

On Renewal and Heroism

**A Theological View of the Month of Iyar,
Yom Ha-atzma'ut, Lag Ba-omer and Yom Yerushalayim**

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Dear Readers,

Over the centuries the month of Iyar has been linked with Lag B'Omer, which honors Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the great Talmudic scholar who spoke out defiantly against the Romans and revealed the "hidden" Torah in the Zohar. In our generation, the month of Iyar has become synonymous with the miracle of Israeli statehood and our long-awaited return to Jerusalem.

It is our pleasure to share with you Divrei Torah from the Meir Harel Hesder Yeshiva in Modiin, where the values of learning Torah and continuing the struggle for Jewish independence are the building blocks of a new generation of scholar-soldiers. We hope that the following articles will provide new and deeper understanding of these monumental days.

Mo'adim lesimcha vel'geula shleimah,

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In memory of our dear friend

Lieutenant General **Amnon Lipkin Shahak** ז"ל

Chief of the IDF General Staff, Minister in the
Government of Israel

Honorary citizen of Modiin

**And true partner in the founding
of the yeshiva**

The “Meir Harel” Hesder Yeshiva – Modiin Family

And the bereaved families

Month of Iyar, the Month of Jewish Renewal and Heroism

1. The month of heroism, once and forever

This month, a number of significant events happened in our past, recent and distant, which we commemorate with special holidays. Two of these belong to the generation of the founding of the State of Israel: Yom Ha-atzma'ut (Israel's Independence Day, 5 Iyar) and Yom Shihur Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Liberation Day, 28 Iyar, colloquially referred to as "Yom Yerushalayim"). Others, such as Lag Ba-omer (the 33rd day of the *omer*, 18 Iyar), harken back to our distant past. Similarly, the entire month of Iyar is marked by customs of mourning relating to the death of Rabbi Akiva's students during the *omer* period in the Bar Kokhba rebellion (Lag Ba-omer is the day they stopped dying). Lag Ba-omer is also the day on which Rashbi, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, passed from this world. These mourning customs while counting from Pesah to Shavuot are begun by some during Pesah and completed on Lag Ba-omer; others observe them from Rosh Hodesh Iyar until Shavuot.¹

Let us consider the significance of Iyar's events from a theological viewpoint.

¹ Rema in *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 493:3, "Gloss — however in a number of places there is the custom to cut hair until Rosh Hodesh Iyar, and those may not cut hair from Lag Ba-omer and on, even though it is permissible to cut hair on Lag Ba-omer itself. Those places where they cut hair from Lag Ba-omer and on, they should not cut hair at all after Pesach until Lag Ba-omer."

The mystics point to a distinction between Nisan, the first of the months, and Iyar, the second: while the former expresses the divine attribute of *hesed*, kindness, the latter expresses *gevura*, might or heroism.²

Iyar embodies *gevura*.

Is there some connection between the important dates in Iyar and its mighty, heroic nature?

We may answer this by using a famous dictum of R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook (“R. Kook”) about the month of Iyar:³

Gevura, sublime among R. Akiva’s students and subtle among the martyrs of the [Ashkenazic] communities [that were destroyed during this period in medieval times], come together in the treasury of Rashbi’s secrets.

In this dictum, R. Kook connects three different moral foci of the month of Iyar: the overt heroism of R. Akiva’s students, who fought fiercely for spiritual and political independence against the Romans in Bar Kokhba’s forces, and the hidden heroism of the martyrs of Speyer, Worms and Mainz,⁴ who died to sanctify God’s name in the Crusades. These two endeavors unite in the enterprise of Rashbi, R. Akiva’s student,⁵ who was pursued by the Romans because of his

² *Kehillat Yaakov*, based on R. Hayim Vital’s glosses on the *Zohar*, Shemot 11b, noting that the numerical value of Iyar (1+10+10+200) is “*Da gevura*” ([4+1] + [3+2+6+200+5]). In his *Igra De-khala*, R. Tzvi Elimelekh Spira of Dinev, author of *Benei Yissaskhar, nter alia*, writes (Noach 11) that while Marcheshvan embodies the aspect of female *gevura*, Iyar embodies the aspect of male *gevura*.

