

**THE RELIGIOSITY OF YOM HA'ATZMAUT:  
HOW WE VIEW THE CREATION OF THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL IN OUR  
RELIGIOUS PRACTICE.**

**BY**

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## Introduction

In his influential work on the State of Israel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “The great quality of a miracle is not in its being an unexpected, unbelievable event in which the presence of the holy bursts forth, but in its happening to human beings who are profoundly astonished at such an event.”<sup>1</sup> On Yom Ha’atzmaut, Jews around the world commemorate Israel’s independence with prayer and song. Although Israel has only celebrated her independence for the past 60 years, the justification for certain prayers to be recited on her independence take root in Talmudic discourse. We have a fixed prayer for Israel’s independence because although the State of Israel is a modern entity, her rebirth is of deep historic and religious significance. So when we pray for the State of Israel and celebrate her independence we are confronted with the questions: to whom are we praying and for what are we praying?

This paper intends to explore the religiosity of Yom Ha’atzmaut by researching the religious celebration of what one might call a secular holiday. Since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish people were without sovereignty on the Land of Israel. After 2000 years of hoping and praying for a return to Israel, the creation of the modern State in 1948 was the answer to our prayers and laments. With a sense of joy and euphoria many Jews around the world celebrated Israel’s independence by reciting psalms of praise to God, Hallel. However, there has been a great debate throughout the Jewish world as to the role of God in the establishment of the State of Israel, leading many to question the appropriateness of saying Hallel for Yom Ha’atzmaut. In order to examine this subject we must first analyze specific passages from Talmudic to medieval texts which deal with the appropriate times

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1969) 5.

when one should or should not say Hallel. After each passage is discussed and examined, we will get a better sense of how our tradition can help us create a Yom Ha'atzmaut liturgy which gives the proper respect to the creation of the State of Israel and God while at the same time keeps us in line with Jewish tradition in general and Reform theology in particular.

After we have established a foundation for our praise on Yom Ha'atzmaut through an in-depth discussion of Hallel in Talmudic and medieval texts we will then examine the view of some modern theologians and thinkers on the State of Israel. Through a look at the work of Rabbi David Hartman, Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Rav Soloveitchik, Rabbis Abraham Yitzhak Kook and his son Tzvi Yehudah Kook and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel we will gain a greater perspective on the religiosity of the State of Israel. With the exception of Professor Leibowitz, the other writers view the State of Israel in deeply religious terms. For the State of Israel is not a secular nation-state; it is an expression and continuation of our Jewish heritage infused with a deep sense of religious meaning. Through the thoughts and beliefs of these writers and thinkers we can gain a greater understanding of how a community can celebrate Israel's independence through prayer.

We will also discuss the debate as to whether the creation of the State of Israel was a divine sign of the People Israel's redemption. Some believe that the actual presence of the State of Israel is redemption; others believe that the creation of the State is the beginning of redemption; a third camp believes that the establishment of the State creates the possibility for redemption. Chapter 2 will help us better understand that Israel is not just another nation; it is a living symbol of our relationship with God and the possibility not the guarantee of redemption.

With a justification for a Yom Ha'atzmaut liturgy from the Talmudic sources in chapter 1 and a rationale for the religious dimension of the State in chapter 2, we can then move to the religiosity of the State as seen through the changing theology and ideology of the Reform Jewish Movement. As we look at the history of Reform Zionist thought we also analyze the various Israel related prayers and services that were created in Reform siddurim. By simultaneously analyzing Reform Movement positions towards Israel and liturgy for Israel we will be able to see that even the Reform Movement (which is considered one of the most liberal denominations of modern Judaism) views the State of Israel as a significant part of our religious life. Through these examinations we will be able to show that Yom Ha'atzmaut cannot and should not be viewed as merely a secular holiday. As Jews in general and Reform Jews in particular, we will see that our positions and liturgy suggest that the State of Israel is a living example of our covenant with God, thus making Yom Ha'atzmaut a commemoration of the Jewish people's renewed covenant.

## Chapter 1

### Hallel

#### What is Hallel?

In referring to a set of liturgical prayers, the word Hallel has three distinct meanings that derive from various discussions throughout the Talmud. In today's liturgical parlance the word Hallel is reserved for a particular set of Psalms (Psalms 113-118) which we recite after the Amidah on certain festivals, or around the Seder table during Pesach.<sup>2</sup> However, the word Hallel in its original form was used to describe any set of psalms for praise. Psalms 113-118 at one point were referred to as "The Egyptian Hallel," because of the beginning of Psalm 114 which speaks of our redemption from bondage in Egypt.<sup>3</sup> The second form of Hallel consists of Psalm 136, which according to the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 118a) is referred to as the Great Hallel, to distinguish it from the "Egyptian Hallel."<sup>4</sup> The third form of Hallel consists of Psalms 145-150 which are recited in the daily morning service under the P'sukei D'Zimra section. We learn of this set of Psalms from the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 118b) in which Rabbi Yossef asks that his portion be with those who recite Hallel daily.<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Yossef's comment regarding the daily recitation of Hallel will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

One of the central debates regarding the celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut in a religious context is whether or not an individual or a community can or should say "The Egyptian Hallel," psalms 113-118. From this point forward, when using the word Hallel I am going to be referring to "The Egyptian Hallel."

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, My People's Prayer Book: Volume 3 P'Sukei D'Zimra (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001) 7.

<sup>3</sup> Hoffman 7.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Idelsohn, Jewish Liturgy and its Development (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1995) 134.

<sup>5</sup> Talmud Shabbat 118b.

Since Talmudic times, Jews have recited Hallel on a variety of occasions as a way to give thanks and show their appreciation to God. The use of this combination of psalms to express thanks to God dates back to the Tannaitic age (the first two centuries CE); it is usually recited at the conclusion of the Amidah during the morning service on specific festival dates which were instituted by the rabbis of the Talmud.<sup>6</sup> The Gemarah of the Babylonian Talmud states in Ta'anit 28b that Hallel is recited on eighteen days of the year; these days are the eight days of Sukkot, the eight days of Hanukkah, the first day of Pesach and the Yom Tov of Shavuot.<sup>7</sup>

### The Evidence of Rosh Chodesh

However, both tractates Ta'anit 28b and Arakhin 10b suggest that Hallel can be recited on other days of the year, such as Rosh Chodesh, but, unlike the Yom Tov of Shavuot, Ta'anit 28b suggests that Hallel for Rosh Chodesh is not of biblical origin.<sup>8</sup> Though it is not mandatory as are the 18 times which were cited above, in Reform liturgical practice we encourage the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. Because the Reform movement was willing to fully embrace the tradition of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, they were able to apply the same rationale for suggesting that Hallel should be recited on Yom Ha'atzmaut. The Reform movement siddurim suggest that Rosh Chodesh and Yom Ha'atzmaut are times in which the Hallel deserves to be recited, thus putting their status on the same level of the festival days which were established by the rabbis of the Talmudic age. The creation and celebration of "new" holy days was a bold move by the Reform Movement,

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<sup>6</sup> Ismar Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993) 114.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Doniel Schreiber, Mitzvat Hallel: A Halakhik Overview

<sup>8</sup> Mark Washofsky, Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice (New York: UAHC Press, 2001) 386.

yet deciding to make Yom Ha'atzmaut a holy day elevates its status over and above secular communal gatherings.<sup>9</sup>

However, Reform practice regarding the recitation of Hallel can and does differ from a more traditionally-halachic based community. Whereas the Reform Movement includes both Rosh Chodesh and Yom Ha'atzmaut in the category of times in which Hallel should be recited, the Rabbis of the Talmudic and Medieval period were somewhat ambivalent. First, since the recitation of Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut is an innovation of the last 60 years, a Talmudic debate about its recitation is moot; however, Rosh Chodesh (unlike Yom Ha'atzmaut) was a recognized observance during the Talmudic age and thus the recitation of Hallel as a way to commemorate the new month deserves some clarification. On Rosh Chodesh we neither remember God's deliverance, nor do we refrain from work;<sup>10</sup> therefore, according to the Talmudic rabbis, the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh is not mandatory. Instead, the practice of reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh is considered a minhag, and is marked by reciting a half Hallel, omitting Psalm 115:1-11 and 116:1-11.<sup>11</sup> Although Reform Jews are not bound by traditional rabbinic halachic authority, this idea of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh as a minhag rather than a mitzvah will be useful in our discussion regarding Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut. Do we as Reform Jews differentiate between minhag and mitzvah? Does the question of minhag or mitzvah affect the way in which we offer Hallel?

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<sup>9</sup>Rabbi Peter Knobel, "A New Light Upon Zion? The Liturgy of Reform Judaism and Reform Zionism," CCAR Journal Spring, 2007: 72.

<sup>10</sup> However, according to Mark Washofsky in his book *Jewish Living*, (page 90) there is an ancient minhag in which women refrain from work on Rosh Chodesh. The tradition suggests that God granted women the day off of work for their refusal to partake in the building of Golden Calf in Exodus 32.

<sup>11</sup> Washofsky 386.



In Reform liturgical practice, the recitation of Hallel for all of these holidays (both the holidays on which Hallel is considered mitzvah and those on which it is considered minhag) begins with the following blessing:

בְּרִידָךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוֵּנוּ  
לִקְרֹא אֶת הַהִלֵּל.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallowed us through the mitzvot and commanded us to recite Hallel.<sup>12</sup>

In the Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 222:2, Moses Isserles reflects on the Ashkenazic practice of reciting the blessing (including וְצִוֵּנוּ, and commanded us) over a minhag and a mitzvah.<sup>13</sup> From this statement, we learn that the blessing for a “mitzvah Hallel” (one of the eighteen times which were instituted by the rabbinic authority of the Talmudic age) is the same for a “minhag Hallel” (Rosh Chodesh and, as we will examine in further chapters, Yom Ha’atzmaut). From this statement in Shulchan Arukh, we can see that there is no difference in the blessing or the kavanah for a “mitzvah Hallel” and a “minhag Hallel;” both instances deserve proper respect and intention. The blessing prior to Hallel is the same in both instances; thus its grandeur in the liturgy should not be affected if it is considered minhag.

This idea of Hallel as a minhag for certain commemorations is important because in recent decades there has been an expansion of communities reciting Hallel on Yom Ha’atzmaut as part of a special Yom Ha’atzmaut service, which is usually placed in the morning worship. We are thus forced to ask ourselves: is Hallel only reserved for the 18

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<sup>12</sup> Washofsky 90.

<sup>13</sup> Washofsky 386.

times which the tractate Ta'anit mentioned, or do we have the right to incorporate times in which Hallel is appropriate? And if we do have the authority to institute the recitation of Hallel as either a mitzvah or a minhag, on what grounds will we base that decision?

### To Say or Not to Say

As stated earlier, Hallel is recited on specific holidays in order to show our praise for God's redemptive power. However, does this suggest that we can only say Hallel on these specific holidays? From the time of the Babylonian Talmud through Maimonides' Mishneh Torah and even today through the use of *sheilot* (rabbinic questions) and *t'shuvot* (rabbinic responses), Jewish tradition does not have a definitive position on when an individual or a community should or should not recite Hallel. This ambiguity in our tradition is relevant as we, the religious community, decides how to celebrate and commemorate Israel's Independence Day.

### Hallel: Minimalist or Maximalist?

In the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 94a, we learn about the reprimand of King Hezekiah. The Talmud retells the dramatic account of the kingdom of Israel under the leadership of King Hezekiah defeating the Assyrian army and their leader Sennacherib. The Talmud states that God wanted to make King Hezekiah the messiah and Sennacherib Gog and Magog;<sup>14</sup> however, at that moment God's attribute of justice (*מדת הדין*) informed God that if King David, who composed these psalms, was not made the messiah, how could King Hezekiah who did not even utter a single psalm be made messiah?<sup>15</sup> Thus, we can infer from this tractate of Talmud that King Hezekiah would have been made the messiah if he had only

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<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Adin Steinstaltz in his commentary on the Talmud states that in the final war against Israel, the war that will lead to the coming of the messiah, the enemy that Israel faces will be Gog and Magog.

<sup>15</sup> Sanhedrin 94a

recited Hallel in recognition and appreciation of the miracles that God had bestowed upon him and the kingdom of Israel.

However, the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 118b, can serve as a counterweight to the inferences from Sanhedrin 94a. Whereas in Sanhedrin 94a we might infer that one who refrains from reciting Hallel when he or she has experienced miracles is ignoring God, Shabbat 118b condemns those individuals or communities who recite Hallel daily.<sup>16</sup> In Shabbat 118b, Rabbi Yosei said, “May my portion be among those who recite the entire Hallel daily.” In responding to this statement from Rabbi Yosei, the Gemarah asks, “Is that right? Did not a Master (a respected rabbinic authority) say that one who recites Hallel every day blasphemes and reproaches the Divine Name?”<sup>17</sup> However, the Rambam comments on this passage in his Hilkhos Tfillah chapter 7 verse 12 that Rabbi Yosei was not referring to the Hallel for special occasions (Psalms 113-118) but rather was referring to the collection of psalms that are found in P’sukei D’zimra, “The Morning Psalms” section of our morning service. These psalms consist of Psalms 145-150 and are often referred to as Hallel because they all begin with the word Halleluyah.<sup>18</sup>

Although Rabbi Yosei’s remarks have been widely interpreted as referring to daily morning Psalms, the Gemara’s initial response to his statement, when it thought Rabbi Yosei was referring to the great Hallel (Psalms 113-118), deserves some investigation. The harsh reaction, proclaiming that one who recites Hallel every day is as if he or the community blasphemes God’s name, suggests that Hallel is so great that it must be reserved for the

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<sup>16</sup> Rabbi Howard Jachter, “Hallel on Yom Ha’atzmaut,” Kol Torah, ed. David Gertler, April 13, 2002, Volume 11 Number 24 <http://koltorah.org/ravj/Hallel%20on%20Yom%20Haatzmaut.htm> .

<sup>17</sup> Shabbat 118b

<sup>18</sup> Elbogen 72.

utmost of special occasions. Does Yom Ha'atzmaut fall under the category of special occasions or does reciting Hallel on that day constitute a blasphemy of God's name?

