

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES 3: 25 - THE PRAYER FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL OU ISRAEL/BEIT KENESSET HANASI - SPRING 2025

• As we saw in the previous shiur, prayer for the non-Jewish government of the land is an ancient Jewish custom with roots even in Tanach. Not only is it recommended but, according to some commentators, it is halachically required. In this shiur we will look at the origins of the Prayer for the State of Israel

A] THE PRAYER FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL - HISTORY AND ORIGINS

• Shortly¹ after the State was declared in May 1948, many rabbinic leaders composed special prayers for the State to be read in their shuls on Shabbat. R. Issur Yehuda Unterman (then Rav of Tel-Aviv) composed a special Mi Sheberach. Rav Reuven Katz in Petach Tikva also composed a prayer based heavily on the 'Hanoten Teshua' model of previous prayers².

• Some Rabbanim were very against the continued use of the formula based on 'HaNoten Teshua', including R. Yosef Kapach who writes explicitly³ that it was composed in order to hint through the use of various verses at actually cursing the non-Jewish government.

• On 16 Elul 5708 (Sept 20 1948) the new Prayer for the State of Israel was announced in the HaTzofeh newspaper in the form we have it now.



תפילה לשלום מדינת ישראל - הצפה, 20/09/1948

תפילה לשלום מדינת ישראל

מור את כל דברי תורתך.
היפך בהדר גאון עוון על כל יושבי
חבל ארצך, ויאמר כל אשר נשמה
באפו ה' אלוהי ישראל מלך ומלכותו
בכל משלה, אמן סלה.

כדאי לציין, שעל פי הזמנת הרב הראשי
הגרי"א הלוי ירצוג והגר"צ עזריאל בהסכ
מת חברי המועצה וראשי הרבנים של תל-
אביב, חיפה ופתח תקווה שליט"א יסדו ותיקנו
את התפילה שלהלן להתאמר בכל בתי הכנסת
בארץ ובתפוצות ע"י הרב או י"י הש"ץ, בשר
בתות ובמועדים, אחרי קריאת התורה.

מרגן ורבנן הרבנים הראשיים לארץ ישראל
הגרי"א הלוי ירצוג והגר"צ עזריאל בהסכ
מת חברי המועצה וראשי הרבנים של תל-
אביב, חיפה ופתח תקווה שליט"א יסדו ותיקנו
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בתות ובמועדים, אחרי קריאת התורה.

„אבינו שבשמים צור ישראל וגואלו,
ברך את מדינת ישראל, ראשית צמי
חת גאולתנו, הגן עליה באברת חסדך
ופרוס עליה סוכת שלומך, ושלח אורך
ואמתך לראשיה, שריה ויועציה ות-
קנת בעצה טובה מלפניך.

חזק את ידי מגיני ארץ קדשנו והנ-
חילנו אלקינו ישועה ועזרת נצחון
תעטרנו, ונתת שלום בארץ ושמחת
עולה ליושביה.

ואת אחינו כל בית ישראל פקדינא
בכל ארצות פזויהם ותוליהם. מהרה
קוממיות לציון עירך ולירושלים משכן
שמן, ככתוב בתורת משה עבדך, אם
יהי נדחך בקצה השמים משם יקבצך
ה' אלקיך ומשם יקחך והביאך אל הא-
רץ אשר ירשו אבותיך וירשתה, ויחד
לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך ולש-

המועצה הארצית של בני עקיבא
תתכנס אי"ה היום ב"ד אה"צ באולס
הישיבות של הפועל המזרחי, תל-אביב.
בסדר היום: א) דו"ח על מפעלי הקיץ;
ב) העבודה החנוכית בארגון — הרצאה ודיון.
ג) סקירה על התנועה בגולה ע"י מרדכי
לאובר.

לישיבה מזמנים חברי המועצה, באי"ח
הסניפים ומדריכים בוגרים.

כנס המורים שיצאו בשליחות לגולה
עם שוב המורים משליחותם החינוכית א-
המחנות באירופה לארץ יקיים מרכז המורים
בחול הכוועד סוכות כנס כללי של המורים
השליחים.

1. There are a number of excellent articles on the origins and development of the Prayer for the State of Israel. See in particular:

ג סג, 75-91 "ניסן תשפ 245 ראשית דרכה של התפילה לשלום המדינה, אוריאל פרנק, המעין גיליון

2. Rav Herzog actually visited Petach Tikva in 1954 and was surprised to find that this other prayer - based on a format used for the non-Jewish government - was still being used when the Rabbanut had issued instructions to use the new one.

3. Tarbitz 26 (1957) p. 199. See Frank fn 5.

The announcement begins and ends with the following statements:

1. מרנן ורבנן הרבנים הראשיים לארץ ישראל הגרי"א הלוי הרצוג והגר"צ עוזיאל בהסכמת חברי המועצה וראשי הרבנים של תל אביב, חיפה ופתח תקווה שליט"א יסדו ותיקנו את התפילה שלהלן להאמר בכל בתי הכנסת בארץ ובתפוצות ע"י הרב או ע"י הש"ץ, בשבתות ובמועדים אחרי קריאת התורה. אבינו שבשמים כדאי לציין, שעל פי הזמנת הרב הראשי הגרי"א הרצוג השתתף הסופר ש"י עגנון אף הוא בניסוח התפילה.

הצופה ט"ו אלול תש"ח

The prayer is said to have been composed by Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Rav Herzog and approved by Rav Benzion Uziel (Sefardic Chief Rabbi), the Moetzet HaRabbanut HaRashit, and the chief rabbis of Tel Aviv, Haifa and Petach Tikva.⁴

• This statement has led to much speculation as to which parts of the prayer were written by Rav Herzog and which by Shai Agnon⁵! R. Herzog's secretary, R. Yaakov Goldman notes in his memoirs:

2. עליתי יום אחד להרב הרצוג זצ"ל ומצאתי נרגז. הוא סיפר לי כי מבקשים ממנו לחבר תפילה למדינה במשך ימים אחדים, שכן בעוד ימים ספורים יתקיים טכס לאומי חשוב ורוצים להתפלל תפילת המדינה. אמר לי הרב 'איני רגיל בכאלה, לחבר תפילות ... ומה עוד בזמן קצר!' רציתי להרגיע את הרב ועל כן אמרתי לו, אין הדבר נורא. תחבר תפילה במיטב יכולתך ואני אביא את הנוסח לפני מר עגנון שישם עינו עליו ויעיר את הערותיו ... הרב הסכים להצעתי בשמחה, ומיד ישב וכתב התפילה.

Reishit Darcha, Ariel Frank fn 11 quoting Rappel

In August 1948, with the War of Independence raging, Rav Herzog was asked to compose a tefilla for the State of Israel at very short notice for an important national ceremony. On hearing the Rav's frustration at this pressure, his secretary suggested that Rav Herzog make a first draft and then send it to Shmuel Yosef 'Shai' Agnon to work on its poetry.

• A letter was indeed sent to Agnon by the Chief Rabbi on Aug 30 1948 which reads as follows:-

3. ב'ה כ'ה אב תש"ח. לידינ' רש"י הלוי עגנון, ה"ו, שלום עד העולם.
מכמה מקומות בתפוצות פונים אלי בדרישה לתקן תפילה במקום 'הנותן תשועה'.
אחינו שבגולה נותנים עיניהם בי ואני נותן עיני בד', כי עמד השירה והסגנון ואתה ירא את ה' מנעורך וכשר והגון לתקן תפילה. מכל מקום אני שולח לך נוסחא קצרה שתקנתי, בתור 'קרבן קפיצה' או מִצָּע.
בתודה רבה ובברכת כט"ס, מוקירך כערכך הנשגב, ידידך י"א הלוי הרצוג.

