## Yom Ha-atzma'ut

**Our Expectations of the State of Israel**

**and the Extent of their Realization**

Based on a sicha by

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"Ascribed to the musician on the death of a son (*al mut la-ben*); a psalm unto David:…" (*Tehillim* 9:1)

"This song is meant for the time to come, when the youth and youthfulness of Israel will be made apparent (*yitlabben*), and their righteousness will be revealed, and their salvation advanced, so as to erase Amalek and his descendants; '*al(a)mut*' is meant here in the sense of 'youth'…." (Rashi, ad loc.)

Not only man grows old; nations also grow old. When the youth of Israel will be made manifest, it will be apparent that old age never had any hold on them; that there is hope for this great nation. The 5th of Iyar is the date of Israel's return to its youth, to its vitality, and the day when the nation knew how to take up arms. We thank God and praise Him for the "turning back of my enemies" (*Tehillim* 9:4); "God will be a stronghold for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble" (*Tehillim* 9:10). Only one who lived through the "oppression" and "trouble" knows what this means; not only the horrors of the Holocaust, but also the days preceding the 5th of Iyar.

Seemingly, David is already singing praise, "The enemy – it has come to an end, in perpetual ruin" (*Tehillim* 9:7), but nevertheless he pleads, "Be gracious to me, O Lord; see my affliction from those who hate me" (9:14). The issue of the relations between Israel and the nations of the world will not be resolved until "every animated thing knows that You have animated it." Until then we conduct a mighty battle with the nations of the world, especially surrounding the issue of Eretz Yisrael. The first war that ever took place in the world, according to Rabbi Yehuda ha-Levi in the *Kuzari*, was over Eretz Yisrael: Kayin and Hevel fought over the right to dwell in the land "that was before God."

This day has a dual character. On the one hand, there is remembrance of the past – "He has made a remembrance of His wondrous works" (*Tehillim* 111:4); the day has the status of a *yom tov*, a festival, and the festive meal that is held on this day has the status of a *se'udat mitzva*. But beyond this there is praise for "Your miracles which are with us every day"; for the existence of the State – its political, social, economic existence.

The Gemara records that "Rabbi Yossi said: Let my portion be with those who recite *Hallel* every day" (*Shabbat* 118b). But this cannot be right: *Hallel* was instituted for special occasions; its recital on a daily basis represents a diminishing of our praise to God; it is a form of blasphemy! The Gemara therefore explains that Rabbi Yossi was referring not to the actual *Hallel*, but rather to *pesukei de-zimra* (the section of the morning prayers that expresses praise to God). Why then did Rabbi Yossi mention "*Hallel*" rather than "*pesukei de-zimra*"?

By rights, a person should truly recite *Hallel* every single day "for Your miracles that are with us every day." However, as the Meiri explains, if we were indeed to recite it daily, the prayer would no longer make its special impression on us. Nevertheless, every individual – and certainly the state as a whole – must know that we are obligated to thank and praise God every single day.

Our thanks extend further with every new house that is built – "Walk about Zion and go around about her; count her towers" (*Tehillim* 48:13). The story is told of Rabbi Sonnenfeld *zt"l* who used to walk about Jerusalem, counting every new building that was constructed. We must give thanks for every additional home, and certainly for every new synagogue and *beit midrash*.

Several decades have passed since the establishment of the State. Let us look back at the expectations that that time, and examine what we have achieved.

There were three expectations in 1948: one on the part of religious Jewry; the second, on the part of those among us who do not maintain our tradition, along with the righteous gentiles of the world; and the third – on the part of those who hate us.

Religious Jews hoped for greatness; the expectation was that along with the physical redemption there would come a spiritual one – "And I shall sprinkle upon you purifying waters, and you will be purified" (*Yechezkel* 36:25). In this realm there is great disappointment; progress is very slow, and often there is no visible progress at all. "My Beloved is like a deer" (*Shir Ha-shirim* 2:9) – as the deer bounds over the hills, it is sometimes visible and at other times obscured.

The expectation of the Zionist movement, along with the righteous of the nations of the world, was that the State of Israel would lead to a state of normalization for the Jews of the world. They believed that this would solve the problem of anti-Semitism and hatred of Jews. This hope animated even the most positively-inclined of the nations, and they came to help the Jews to become a normal nation. They, too, have been disappointed: anti-Semitism continues to exist, and the existence of the State of Israel has perhaps even intensified it.