³ R. Kook, *Meged Yerachim*, monthly dicta for the “Eretz Ha-tzvi” calendar from the year 5674 (1913-14).

⁴ In Iyar of 4856 (1096), c. 12,000 Jews were killed in Europe during the First Crusade, due to their refusal to convert to Christianity.

⁵ The Rambam writes (Introduction to Commentary on the Mishna): “Throughout the Mishna, the Rabbi Shimon mentioned without any other title or patronymic is Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, Rabbi Akiva’s student, whose issue with the emperor is well-known.”

part in the insurrection, and he hid in a cave, where he occupied himself with the study of the mystical Torah.

In divine Providence there is a glorious historical coincidence of the events of national renewal and heroism in the contemporary era – Yom Ha-atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim, which fall in the month of Iyar – and the events of heroism in the month of Iyar in the distant past.

Beyond the common denominator between the different events of *gevura*, there is an ingredient, additional and deeper, which is tied to Rashbi's revelation of the esoteric discipline that R. Kook mentions in his dictum, and which we will try to understand.

2. Jewish heroism combines the spiritual and physical dimensions

There is an additional event which occurs in the month of Iyar: the anniversary of the war with Amalek (though we do not have the custom of marking the date):⁶

On the twenty-third of Iyar, they journeyed from Alush and came to Refidim, and there they were given a well, fought Amalek, and spent their second Shabbat.

The first war with Amalek occurred about a **month after the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the Red Sea. This war is the first event in history in which the Jewish people fought as a nation, not as a clan or tribe. In the course of this battle, Jewish national *gevura* was manifest.**

⁶ *Seder Olam Rabba*, ch. 5.

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This was no regular war. The Amalekite objective was to achieve territorial or economic aims, but to attack the Jewish people as they were, and to stop them on their way to the land of Israel and on their way to self-definition through receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. The strategic objective motivating Amalek was, in a manner of speaking, “spiritual” — Amalek opposed Israel’s destiny in the world and wished to prevent the Jewish nation from reaching its land, thereby preventing its unique spiritual potential from being actualized.

R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (“Netziv”) explains that the first war with Amalek was also designed to be a **model for the Jewish nation’s conduct of its future wars:**

Moshe wanted to show Israel **the power of God’s providence over them even without a revealed miracle. Therefore this war unfolded naturally.**⁷

According to Netziv, Moshe was commanded to direct all of the phases and components of this war so that we may learn from it for our natural wars in the future, without relying on a miracle.

The selection of combatants for the battle with Amalek, teaches us about the unique profile of the *gevura* of a warrior in Israel’s army through the generations. Moshe commands Yehoshua:

Select men for us, and go out and wage war upon Amalek.⁸

Rashi *ad loc.* explains:

Select men for us: **men who are mighty and sin-fearing**, so that their merit will help us.

The two characteristics required for the Jewish army in order to fight Amalek are physical strength and spiritual circumspection. In

⁷ *Ha’amek Davar*, Shemot 17:9.

⁸ Shemot 17:9.

Netziv's commentary it is made clear that there is a connection between them; these aspects are not incompatible, but rather complementary:

“Select men for us” – **mighty men, like in a natural war**. The Targum has “strong in commandments”, i.e. **mighty in the war of Torah, who are uniquely capable of natural war**, as I have written a number of times.⁹

According to Netziv, the integration of natural physical military might with spiritual might and a fighting spirit stems from the fact that these are two sides of the same coin, of the aspect of the *gevura* of the soul, and therefore they are interdependent and complementary.

The unique martial model of the army of Israel finds expression in **the waging of war** against Amalek.¹⁰ The echelon which conducted the war integrated the two elements, military might and spiritual power. Therefore, it was not Yehoshua, the field general, who led it but a combination of him and the spiritual leadership of Moshe, Aharon, and Hur.¹¹

⁹ *Ha'amek Davar, ad loc.*

¹⁰ God rearranged nature: paradoxically, specifically Amalek, which hoped to take advantage of the Israelites' weakness and defeat it due to their laxity in Torah study, taught them for all generations that the model for success – combining spiritual power and physical prowess.

