



## HALACHIC HOLIDAYS?

Following the miraculous birth of the State of Israel in 1948 and the dramatic unification of Yerushalayim in 1967, the Chief Rabbinate, together with leading authorities, established Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim as full-fledged festivals, with the recitation of special *tefillot*, including *Hallel*.

The question, debated by many, was: is it permissible to add new holidays to the Jewish calendar? According to the Ramban, creating a new Jewish holiday violates the prohibition of *bal tosif*, “adding” to the *mitzvot* of the Torah (See Ramban to Devarim 4:2). But throughout Jewish history, both communities and individuals who experienced a miraculous salvation established ‘Purims,’ festivals to be celebrated like Purim, in commemoration of the miracle.

In the 16th century, the Jewish community of Lepanto (today Nafpaktos, Greece), established a holiday to give thanks to G-d for sparing them from imminent destruction and to publicize the miracle. Members of the community asked Rabbi Moshe Alashkar if they were justified in creating such a holiday, like Purim, to celebrate this miraculous salvation. The Maharam Alashkar ruled that indeed community leaders have the authority to establish such a day, and it is binding upon members of the community – present and future – no matter where they reside (Teshuvot Maharam Alashkar, 49).

The Pri Chadash, Rabbi Chizkiyah da Silva, was upset with this practice, and based his objection on *Megillat Ta’anit*, a list of 35 holidays observed during the Second Temple Period. He

cites a passage in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 18b), which relates that following the destruction of the Temple, *Megillat Ta’anit*, together with all of the holidays it describes, became null and void. Accordingly, he rules that neither a community nor an individual has the authority to declare new holidays today (Pri Chadash, OC 496:14).

The Chatam Sofer defended the practice of instituting new holidays, arguing that even according to the opinion that *Megillat Ta’anit* is null and void, the holidays of Chanukah and Purim were never nullified. Accordingly, holidays created to commemorate a miraculous salvation, patterned after Chanukah and Purim, are indeed permissible. He concludes by noting how he and his teacher, Rabbi Natan Adler, were careful to observe ‘Purim Frankfurt,’ even when no longer living in Frankfurt (Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, OC 191). ‘Purim Frankfurt,’ also known as ‘Purim Vinz,’ celebrates the downfall of the wicked Vincenz Fettmilch who led a populist uprising and a pogrom against the Jews of Frankfurt am Main in 1614, forcing them to flee the city until the emperor personally intervened. Even today, the Jewish community of Frankfurt celebrates the 20th of Adar, the day when Fettmilch and his followers were hanged and the Jews returned to their homes. Elsewhere, the Chatam Sofer writes that establishing a holiday to mark a miraculous event is a Biblical requirement, and one who does not do so is in violation of not performing a positive commandment (Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, YD 233).

The Magen Avraham (OC 686:5) and Mishnah Berurah (OC 686:8) both record that a community can create a

‘Purim,’ for themselves and for future generations, on a day in which they experienced a miracle. Rabbi Avraham Danziger himself celebrated the day and his family were spared after a powder keg explosion destroyed a number of homes including his own, claiming the lives of 31 people (Chayei Adam 155:41). Over the centuries, tens of communities and families have established ‘Purims,’ sometimes with the recitation of special prayers, meals, and sometimes even reading from a special Megillah, written to commemorate the event. (For an exhaustive list, see Yom Tov Levinski, “Purim Sheni,” published in his Sefer HaMoadim, vol. 6, pp. 297-321).

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 94a) relates that King Chizkiyahu could have been made the Messiah but for the fact that he failed to give praise upon the downfall of the wicked Sancherev, King of Assyria. Chizkiyahu failed to give this profound experience religious expression. We dare not make the same mistake.

Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim possess profound religious significance and meaning. These are days of great Divine Providence – miracles and wonders – and deserve religious expression. By celebrating Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim as holidays, we express our thanks for the tremendous gifts of the State of Israel and Yerushalayim.

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