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Purim Sheni: An Instance of the Liturgical Sacralization of Personal Time

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Chapter I: Introduction

On the 19th of Adar, 5737 (March 9, 1976), Rabbi Nachman Frimer, along with a group of others, was held captive in the B'nai B'rith building in Washington D.C., by a group of terrorists who threatened their lives. One man was killed while others were beaten during the period of captivity. At two distinct moments during the forty-one hours in which the hostages were held, Rabbi Frimer was convinced that his life would also soon be ended. Yet, on Adar 21, Rabbi Frimer was miraculously freed.

In honor of this miracle of deliverance, the Frimer family declared for their own celebration a day of praise and thanksgiving to God. Every year on that day, the Frimer family gathers from around the world to celebrate "Purim Frimer" with study, prayer, tzedakah, and a festive meal. As part of the study component of the celebration, the family publishes a volume of articles dedicated to Rabbi Frimer and to the Purim Sheni (Second Purim), the Purim Frimer, which they celebrate.[1]

Purim Sheni celebrations like that of the Frimer family are not uncommon. The Encyclopedia Judaica lists over 100

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[1]. see Or Ha-Mizrach 31 (1983), 32 (1984), and 34 (1985), for this continuing series of articles.

such celebrations[2] while Cecil Roth analyzes a number of the Megillot written for them.[3] A majority of these Second Purim celebrations date from the period of the French Revolution in the Mediterranean region. It was then that the Jews, suspected sympathizers with the revolutionary cause, faced considerable danger. Hardly a community did not have its moment of peril, escape from which was considered to be an occasion for special gratitude and thankfulness to God.

All of these holidays have one thing in common: they were declared as a result of being saved from peril. Second Purim celebrations commemorate timely release from tyrannical rule, or escape from impending disasters such as earthquakes, plagues, and enemy attack. Unlike the original Purim, these second Purims are not universally celebrated. Rather, only people directly involved with the event itself observe the Second Purim holiday.

Various types of Second Purim celebrations have been declared. Purim Primer is an example of a Personal Purim declared by an individual or a family for an event which happened specifically to them. But the most common example of a Second Purim celebration is that of a community or city. These are declared when the entire Jewish community in one

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2. Encyclopedia Judaica, "Purims, Special", vol. 13, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), p. 1396.

3. Cecil Roth, "Some Revolutionary Purims", Hebrew Union College Annual 10 (1935): pp. 451-482.

locale has faced a certain peril and then been delivered to safety. Community Purim celebrations are typically named for the community itself, e.g. Purim Verona, declared when the Ghetto was instituted, providing the Jews with much needed security.[4] Various other names are documented which recall the peril faced or the specific event which occurred, e.g. Purim Hitler, declared when the Nazis left Casablanca without deporting the Jews,[5] or Gunpowder Purim in which a magazine of gunpowder exploded killing many, yet only wounding Abraham Danzig and his family.[6]

The exact nomenclature with which one refers to these holidays is unclear. The Encyclopedia Judaica lists them as "Special Purims",[7] in order to differentiate them from "Purim Katan", another term commonly used to describe them, yet one which is also the name given to the 14th and 15th days of the first month of Adar in a leap year. In English, when not referred to as "Special Purims" they are often referred to as "Personal Purims," a reflection of the often used Hebrew term "Purim Yachid". This thesis will utilize the terms "Purim Sheni" (Second Purim) or "Personal Purim" to identify clearly

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4. Cecil Roth, A Jewish Book of Days, (London: Edward Goldstone Ltd., 1931), pp. 13-14.

5. Yom Tov Lewinski, Sefer Ha-Moadim, (Tel Aviv: Dvir Co. Ltd., and The Oneg Shabbat (Ohel Shem) Society, 1955), p. 309.

6. Cecil Roth, A Jewish Book of Days, p. 277.

7. Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 13, p. 1396.

the holiday without raising other issues which might interfere with the correct understanding of the holiday under discussion.

Second Purim closely parallels the original Purim not only because they both celebrate deliverance from death, but also in the nature of their ritual. As on the original Purim, the celebrants usually engage in no work and for most of the holidays (both community and personal) a specially composed Megillah is read publicly. Like Megillat Esther, these Megillot retell the events the holiday commemorates and are often written in a style similar to that of the original scroll. As in Megillat Esther, the language used is ancient Hebrew and the rhythm and cadence approximates that of the ancient text.

Synagogue services on the holiday include an innovative liturgy with special prayers of thanksgiving in the style of piyyutim. Like the prayer retelling the miracle of Purim and Chanukah, a special Al Hanissim which tells of the miracle of the Special Purim is often found. Often too, a Mi-Camocha prayer is written which describes the contemporary miracle being celebrated. The original Mi-Camocha tells of the redemption from Egypt and of the miracle of the Red Sea and thus offers a pattern for telling of deliverance from death by a miracle of God. Surrounding the reading of the Megillah and the recitation of the Mi-Camocha are special liturgies which are sometimes included for posterity within the prayer

books of the communities in question. There is even discussion of whether a member of a community who moves should continue to celebrate the original community's Second Purim.[8] In some cases, communities recited Hallel on the day of their celebration,[9] a highly unorthodox procedure which is much debated.

Other rituals from the original Purim have also been included in Second Purim celebrations. Mishloach manot, the giving of packages of charity, for example, and a festive meal. Some Community Purims are even preceded by fast days as a reminder of the troubles from which the community was delivered.[10] A fast preceding the feast parallels the Fast of Esther which precedes Purim and which is described in the Megillah.[11]

Some of the more prominent Special Purims exemplify the various occurrences which have been celebrated over the years. An annual Purim marked in Tunisia has its roots in the natural elements. In January 1891 a blinding snowstorm was raging in Tunis and many died from the cold and lack of facilities caused by the weather. One of the synagogues in

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8. Yom Tov Lewinski, Sefer Ha-Moadim, p. 298.

9. Ibid., pp. 297-298.

10. See Cecil Roth, A Jewish Book of Days, pp. 154-155 and pp. 304-305, and David Philipson, Old European Jewries, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 5703-1943), pp. 66-69, for examples.

11. Esther, 4:16.

the city became a distribution center for food and shelter for those whose homes had been destroyed. When the snow ceased, the people began to return to their homes. The night after the synagogue was cleared, the roof fell in from all the snow, yet miraculously, no one was hurt. The Jews of Tunis annually observe the 24th of Tevet as Purim Sheleg, a Snow Purim, to mark their rescue.[12]

Another example of a Purim Sheni occurred in Tripoli. In late 1704 and early 1705, a blockade had been established around the city threatening to strangle the city and starve its citizens. Food was short; disease ran rampant; there seemed no way out other than death. Yet, on January 20, 1705, a plague caused the enemy to retreat, lifting the blockade. The Rabbis instituted Purim Sherif with a special Megillah and Mi-Camocha written especially for the occasion.[13]

All of the examples cited have in common the inauguration of a holiday to commemorate an unlikely escape from impending harm. The celebrations are referred to as Purim not because they fall on the traditional date of Purim but because they are identical enough with the main plot of the holiday to be called Purim. As the Megillah states, ". .

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12. David Geffen, "Have Your Own Purim", The Jerusalem Voice, (Jerusalem: Association of Americans & Canadians in Israel), vol. 20, no. 2, March - April 1986.

13. Cecil Roth, A Jewish Book of Days, pp. 17-18.

. relief and deliverance will come to the Jews. . . "[14] and, ". . . there was joy and gladness for the Jews, a feast and a good day."[15] Integrated into the festival of Purim, and its modern imitations, are many of the essential teachings of Judaism: faith, hope, and the doing of charity. In each of the Purim Sheni celebrations, is the spiritual lesson of the original Purim: that the hand of God guides the destiny of the Jewish people.

The Purim holidays which were, and continue to be, declared reflect an intense religious spirit with which Jews face contemporary events. They are a vehicle through which people can turn the everyday, the profane, into sacred time. By sanctifying otherwise ordinary time, men and women are able both to recognize and to mark God's involvement in their lives. Conceptualizing time so as to permit its sacralization permits the viewing of modern-day events not as a part of the frivolous passing of time but as a distinct and important part of providential history. A Purim Sheni celebration is an expression of history's religious relevance.

This thesis will analyze the halakhah with regard to Purim Sheni celebrations in order to understand the positions which the tradition holds regarding the declaration of

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14. Megillat Esther, 4:14.

15. Esther, 8:17.

personal sacred time. Personal time is defined as any time which is not otherwise designated as religious time in that no other religious obligations are present. Instead, an individual must actively seek to mark that time as religious, sacred time. Through an analysis of the halakhah it is hoped that themes will become apparent which will guide Liberal Jews as they search their history for examples of religious expressions of relevance. This thesis will show that Judaism allows us the latitude to recognize God's involvement in our lives and to respond religiously by the creation of sacred time.

Two distinct processes are present in each chapter of this thesis. The first is an analysis of relevant halakhah which is sufficiently voluminous as to demand that this thesis focus on only five primary issues which relate to Second Purims: 1) The declaration of a holiday, 2) The nature of the miracle required for a holiday to be declared, 3) The principle of Bal Tosif, which limits what may be added to the tradition, 4) The blessings which may be recited on the new holiday, and 5) The recitation of Hallel. Each of these areas are indicative of the halakhah's response to the sacralization of personal time.

In our day, traditional Judaism has debated these topics as they relate particularly to the celebration of Yom Haatzmaut, Yom Hashoah, and Yom Yerushalayim. These are all modern holidays that have been declared in the past forty

years and are celebrated in a religious manner almost unanimously by Jews today. Each serves as a model for the liturgical sacralization of personal time: normal days have been converted into religious holidays by virtue of religious acts performed. Like Purim Sheni, the debate has centered upon the precedents for the declaration of new holidays, and the exact ritual which may be performed on each day.

Once the halakhah has been presented and analyzed clarifying the fact that Judaism allows personal latitude with regard to sacred time, the second process, that of drawing conclusions, begins. Liberal Judaism developed in the nineteenth century out of a desire to create a Judaism which is relevant to modern life. Having successfully created a synagogal structure which achieves this goal, it is time for liberal Jews to begin to create behavioral structures which allow for the creation of sacred time in their personal lives as well. The halakhah points to significant themes to which a Liberal Jew must pay heed as he or she takes steps to respond religiously to contemporary events. But, as this thesis will show, the halakhah is only a first step. Beyond the halakhah, yet still within its spirit, is a wealth of room for relevant religious responses to the acts which God performs in our lives.

Chapter II: Declaring a Holiday

Traditional Jewish life is controlled in all of its daily details by the halakhah. No new act may be performed, no blessing recited, no commandment fulfilled that is not halakhically prescribed. Thus it is natural that the desire on the part of a community, an individual family, a single individual or even the entire Jewish people to declare a holiday of its own would meet with apprehension from those rabbis and teachers who study and interpret the law in order to ensure that today's acts are within the bounds of ancient prescriptions. Before they, in the name of the tradition, can acquiesce to any action which seems to be of doubtful legal precedent, a complete rationale must be presented which proves not only that the tradition allows for such an act, but that roots can be found throughout Jewish history extending back, in theory at least, to the Bible itself.

Those who desire to celebrate a personal holiday thus feel the need to support their action from within the tradition and where possible, from within the Bible, the most ancient and thus the most revered legal document in the Jewish tradition. The many articles written about various aspects of personal Purim celebrations and other holidays which are contemporary in their evolution, are meant to defend contemporary action from within the bounds of the halakhah. Despite the fact that much of the traditional law

is ancient in its derivation and evolution, it still lives today as a legal system which dictates the answers to day-to-day spiritual, ethical, and practical problems which a traditional Jew might face in our world. Thus, before one can declare a personal holiday, whether it be for him or herself, for a specific community or for the entire Jewish people, it is essential that both precedent and the halakhah be clearly in support of such an action.

In reviewing the legal discussions surrounding the declaration of personal Purim celebrations, it is clear that the burden of proof is upon those who are declaring the holiday or those who support such a notion. Before one would be allowed to declare a new holiday, one would have to prove that one's actions are within the bounds of law. Since nowhere within the halakhah can a clear statement be found which mentions the declaration of such a day, all arguments have to be based on legal implication and on traditional precedent.

How then is the declaration of a new holiday permissable within the law? In the Babylonian Talmud, the issue is discussed not in regard to the declaration of a personal holiday, but in regard to the declaration of the original Purim celebration which was set after the Torah had already been canonized. The following discussion in Megillah 14a[16]

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16. Megillah 14a (8:81).

is concerned with who was allowed to declare the new holiday and the reasons that they were.

> Our Rabbis taught: Forty-eight and seven prophets prophesied to Israel, and they took away from nor added naught to what is written in the Torah save only the reading of the Megillah. How did they derive it [from Torah]? R. Hiyya b. Abin said in the name of R. Joshua b. Korha: If for being delivered from slavery to freedom we chant a hymn of praise, should we not do so all the more for being delivered from death to life?