### **Hallel for Miracle or Redemption?**

#### **Hallel for Redemption**

The next Talmudic source which gives us a possible precedent for the recitation of Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut is found in Pesachim 117a. The Gemara states that the prophets of Israel declared that aside from the festivals (the 18 times in which we are already instructed to recite Hallel), a community should recite Hallel whenever they have been delivered or redeemed from dire straits.<sup>19</sup> Prior to this statement, the Gemarah notes several different occasions in which the Jewish people have said Hallel in times of dire straits: at the Sea of Reeds, when the Kings of Canaan attacked Israel and when Sisera attacked Deborah.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Reed Sea example is considered one of the greatest miracles in the tradition, both the Kings of Canaan incident and the confrontation with Sisera could be viewed as military victories without the presence of a miracle. From this, one can read the Gemarah as a suggestion that these circumstances in which we should pray Hallel in recognition of our deliverance were not the result of a miraculous event, but rather the result of being rescued from dire straits. Yet, there is a deeper meaning here; whereas the Reed Sea was clearly a divine miracle, both the Kings of Canaan incident and Sisera were moments of human action. Our rescue from dire straits was not miraculous in these instances, it was the strength and courage of human action. In commenting on this Gemarah, Rashi adds that Hanukkah is an example of reciting Hallel in celebration of a redemption from dire straits-yet we can also say that Hanukkah was another instance in which human action was the driving

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<sup>19</sup> ועל כל צרה וצרה שלא תבא עליהם לישראל, ולכשנגאלין אומדים אותו על גאולתן

For all of the dire straits that befalls Israel, they should give thanks for their redemption.

<sup>20</sup> Peaschim 117a.

forces of our freedom from dire straits.<sup>21</sup> But can human action be viewed as divine? Does human action in these instances take away from the powerful freedom that our people experienced in the aftermath?

However, commentators since Rashi have interpreted this Gemarah to refer to miracles that God has done for the Jewish people. The Meiri's commentary on Pesachim 117a states that if a miracle happens to an individual or to a community of Jews, then that community may establish the day of redemption as a day for reciting Hallel; however, this should be done without a Beracha. Only if the miracle occurred to all Jews, such as Hanukah, may we recite Hallel with a Beracha.<sup>22</sup>

As compelling as one might find the Meiri's commentary to Pesachim 117a, the actual Gemarah does not mention the word miracle (*nes*). This is important to note as we discuss the arguments for and against reciting Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut. If we were to take Rashi's view on Pesachim 117a, in that we should say Hallel when we have been redeemed from dire straits, such as the story of Hanukah, then one could argue that it is entirely appropriate to recite Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut.

In referring to Israel's War of Independence, the view that the Haganah and later the Israel Defense Forces were under such grave attack that they were in dire straits is not universal. From the time of Israel's independence in 1948 until the mid 1980s, the classic myth regarding the War of Independence portrayed Israel as David fighting the Arab Goliath.<sup>23</sup> This myth of Israel being outnumbered and struggling to win the war led many to believe that Israel prevailed by means of a miracle. However, in the mid-1980's when

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<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Howard Jachter.

<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Howard Jachter.

<sup>23</sup> Avi Shlaim, "The Debate about 1948," Making Israel, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007) 128.

government papers from the first years of Israel's birth were declassified, a group of scholars known today as the "New Historians" began to discover that the "David and Goliath" portrayal was simply a myth.<sup>24</sup> Research shows that although the Haganah was outnumbered they were better prepared, mobilized and organized than their Arab counterparts. Research also shows that during a cease fire in July 1948, the Israeli Defense Force ignored a UN embargo and smuggled many weapons from Western countries.<sup>25</sup> These facts, albeit disputed, suggest that Israel's success was not miraculous but rather well planned and organized. However, Israel did sustain heavy casualties and one could and should suggest that any war no matter how prepared or unprepared could still fall under the category of dire straits (צרה) and thus Hallel would be entirely appropriate.

### Hallel for a Miracle

The next Talmudic passage deals with the recitation of Hallel on Hanukah and focuses less on whether one should or should not say Hallel, but rather the kavanah (intention) for the recitation of Hallel. In the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b, the Gemarah explains that we celebrate Hanukah by recognizing the miracle that the small amount of oil found in the Temple after the fighting had ceased was able to light the Menorah for eight days.<sup>26</sup> In the context of this Gemarah, the military victory of the small Hasmonean army over the mighty Greek army was not mentioned because according to Rabbi Zvi Hirsch

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<sup>24</sup> This group of scholars known as the New Historians, consists of such Israeli intellectuals as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim. Their work and goal has been to expose the historiography that had been taught to both Israeli and diaspora school children on the beginnings of the State of Israel.

<sup>25</sup> Shlaim 134.

<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Howard Jachter.

Chajes<sup>27</sup>, this was not a blatant or an obvious miracle, while the 8 day preservation of oil was an obvious miracle.<sup>28</sup> The actual text of Shabbat 21b does not mention the words “blatant” or “obvious miracle,” which occur in the commentary of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, but the text does mention both the military victory and the finding of oil, and the words miracle and Hallel are only associated with the finding of the oil. This 19<sup>th</sup> century commentary by Rabbi Chajes provided a basis for some rabbinic authorities of today to argue that we should not say Hallel on Yom Ha’atzmaut since the tradition suggests that Hallel is only recited for blatant miracles and a blatant miracle did not take place during the War of Independence in 1948, but rather the Jewish people experienced a string of subtle miracles.<sup>29</sup> Thus according to some, the obvious miracle in the Hanukah narrative was the oil, and the subtle miracle was the military victory.

In the context of the Talmudic debate regarding the miracle of Hanukah in Shabbat 21b, we must ask ourselves, what constitutes a blatant miracle? Does a military victory fail to constitute a blatant miracle because the active participation of human beings blurs the lines between God’s role and our role? In regards to our active participation in bringing about our own redemption, Nachmanides’ commentary on the Song of Songs 8:12 states that although redemption will come as a miracle, human beings are enjoined to contribute their own share and leave the rest to heaven. The Ramban says that the beginning of Israel’s redemption will come about through a partial ingathering of the exiles; thereafter God will speed along the process.<sup>30</sup> Thus we can infer through Nachmanides’ statement on Israel’s redemption and the

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<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, also known as the Maharatz Chiyutz was an early 19<sup>th</sup> century Galician Talmudic scholar.

<sup>28</sup> Rabbi Howard Jachter.

<sup>29</sup> Rabbi Howard Jachter.

<sup>30</sup> Yosef Tirosh, “The Essence of Religious Zionism,” Religious Zionism: An Anthology, (Jerusalem: Torah Education Department of the World Zionist Organization, 1975) 11-34.

use of miracles that we might be able to say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut because although it was not a blatant miracle as argued by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, it was still a miracle by God; it just might have been blurred by man's necessary involvement as Nachmanides might suggest.

However, Talmud Shabbat 21b and the opinion of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes are not the only sources we have regarding the intentionality behind the recitation of Hallel on Hanukah and its relevance for determining whether or not we should recite Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut. Writing centuries after the codification of the Babylonian Talmud, the Rambam (Maimonides) discussed the various reasons for the celebration of Hanukah in his Hilchot Hanukah, chapter 3 verses 1-3. The Rambam states that in our rejoicing of Hanukah we recite Hallel not for one specific miracle, but for both miraculous and non-miraculous events. The lighting of the Hanukiah is to serve as a manifestation of the miracles, but Hallel represents more than just the miracle of the oil and the military victory.<sup>31</sup> Rambam also argues that we are rejoicing on Hanukah because Jewish sovereignty was restored in the land of Israel for a period of two hundred years before the destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>32</sup> This statement gives us yet another argument from the traditional sources which allows us to say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut without using miracles as a basis. Whether or not the War of Independence was filled with blatant or subtle miracles from God, the Rambam rules on that Hanukah we can say Hallel for the mere fact that Jewish sovereignty was restored in the land of Israel. This idea will be further explained in latter chapters as we look at the thoughts and beliefs of Rabbi David Hartman.

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<sup>31</sup> Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House Inc, 1972) 118.

<sup>32</sup> Twersky 118.



These interpretations for the recitation of Hallel on Hanukkah might convince us that for the same reasons we must also say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut. However, just as Hanukkah tells the story of the Jewish people finding themselves in dire straits, only to come out victorious, we read a similar story in the megillah on Purim, yet we do not recite Hallel. In Megillah 14a, the Gemarah asks why we do not say Hallel on Purim; to this question several responses are submitted. The first is that since the redemption from Egypt, Hallel is not recited for miracles that occur outside of the land of Israel. In his Hilkhhot Purim, the Rambam concurs that we should not say Hallel on Purim because it was outside the land of Israel, and indeed while the events of Shushan were taking place, the land of Israel lay in ruins and the Jews were not a sovereign people on the land.<sup>33</sup> We can thus argue that since the events of 1948 took place on the land of Israel and directly led to the restoration of sovereignty to the Jewish people, Hallel, not recited on Purim, should be recited on Yom Ha'atzmaut.

However, another response to the question of why Hallel is not recited on Purim states that the act of reading the megillah takes the place of the recitation of Hallel.<sup>34</sup> In Hilkhhot Hanukkah 3:6 the Rambam ruled, "The rabbis did not establish that Hallel be read on Purim since the reading of the megillah is the Hallel."<sup>35</sup> Through this one can further suggest that since Yom Ha'atzmaut does not have a special megillah, Hallel should be used to mark its unique praise of God for redeeming the Jewish people. And again we can go back to our discussion regarding human action; Purim like Hanukkah is an example of the human action being the dominant force in leading the People Israel to safety from dire straits. The human

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<sup>33</sup> Rabbi Judah Zoldan, "Reciting Hallel on Purim," Bar-Ilan University's Parshat Hashavua Study Center, Purim 1999 <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/purim/zol.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Megillah 14a.

<sup>35</sup> Rabbi Judah Zoldan.

experience is an integral component to the story of Purim; a story which does not mention the name of God, yet its religiosity is no less diminished.

### Hallel Marks Human Initiated Redemption, Not Divine Miracles

Another explanation is that Purim was only a partial redemption, since the majority of Jews remained under the rule of Ahashveros.<sup>36</sup> The argument was made by Rabeinu Tam in his commentary to Sukkah 44b, in which he states that Hallel was introduced for those occasions in which ALL of Israel has been saved by a miracle; then and only then should we introduce a new festival and recite Hallel.<sup>37</sup> Rabeinu Tam's commentary compels us to ask: was 1948 a miracle, and was it a miracle for all the Jewish people as was the miracle of Hanukkah?<sup>38</sup> However, what constitutes a miracle? As the 19<sup>th</sup> century Talmudic commentator Rabbi Chajes mentioned in his commentary on Talmud Shabbat 21b, there is a difference between blatant and obvious miracles which affects how we commemorate and celebrate each type. For the millions of Jews living under communist rule, the War of Independence might have been a miracle, but its results did not lead to redemption until Communism fell in 1989. Since some Jews remained in captivity after 1948 should we say Hallel? According to Rabenu Tam's commentary on Sukkah 44b, this might cast Yom Ha'atzmaut in the category of a partial redemption. However, we can counter this with the Meiri's commentary on Pesachim 117a that a person who was delivered from trouble may recite Hallel for himself, yet with the caveat that it is done without a blessing.<sup>39</sup> Since the

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<sup>36</sup> Rabbi Judah Zoldan.

<sup>37</sup> Rabbeinu Tam cited in Tosefot, Masekhet Sukka 44b

<sup>38</sup> Rabbi David Brovsky, "The Laws of Prayer: Hallel," The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash, Yeshivat Har Etzion, Shiur #18 <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/tefila/67-18tefila.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Beit HaBecheirah-Commentary on Talmud.

war of 1948 was not a redemption for all Jews but for some Jews, those who feel it was a redemption for them can and should recite Hallel in recognition of Yom Ha'atzmaut, but it should be done without a Beracha.

As the Jewish community wrestles and debates the appropriateness of reciting Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut, we often give Hanukah as a source and suggest that just as we say Hallel for the miracle of Hanukah, so too we say Hallel for the miracle of Yom Ha'atzmaut, since in both instances we commemorate the victory of a "small David over a giant Goliath." However, our exploration of the various Talmudic and medieval texts which deal with the recitation of Hallel suggest that we can and should say Hallel for times when we are in dire straits and have been redeemed, whether or not they fall into any of the Talmudic/traditional categories of miracles. Those Jews wanting to say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut but are uncomfortable attributing God's miraculous power to the War of Independence might find solace in these Talmudic passages.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Holy versus Secular**

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was not just an event for those Jewish people living in the Yishuv (the land of Israel occupied by Jewish pioneers prior to Independence in 1948); it was also an event for world Jewry. However, there are diverse opinions regarding the meaning behind the establishment of the State of Israel, which has led to a plethora of commemorations and celebrations of Yom Ha'atzmaut. There is considerable debate both among Israelis and Jews outside of Israel as to whether Yom Ha'atzmaut is a secular or a religious holiday. Yom Ha'atzmaut is celebrated by secular Israelis in a secular way. In the early years of statehood Yom Ha'atzmaut was celebrated with parades; in the last few decades Yom Ha'atzmaut has been celebrated with barbecues in public parks, fireworks and street parties. In this context it is similar to the United States of America's Fourth of July, which is mostly celebrated in homes and public parks. But there is a significant portion of the Israeli population for whom the celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut is filled with liturgy and Torah reading. The commemorations which take place in synagogues in Israel and throughout the world suggest that Yom Ha'atzmaut is not simply a celebration of independence for a country, but a celebration of religious renewal for a world religion.

If we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut in the synagogue with a liturgical service, then how do we view Eretz (land) Yisrael and Medinat (state) Yisrael?<sup>40</sup> The Hallel discussion suggests that in and of itself, Eretz Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael are more than just secular entities, they contain elements of the holy. By considering how some leading Jewish and Israeli scholars view the religiosity of the State of Israel, we will gain a greater perspective

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<sup>40</sup> When referring to Medinat Yisrael, I am referring to the government of Israel and the 60 year old state. When referring to Eretz Yisrael I am referring to the actual land of Israel, separate from its government. Medinat Yisrael has existed since 1948, but the terminology "Eretz Yisrael" has existed since Abraham was called by God to leave Haran and go to the land that God would show him (Genesis 12).

on how one might recite certain liturgical pieces which are overlaid with theological meaning in order to express praise and thanks for the creation of Medinat Yisrael or Eretz Yisrael.

