Beyond the Flag:  
The Religious Dimensions of Yom Ha’atzma’ut  

Rabbi Eliezer Diamond, Rabbi Judah Nadich  
Associate Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics  

1. Megillat Esther Chapter 9 (translation: NJPS)

17 That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking. 
18 (But the Jews in Shushan mustered on both the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and so rested on the fifteenth, and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.) 
19 That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another. 
20 Mordecai recorded these events. And he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, near and far, 
21 charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year— 
22 the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor. 
23 The Jews accordingly assumed as an obligation that which they had begun to practice and which Mordecai prescribed for them... 
26 the Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year... 
28 Then Queen Esther daughter of Abihail wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned one of Mordecai the Jew... 
31 And Esther’s ordinance validating these observances of Purim was recorded in a scroll...
2. **Local Communal Purims** ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purim#cite_note-91](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purim#cite_note-91))

Historically, many Jewish communities around the world established local “Purims” to commemorate their deliverance from catastrophe or an antisemitic ruler or edict. One of the best known is Purim Vinz, traditionally celebrated in Frankfurt one week after the regular Purim. Purim Vinz commemorates the Fettmilch uprising (1616–1620), in which one Vincenz Fettmilch attempted to exterminate the Jewish community. According to some sources, the influential Rabbi Moses Sofer (the Chasam Sofer), who was born in Frankfurt, celebrated Purim Vinz every year, even when he served as a rabbi in Pressburg.

3. **One of two letters appearing at the beginning of the Second Book of Maccabees** ([translation from the Greek: http://www.usccb.org/bible/2maccabees](http://www.usccb.org/bible/2maccabees))

**Letter 1: 124 B.C.**

1 The Jews in Jerusalem and in the land of Judea send greetings to their kindred, the Jews in Egypt, and wish them true peace!
2 May God do good to you and remember his covenant with his faithful servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
3 give to all of you a heart to worship him and to do his will wholeheartedly and with a willing spirit,
4 open your heart to his law and commandments and grant you peace,
5 hear your prayers, and be reconciled to you, and never forsake you in time of adversity.
6 Even now we are praying for you here.
7 In the reign of Demetrius,* the one hundred and sixty-ninth year, we Jews wrote to you during the height of the distress that overtook us in those years after Jason and his followers revolted against the holy land and the kingdom,a
8 set fire to the gatehouse and shed innocent blood. But we prayed to the Lord, and our prayer was heard;* we offered sacrifices and fine flour; we lighted the lamps and set out the loaves of bread.b
9 We are now reminding you to celebrate the feast of Booths in the month of Kislev.*
10 Dated in the one hundred and eighty-eighth year.*

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* [1:7] Demetrius: Demetrius II, king of Syria (145–139, 129–125 B.C.). The one hundred and sixty-ninth year: i.e., of the Seleucid era, 145 B.C. Regarding the dates in 1 and 2 Maccabees, see note on 1 Mc 1:10. On the troubles caused by Jason and his revolt against the kingdom, i.e., the rule of the legitimate high priest, see 2 Mc 4:7–22.
* [1:8] Our prayer was heard: in the victory of the Maccabees.
* [1:10] The one hundred and eighty-eighth year: 124 B.C. The date pertains to the preceding, not the following letter.
4. Al Hanissim for Hannukah

And [we thank You] for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds, for the saving acts, and for the wonders which You have wrought for our ancestors in those days, at this time—
In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the Greeks [=the Seleucid empire] rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will. But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah. You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day. Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.
5. **BT Shabbat 23a** (translation: Steinsaltz/William Davidson Talmud)

And what blessing does one recite? He recites: Who has made us holy through His commandments and has commanded us to light the Hanukkah light. The Gemara asks: And where did He command us? The mitzva of Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Torah, so how is it possible to say that it was commanded to us by God? The Gemara answers that **Rav Avya said:** The obligation to recite this blessing is derived from the verse: “You shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare unto you, to the right, nor to the left” *(Deuteronomy 17:11)*. From this verse, the mitzva incumbent upon all of Israel to heed the statements and decrees of the Sages is derived. Therefore, one who fulfills their directives fulfills a divine commandment. **Rav Nehemya said** that the mitzva to heed the voice of the Elders of Israel is derived from the verse: “Ask your father, and he will declare unto you, your Elders, and they will tell you” *(Deuteronomy 32:7)*.