מכתב מרב הרצוג לרש"י עגנון, כ'ה אב תש"ח

Rav Herzog writes to Agnon in the warmest possible terms asking for his poetic input in the 'short nusach' that he had created as a basis or 'spring board'. Interestingly he stresses that he is writing as one Levi to another!

4. ש"ץ צריך שיהיה הגון. ואיזהו הגון שיהא ריקן מעבירות ושלא יצא עליו שם רע אפילו בילדותו

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות ברכות ושאר ברכות סימן נג סעיף ד'

Rav Herzog is also echoing the wording of the Shulchan Aruch concerning who is an appropriate Shaliach Tzibbur - someone who is God-fearing and has a good name, even from his youth. Agnon is being addressed in this manner.

• Agnon's response has survived and it takes the form that is virtually the same as the tefilla we have today. There are two small alternative wording suggestions⁷, although the important initial wording is already:

אבינו שבשמים, צור ישראל וגואלו, בך את מדינת ישראל, ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו

• However, it is not at all clear what was the wording of Rav Herzog's 'short nusach' that he sent to Agnon. In fact, Dr. Rappel uncovered two handwritten versions of the prayer - one in Agnon's hand (left) and another in Rav Herzog's. These were virtually identical, leading Rappel to suggest that Rav Herzog's handwritten version was the one he sent to Agnon who, ultimately, made very few changes.

4. Although the Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim, R. Tzvi Pesach Frank, is not personally mentioned, he was included in the Moetzet HaRabbanut HaGedola and later explicitly confirmed that he had approved the wording.

5. Rav Herzog was generally considered the author until a 1983 article in Ma'ariv in which David Tamar raised the possibility of Agnon's authorship. However, research and findings by Dr Yoel Rappel, and corroborated by the National Library of Israel in 2018, confirmed Herzog's authorship but also that Agnon had edited the draft. Rappel's doctoral thesis was *The Convergence of Politics and Prayer: Jewish Prayers for the Government and the State of Israel*, Boston University, 2008. This was later published in Hebrew and English as a book - *Politics and Prayer - Jewish Prayers for the Government and State of Israel*.

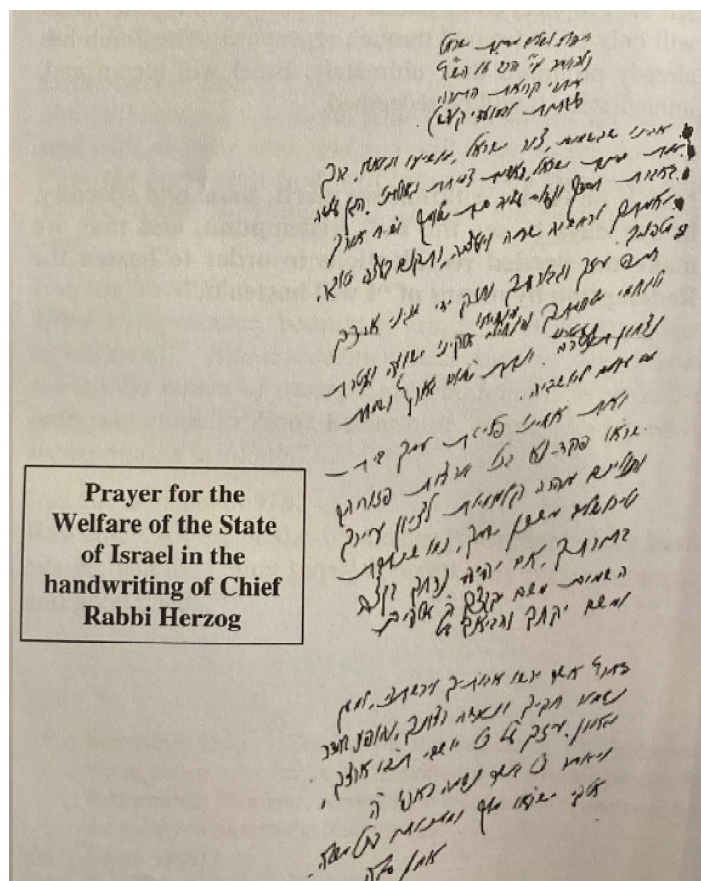
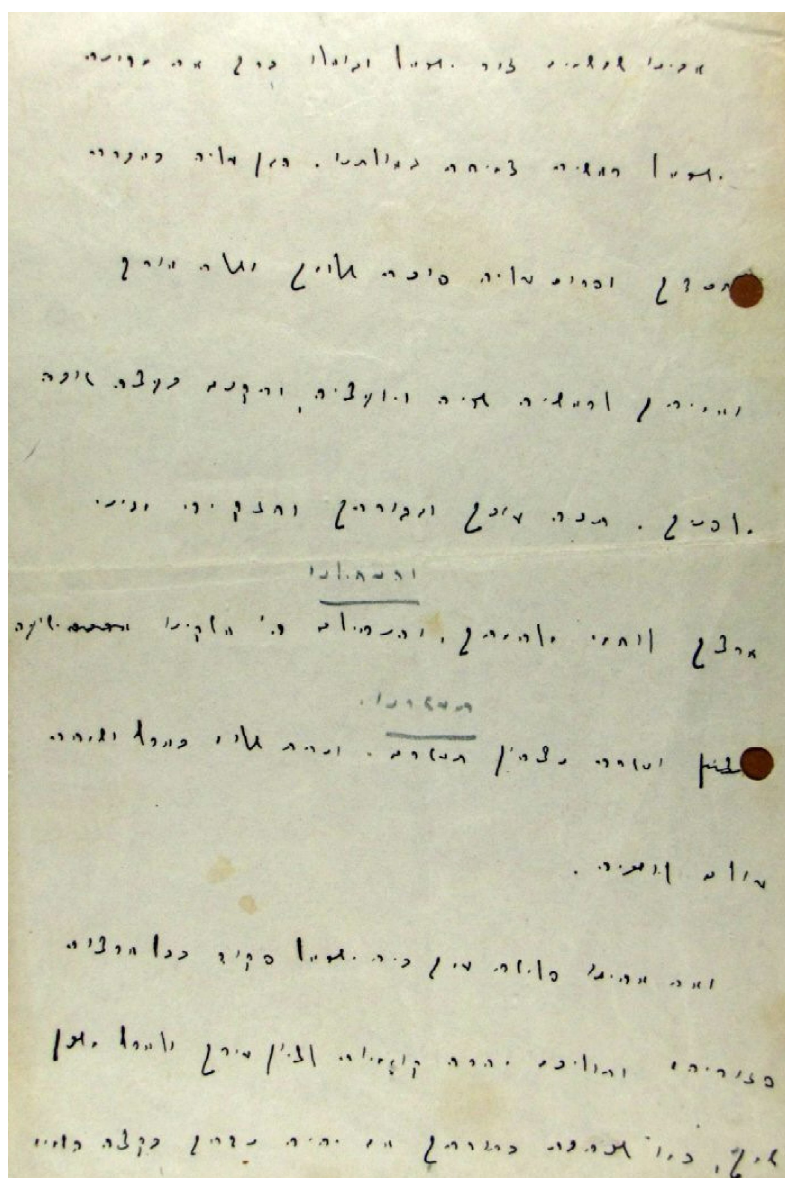
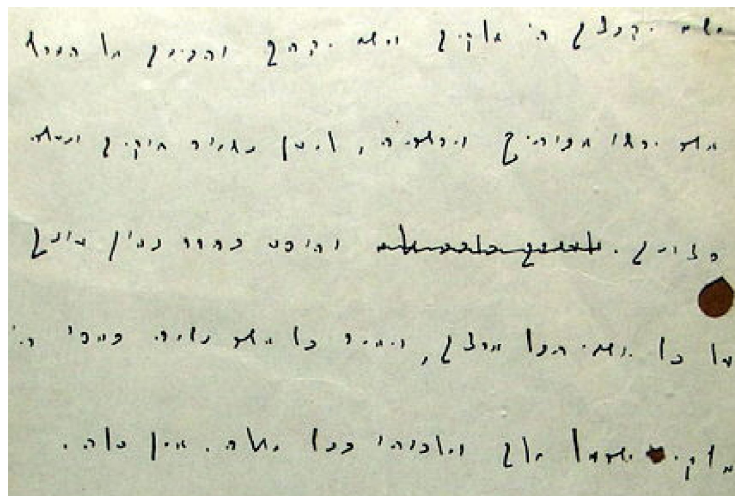
6. Compare the similar wording relating to Choni HaMa'agal in Ta'anit 22b.