### Hartman versus Leibowitz

In discussing the various Jewish views towards the State of Israel, we run the risk of falling into a political discussion; this however is not my goal. Rather than outline the politics of the religious Zionists<sup>41</sup>, I want to explore the ways in which certain thinkers and scholars view the State of Israel rather than to suggest the “right” way to religiously view it. Two modern scholars who have been at the forefront of this debate are Rabbi David Hartman and the late Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz. Although Leibowitz was an Israeli and an ardent Zionist, he believed that the State of Israel of our time did not contain any religious significance.<sup>42</sup> Rabbi David Hartman, on the other hand, believes that the land of Israel is holy from a covenantal perspective because it provides *greater* responsibility and initiative for the community of Israel.<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Hartman believes in the possibility for greater Jewish commitment and practice based on the simple fact that there is a sovereign Jewish nation on historically Jewish land.

Professor Leibowitz does not deny that the State of Israel is a Jewish state; in fact, as stated earlier, he was an ardent Zionist. But Leibowitz refused to endow Zionism with any sense of holiness. According to Leibowitz, Zionism was an aspiration to political-national independence, and this in and of itself was a legitimate Jewish aspiration, but it must not be

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<sup>41</sup> According to Daniel Shoag, most American Jewish congregations should fall under the category of religious Zionists because of the simple fact that they display an Israeli flag on the bimah and they say a prayer for the State of Israel. However, according to the Encyclopedia Judaica, religious Zionists in modern Hebrew parlance refer to those Jews who live a life style according to traditional halacha and believe in the need for the Jewish homeland.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Shoag, “Reviving Religious Zionism,” The Harvard Israel Review, 2006  
<http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hireview/content.php?type=article&issue=spring04/&name=shoag>.

<sup>43</sup> David Hartman, “The Third Jewish Commonwealth,” Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader, ed. Elliot N. Dorff & Louis E. Newman (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 438.

given a religious aura.<sup>44</sup> Thus Leibowitz was making a distinction between the Jewish realm and the “religious realm.” For Leibowitz, Zionism, which was the pursuit of attaining a sovereign land in which Jews no longer were ruled by non-Jews, should be void of any connection with Judaism because for Leibowitz, Judaism, in the religious sense, concerns the observance of Torah and Mitzvot, which are binding on us regardless of our historical circumstances.<sup>45</sup> The Zionist pursuit was for national autonomy, which was important in Leibowitz’s eyes, but he believed that only what is done for the sake of Heaven should be given religious significance. For Leibowitz, Zionism was not pursued for the sake of Heaven.<sup>46</sup> Leibowitz did not want to grant religious significance to an enterprise which he viewed as purely secular. Thus, for Leibowitz and those who follow his point of view, the celebration of Yom Ha’atzmaut should not involve a recitation of Hallel or any other liturgy. In fact, any celebration inside the Beit T’filah would seem altogether wrong. To adhere to this point of view one should hold a celebration devoid of any religious significance, focused solely on the national-secular aspect of the day.

Rabbi David Hartman approaches the Land and State of Israel from another perspective. For Hartman, the Land and State are holy because they provide greater opportunities for the Jewish people to re-commit to Jewish practice while living in a sovereign country. In talking about the land of Israel, David Hartman is not blind to the reality that the State of Israel in its current form is not the utopia that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai envisioned in order for Israel to fulfill its covenantal destiny, though Hartman states

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<sup>44</sup> Shoag, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Yeshayahu Leibowitz, “The Significance of the Redemption of Israel,” Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader, ed. Elliot N. Dorff & Louis E. Newman (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 461.

<sup>46</sup> Leibowitz 461.

that where there is potential for desecration there is also potential for sanctification.<sup>47</sup>

Hartman relies on the hope that through living together in the Jewish state the Jewish people will develop a new spiritual direction.<sup>48</sup> Hartman's hope derives from his faith that Jews living together in an autonomous Jewish state on historical and religious land will foster a renewed commitment to Jewish practice and living. Hartman argues that the religious Zionist movement celebrates Yom Ha'atzmaut as a religious holiday because in their mind-set there is currently a redemptive process working itself out in the reborn Jewish state.<sup>49</sup> The redemptive process can be both a vision of the Orthodox religious Zionists as well as Reform Jews. After 2000 years of praying and longing for a Jewish state, it has finally been rebuilt. To make the process all the more captivating, it was rebuilt in the face of great odds and adversity. The ingathering of Jews throughout the world to live together and expand a Judaism which suffered significant loss during the Holocaust is an act of ongoing redemption. Redemption was not and is not an overnight phenomenon; rather, redemption started in the decades prior to independence in 1948 and the Jew living in Israel has the ability to continue that redemption day by day.

#### Rav Soloveitchik

It is possible that Hartman's religious and spiritual devotion to the Land and State of Israel derives from his teacher Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, or "the Rav" as he was commonly called by his students. The Rav came from a great rabbinic dynasty, and his Jewish fervor did not always guide him towards the side of Zionism. In the early 1940s Rav Soloveitchik was associated with Agudat Yisrael, an Ashkenazic Orthodox movement which

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<sup>47</sup> David Hartman 440.

<sup>48</sup> David Hartman 440.

<sup>49</sup> David Hartman, A Heart of Many Rooms: celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism, (Woodstock Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999) 273.

was anti-Zionist and did not approve of the creation of a Jewish State. Rather, its members felt that a Jewish State would be delivered by the hand of God, and so the secular Zionists who were actively building the Jewish State were an affront to Jewish teaching and God's will.<sup>50</sup> However, this was not Agudat Yisrael's only platform, and the Rav was a member of the organization for many other reasons. Just a few years prior to Israel's independence the Rav switched his affiliation and became a supporter of the creation of the soon to be State of Israel. On Yom Ha'atzmaut of 1956, just eight years into statehood, the Rav delivered a sermon at Yeshiva University in New York entitled "Kol Dodi Dofek" (Listen-My Beloved Knocks) which became a major source in Religious Zionist thought. The title comes from Shir Hashirim and tells the story of a boy who knocks on the door of a girl with whom he is in love. After each knock she tells him to come back later; finally she goes to find him and he is gone forever.<sup>51</sup> The story of Shir Hashirim is often interpreted as God knocking on the door of the Jewish people and the Jewish people continually ignoring the knock. However, on Yom Ha'atzmaut 1956, the Rav re-interpreted the story to refer to events leading up to the creation of the State of Israel and the responsibility of the Jewish people to respond to those events, symbolized by the knocks.

Twenty years later, on November 22, 1975, the Rav gave a lecture on the American Jewish experience. While describing the beauty of America and the wonderful life it provides for American Jews, the Rav spoke about a crisis of identity the American Jew had to face with the emergence of the State of Israel. As Jews we have a commitment to Israel but we are constantly trying to examine the sociology behind that commitment. The Rav

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<sup>50</sup> Rabbi Aaron Rothkoff-Rakeffet, "Lecture 3 on the Life and Beliefs of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," ed. Jonathan Baker, Lincoln Square Synagogue, July 1993 <http://www.panix.com/~jjbaker/teachrav.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Kol Dodi Dofek, Translated by David Gordon, (New York, New York: Yeshiva University Publication, 2006) 29.



suggests that our commitment is metaphysical; it comes from our Jewish heritage and identity.<sup>52</sup> However, in the same lecture, the Rav warned that although we have found a great home in America, we should not worship America, for this would be Avodah Zarah (idol worship); in the very next line the Rav mentioned that the same applies to the State of Israel.<sup>53</sup> From the writings of Kol Dodi Dofek and his lecture on the American Jewish experience it is clear that the Rav had a deeply religious view towards supporting the State of Israel, but he warns us to be cautious that our support and praise for it not fall into the category of idol worship. Therefore we are compelled to ask the question: does a liturgical service on Yom Ha'atzmaut constitute idol worship? Are we worshipping the State of Israel, or are we praising God for allowing us to live in the Jewish state on its historical and religious land?

Rabbi Soloveitchik's discussion of the Kol Dodi Dofek (the cacophony of events which led to the creation of the State of Israel) brings us to the idea of the messiah and how messianic ideology dictates the religious significance of the State of Israel for some Jews. One could argue that in the Orthodox Jewish community today there are multiple positions regarding the State of Israel and its religious significance, but for the purpose of this discussion we are going to place them into three categories: 1) the once anti-Zionist but now non-Zionist camp of Agudat Yisrael, 2) the non-messianic Orthodox Jews who support the State of Israel, who in pre-state days fell under the auspices of the Mizrahi party and 3) the Religious Zionist camp who adhere to the teachings of Palestine's first chief Rabbi, Avraham Isaac Kook.<sup>54</sup> Agudat Yisrael believed that a Jewish sovereign state would be created by

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<sup>52</sup> A Lecture given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on "The American Jewish Experience." November 22, 1975.

<sup>53</sup> A Lecture given by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, on "The American Jewish Experience." November 22, 1975.

<sup>54</sup> According to Arnold Eisen in his essay, "The State of Zionism; The Jewish State," prior to the creation of Israel in 1948, Orthodox rabbis who believed in the creation of state of Israel formed the group Mizrahi.

God, not by secular Jews. The Mizrahi party viewed Zionism not as a messianic movement, but rather an attempt to rescue Jews from persecuted countries and give them the opportunity to live in the Holy Land of Israel.<sup>55</sup> The religious Zionist camp, however, viewed the creation of a Jewish State as the beginning of our redemption, a time in which the messiah would eventually be anointed, and so the actual building of the state was a sign of our partnership with God.

### The Rabbis Kook

Whereas some scholars and Rabbis such as David Hartman have taken more of a metaphoric approach for seeing the work of the divine in the new State of Israel, Rav Kook openly professed his belief that the Zionist revolution was a part of God's redemptive scheme in history.<sup>56</sup> Although the creation of the State of Israel was a non-religious activity, Rav Kook believed that this process was a necessary step for a revitalization of the Jewish spirit. He believed that the creation of the Jewish state would unleash a new form of messianic fervor. It is unclear what this messianic fervor would entail; if the messianic fervor is viewed in terms of a messianic age, then this fervor could greatly benefit both Jews and non-Jews alike. But, if the messianic fervor is expressed through Jews justifying un-ethical action in the name of God, then this messianic fervor is dangerous.

According to Kook, Eretz Yisrael was and is the physical center for the holiness in the world, and the spirit of the Land was clean and pure as compared to the impurity of all

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However, those who opposed the creation of the State of Israel, due in large part to a belief that the Messiah will restore sovereignty to the land, created Agudat Yisrael as an opposition to Mizrahi. Once the State of Israel was created, Agudat Yisrael changed its policy from an anti-Zionist movement to more of a non-Zionist movement.

<sup>55</sup> Arnold Eisen, "The State of Zionism; The Jewish State" Zionism the Sequel, ed. Carol Diamant (New York, New York, Haddasah Women's Zionist, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Rabbi David Hartman, A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998).

the other lands around the world.<sup>57</sup> Thus, for Kook, although the Zionist revolution was a secular endeavor, the act of bringing Jews out of impure lands back to the land of pure holiness was a first step to a religious revival which ultimately will lead to a religious purity. Although Kook did not agree with the secularist approach of some Zionists, his disdain for Diaspora Judaism allowed him to see the secularist creation of the State of Israel as holy work aimed at rescuing Jews from the Diaspora. It is interesting to note that according to Rabbi Kook, the holiness of the Land does not derive from the Temple, whether in existence or destroyed. For Rabbi Kook the Land of Israel is holy because it is the Land of God.<sup>58</sup> Rav Kook finds deeper holiness in Israel than, say, England because like the People Israel, the Land of Israel has been a choice possession of God since the early chapters of Genesis. For Kook, the holiness comes from its beloved and precious position throughout the Bible. Yet, just because the land is holy does not mean that all who inhabit the land are holy; for Kook, the land is only holy for the Jewish people, since the land was given by God to the Jewish people. For Kook, the Jew who lives on the Land of Israel can derive holiness from the location, but a non-Jew living on the land cannot, for the land and its holiness were not given to the non-Jews for their benefit.

Ironically, it was Kook's theology which ultimately allowed him to join forces with the secular Zionists. Kook didn't see his involvement with secular Zionists as a compromise or even an abandonment of his Jewish faith. Although the secular Zionists argued that a Jewish State would follow a course that would lead to God and the Jewish religion becoming anachronisms, Kook believed that God would ultimately divert this course of events and turn

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<sup>57</sup> Arnold Eisen, "Exuding Holiness," The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspective, ed. Lawrence Hoffman, (South Bend: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, Olat Re'iyah, (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963) 387.

even the secularists into a Kingdom of priests as it states in Exodus 19:6.<sup>59</sup> Although Rav Kook died before Israel's independence, his ideology regarding both the land and the secularists who helped create the modern State of Israel has influenced the past two generations of Religious Zionists. Kook taught that living on the land elevated the potential for the Jew to live a holy life; Jewish creativity both in the realm of ideas and in the realm of daily life was only possible in Eretz Yisrael.<sup>60</sup> We can infer from the writings of Rav Kook and the teachings of his son Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook that Yom Ha'atzmaut should be celebrated with liturgy and praise to God not only because of the miracles that surrounded the 1948 War of Independence but also because of the opportunity it gives world Jewry to come and live freely on the Land of Israel. For this reason we can assume that Rabbi Kook would have commemorated Yom Ha'atzmaut with a Hallel.

Although Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook died before the creation of the State of Israel, his son Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook was able to witness the creation of the state and adopted many of his father's writings and teachings to help advance the cause of religious Zionism. However, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook took his father's religious Zionism into a more militaristic and violent direction. Often seen as the father of the settlements, Tzvi Yehuda viewed the conquering of the land with weapons as a holy endeavor. Tzvi Yehuda often taught that conquering the land of Israel in order to secure Jewish sovereignty was a mitzvah of the Torah. Tzvi Yehuda based his teachings on the Ramban's commentary to Numbers 33:55,<sup>61</sup> in which he viewed dwelling in the Land of Israel (Yishuv Ha'aretz) and

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<sup>59</sup> Rabbi David Hartman, Israel and Judaism's future, Part 3: Messianic Religious Zionism, April 28, 2008 [http://www.hartman.org.il/Holidays\\_Article\\_View\\_Eng.asp?Article\\_Id=104](http://www.hartman.org.il/Holidays_Article_View_Eng.asp?Article_Id=104).