¹¹ Similarly, the *mishna* Rosh Hashana 3:8 states: “When Moshe would raise his hands, Israel would prevail...” (Shemot 17:11) — do Moshe's **hands** make war or break it? This tells you that **as long as Israel would look skyward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they would overpower them; if not, they would fall.**” The *mishna* indicates that not only Moshe, Aharon, and Hur raised their hands in prayer; the Israelites “**would look skyward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven**” – **even the combatants**, to the extent that the battle raging around them allowed, “would look skyward” in prayer, and in this merit “they would overpower them” in combat. Their prayer acted through a number of spiritual channels, drawing forth God's help and strengthening their spirit and resolve during battle.

The actual fighting was also singularly conducted according to the model characteristic of Israel's wars, **combining operational combat, which works by natural means, with spiritual effort, prayer at the time of war**, as Netziv writes:

However, in this place, when there was a temporary need of natural war, **Moshe did as all Israel would act for all generations, and even in a time that they are confident that they will prevail in war, it is necessary to pray, as I wrote above.**¹²

3. The *gevura* of Rabbi Akiva and his students

The paradigm established in the first Amalekite war was also applied in the Bar Kokhba's war against the Romans. The heroic men who enlisted, R. Akiva's students, were yeshiva students who worked on the attribute of *gevura* in their character, the *gevura* of Torah study, on the benches of the study hall. For them as well, the profile of the

¹² *Harhev Davar* on v. 11, no. 1. The words of Netziv are explained in *Rinna shel Torah* on ch. 4 of Shir Ha-shirim, based on *Berakhot* 53b: "Said R. Nehorai to him: 'I swear to you by heaven that it is so. The proof is that while the common soldiers advance and open the battle, it is the seasoned warriors who go down to win the victory!'"

Shlomo composed a perfect and sublime song... it is **based on the wars that Israel would wage against its neighbors...** and before I begin to explain it, we should explain what is the way and the direction of Israel in war and their return from war... At first, the common soldiers would weaken the enemy opposite them, but they were not the main combat body. These were instead the pedigreed Israelites who would go down to war. Since [the common soldiers] were not Torah scholars and were not filled with the fear of God, in the manner of those with long hair, they would only engage at first to weaken their opponents. **Afterwards, the seasoned warriors would overwhelm them, and they were all righteous and experts in Torah, illustrious in Israel** as known in the days of David, etc.

See also v. 2: "'Your teeth' – these are the **war heroes** who are the main victors... and the parable is that the **heroes were all righteous** and were washed in repentance from any sins... This is how they explained in the Midrash that Israel's master soldiers were careful even about the minor commandments and did not don their head *tefillin* prior to their arm *tefillin*..."

warrior was a “winning combination” of two qualities: one – **spiritual fortitude, marshaling the power of the spirit and increasing spiritual might, and on the other hand, physical prowess, fighting battles in the regular sense.** In this war as well, we see the combination of R. Akiva’s spiritual leadership in times of war alongside the military leadership of Bar Kokhba.

Granted, the Talmud (Yevamot 62b) points to the reason for the death of Rabbi Akiva’s students in a plague:

For they did not show respect to each other

However, R. Sherira Gaon, in his famous Epistle, explains that they died in the revolt against the Roman Empire due to their support for Bar Kokhba:

There was persecution (*shemada*) of the students.

This is also what *Etz Yosef* writes (commentary to *Kohelet Rabba* 11:6):

They all died in the war of Bar Kokhba between Pesach and Shavuot

Elsewhere we discussed that the Babylonian Talmud hides the nationalistic and martial aspects of Jewish holidays, Hanukah, the *omer* period, and Lag Ba-omer, out of fear of persecution by the nations of the world in our exile. However, there are many allusions scattered in the different sources which allow us to build a complete picture.

As our master and teacher R. Tzvi Yehuda Kook used to note the involvement of R. Akiva and his students (including Rashbi) in the Bar Kokhba revolt while noting that R. Akiva was the one on whose view the entire Oral Torah was decided. He stressed the

compatibility of these two facts – his participation in the revolution stems from his greatness and his spiritual outlook:

Specifically because of his greatness in Torah, Rabbi Akiva participated, together with his students, in the war against the Romans, despite the great dangers and opposition of other sages. He himself took an active part, to the point that he became Bar Kokhba's arms bearer.¹³

The *gevura* of R. Akiva's students, formed in the study hall of the great academy of R. Akiva, was that which, at the time of need, comes to expression in enlisting in the rebellion and in their active combat against Rome.¹⁴

4. *Gevura* and the ability to contemplate hidden levels

There is an additional aspect of the *gevura* of R. Akiva and his students, connected to contemplation of deeper levels of reality and Torah, which average people are not capable of seeing. This as well the students learnt from their master.