7. It has been suggested that this change is based on the different perspectives of Jews in Israel and chu"l.

- The most important change is in the opening of the prayer which, according to Herzog's original read:

אבינו שבשמים, צור ישראל מושיענו וגואלו, ברוך את

- One problem with this interpretation of events is that Rav Herzog's initial draft is hardly a 'short nusach' designed as a basis for development; it is virtually the final version! Also, it is not clear why Agnon would have written out the whole tefilla again and inserted his suggested changes. Why not simply write them in the margins of Herzog's draft?



- Other scholars⁸ have suggested that, in fact, Agnon produced most of the wording and the version handwritten by Rav Herzog was in fact copied later from Agnon's wording!

5.

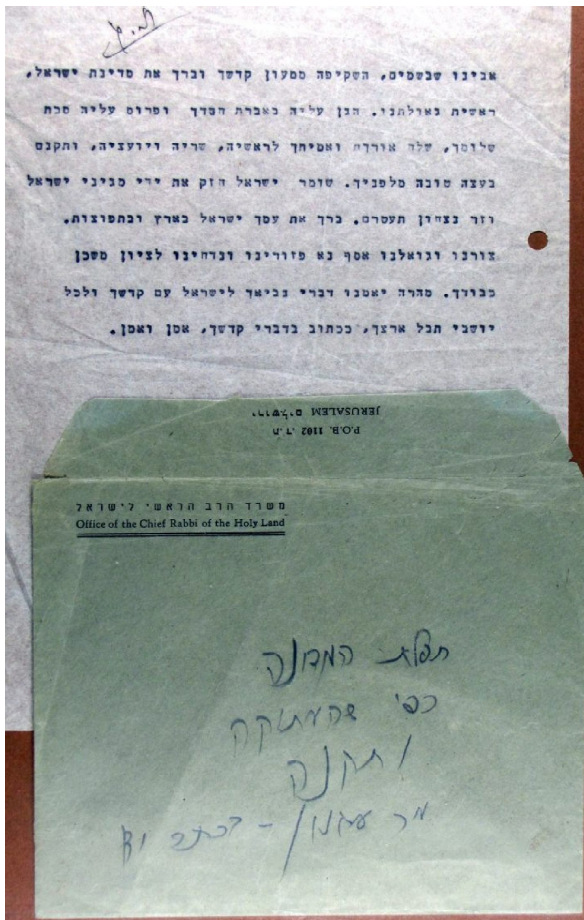
את עצמו מחברה. (ואעיד בזה כי בבואי לפני הרב ר' יצחק אייזיק הלוי הרצוג, והזכרתי, בין השיחים, כי ניסיתי לחבר בענני כמין תפילה לשלום המדינה, חייך לעומתי ואמר: רש"י עגנון קדמך. והוא חיוק לסענתו של ר' דוד תמר בזה) אכן

דב סדן באורח מדע-מחקרים בתרבות ישראל: מוגשים לאהרן מירסקי במלאת לו שבעים שנה

Dov Sadan⁹ reports that he personally spoke to Rav Herzog about his own poor attempts to write a tefilla for the State but Rav Herzog told him that Shai Agnon had beaten him to it!!

8. Notably Prof. Yosef Ofer - see *Rav Herzog, Shai Agnon and the Prayer for the Peace of the State*, *Iyunim* 38 (2023) p. 220

9. (1902-1989), Israeli literary critic and MK between 1965 and 1968. He received the Israel Prize for Jewish Studies in 1968.



• This alternative account is supported by the discovery of a much shorter typed version of the tefilla with an envelope on which Rav Herzog wrote: 'Prayer for the State, as copied and corrected by Mr. Agnon's in his handwriting.'

• The wording of this short version is as follows (words in bold are those that were included in the final draft):

6.

אבינו שבשמים, השקיפה ממעון קדשך וברך את מדינת ישראל, ראשית גאולתנו. הגן עליה באברת חסדך ופרוס עליה סכת שלומך, שלח אורך ואמיתך לראשיה, שריה ויועציה, ותקנם בעצה טובה מלפניך. שומר ישראל חוק את ידי מגיני ישראל וזר נצחון תעטרם. בך את עמך ישראל בארץ ובתפוצות. צורנו וגואלנו אסף נא פזורינו ונרחינו לציון משכן כבודך. מהרה יאמנו דברי נביאך לישראל עם קדשך ולכל יושבי תבל ארצך, ככתוב בדברי קדשך, **אמן ואמן**.

• Note that the State is here described as 'Reshit Geulateinu' - the beginning of our redemption. In the final draft a further 'hedge' was added to make it 'Reishit Tzemichat Geulateinu' - the beginning of the flowering [ie not yet fruition] of our redemption.

• Who in fact coined the final phrase 'Reishit Tzemichat Geulateinu'? Most scholars agree that this came from Herzog and not from Agnon, although according to some scholars Agnon may have added in the 'Tzemichat'.

• Most scholars now agree that the prayer was fundamentally composed by

Rav Herzog, which he confirmed in an article written on Israel's 10th anniversary in which R. Herzog referred to 'the prayer that I established', quoting from parts of the Prayer for the State.

• Agnon returned his handwritten version of the tefilla to Rav Herzog the next day, on which Herzog consulted with R. Uziel and other rabbanim before publishing the text in the newspapers from September 20. Small changes were then made over the following months and years.

• The now famous tune for the prayer was composed by cantor Sol Zim in 1988¹⁰.

B] THE PRAYER FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL - CONTENT AND CONTROVERSY

• The final version of the tefilla can be divided into 5 sections:

| | |
|--|--|
| א. אבינו שבשמים, צור ישראל וגואלו | |
| Our father in Heaven, rock and redeemer of Israel | |
| <i>It opens, as other tefillot, with praise of God as the Rock and Redeemer of Israel</i> | |
| ב. בך את מדינת ישראל, ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו. הגן עליה באברת חסדך, ופרש עליה סכת שלומך, ושלח אורך ואמתך לראשיה, שריה ויועציה, ותקנם בעצה טובה מלפניך ¹¹ . חוק את ידי מגיני ארץ קדשנו והנחילם אלקינו ישועה ועזרת נצחון תעטרם, ונתת שלום בארץ ושמחת עולם ליושביה. | |
| Bless the State of Israel, the initial flowering of our redemption. Provide her leaders with good counsel. Shield her beneath the wings of your lovingkindness; spread over her the shelter of your peace; send your light and your truth to its leaders, officers, and counselors, and correct them with your good counsel. Strengthen the defenders of our Holy Land; grant them, our God, salvation, and crown them with victory, give the land peace, and everlasting joy for her inhabitants. | |

It then requests beracha for the State of Israel which it frames in clearly redemptive terms - 'the first flowering of our redemption' - and requests peace for the Land and people, wisdom for its leaders and strength for its defenders.

10. The song has been recorded countless times. For a recording of Zim see

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tpiZdwNDQ&ab_channel=יובל%20אנסמבל%20מבלי%20הארץ. In my personal opinion, one of the attractions of the tune is its classic 1960s 'biblical' sound - compare the opening chords with those of the theme tune of the 1960 movie Exodus written by Ernest Gold. The similarity cannot be coincidental and it seems very likely that Zim based his opening theme on the theme from Exodus.

