too, answers depended on how respondents understood the expression "spiritual needs of the Jewish people"—which one respondent stated he, as an atheist, did not understand and could not answer. The reasons given for those who agreed with the expression offered in the public celebrations in Israel or in the USA were as follows:

- It arouses special feelings which are unlike other holidays
- It is a party atmosphere
- Creates a feeling of closeness to Israel
- It is important to feel that one is part of a community

Several of those who agreed with the present celebrations expressed disappointment that the celebrations have changed and no longer have the military parades or other ceremonies (unspecified) that existed in the early decades.

For those who disagreed, the reasons given included:

- It does not express the real importance of the holiday
- It is too much of a party atmosphere and lacks any spiritual meaning
- In the USA it has become a marketing ploy for fundraising
- The young people in Israel often do not find something that is appealing to them in the way the holiday is celebrated

Those who responded that they were "neutral," as well as a number of those who "disagreed" and even a few who "agreed" remarked that there were differences in the way they evaluated the celebrations in Israel vs. in the USA. About this the comments were:

- In the USA the holiday is not well-publicized or given much importance
- There is not much identity with Israel in the Diaspora, especially among the younger generation
- The unstable situation in Israel makes it seem unsafe, and Israel's political actions have often been criticized as undemocratic, thus making it hard to celebrate Israel's existence for some

The related question whether or not there is a need for more spiritual expression of emotions on Yom Ha'atzmaut than presently exists, and whether or not this should be done through liturgy, poetry, or song brought forth a similar range of opinions. However, these were not predictable based on the answer to the previous question (*i.e.*, those who agreed that the present celebrations were sufficient in expressing their spiritual needs did not in most cases disagree that more spiritual expression and different formats were needed.) Eight respondents strongly agreed with the premise, four agreed somewhat, eight others were neutral, three disagreed somewhat and three disagreed greatly. Those who agreed gave the following explanations:

- It was important to help express pride in Israel and develop connections to Israel, especially for Jews in the Diaspora—so every means should be used for this
- Israel's assertive image has been missing and there is a need to showcase more of Israel's successes in attractive and effective ways

For those who disagreed, the answers were as follows:

- There are already enough forms of spiritual expression and celebration
- The spiritual and national needs should be separate
- More spiritual expression is not needed, but a way of being more inclusive and encouraging others to join in is needed

Among the “neutral” answers, there were several interesting explanations given:

- Prefers altogether more personal celebrations, like family or friends holding an annual picnic, or one preferred an alternative celebration which is held annually among Jews and Arabs, stressing the need to work for peace
- The spiritual expression will evolve “naturally” in Israel, while in USA anything that is “created” is not usually successful in the long run.
- Perhaps this is the normal process of evolution of all countries and we are seeking something that is unnatural; the songs and poetry used in some celebrations in Israel sound outdated today.

In thinking about these answers, especially to the last two questions, it is also important to notice the levels of participation in Yom Ha'Atzmaut observances of the respondents. Here were also widespread differences, and several did offer reasons for their answer:

Nine of the respondents attend every year, stating that this is an important holiday, expressing a close connection to the Jewish homeland, giving them an outlet to express their pride and freedom, allowing them to participate in a socially important event (the one who attended the alternative celebration with Jews and Arabs mentioned above), and generally was an enjoyable affair.

Four said they had attended for most of the last 20 years, saying that this was something that the majority of the people around them did, or saying that at times they were unable to attend because of work.

Five said they attended about half of the last 20 years, with one respondent saying that there was not much celebration in the small community where he now lives.

Six said they had attended much less than half of the last 20 years, with comments that their USA communities didn't give much attention to this day, or that they preferred private celebrations, or that other needs in life took priority. Two respondents said that they had never or only once attended a celebration of Yom Ha'Atzmaut, but neither offered any comment or explanation of this.

From this small survey, it is interesting to see the range of attitudes and ideas about Yom Ha'Atzmaut that exist among those who define themselves as mostly “secular” Jews. Certainly there is a strong feeling about the importance of Israel itself to the Jewish people, but Israel, after 56 years of existence, is now an accepted fact for most people and some no longer feel the need to celebrate its existence. In fact, those who have critical views of Israel's political actions often find it difficult to separate these and express pride and joy in Israel's existence. There is, however, a concern that the younger

generation of Jews, especially in the Diaspora, are losing any feelings of identification with Israel and for that reason some see Yom Ha'Atzmaut as having more importance in helping to develop and maintain this connection with Israel as part of our annual cycle of Jewish holidays. While there are a good number in our survey who feel that the present celebrations, at least those in Israel, adequately express the spiritual needs of the Jewish people today, there are enough others who also think that the younger generation, especially in the Diaspora, is not being reached so effectively. They seem to agree that other cultural and spiritual elements that would highlight Israel's successes and be appealing to more people are certainly needed in the modern observances of Yom Ha'Atzmaut.

Questionnaire About Yom Ha'Atzmaut - For Dorit Edut's Paper

PLEASE ANSWER AS COMPLETELY AS POSSIBLE, ESPECIALLY THE OPEN-ENDED SECTIONS.

1) I see the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as an extraordinary event in Jewish history .