6. **Yom Ha-Zikaron Observances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
<th>Secular</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Begins at night</td>
<td>Sounding the siren</td>
<td>Flags lowered to half staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Precedes the holiday of Yom ha-Atzma‘ut</td>
<td>Opening ceremony at the Kotel (=Western Wall)</td>
<td>Moment of silence</td>
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<td>Day of observance changed, if necessary, to avoid the desecration of Shabbat</td>
<td>Wearing stickers depicting the “Dam Ha-Maccabim” flower</td>
<td>Honor guards at war memorials</td>
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<td>Places of entertainment closed</td>
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<td>Memorial ceremonies at military ceremonies</td>
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<td>Memorial candles</td>
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<td>Special prayers for the fallen, including Psalms (in particular 9 and 144) and prayers prescribed by the Chief Rabbinate</td>
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<td><em>E-I Malei</em> prayer</td>
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7. Red Everlasting, the official memorial flower of Israel, also known as דם המכסים, “The Blood of the Maccabees”

8. Yom Ha-Atzma’ut Observances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Secular</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief Rabbinate</td>
<td>Israeli folk danced and folk songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kibbutz ha-Dati, Mesorati, Reform,</td>
<td>Military parade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Visiting military installations</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Half Hallel” during the day only</td>
<td>Awarding the Israel Prize</td>
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<td>not preceded by a blessing</td>
<td>Barbecues and picnics – “al haesh”</td>
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<td>Haftarah without a blessing during</td>
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<td>the day</td>
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<td>Haftarah during the day</td>
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<td>Torah reading and haftarah during</td>
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<tr>
<td>the day with blessings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al ha-Nissim</td>
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We thank You for the heroism, for the triumphs, and for the miraculous deliverance of our ancestors, in other days and in our time.

In the days when Your children were returning to their borders, at the time of a people that rose up again in its land as in days of old, the gates to the land of our ancestors were closed before those who were fleeing the sword. When enemies from within the land together with seven neighboring nations sought to annihilate Your people, You, in Your great mercy, stood by them in time of trouble. You defended them and vindicated them. You gave them the courage to meet their foes, to open the gates to those seeking refuge, and to free the land of its armed invaders. You delivered the many into the hands of the few, the guilty into the hands of the innocent. You have wrought great victories and miraculous deliverance for Your people Israel to this day, revealing Your glory and Your holiness to all the world.
10. Haskamah, letter of approval, written by Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac ha-Levi Herzog, for the Tikkun Yom ha-Atzma’ut, 23 Nisan 5715 (=1955)

It is my view that in the case of the miracle that took place in behalf of the entire Jewish people – including our brethren in the Diaspora – [namely] that caused the people of Israel to be regarded with greater respect by the nations of the world, that breathed new life into the hearts of the Jewish people in exile after the horrors of the Shoah, and that consequently led to the strengthening of faith, and that provided a safe haven for the entire nation until the advent of the Messiah – if, God forbid, there be persecutions of a portion of the Jewish people, wherever they may be – all would agree that it is fit to establish a day of remembrance in order to strengthen our faith, for this is truly the beginning of the [final] redemption. But withal one must be careful and not be excessive [in establishing the forms of liturgical observance].

11. Responsa Kol Mevaser, R. Meshullam Roth, No. 21
The Fifth of Iyyar, which has been established as the day to celebrate throughout the land as a remembrance of our redemption and liberation – it is a mitzvah to make it a day of rejoicing and festivity and to recite Hallel. [After all,] even a community in a particular city or individuals who establish a holiday for themselves because of a miracle done for them, are obligated to establish [that observance as binding] upon them and their progeny and descendants forever...

And the Hatam Sofer (Moses Schreiber, Responsa Hatam Sofer Orah Hayyim 191) wrote that [one should recite Hallel] only if one found oneself in a life-threatening situation, as in the case of Mordechai and Esther, but not in the case of redemption from other adversities...

It is clear in this case, [a miracle affecting] all of the Jewish people, and in which took us from subjugation to redemption, in that we were liberated from being subjugated by powerful nations and have become a free people, achieving political independence, as well as being saved from death, in that we were saved from an enemy that stood against us to liquidate us, certainly it is an obligation to establish a festival.

And they had the proper intention when they established this day, [the day on which the State of Israel was declared,] for on this day was the essential miracle that we were liberated by declaring independence.

12. Prayer for the State of Israel

Version 1:

אבינו שבחים, צור ישראל וגואלו, נר את מדרינת ישראל וארשנת אמת נاجتماع

Our Father in Heaven in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel, the beginning of the flowering of our redemption

Version 2:

אבינו שבחים, צור ישראל וגואלו, נר את מדרינת ישראל וארשנת אמת נاجتماع

Our Father in Heaven in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of Israel, may it be the beginning of the flowering of our redemption
13. Email from T’ruah

In Israel, the transition from Yom HaZikaron to Yom HaAtzma’ut captures the emotional intensity of mourning and joy at once. Join J Street, NIF, and T’ruah at 5 p.m ET on Tuesday, April 28 as we pay homage to that transition with an online arts evening. By exploring poetry and artwork done by Israeli and Palestinian artists, we will create space for the range of emotion we experience as progressive Zionists on these days...

Regardless of our complex feelings about politics and government in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, we can come together to celebrate the rich cultural flowering of both people who view this land as a homeland.

*Monument to the Negba Defenders - Natan Rapoport (1953)* - אנדרטת המגנים בנגב