R. Akiva's students lived in the period of the Destruction of the Temple, nation, and land, a period in which many gave up and lost hope. The *gevura* of R. Akiva's students emanated from their ability to marshal spiritual fortitude and to strengthen their faith, which in turn gave them the ability to raise their heads and to rise up against the Romans. They did not succumb to the psychological tendency to give up and lose hope.

¹³ This appears in R. Zvi Yehuda's published lectures, Lag Ba-omer 5733.

¹⁴ See at length below.

Two famous stories teach us about the unique Torah of Rabbi Akiva, based on pondering its deep and hidden levels. The first one is tied to his meditation on the Torah to reach deep insights:

R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav: “When Moshe ascended on high, he found the Almighty sitting and tying crowns onto the letters [of the Torah]. He said: “Ruler of the Universe, who is holding back Your hand?” [God] answered: “There is a man who will appear after several generations, Akiva b. Joseph is his name. He will derive mounds of laws from every jot and tittle.” [Moshe] said: “Ruler of the Universe, show him to me.” [God] responded: “Turn around!”

Moshe went and sat in the eighteenth row [of R. Akiva’s class] and did not know what they were saying. He became depressed. When they arrived at a certain point, his students said to him: “Master, what is the source [for this ruling]?” He said, “It is a law of Moses from Sinai (*halakha le-Moshe mi-Sinai*).” [Moshe] was relieved.¹⁵

The second story relates to his contemplation of different levels of reality and the processes of redemption:

Another time R. Gamliel, R. Elazar b. Azarya, R. Joshua, and R. Akiva were ascending to Jerusalem. When they reached Mt. Scopus, they tore their garments. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the place of the Holy of Holies. The others started weeping; Rabbi Akiva laughed.

Said they to him: "Why are you laughing?"

¹⁵ Menahot 29b, *Ein Yaakov* version, no. 2.

Said he to them: "Why are you weeping?"

Said they to him: "A place [so holy] that it is said of it, 'the stranger that approaches it shall die,' and now foxes traverse it, and we shouldn't weep?"

Said he to them: "That is why I laugh. For it is written, 'I shall have bear testimony for Me faithful witnesses — Uriya the Priest and Zechariah b. Yeverekhya.' Now what is the connection between Uriya and Zechariah? Uriya was [in the time of] the First Temple, and Zechariah was [in the time of] the Second Temple! But the Torah makes Zechariah's prophecy dependent upon Uriya's prophecy. Regarding Uriya, it is written: 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; [Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the Temple Mount like the high places of a forest.] With Zechariah it is written, 'Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem.' As long as Uriya's prophecy had not been fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy may not be fulfilled either. But now that Uriya's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled."

With these words they replied to him: "Akiva, you have consoled us! Akiva, you have consoled us!"¹⁶

This can be explained in light of the teachings of R. Moshe Hayim Luzzatto ("Ramchal") and R. Kook.¹⁷ R. Akiva did not ignore the destruction on the overt level, and therefore he even rends his garments.¹⁸ His laughter and joy, seeing the fox coming out of the

¹⁶ Makkot 24b.

¹⁷ Ramchal, *Da'at Tevunot*, chs. 124 and 146; *Kelah Pithei Hokhma*, chs. 1 and 30; R. Kook, *Orot Ha-kodesh* III, p. 341; *Iggerot Ha-re'aya* III:819; *Ma'amarei Ha-re'aya* III, pp. 324, 360.