<sup>60</sup> Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, The Zionist Idea: An Historical Analysis and Reader, Ed. Arthur Hertzberg. (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Publication Society of America, January 1997) 421.

<sup>61</sup> Numbers 33:55-“But if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land, those whom you allow to remain shall be stings in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land which you live.”

conquering the Land of Israel (Kibush Ha'aretz) as positive commandments. The Ramban expands his commentary on Numbers 33:55 in his gloss (hashmatot) to the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot in which he takes issue with Rambam for omitting both of these activities from his Sefer HaMitzvot, suggesting that according to Rambam dwelling and conquering Eretz Yisrael are not commandments.<sup>62</sup>

Tzvi Yehudah added to Ramban's teaching and stated that until this generation it was impossible for Jews to conquer the land, but this generation has the weapons of war to conquer the land, and thus it is a mitzvah to conquer the land by means of force if necessary and to rejoice in the sovereignty that comes from conquering.<sup>63</sup> Although Tzvi Yehudah preached with more militancy than his father, he still held the basic belief that creating the State of Israel on the Land of Israel was the beginning of Israel's redemption. For him, Yom Ha'atzmaut was the day in which Israel moved a step closer to her redemption. It has been noted that on Yom Ha'atzmaut, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook would give a sermon at Mercaz Ha-Rav Kook<sup>64</sup> on the progress of Israel's redemption.<sup>65</sup> From the teachings of his father, we can assume that redemption refers to the end of Diaspora Judaism and the fears and chains which according to father and son Kook, prevent Jews and Judaism from fully thriving as a religion and a people.

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<sup>62</sup> Tzvi Yehudah HaCohen Kook, Torat Eretz Yisrael, ed. David Samson and Tzi Fishman (Jerusalem: Torat Eretz Yisrael Publications, 1996) 12.

<sup>63</sup> Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook Torat Eretz Yisrael, 124.

<sup>64</sup> Mercaz HaRav Kook was established in 1924 as a Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Today it is among the top Yeshivas in the Religious Zionist community.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. Aharon Arend, "Yom Ha'atzmaut-Israel's Independence Day 1998," Bar-Ilan Faculty Torah Lecture Series, 1998 <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/yomatz/are.html>.

### Israel's Chief Rabbinate

Since the beginning of the State of Israel, the Israeli Chief Rabbinate has been creating liturgies for both Israelis and Jews throughout the world to recite on Yom Ha'atzmaut. The Chief Rabbinate declared Yom Ha'atzmaut a national holiday and wrote a special prayer for the day.<sup>66</sup> Shortly after Israel gained independence the Chief Rabbinate found itself in a unique and historic situation. Jews have long prayed for the welfare of the government; Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman notes in My People's Prayer Book that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Rabbi David Abudarham included a prayer for the government in his siddur and suggests in its commentary that this was already an established custom.<sup>67</sup> With this tradition in mind, the Chief Rabbinate was now in the position to create a prayer for a Jewish government in a Jewish state. The translation of the prayer is as follows:

*Our Father in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of Israel, bless the  
State of Israel which begins the sprouting forth of our Redemption.  
Shield her beneath the wings of Your love. Spread over her Your shelter  
of peace; send Your light and truth to her leaders, officers, and  
counselors, and direct them with Your good counsel.*

*O God, strengthen the defenders of our Holy Land; grant them  
salvation and crown them with victory. Establish peace in the land, and  
everlasting joy for her inhabitants.*

*Remember our brothers, the whole house of Israel, in all the lands  
where they are dispersed. Speedily let them walk upright to Zion, Your*

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<sup>66</sup> Yoram Bilu, "The Sanctification of Space in Israel: Civil Religion and Folk Judaism," Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns, ed. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim Waxman, (New England: University Press of New England, 2004) 374.

<sup>67</sup> Rabbi Ed Snitkoff. "Praying for the Welfare of the State of Israel."  
[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Modern\\_Holidays/Yom\\_Haatzmaut/Prayer.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Modern_Holidays/Yom_Haatzmaut/Prayer.htm)

*city, to Jerusalem Your dwelling-place, as it is written in the Torah of Moses your servant: 'Even if you are dispersed in the uttermost parts of the world, from there Adonai your God will gather you. Adonai your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it.*

*Unite our heart to love and be in awe of Your Name, and to observe all the words of Your Torah. Shine in Your glory over all the inhabitants of Your world. Let everything that breathes proclaim: Adonai, God of Israel is King; His majesty rules over all. Amen.*

The national prayer for the state of Israel suggests that the establishment of the State of Israel was a divine event which fulfilled God's promise. The prayer also petitions God to maintain the defense of the state and then claims that God will bring all Jews from exile.<sup>68</sup> As seen through the prayer and the message it conveys, the Chief Rabbis who composed it had similar views to that of Rav Kook: the creation of the state was the first step in God's redemption of the Jewish people.<sup>69</sup> However, it should be noted that not all Jews have accepted the national prayer. Both the Reform movement in Israel and the Reconstructionist movement in America have composed new prayers for the State of Israel which tone down the language of redemption. While many want to hope that the State of Israel symbolizes the beginning of the Jewish people's redemption, they are still uncomfortable emphatically

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<sup>68</sup> Rabbi Ed Snitkoff. "Praying for the Welfare of the State of Israel."

[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Modern\\_Holidays/Yom\\_Haatzmaut/Prayer.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Modern_Holidays/Yom_Haatzmaut/Prayer.htm)

<sup>69</sup> Although credit for the composition of Israel's national prayer is given to former Chief Rabbis Yitzhak Herzog and Ben Zion Uziel there is some speculation that Israel's first Poet Laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon composed the prayer.

stating that in a public prayer.<sup>70</sup> However, the prayer composed by the Chief Rabbinate says with certainty that the State of Israel marks the dawn of our deliverance, thus equating Israel's Independence with God's divine plan. There is also some controversy surrounding the line, "crown them with victory." Although we understand the reality of Israel's situation and the need to defend the land and her citizens, do we want to be seen as victorious? Do we want our prayer for the State to be infused with militaristic language or do we want only to pray for peace?

Along with the Chief Rabbinate's authorship of Israel's national prayer and its declaration of Yom Ha'atzmaut as a national holiday, other branches of the government have helped to create religious ceremonies and prayers in which theology and ideology are ever-present. Siddur Rinat Yisrael, which is often cited as the national siddur of the State of Israel, was first published in 1970 in conjunction with the Israel Ministry of Education. The siddur contains a full liturgical service for Yom Ha'atzmaut with select prayers, Hallel, psalms that are not included in the Egyptian Hallel and a blowing of the shofar.<sup>71</sup> That this siddur was published in conjunction with Ministry of Education suggests that even the government of Israel cannot fully separate secular from religious. The editors of the siddur view Yom Ha'atzmaut as a Yom Tov and suggest that all people wear clothing fitting for Yom Tov.<sup>72</sup> As the congregation concludes the service in honor of Israel's Independence, they are to sing *Ani Ma'amin*, which is a rendition of the Rambam's thirteen principles of faith in which he states that we should believe in the coming of the messiah. It is not without significance that *Ani Ma'amin* was also sung by some Jews during the Holocaust as they were marched to the

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<sup>70</sup> In our next chapter we will explore in depth the liberal/progressive versions of the prayer for the state of Israel.

<sup>71</sup> Siddur Rinat Yisrael, ed. Dr. Shlomo Tal and the Israel Ministry of Education. Yom Ha'atzmaut service Pages 437-443.

<sup>72</sup> Siddur Rinat Yisrael 437.



death chambers. The liturgy in Siddur Rinat Yisrael, coupled with the editor's notes, suggests that Yom Ha'atzmaut should be viewed as a day in which we give thanks to God for the divine acts that helped Israel gain independence. From this standpoint, Hallel for Yom Ha'atzmaut should be said with the intention of thanking God for miracles not just for sovereignty and deliverance from dire straits.

### Debate on Israel's Redemption

Although one might believe in the religiosity of the Land and State of Israel, there is much debate going on in the Religious Zionist movement as to the phase of redemption in which Israel now finds herself and how that ideology affects the way in which we pray for the state. Rabbi Ovadia Hadaya, a Sephardic Rabbi who lived in Israel during the first few decades of Independence, ruled that because Israel's security situation was so precarious, saying Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut would be inappropriate; instead, we should recite the sections of Hallel without a Beracha.<sup>73</sup> This concept of reciting Hallel without a Beracha suggests that while we are praising God for the land and State of Israel we are also consciously recognizing that Israel is not yet complete and our redemption is not yet complete. Many scholars and thinkers whom we have previously discussed recite Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut with a Beracha because they view Israel's independence as the beginning of the People Israel's redemption. However, Rabbi Ovadia Hadaya suggests that we should recite Hallel without a Beracha because according to his reading of the Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 10:6, when Israel left Egypt they did not recite Hallel because it was only the beginning of redemption and not the redemption itself.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Teshuvot Yaskil Avdi OC 10:7-A Halachik compendium by Rabbi Ovadia Hadaya in the mid 1950s.

<sup>74</sup> Rabbi Joshua Flug, "Should One Recite a Bracha on the Recitation of Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut?" Yom Ha'atzmaut 5768 To-Go, ed. Rabbi Robert Shur, (New York: Yeshiva University Center for Jewish Future, 2007) 17.

It should also be noted that at the time of Israel's independence both of Israel's Chief Rabbis, Rabbi Isaac Herzog and Rabbi Ben-Tzion Uziel, ruled that Hallel should be recited without a Bracha because Israel's Independence only saved a portion of the Jewish people, not the entire Jewish people.<sup>75</sup> We can understand this point of view not only from the Talmudic verses<sup>76</sup> from which these rabbis derived their opinions but also by looking at the plight of the Jewish people worldwide in 1948. When Israel gained Independence, many Jews in Arab lands found that life had been made more complicated. The Jews of Yemen were still living persecuted lives until the government of Israel brought most of them to the land of Israel in the early 1950s. The plight of Russian Jewry was still continuing and would continue for another thirty years. Ethiopian Jews had to wait until the mid 1990s to see their redemption. With this in mind, while Yom Ha'atzmaut can represent the beginning of Israel's redemption, full redemption seems to come at different times for different communities. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, a former member of Israel's Supreme Rabbinical Court, ruled with Rabbi Yosef that Hallel with a Bracha would be inappropriate considering that the work of redemption was not yet complete. Both suggest that just as one does not recite Birkat HaGomel (the blessing an individual offers upon recovery from an illness) until one has completely recovered, so too one should not praise God for Israel's deliverance when the deliverance is not yet complete.<sup>77</sup> Should the Russian Jew who made Aliyah July 16<sup>th</sup> 1993, say Hallel with a Bracha on Yom Ha'atzmaut or does he say Hallel with a Bracha on July 16<sup>th</sup>?

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<sup>75</sup> Rabbi Joshua Flug 14.

<sup>76</sup> The Meiri Commentary on Pesachim 117a-this was analyzed in chapter 1.

<sup>77</sup> Rabbi David Milston, "Hallel and Yom Ha'atzmaut 5764," Weekly Shiur: Online Torah, <http://www.harova.org/torah/view.asp?id=1079>.

Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, Israel's former Chief Rabbi, suggested that we should not say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut because of the spiritual shortcomings of the State of Israel. In Rabbi Frank's view, Israel as the Jewish state was not living up to its spiritual and religious potential. We can safely assume that when Rabbi Frank spoke of "spiritual shortcomings" he was referring to the growing secular Israeli population in the State of Israel and the lack of traditional religious practice, but from the perspective of Reform Judaism the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the human rights abuses of Palestinians or disdain for minorities are spiritual shortcomings in Israel. Rabbi Frank was not opposed to Israel as the Jewish state; he just did not believe that at that moment Israel as the Jewish state was reaching its maximum potential, and thus saying Hallel would be premature. As Reform Jews we can understand Rabbi Frank's view. With the many problems Israel faces and with the lack of respect Progressive Judaism receives in Israel, Reform Jews might consider Rabbi Frank's point of view and either say Hallel without a Beracha or create an alternative which would allow us to express our joy and appreciation for the potential of Medinat Yisrael on Eretz Yisrael while at the same time acknowledging its shortcomings both in pluralism and in terms of safety.

As the debate still lingers, the Jewish community is divided on every step of the spectrum as to how we view the State of Israel in general and Yom Ha'atzmaut in particular. Is Israel a secular or religious state? The answer to this question can help us determine how we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. If one were to view Israel as a secular state, as did Yeshayahu Leibowitz, then Yom Ha'atzmaut is a secular holiday which celebrates the creation of a secular state. However, for those who believe that the State of Israel holds religious meaning, then the celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut is a religious occasion. For it

does not only commemorate Independence, but as Hartman, Soloveitchik and the Kooks have expressed, Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrates the beginning of a new phase in Jewish religious living. For Hartman, Yom Ha'atzmaut is a religious celebration because Israel's independence provides the Jewish community an opportunity for greater Jewish involvement and religious practice. For Soloveitchik and the Kooks, Yom Ha'atzmaut is a religious celebration because the creation of the State of Israel represents the beginning of God's work in redeeming the people of Israel. Yet in the last few decades debate has arisen as to how we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. Views have been expressed suggesting that although Israel is viewed as the Jewish state, it has yet to reach its potential both spiritually and morally. With these flaws in Israeli society and consciousness, many are conflicted regarding praising God for a newly created Jewish state which has yet to reach its spiritual and moral height. This conflicted nature has been a major point of debate and contention throughout the history of the Reform Movement in America. From its anti-Zionist position in the early years to its support for Zionism and the State of Israel in the last seventy years, the question as to how we religiously envision the State of Israel is relevant today.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Reform Movement's Stance on Israel**

Reform Judaism has undergone significant changes since its creation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. As Reform ideology and theology transform, so do the siddurim from which we pray. The prayer book revision process is a bold statement to show how we as a movement approach God. As we explore these revisions, we will see how they reflect the Movement's changing stance on Israel and how the liturgy can suggest how we view both the land and State of Israel in theological terms. The founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, coined the phrase "Judaism as a Civilization," in which he taught that Judaism is more than just a religion, it is a people, a culture and above all a civilization.<sup>78</sup> When we as Reform Jews talk about Israel we all too often refer to Israel in terms of the civilization aspect of Judaism, in which we unknowingly create a divide between the religious and cultural. We talk of Israel with secular terminology, yet in our siddurim Israel is infused with theology and ideology which are all but absent from our conversation. As we explore the change of the Reform Movement's stance on Israel we will also see a significant change in the liturgy.