This text reasons by virtue of a Kal vechomer hermeneutic, a reasoning from a minor to a major point, that if a holiday exists celebrating the redemption from Egypt (Passover) then clearly a holiday can be declared for a redemption from death as in the case of the Jews of Persia whom Haman meant to hang. "Chanting a hymn of praise" as described in the Talmud passage has been interpreted to be more than just saying Hallel or praises to God, but also declaring a special day. This Kal vechomer reasoning will play a large role in defending the right to declare a holiday in later generations.

In the Jerusalem Talmud a very similar discussion takes place with regard to setting Purim as a holiday. The rabbis are again concerned that nothing new be added after the Torah is canonized, since the Torah is the word of God. After a discussion of the roots of Purim, the question is asked: "Can something new be added?" The answer is that nothing new

may be added until a source is proven from the Torah.[17] The conclusion of the Palestinian Talmud demonstrates more caution than the Babylonian; rather than allowing for the possibility of a new holiday through the use of a hermeneutic device, it requires a more direct supportive link to the biblical text. The discussion thus ends with the requirement of a biblical text without admitting the possibility of the Kal vechomer argument which is the basic rationale presented in the Babylonian Talmud. This discussion proved decisive later, as subsequent generations adopted it over the Babylonian Talmud's liberalism and demanded demonstration of a biblical commandment for the declaration of a new holiday.

The Rishonim do not deal directly with the declaration of a holiday. For example, Numbers 10:10 reads:

> And on your joyous occasions, your fixed festivals and new moon days, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of wellbeing They shall be a reminder of you before the Lord you God: I, the Lord, am your God.[18]

To which a variant manuscript of Ibn Ezra comments:

> When you leave an enemy land or you defeat an enemy who has attacked you, and you set a joyous day like Purim days, as in the time of Chanukah. Only the

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17. Palestinian Talmud, Meg. 7:1.

18. All Biblical citations to the Torah are given from: The Torah, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962, p.264.

> older ones [Havatikin] understood 'your joyous occasions' to mean Shabbat. . [19]

This comment is important for a number of reasons. It is clear that, although he doesn't state it explicitly, Ibn Ezra allows for the declaration of a personal holiday. His statement, "and you set a joyous day like Purim" recognizes that such a practice existed. Secondly, in comparing the setting of a new holiday to the declaration of Chanukah, a holiday set after the canonization of the Torah, a precedent is advanced to prove not only that such a practice is in existence but that it has roots within the tradition as well. But Ibn Ezra feels compelled to refer to the more traditional interpretation of the verse which understands "your joyous occasions" to mean Shabbat rather than any joyous day. This may imply that Ibn Ezra was offering a non-traditional explanation which he had to defend in light of the tradition. Finally, although Ibn Ezra accepts the declaration of a personal Purim he does so only in limited situations: only in the case of leaving "an enemy land" or in the case of the "defeat of an enemy."

Rashi does not discuss the declaration of a holiday directly but refers to it in his commentary to the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 13b. His discussion centers around a Baraitha which comments on the writing of Megilat Taanit, a scroll written in the first half of the first century. This

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[19]. Ibn Ezra, Numbers 10:10 in Mikraot Gedolot.

scroll is significant in that it outlines the victories and significant events during the second Temple period. The priests and rabbis of the time declared certain days as joyous ones on which fasting and the delivery of eulogies was forbidden. Many of these holidays were observed until much later - the third century according to Rosh Hashanah 18b, Taanit 66a, and Taanit 2:13 - when the scroll was annulled.

Unlike the Gemara itself, Rashi does not join the debate on who wrote Megilat Taanit, but he mentions the fact that today "we are not able [to declare holidays] because they [our troubles] are too constant," or according to another text "we are not able to declare holidays every day."[20] Rashi is not questioning whether one is allowed to declare a personal holiday. Rather, he tacitly seems to recognize that this possibility exists in theory, for he says, "we are not able to. . ." due to the fact that our troubles are so constant that an end is not in sight which would allow for the declaration of a holiday. In the second part of his comment, the alternative text given, he goes so far as to imply that holidays might even be declared every day except that there are so many troubles that there is truly never an end to them which would allow for a celebration. Rashi does not discuss at all the nature of the declaration of the

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[20]. Rashi on Shabbat 13b.

holiday, what requirements might exist, or what type of day it would be.

The Rambam is reported to have declared a holiday of his own upon disembarking from his ship when he arrived in the land of Israel.[21] In his commentary to the Mishnah[22], he discusses the declaration of holidays in a manner similar to that of Rashi. It is clear that he recognizes that they exist because he refers to them in his discussion of the 15th of Av, a joyous day set in Megilat Taanit. But, he goes a few steps further and discusses details regarding a number of requirements for the declaration of the holiday. He notes that a holiday can be declared not just for victory, as in the case of Ibn Ezra (above), but for any good thing. He also adds that the day is not just a day without sadness like the days upon which no fasting or eulogizing are allowed, but that the holiday is a day of joy.

Moses Nachmanides, the Ramban, in his commentary to Deuteronomy[23] refers back to the theme which was noted in the Jerusalem Talmud, that of the need for a biblical source for

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21. This is mentioned in an article by Rabbi Yehuda Gershuni, Hadarom, vol. 50, Nisan, 5740, p. 152, where he quotes a manuscript found in Eliezar ben Moses Azikri, Sefer Haredim, Mitzvot Teshuvah, chapter 3, yet, no first hand source is available to document this claim.

22. Moses Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishnah, Taanit, 4:7.

23. Moses Nahmanides, Commentary on the Torah, (New York: Shilo Publishing Inc., 1976), Deuteronomy 4:2.

the declaration of a new holiday. The Ramban introduces a new solution to this requirement when he mentions the possibility that since the holiday is not from the Torah directly it can exist due to a fence around the Torah. This means that even though no direct commandment can be found upon which the declaration of a holiday can be based, such an act could be based on the preventative measure that there should be a fence around the Torah. Certain acts can then become required not because they are biblically commanded, but in order to protect a commandment which does exist within the Torah. Ramban does not specify the commandment that would be protected in the case of personal holidays, but as we shall see, Rabbi Shlomo Goren identifies it as Pirsum Nes, the publicizing of a miracle.

The later commentators, the Acharonim, rely upon the Rishonim for the nature and the tone of their comments. Moses ben Isaac Alashkar, for example, who lived both in Egypt and Jerusalem in the latter part of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, was an advocate of the declaration of personal holidays. As a prominent rabbi in his time, Alashkar's opinions were held in esteem throughout the Mediterranean region, including Italy. In his collection of Teshuvot he writes, "A court can declare for a city a day each year in which thanks and praise are given to

God for a miracle which was performed for them."[24] This is the first direct instance of a holiday being declared for an individual city.

Alashkar adds other new points to the discussion as well. "A court," he says, can declare the holiday for a city with the supportive sanction of cherem. He does not define the nature of the miracle required for the declaration of the day, nor does he discuss the nature of the day beyond the statement that "thanks and praise are given to God for a miracle."

The extremely conservative legal authority, the Hatam Sofer, takes up the same theme of the Palestinian Talmud as did Nachmanides, i.e., declaring a holiday must be based on a biblical commandment.[25] But, unlike Nachmanides he actually identifies the scriptural command; it is Pirsum Nes, the obligation to publicize a miracle. Thus, in line with the Jerusalem Talmud he finds a biblical commandment upon which to rely. The basis of any such holiday is therefore biblical while the nature of the actual celebration of the day is rabbinic. Both Purim and Chanukah exemplify the Hatam Sofer's point. We are taught that both celebrate a miracle, even though the actual celebration of each is different according to the rabbis who declared them.

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[24]. Moses ben Isaac Alashkar, Teshuvot, Saboneta, 1553, 49.

[25]. Moses Sofer, O.H. 233, Vienna, 1754.

Finally we have the opinion of the Magen Avraham, Abraham Gombiner, a seventeenth-century commentator to the Shulchan Arukh. In his opinion, the people of a city can declare a holiday like Purim with penalty of cherem on the day a miracle occurred there."[26] His comment is very similar in nature to that of MaHaRam Alashkar in that cities can observe their own holidays for a miracle which was performed in the city and that all must conform under the penalty of cherem. But, for Gombiner, it is the people of the city who can declare the holiday; for Alashkar the court decides on behalf of the city.

A dissenting voice among the later commentators is strong enough that it must be dealt with by all who discuss the question of the declaration of a personal holiday. The Peri Chadash, a seventeenth-century commentary to the Shulchan Arukh, written by Hezekiah Ben David Da Silva, maintains that once Megilat Taanit was annulled (see Rosh Hashanah 18b, Taanit 66a, and in the Palestinian Talmud, Taanit 2:13) no new holidays may be declared.[27] He does not seem to doubt the fact that it was at one time possible to create a new holiday, at least for certain purposes, yet he argues that since the time that Megilat Taanit (along with the celebration of the holidays contemporary to it) was

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26. Abraham Gombiner, Magen Avraham, to the Shulchan Arukh, O.H., 686.

27. Peri Chadash, 496:14.

annulled, surely any other contemporary holiday would be annulled as well. This view is reported in most articles by modern writers who (as we shall see) discount it for various reasons. Rabbi Shlomo Goren deals with it explicitly. (see page 21)

Modern commentators writing on this issue do so with their own specifically modern agenda. Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent celebration of Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) there has been extensive debate as to the nature of the holiday. The holiday is celebrated today, almost universally, as not only a political and secular day, but as a religious holiday as well. The religious nature of the holiday as well as its halakhic basis are chronic topics of debate.[28]

Rabbi Shlomo Goren, a former chief rabbi of the Israeli armed forces, is a leader among those rabbis today who argue that Israeli Independence Day can, and should, take its place on the calendar together with the other, more traditional religious holidays. Goren's writings are unusual in that they display not only a thorough knowledge of the halakhah and all its ramifications but also a sensitivity to the need

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28. Recently a book has been published which contains articles dealing with various issues connected to the religious celebration of Yom Haatzmaut. See: Nachum Rakover, ed., Hilchot Yom Haatzmaut Veyom Yerushalayim. (Israel, Department of Education and Culture and Department of Religion, 1984).

for religion to react positively to modern historical events. In discussing the possibility of declaring a holiday in our time, Goren turns to the sources for proof texts, yet does so with an eye to the impact they might have upon modern religiosity. He takes Megilat Taanit as a proof text for any society which wishes to declare a contemporary holiday.[29] Just as holidays were declared to recognize miracles in the time of the second Temple, so too in our day can we declare holidays to remember miracles. Megilat Taanit emerges here both as a proof text and a spiritual guide valid for Jews of all ages.

In addition, Goren notes that the holidays described in the scroll, including both Purim and Chanukah, are holidays which have been declared for all of Israel.[30] This statement clarifies, with regard to historic precedence, the nature of the holidays which one may declare. They must be public miracles in which all of Israel was involved.

Goren counters the Peri Chadash's argument that once Megilat Taanit was annulled no new holidays could be declared, with the claim that the commandment of Pirsum Nes, publicizing a miracle, still stands. Following the lead of the Palestinian Talmud which required a biblical source for the declaration of a holiday, Goren, identifies Pirsum Nes as

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29. Shlomo Goren, "Hasemichut lekviat Yom Tov Bezman Hazeh", Rakover, p. 48.

30. Ibid.

the biblical basis that the declaration of a holiday in our time requires.[31] The Megillah which is read aloud on Purim is central in this line of reasoning. It is this act, the retelling of the story of the miracle, which is the fulfillment of the command to publicize the miracle.[32]

Goren's final argument in defense of our right to declare a holiday in our own time, reverts to Rambam's citation regarding a fence around the Torah. Goren concedes that there may not be a direct commandment in the Torah which allows the declaration of a holiday, but in general, one is commanded to take the act in order to avoid breaking, even inadvertantly, a biblical commandment. Thus, if a commandment exists to publicize a miracle, one would declare a holiday as a preventative measure to ensure that the commandment is not broken.

Rabbi Yehuda Gershuni returns to the Kal vechomer argument proposed by the Palestinian Talmud in Megillah 14a (see above). The declaration of a new holiday and the new commandments connected with it, such as the reading of the Megillah on Purim, are similar to the song of joy after the freedom from slavery.[33] Gershuni raises a new issue which creates a distinction between the declaration of a new

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31. Ibid., p. 53.

32. Ibid., pp. 49-50.

33. Yehudah Gershuni, "Al Keviat Yom Tov", Rakover, p.58.

holiday comparable to those set in the Bible (yom tov) on which work is forbidden, and a day of festive rejoicing (yom mishteh vesimchah). Purim, or any other contemporary holiday, is a day of festive rejoicing (yom mishteh vesimchah) declared in order to fulfill the commandment that a miracle must be publicized and not equal in import to a biblical yom tov.[34] This allows for more lattitude with regard to celebration and avoids the question of direct biblical roots.