¹⁸ See Maharsha *ad loc.*

Holy of Holies, emanates from his ability to perceive hidden levels, in which processes of redemption are taking place even as the signs of the distressing destruction are still evident on the most obvious level. R. Akiva does not need to see Uriya's prophecy fulfilled in order to believe that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled. Rabbi Akiva comes to teach us that the prophecies are complementary: Uriya's "Zion shall be plowed as a field" is the beginning of the process; Zechariah's "Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem" is the completion of the process. **The fulfillment of Uriya's prophecy constitutes evidence of the beginning of the redemption process. Once the process begins, it will come to its fulfillment as delineated in Zechariah's prophecy.** In light of this, we may understand how R. Akiva succeeds in comforting the sages who ascended to Mt. Scopus: by showing them that indeed, the process has begun!

Rabbi Akiva teaches us that even if on the obvious level it appears that there is destruction, and therefore one must rend one's garments, the prophecy of Uriya tells us that the fox's emergence from the Holy of Holies is evidence of the beginning of the coalescence of the redemption process on a hidden level, and this is cause for jubilation.

This may also be the source of the *gevura* of the martyrs of the Crusades, that even in a situation of exile, when on the revealed layer everything appears lost and hopeless, they drew their power from the hidden level, in order to continue to cleave to the Torah with dedication and to sanctify God's name.

In our *beit midrash*, we are accustomed to say that behavior of R. Akiva and his students during the Bar Kokhba revolt paved the way

for spiritual activism, a way according to which one who believes in God is bound not only to realize **intellectually the reality** of the Creator, but also to translate the thought into action. As part of one's link with God, he is obligated to contemplate reality and to attempt to identify the divine process by which God is currently directing the world. When one can identify this process, he sees an obligation incumbent upon him to become a partner, in a practical way, in advancing this process, in whatever way he may do so. Therefore, the spiritual activist is "acting in concert with God," "a partner of the Holy One, Blessed be He, in the work of Creation."

5. Rebirth and heroism in the previous generation

The events of the month of Iyar in our generation are similar in their character to the events of the past.

On Yom Ha-atzma'ut, we mark one of the most wonderful events of our time, the establishment of the State of Israel, "the first flowering of our redemption." This is a state created by human effort and intense activism on the part of many Jews from different backgrounds, demonstrating *gevura* and dedication — but also by miracles from Heaven. This is a state which realizes the vision and dream of the generations, after two millennia of exile, reviving the political independence of the Jewish nation of yore. This is a state which proudly champions the destiny of the Jewish people and is the stage for the realization of that destiny.

Reflecting on the founding of the State of Israel from a theological viewpoint connects us to our past, to our Exodus from Egypt to the Land of Israel, in order to establish in it our unique government, as freemen; it also connects us to the war with Amalek, who sought to

prevent this from happening, during which a paradigm of uniquely Jewish heroism was forged. It also connects us to R. Akiva and his students, who took their fate into their hands and set out to wage a heroic war against the Romans in order to merit spiritual and political independence. Even though they did not succeed, their legacy remains in our heart.

The State of Israel is a unique country, the integration of a conventional physical, political framework with a unique spiritual destiny. This fusion is expressed in the national symbol, a candelabrum flanked by two olive branches, taken from the prophecy of Zechariah:

And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubavel: 'Not by force, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts."¹⁹

The force and power of the physical plane are united with the spiritual plane: "'Not by force, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts."

Since the establishment of the state, we have been in a constant existential battle. The battles to establish the State of Israel, from the

¹⁹ Zechariah 4:2-6.

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War of Independence onward, have been waged by the people's army, defending our country. In the Israel Defense Forces, we see the unique historical amalgamation of physical *gevura* in the battlefield with spiritual power beating in the heart – between human action and God's guiding miracles. We have seen this in the War of Independence and in all of Israel's conflicts.

On Yom Yerushalayim, we mark the State of Israel's connection to holiness. With the liberation of Jerusalem in the Six Day War, with the announcement, "The Temple Mount is in our hands," we were linked once again to the Holy of Holies, to the Temple. This sanctity unifies the Jewish nation, charged to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Once the city was unified, another prophecy of Zechariah's was realized: "Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem." However, this process is still not complete; the Temple has not yet been rebuilt.

In the month of Iyar, between Yom Ha-atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim, there is a profound progression: from the first step of creating a political foundation for which we thank God on Yom Ha-atzma'ut, to the deep, inner stage of connecting to holiness, which we mark on Yom Yerushalayim.

