

God, History and Birchat Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut

R. Mois Navon

Beit HaKenneset HaSefaradi BeRimon – Parashat Emor / Yom HaAtzmaut 5779

Question: On what basis do you believe in a God? (על סמך מה אתה מאמין באלוקים)

Now, of course I realize that, as Blaise Pascal (1670) famously said: “The heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing.” (ללב סיבות משלו). And so I understand that you believe in God; but nevertheless, as we learn in Pirke Avot (2:19), “Know what to answer a heretic” which can be “the heretic in you as well as in others. So, if you had to point to some rational justification for your belief, what would it be? To address this question, a friend of mine wrote a book called “Permission to Believe” (רשות להאמין) in which he discusses 4 different reasons:

- Absolute Morality – there can be none without a Creator;
- Cosmological – the big bang supports the notion of Creation, as the world started from nothing.
- Teleological – The argument from design: the world looks like it was designed and thus it has a designer.
- Jewish History

It is with this last claim that we can approach an interesting halachic dispute regarding Yom HaAtzmaut. True, Yom HaAtzmaut was yesterday and celebrated two days ago; but Yom HaAtzmaut is really relevant all year round because it says everything about how we look at this country we live every day of the year.

The issue I would like to discuss regard Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut. Now, there are actually many issues regarding the recital of Hallel of Yom HaAtzmaut:

- Hallel: Yes or No?
- Full Hallel or Half-Hallel?¹
- Hiyuv D'oraita or D'Rabanan?²
- Hallel at night and day or day only?³

¹ “Modern poskim differ on whether and what type of Hallel should be recited on days of national celebration for recent miracles such as Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day). According to Rav Ovadia Yosef, a miracle only qualifies for whole Hallel with a blessing if the entire Jewish nation, as opposed to a community, was saved thereby. According to Rav Ovadia, Yom Ha'Atzmaut would not qualify because it was the Jewish community in Israel and not outside Israel whose lives were threatened by the Arab onslaught. In addition, writes Rav Yosef, the Israel War of Independence was won at the cost of many casualties.” <https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/halacha-hashkafa/whole-hallel-half-hallel-no-hallel/2019/05/09/>

“Rav Soloveitchik (quoted by Rav Schachter in Nefesh HaRav p. 96) held that one should only say half Hallel without Brachot. Sh"t Yabia Omer 6:41-2 writes that one shouldn't make a Bracha on Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut. Yalkut Yosef 218:1 codifies this.”

https://www.halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Yom_HaAtzmaut#cite_note-3

² “The Rambam (Hilkhos Megilla Ve-CHANUKA 3:6) writes that the recitation of Hallel on the festivals and on Chanuka is only a mitzva mi-derabanan. The Ramban (Sefer Ha-mitzvot, shorsh 1), however, disagrees. He writes that Hallel on the festivals is either a halakha le-Moshe mi-Sinai or included in the fulfillment of the biblical obligation of simcha (rejoicing) on the festival. The Ra'avad (Rambam, ibid.) describes the obligation to recite Hallel as “mi-divrei kaballa” – from the prophets.”

<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/celebrating-yom-ha-atzmaut-and-yom-yerushalayim>

³ https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/05-04-08/#_ze01fenref4_8

I do not wish to deal with any of these issues, but rather the one “simple” question: do we say Hallel with a bracha or not?⁴

There are numerous big thinkers on both sides of the issue. Those that hold we should say Hallel WITHOUT a BRACHA refer to various things lacking:

- 1) Hallel is said with a blessing only when ALL of Israel experiences a miracle (Chida); and when we declared independence only a minority of world Jewry lived in Eretz Yisrael.
- 2) We should give thanks only for a complete salvation; and our enemies still threaten us on all sides.

Side note: there are a few other issues brought:

- 3) The spiritual state of the country's leaders and many of its citizens [diminishes our joy].
- 4) It is proper to show deference to the opinion that holds that Hallel should be said only when a REVEALED miracle occurs, like the miracle of the Menorah, whilst the establishment of the State was a NATURAL miracle.
- 5) It is unclear whether the day of thanksgiving should be set for the day we declared independence [the 5th of Iyar], the day the War of Independence ended, or the day the United Nations decided to establish a Jewish State, which was the sixteenth of Kislev (Nov. 29).