11. Note that these expressions appear in the beracha *Hashkiveinu* in Maariv, which is called by the Talmud '*geula arichta*' - an extension of the beracha of Ge'al Yisrael.

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ג. וְאֵת אֲחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּקֵד נָא בְּכָל אֲרָצוֹת פְּזוּרֵיהֶם, וְתוֹלִיכֶם מֵהֶרָה קוֹמְמוֹת לְצִיּוֹן עִירְךָ וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם מִשְׁכַּן שְׁמֶךָ, כְּכַתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹדְךָ (דברים ל"ד-ו): אִם יִהְיֶה נִדְחָךְ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם, מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצֶךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ. וְהִבִּיאֶךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יֵרָשׁוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וִירוּשָׁתָהּ, וְהִיטִבְךָ וְהִרְבֶּךָ מֵאֲבוֹתֶיךָ.¹² וְנִמְלֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ וְאֶת לֵבב זֶרְעֶךָ, לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ, לְמַעַן חֲיֶיךָ.

Gather to her all the exiles as you promised. Remember our brethren, the whole house of Israel in all the lands of their dispersion and bring them speedily to Zion, your city, and to Jerusalem where your name lives. As it is written in the Torah of your servant Moses (Deuteronomy 30:4-6): *Even if you are dispersed in the uttermost parts of the world, from there HaShem, your God, will gather and fetch you, and HaShem, your God will bring you to the land which your ancestors possessed, and you shall possess her; and HaShem will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. (Then HaShem your God will open your and your children's hearts, to love HaShem your G-d with all your heart and soul, so that you may live.)*

Part 3 turns to the Jews outside Israel and prays for their speedy Aliya, quoting the verses of teshuva in Devarim. The continuation of the verses with וְנִמְלֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ is not in the official prayer but is added in a number of siddurim. This addition calls of the religious return of the people to mitzvot and Love of God.

ד. וְיִחַד לְבָבֵנוּ לְאַהֲבָה וְלִירָאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֶיךָ תוֹרָתְךָ

Unite our hearts to love and revere your name, and to observe all the precepts of your Torah

There is then a call for the unity of the Jewish people and their religious revival.

ה. וְשַׁלַּח לָנוּ מִהֶרָה בֶּן דָּוִד מְשִׁיחַ צִדְקָךָ, לְפָדוֹת מַחְכֵי קֶץ יְשׁוּעָתְךָ. הוֹפֵעַ בְּהָדָר גָּאוֹן עוֹד עַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵּבֵל אֲרָצְךָ, וְיֹאמַר כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמָה בָּאָפֶּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֶלֶךְ, וּמַלְכוּתוֹ בְּכָל מְשָׁלָה אֲמֵן סֵלָה.

And speedily send us your righteous messiah of the House of David, to redeem those waiting for your salvation. Shine forth with the glory and pride of your strength over all the inhabitants of your world, and let everything that breathes proclaim: "HaShem, God of Israel is King; whose majesty reigns over all!" Amen, Selah.

The last section calls for the coming of Mashiach and salvation for the entire world.

B1] AVINU SHEBASHAMAYIM - OUR FATHER [WHO ART?] IN HEAVEN

7. רבי פנחס בן יאיר אומר משחרב בית המקדש בושו חברים ובני חורין וחפו ראשם ונדלדלו אנשי מעשה וגברו בעלי זרוע ובעלי לשון ואין דורש ואין מבקש ואין שואל. על מי לנו להשען? על אבינו שבשמים. רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר מיום שחרב בית המקדש שרו חכימא למהוי כספריא וספריא כחזנא וחזנא כעמא דארעא ועמא דארעא אזלא ודלדלה ואין מבקש. על מי יש להשען? על אבינו שבשמים. בעקבות משיחא חוצפא יסגא ויוקר יאמיר הגפן תתן פריה והיין ביוקר והמלכות תהפך למינות ואין תוכחה והאמת תהא נעדרת. נערים פני זקנים ילבינו זקנים יעמדו מפני קטנים הבן אינו מתבייש מאביו ועל מי יש לנו להשען? על אבינו שבשמים.

משנה מסכת סוטה פרק ט משנה טו

Avinu Shebashamayim¹³ is not a common way to start a Tefilla¹⁴. Its main appearance is in the Mishna¹⁵ at the end of Mesechet Sota, the context of which is very important. As the Mishna recounts the descent of society into chaos and the urgent need for redemption and Mashiach it asks three times - on whom can we rely in such desperate times? On our Father in Heaven!¹⁶

8. וא"ר אלעזר מיום שחרב בית המקדש נפסקה חומת ברזל בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים שנא' (יחזקאל ד':ג) וְאֵתָהּ קוֹחַ לֵךְ מִחֲבַת בְּרָזֶל וְנִתְּתָהּ אוֹתָהּ קִיּוֹר בְּרָזֶל בֵּינָךְ וּבֵין הָעִיר.

ברכות לב:

Our disconnection from God due to Exile is expressed by Chazal as an iron wall separating us from 'Our Father in Heaven'.

12. The continuation of these verse is not in the official version of the prayer but is added in a number of siddurim, including the Koren.

13. One theory connects the choice of these opening words to the (original? - see above) short draft of the Prayer which began .. אבינו שבשמים, השקיפה ממעון קדשך וברך .. This is taken from Devarim 16:15 and the wording of vidui ma'aser, which Chazal associate with a request for children (Mishna Ma'aser Sheni 5:13). As such we are relating in these words to God as the ultimate Father in Heaven. Even though the quote from Devarim 16:15 was ultimately dropped in the final version, Avinu Shebashamayim remained.

14. It must be noted, however, that we address God as *Abuhon di-vishmaya* every day in Kaddish Titkabel.

15. According to some commentators this section is actually a Beraita - see Maharsha Sota 49b.

16. The expression does not appear in the Tanach and rarely appears in Chazal, notably in Tana Debei Eliyahu 7 where it appears for the first time as a prayer. אֲבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם appears many times in Eliyahu Rabba. אֲבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם appears once only in the siddur, in the prayer immediately before korbanot which also addresses the ingathering of the exiles:

אֲבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם גְּשֵׁה עִמָּנוּ חֶסֶד בְּעֶבֶר שְׁמֶךָ הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁנִּקְרָא עָלֵינוּ וְקִיָּם לָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִה שְׁכֻתוֹ: בָּעֵת הַהִיא אָבִיא אֶתְכֶם וּבָעֵת קִבְּצִי אֶתְכֶם קִיָּאתִי אֶתְכֶם לְשֵׁם וְלִתְהִלָּה בְּכָל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ בְּשׁוּבִי אֶת־שְׁבוּתֵיכֶם לְעִנְיֵיכֶם אָמֵן ה':

- But do the opening words carry an underlying message to the Christian world?

9. Third, the Beloved also began to knock on the door of the tent of theology, and possibly this is the strongest beckoning. I have, on several occasions, emphasized in my remarks concerning the Land of Israel that the theological arguments of Christian theologians to the effect that the Holy One has taken away from the Community of Israel its rights to the Land of Israel, and that all of the biblical promises relating to Zion and Jerusalem now refer in an allegorical sense to Christianity and the Christian Church, were all publicly shown to be false, baseless contentions by the establishment of the State of Israel. One must have a broad familiarity with theological literature from the time of Justin Martyr down to the theologians of our own day to comprehend the full extent of this marvel by which the central axiom of Christian theology was shattered.

Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, Kol Dodi Dofek, 'The Six Knocks'

- Rav Herzog was certainly aware of the opening words of the 'Lord's Prayer' - 'Our Father who art in Heaven' and the Catholic prayers for the 'perfidious Jews' who rejected their 'true' faith. It is quite possible that he gave a special cadence to the opening of this new prayer for the State of Israel that declares boldly that the Christian position on the Jews has proven to be lies.