Before turning to contemporary implications of this sustained halakhic debate, we should turn our attention to one more argument that is found in the literature. It is possible to declare a personal holiday based upon Berachot 54a, where we are informed that those who have been saved from sure death are allowed to thank God for saving them. This text is read in conjunction with the discussion in Megillah 14a (see above) which compares the granting of freedom to the slaves to being saved from death, and thus suggests permission to declare a holiday of thanksgiving for instances of the former.

The implications of a discussion on the declaration of a personal holiday are important for religious individuals in our time who are searching for a manner in which to allow

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[34]. Ibid., pp. 57-58.

traditional religion to react to events current in their lives. The themes of the debate teach us various ways in which we may respond to events in our lives in a religious way.

The first conclusion to be drawn is that the Jewish legal tradition does allow for personal holidays to be declared. This is an important model for Jews today who have events in their lives that they wish to mark religiously. Personal holidays, or personal sacred time, is a perfect way in which an individual can acknowledge the sanctity of certain events in his or her life.

Before any further serious implications can be drawn, Reform Jews must note that for them, decisions fall, at least in part, in an extra-halakhic realm. As noted previously, a traditional Jew today is bound by the halakhah for his or her every action. For a traditional Jew, any discussion on declaring a holiday would have to be within the bounds of this legal way of life. By contrast, Reform Jews today do not live their lives bound solely by a legal heritage passed on through the generations. Instead, they attempt to evolve meaningful religious rites and rituals which stem from within the tradition yet are relevant to their contemporary lives. Thus the legal implications of the halakhic discussion on whether or not one may declare a holiday are not the only relevant factors. A liberal Jew today is concerned foremost with the internal spiritual satisfaction gained through a

certain act which is derived from the tradition, and only later, in a more minor sense, with the Jewish legal rationale for the act.

Yet, the legal discussion does contain within it important themes which help the modern Jew conceptualize how the Jewish tradition can respond to current events, and therein lies its relevance even for liberal Jews for whom the legalism per se is not decisive. The issues which do arise within the halakhic discussion are the twin conceptions of the holiness of a day and human agency in declaring a day to be holy in the first place.

The sections quoted above from both Talmuds are important in that they stress the need for roots within the tradition. In neither case could a new holiday be declared without proof that a precedent could be found. Thus Purim, for example, was compared with other holidays in the tradition, such as Passover and Chanukah. By comparison, our declaration of time to be sacred today requires a similar finding of roots within the tradition, if our religious act is to have legitimacy. If the new holiday follows the example of, and is historically, spiritually, or ritually parallel to another religious celebration, the one who celebrates the day will feel a part of religious tradition. This recognition on the part of the individual and on the part of the religious group to which he or she belongs is necessary if the celebration is to be viewed as legitimate,

and thus guaranteed at least a chance for a place for posterity, or (at least) for as long as the reason for celebration is valid.

Some specific occasions which call for special recognition and celebration are discussed later in this thesis (see Chapter three). But, Megilat Taanit does provide a model for the type of occasions that should be marked and the relevant aspects of that model should be clearly delineated here:

1) The days that were declared as holidays in the time of the Second Temple all revolved around miracles God had performed. These holidays recognized God's involvement in the lives of the Jews at that time. Thus for a day to be declared sacred today, God's involvement would be a necessary component. The lack of "spirituality" which is often bemoaned in the Reform movement today is often blamed upon the fear of discussing an issue as private as personal theology. Until Reform Jews are comfortable discussing God - not just in the abstract but also in a very personal sense which recognizes God's presence and action in our lives - it would be traditionally impermissable to declare personal sacred time. The premise that God acts in our lives is the first basis for declaring a new holiday.

2) In Megilat Taanit priests declared the day to be special. Later commentators mention both courts and a city as authorities empowered to declare special times. A penalty

of cherem is threatened for those who disregard the declaration. Today, Liberal Jews do not have a court or even leaders who have power enough invested in them to declare a holiday. Nor is there any figure powerful enough to declare let alone carry out, a punishment for those who contravene the declaration. For autonomous Jews any declaration must be meaningful if it is to be followed. The final authority for us then, must lie within the individual who may (at best) look for guidance from the leadership of his or her own synagogues or movements.

In the twentieth century two new holidays have become almost universally accepted within the Liberal movement worldwide and which are increasingly celebrated by Liberal Jews: Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) and Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day). Both of these two events qualify as potential holy days on a par with those declared in our history, since they satisfy the two criteria outlined above:

1) Both involve a miracle performed by God. The return of the Jews to Israel and the seemingly impossible victory in the War of Independence are a modern miracle. Yom Hashoah provides a more difficult example. God's involvement is not as clear; in fact God's lack of involvement has been an issue in itself. But, in light of the creation of the State of Israel and the rebirth of the Jewish people, redemption from the Holocaust is a theme of the holiday. Both of these days

are viewed as legitimate religious celebrations because they respond to events which Jews see as religious: the birth of the modern Jewish state, and the annihilation of six million Jews. In both cases it seems natural to turn to God and to Judaism for an expression of the profound feelings which these events evoke.

2) Both modern celebrations have been declared by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel as well as by the leadership of all movements within Judaism except for the most extreme which do not recognize the modern state. These events are celebrated out of a felt need of the populace, and of its leaders, to respond religiously.

The continuing legitimacy of the celebrations as not just momentary in history but as equal to other holidays is assured only with the creation of appropriate liturgy for the day. Whether we look at The Gates of Prayer, the prayer book of the American Reform movement, or Rinat Yisrael, an orthodox prayer book published in Israel, we find prayers for Yom Haatzmaut and even for Jerusalem Day which celebrates the unification of that city in 1967.

A further lesson which the tradition teaches Jews today is found in the comments of the Hatam Sofer. He writes that the basis of the holiday must be found in the biblical text, but that the nature of the holiday is up to the generation

which declares it.[35] This leaves each generation the latitude to declare time sacred, assuming that a biblical root can be found, and then to celebrate it in a meaningful manner. This is a pattern which we should follow for any holiday declared today. It should not be set up to parallel exactly the traditionally set holidays. As Rabbi Gershuni wrote (see above), once a day is declared not as a yom tov, a holiday upon which work is prohibited, but as yom mishteh vesimchah, a day of festive rejoicing, one may thank and praise God freely.

Sacred time need not be biblical in its origin. In fact, religion could become more a part of everyday life for a modern liberal Jew if he or she knew that the traditional holidays were not the only ones that can exist. Days of festive rejoicing and offering of thanks and praise to God would allow a modern Jew to respond to significant events in his or her life.

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35. See footnote 25, above.

Chapter III: The Nature of the Miracle

We have seen that the concept of a person, community, or all of Israel, declaring a holiday is clearly rooted in the Jewish tradition and developed over history. The argument is no longer whether or not a day may be set aside to give praise and thanks to God for a specific event; but the nature of the event for which such a day may be set aside. We now ask, what events merit the declaration of a holiday, and what is the definition of a miracle which would allow for, or even require a celebration.

Megilat Taanit taught that days could be declared holy in order to remember a miracle which God performed. The Gemara in Berachot 54a discusses in detail the types of miracles for which one may bless. There is little doubt in the mind of the editor of this section nor in the mind of any of the later commentators that anyone from among the people of Israel may offer thanksgiving and blessings for a miracle which occurred to all of Israel. Many examples are listed in the Gemara:

> Our Rabbis taught: If one sees the place of the crossing of the Red Sea, or the fords of the Jordan, or the fords of the streams of Arnon, . . . for all of these should give thanksgiving and praise to the almighty.[36]

Thanksgiving and praise for a community miracle are to be offered only upon seeing the place where the miracle

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36. Berachot 54a-54b (p. 330)

occurred. The Mishnah and Talmud text testify to this point when they state, "When one sees a place where miracles have been wrought for [all of] Israel, he should say, Blessed be the One who wrought miracles for our ancestors in this place."[37] Throughout the tradition there is no question that the blessing of a miracle for the community of Israel is tied to the place in which it occurred.

In the case of a miracle which happens to an individual, the tradition provides a different response. In the case of a community miracle, the common bond for all who celebrate is the place in which the miracle occurred. But for an individual who experiences a miracle, the blessing is tied not to the place but to the individual directly. Thus, the miracle is necessarily remembered not by virtue of a place but by the human being to whom it happened. Again the original Talmud text demonstrates this point when it lists the examples of individuals who recite a blessing without mentioning the specific place in which the miracle occurred.[38]

The difference between practices established for an individual and for the community of Israel (should they be saved by a miracle) will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. For now, however, we turn to the individual.

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37. Berachot 54a (p. 327).

38. Berachot 54b.

Opinions through the centuries try to define the nature of a miracle performed for an individual. There are four categories of such miracles which are established by the Talmud:

> Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: There are four [classes of people] who have to offer thanksgiving: Those who have crossed the sea, those who have traversed the wilderness, one who has recovered from an illness, and a prisoner who has been set free.[39]

These categories all imply deliverance from what were surely, in the early years of the common era and before, situations that were perilous to the point of death. In each case the person is to thank God with what is referred to today as Birkat Hagomel (see chapter five for a discussion of appropriate blessings). The Talmud text adds other instances for such blessings:

> What of the case of the man who was once travelling through Eber Yemina when a lion attacked him but he was miraculously saved, and when he came before Raba he said to him, "Whenever you pass that place say: Blessed be He who wrought for me a miracle in this place"? There was the case, too, of Mar the son of Rabina who was once going through the valley of Araboth, suffering from thirst and a well of water was miraculously created for him and he drank. Another time he was going through the manor of Mahoza when a wild camel attacked him and at that moment the wall of a house near by fell in and he escaped inside;. . . for a miracle done to an individual he alone is required to say a blessing.[40]

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39. Berakoth 54b (p. 332).

40. Berakoth 54a (pp. 329-330).

This discussion clearly expands the four basic categories above. All of the miracles seem to have in common the fact that they are all experiences of deliverance from sure death. As the Kal vechomer hermeneutic in Megillah 14a argues, "If for being delivered from slavery to freedom we chant a hymn of praise, should we not do so all the more for being delivered from death to life?"[41] No wonder the Gemara here allows anyone who has been saved from death to offer hymns of praise!

But is deliverance from death the only criterion? and at least where special days are at issue, is it a sufficient measurement? What is the exact definition of "miracle" in the sense of "miraculous deliverance"? Ibn Ezra's allows for "joyous days" in the event "you leave an enemy land or you defeat an enemy who has attacked you. . ."[42] The event which would warrant the declaration of a day for Ibn Ezra has to do with victory in battle or freedom from foreign rule. Presumably, blessings might be offered on other occasions but no special days of commemoration are set aside.

Rashi however, goes further, at least implicitly. We saw above his comment to Shabbat 13b regarding Megilat Taanit, where he reasoned that holidays cannot be declared because "they [our troubles] are too constant . . .we are not

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41. Megillah 14a, (p. 81).

42. Ibn Ezra, Numbers 10:10, in Mikraot Gedolot.

able to declare holidays every day."[43] Rashi thus seems to allow for the declaration of a holiday at the end of any trouble, but complains that the troubles are never ending! Unlike the Berachot 54a passage, Rashi does not limit the scope of the troubles required for declaring a holiday to the four categories of who may recite a blessing. He goes even further than Ibn Ezra who allows a joyous day in the event of redemption or military victory. For Rashi, the end of any trouble may potentially be celebrated.

Moses Maimonides, too, goes beyond the Talmud texts and the Ibn Ezra comment, and in addition, he is more specific than Rashi. In his commentary to The Mishnah,[44] he claims that the miracles of Berachot 54a are just examples of any miracle which saves one from death. Maimonides draws this conclusion from the fact that the Talmud itself expands its original four categories to include other situations too, in which a person is saved from sure death. According to Maimonides' comment, thanksgiving can be offered for any redemption from death. This theme is continued by the Hatam Sofer, whose responsum on declaring a holiday refers to the Kal vechomer argument in Megillah 14a to prove that any redemption from death is sufficient to offer thanks.[45]

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43. Rashi, Shabbat 18b.

44. Moses Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishnah, Berachot 7:1.

45. Moses Sofer, Teshuvot, 233.

Later tradition expands the argument even further. The Shulchan Arukh, for example, asks what can be considered a miracle, but focuses no longer on redemption from death, but on whether or not the miracle is ordinary or extraordinary. Even if an act is ordinary, the Shulchan Arukh claims, you may offer praises and thanksgiving to God but not with an introductory blessing[46] (. . .vetzivanu. . .), since such a blessing would imply that you have been commanded to offer thanksgiving. Allowing thanksgiving but without a blessing avoids the question of what is truly a miracle which deserves hymns of praise to God. The Shulchan Arukh's example of an ordinary miracle is a case of robbers who enter your house while you are asleep thus endangering you; if you escape unharmed, you should offer praise without a blessing since this is a miracle of an ordinary nature.[47] Caro here follows the Tur which offers the same ruling: only for a miracle which is out of the ordinary may one offer thanksgiving with the complete blessings. There too, the example given is robbers entering an individual's home in the night and that person escaping unharmed.