#### Israel in American Reform Siddurim

Prior to 1937, when the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) reversed its stance on Israel, the Reform Movement had an official position of anti-Zionism. The comfort and acceptance Reform Jews felt in America led them to reject the notion that we were living in exile. This frame of mind led many to have ambivalence towards a Jewish

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<sup>78</sup> Mordecai Kaplan, Judaism As a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1994).

state.<sup>79</sup> Prior to the revisions made to the Union Prayer Book in 1940, all siddurim published by and for the Reform Movement lacked any mention of a Jewish homeland; thus our exploration of Eretz Yisrael in Reform Liturgy will only date back to 1940.<sup>80</sup> However, before we give a chronological overview of the Movement's position on Israel and how those positions have influenced or have been influenced by our theology and liturgy, let's first examine how the State of Israel is now envisioned in the minds of the Rabbis of the CCAR.

### The Role of the State of Israel in our Services: CCAR Responsa

In a 1997 CCAR responsum, Rabbi Lance Sussman from Binghamton, New York posed a she'elah regarding the singing of Hatikvah. Rabbi Sussman asked whether it was appropriate for American Jews to sing Hatikvah in our religious services, a composition which the Vice President of his synagogue referred to as a "Foreign Anthem," without the singing of our own American Anthem. The responsa committee responded to Rabbi Sussman's she'elah with an emphatic, yes! It is certainly acceptable to sing Hatikvah without singing the Star-Spangled Banner during our religious services. However, the reasoning behind the committee's responsum is important in understanding the way in which Reform Judaism views the State of Israel:

The state of Israel is the political embodiment of the age-old Jewish dream of national redemption, a dream which we have expressed in our prayers for two millennia. The survival and welfare of the Jewish state are therefore matters of our utmost religious as well as political concern.

It follows that the symbols of the Israeli state are not simply Israeli symbols; they reflect and convey a powerful Jewish meaning to us.

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Knobel, "A New Light Upon Zion? The Liturgy of Reform Judaism and Reform Zionism," CCAR Journal, Spring 2007, 69.

<sup>80</sup> Knobel 70.

Should we choose to display the Israeli flag in our synagogues, we do not thereby declare political allegiance to the Israeli state; we rather affirm that the Jewish ideas and ideals which that flag symbolizes are present in the religious life of our community.<sup>81</sup>

Although CCAR responsa do not represent the official stance of the Reform movement, they do serve as a basis for accepted Reform thought. From this statement we see that there is a sound Reform responsum suggesting that Israel is not simply a foreign political entity, but rather Israel and her symbols represent a deep Jewish religious meaning. One could even suggest that the presence of the State of Israel on the Land of Israel is proof that our prayers can and do become reality, and thus the State of Israel forces us to confront the way in which we view prayer. If the reestablishment of the State of Israel had been in our prayers for nearly two millennia and now there is a state, should we give some credit to divinity? The responsum continues by arguing that Hatikvah is not just the Israeli anthem; it is the Jewish anthem.

But when we sing Hatikvah, we do not do so in order to show respect for or loyalty to a foreign political entity. We do it because Hatikvah celebrates the symbolic role of the state of Israel in defining our religious and cultural identity as Jews, not our political identity as Israelis. As Jews, we are am yisrael, the Jewish people, rather than simply Americans or Canadians of the Mosaic persuasion. Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, is the homeland of this people. And Medinat Yisrael, the state of Israel, is the political structure through which this people unites to give concrete expression to its national existence. Hatikvah,

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<sup>81</sup> CCAR Responsa. Hatikvah and The Star-Spangled Banner-5758.10. [www.ccarnet.org](http://www.ccarnet.org)

like the flag of Israel, is to us a powerful representation of that nexus of meanings.<sup>82</sup>

Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, and the State of Israel both protects the homeland and allows Jewish life and culture to expand and grow in the homeland; for this reason Reform Jews pray for the Land and State of Israel.

### Reform Movement's Anti-Zionism

The 1997 responsum shows how far Reform Judaism has traveled since its origins in the previous century. In 1885 in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, a conference was convened to canonize the ideology and theology of Reform Judaism in America. The document which was produced at this conference, the "Pittsburgh Platform," declared that Reform Jews no longer desired nor expected to return to a national homeland in Palestine.<sup>83</sup> In this statement the Reform Movement had effectively declared its Anti-Zionist position. Classic Reform theologians such as Abraham Geiger and Kaufman Kohler stressed that there was an unavoidable dichotomy between a particularistic longing for a return to Zion and the universalistic teachings which were inherent in any Reform theology. In Judaism and Its History, Abraham Geiger taught that the Jewish sovereign people and state had theological significance only within a certain historical context; however, that time period is over, and a theology of sovereignty would strangle Reform's universal mission.<sup>84</sup> Through this ideology both Geiger and Kohler relegated Zionist thought to a purely secular or political position.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>CCAR Responsa. Hatikvah and The Star-Spangled Banner-5758.10. [www.ccarnet.org](http://www.ccarnet.org)

<sup>83</sup> Rabbi Richard Levy, A Vision for Holiness: The Future of Reform Judaism, (New York, New York: URJ Press, 2005) 275.

<sup>84</sup>Rabbi Joshua Haberman, "The Place of Israel in Reform Theology" Judaism Volume 21, No. 4, Fall 1972, pp 437-448.

<sup>85</sup> Haberman 448.



However, this was also unacceptable, as Jews had tried for centuries to ensure their status as citizens in their native lands.

### The Slow Move Toward Zionism; Union Prayer Book

The world, however, had dramatically changed in the decades since 1885. In 1937 when the Central Conference of American Rabbis convened in Columbus, Ohio, to revise and update its beliefs, the Conference dramatically reversed its position on a Jewish homeland. The “Columbus Platform” stated that “In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its up-building as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.”<sup>86</sup> This reversal of opinion stemmed from the ever-growing persecution of Jews world-wide, specifically those Jews living in Nazi Germany. Three years later the CCAR published a revised edition of the Union Prayer Book in which for the first time the word “Zion” referring to the Jewish homeland was mentioned. On page 68 a reading was created which was the first step in the formulation of a Reform liturgy and theology toward the land of Israel.

*Uphold also the hands of our brothers who toil to rebuild Zion. In their pilgrimage among the nations, Thy people have always turned to the land where Israel (the people) was born, where our prophets taught their imperishable message of justice and brotherhood and where our*

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<sup>86</sup> [www.ccarnet.org](http://www.ccarnet.org) Documents and Positions/ “The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism”-Columbus Platform 1937.

*psalmists sang their deathless songs of love for Thee and of Thy love for us and all humanity. Ever enshrined in the hearts of Israel was the hope that Zion might be restored, not for their own pride or vainglory, but as living witness to the truth of Thy word which shall lead the nations to a reign of peace. Grant us strength that with Thy help we may bring a new light to shine upon Zion.*<sup>87</sup>

Through this prayer we can see a great hesitation by its authors to link us with those who “toil to rebuild.” In this prayer we ask God to protect not us, but our “brothers” who work for the rebuilding of Zion, thus allowing us to be one step removed from the process. Although we are included at the end of the prayer when we ask God to “*Grant us strength that with Thy help we may bring a new light to shine upon Zion,*” it still tries to mitigate the connection between American Reform Jews and those living in the Land of Israel. It should also be noted that this prayer appears in the fifth service in the Union Prayer Book. When the prayer book was created it was designed with five services corresponding to the weeks of the month. A congregation would pray from service number one on the first Shabbat of the month, service number two on the second Shabbat of the month and so on. Since the newly created prayer for the rebuilding of the Land of Israel was embedded in the fifth service, a service which was reserved for those rare occasions when a month would contain five Shabbatot, we might suspect that its placement in the fifth service was due in large part to the lingering ambiguity regarding Zionism in Reform synagogues. We might see this prayer as only a small step towards a vision of Zionism in our prayers, yet it does boldly acknowledge the work of the *chalutzim* in working the Land of Israel as an important religious act.

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<sup>87</sup> Revised Union Prayer Book, both the 1940 and 1961 edition. Published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Pg 68-69.

### A Passion for Zion: Gates of Prayer

Although there was a revision to the Union Prayer Book in the early 1960s, the liturgy on Israel did not change. In 1974 the CCAR abandoned revisions to the Union Prayer Book and published Gates of Prayer. The most significant change in our theology and ideology was the inclusion of a special set liturgy for Yom Ha'atzmaut.<sup>88</sup> It should also be noted that Chaim Stern, the editor of Gates of Prayer, and Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus, chair of the committee, wrote in its introduction that the "rebirth of Israel" was one of the historical factors which prompted the creation of a new Reform Movement siddur.<sup>89</sup> The historical realities of the time prompted Reform rabbis to create a liturgy, thus creating a theology for the Land and State of Israel. With a new theology toward Israel and the changing state of spiritual and religious needs among Reform Jews, a new Reform siddur was needed. In 1970, just five years prior to the publications of Gates of Prayer, Rabbi Jakob Petuchowski created a service of various readings for the CCAR's first convention in Israel. With permission of Rabbi Petuchowski some of the readings from the service he compiled were adapted and formatted and added to the Yom Ha'atzmaut service in Gates of Prayer.<sup>90</sup> With the creation of a separate service for Yom Ha'atzmaut in the new siddur we are forced to ask: is there a divine relationship between God and Israel, and was God's divinity involved in the War of Independence?

In a commentary to Gates of Prayer, Chaim Stern noted that the CCAR proclaimed Yom Ha'atzmaut a festival and the service in Gates of Prayer reflects this proclamation.<sup>91</sup> With this in mind, it is no wonder that a Hallel is suggested for Yom Ha'atzmaut; just as we

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<sup>88</sup> Knobel 73. The service for Yom Ha'atzmaut can be found on pages 590-611 in Gates of Prayer.

<sup>89</sup> Mark Washofsky, "Mishkan T'filah and Israel: Some Reflections," [www.arza.org/kd/go.cfm?destination=ShowItem&Item\\_ID=1298](http://www.arza.org/kd/go.cfm?destination=ShowItem&Item_ID=1298) Pg 2.

<sup>90</sup> Chaim Stern, Gates of Understanding, ed. Lawrence Hoffman, (New York: UAHC Press, 1977) 250.

<sup>91</sup> Chaim Stern, 248.

recite Hallel for Toraitic festivals, so too should we recite Hallel for a modern Jewish festival. Yet the Hallel which is provided for Yom Ha'atzmaut is not a full Hallel and it lacks a Beracha. In chapter 2 we examined a debate in which some modern Orthodox communities are reciting a shortened Hallel without a Beracha on Yom Ha'atzmaut as a suggestion that the rebuilding of the State of Israel is not complete, and therefore our praise of its creation should not be complete. However, it is doubtful that this was the explanation of a shortened Hallel without a Beracha in the Yom Ha'atzmaut service in Gates of Prayer. Chaim Stern did not insert a note regarding the shortened Hallel in Gates of Understanding; thus we can assume that it was shortened because the full Hallel was seen as too long. Moreover, the decision by the Reform Movement to adopt Yom Ha'atzmaut as a sacred occasion shows the conscious decision of the Movement to elevate this day above a secular communal gathering and make it a significant religious event in which we have a liturgy to express our joy.<sup>92</sup>

The CCAR again convened to re-state and revise its theology and ideology in the 1976 Centenary Perspective in San Francisco, California. By this time a dramatic shift had occurred in Reform theology and ideology, as seen in the liturgy about Israel in Gates of Prayer. This shift was largely influenced by the events of the Holocaust, the re-birth of the State of Israel and events leading up to, during and after the Six-Day War and the pain of the first few weeks of the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The Rabbis who helped write the Centenary Perspective and who helped create the liturgy for Yom Ha'atzmaut in Gates of Prayer had seen the destruction of European Jewry, the creation of the State of Israel and the possible destruction of the State of Israel in 1967 only to be turned around to one of Israel's fastest and greatest military victories. However, the euphoria of 1967 was tempered by the

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<sup>92</sup> Knobel 72.

surprise attack of 1973 and the horrendous few weeks the Yom Kippur War wrought for Israeli soldiers, citizens and Jews world-wide. These events dramatically changed the way Reform Judaism in America viewed itself and its place in history.

The 1976 Centenary Perspective was the first platform published by the CCAR since the creation of the State of Israel. It states emphatically the Reform Movement's support for the State of Israel, not just as a land for Jewish refugees but also as a place to which we are religiously committed.

We are privileged to live in an extraordinary time, one in which a third Jewish commonwealth has been established in our people's ancient homeland. We are bound to that land and to the newly reborn State of Israel by innumerable religious and ethnic ties. We have been enriched by its culture and ennobled by its indomitable spirit. We see it providing unique opportunities for Jewish self-expression. We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security, and defining its Jewish character. We encourage aliyah for those who wish to find maximum personal fulfillment in the cause of Zion. We demand that Reform Judaism be unconditionally legitimized in the State of Israel.<sup>93</sup>

The Centenary Perspective shows that the bonds which unite the people of Israel with the land and State of Israel are not merely cultural and historical but religious and spiritual. It would have been enough had the platform simply affirmed "ethnic ties" to the Land of Israel;

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<sup>93</sup> [www.ccarnet.org](http://www.ccarnet.org) Documents and Positions/ "Centenary Perspective" 1976 San Francisco, California.

the use of the phrase “religious ties” compels us to examine the religiosity of the State of Israel and how American Jews can “religiously” connect to the Land and the State.

In Reform Judaism Today: A Commentary on the Centenary Perspective, Dr. Eugene Borowitz discusses the unique nature of being a people and a religion. Through this discussion he comments on the Land and State of Israel and how support for the state is essential to fulfilling our religious obligations. Dr. Borowitz reminds us that we are a people of both individual and communal obligations. An autonomous state which is located on the historic and religious land of the Jewish people is the best way to fulfill those obligations to God and humanity and create a righteous society.<sup>94</sup> For Dr. Borowitz the religious side of Zionism is the opportunity for Jews to fully live out our social responsibility.