B2] TZUR YISRAEL VEGO'ALO

- Use of the expression 'Tzur' - Rock - to refer to God has strong biblical roots, especially in Shirat Ha'azinu which is the poetic account of how God drives the process of Jewish exile and redemption.

10. (ד) הַצֹּרֶת תָּמִיד פָּעִלָּה כִּי כָל־דָּרְכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֶל אֲמוֹנָה וְאֵין עוֹל צְדִיק וְיִשְׁרָהּ הוּא: ... (טו) וְיִשְׁמֹן יִשְׁרוּן וְיִבְעֹט שְׂמֹנֶת עֲבִית כְּשִׁית וְיִטֹּשׁ אֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂהוּ וְיִנְבֹּל צֹר יִשְׁעָתוֹ: ... (יח) צֹר יִלְדֵּךְ תִּשִּׁי וְתִשְׁפַּח אֶל מַחְלָלֶךָ: ... (ל) אֵיכָה יִרְדֹּף אֶחָד אֶלֶף וּשְׁנַיִם יִנִּסּוּ רִבְבָּהּ אִם־לֹא כִי־צוּרָם מְכֻלָּם וְהָ הַסִּגִּירָם: (לא) כִּי לֹא כְצוּרָנוּ צוּרָם וְאֵיבֵינוּ פְּלִילִים: ... (לו) וְאָמַר אֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ צֹר חֲסִיו בָּהּ:

דברים פרק לב

11. אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִי דָבָר צֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשֵׁל בְּאֲדָם צְדִיק מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאֵת אֱלֹהִים:

שמואל ב' כג:

The expression Tzur Yisrael is used by David in his final address

12. הַשִּׁיר יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כְּלִיל הַתְּקֵדָה־שְׁחָג וְשִׁמְחַת לֵבָב כְּהוֹלֵךְ בְּחִלָּל לְבוֹא בְּהֶרֶה' אֶל־צֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל

ישעיהו ל:כט

..... and by Yeshayahu in his prophecies of the end of days¹⁷ and the return of the Jewish people to their God.

13. יִהְיֶה לְרָצוֹן אֲמִרִי־לִי וְהִגִּינוּ לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ ה' צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:

תהלים יט:טו

14. לָכוּ נִרְנְנָה לָהּ נִרְיָעָה לְצֹר יִשְׁעָנוּ:

תהלים צה:א

Tehillim contains references to God as our Rock, Redeemer and Salvation, many of which form a central element of our regular prayers.

15. צֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹמָה בְּעֶזְרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפְדָה כְּנַאמָךְ יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, גֹּאֲלֵנוּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' גֹּאֲלֵנוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

סידור שחרית ברכת גאל ישראל

We are familiar with the use of the expression 'Tzur Yisrael' from the last beracha before the Amida, which calls on God - the Rock of Yisrael - to redeem us as the Goel Yisrael.

17. A few verses earlier (Yeshayahu 30:26) is the famous prophecy that the light of the moon shall once again be like that of the sun

16. תני - הקורא את שמע בבוקר צריך להזכיר יציאת מצרים באמת ויציב. ר' אומר צריך להזכיר בה מלכות. אחרים אומרים צריך להזכיר בה קריעת ים סוף ומכת בכורים. ר' יהושע בן לוי אומר צריך להזכיר את כולן וצריך לומר צור ישראל וגואלו.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת ברכות פרק א הלכה ו

The Yerushalmi quotes a Beraita ruling that we must praise God in Emet VeYatziv as 'Tzur Yisrael VeGoalo'. This may have been the actual custom in Ma'ariv prayers in Eretz Yisrael at the time of the Mishna.

17. ... ונהירנא צילדותי היה רופא ח' זקן שמו מהר"ר שלמה שהלך צסוף ימיו לא"י שאל מן הגאון מהר"ר מאיר ז"ל צלוצלין על מ"ש צמערצית [צפיוט של ליל פסח] צב"י מלך צור ישראל וגואלי שהוא נגד התלמוד ולא היה צידו להשיב ואמ' שצדו צלוצו לציתו יתיישב צזה וכן שאלתי אחריו את מו"ח ז"ל ועוד הרבה רבנים ואין צביהם מענה וכן י"ל מדברי הטור שהצי" כן צשם הירו' צריך להזכיר צאמת וליצי יציאת מלרים וכו' ולור ישראל וגואלו וכו' עכ"ל.

ט"ז אורח חיים סימן ס"ק ו

18.

| SECOND NIGHT | FIRST NIGHT |
|--|---|
| ליל שמרים, עטור פלאי צדקך בצבא נאות*, קרבך לי טוב ישועות הבאות, שתי כך מחסי במלאכות הנבאות, מלך ישראל וגאלו יהודה צבאות. ¹⁰ | ליל שמרים, קראו נורא עליה, כי בו שבר מוטות עגלה*, רעץ ירעץ אום מדקה ואכלה*, יוסיף שנית בו להגאלה. |
| [גרוד ... גאל ישראל (Some conclude the blessing as follows; others conclude with גאל ישראל.) ברוך אתה יהודה, מלך צור ישראל וגואלו. (Cong. – אמן.) | |
| ברוך אתה יהודה, גאל ישראל.* (Cong. – אמן.) | |

Many commentators raise a question on the minhag in Ma'ariv on Leil Pesach to end the beracha of geula - 'melech tzur Yisrael veGoalo'.

- Famously, the expression 'Tzur Yisrael' was also adopted in Israel's declaration of Independence referring to God as the 'Rock' on which the faith of the founding fathers of Israel was based. For the religious signatories this meant the guiding hand of the biblical God. For others it could mean many things - the strength of the Jewish nation, the fate of history, the force of God in nature etc¹⁸,
- This expression was actually in the earliest draft of the text, put together by Mordechai Beham, a junior member of the legal team working under Felix Rosenbluth (later Pinchas Rosen the State's first Justice Minister). Rosenbluth asked Beham on April 22 1948 to put together a first draft of the declaration¹⁹.

19. מתוך בטחון בצור ישראל הננו חותמים בחתימת ידנו לעדות על-הכרזה זו ...

סוף מגילת העצמאות

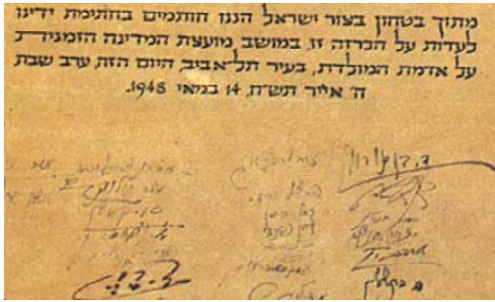
20. with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

The end of the America Declaration of Independence, July 4 1776

The words Tzur Yisrael are intended as a translation of the wording 'divine Providence' in the oath at the end of the American Declaration of Independence.

18. Ben Gurion himself was a Spinozist, publishing in 1953 an article in the labor union daily, *Davar*, entitled *Let Us Amend the Injustice*, concerning the rehabilitation of Spinozan ideas within mainstream Jewish thought. The JTA Daily Briefing for Dec 28 1953 reads: *The abolition of the excommunication declared by the Amsterdam Jewish community about 300 years ago on the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and the publication of all his works, is demanded by David Ben Gurion, retired Israel Premier, in his first article written in Sdeh Boker, his residence in the Negev. The article is published in Davar, a pro-government Laborite daily newspaper. Mr. Ben Gurion suggests that the Hebrew University should sponsor the publication of the works of Spinoza. He points out that just as the excommunication declared by Athens on Socrates could not prevent the Greek philosopher from being recognized as first thinker of Hellenic times, so the excommunication of Spinoza by the Jews of Amsterdam can not evade the fact that Spinoza was Jewish. Mr. Ben Gurion urged that the publication of Spinoza's works should be timed for the 300th anniversary of his excommunication, in 1956.*

See also <https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/icon/icon%20Iconoclasts%20Spinoza%20Secular%20Daniel%20Schwartz%20AJS.pdf>
19. See <https://mosaicmagazine.com/picks/israel-zionism/2019/08/the-forgotten-man-who-wrote-the-first-draft-of-israels-declaration-of-independence/>. See also <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/who-owns-israels-history>. In putting together this first draft Beham consulted with his neighbor, R. Shalom Tzvi Davidowitz, a Lithuanian born Jew who had spent almost two decades as a Conservative Rabbi in the United States before moving to Tel Aviv in 1934 where he ran a dental factory and translated Shakespeare's plays into Hebrew. Davidowitz lived nearby, and had a large library.