It is not until the more modern commentators that a more complete discussion of the nature of a miracle takes place. These rabbis are faced with the scientific understanding of

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46. Shulchan Arukh, O.H., 218:6.

47. Shulchan Arukh, O.H., 218:9.

the immutability of the laws of nature and thus must define miracles differently. Rabbi Aryeh Frimer discusses the difference between an ordinary and an extraordinary miracle. If one were wandering through the desert in dire thirst and came upon a natural source of water, this would not be considered extraordinary. Yet, if one were in the same situation and water came from heaven (He does not discuss in what manner this water would arrive - it would have to be in a very unusual manner) then one could offer praise to God with the complete blessings, for this would have been an extraordinary miracle. Returning to the familiar example of robbers' coming in the middle of the night, Rabbi Frimer thus supports the earlier halakhic view that one would offer thanks to God but without the complete blessings.[48]

Rabbi Frimer differentiates two criteria for miracles. On the one hand, there is the difference between 1) miracles within the laws of nature which by definition are ordinary; and 2) those which fall outside of the laws of nature and are not. It is only this latter category of miracles which breaks the laws of nature, and so, necessitates direct intervention by God. The second opinion (and the one held by Frimer) is that all miracles are in essence extraordinary regardless of whether or not they break the laws of nature.[49]

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48. Aryeh Frimer, "Behagdarat Hanes Shealav Mevarkhim Birkat Hanes", Or Ha-Mizrach 31, p. 313.

49. Ibid., p. 313.

Take for example, the case of a lion attacking a human being. In most cases the human being will die. So, Frimer argues, should that individual live, a miracle would have occurred, even though the laws of nature were not changed for the individual to survive.[50] He or she should be able to offer hymns of praise to God with the complete blessings.

Rabbi Frimer summarizes his article with a concise review of the traditional options available for individual guidance.

1) If a miracle is not actually supernatural in nature, one should not offer thanksgiving at all. This extremely conservative view is a minority opinion, which ignores the fact that the tradition teaches that we are always able to offer thanksgiving to God.

2) The second opinion (the majority), is that there are two types of miracles, ordinary and extraordinary. One may offer thanksgiving for both, yet only for an extraordinary miracle are we commanded to thank God and thus only for this type of miracle may the vetzivanu blessing be recited before the thanksgiving.

3) Finally, the third opinion which can be found within the tradition, and the one which is supported by Rabbi Frimer, is that all miracles are abnormal, even those that

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50. Ibid., pp. 315-316.

fall within the laws of nature.[51] He buttresses his minority opinion with the example of the lion (above) and with a number of proof texts from the Midrash. He uses a section from the Tanhuma[52] in which Joseph blesses the pit into which he was thrown by his brothers and from which he was then sold into slavery.[53] The pit has saved his life, Rabbi Frimer argues, so that some figures in the tradition certainly are seen as offering blessings for miracles that don't fall outside the laws of nature.[54]

Relevant to the question of ordinary and extraordinary miracles is the Israeli Airforce's successful night raid on the airport in Entebbe in order to save the lives of the hostages held there. The question was asked if one who was freed from the terrorists, and thus whose life was saved, could thank God with the complete blessings? Responses came from the Chabad Rebbe, from Rabbi J. David Bleich, and from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. The answer was unanimous: yes, a person could recite the blessing before offering thanksgiving

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51. Ibid., pp. 318-319.

52. It is interesting to note that Rabbi Frimer uses a Midrashic text in order to support his opinion. The Midrash is generally used homiletically and only very infrequently used to prove a legal point. When one refers to the Midrash as a proof text it is clear that there is little else of stronger value within the halakhah to support one's point.

53. Tanhuma, Parashat Vayehi, 17.

54. Rabbi Aryeh Frimmer, "Behagdarat Hanes Shealav Mevarkhim Birkat Hanes", Rakover, p. 316.

to God.[55] Rabbi Frimer clearly saw this response as support for his view that one may offer thanksgiving with blessings even for miracles not outside the laws of nature.[56] His view was that the raid on Entebbe was performed by humans and thus was not extraordinary.[57]

For a modern Liberal Jew, the entire discussion as to the nature of the miracle which deserves to be recognized, while in the realm of law, still demonstrates important lessons regarding the potential role of religion in modern life. It is important to note that the normative response to certain events includes both praising God and offering God thanks. The lessons regarding which events deserve such a response are important for liberal Jews.

1) The Talmud text and the halakhah as a whole differentiate between a miracle which occurs for the entire community and one that occurs for an individual in that the first can be remembered only at the specific site of the miracle, while the remembrance of the second is not tied to a

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55. As reported in Ibid., p. 319.

56. Ibid.

57. A second reading of the Entebbe responsa is possible however. It is quite possible that the rabbis actually considered the miracle to be outside the laws of nature, in that the Israeli Airforce succeeded only due to God's intercession.

specific place. Remembering an event at its original location may be considered an ideal, in that the poignancy of the event will be felt more acutely when its actual environmental stimuli are present to remind us of its exact nature. But, given the mobility of life today, tying the event to its place is extremely difficult. If a celebration were not allowed because one was not at the place of the event being celebrated, the celebration would all too often not take place. This would prevent the mitzvah of pirsum nes; it would defeat the goal of declaring a celebration: recognizing God's role in events in our lives and offering up appropriate thanks and praise. Liberal Jews cannot demand on-site celebration.

2) The Halakhic tradition allows the offering of thanks and praise for a significant event, but "significant" is defined by all legal sources as redemption from death. As significant as such an instance of divine intervention may be, it is not the only important episode in our lives in which God is present. The intent of the narrow ruling seems to have been to prevent the abuse of the privilege of thanking God: for example, children who pray to God in order to do well on an exam, or to win a race, and then offer thanks to God for succeeding.

Our reading of history, archeology, and philology negates any interest we might have in proving that the Torah

is the ultimate unamendable law of God. But, even for us, the danger exists that our move to recognize God's involvement in day-to-day life may entail an abuse of our understanding God's role in that we may tend to rely on God in situations where we ought more properly to rely on ourselves. Traditional limitations prevent such abuse, since it is clear that the event for which we give thanks for God's involvement must be a significant one.

How then can we recognize such a significant event? Again the tradition instructs us. Instead of using the criterion of deliverance from death, we may elect the second alternative and differentiate the ordinary from the extraordinary, the former being what is commonplace, and the latter entailing our subjective judgement that God is involved in our daily lives.

3) The problem for us, in this regard, is that the tradition defines these extraordinary events as "miracles", a difficult concept for moderns. Extraordinary they may be; miracles they are not - - or so goes the usual scientific argument. In our own day miracles are suspect because they attribute to God the power to break the laws of nature, an idea inconsistent with the very notion of scientific law, as we understand it. The challenge then is to expand the definition of a miracle so that modern, scientifically consistent human beings can see them in their own lives.

With regard to the miracle at the Red Sea Martin Buber writes,

> What is decisive with respect to the inner history of Mankind, however, is that the Children of Israel understood this as an act of their God, as a 'miracle'; which does not mean that they interpreted it as a miracle but that they experienced it as such, that as such they perceived it.[58]

Buber's point is that the perception of an event may not equal an analysis of the same event after the fact. Science will always have explanations for events like the splitting of the Sea. Yet, no scientific explanation can validly exclude the possibility of those present perceiving God's involvement in the act; it is this perceived involvement that defines a miracle. As the Torah puts it, describing only the perception, not the explanation,

> And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord: they had faith in the Lord and in His servant Moses.[59]

The lesson for modern, intellectual, scientific men and women is that God's providence can be seen even in events that do not defy the laws of nature.

The discussion of the rescue at Entebbe supports this position. The events which took place in the air and on the ground during the Air Force raid there may not have defied

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58. Martin Buber, Moses, (Oxford and London: East & West Library, 1946), pp. 75-79.

59. Exodus, 14:31 (p. 124).

the laws of nature. Yet the events were perceived not only by those directly involved but also by others as miraculous in nature in that they pointed toward God's providence.

The nature of the thanksgiving celebration will be discussed later in this thesis, but for this type of event - or even for a more minor event in the life of a human being as long as it is perceived as entailing God's involvement - it is proper to give thanks and praise to God; to recognize that God is involved in our lives today.

Chapter IV: "You Shall Not Add"

We have been surveying the legal background to the question of declaring a contemporary holiday. Like any other legal system, the halakhah is concerned that once laws are established, they are not broken. At issue, therefore, is a concern that the declaration of a new holiday may contravene one of the commandments. It is desirable, therefore, that the roots of any new holiday or practice be found within the tradition, preferably dating back to the Torah. If no biblical roots are available, two different alternative solutions are suggested. The Babylonian Talmud allows for a celebration based upon a Kal vechomer hermeneutic, which compares the joy one expresses when freed from slavery to the joy one would express when saved from death. The Palestinian Talmud retains its textual hold on biblical precedent, by finding there either the commandment to publicize a miracle, or the commandment to create fences around the Torah, either of which provides the basis for new holidays.

A further halakhic principle which has developed is called Bal Tosif, meaning, "You shall not add." This principle is derived from a number of verses in the Torah which specify that the laws which the Torah commands are finite. The last verse in the book of Leviticus, for example, "These are the commandments that the Lord gave Moses

for the Israelite people on Mount Sinai,"[60] is rendered by halakhah to imply that the commandments found within the Torah are "these" and no others. The book of Deuteronomy admonishes even more clearly: "You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you."[61] Finally, later in the book of Deuteronomy, the message is repeated for the third time, in an even more direct manner: "Be careful to observe only that which I enjoin upon you: neither add to it nor take away from it."[62] The force of these verses within the tradition is that no new action may be decreed unless it can be found within the Torah text. Traditional Jews then, must be careful to ensure that any interpretation that they may have of the halakhah does not break the intent of the Bal Tosif principle; nothing they do can add or take away from the traditional understanding of the laws set forth in the Torah.

This concern arises in the earliest texts which deal with the declaration of a holiday. The Babylonian Talmud (Meg. 14a) raises the issue of Bal Tosif with regard to Purim:

> Our Rabbis taught: Forty-eight and seven prophets prophesied to Israel, and they neither took away

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60. Leviticus, 27:34 (p. 237).

61. Deuteronomy, 4:2 (p. 330).

62. Deuteronomy, 13:1 (p. 349).

> from nor added to what is written in the Torah save only the reading of the Megillah. How did they derive it [from the Torah]? Rabbi Hiyya ben Abin said in the name of Rabbi Joshua ben Korha: For being delivered from slavery to freedom we chant a hymn of praise. Should we not do so all the more for being delivered from death to life?[63]

According to the Talmud text, the command to read the Megillah is not present in the Torah but is derived from it according to the analogy of Purim to Passover.

The Palestinian Talmud raises the same issue, yet provides a different rationale:

> Eighty-five elders, among them many prophets, were troubled [about the matter of the new duty to read the Scroll of Esther]. They said, "It is written, 'These are the commandments which the Eternal commanded Moses.'[64] These are the commandments that [we] were ordered by the mouth of Moses, and Moses told us that no other prophet is destined to establish anything new for you - and Mordecai and Esther want to establish something new for us!" They did not move from there while discussing the matter, until the Holy One, blessed be He, enlightened their eyes [and they found the new commandment of reading the Megillah intimated in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings].[65]

Here the admonition against adding a new law, such as the commandment to read the Megillah, is overcome only by divine intervention: "God enlightened the eyes" of the elders who then found an intimation of the commandment in the Bible.

The declaration of new holidays in general are thus not discussed in either of the Talmud texts. Rather, the concern

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63. Megillah 14a (p. 81).

64. Leviticus, 27:34.

65. Palestinian Talmud, Megillah 1:7.

in both is the reading of the Megillah, which with its blessings, implies that the act was commanded by God in the Torah. The new law is the reading of the Megillah, not the declaration of the day as a holiday. The concern is with the ritual, not the day itself.

It is not until the Rishonim that the discussion regarding the admonition against adding anything new is applied not only to a specific practice but to the declaration of a new holiday as well. The Rambam supports the view of both Talmuds when he proposes that far from being an addition, Purim is a fence around the Torah. A new commandment has not been declared; instead, a ruling is created merely to protect a commandment already written within the Torah.[66] Similarly, a new holiday would be declared but only to protect an original commandment. However, Rambam does not clarify what such an original commandment is.

In his commentary to the Torah, Moses Nachmanides deals at length with the issue of Bal Tosif. After quoting our three biblical texts and the Palestinian Talmud (all cited above), Ramban writes:

> In my opinion, even if someone devised an independent commandment [rather than altering an existing one] such as establishing a festival in a month which he devised of his own accord. . .he transgresses the negative commandment 'Ye shall not

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66. Moses Maimonides, Hilchot Mamrim, 2:9.