There is a significant difference between the texts in Reform siddurim and what Reform Jews do “on the ground.” Rabbi Peter Knobel notes that while most Reform congregations celebrate Yom Ha’atzmaut as a communal secular event (events lacking services and liturgy), the mere fact that our Reform siddurim have a special liturgy is significant.<sup>95</sup> In Judaism in general and Reform Judaism in particular, our words and prayers are meaningful. We try to think carefully about the words we say and the theological implications of these words. When the editors of Gates of Prayer inserted a special service for Yom Ha’atzmaut and included it in “ya’aleh veyavo,”<sup>96</sup> the editors endowed Yom Ha’atzmaut with the same level of holiness as Toraitic festivals, suggesting that the once

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<sup>94</sup> Dr. Eugene Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today: Book Three-How We Live, (New York: Behrman House Inc., 1983) 64.

<sup>95</sup> Knobel 72.

<sup>96</sup> In a traditional siddur, ya’aleh veyavo is part of the kedushat hayom prayer in the festival Amidah.

anti-Zionist Reform Movement now views the creation of the State of Israel as a holy event in Jewish religious history.<sup>97</sup>

Whereas Reform Judaism had been criticized for “coming late to the game” in support of Zionism, the creative liturgies that have blossomed from this “late support” have by far outreached that of Orthodoxy. Although certain segments of the Orthodox community may have been leaders in Zionist thought and practice, their reluctance to change or tamper with received liturgy is evident in the lack of liturgical pieces and services in Orthodox siddurim.<sup>98</sup> The absence of these creative liturgical pieces does not suggest an ambivalent view towards the Land or State of Israel, but it does speak to the ways in which various segments of Judaism express their theology and beliefs.

With the ability to evolve from the fixed prayer of the Jewish tradition the Reform Movement made a conscious decision to reject the prayer for the State of Israel that was created by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and create its own prayer for the State of Israel that would be recited at every Shabbat morning service. Rather than focus on the particularity of the land of Israel, the Reform Movement beautifully wove together a theology for Israel while staying true to a theology and commitment of universalism.<sup>99</sup> In 1978, just three years after the publication of Gates of Prayer, the CCAR published Gates of Repentance, a High Holy Day Machzor. Within the Yom Kippur Service, the editors of Gates of Repentance inserted a new Reform prayer for the State of Israel:

*We pray for the Land of Israel and all its people. May its borders know  
peace, its inhabitants tranquility. And may the bonds of faith and fate*

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<sup>97</sup> Washofsky 2.

<sup>98</sup> Rabbi David Ellenson, “Envisioning Israel in the Liturgies” Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews, ed. Allon Gal, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1996) 122.

<sup>99</sup> Ellenson 142.

*that unite the Jews of all lands be a source of strength to Israel and to us all. God of all lands and ages, answer our constant prayer with a Zion once more aglow with light for us and all the world, and let us say, Amen.*<sup>100</sup>

Thus, for the Reform Jew, Israel as the Jewish state can help bring about the messianic age in which all people can live in peace. This prayer for the State of Israel follows the ideology of Rabbi Leo Baeck who taught that Israel can provide a safe haven for Jews so that we can continue the work of tikkun olam that God intended. Rabbi Joshua Haberman<sup>101</sup> wrote about Israel providing an ethno-theology in that we speak of a distinctive national existence so that we may work on a world-saving faith.<sup>102</sup> Rabbi Haberman follows the teachings of Leo Baeck's Essence of Judaism, in that as Jews we recognize our mission from God handed down to the Prophets, and in order to accomplish this mission, one of ethical monotheism, we need to have some form of exclusivity; according to Baeck this is the Land and State of Israel.<sup>103</sup> According to Baeck, a theology of particularism can in fact be compatible with a theology of universalism. From these views on the State of Israel we can suggest that saying Hallel and other liturgical pieces on Yom Ha'atzmaut can from a Reform perspective praise God for allowing us to further our mission in the safe haven of our State. Yom Ha'atzmaut can be viewed as the beginning (certainly not the end) of our ability to create systemic change in the world and spread a message of peace and understanding through the safety of our sovereign land.

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<sup>100</sup> Gates of Repentance, 442. Prayer for the State of Israel.

<sup>101</sup> Rabbi Joshua Haberman served as Senior Rabbi of Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington DC and wrote extensively on Reform Zionist Thought.

<sup>102</sup> Haberman 445.

<sup>103</sup> Haberman 445.



### Yom Ha'atzmaut and its Connection to the Shoah

Emil Fackenheim takes a different position from that of Baeck, though he arrives at the same conclusion that there is a theology in the establishment and existence of the State of Israel. Fackenheim taught that in a post-Holocaust era there is little or no distinction between a secular and religious Jew.<sup>104</sup> For Fackenheim, even a secular Zionist who was dedicated to the creation of the State of Israel in order to reinforce Jewish survival was in fact partaking in a religious act. Fackenheim wrote:

A secular holiness, side by side with the religious, is becoming manifest in contemporary Jewish existence...Israel is collectively what every survivor is individually: a “No” to the demons of Auschwitz and a “Yes” to Jewish survival and security.<sup>105</sup>

Fackenheim's point is crucial to understanding Reform Judaism's first Zionist theology. By and large, the Reform Rabbis who created Gates of Prayer, responsa and other Reform publications which speak of our theology, created a Zionist theology based on their experiences as witnesses of a post-holocaust Jewry. As Lawrence Hoffman notes in “The Liturgical Message,” the rediscovery of Judaism as a people not just a religion stems from the rebirth of the State of Israel and the devastation of the Holocaust, which “tragically underscored the Zionist argument.”<sup>106</sup>

The theological connection between Israel and the Holocaust is not in thought alone, but can also be found in the services around Yom Ha'atzmaut. In Gates of Prayer, both the

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<sup>104</sup> Haberman 446.

<sup>105</sup> Emil Fackenheim, “The People Israel Lives: How my mind has changed,” The Christian Century, (KTAV Publishing House; May 6, 1970) 305.

<sup>106</sup> Lawrence Hoffman, “The Liturgical Message,” Gates of Understanding: A Companion Volume to Gates of Prayer, ed. Lawrence Hoffman, (New York: CCAR and the UAHF Press 1977) 153.

“Shabbat before Yom Ha’atzmaut” service and the actual Yom Ha’atzmaut service draw a connection to the Holocaust by use of Hannah Senesh’s poem, “Blessed is the match.”<sup>107</sup> In the service for the Shabbat before Yom Ha’atzmaut which is found on page 412 in Gates of Prayer another prayer was inserted to remind us of the Holocaust.

*Blessed are the eyes that behold Israel reborn in its ancient land of  
promise! Blessed the age that has seen our people outlive death’s  
kingdom!...For every anguished yesterday let there be a joyful  
tomorrow. Let the Jewish spirit flower on its reclaimed soil. Rise up, all  
creation, and sing!*<sup>108</sup>

There are two important theological implications in this prayer. We begin in the first sentence: we state clearly that Israel is our ancient land of promise. This contradicts any speculation that Reform Judaism does not revere the land on which the state is a part. Our commitment to the land and the state is biblical in origin and our prayers support that claim. The second theological implication found in this text is the link between Israel and the Holocaust. These connections in our liturgy “help canonize the myth of Holocaust and Redemption,”<sup>109</sup> suggesting that the Holocaust was in part responsible for the rebirth of Israel and the beginning of our redemption was sealed. This correlation between the Holocaust and redemption is difficult at times to accept. Aside from the fact that this link tries to justify the horrors of the Holocaust through the rebirth of the State of Israel, history has shown us that the seeds of the creation of the State existed long before the rise of Nazi Germany.

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<sup>107</sup> Ellenson 145. The poem reads as follows: “Blessed is the match, consumed in kindling flame. Blessed is the flame that burns in the heart’s secret places. Blessed is the heart that knows, for honor sake, to stop its beating. Blessed is the match, consumed in kindling flame.” Gates of Prayer pg 413 and 590.

<sup>108</sup> Gates of Prayer 412-413.

<sup>109</sup> Ellenson, 145.

Moreover, the creation of the State of Israel was not a modern event, but the continuation of a historic and religious promise.

### Gates of the Seasons

Less than a decade after the publication of Gates of Prayer, the Reform Movement published another book which expressed our Zionist theology. In 1983 the CCAR produced, Gates of the Seasons: A Guide to the Jewish Year, edited by Rabbi Peter Knobel. As a guide to help Reform Jews deepen their spiritual lives, Gates of the Seasons gives various suggestions for mitzvot one can do on the different Jewish holidays and shows how the Reform Movement affirms these mitzvot. On page 102 in Gates of the Seasons, we are given various suggestions on how and why to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. The "why" comes from a CCAR proclamation made in Jerusalem at the 1970 convention in which the CCAR declared Yom Ha'atzmaut to be a "permanent annual festival in the religious calendar of Reform Jews."<sup>110</sup> Through this book the CCAR further affirms that the State of Israel represents a new era for the Jewish people which should be celebrated. Again, linking the Holocaust with Israel, the CCAR states:

The Rebirth of Israel from the ashes of the Shoah is a symbol of hope against despair, of redemption against devastation.<sup>111</sup>

In a sense the State of Israel redeemed God's presence in the eyes of those who lost faith and hope during the Holocaust, and our theology is one of recognizing our renewed people's faith. The manner in which we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut is somewhat ambiguous in Gates of the Seasons. Seven years prior to this publication the CCAR published Gates of Prayer

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<sup>110</sup> Peter Knobel, Gates of the Seasons: A Guide to the Jewish Year, (New York: CCAR Press 1983) 102.

<sup>111</sup> Knobel 102.

which included an extensive service for Yom Ha'atzmaut with original liturgical pieces and a shortened Hallel. However, in Gates of the Seasons Rabbi Knobel writes:

It is a mitzvah for every Jew to mark Yom Ha-atma-ut by participating in public worship services and/or celebrations which affirm the bond between the Jews living in the Land of Israel and those living outside. Furthermore, a special act of Tzedakah to an organization or institution which helps to strengthen the State of Israel would be a significant way of affirming the unity of the Jewish people.<sup>112</sup>

Although he does mention that Jews should engage in either public worship services and/or celebrations he does not specify how one should engage. The ambiguity of the statement further exacerbates the tension regarding how and what we should do for Yom Ha'atzmaut. Should we read and study biblical verses which speak of God giving the Land of Israel to the Jewish people? Should we recite Hallel? Should we use our regular liturgy but replace the everyday nusach with tunes and melodies from Israeli folk songs? (One could sing Mi Chamocha to the tune of Yerushalaim Shel Zahav and daven Kedusha to Erev Shel Shoshanim.) Specific instruction would have been helpful in this context to help guide us in a celebration which is relatively new in our community. Furthermore, it does not mention the theology behind saying liturgical pieces for Yom Ha'atzmaut. However, it does make it clear that Yom Ha'atzmaut is not viewed as a secular holiday in the eyes of American Reform Jews and it does open the door for creative ways to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. In my conclusion I will discuss and give suggestions for other ways in which we can celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut and continue the Reform trend of seeking to elevate Yom Ha'atzmaut and deepen our religious connection with the land.

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<sup>112</sup> Knobel 102.

### A Cautious and Tempered Zionist Theology: Mishkan T'filah

Although the CCAR published a smaller, gender sensitive, version of “Gates of Prayer” in 1994, which is often referred to as “Gates of Grey” for its grey color, the next major publication by the CCAR was Mishkan T'filah. During the writing of this thesis, Mishkan T'filah, in its infancy, is slowly entering congregational life in North America. Almost a decade prior to the publication of Mishkan T'filah the CCAR convened in 1997 to recognize the one hundred years since the creation of the World Zionist Congress in 1897. In honor of this centenary the CCAR drafted a special platform dedicated exclusively to the relationship between Reform Judaism and Zionism.<sup>113</sup> The document entitled “Reform Judaism and Zionism: A Centenary Perspective,” expresses the view that Medinat Yisrael is a nation unlike other nations and it has an obligation to help the Jewish people attain its highest moral character. While the platform affirms Diaspora Judaism, it also encourages aliyah. The final section of the platform clarifies the Reform Jewish perspective on the State of Israel as the beginning of Redemption for the Jewish people. As we saw in Chapter 2, many members of the Orthodox community in and outside of Israel believe that the creation of the State of Israel marked the beginning of the People Israel’s redemption. The first paragraph of the Redemption section states:

We believe that the renewal and perpetuation of Jewish national life in Eretz Yisrael is a necessary condition for the realization of the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people and of all humanity.

While that day of redemption remains but a distant yearning, we express the fervent hope that Medinat Yisrael, living in peace with its neighbors,

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<sup>113</sup> Levy 275.

will hasten the redemption of Am Yisrael, and the fulfillment of our messianic dream of universal peace under the sovereignty of God.<sup>114</sup>

According to the Reform Jewish perspective, the creation of the State of Israel did not mark the beginning of the Jewish people's redemption, rather the creation of the State makes redemption a possibility. The paragraph then turns to us and puts the possibility of the redemption into our hands. By suggesting that Medinat Yisrael living in peace with her neighbors will hasten our redemption, this Platform puts the onus on the Jewish people living in and outside the Land. In a sense, if we can make peace with our neighbors then we can play an active role in our redemption. However, the Reform Zionist Platform can also be interpreted as "peace as a far-off messianic vision,"<sup>115</sup> a peace which is not up to us but rather a peace that might come one day. Rabbi Richard Levy suggests that the Reform Zionist Platform leaves our actions out of the equation for peace, but the Pittsburgh Principles which were adopted by the CCAR in 1999 speaks more of our role in "striving" for peace.<sup>116</sup>

With its well defined commitment to Zionism and the State of Israel, Mishkan T'filah made tremendous strides in incorporating many Zionist prayers and readings which were excluded from previous Reform siddurim. Although we will not explore in depth all of the Zionist inclusions, all traditional prayers which mentioned a renewed Zion or an ingathering of the exiles have been included in the siddur as options for people to offer.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> [www.ccarnet.org](http://www.ccarnet.org) Documents and Positions/ "Reform Judaism and Zionism: A Centenary Platform" adopted by the CCAR on June 24, 1997 in Miami Florida.