• The use of the expression 'Tzur Yisrael' in the Declaration was one of the topics of discussion at the meeting on May 13 1948 of the *Minhelet ha'Am*. It had remained in Moshe Shertok's final draft and would have been immediately recognizable by all members, even those who were not religious but who had, for the most part, been raised in homes in which traditional prayers were said. Many other more fundamental issues were still being debated, including whether the name of the new State should be Israel, Judea, Zion or Eretz-Yisrael²⁰!

• Ben Gurion was in favor of the inclusion of 'Tzur Yisrael' (which had been in the document from the very first draft) and was frustrated that this issue was taking way too much time in the urgent pre-State discussions. For a fuller account of the last-minute discussions on this issue see the Appendix below.

B3] REISHIT TZEMICHAT GEULATEINU

• This expression has proved to be one of the most controversial. Is it really so clear that the establishment of the State and all that comes with the Yishuv, is indeed the start if the flowering of the redemption. Is it sufficient that the expression is hedged twice. It is not THE redemption, but the beginning of redemption; and not even the beginning of its fruition but of its flowering - ie just a future promise of fruit which may or may not come to be²¹.

21. והאמר מר: בששית - קולות, בשביעית - מלחמות, במוצאי שביעית בן דוד בא. - מלחמה נמי אתחלתא דגאולה היא.

מגילה יז:

Chazal understood that the stage of redemption called 'atchalta degeula' was one of wars in Eretz Yisrael.

• The expression 'atchalta degeula' was used frequently²² in the decades during the building up of the New Yishuv²³. Rav Herzog himself wrote to Shlomo Zalman Shragai in December 1947: "Blessed be He that we have reached this stage, even though it is still only the beginning of the redemption, and perhaps only the beginning of the beginning²⁴."

• The precise phrase 'Reishit Tzemichat Geulateinu' seems to be original to the Prayer for the State, although very similar expressions can be found in Rav Kook's writings.²⁵

22. (לג) כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' בַּיּוֹם טַהְרִי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-הָעֲרִים וְנִבְנוּ הָחָרְבוֹת: (לד) וְהָאֶרֶץ הַנִּשְׁמָה תַעֲבֹד תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הִיְתָה שְׂמֵמָה לְעֵינַי כָּל-עוֹבְרָ: (לה) וְאָמְרוּ הָאֶרֶץ הַלֵּלוּ הַנִּשְׁמָה הִיְתָה כְּגוֹן-עֲדוֹ וְהָעֲרִים הָחָרְבוֹת וְהַנִּשְׁמָה וְהַנְּהָרוֹת בְּצוּרוֹת יִשְׁבּוּ: (לו) וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹלִים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָרוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּלִילִי הַנְּהָרוֹת נִטְעַמִּי הַנִּשְׁמָה אֲנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי: ס

יחזקאל פרק לו

Yechezkel describes the reflowering of the Land at the time of Geula.

23. ואמר רבי אבא: אין לך קץ מגולה מזה, שנאמר (יחזקאל לו:ח) וְאֵלֶּם הָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנֹפֶכְךָ תִּתְּנוּ וְיִכְרְכֶם תִּשְׁאֲלוּ לְעַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי קָרְבִי לָבוֹא. (רש"י - כשתתן ארץ ישראל פריה צעין יפה אז יקרב בקץ, ואין לך קץ מגולה יותר).

סנהדרין צח.

In Sanhedrin 98a, after a lengthy debate with proof texts, R. Eliezer remained silent after hearing R. Yehoshua's final proof that teshuva is NOT essential for redemption. The Gemara then immediately continues 'and R. Abba states' that the surest way to know that Geula is approaching is the reflowering of Eretz Yisrael. Why is this added to the debate?

20. See *Israel's Declaration of Independence*, Neil Rogachevsky and Dov Zigler, Cambridge University Press, 2023, p 187-189. See also

<https://www.thejc.com/judaism/why-israels-independence-led-to-an-argument-over-the-name-of-god-eldd2na5>

21. Note that in document dated January 21 1949 (by Rav Herzog?), the State is described in a TRIPLE hedge - the first buds of the beginning of redemption.

22. See *The Beginning of the Flowering of Our Redemption*, Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter at <https://repository.yu.edu/bitstreams/4e6c73a4-9f4b-43e7-b8ef-3c5aee9b0a7/download>.

23. R. Yisrael Yehoshua Trunk of Kutno wrote in 1891 (Shu't Yeshuot Malko, YD 66), and R. Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook in 1913 (Iggerot HaRaaya, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1985), 176) that the gathering of Jews in Eretz Yisrael, then slowly under way, was *atchalta degeula*. Ze'ev Yavetz, the editor of *HaMizrab*, the official publication of the religious Zionist Mizrahi movement, supported the Uganda Plan suggested by the British in 1903, going so far as to also call this *atchalta degeula*: In 1937, R. Isser Zalman Meltzer favored the partition plan recommended by the Peel Commission in July 1937, referring to it as *atchalta degeula* even though the amount of land it granted the Jews was only a fraction of what they wanted.

24. R. Schacter notes the channeling of Churchill's famous speech after the Allied victory at El Alamein that "this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning". That victory was crucial in the survival of the Yishuv in the face of the advancing German army.

25. In an essay written in Boisk in 1901-1902, R. Kook uses the phrase, "*reishit tzemichat yeshuat Yisrael*", the first flowering of the salvation of Israel, and in an essay in 1919-1920 he included the phrase, "*reishit tzemichat ge'ulat ameinu*", the first flowering of the redemption of our people. Similar language can be found in Rav Kook's letters, but not the exact formulation of the Prayer. See R. Schacter's article fn 13 and 14.

בזה שארץ ישראל עושה פירותיה בעין יפה... בהסבר זה בגמרא זכיתי לכוון לדברי רבי זונדל סלנטר רבו של רבי ישראל סלנטר, אבי תנועת המוסר, כפי שהובאו בספרו של רבי נתן פרידלאנד, המזכיר את רבי זונדל כמורו ורבו.

...ומהו הקשר שבין שני המאמרים? צריכים אנו לומר, אפוא, שהקשר הוא ענייני. מכיון שהקץ אינו תלוי בתשובה — זוהי מסקנת התנאים שם, כיצד, אפוא, נוכל להכירו?

רב צבי יהודה קוק, לנתיבות ישראל ב', 'מומו יט למדינת ישראל'.

R. Tzvi Yehuda Kook (reflecting an earlier position of R. Zundel Salanter) understands that, since the Gemara concludes like R. Yehoshua - that redemption is NOT dependant on teshuva, we will not know when redemption is coming. As such, we need a sign to indicate that Geula has begun. This sign is the renewed fertility of Eretz Yisrael

- Based on this, most people understand that Rav Herzog saw in the new Yishuv and then the State an irreversible process leading ultimately to redemption.