As for Israel's enemies, they never imagined that the country would survive for this long; at most they gave it a few years.

The question that should occupy us is whether the State of Israel is an act of God or a human creation.

The Midrash Rabba interprets the verse, "You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies" (*Tehillim* 23:5), as a reference to the nations of the world, who predicted that once we left Egypt, we would die out in the wilderness. "In the presence of my enemies" – who did not believe that our freedom would persist, and that the State would survive.

For many years, Christianity refused to recognize the State of Israel. They understand that "it is not by their sword that they inherit the land… but [You, God] have accepted them with favor." If Israel were a secular country, a mere political entity, they would have no problem accepting us, but they perceive the religious significance of the State of Israel, "for Sovereignty belongs to You." *Chazal* teach, concerning the verse, "The Lord reigns; let the nations tremble" (*Tehillim* 99:1), that when the nations saw that the Children of Israel had entered the land, they trembled. When the Jews return to their land, this means that "the Lord reigns" – and this is something that the nations understand. They remind us of our unique nature, "This people I have created for Myself" (*Yishayahu* 43:21), for "You have chosen us from all the nations." Only this gives us hope and security, "for Sovereignty is Yours, and You shall reign in splendor forever."

We should not take too much notice of those who speak about a "secular state" and have no idea why they are living in Israel. We should also not worry ourselves too much with the *tzaddikim* who fail to see God's hand in all of this, as the Gemara teaches:

"'Who has despised the day of small things?' (*Zekharia* 4:10) – What caused the righteous to have their table for the Time to Come diminished? It was their own smallness, in not believing in God." (*Sota* 48b)

The establishment of the state was for the purpose of sanctifying God's Name. "It is not for your sakes that I act…."

We pray, "Praise God, all the nations" (*Tehillim* 117:1) – but we know that there is still a long road to travel. While we do say, "All nations shall call you blessed, for you shall be a land of delight" (*Malakhi* 3:12), the condition for this is that we are first a "land of delight" in our own midst. This is not something that is measured in laws passed by the Knesset, not even if all the laws of the *Shulchan Arukh* were passed as law. It is measured by the people, and what is going on amongst them. As for our enemies, whose expectations were not realized – thank God.

Concerning the second expectation, by those seeking normalization for *Am Yisrael*, this is impossible; we are " a nation that dwells alone." *Am Yisrael* is different; "their youth becomes apparent." The historical laws that apply to us are different. The State of Israel has religious significance, "for sovereignty belongs to You" – this is Jewish sovereignty. *Am Yisrael*, according to *Chazal*, is either like "the dust of the earth" or like "the stars of the heavens." Neither the lowly dust nor the exalted stars represent a normal situation.

As to the disappointment felt by religious Jewry: we had hoped to approach redemption with great strides, but we did not merit this. There was another period in history when the redemption was eagerly awaited. Rabbi Yehuda ha-Levi, in the *Kuzari*, writes that all the prophecies of Yishayahu were meant to be fulfilled in the Second Temple, but they were not, because the people did not return willingly and gladly to the land; most remained under foreign sovereignty, unwilling to leave their homes. "Open for Me, My sister" – on the 5th of Iyar, 5708, the gates were opened… this is certainly something to think about, and a possible response to our disappointment.

It may be that there is another answer, too. *Chazal* teach that God sought to make King Chizkiyahu the Messiah, but in the end he was not the Messiah because he did not praise God. Perhaps we were not appropriately grateful and did not express our thanks and praise to God as we should have, for all that He did for us.

*Chazal* teach, "But the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive" (*Devarim* 29:3) – a person does not fully understand his teacher's thought until the age of forty. Perhaps now that we have passed our fortieth year, we will understand the thinking of our Teacher, the Holy One, blessed be He, and perceive what He wanted of us at the time of the establishment of the State. Then we will merit for God to pour a spirit upon us from on High, as Rabbi Yehuda ha-Levi said: "As I emerged in Your direction, I found You emerging towards me."

(This sicha was delivered on Yom Ha-atzma’ut 5747 [1987].)