Among the voices that hold this position of Hallel WITHOUT a BRACHA:

- **Rabbi Ovadyah Hadayah** (Yaskil Avdi, vol. 6, O.C. 10) - Hallel **without a blessing**. Hallel should be said only over a miracle that happened to Klal Yisrael, adding that the salvation [of 1948] was not complete.
- **Rabbi Ovadyah Yosef** (Yabi'a Omer, vol. 6, O.C. 41) Hallel **without a blessing**, because the miracle did not happen to all of Klal Yisrael and because we still have a long way
- **Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli**, holds that one should recite the Hallel **without a blessing**.
- **Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu** holds that one should recite the Hallel **without a blessing**.

A slightly accommodating opinion is that of:

- **Rabbi Avraham Shapiro** holds that one should recite the Hallel **without a blessing**, but holds that one who wants to recite the blessing, in accordance with his custom, is permitted to do so (cited in Sefer HaRabbanut HaRashit, vol. 2, pp. 901-903)

Among the voices that hold we should say Hallel WITH a BRACHA

- **Rabbi Meshulam Roth**, Hallel **with a blessing**. He writes: “The leaders who chose this day in particular were correct, for that was when the main miracle occurred, when we went from bondage to freedom by declaring independence. Had we postponed this declaration for a different day, we would have missed the opportunity and we would not have attained the recognition and consent of the world's major powers, as is well known. This miracle also brought in its wake the second miracle: being saved from death to life, both in terms of our war against the Arabs in Eretz Yisrael and the salvation of the Diaspora Jews, who immigrated to the Land. This led to the third miracle: the ingathering of the exiles.” He holds we say Hallel **with a blessing** since the miracle actually did happen to Klal Yisrael. Thus, even the Chida

⁴ See R. Melamed for most of the material following: <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/05-04-07/>

would agree. Furthermore, the residents of Eretz Yisrael are considered the entirety of Israel.

- **Rabbi Goren** and **Rabbi Gershuni** explain like R. M. Roth (Hilchot Yom HaAtzmaut VeYom Yerushalayim).
- **Rabbi Yosef Mashash** (Otzar HaMichtavim 3:1769) holds that one should recite the full Hallel **with a blessing**. Rabbi Shalom Mashash felt that one should recite the blessing, but when he heard Rabbi Ovadyah Yosef's opinion, he ruled that one who already has a custom to say the blessing should continue to do so, while one who does not have such a custom should **refrain from reciting** the blessing (Shemesh U'Magen 3:63, 66)
- **Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah HaKohen Kook** (L'Netivot Yisrael, vol. 1, pp. 248-49) says that the courage displayed in declaring the State was miraculous, in and of itself; see Bava Metzia 106a, with Tosafot. Should say Hallel **with a blessing but**, since the Rabbanut HaRashit poskined against saying a bracha AND given that Mercaz Harav is a national icon, Rav Tzvi Yehuda decided to tow the party line. That is, for individuals or less central/iconic organizations/yeshivot/shuls – they could do as their heart dictated.

"בישיבתנו המרכזית נהגנו כפסק הרבנות כי אין אנו קלויז של חוג מיוחד - שייכים אנו לענייניו של כלל ישראל המרוכז בירושלים, ומכיון שבכללו של הציבור יש לעת עתה, לצערנו, ולבושתנו, עיכובים בשלמות האמונה והשמחה, ומתוך כך - בחיוב הברכה, נכון הוא שנהג אף אנו כהוראת הרבנות הראשית לכלל כולו"⁵

However, when the Chief Rabbinate (1974), after the events of 1967 and 1973 (which was a victory despite the tragic losses), Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren and the head of the Rabbinate decided, by majority vote, to say full Hallel **with a blessing**, HaRav Tzvi Yehudah HaKohen Kook said to recite Hallel **with a blessing**.

Now, while I am certainly not going to decide between these giants, permit me to conclude on a personal note. And that is, that personally, without the State of Israel, I doubt I would be religious, all the more so that I would not be a Rabbi. But ask yourselves the same question: Where would you be without the state of Israel? Where do you think the Jewish people would be after the holocaust? For me, there is no greater testament to the living God than this modern State of Israel. The State of Israel is the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. That we have returned to our land after millennia of antisemitism, that we have survived and succeeded as a nation is beyond nature, is above history. For me there is no greater day than Yom HaAtzmaut – it is the day to acknowledge that there is a God, it is the day to rejoice in the presence of God, of God in History, of God in our everyday existence here in this ongoing miracle called the State of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Atzmaut Samayach.

⁵ <http://meyda.education.gov.il/files/hemed/arv1.pdf>