> add unto the word which I command you'[67]. . . Thus you see that [the institution of] this commandment [of reading the Scroll of Esther on Purim] would have been forbidden to them [were it not for the fact that ultimately they found it intimated in the Torah, etc.]; otherwise it would have been included in the principle, 'Thou shalt not add thereto.'[68] However, the prohibition against adding [to the Torah] by word of a prophet we derive only from the verse stating, 'These are the commandments,'[69] which establishes, 'From now on, no prophet is permitted to originate anything [in the Torah]'(Bal Tosif). Whatever [laws] the Sages have established in the nature of 'a fence [around the Torah],' such as the secondary degrees of forbidden marriages[70] - that activity of [establishing fences] is itself a requirement of the Torah, provided only that one realizes that these [laws] are a result of a particular fence and that they are not [expressly] from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed by He, in the Torah.[71]

Ramban questions the basis for both the additional commandment to read the Megillah and the declaration of a holiday. Whereas the Talmud deals only with the reading of the Megillah, Ramban is compelled to analyze both questions. He answers the Bal Tosif argument by proposing that the declaration of either of the new commandments (the reading of the Megillah or the declaration of a holiday) exists as a fence around the Torah. The seventeenth-century critic of Joseph Caro's Shulchan Arukh, Rabbi Hezekiah Ben David da

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67. Deuteronomy, 4:2.

68. Deuteronomy, 13:1.

69. Leviticus, 27:34.

70. Yebamot 21a-b.

71. Moses Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, pp. 50-51, (Ve'etchanan, 4:2).

Silva, normally a lenient decisor, nevertheless opposes the declaration of new holidays, citing a literal reading of the admonition, "You shall not add." According to da Silva ever since Megilat Taanit was annulled, along with the holidays it declared (see Rosh Hashanah 18b), the power to add new holidays has been lost.[72] Hence new generations do not have the right to add to the holidays already in existence.

Moses Sofer, the conservative, on the other hand, is a staunch supporter of the right to declare holidays, and so, differs with da Silva. He interprets Rosh Hashanah 18b in light of Taanit 18a which proposes that Megilat Taanit was only partially annulled. Only holidays for miracles performed in The Temple itself were annulled while other "new" holidays such as Purim and Chanukah still stand. In light of the Talmud texts, the Hatam Sofer would allow a community, in which a miracle took place, to declare a holiday. He even specifies the biblical commandment that is the basis for its declaration. A community is required to publicize a miracle (Pirsum Nes) and thus is not adding a new commandment by declaring a new holiday.[73]

Rabbi Shlomo Goren argues against the principle of Bal Tosif in two ways. He supports the reasoning of the Rambam and the Ramban who allowed for the declaration of a holiday

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72. Peri Hadash, O.H., 493.

73. Moses Sofer, O.H., 233.

despite Bal Tosif because it would exist as a fence around the Torah.[74] In addition, Goren quotes from Megilat Taanit itself to demonstrate that the Bal Tosif principle is not valid: "Rabbi Karcha said: since Moses there has only been Purim. As Passover is seven days so Purim is one."[75] This comparison is similar to the Kal vechomer argument found in the Babylonian Talmud which allows for Purim because it is similar to Passover. Thus a new holiday is allowed despite Bal Tosif because in essence it is not new, it is created in the pattern of an earlier biblical holiday, just as Megilat Taanit indicates.

Rabbi Yehuda Gershuni is another contemporary author who has addressed these questions. He stresses the fact that Ramban concentrates on the reading of the Megillah and not on the declaration of a new holiday. According to Gershuni the main issue is the rites and rituals of the new holiday, not the legal basis for declaring the day. Like Rambam and Ramban, Gershuni minimizes the importance of the Bal Tosif principle. It can be circumvented because the new rites and rituals as well as the holiday itself constitute a fence around the Torah and the publicizing of a miracle.[76]

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74. Goren, "Hasemichut Lekviat Yom Tov Bezman Hazeh", Rakover, p. 53.

75. Quoted in Goren, ibid., pp. 49-50.

76. Gershuni, "Al Keviat Yom Tov", Rakover, p. 58.

Gershuni cites Chanukah as his precedent. It too includes "commanded" rituals: lighting the candles and reciting the Hallel. Yet, these commandments could not have come into being until after the canonization of the Torah, but are due, according to Gershuni, to the three arguments which have already been presented:

1) The Kal vechomer hermeneutic found in Megillah 14a reasons that as Passover is celebrated for redemption from slavery so too can Purim (or other new holidays) be celebrated from redemption from death;

2) The fence-around-the-Torah argument which allows for a new commandment to protect an already existent commandment found within the Torah;

3) Pirsum Nes, the commandment that a miracle must be publicized.[77]

It is Gershuni's contention that Purim and other newly declared holidays fit into the category of yom mishteh vesimchah, a day of festive rejoicing, but not the category of yom tov, a full holiday upon which work is forbidden. The principle of Bal Tosif would not apply then, because a yom tov not found in the Torah has not been declared. The newly commanded day and its rituals act merely to publicize the miracle, and do not fall under the admonition that we should

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77. Ibid., p. 59.

not add to the words and commandments already existent in the Torah.

The principle of Bal Tosif is of only minor concern to a Reform Jew since it presupposes a law that is supreme and unalterable, whereas the Reform Jew sees Jewish law as undergoing constant alteration through time. Moreover, a liberal Jew looks to the law not as law per se, but as a traditional guideline which actually demands personal creativity in its application. Yet the status of law as a traditional guideline enables a Reform Jew to ask the same question albeit within a different framework than that of a traditional Jew. It is this new framework that we must elucidate now.

There is no doubt that for a newly created holiday, rite, or ritual, to be successful or enduring, it must be viewed as legitimate by those who observe it. Thus, the Reform Jew who would declare a holiday or create a new ritual, must ask, Is this an authentic extension of the tradition? But authenticity is subjective, in that the Orthodox will always regard what is new or liberal as inauthentic. For Reform Jews, authenticity is based both in the tradition and in the present. We cannot ignore the past because that is what defines the Judaism we have received. Yet we must sensitively blend the present with the past to ensure a legitimate and authentic Jewish act. The question

changes from what will the law bear, to what will the tradition bear given the reality of the present.

Just as Gershuni, working from a legal perspective, has differentiated two legal categories: yom tov and a new day of festive rejoicing (yom mishteh vesimchah), so a Reform Jew must differentiate tradition-based categories: what has been passed down through the tradition and what is now being added to it. The Ramban expressed this concern well when he cautioned that even though later generations could add new holidays or commandments if roots were found within the Torah, they should make clear that "these [laws] are a result of a particular fence and that they are not expressly from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the Torah."[78] New traditions can take their place along with the old only when the origins of the new within the tradition are clear, or the need for the new supersedes what the tradition will bear.

The legal justification for the declaration of new holidays and of new commandments was that they serve either as a fence around the Torah, or to publicize a miracle. Both lines of reasoning can act as guidelines for Reform Jews, not because we demand that novelty be proven from the Torah, but because we, too, are concerned that whatever is defined as new be viewed at the same time as legitimate from within the

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78. Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, p. 51.

tradition. It is this concern that will legitimize any new addition and thus ensure that it can become an authentic part of Liberal Judaism.

Traditional guidelines demonstrate how Liberal Jews may exercise care before declaring a new holiday or a new ritual: we should look for precedent when we can. A Liberal Jew can look to Purim and Chanukah, for example, as precedent for declaring a new holiday. The reading of Megillah on Purim fulfills the commandment to publicize a miracle as does the lighting of the candles on Chanukah. Even the declaration of Yom Haatzmaut today is legitimated by a concern for fulfilling the commandment to publicize a miracle. The ritual which is celebrated in the Synagogue on Yom Haatzmaut parallels other traditional holidays with the lighting of the candles, the recitation of Hallel, and the reading of the Torah.[79]

As an example of what I mean, I cite here one further area in which the bounds of the tradition are being tested: the creation of new rituals to celebrate life cycle events never before observed within the Jewish tradition. The women's movement is experimenting with rituals to celebrate events in a woman's life which have been ignored by the tradition. An example is the creation of a Brit Banot, or Brit Chayim, a covenant ceremony which welcomes a baby girl

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79. See Gates of Prayer, p. 590.

into the Jewish people. Liturgies and rituals have been developed which look to the tradition to find themes which are then adapted to fit the new ritual. The lighting of candles or drinking of wine at such a ceremony has been introduced not just because each has a meaning special to it, but also because they are traditional rituals which can add legitimacy to a new observance. The final determination of whether or not these rites are accepted and become new tradition is in the hands of the people who will choose to observe them. This choice will ultimately be based upon what is viewed as legitimate within the tradition or what is deemed a necessary response to events of modern life which are not considered within the tradition.

Bal Tosif - "You shall not add to the words of the Torah" - is as meaningful for a liberal Jew today as it is for a traditional Jew. But for Liberal Jews, its meaningfulness lies in the lesson that we may not add that which is not viewed as an integral part of the tradition itself. As a Jew takes the step to create a day or a ritual to celebrate an event in which the perception is that God has acted in his or her life, it is crucial that the new observance be viewed not as foreign or extraneous but legitimately as a part of our tradition.

Chapter V: Blessings

One of the halakhah's primary concerns with regard to new holidays is the nature of the blessings that are recited. As discussed earlier, the blessing fulfills a crucial role in determining the religious nature of an act. Within certain bounds, the halakhah allows each of us personally to determine how to respond religiously to any moment in life. The halakhah governs time and actions yet the recitation of a blessing further restricts actions in that it implies that the act about to be performed was specifically commanded by God.

The power of the blessing lies within its wording. Every blessing recited before an action begins: Barukh atah adonai, eloheinu melekh haolam, asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu . . . - "Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us through commandments, and commanded us to. . . A literal analysis of the words teaches that God sanctifies human beings through giving commandments and that the action about to be performed has specifically been commanded by God. For a Jew who takes these words and their intent literally, the recitation of a blessing implies divine direction to act. These words then, and the action which they preface, are not to be taken lightly.

The natural consequence of the importance of the blessing formula is that the tradition acts to ensure that

blessings are not recited indiscriminately as wasted blessings, or "blessings [recited] in vain" (berakhah levatalah). Such blessings are avoided at all costs because they are tantamount to taking God's name in vain. Laws have developed within the halakhah to ensure that the correct blessings are recited at the proper time alone, by the proper people, and over the proper act.

The Mishnah is the first source to discuss the issue of blessings as they relate to personal holidays. According to the Mishnah, a miracle is an event which calls for the recitation of a blessing when one sees the place where the miracle occurred.[80] Next it mentions the wording of the blessing and stipulates that it cannot be recited unless an interval of time has passed since it was last recited, thus avoiding indiscriminate repetition of a blessing.[81] The Shehechiyanu blessing is specified in connection with acquiring a new home or new utensils.[82] The Tosefta does not deal at all with the issue of the miracle and its blessings. However, like the Mishnah, it does discuss the specific time interval required before one may bless an event which one has previously blessed. It adds that one may recite a blessing over a wonderful sight, such as the sea, if it has changed

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80. Mishnah, Berachot 9:1.

81. Mishnah, Berachot 9:7.

82. Mishnah, Berachot 9:5.

since the previous time that the individual saw it, even if that was just the day before.[83]

The Talmud discusses in detail various aspects of the issues brought up in the Mishnah and in some instances expands upon them. It looks first for a biblical source which would prove that we are commanded to recite blessings when seeing a miracle. The source provided is: "And Jethro said: Blessed be the Lord who has delivered you out of the land of the Egyptians. . ."[84] Once a biblical source can be proven, the Talmud then compares an individual miracle with one that affects the entire people of Israel and asks if there is a difference with regard to blessings. The answer is: ". . .for a miracle done for a large body it is the duty of everyone to say a blessing; for a miracle done to an individual, he alone is required to say a blessing."[85] An attachment to the place where the miracle occurred is also of concern in that the blessing is recited upon seeing the spot where the miracle took place. The exact wording of the blessing to be recited is provided. For an individual it is: "Blessed be He. . .who did a miracle for me in this place"[86], or for the community: "Blessed be He. . .who bestows

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83. Tosefta, Berachot 6:6.

84. Exodus, 18:10.

85. Berakhot 54a (pp. 329-330).

86. Berakhot 54a (p. 329).

lovingkindnesses."[87] As discussed earlier, the Talmud is concerned with who may recite the blessing. Four categories of individuals are described: [those who] 1)cross the sea; 2)cross the desert; 3)recover from illness, and 4)are set free from jail. All of these have in common the fact that the individual involved is redeemed from death. Another significant point which the Talmud debates is whether a minyan is required for the recitation of the blessing and if at least two scholars need to be present. This debate is not concluded, although modern practice is to recite Birkat Hagomel during the Torah service, which is when a minyan is present, with (in most cases) at least two scholars as well. Finally, the Talmud discusses the nature of the miracle which needs to be blessed. A myriad of examples are given, all of which are similar to the four categories of who may bless (outlined above) in that each is a miracle which saves an individual from death.

