



Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut

The Rav's Official Position

In my forthcoming book, *ויהי בנסוע הארון – Seventy Conversations with HaGaon HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l*, (Urim Publications and OU Press), I deal with 70 conversations I held with the Rav during my 1974-76 tenure as the Rav’s chauffeur in New York City. In the following excerpt of this edited conversation, it appears that the Rav did, indeed, entertain an official position on the question of Hallel for Israel’s Independence Day.

The position of HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l (popularly known as “The Rav”) regarding the recitation of Hallel on Israel’s Independence Day is somewhat ambivalent. Many have claimed to have witnessed the Rav do this or that (full Hallel, half Hallel, before Kaddish, after Kaddish, etc...).¹ Some have suggested that this ambivalence demonstrated a less-than-enthusiastic attitude towards the State itself.²

During the mid-1970s, Rabbi Louis Bernstein’s doctoral dissertation was accepted by the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University.³ This academic work dealt with the impact of the Rabbinical Council of America [RCA] on the formation of modern Orthodoxy in America.⁴

This dissertation contained an appendix with eight printed halachic responsa from the Rav (as Chairman of the Halacha Commission) to the Executive Director and officers of the

RCA. They were all questions dealing with public policy on the part of the RCA. One question, dated in the early 1950’s, sought the Rav’s opinion regarding the reaction and proper procedures of the RCA towards Israel’s Independence Day. Specifically, should Hallel be recited or not? The Rav’s extremely brief four-Hebrew-word response was: “They said and they said” (הם אמרו והם אמרו).

In conversation, I asked the Rav what he meant by using this Talmudic phrase.⁵ The Rav responded that he had nothing to do with the establishment of Israel’s Independence Day. It was the Chief Rabbinate of Israel that instituted the saying of Hallel that day. Therefore, הם אמרו – they said there should be a holiday, so הם אמרו – they have the authority to say what should be done or said on that day. The Rav explained that this was not a private halachic inquiry, but rather one of public nature. As a question as such emanated from Israel, the Chief Rabbinate must serve as the resident Rabbinic authority (מרא דאתרא) in this case.⁶

In his “Davening with the Rav,” 2006, p. 115, Rabbi Mendi Gopin reports on the Rav’s customs in Boston’s Maimonides School *Minyan*: “On Yom HaAtzmaut to recite the whole Hallel without a beracha, and on Yom Yerushalayim to recite whole Hallel with a beracha at the beginning and the end.” This is completely in line with the Rav’s directives to the Rabbinical Council of America from the 1950’s.

- 1 For a full overview, see Rabbi Shmuel Katz, *The Chief Rabbinate of Israel – 70 years since its Foundation*, 2002, Vol. 2, (Hebrew), pp 950-1, Notes 153-6. See also Rabbi Hershel Schachter, *Divrei HaRav*, 2010, pp 175-6.
- 2 Negating this point vehemently, see Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, “The Relationship of the Gaon Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik to Zionism,” (Hebrew) in 2012, חמש דרשות, In his *Thinking Aloud* (2009), p. 199, Rabbi David Holzer (the Rav’s driver of the late 1970’s) published a 1978 un-edited convoluted open conversation on the Rav’s various opinions regarding Yom HaAtzmaut practices.
- 3 In 1976, Rabbi Bernstein, the veteran Rabbi, educator, and Jewish leader, was elected to the Presidency of the Religious Zionists of America - Mizrahi.
- 4 The published book version, *Challenge and Mission: the Emergence of the English-speaking Orthodox Rabbinate*, appeared in 1982.
- 5 In Talmudic terms, the phrase, הם אמרו והם אמרו, means that the Sages who ordained a restriction also had the authority to relax this restriction in specific cases. See, for example, Mishnah Yoma 8:1 and Tosafot Yom Tov et al.
- 6 In conversation with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, I was told that the Rav did not grant the Israeli Chief Rabbinate מרא דאתרא status on all subjects. But he did agree that on questions regarding Hallel on Israel’s Independence Day, the Chief Rabbinate did serve in this function. So, too, regarding the Rav’s opinion on the personal status of the Ethiopian Jewish community immigrating to Israel in the 1980’s, the Rav opined that the RCA should follow the instructions of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

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