- I agree very much
- I agree somewhat
- I am neutral about this
- I disagree somewhat
- I disagree very much

Please explain your answer:

2) The wording in the Declaration of Israel's Statehood that this event signals "*resheet zmichat ge'ulateynu - the beginning of the flowering of our Redemption*" is something that I:

- agree with very much
- agree with somewhat
- feel neutral about
- disagree with somewhat
- disagree with very much

Please explain your answer:

3) I think that the significance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut has today:

- become much greater for the Jewish people
- become somewhat more important for the Jewish people
- not changed in importance since the establishment of the State
- become somewhat less important for the Jewish people
- become much less important for the Jewish people

Please explain your answer:

4) The current national public celebration in Israel on Yom Ha'atzmaut (or the local community ones in the USA) sufficiently express the spiritual needs of the Jewish people for this holiday:

- agree strongly
- agree somewhat
- am neutral about this
- disagree somewhat

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The State of Israel has now existed more than half a century. One can already see changes in the attitudes of the Jewish people, both in Israel and the Diaspora, around the meaning and significance of this phenomenon. Yom Ha'Atzmaut, the holiday which celebrates the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, has been observed both as a secular, national holiday and as a religious observance for the Jewish people. This paper has primarily focused on the development of the religious observance of this day, since Israel's founding, as it has been expressed in the liturgy of various groups and movements, both in Israel and in the USA. This paper has also briefly looked at the historical background of this holiday and at the views of those who consider themselves "secular" or "non-observant" about its observance.

Liturgically, there has been a plethora of *siddurim*, *sidrai tefilot*, and *tikkunim* produced for observing Yom Ha'Atzmaut, using prayers and formats from other holidays, such as Shabbat, Pesach, Hoshanna Rabbah and even the High Holy Days. There are also original prayers, poetry, and songs which have become associated with important events in modern Israel's short history, such as the Six-Day War when the Old City of Jerusalem and the Western Wall again became part of Israel. Although the government tried during the early years to direct the observances and development of liturgy for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, this was not accepted by the general public. Soon, people developed other ways of celebrating, such as private parties and family gatherings, as well as religious services based on models from other Jewish holidays. The de-emphasis on the State as supreme authority and the search for an expression based more on a traditional religious view of Israel in part resulted from the influx of Jews from Arab countries. They were not imbued with the Socialist Zionist ideas of the European Jews who preceded them. With time the Rabbinate also became more sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of the general public and this was reflected in their publications and official statements on ways of observing Yom Ha'Atzmaut. Among the more recent developments, for example, was that of a *haggadah* for families or small groups to use, published by the Frankel Center in cooperation with WZO. This *haggadah* reflects also the intention to appeal to Jews of all different religious backgrounds, including those who may identify as "secular" but are willing to participate in such observances to express their emotions.

In reviewing and comparing the liturgy of the various movements and groups in Israel, it is interesting to note that the Sephardic and Oriental communities have clear references to Redemption and the Messiah, and even the rebuilding of the Temple in their liturgy for Yom Ha'Atzmaut. The Reform movement in Israel also refers to the establishment of the State as the start of the final Redemption, as is mentioned in the Declaration of Statehood. In fact, it is the Reform movement today, which once was anti-Zionist, that has one of the strongest expressions of religious Zionism in its *siddur* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut. The Religious Kibbutz Movement has also developed its own *sidrai tefilot* over the years, including an evening and morning service, Torah reading, and reciting Hallel at both times.

Celebrations of Yom Ha'Atzmaut in the USA have often brought the different movements together for communal observances, which also, as in Israel, included non-

religious activities. Although the religious observances which developed in the USA were initially based on those done by the members of the same movement in Israel, over time some differences developed, such as emphasizing more strongly the connection with the people of Israel and omitting any reference to the *mitzvah* of making *aliyah* to Israel and to the end of the Diaspora. Also, unlike the movements in Israel, the American Jewish movements did not develop their own special *siddurim* or *sidrai tefilot* for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, preferring instead to incorporate prayers for Israel in the daily worship, and on the holiday itself. Only the Reform movement developed a complete service for this day which it included in its daily and Shabbat *siddur*.

The halachic issues which have affected the choice and implementation of certain prayers and observances have been discussed among the rabbinic authorities in Israel since the inception of the State. The primary debate was whether the day could even be established as a "*yom tov*" since this meant setting up a new holiday unsanctioned by the Torah or by the Rabbis of the Talmud, and determining whether this day really commemorated a miracle of Divine salvation. The different argumentation included whether or not to recite certain prayers such as *Hallel* and *Al-Haniseem* which are also only said in the event of a public miracle. Other halachic questions concerned the reading of Torah and Haftarah on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, the overriding of *Sefirah* prohibitions since Yom Ha'Atzmaut always falls during the time between Pesach and Shavuot, and the changes necessitated when Yom Ha'Atzmaut coincides with a Shabbat on the calendar. Generally, the halachic responsa have found a comparative basis with Hanukkah and Purim in determining the miraculous nature of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. For the most part, they favor the use of the prayers and practices that would emphasize this and our thanks to God.

Those who consider themselves "secular" Jews represent the majority in Israel today, and they have also changed their attitudes towards observing Yom Ha'Atzmaut. While they still have strong feelings of the importance of the holiday and participate to some extent in the public festivities, many prefer to celebrate with friends in private parties, allowing for more individual expression of their feelings, and rejecting any government-sponsored expressions of national pride or patriotism. However, similar to the American Jewish community, the emphasis on the Jewish nation and its elements of shared culture is what predominates rather than the focus on the State itself. This is perhaps because the State of Israel is now accepted as a given fact by the younger generations that were not involved in the struggles to establish it, and also strong criticisms voiced about how the Israeli government manages State affairs.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a religious observance, both in Israel and in the USA, has attracted only a limited number of people, and yet much creativity has surfaced in the development of liturgy and observances. While government-sponsored observances seem to be less attractive ways of expressing feelings of national unity and hope, it is possible that these religious observances will someday become the chosen mode of expression as Jews understand the deep significance of this holiday in our overall history. Much will depend on how well the significance of this holiday is transmitted to the younger generations and how inclusive and appealing the observances are for most of the Jewish people.