When discussing the Shehechiyanu blessing which is recited upon seeing a friend, the Talmud requires thirty days to have passed before one may recite the blessing upon seeing the friend again.[88] This Shehechiyanu, although not directly germane to the topic of miracles, is important in later

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87. Berakhot 54a (p. 333)

88. Berakhot 58b.

discussions regarding blessings which may be recited at personal holidays.

The Palestinian Talmud discusses the Mishnayot separately and although the tone of the commentary is similar to that of the Babylonian Talmud, many of the specific comments are quite different. The discussion of individual versus community blessings is in fact a corrupt text which is clarified only when read in light of a commentary by a fourteenth-century commentator, Abudraham. His reading of the text helps us to understand that a son or a student may not bless for his father or his master's miracle unless that person was significant or died as a martyr.[89]

The wording of the blessing found in the Palestinian Talmud is different from that found in the Babylonian Talmud. "Blessed is He. . .who did a miracle for our ancestors at this place."[90] This form of the blessing is for the entire community and seems to be directed toward recitation at the exact spot where the miracle took place. The text continues with a discussion which is extraneous since it concentrates on the nature of blessings in general, but it does determine that for a blessing to be complete, it requires the mention of God as ruler of the universe. Later generations will

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89. See Ahavat Tzion Viyerushalayim, (vol. 1) B. Ratner, ed., (Vilna: Buchdruckerei v. Wittwe & Gebr., 1901) p. 193.

90. P.T. Berachot 9:1.

suggest the option of allowing praises and thanksgiving for miracles only if the phrase which mentions God as ruler of the universe, in essence, symbolic of the entire blessing, is excluded.

Just as the Babylonian Talmud discusses the importance of an interval of time lapsing before repeating a blessing for a certain event, so, too, the Palestinian Talmud discusses an interval of time and defines it to be thirty days. When deliberating upon the Shehechiyanu blessing, it is interesting to note that two versions of the blessing appear. One is the version found in the Babylonian Talmud (which we use today), and the other is a shortened version: "Blessed is He who has helped us to reach this time."[91]

Blessings continue to be a question for discussion by generations of commentators. The Rambam again asks the question, Who can bless? He responds in a manner similar to that of the Palestinian Talmud: a son may bless for a miracle which occurred to his father; but he omits the stipulation that the person be a significant person or a martyr.[92] The Vilna Gaon, in a gloss to the Babylonian Talmud again asks: Who can bless? Yet he goes further than any previous responsdent. Referring to the Geonim and the Rif, the Vilna Gaon adds that the duty to bless extends to children and

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91. P.T. Berakhot 9:4.

92. Moses Maimonides, Hilkhot Berakhot, 10:9.

grandchildren.[93] Finally, in a gloss to the Palestinian Talmud, Eliezar ben Moses Azikri extends the duty to all offspring of the person for whom the miracle occurred.[94] The Tur adds its support to this decision by stating that all offspring may bless for a miracle which happened to an ancestor.[95] The wording of the blessings which the Tur presents is derived from the Palestinian Talmud. The fact that the wording mentions "fathers" (in the plural) rather than "father" is used as evidence to support the position that offspring may bless for an ancestor: Blessed is He. . .who did miracles for our fathers. . ."[96] This is followed today when a blessing is recited for a miracle. Later in this chapter we will see that Rabbi Aryeh Frimer discusses the reasons that offspring are allowed to bless together with sons.

Like both Talmuds, the Shulchan Arukh deals with the issue of blessings in great detail. It rules that when one sees a place where a miracle occurred for the entire community of Israel, a person may recite the complete She'asah Nissim blessing including mention of shem umalkhut,

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93. Elijah ben Solomon (HaGrah), gloss to Berakhot 54a.

94. Eliezar ben Moses Azikri, Sefer Haredim, gloss to P.T. Berakhot 4:1.

95. Tur, O.H. 281.1.

96. Tur, O.H. 218.1.

the formula for a complete blessing.[97] The Shulchan Arukh continues with a discussion of the time required between the recitation of blessings for the same event. Following what both Talmuds have already stated, it rules that thirty days must transpire before one can repeat a blessing for seeing the place where a miracle occurred.[98] Also similar to the patterns established in the Talmuds, the Shulchan Arukh rules that an individual should say the blessing for himself but that others cannot say it for him when they see the place where the miracle occurred. Finally, in line with all the other commentaries and codes, the Shulchan Arukh agrees that all offspring may recite the blessing for a parent or master.[99]

The Talmud allowed for the recitation of the Shehechiyanu only when seeing a friend whom one had not seen for thirty days. The Shulchan Arukh discusses the nature of the friendship in order to determine exactly for whom one must recite the Shehechiyanu. The issue centers upon the question of whom one is truly glad to see, and thus who deserves the recitation of a blessing. The solution is that one need recite the Shehechiyanu only upon seeing a friend

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97. Shulchan Arukh, O.H. 218.1.

98. Shulchan Arukh, O.H. 218.4.

99. Shulchan Arukh, O.H. 218.5.

whom one likes very much and is truly glad to see.[100] The concern of the Shulchan Arukh is that a blessing not be recited in vain if one is not truly glad to see the friend.

Rabbi Aryeh Frimer has written extensively on blessings for Personal Purim holidays because of his own concern about what is appropriate for his family's celebration: Purim Frimer. He discusses the development of the halakhah which over time, allowed offspring to bless for the miracle of a parent or a master. Searching for a reason for this development, he explains that without the occurrence of the miracle which saved the parent or the teacher from death, the offspring would never have come to life; or in the case of a master (teacher) the growth and development which he has fostered would never have come to be.[101]

Rabbi Frimer is concerned that a blessing not be recited in vain. In order to avoid such an occurrence he proposes that a blessing recited out of choice rather than out of obligation could not be a wasted blessing. He supports his rather aggressive stance with a statement by Rabbi Shlomo Goren that one is allowed to bless for the miracle of Israeli Independence Day not out of obligation but out of choice.[102] In addition, he quotes Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer who claims

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100. Shulchan Arukh, O.H. 225.1.

101. Rabbi Aryeh Frimer, "Behagdarat Hanes Shealav Mevarchim Birkat Hanes", Or Ha-Mizrach 31, p. 309.

102. Ibid., p. 320.

that a blessing of personal praise can be recited at any time by any person because there is no concern of a wasted blessing.[103]

Rabbi Frimer's arguments are tenuous at best, because of the weak nature of his support within the halakhah. Rabbi Goren's position is not universally supported,[104] and the position that a blessing may be recited out of choice not obligation is not clear because there is still the chance that it could be a wasted blessing. Azriel Hildesheimer's argument would add support except that it is taken out of context by Rabbi Frimer. Hildesheimer was discussing the Shehechiyanu blessing which can be recited at more general occasions, and not the blessing for a miracle which is specifically regulated.

The Shehechiyanu blessing is central to the discussion of the use of blessings at personal holiday celebrations because it is the one prayer which is not specific for certain acts but is a prayer of personal praise. As Azriel Hildesheimer wrote, its recitation could possibly fall within the realm of personal choice rather than obligation. The Tur also points out that the Shehechiyanu is quite different from other blessings. It suggests that one can recite it at any joyous occasion even though one is not obligated. This

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103. Ibid., p. 321.

104. See Chayim Dov Regensberg "Yom Haatzmaut Ayno Yom Tov", in Rakover, p. 114.

then alleviates the worry of a wasted blessing.[105] Rabbi Frimer supports this view and quotes both Rabbis Goren and Shaar-Yashuv Cohen who allow Shehechiyanu to be recited on Yom Haatzmaut because it falls within the realm of choice. True joy becomes the determination of when the blessing may be recited.[106]

But, the weakness of the choice versus obligation debate is clear when Rabbi Frimer acknowledges that the fear of a wasted blessing is still present and that "according to the law it is best and correct for a person not to recite a doubtful blessing."[107] It is clear that doubt continues to exist regarding whether the Shehechiyanu falls within the realm of choice or obligation. In order to protect the law from being broken, even if inadvertently, a traditional Jew might remain cautious and not recite the Shehechiyanu. Another possibility which the tradition allows is to recite the Shehechiyanu but to leave out the beginning formula (shem umalkhut) which the Palestinian Talmud emphasizes as the phrase that makes the blessing complete.

In an ingenious maneuver within the law, Rabbi Frimmer suggests that even though the halakhah cautions against reciting the Shehechiyanu, it might still be possible to do

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105. Tur O.H. 219.1.

106. Aryeh Frimer, "Birkat Shehechiyanu Beseudat Purim Yachid", Or Ha-Mizrach 32, p. 295.

107. Ibid., p. 297.

so at a Personal Purim celebration such as Purim Frimer. Returning to the original Halakhic discussion about the Shehechiyanu (see Berakhot 58b) we see that one may recite the blessing upon seeing a special friend whom one has not seen in thirty days. At a personal holiday celebration, one's friends and family would surely be gathered to share in the joyous occasion. Among this crowd, there would surely be a friend whom one had not seen in thirty days. Rabbi Frimer suggests that this would allow the entire gathering to recite the Shehechiyanu blessing (due to the obligation handed down from the Talmud) and that during the recitation one could also think about the miracle and recite the blessing for the miracle at the same time.[108]

The difference between the celebration of a miracle for a community and an individual is an important topic within the category of blessings. It is clear from both Talmud texts that for a miracle which happened to all of Israel, all of Israel may recite blessings. Yet, for a miracle which occurs to an individual, only an individual (later enlarged to that individual's family) may recite blessings.[109] From this text comes the position that a holiday for all of Israel may be declared only if the miracle occurs to the entire community. A holiday for an individual and his or her

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108. Ibid., p. 297.

109. See Berakhot 54a and P.T. Berakhot 9:1.

family, which can be extended to mean a specific community or town, may also be declared, but the rest of Israel may not participate in the recitation of blessings for another person or community's miracle.

We have seen that the halakhah acts to protect the blessing as a rite which is determined by God. The degree of protection within the law tells of the deep concern that the law has to protect the use of blessings from indiscriminate purposes. This concern should be shared by all Jews, liberal or traditional, because the power of a blessing is important for liberal Jews as well as for those who follow the halakhah. But, for a liberal Jew who does not believe in religious obligation as codified in the halakhah, the recitation of a blessing falls into the realm of choice rather than divine obligation. Although the wording implies that God has commanded the action to follow the blessing, a liberal Jew can interpret this obligation in a personal rather than a legal sense. He or she determines the meaning of the obligation and could very possibly fulfill the commandment for reasons of cultural identification rather than out of a theological or legal obligation. A liberal Jew fulfills a religious obligation not because he or she is commanded by an outside authority, but because he or she is moved by a personal motivation to do so.

In the Bible, when Jethro blessed God for taking the Jews out of Egypt[110] he was recognizing that God takes part in the life of the people. Jethro responded to an event by recognizing and praising God's action. For a traditional Jew, the halakhah defines the times when one is allowed to respond in this nature. However, Liberal Jews, who do not recognize a central authority, do not have the right to define for another liberal Jew when a blessing for a special event may be recited. It is still incumbant though, for Reform Judaism to recognize the importance of the use of blessings as a response to events in life, and to act to ensure that they are included in liturgy and recited only at appropriate moments.

The definition of appropriate moments cannot be a legal one. In a movement which stresses individual autonomy it is the individual who will define the moments that are significant and that call out to be recognized. New blessings can and should be created to respond to modern events and society. However, they should be created with an eye toward a tradition which acts to protect the invocation of God's name and an understanding that due to time and tradition, a blessing holds mystical power over individuals. However, in newly created rituals the use of the blessing formula should be carefully included. It is the inclusion of

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110. Exodus, 18:10.

the blessing which will add the legitimacy of tradition to the ritual act. It is important that the blessing be used only in a legitimate manner so as not to diminish from its traditional power. An abused blessing could lose its mystical aura and become just another legal or cultural formula devoid of the divine presence.

Rabbi Shlomo Goren and other modern commentators who follow his lead, lean toward allowing personal latitude in deciding which blessings to recite at modern events. Unlike liberal Jews though, they do so only according to the guidelines of the halakhah. Thus when Goren allows one to recite the Shehechiyanu blessing despite the fear of reciting a wasted blessing, he does so because he interprets it as falling within the realm of personal choice and not obligation. In allowing this he encourages individuals and communities to respond to modern events in a religious manner. For Goren, the intent of the blessing, in the case of a miracle or of redemption from death, is true joy. This intent seems to outweigh any potential fear of reciting a blessing for which one was not obligated. In fact, for Goren, the intent of true joy might in essence create the obligation.