25. שאלתי את רב הרצוג: יסלח לי כבוד תורתו, אך מניין לכם שהמדינה היא ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו? אולי יש לה ערך גדול להצלת עם ישראל אבל מי אומר שהיא הגאולה שעליה ניבאו נביאינו ודיברו רבותינו? חייך הרב צבטני בלחיי ואמר לי: 'כנראה שכחת גמרא מפורשת. הרי על הפסוק וְאַתֶּם הָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲנַפְכֶם תִּתְּנוּ וּפְרִיכֶם תִּשְׂאוּ לְעַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי קָרְבוֹ לְבֹא (יחזקאל לו:ח) דורשים חז"ל (סנהדרין צח.) 'אין לך קץ מגולה מזה!'

האיש על העדה - סיפור חייו ופעלו של הרב אליהו יוסף שאר-ישוב כהן, יחיאל פריש וידידיה הכהן, תשע"ג עמ' 153

Rav Sha'ar Yashuv Cohen²⁶ asked Rav Herzog how he could be sure that this was indeed the beginnings of the ultimate redemption. Rav Herzog responded that the clearest proof was the flowering of Eretz Yisrael which was predicted by Yechezkel. This unprecedented miracle is an undeniable fact which hardly seems open to interpretation, as compared with the political situation of the country which is far less clear.

26. In 1943, the Nazis (yemach shemam) were undefeated and had conquered all of North Africa all the way to the eastern portion of Egypt, within 100 miles of Eretz Yisrael. Jews in Eretz Yisrael were severely panicked because the Allies had been heretofore unable to resist the Nazi advances in the Middle East or any other location. Rav Herzog, at that point, remarked that there was no need to panic, as the Torah guarantees that there will never be a third Churban (destruction) in Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Herzog took this belief quite seriously, as he made this remark upon embarking on a return trip to Eretz Yisrael in 1943 while the Nazis had yet to be defeated. Rav Herzog was in the United States fundraising for the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael and was accompanied by Yeshiva University rebbeim to Kennedy (then Idlewild) Airport. The rabbis were begging Rav Herzog to remain in the United States for safety's sake when Rav Herzog told them that there was no need for concern since he felt that the Torah guarantees that the Nazis would not advance into Eretz Yisrael. Baruch Hashem, Rav Herzog's expectations were met when the Nazis were, baruch Hashem, defeated for the first time at the decisive battle of El Alamein, which turned out to be the turning point of the war.

Rav Shaul Chill of the Young Israel of Far Rockaway related a similar story in regard to Rav Shlomo Goren in 1967 (he related this story at Congregation Rinat Yisrael in Teaneck, New Jersey, on Parshat Bechukotai 5768 at the aufruf of Dani Neuman, the husband of Rav Chill's daughter Rena). Later the Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Israel, Rav Goren was then the chief rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces (Tzahal). Immediately before the Six-Day War, Rav Goren was in the United States raising funds. Rav Goren tried to make it home to Israel for Shabbat but was unable to and instead stayed in Far Rockaway for that Shabbat. It was Parshat Bechukotai, during which we read the tochacha, and Rav Goren was praying at Congregation Sha'aray Tefilla in Far Rockaway.

Rabbi Emmanuel Rackman introduced Rav Goren, and Rav Goren announced that there was soon going to be a war launched by the Arabs against Israel. The congregation began to weep as people feared a second Holocaust, Rachama litzlan (heaven forfend). Rav Goren then calmed the congregation by telling them not to worry, since the Torah guarantees that there will not be a third Churban. Rav Goren ironically may not have been aware that Rav Herzog made a similar statement only a few miles from where Rav Goren was speaking.

The Great Reishit Tzemichat Geulatenu Debate, R. Haim Jachter, May 5, 2022²⁷

26. Rav Cohen was born in 1927 so it seems likely he was in his early 20s during this exchange.

27. <https://jewishlink.news/the-great-reishit-tzemichat-geulatenu-debate/>

27. When R. Herzog spoke of the beginning of the flowering of our redemption, he did not mean the messianic redemption; rather, he meant the simple redemption consisting of Jewish sovereignty in the land. Hatam Sofer (Parashat Shoftim, 37) comments that several times during the course of history, God wanted to redeem Israel with an incomplete redemption—as during the period of the Second Temple— but the nation of Israel refused, for we have no desire for an incomplete redemption without the Mashi'ah. Hatam Sofer wrote this prior to the Holocaust, but after that terrible period during which people sailed aimlessly in boats, with no home, we understand that there was never any hillul Hashem—desecration of God's name—like the Holocaust, nor any kiddush Hashem—sanctification of God's name—like the establishment of the State. There can be no doubt that praise and thanks should be offered for the establishment of the State, even if it is not a messianic redemption, the “revealed end.”

Indeed, in 1948 we did not speak of the Mashi'ah. We prayed for malkhut Yisra'el and sufficed with sovereignty comparable to that of the Second Temple period. There is no doubt that we attained at least that much. During Ezra's time, very few people came back to Israel; in our time – thank God, we have reached five or six million. We have never had such numbers here!

The messianic feeling, the sense of the “revealed end,” started after the Six Day War.

Rav Yehuda Amital, *What Is The Meaning of 'Reshit Tsemihat Ge'ullatenu'?*, Tradition 39:3, 2006, p. 11
However, Rav Amital disagrees. His understanding is that Rav Herzog related to the Yishuv and the Jewish State as 'Geula' in the classic biblical sense - the recovery of one's land and independence.

28. Despite the many problems the State faces, we may not ignore the great miracles we experienced at the time of its establishment. Analogously, although the Hasmonean state was far from perfect, its establishment (and the return of Jewish sovereignty, albeit limited) was nevertheless a cause for celebration, as the Rambam emphasizes. The Rambam (Commentary to the Mishna, Yoma 1:3) knew very well the inauspicious character of the Hasmonean kings:

But in the time of the Second Temple, things were imperfect, as is well known - the kings did not follow the correct tradition and they would appoint the High Priest by force, even though he was unworthy...

Nevertheless, he felt that the establishment of the Hasmonean monarchy constitutes the main reason behind the celebration of Chanuka (Hilkhos Chanuka, 3:1-3):

The High Priests of the Hasmonean family were victorious and killed [the Greeks], thus saving Israel from their hands. They established a king from among the priests, and monarchy returned to Israel for over two hundred years... Because of this, the scholars of that generation instituted that these eight days, starting from the twenty-fifth of Kislev, shall be days of joy and praise.

The Second Temple period thus serves as a legitimate model by which we may assess the contemporary Jewish State, a half-century after its establishment. However imperfect, one cannot overlook the many positive elements of our independent national existence. Our leaders today are no worse than the Hasmonean kings, and our country is no worse than theirs was. To the contrary, our leadership and society often exhibit moral qualities far superior to those of the Hasmonean dynasty.

How can we not thank the Almighty for all the kindness that He has showered upon us? First and foremost, the State of Israel serves as a safe haven for five million Jews. After the nightmare of the Holocaust, hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees wandered around the globe, finding a home and refuge only in Israel. The State has contributed an incalculable amount to the restoration of Jewish pride after the devastating chillul Hashem (desecration of God's Name) caused by the Holocaust. Today, too, the State plays an enormous role in the Jewish identity of our brethren throughout the world. For so many of them, the emotional attachment to the State remains the final thread connecting them to the Jewish People and to the God of Israel.

Rav Yehuda Amital, *The Religious Significance of the State of Israel*²⁸

29. וְהַשְׁמַתִּי אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ וְשָׁמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ אֹיְבֵיהֶם הַיָּשָׁבִים בָּהּ:

ויקרא כו"ב

In the Tochacha in Vayikra, the Torah predicts that Eretz Yisrael will be barren and desolate, but that our enemies on the land will also be desolate.

