The Fifth of Iyar

Many questioned the Rabbanut’s decision to establish the fifth of Iyar as Yom HaAtzmaut, thinking it would be more appropriate to celebrate the day that the Milchemet HaShichur, the War of Independence, was won.

The answer to this question is based on the Gemara in Megillah (17b) that makes the following observation in reference to atchalta deGeula: "War is also considered the beginning of the redemption." Rashi explains that this refers to wars between Jews and non-Jews. Presumably, it is the final war relating to control over Eretz Yisrael that will take place close to the time of the arrival of Mashiach.

It would seem obvious that the War of Independence, which broke out immediately after hakamat haMedina, is the war the Gemara was referring to. Indeed, the fact that the outbreak of the war and the declaration of independence occurred simultaneously serves as a sign that the hakamat haMedina itself was truly an atchalta deGeula. If a Jewish government is established and this leads to the outbreak of war with enemies of the Jewish nation, it is the beginning of the war that is the atchalta deGeula.

In 1948, when the Medina was established, the fifth of Iyar was a Friday and the British Mandate was to conclude at midnight. Therefore, legally, it was only possible to establish the Medina on Shabbat, the sixth of Iyar. Because some of those who signed the Declaration of Independence were shomer Shabbat, they signed the statement of hakamat haMedina on Friday, the fifth of Iyar, although the documents became legally binding only on the sixth.

At that time, one of the tzaddikim of Yerushalayim, Rav Ya’akov Moshe Charlap, was dancing from joy, exclaiming that he finally understood why these dates are alluded to in the sefer Kol HaTor. This sefer, the theme of which is the concept of Mashiach ben Yosef, was written by one of the talmidim of the Vilna Gaon, Rav Eliyahu Hillel of Shklov. Although Mashiach ben Yosef is mentioned in only one place in Shas, the idea is discussed at length in the Zohar. In fact, the Vilna Gaon is quoted as having said that the insights he developed on the concept of Mashiach ben Yosef were his most important contributions in Torah.

The sefer singles out the 20th day of Sefira as being very important in the process of the final Geula, referring to it as "yesod shebeTiferet derech malchut." The sefer reports that in 1812 (תקע"ב), on the 20th day of the Omer, known as yesod shebeTiferet, the Gra’s students laid the foundation of “Beit Medrash Eliyahu” in Yerushalayim. It appeared to them that this re-establishment of the yishuv in Yerushalayim was the first step in the removal of the “iron partition” that had been present since the churban haBayit. Now Rav Charlap understood how these two days mentioned in the Kol HaTor represented a major step towards the Geula — the fifth of Iyar corresponds to the 20th day of Sefira, yesod shebeTiferet, and the sixth of Iyar to malchut shebeTiferet.

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

1 Sanhedrin 97a, s.v. milchamos.
2 See Beikvi HaTzon, pp. 220-221; The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society XVI, pp. 81-95.
3 5:1; also see 2:2.
4 Sukkah 52a.

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