For liberal Jews too, the intent of true joy should provide an opportunity to recite an appropriate blessing. At such a moment a Liberal Jew would bless out of choice but

turn to the tradition for an appropriate blessing, or create a new one if one could not be found within the tradition.

The final lesson which the tradition teaches regarding the recitation of blessings is the importance of community. In the earliest layers of commentary the obligation to recite blessings for an individual miracle was extended from the individual to his sons, and then to his offspring. In times of great joy, one should share emotions with family or close friends. The tradition recognizes this and has allowed for communal sharing of blessings which express joy and gratitude.

The tradition is not concerned with the position of a woman in reciting these blessings.[111] It may be that for individual occasions a woman is regarded in the same legal light as a man and that she and her offspring should follow the identical procedure. Liberal Judaism would of course include a woman in the same category as a man. Should she feel the religious need to respond to God's actions she would have the same power as a man to recite an appropriate blessing. Since liberal Judaism considers men and women to be equal, a man and a woman would respond in the identical manner.

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111. An article was published, after the writing of this thesis, which deals with this issue. See: Or Ha-Mizrach 34 (September, 1985).

Chapter VI: Hallel

Creating a contemporary holiday celebration allows one to offer thanks to God for a miracle which has occurred. The halakhah allows several blessings of thanks: Birkat Hanes, the blessing which thanks God for performing a miracle; Birkat Hagomel, which thanks God for bestowing lovingkindness; and even the Shehechiyanu, which thanks God for keeping us alive and enabling us to reach this time. All are blessings which, under the correct circumstances, can legitimately be recited by an individual, a family, or a community to thank God for a miracle.

But the ultimate offering of praise and thanksgiving to God is the Hallel: a combination of psalms recited at fixed times including the three festivals, Chanukah, and the new moon. Since this prayer is recited to give thanks to God at times of rejoicing, it is natural that those who are in favor of the declaration of new holidays would discuss the possibility of offering the Hallel as the appropriate thanksgiving prayer at such celebrations.

Due to the important position it holds within the liturgy, the tradition discusses the Hallel in depth. The Tosefta, and two different tractates of the Talmud contain

parallel discussions of the Hallel,[112] stipulating the holidays upon which it is to be recited:

> R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Jehozadak: there are eighteen days on which an individual completes the Hallel: the eight days of the Feast [of Tabernacles], the eight days of Chanukah, the first Festival day of Passover and the Festival day of the Feast of Weeks. In the exile on twenty-one-days: the nine days of the Feast [of Tabernacles], the eight days of Chanukah, the two Festival days of Passover, and the two Festival days of the Feast of Weeks.[113]

These passages all clarify the exact days upon which Hallel may be said.

Tractate Pesachim asks the same question - - When may Hallel be recited? - - but responds with a different answer

> "The prophets among them ordained that Israel should recite it at every important epoch and at every misfortune - may it not come upon them! - and when they are redeemed they recite it [in gratitude] for their redemption.[114]

This passage presents a more open stance regarding days upon which Hallel may be recited. Based upon this text, it seems, that Hallel would be appropriate for any important occasion at which thanksgiving would be offered.

Moreover, tractate Shabbat quotes R. Jose as saying: " May my portion be among those who recite the Hallel every

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112. See Tosefta Sukkah Chapter 3, Taanit 28b. and Arakin 10a.

113. Arakin 10a-10b (p. 56).

114. Pesachim 117a (p. 599).

day,"[115] implying that the Hallel may be recited daily. "But," the text continues, "that is not so, for a Master said: he who reads the Hallel every day blasphemes and reproaches the divine name. We refer to the 'Verses of Song'."[116] Here the text takes a strong position against R. Jose's position that Hallel could be recited everyday. In fact, those who do recite it so often are considered "blasphemers" of the divine name. In order to harmonize the text with R. Jose's objection, the argument suggests that instead of Hallel, what is truly being discussed are "Verses of Song", or psalms of thanksgiving.

The final Talmud text which deals with the question of Hallel is found at the end of the Megillah section which has already been discussed in detail.[117] The discussion is a long one which covers a number of topics. It asks, Why is Hallel not recited on Purim? It also deals with the problem of reciting Hallel for a miracle outside of the land of Israel.

> If for being delivered from slavery to freedom we chant a hymn of praise, should we not do so all the more for being delivered from death to life? If that is the reason, we should say Hallel also? We do not do so because Hallel is not said for a miracle which occurred outside of the Land of Israel. How then do we come to say it for the Exodus from Egypt which was a miracle which

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115. Shabbat 118b (p. 582).

116. Shabbat 118b (p. 582).

117. Megillah 14a (p.81).

> occurred outside the Land of Israel? As it has been taught: Until they entered the Land of Israel, all lands were counted as proper for chanting a hymn of praise [for miracles done in them]. After they had entered the Land, other countries were not counted as proper for chanting a hymn of praise [for miracles done in them]. R. Nahman said: The reading of the Megillah is equivalent to Hallel. Rabba said: There is good reason in the case [of the Exodus from Egypt] because it says [in the Hallel], `Praise ye O servants of the Lord,' who are no longer servants of Pharaoh. But can we say in this case, Praise ye, servants of the Lord are not servants of Ahasuerus? We are still servants of Ahasuerus! Whether on the view of Rabba or on the view of R. Nahman, there is still a difficulty in what has been taught [above], that after they had entered the Land, other countries were not counted as proper for chanting a hymn of praise [for miracle done in them]? When the people went into exile, the other countries became proper as at first.

The problem within the text seems to be that Hallel is recited on Passover which is an event that occurred outside the Land of Israel, even thought it is reserved for miracles within the Land. The problem is solved by restricting the latter regulation to the period after the Land was settled, thus excluding Passover. But what about Purim, which occurred after the settlement of the Land of Israel, yet which has a megillah reading which is tantamount (in Nahman's view) to a Hallel? The solution is that "once the people went into exile, the other countries became proper as at first."

This section is quite important for later commentators in that it clearly permits Hallel for miracles outside the Land of Israel, a ruling that forms the basis for the

contemporary argument that Hallel may be recited for a miracle today.

In fact, as we saw, Hallel itself is not an issue on Purim": it is not listed in the earlier sources as one of the days on which it was said. So the argument is purely hypothetical, based on a prior presumed analogy between Hallel and the Megillah, both being praise to God for a miracle. Our conclusion that thanks to God are due outside the Land, justifies Hallel in the case of Passover, and the Megillah in the case of Purim. This seems to be the Ramban's point as he discusses Hallel on Purim, and follows Nahman in noting that "singing for joy is reading Megillah."[118] In cases like Purim - - i.e., of redemption from death - - it would seem that the creation of a Megillah, without Hallel, would suffice for offering praises to God.

The Hatam Sofer, a strong supporter of the ability to declare holidays, is more aggressive in his stance. Following the discussion in Megillah and Arakin which allows for Hallel outside the Land, he reasons that Hallel may be recited even with its appropriate blessing for a contemporary miracle outside the Land of Israel.[119] To support his position he also returns to the Kal vechomer analogy in

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118. Moses Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, p. 50-51 (Parashat Veetkhanan, 4:2).

119. Moses Sofer, Y.D., 233.

Megillah 14a which says that just as you sing at Pesach so too you can sing at Purim.

In his comment to the Pesachim text, the Meiri is more careful. He agrees that the Gemara proves that one can declare a holiday and recite Hallel, yet he cautions that one must do so without reciting the preceding blessing which infers that God has commanded one to recite the Hallel.[120] Since the blessing is not recited, the possibility of reciting a wasted blessing is avoided, and the Hallel becomes nothing more than a collection of Psalms of praise.

Rabbi Shlomo Goren carefully examines the issue of reciting the Hallel for a modern day miracle and decides in favor. It is interesting that he does so not only for halakhic reasons but for spiritual reasons as well. In a non-halakhic manner, he notes the importance of the Hallel for creating an environment of sanctity of a special day.[121] For Goren, Hallel becomes a matter of sanctity and spiritual fulfillment as much as it is a legal concern.

Yet, Goren must attempt to support his position within the law as well, so he returns to Megilat Taanit as an example of the declaration of new holidays and their celebration. These holidays are for the entire community of Israel - Chanukah and Purim are included. Since Hallel is

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120. Meiri, Sefer HaBechirah, Pesachim 117a.

121. Shlomo Goren, "Keriat Hallel Bechag Haatzmaut", Rakover, p. 140.

mentioned as an example of the ritual included in the celebration of Chanukah,[122] it follows that it may be set for an extra-biblical holiday, our own included.

Goren supports his conclusion with a number of additional proof texts. First he turns to the Midrash on Exodus:

> We shall tell our children and our children will tell their children that they should recite Song such as this before Thee, when thou performest miracles for them.[123]

The song of which the Midrash speaks is the Song of the Sea which the children of Israel sang after crossing the Red Sea. Along with others in the tradition, Goren understands "Song" to imply Hallel. This text then would prove that Hallel should be recited by every generation for miracles performed for them. Another Midrashic proof text is found in Midrash Rabbah: "One must render thanks [to God] for good tidings."[124] "Thanks to God" is understood to imply Hallel while "good tidings" implies a miraculous event. The final proof text which Goren cites deals directly with miracles and

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122. Shlomo Goren, "Hasemichut Lekviat Yom Tov Bezman Hazeh", Rikover, p. 48.

123. Midrash Rabbah, Exodus, 23:12, (London, Soncino Press, 1939), p. 290.

124. Midrash Rabbah, Genesis, 58:6 (p. 512).

Hallel: "In every miracle and saving they thank God with Hallel and song."[125]

All of these proof texts show that the tradition is inclined toward songs of praise after a miracle. But, contrary to Goren's point, the halakhah does not seem to allow Hallel after any random miracle and that fact may be why he turns to the midrash for support. Megilat Taanit is problematic in that it has no officially legal status, and in any event, it was officially annulled in the Talmud. The Talmud moreover, as discussed above, is not in favor of allowing Hallel at any general occasion, and most of the Talmudic texts which Goren cites as support only imply song in general, they do not declare that Hallel is allowed.

The Arakin text (see page 73) allows Goren to claim that there are two types of Hallel, one biblical, and the other rabbinic. The holidays described in the Arakin text are biblical in nature except for Chanukah and Purim, on both of which, "song" (Hallel in the case of Chanukah, and Megillah in the case of Purim) is allowed. According to Goren the biblical Hallel, is considered to be "Shirah," while the rabbinic Hallel of Chanukah and the Megillah for Purim are not just song, but are the offering of thanks for a miracle. For Goren this differentiation allows for the recitation of Hallel at a modern holiday; even if the Hallel as song of

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125. Quoted in Shlomo Goren, "Keriat Hallel Bechag Haatzmaut", Rakover, p. 141.

praise is not permitted, still, it falls into the category of thanksgiving, which is due for a miracle.[126] In conclusion, Goren modifies his strong position that Hallel can be recited for an event that occurs today: only miracles which happened to the entire community of Israel may be marked with Hallel.[127]

Rabbi Israel Frimer supports Goren's arguments and adds a number of new interpretations. Frimer returns to the Shabbat 119b text which mentions reciting Hallel every day and develops an argument which understands "every day" to mean that any day holds the potential for the recitation of Hallel. Utilizing philological techniques, Frimer proves that on each occasion in the Talmud when B'khol Yom is used it literally means, "every day."[128]

Frimer reasons that the Talmud text in Shabbat seems to negate the use of Hallel on each day. Frimer argues that this is so for three reasons: 1) It would be used too regularly for it to remain a special prayer; 2) It would then lose the special intent which it requires, and 3) It might be said over a miracle which is not a true miracle. Countering these arguments, Frimer claims 1) that miracles are not regular events, so Hallel would not be used too frequently;

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126. Shlomo Goren, ibid., p. 143.

127. Ibid., p. 145.

128. Israel Frimer, "Beinyan Hallel Bekhol Yom", Hadarom 50, p. 226.

and, 2) the intent would definately be sincere since the event would be so extraordinary.[129] The only argument which he has trouble refuting is that of the nature of the miracle; it seems true that Hallel could be recited for a miracle which is not truly extraordinary. In the end though, Frimer insists that all miracles are extraordinary (see page 36).

Rabbi Leib Baron argues in favor of allowing the recitation of Hallel for events that occur today, yet his support is so very careful that in the end it is no support at all. In looking at Rashi's comment to Pesachim 117a which discusses when Hallel should be recited, he notices that Rashi stipulates, "like Chanukah". From this comment, Baron concludes that Hallel may be recited only for a contemporary event which occurs to all of Israel such as in the case of Chanukah. Today, when Israel is spread around the world, such an occurrence is not possible. Thus it would not be possible to recite Hallel for a miracle which occurs today.[130] Baron also makes note of the type of miracle which occurred at Chanukah. The miracle of the oil was an outright miracle visible to all. Thus the nature of the miracle would be a second determination to the recitation of Hallel. Another mitigating factor against the recitation of Hallel today is that it must be set by acknowledged public rule,

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129. Ibid.