28. This sicha was originally delivered on Chanuka 5757 [1996]. It appears in Hebrew in Alon Shevut #151 and in Alon Bogrim #11. For the full version see <https://www.torahmusings.com/2014/05/the-religious-significance-of-the-state-of-israel/>

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30. וכן מה שאמר בכאן (בפסוק לב) וְשִׁמְמוֹ עָלֶיךָ הָאֲרָצָה, היא בשורה טובה מצרפת בכל הגליות שאין ארצנו מקבלת את אויבינו. וגם זו ראייה גדולה והבטחה לנו. כי לא תמצא בכל הישוב ארץ אשר היא טובה ורחבה ואשר היתה נושבת מעולם, והיא חרבה כמוה. כי מאז יאלצו ממנה לא קבלה אומה ולשון, וכולם משתדלים להושיבה ואין לאל ידם.

רמב"ן ויקרא כו:

31. (לב) וְשִׁמְמוֹ עָלֶיךָ הָאֲרָצָה. שממה תהיה לאויביכם שלא ימצאו בה נחת רוח, ובשורה טובה היא לישראל. וכן דרשו רז"ל בתורה כהנים (ספרא ו:ח) 'זו מדה טובה לישראל, שלא יהו ישראל אומרים: הואיל וגלינו מארצנו עכשיו האויבים באים ומונאים עליה נחת רוח ...! ומזה אמר שאף היושבים בה ינהגו שממה עליה שלא יבנו עליה חומה ומגדל. וכל האומות ישתדלו לצותה ואין להם כח, ויש צוה סימן גדול לישראל שמיום שחרבה לא קבלה אומה ולשון, ולא תקבל עד שישובו אפרוחיה לתוכה.

[רבינו] בחיי ויקרא פרק כו פסוק לב

The Ramban and his student R. Bachya (based on the Sifra) point out the wonderful news hidden in this verse. Even though Eretz Yisrael is one of the most fertile areas of the whole world, it will not release its bounty to our enemies, only to the Jewish people. Even more, the non-Jews who dwell in our land will, often inexplicably, be so destructive in it as to leave it desolate and even burn it down!

32. We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent, mournful expanse, wherein we saw only three persons—Arabs, with nothing on but a long coarse shirt (Chap 47)

Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies. Nazareth is forlorn; about that ford of Jordan where the hosts of Israel entered the Promised Land with songs of rejoicing, one finds only a squalid camp of fantastic Bedouins of the desert. Jericho the accursed, lies a moldering ruin.... Bethlehem and Bethany, in their poverty and their humiliation, have nothing about them now Renowned Jerusalem itself, the stateliest name in history, has lost all its ancient grandeur, and is become a pauper village; the riches of Solomon are no longer there to compel the admiration of visiting Oriental queens; the wonderful temple which was the pride and the glory of Israel, is gone

The noted Sea of Galilee, where Roman fleets once rode at anchor was long ago deserted by the devotees of war and commerce, and its borders are a silent wilderness. Capernaum is a shapeless ruin; Magdala is the home of beggared Arabs; Bethsaida and Chorazin have vanished from the earth, and the "desert places" round about them sleep in the hush of a solitude that is inhabited only by birds of prey and skulking foxes.

Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land? Palestine is no more of this work-day world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition—it is dream-land. (Chap 56)

²⁹The Innocents Abroad, Mark Twain

33.

עד כי, בעת החלו שרידי בניה לחונן עפרה, מצאווה חרבה ושוממה, כיום עזובה אבותינו. ציה ואופל כיסו פניה, שמה ושאייה על כל הרריה. שדה חמודותיה עזובות וכרמי גפניה זנוחות. ושמונת-עשרה מאות שנות שיכוליה, לא העצירו כח להיטיב מצבה ולבנות הריסותיה.

אך החלו בניה לבא שעריה, לשכון חדריה, האח! תראינה עינינו, יפה נוף, משוש חמדתנו. לאט לאט, תסיר צעיף אלמנותה תחליץ שד להיניק גוריה, תתנער מעפר שיממותיה ותתעטף בשמלת כלולות.

ר' יואל משה סלומון

Yoel Moshe Soloman, one of the founders of Petach Tikva in 1878, expressed this in beautiful poetry.

APPENDIX - THE DEBATE CONCERNING TZUR YISRAEL

The debate was not over. Late that evening, Ben-Gurion hosted the atheist *Mapam* party member Aharon Zisling and the Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman at his house to discuss the work. Along with Moshe Shertok, these two had been delegated, after the review of Shertok's draft, to produce a final text. Likely upset by the reception of his work, Shertok did not join the other two at this late-night visit to the home of the Old Man.¹¹

Ben-Gurion later recalled that both accepted Ben-Gurion's text but argued vociferously over the question of *Tzur Yisrael*. Rabbi Fishman suggested "*Tzur Yisrael v'gaolo*" ("rock of Israel and his redeemer"), a more religious formulation that evokes the blessing of redemption in the daily prayer service – and a possibility that he had raised earlier with Shertok. Zisling protested against the mention of redemption, and in general objected to the whole phrase.

Ben-Gurion himself popularized this account later in life, disseminating letters and making other public pronouncements on the issue. In a letter to historian Alex Bein in 1972, Ben-Gurion wrote:

I explained that Rav Fishman and his associates could interpret the words "with trust in *Tzur Yisrael*" to mean "trust in God," and Zisling and his associates could interpret it to mean ... "the strength of the Jewish people." There followed an argument that lasted two hours, and in the end they accepted my argument.¹²

The fact of the matter is that two hours were not enough. Zisling did not let the matter go. There was a final meeting before independence held the next day at 1 pm with the full representative body of the *Yishuv*, the 37-member *Moetzet ha'Am*, to approve the text of the Declaration of Independence. Zisling again brought the issue of "rock of Israel" to the fore.¹³

We do not intend to limit someone's freedom of conscience ... We know how to respect values and beliefs. But on the other hand let's not force anyone of us to articulate "I believe" who does not have that belief in his heart or in his conscience. Every one of us will believe as he believes ... It's possible that the expression "rock of Israel" could be included in this declaration, and in that case that wouldn't wound us. But don't compel "I believe" on us.¹⁴

Ben-Gurion was clearly less than thrilled to have to revisit the topic. But his answer to Zisling was decisive:

It seems to me that we all believe, everyone in his own way and according to his own understanding. There is one good thing, among the other good things in Judaism, and that is: "this do," and "this do not do." How to believe – about this we are not commanded. Every one of us believes in *Tzur Yisrael* in his own way and according to his own understanding. There is – and I bring my belief and feeling both on a Jewish and human level – nothing injurious and nothing coercive when we put our faith in *Tzur Israel*. I know what the *Tzur Israel* that I have faith in is. Surely my friend on the right knows in whom he believes, and I also know how my friend on the other side believes in it.¹⁵

This was to be the final word on the issue. Using his power as the convener of the meeting, Ben-Gurion ensured that the phrase would not be voted upon. An oath upon *Tzur Israel* was to stay in the Declaration. A materialist could see the Rock of Israel as a "what," either a material thing or a principle. A traditional believer could see the rock of Israel as an active God who intervenes in history.¹⁶

This entire episode shows Ben-Gurion's tremendous political and even bureaucratic tact. Though most members of *Moetzet ha'Am* were irreligious, nearly all, and doubtless Ben-Gurion, would have recognized the phrase *Tzur Yisrael* from the prelude to the culminating prayer in the *Shacharit* service, the *Amidah*. In the Hebrew language, itself reborn from the Hebrew of the Jewish religious tradition and the *siddur*, the phrase *Tzur Yisrael* has an obvious meaning.

Perhaps the phrase appealed to Ben-Gurion's belief that he had a philosophic understanding of the nature of God. Ultimately, Ben-Gurion knew that God had to be in the document. As Rabbi Fishman had said at the previous day's meeting, all world constitutions, excepting that of the Soviet Union, invoked the name of God. A declaration of independence for a people who, as Israel's Declaration begins, wrote the "book of books" would be an unlikely exception to this rule.

Israel's Declaration of Independence, Rogachevsky and Zigler, pp 202-204.