<sup>115</sup> Levy 240.

<sup>116</sup> Levy 241.

<sup>117</sup> On page 60 in Mishkan T'filah, The *Yotzer Or* prayer which in previous Reform siddurim excluded the last line: "*Or Chadash al Tzion ta-ir*" has now been included. "The inclusion of this line which is translated as "Shine a new light upon Zion," consciously affirms our Movement's devotion to the Modern State of Israel and signals is recognition of the religious significance of the reborn Jewish Commonwealth."-Rabbi David Ellenson's commentary to *Yotzer Or* on page 60 in Mishkan T'filah. The following prayer, *Ahava Rabbah*, on page 62 included the once excluded line, "Gather us in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land. For You, O God, work wonders. You Chose us." This

It's one thing for the CCAR and the Union for Reform Judaism to draft statements and policies in support of the State of Israel, but when we incorporate in our siddurim prayers and readings which express our love and support of the State, we have then moved from a Reform ideology of Israel to a Reform theology of Israel.

However, although Mishkan T'filah builds on the Zionist themes of its predecessors, the decisions to include and exclude certain prayers created an ambiguous Zionist theology. As mentioned above, Gates of Prayer took a bold and dramatic step forward by creating a full liturgical service for Yom Ha'atzmaut and including some form of Hallel, a move that many in the orthodox community are still struggling to incorporate.<sup>118</sup> Whereas Gates of Prayer included Yom Ha'atzmaut in the ya'aleh veyavo (pg 601 in Gates of Prayer), giving it the status of a Toraitic festival, Mishkan T'filah appropriately removed the ya'ale veyavo section from the Yom Ha'atzmaut service and inserted a *birkat ho'daah*, "Blessing of Thanksgiving." This liturgical change fittingly equates Yom Ha'atzmaut with other "rabbinically" ordained festivals such as Hanukkah and Purim.<sup>119</sup> In the notes to Gates of Understanding Chaim Stern did not explain why he decided to insert Yom Ha'atzmaut in ya'aleh veyavo rather than in the ho'daah. However, with the inclusion of a special ceremony in Mishkan T'filah which states that the rebirth of the State of Israel was a miracle (page 538), I think we can safely assume that the removal of the ya'aleh veyavo was a not a sign of the Reform Movement's Anti-Zionism but rather a conscious effort to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut in a way that is theologically and culturally honest.

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again shows our commitment to aliyah in that we ask God to gather us from the exiled lands and bring us to the land of Israel.

<sup>118</sup> See chapter 2 in which we explore the various orthodox t'shuvot that have been written regarding the use of Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut and the theological implication one gives to the current state of affairs in Israel.

<sup>119</sup> Washofsky 4.

In recent years the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA) has created a think tank in which Reform Rabbis, scholars and lay leaders convene to try and create Reform Zionist theology and ideology. With this project underway, we must ask: do we currently have a Reform Zionist Theology? In the Spring 2007 issue of the CCAR Journal, Rabbi Stanley Davids, then President of ARZA, wrote an article, “A Theology of Reform Zionism.” The task for creating a theology of Reform Zionism is underway but far from complete. In order to help create this theology Rabbi Davids outlines six questions which he hopes will help the Reform movement create a theology of Zionism.

1. What does it mean to long for something that already exists?
2. Can Jewish Nationalism survive in an America increasingly committed to a celebration of the individual?
3. To what extent is the Hebrew language a necessary part of the Reform Jewish theological encounter with the land?
4. Is there a geographic center to Jewish life?
5. Can a Reform Zionism raise aliyah to the category of mitzvah?
6. Where, then, is God and K’dushah in our 21st century Reform Zionist Theology?<sup>120</sup>

With this project underway we can see that the Reform Movement is currently working on creating a sound Zionist Theology. Although the ARZA think tank might not have coincided with the creation of Mishkan T’filah, the thoughts and attitudes which led to the creation of the think tank might have also led to the ambiguous Zionist theology in Mishkan T’filah. Unlike the service in Gates of Prayer, Mishkan T’filah gives an alternative ceremony for those who might have difficulty finding the religious meaning in Yom Ha’atzmaut. This

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<sup>120</sup> Rabbi Stanley Davids, “A Theology of Reform Zionism” CCAR Journal, Spring 2007 (New York, CCAR Press).



ceremony in Mishkan T'filah represents a less presumptive conception of the day's religious status.<sup>121</sup>

The religiosity of the day is all but removed from the candle lighting ceremony in Mishkan T'filah. This ceremony can either be included in a service or it can stand alone. The ceremony in Mishkan T'filah uses the Israeli Declaration of Independence as its main text and inserts both secular Israeli readings as well as passages from Tanakh. The ceremony is divided into seven sections, each one containing a candle lighting segment. Although the words of the ceremony might not be as theologically concrete as Gates of Prayer, the ceremony does contain many elements from our religious and cultural history. The lighting of seven candles clearly represents the menorah from the Tabernacle, a model of which was placed in front of the Israeli Knesset in Jerusalem. The ceremony takes the Israeli Declaration of Independence and elevates it from a nationalistic document to a Jewish religious text. Although liturgy from the tradition is not used in the ceremony, Israel is viewed in a religious context.

Yet that context is ambiguous. As mentioned before, Yom Ha'atzmaut in Mishkan T'filah does not receive a ya'aleh veyavo, but rather like Hanukkah and Purim it receives a ho'daah. However, unlike Hanukah and Purim the ho'daah for Yom Ha'atzmaut lacks an al-hanism.<sup>122</sup> For Hanukah and Purim the ho'daah insert talks about the days of Mattathias and the days of Mordecai, but those passages are preceded by an al-hanism which says:

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<sup>121</sup> Washofsky 4.

<sup>122</sup> Washofsky 4.

*We thank You for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds  
and saving acts, brought about by You, and for the wars which You  
waged for our ancestors in the days of old, at this season.*<sup>123</sup>

However, this is missing from the Yom Ha'atzmaut ho'daah. It would appear that the editors of Mishkan T'filah wanted to exclude the idea that Israel's War of Independence was at all miraculous, just as we saw in chapter 1 during the Talmudic analysis of Hanukkah. In fact the ho'daah insert lacks any references to the war or the fighting that took place to gain independence. The ho'daah on page 555 in Mishkan T'filah states:

*In the return to Zion of our time, Your people gathered in Your land to  
build it up and to be built up themselves. They established this  
Independence Day as a festival of joy, thanksgiving and praise to You.  
As You performed miracles for our ancestors, do likewise for us, saving  
us now as You did then.*<sup>124</sup>

If the removal of an al-hanisim was intentional, then we also must assume that the language they used for the ho'daah was intentional. Yet the first candle lit for the Yom Ha'atzmaut ceremony on page 538 is in honor of "the miracle of rebirth." However, I think we can assume that the way in which the word miracle is used is not the same way in which some refer to the victory of the War of Independence as a miracle. By stating, "the miracle of rebirth," I think they are using miracle in the same way as people use the word miracle when speaking about child-birth.

The editors wanted to equate Yom Ha'atzmaut with Hanukah and Purim by giving it a ho'daah, yet unlike Hanukkah and Purim they excluded an al-hanisim to show that 1948

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<sup>123</sup> Mishkan T'filah, "Al-Hanisim" ed. Rabbi Elyse Frishman (New York, CCAR Press, 2006) 556-557.

<sup>124</sup> Mishkan T'filah, Ho'daha insert for Yom Ha'atzmaut, 555.

was not a miracle. In the specific ceremony for Yom Ha'atzmaut a candle is lit for the miracle of rebirth: these contradictions create great ambiguities surrounding our theology and ideology of the State of Israel.

Without the reference to fighting it seems that this ho'daah is acknowledging all the work that was put into creating the land of Israel, not just the fighting. The language takes into account the work of the early settlers at Kibbutz Degania,<sup>125</sup> the founding of Zichron Ya'acov<sup>126</sup> and the establishment of Rishon LeZion.<sup>127</sup> Mishkan T'filah's take on Yom Ha'atzmaut is not a celebration of one year of fighting, but rather a celebration of over a half a century of work and toil to bring about independence. Although some of the language is similar to Labor Zionism's "build it up to be built up" there is also deep religious significance in the line which says, "Your people gathered in Your land." Here the liturgy emphatically states that the land of Israel is God's land and we are God's people. In a siddur where Zionism is both encouraged in the regular prayers and tempered in the Yom Ha'atzmaut service, it is interesting to note that the use of chosenness both as a people and as a land was acceptable. I do not believe that Mishkan T'filah takes a step backwards in terms of Zionism, but rather I think it takes a cautious step backwards in terms of the passion and zeal that were put forth in Gates of Prayer. It is also noteworthy that Mishkan T'filah excludes any reference or connection to the Holocaust with Yom Ha'atzmaut. Whereas the two were woven together in the theology and ideology of Gates of Prayer, both are now separate and relegated to their own special ritual/ceremony. With the publication of Gates of

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<sup>125</sup> In 1910 Kibbutz Degania was settled and served as a guiding light for future kibbutzim. It was at Kibbutz Degania where communal living and collective work was established.

<sup>126</sup> Zichron Ya'acov was founded in 1882 by the Rothchild family and established itself as one of the first cities in Israel complete with a sound agricultural system.

<sup>127</sup> Rishon LeZion was founded by Russian immigrants in 1882 and served as a major settlement in the North of Israel during the first wave of Aliyah.

Prayer in 1975, just two years after the Yom Kippur War and only thirty years after the Holocaust, the Jewish community was in a survival mentality and the need for the State of Israel was automatically linked with the Holocaust. However, we are now sixty years removed from the Holocaust and the survival mentality has diminished, thus weakening the connection between the Holocaust and the State of Israel.

Since the publication of Gates of Prayer, the Jewish community has seen the publications of the Israeli New Historians,<sup>128</sup> the disillusionment of the first and second Lebanon Wars, the growing gap between rich and poor and the fight for equality of Reform Judaism. With these factors, the Reform community might not be willing to praise God in the fashion that Gates of Prayer had in mind but rather temper our praise as a way to show that although the current state has potential it is a long way from reaching its ultimate fulfillment.

#### How Progressive Israelis Envision Israel

Just as there has been much revision and creativity among the American Reform siddurim regarding Israel and her Independence, so too does the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) struggle to find creative and meaningful ways to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut through a liturgical framework. The Yom Ha'atzmaut service in Ha-Avodah Shebalev, the Israeli progressive siddur, has a similar passion and zeal for the land and the people of Israel as does the Yom Ha'atzmaut service in Gates of Prayer. However, rather than speak solely of redemption and miracles, Ha-Avodah Shebalev takes more of a Zionist approach. In a service entitled Seder Yom Ha'atzmaut<sup>129</sup> a special Amidah is recited in

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<sup>129</sup> Ha-avodah Shebalev 220-223.

which three biblical passages are included (Genesis 13:14-15, 26:2-5 and 28:13-14),<sup>130</sup> each of which describes God's promise of Eretz Yisrael to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.<sup>131</sup> After the recitation of the special Amidah, one has the option of reciting a special al-hanism for Yom Ha'atzmaut. Rabbi Peter Knobel translates the al-hanism as follows:

*In the days of Zion's second restoration when the saving remnant from the Valley of Murder and Your people from all their dispersions arrived, strangers ruled over our holy land and the gates were locked in the faces of the persecuted ones. Then seven nations rose to annihilate Your people Israel. And You in Your great mercy stood up for them in the time of their trouble to assemble and to stand up for themselves and to teach their hands to fight and the fingers to make war and You delivered the many into the hand of the few and the arrogant into the hand of Your covenant people and You made Your Name great and holy in Your world and for Your people Israel you made a great salvation and deliverance as this day. And afterwards Your people gathered to build and be rebuilt in Your land and to fix this Day of Independence for celebration and rejoicing, for thanksgiving and praising Your great*

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<sup>130</sup> **Genesis 13:14)** And Adonai said unto Abram, after Lot was separated from him: 'Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15) For all the land which you see, I will give it to you and your seed for ever.

**Genesis 26:2-4)** And Adonai appeared to him, and said: 'Go not down unto Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell you. Travel in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you and your seed, I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham you father; and I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and will give unto your seed all these lands; and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves;

**Genesis 28:13-14)** And, behold, Adonai stood beside him, and said: 'I am Adonai, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you sleep, to you will I give it, and to your seed. And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

<sup>131</sup> Knobel "A New Light Upon Zion: The Liturgy of Reform Judaism and Zionism," 76.

*Name and just as You did wonders for earlier generations so You do for  
later generations and You save us in these days and as in those days.*<sup>132</sup>

The IMPJ gives deep religious significance to the creation of the State of Israel but it does so without mentioning the use of miracles. The concept of secular non-religious Jews building the country is irrelevant in the words and meanings of these prayers. Although the builders might have considered themselves secular in the “traditional halachic sense,” the meaning behind the liturgy of the IMPJ suggests otherwise. The creation of the state was and is a religious experience, the line “to build and be rebuilt” suggests that even among the secular “anti-religious Zionists” there was some sense of historical/religious obligation in creating a Jewish state on the land which was biblically promised to the Jews.

There is also significant reference to the Holocaust in the IMPJ liturgy. As mentioned above, references to the Holocaust were excluded from the Yom Ha’atzmaut section of Mishkan T’filah. Although we as American Reform Jews share many of the same theologies and ideologies as the IMPJ, there is still a profound disconnect. For Israelis the Holocaust plays a major role both in their consciousness and in their theologies. As seen through the special al -hanisim, the Holocaust serves a political, psychological and theological rationale for the creation of the State of Israel.<sup>133</sup> Israelis live both literally and figuratively close to the memories of the Holocaust and are unable to exclude it from their theologies.

Seder Yom Ha’atzmaut continues on page 221 with texts from God’s promise of the land to Moses, Joshua, the Prophets, Shimon the Hasmoneon, Theodor Herzl and David Ben Gurion. The goal of Seder Yom Ha’atzmaut in Ha-Avodah Shebaley is to show the Jewish

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<sup>132</sup> Translation by Peter Knobel, 77.