130. Leib Baron, "Beinyan im yesh Chiyuv Amirat Hallel al Nes Sheirah Bezman Hazeh", Rakover, p. 130.

something the Jewish people, divided and spread around the world, lacks.[131] Baron turns also to the point made by Rabba in Megillah 14a, that is, that the reason Hallel is not recited on Purim is that Hallel stipulates "servants of the Lord," whereas even after the miracle of Purim, Jews were still servants of Ahasuerus. In the diaspora too, he concludes, redemption is never complete, so that Hallel may not be recited there. Citing a difference between Hallel for the community (all of Israel) and songs and praise for a single group of people, Baron rules that in the case of the community, one has the obligation to bless the miracle of which one was a part,[132] while in the case of the individual, all one must do is praise God, an act which requires no blessing at all.[133]

In summary, Baron claims that the tradition permits the recitation of Hallel for a miracle, but not in modern times when Israel is spread about the face of the earth and thus is beyond common experience of a miracle, and in any event, is not totally free to be a "servant [only] of God." So he permits the recitation of songs and praise in the form of

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131. Ibid., p. 132.

132. See Rashi on Pesachim 64a.

133. Baron, Ibid., p. 136.

Psalms, but only if this is done without the requisite blessing which would qualify it as Hallel.[134]

The halakhah is careful with regard to the recitation of Hallel. Both Rabbis Goren and Frimer respond to contemporary events and rule very liberally when they allow Hallel to be recited. Even though Goren and Frimer find support to allow its recitation for contemporary miracles such as Yom Haatzmaut, the tendency of the law is to argue against such an aggressive stance.

As we saw above, the Arakin source for Hallel is exclusive in its strict definition of the days on which Hallel may be said. By contrast, the Gemara in Pesachim which allows Hallel generally for "every important epoch and at every misfortune. . .and when they [the people of Israel] are redeemed,"[135] is much more inclusive in its ruling. Rabbis Goren and Frimer take the inclusive approach, thus permitting Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut, which they see as a miracle which has occurred to the entire people of Israel.

A liberal Jew would appreciate this lenient stand in the halakhah. But he or she could not be concerned just with the question, May Hallel be recited? Rather, it would be more appropriate to ask, What function does Hallel have in

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134. Ibid., p. 138.

135. Pesachim 117a (p. 599).

the celebration of a contemporary event? This question encompasses more than a range of answers to the question of Hallel's permissibility; it raises in addition considerations of the fundamental direction that a modern celebration might take.

The spirit of the tradition as presented in this chapter provides lessons with regard to that direciton. Along with Shlomo Goren[136], we too should be concerned with the spiritual essence of the day. This concern that the nature of the day be personally fulfilling should be balanced with the concern of the halakhah that Hallel is a special prayer. To begin with, the psalms which make up the Hallel are together the ultimate traditional vehicle for offering praise to God, but are reserved for the festivals and the new moon. Time and tradition have imparted to them the status of "high" liturgy in that they are reserved for synagogue occasions of great pomp and circumstance. The is no reason to change the traditional status of Hallel since other avenues for praising God are open to liberal Jews. The creation of new blessings or the writing of a personal Megillah would better express personal feelings of thanks than the use of the Hallel. The goal of Reform Judaism, as it attempts to create its own tradition of Hallel, should be to preserve the traditional status of Hallel as proper for community events.

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136. See above, p. 77.

In defending the recitation of Hallel for contemporary events, Rabbi Frimer points to three determining factors:[137]

1) The event must be unique. Hallel should be recited in special circumstances only, not on a regular basis.

2) The correct personal intent (Kavanah) should be present. It must reflect the serious nature of the event, and be present in the community which is reciting the psalms.

3) The event must be a miracle which is perceived as extraordinary. The perception must be that God has actively intervened in earthly affairs.

According to Frimer, only when all of these conditions are met can the people of Israel recite the Hallel.

These determining factors can in fact guide the liberal Jew who must decide the appropriate use of the Hallel.

1) The lesson of the tradition is that Hallel should be reserved for events which are unique and thus deserving specifically of its ritual presence, since other avenues of praising God are available. Liberal Jews too, should preserve the Hallel for such events.

2) Yet there are times, such as Yom Haatzmaut, when a modern community event deserves the Hallel. But, the proper intent in those reciting the Hallel is important, otherwise it loses it special status. Intent should be a concern of

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137. See pages 80 and 81, above.

liberal Jews as well, as we attempt to create new situations in which Hallel may be recited.

3) The only way to ensure the proper intent is to reserve the Hallel for those occassions which the entire community perceives as extraordinary. Liberal Jews would add to Rabbi Frimer's three points, the condition that the event must be a community event which is commonly perceived to be extraordinary.[138] When this consensus is present, the proper personal intent will also be present, since it is probable that a community could only arrive at this consensus in the event of an extraordinary occurrence.

For an individual celebration of thanks and praise to God other avenues are available. The Shehechiyanu, Birkat Hanes, and Birkat Hagomel are all options for thanking God for the gift of life. Tradition and history also teach that individuals and communities which declared special holidays often wrote a Megillah which told the particular story of redemption which they celebrated annually. We know from the Talmud that Megillah is considered to be song in the same category of the Hallel. The process of writing and reading a family or community Megillah would help to fulfill the three fundamentals which Rabbi Frimer outlines above, without utilizing the Hallel in a non-traditional manner.

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138. Rabbi Frimmer need not add this stipulation since the Halakhah is clear that Hallel may only be recited for a community event.

Chapter VII: Conclusions

There is little doubt that the halakhah allows for the setting aside of time to recognize God's involvement in our lives. Purim Sheni celebrations are an instance of the sacralization of personal time; they provide an individual the opportunity to create a religious moment by virtue of a religious act or the recitation of a blessing. The preceding chapters have reviewed sections of the halakhah pertaining to the issues surrounding Purim Sheni celebrations. Each issue raised within the halakhah seems to be concerned primarily that the tradition be kept in an authentic way; that personal latitude in responding to God's acts be allowed, yet only within reasonable bounds, as defined by the tradition. The lessons which the tradition teaches, and the themes to which it points, although not directly relevant in a strictly legal sense alone, are important for liberal Jews as we open ourselves and our lives to the potential for sanctity in each moment. The creation of personal sacred time is a perfect example of allowing the sacred to enter our personal lives.

The declaration of a Purim Sheni to recognize God's involvement in day-to-day life is predicated on a personal need for meaning, a desire to recognize the power of forces outside of ourselves. A holiday which recognizes an act of God in our lives should be declared not just because the law

allows for it, but because of the internal spiritual satisfaction which can be derived from its celebration.

In liberal Judaism today, the authority for the declaration of sacred personal time is vested in the individual alone. As compared with the tradition which allows a court or a city to declare a holiday, in liberal Judaism, no authority can determine whether or not an individual is correct in his or her acts. The declaration of a personal holiday must be meaningful for the individual, if it is to be followed by that individual.

The Hatam Sofer argues first that the basis of a holiday should be found in the biblical text while secondly, the nature of the holiday is up to the generation which declares it.[139]

It is essential for us to keep the difference in mind. As for the former we see that the religious legitimacy of a contemporary celebration must have its roots within the tradition. Yet the latter teaches us that for such a celebration to be meaningful in our lives today, it must reflect our world and our expression of Judaism. Following the theme of the Hatam Sofer's argument then, we can conclude that we are free to declare personal holidays in our day, and to celebrate them in a manner which is meaningful to us, yet only after we have reached into our tradition to assure

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139. See pages 28-29, above.

ourselves that the celebration we have declared has authentic roots within the tradition.

The search for authentic moments to mark raises the questions of the nature of the miracle which can be celebrated. Concerned that the ability to declare sacred time not be abused, the halakhah determines that the event which is to be celebrated must be extraordinary. The limitation that the event must be an act of God which includes deliverance from death may be too constraining for a liberal Jew who should be able to recognize any extraordinary act of God, even in the day-to-day lives of normal existence.

But a liberal Jew must first be able to recognize that God does in fact act there. Only once a liberal Jew perceives that God acts in many ways in the world, is he or she prepared to recognize God's actions by declaring sacred time.

So we arrive at the conclusion that Liberal Jews share with the halakhah the concern for authenticity in events marked, and thus, that only those actions which are extraordinary are deserving of the declaration of sacred time. What then is extraordinary and deserving of recognition? For us, individual perception is the key to the definition of "extraordinary". What each individual perceives to be a miracle, regardless of scientific explanations, should be regarded as such. Liberal Jews need not wait for supernatural "miracles" of redemption from

death. Rather, liberal Jews should be willing to recognize as significant all those events which are extraordinary according to individual and community definitions.

It is important that individual latitude to declare sacred time not be abused. The concept of Bal Tosif - - You shall not add to the tradition - - guards against the indiscriminate declaration of sacred time. In declaring time sacred the first question to ask is, What will the tradition bear? However, the halakhah provides answers which are too restricting for a liberal Jew. In a liberal milieu, it is the individual who will decide what the tradition will bear.

The halakhah teaches that a traditional precedent should be found before establishing a new celebration. Many such precedents are suggested, ranging from biblical citations to establishing a fence around the Torah. A liberal Jew should also search for a precedent within the tradition. Pirsum Nes, the publicizing of a miracle, is a commandment which could be the basis for recognizing significant acts of God in our lives. We are commanded biblically to recognize and publicize God's acts in our lives.

Yet, while looking to the tradition for a precedent, it is important to differentiate between traditional holidays and new celebrations. A traditional yom tov implies direct biblical roots while a contemporary yom mishteh vesimchah implies the desire of an individual or a community to commemorate an event through joy and celebration. We should

feel free to respond religiously to events in our lives without equating such a response with traditional holidays.

The ritual acts performed by the celebrants, and the blessings they recite, will determine the religious nature of the time set aside as sacred. Yet, the use of blessings is restricted by the tradition so as not to overuse an important religious formula. A blessing should never be recited in vain. God's name should not be invoked when it is not proper to do so. Liberal Jews, not bound by the same traditional restrictions, should be aware of the sanctity of the blessing formula and be careful not to abuse it in their attempt to respond to God's actions through the recitation of blessings. Nevertheless, saying a blessing is the proper religious ritual for Jews, and therefore, for a liberal Jew too, who wishes to declare personal sacred time. A liberal Jew might wisely choose among traditional options here:

1) Birkat Hanes (Blessed are You . . . who does miracles. . .) is appropriate for the recognition of a personal or family event which is perceived as a miracle.

2) Birkat Hagomel (Blessed are You . . . who bestows lovingkindness. . .) offers thanks to God for special events which are not as extraordinary as miracles yet deserve recognition.

3) Shehechiyanu (Blessed are You . . . who has enabled us to reach this occasion) is a more general blessing which offers thanks to God for the gift of continued life.

In situations where these blessings are not appropriate or do not adequately satisfy the needs of the moment, the tradition may be able to provide alternative choices. Yet, a liberal Jew has the additional option of creating new blessings which follow the traditional formula, but in content express more precisely the praise and thanks which he or she desires to offer at the celebration.

The ultimate prayer of thanksgiving in traditional Judaism is the Hallel. It is recited only in the synagogue and only on special days determined by the halakhah. In declaring Purim Sheni celebrations it would be improper to change the status of this special collection of psalms which are preceded by the recitation of a special blessing. Three conditions help liberal Jews determine the propriety of utilizing the Hallel.

1) The event being celebrated should not be an event which is celebrated regularly. The halakhah is determined that Hallel be recited only on special occasions.

2) The intent (kavanah) of those reciting the Psalms should be special as well. Only a special occasion for which a community is truly thankful would create the proper intent in the hearts and minds of those reciting the Hallel.

3) The event being celebrated should be extraordinary in nature. It should be clear to those involved that God's action was critical in the event itself.

If these conditions are met, yet the celebration is not community-wide, it would be improper to recite the Hallel. However, the tradition provides another religious option for expressing thanks and praise to God: the reading of the Megillah, which is seen as being equal to the recitation of Hallel.

In the event of a personal Purim celebration, the individual or family could write a Megillah which they would recite each year at their family celebration. The Megillah, like Megillat Esther, would retell the miraculous events which occurred, and offer praise and thanks to God for God's actions. The writing of a Megillah is an exciting option because it allows the family to retell the events in their own words yet still within a traditional format.

The halakhah thus offers Jews wide opportunity to declare personal holidays which recognize God's involvement in day-to-day life. Such an opportunity challenges liberal Jews to make the statement of faith that God does act in our world and that such action deserves religious recognition. An event which is perceived as extraordinary can be recognized through legitimate Jewish responses which liberal Jews can interpret to reflect their expression of Judaism. Blessings, both traditional and newly created, the Hallel, and the creation of a Megillah as an individual response, all

institute personal religious reactions to God's presence in our world.

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