<sup>133</sup> Knobel, 77.

people's claim to the Land of Israel from biblical times until independence.<sup>134</sup> For the IMPJ Yom Ha'atzmaut is a time to celebrate Israel's Independence and to acknowledge that the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the ongoing creation of the state is a religious experience, one that connects us to God and the promise that God made to our ancestors. Similar to the special Amidah, the historical/religious claim to the land is deeply embedded in the observance and celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

One could argue that the service was commissioned as a polemic aimed at refuting Israel's enemies and those who deny Israel's claim to the land. This might very well be one justification for the service; however, I think we can and should approach Seder Yom Ha'atzmaut with another intention. The passages from Abraham to Ben Gurion laying claim to the land can be seen as a way to link ourselves with our historical and religious past. As Jews recite these texts on Yom Ha'atzmaut, we are placing ourselves in the context of a greater reality. Yom Ha'atzmaut has the ability to remind us that we are the guardians of a land and a people. It reminds us of our history, of our collective responsibility and our purpose. In referring to the High Holy Days, the Rambam taught that the sound of the shofar should awaken us to repentance. Similarly, on Yom Ha'atzmaut the recitation of biblical texts laying claim to the Jewish right to the land can awaken us to better appreciate and work towards a land which is fitting to be referred to as a "gift from God."

The Reform Movement in America has come a long way in its position towards Zionism. In its early years, Reform Jews were adamantly opposed to the creation of a Jewish State. However, as Jews were subjected to persecution throughout the world, the Reform Movement began to revise its position on the need for a Jewish state. In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel the Reform Movement began to focus on the

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<sup>134</sup> Knobel, 77.

theological and ideological implication of a Jewish State. The liturgy and ideology regarding the State of Israel in Gates of Prayer was transformative compared to earlier siddurim in the Reform Movement. The siddur was complete with a special service for Yom Ha'atzmaut, the reading of a partial Hallel and a ya'aleh v'ya'avo which places Yom Ha'atzmaut on par with other Toraitic festivals. Nearly thirty years later with the publication of Mishkan T'filah, the passion for the State of Israel is similar but the liturgy was tempered. The celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut in Mishkan T'filah is a ceremony rather than a service and a ho'daah is inserted placing it on par with Hanukkah and Purim. Although the movement is currently trying to formulate its "Israel-theology," it has come to accept that the Land and State of Israel play significant roles in both our cultural and religious lives as Jews. The creation of the State of Israel might not have marked the beginning of our redemption, but it did mark the beginning of an era where our redemption is possible; for this reason the recitation of Hallel to thank God for allowing this possibility is appropriate and encouraged.



## Chapter 4 Creating a Prayer for Yom Ha'atzmaut

Through my research I have become envious of the rich and public debate in Orthodox communities regarding the religiosity of Yom Ha'atzmaut. In many of these circles there exists a great tension between wanting to praise God on Yom Ha'atzmaut yet not knowing why they are praising God. That struggle seemed all but absent in the Reform Movement when Gates of Prayer was introduced. The zealotry behind the creation of the Yom Ha'atzmaut service in Gates of Prayer gave us a lot of substance with little thought. On the reverse, the editors of Mishkan T'filah wanted to include prayers and a ceremony which gave people options depending on their stance toward the State of Israel. Yet, the ambiguous nature of Mishkan T'filah's Zionist theology led to the creation of a ritual for Yom Ha'atzmaut which can or cannot invoke the name of God. While writing a Seder Yom Ha'atzmaut would be a bit too ambitious, I have created a prayer for Yom Ha'atzmaut which can express our cautious theology towards the Land and State of Israel.

### A Prayer for Yom Ha'atzmaut

*Adonai our God, guard and protect the State of Israel. On this Day of Independence, we thank You, Adonai our God, for providing us a Land and a State where we can fully serve You and all of humanity.*

*Strengthen our hands and voices so that we may continue the creation of the State of Israel and build her up to be a beacon of hope and justice, of good and peace. May the words of our Prophets find voice in all who ascend to her highest peaks and all who walk in her sacred valleys. May the history of our sacred Land inspire the State and all who serve her to become a light unto the nations. Adonai our God, give*

*us the strength and courage to make Israel the spiritual center from which our redemption will proceed.*

There are a few phrases in this prayer that deserve some explanation. In the third line it says, “a State where we can fully serve You and all humanity.” This phrase does not suggest that Jews living outside of the Land of Israel are not fully serving God but suggests that living on the Land and in the State of Israel Jews have the safety and autonomy to live full Jewish lives. The phrase “fully serve You,” is also a combination of Leo Baeck’s and David Hartman’s views on the State of Israel. As mentioned earlier Leo Baeck felt that through living in the safety of the State of Israel Jews would be able to fulfill their commitment of tikkun olam. Similarly David Hartman speaks of the possibility of spiritual fulfillment while living safely in a Jewish state.

In the fourth line I added the phrase, “continue the creation of the State of Israel.” This phrase puts responsibility in our hands and asks our generation to be chalutzim and continue to create the State of Israel. The phrase suggests that Israel is not yet complete; with its precarious security situation, the widening gap between the wealthy and the impoverished, discrimination towards minorities and the lack of religious pluralism, Israel has yet to become the Jewish state of its potential. There is more work to be done to help Israel achieve her goals of becoming a state which is Jewish not just through strict laws which segregate society, but through Jewish ethics and morals which can help mend a society

The third and final phrase appears at the end of the prayer: “Israel the spiritual center from which our redemption will proceed.” This phrase allows our thoughts and hopes for the State of Israel to transcend any political situation and places the State of Israel in a larger historical and religious connotation. Although the creation of the State of Israel was not the

redemption of the Jewish People; redemption can only take place from the State of Israel on the Land of Israel, therefore the presence of the State makes redemption a possibility, not a given.

This prayer was created for Yom Ha'atzmaut in particular to show how our ideology and theology towards the State of Israel can be expressed in religious terminology. I specifically did not make reference to the War of Independence, miracles or God's presence being involved in the creation of the State. The absence of these themes does not stem from a lack of belief in God's presence throughout this process, but from a belief that the War of Independence was not the final marker in our redemption; rather, every day that Jews live in their sovereign land is a day in which our redemption is possible. This prayer not only thanks God for the Land and the State but it also gives us a charge, a call to action.

I wanted to put a charge and a call to action in the prayer because I don't want to view Yom Ha'atzmaut in the same fashion as Shabbat. In the weekday Amidah we petition God and ourselves to alleviate the many problems in our world. However, halacha instructs us not to recite the petition section of the Amidah on Shabbat. The Babylonian Talmud Berachot 21a teaches us that the worshiper should not trouble himself with petitions so as to protect the honor of Shabbat. Another explanation suggests that if the worshiper says the petitions on Shabbat, then he will be reminded of his shortcomings and be plagued with psychic pain rather than focusing on the glory of Shabbat.<sup>135</sup> I think Yom Ha'atzmaut should not be treated like Shabbat. On Yom Ha'atzmaut we should not only offer thanks and praise, but we should also remind God and ourselves of the work that has to be completed in order to make Israel the state worthy of its name.

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<sup>135</sup> Rabbi Daniel Landes, My Peoples Prayer Book: Shabbat Morning, ed. Lawrence Hoffman (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003) 116.

## **Conclusion**

As I write the conclusion of this thesis, the State of Israel just held elections in the aftermath of the Gaza incursion which took place during the Winter of 2008 and 2009. The coalition to form the next Knesset has yet to be established but the election results clearly show that Israeli society has moved toward the right on the political spectrum. Many liberal American Jews are reading about the election results with a sense of fear and anxiety. What kind of policies will this new government enact? Will the Arab-Israeli population be stripped of more of their rights under this newly elected government? Are the prospects for peace slowly fading away? The fear of a right-leaning hawkish Israeli government forces us to transcend the current political situation and remind ourselves of the deeper meaning embedded in the Land and State of Israel. The goal of this thesis was to show that through Jewish sources and thinkers in general and Reform Jewish sources and thinkers in particular the Land and State of Israel transcend any political situation and should be viewed within the religious context of Jewish history rather than the cultural context of modern history.

Yom Ha'atzmaut is a secular and a religious holiday for both Israelis and Jews living in the Diaspora. Jews world-wide who want to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut as a secular holiday can pick and choose from many different ceremonies and rituals to commemorate the Independence. For Jews outside of Israel, they can mimic Israeli culture by having barbeques, hosting meals with Israeli-style food, dress in blue and white, hang an Israeli flag, listen to Israeli music and the list can go on. For these Jews, the celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut means the celebration of Israeli secular culture-it means viewing the State of Israel and the world Jewry in terms of peoplehood and culture.

Yet, the Jewish connection to Israel has to be deeper and greater than a cultural love and support. There are many Israelis and Jews world-wide who hold firm to the idea of culture and peoplehood but also believe strongly that the religious nature of Judaism is what ties them together. The cultural aspect of Judaism and the notion of peoplehood are offshoots of the religious aspect of Judaism. The simple yet complex fact that the State of Israel was founded on the religious and historic Land of Israel prevents me from celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut in purely secular terms. Jewish history is not just the history of a people, it is the history of a religion, and the creation of the third Jewish commonwealth on the site of the previous two commonwealths is infused with deep religiosity and meaning.

The decision, however, to infuse Israel's independence with religion creates a theological and ideological dilemma. As discussed in chapter 1, the decision to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut with the recitation of Hallel is appropriate, yet the intentionality behind the recitation should be specified. As a Reform Jew I was always troubled by the recitation of Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut because I was equating Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut with Hallel on Hanukkah and the narrow viewpoint that Hallel is recited on these two occasions for the miracle of a little "David" army defeating a giant "Goliath" army. But our examination of Hallel throughout Talmudic and medieval sources suggests that saying Hallel for miracles is just one of many reasons to say Hallel. In fact, our discussion in Chapter 1 showed that we say Hallel on Hanukkah not because we feel God helped the Maccabees with a military victory but because of the miracle of the oil. Therefore we do not have to suggest that we say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut because we feel the military victory in 1948 was a divine act.

The most compelling argument I found for reciting Hallel on Yom Ha'atzamut comes from Pesachim 117a suggesting that we should say Hallel for being saved from dire straits.

One does not have to limit oneself to 1948 in order to see dire straits; rather we can suggest that the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 saved many displaced persons from dire straits, and thus a Hallel is appropriate. With this intention, the recitation of Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut does not suggest a prophetic messianic wish; it does not suggest that God assisted the Haganah in defeating the neighboring Arab armies, but rather recognizes that Israel's independence saved a significant segment number of world Jewry and continues to save world Jewry today by being a haven for all Jews.

Yet, we do not have to base our recitation of Hallel on Talmudic sources alone. Rabbi David Hartman of Jerusalem recites Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut to praise God for the ability to live in a sovereign Jewish state and the opportunities which a Jewish state can provide for the future of Judaism. Whether or not we believe in miracles, whether or not we believe in redemption, Yom Ha'atzmaut can still have religious significance to us.

As Reform Jews we should say Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut because the recitation of Hallel is a way for us to praise God and recall the freedom that we won in a time when the future of the Jewish people was dark and unknown. We should recite Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut as a way to give thanks for the great possibilities that the sovereign State of Israel provides for the Jewish people. Yet at the same time we should consciously recite a partial Hallel without a Beracha rather than a full Hallel with a Beracha. In the Yom Ha'atzmaut of Gates of Prayer the Hallel that was suggested was a partial Hallel without a Beracha; however, in the notes to Gates of Prayer Chaim Stern did not mention that this was a conscious decision. Rather, we can safely assume that the partial Hallel without a Beracha for Yom Ha'atzmaut was suggested for the purpose of brevity. However, similar to some modern Israeli Rabbis who suggest that we should recite Hallel without a Bracha because of

the spiritual shortcomings of Israeli society we should consciously recite a partial Hallel without a Beracha to suggest that Israel still has work to do in order to become a Jewish state worthy of the title, “a light unto the nations.”

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s final chapter in Israel: An Echo of Eternity, is entitled “A rendezvous with history,” a fitting title for a section which discusses the future of our personal connection and relationship with the State of Israel. Heschel began the chapter by writing about his personal reaction to the events surrounding the Six Day War in 1967 but then continued by speaking about the State of Israel through Biblical imagery and mystical metaphor. Through Heschel’s poetic words we can further understand that our connection to the Land and State of Israel is a connection that has been in our sources and our liturgy for two millennia. A prayer for the State of Israel that was translated from its original German and published in a 1962 siddur for the London New Liberal Jewish Congregation states:

*Countless generations of our people have turned to Thee in hopeful  
prayer for the restoration of our ancestral land, for the redemption of  
the oppressed and the salvation of the homeless of our people. We, O  
Lord of redemption, are permitted to see this hope and dream of our  
sages, poets and people come true. Deserts have been swept away,  
ruins have been rebuilt, and out of desolation and oblivion rises again  
on the holy soil of Zion the Nation of Israel.*<sup>136</sup>

The beauty and history in this prayer expresses not only connection to the Land and State of Israel but places the State of Israel in the larger historical and religious contexts of the Jewish religion. It is with this in mind that Rabbi Heschel concludes his book by stating:

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<sup>136</sup> Jakob Petuchowski, Prayer Book Reform In Europe, (New York: The World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1968) 282.

The ultimate meaning of the State of Israel must be seen in terms of the vision of the prophets: the redemption of all men. The religious duty of the Jew is to participate in the process of continuous redemption, in seeing that justice prevails over power, that awareness of God penetrates human understanding.<sup>137</sup>

When we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut we recognize the answered prayers and hopes of two millennia. The celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut is not just a recognition of the events that took place in and around the 1948 War of Independence; it is a religious reminder of the covenantal responsibility to guard and protect the Land of Israel and to allow the prophetic message to ring forth for Israel and for all humanity. The Land of Israel is the spiritual center for the Jewish people. It is a physical sign of the relationship between God and the people Israel, and its holiness has increased throughout history as the Jewish people continue to fulfill God's promise and words on the Holy Land. From this the State of Israel provides for the safekeeping of the Jews and the Land so that redemption might one day come. While we continue to live lives of meaning and understanding and embrace the realities of the time, Yom Ha'atzmaut can remind us of the extraordinary age in which we are living and the need to elevate the religious significance of State of Israel so that we may fully serve God, the Jewish people and all humanity.

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<sup>137</sup> Heschel 225.



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