Throughout the state's existence, we have known days of high spirits and jubilation, but we also knew days of distress. There are still more than a few daily problems. For some, these issues cause despair and prevent them from seeing the power and greatness inherent in the State of Israel's very existence. It causes them to doubt that it is "the first flowering of our redemption." As a remedy, we must adopt R. Kook's counsel: contemplate the situation in a profound and penetrating manner, which we have learnt from Rashbi's teachings. This will allow us to see the deeper implications of reality, to perceive how redemption forms and advances.

“On the Inherent Sanctity of Independence Day”

The title of this essay is taken from the title that my revered teacher, R. Zvi Yehuda Kook (from whom I was privileged to learn at the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva), gave to a speech he delivered at his yeshiva on Israel’s third Yom Ha-atzma’ut. R. Zvi Yehuda was one of those who established the day as one that has spiritual and religious significance, in addition to its national significance.²⁰ His attitude informed the customs related to this holiday, which took shape in his yeshiva: recitation of special prayers, prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel, and *Halel*.

After the Disengagement and the incidents at Amona, there were voices within the religious Zionist community that questioned our relationship with the state and our relationship to Yom Ha-atzma’ut in particular. Some even called for the end of the special prayers and from waving the flag. These people raised various claims about the spiritual meaning of Yom Ha-atzma’ut. Some went even further, calling on the community to “disengage” from the state and from participation in its military.

Claims and challenges about the spiritual significance of Yom Ha-atzma’ut have been raised in the past and are nothing new, but during the first years of the state no questions were raised about celebrating Yom Ha-atzma’ut; the state’s declaration of independence on 5 Iyar, 5708 (May 14, 1948), a few short years after the Holocaust, generated a torrent of spontaneous celebration amongst all segments of the people. There was a feeling that we

²⁰ In his *Netivot Yisrael* I:181.

have been privileged to see the moment that had been anticipated throughout 2,000 long years of exile – “to be a free people in our land.” **Even the greatest rabbis of the Haredi community spoke of the state using expressions like “the first flowering of our redemption.” Over time, however, questions were raised about the permanent establishment of the holiday** for several reasons, including:

- a. Once the state became a routine fact, the spontaneous joy diminished.
- b. Over time, numerous flaws in the state’s administration were exposed, pertaining especially to issues dear to the religious community. This caused many to wonder if the state we have is indeed the state we had hoped for, and whether one may celebrate the birth of a state that, in some ways, contravenes the Torah.
- c. Some claimed that there is no spiritual or theological value to Israel’s independence from foreign rule, only national value; there can only be spiritual or theological value to a state that adheres fully to the commandments of the Torah.

Those who raised questions more recently are part and parcel of the religious Zionist camp and grew up within it. Although we must give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that their questions grew out of their deep pain over the condition of the state, its institutions, and the way it is being governed, these questions must not dull our passion for Yom Ha-atzma’ut as a day of thanking the Almighty for the great gift He has given us and the great kindnesses He has done for us through the establishment of the state – as will be specified.

One of Israel's greatest rabbis compared the obligation to express gratitude to God on Yom Ha-atzma'ut to a couple that has a child after many barren years: the happy couple wholeheartedly thanks God for the amazing gift He has given them. It later becomes apparent that the child suffers from a birth defect that forced him and his parents to undergo prolonged treatment and no small amount of suffering. Should the parents therefore be ungrateful to God and complain to Him that His gift was imperfect? Certainly they would give full-throated thanks to God despite their suffering. So too on Yom Ha-atzma'ut: we thank God for the great gift he has given us – a state that manifests the dream of generations – and although we do not ignore its flaws or the physical and spiritual suffering it occasionally causes, our obligation to thank God for this gift is not mitigated in the slightest. On the contrary, we must marshal our strength to repair and resolve its flaws and thus become God's partners in this endeavor.

The questions and doubts that have arisen about “the power of the sanctity of our day of independence” **obligates us, for our own sake, to repeat and review this matter** as it was explained in great breadth and depth in the words and writings of our great masters, whose halakhic and ideological responses to the events as they occurred remains relevant today. In particular, R. Zvi Yehuda devoted dozens of essays and gave numerous speeches about various aspects of this issue.

The fundamental question about the spiritual value of this day is: of what significance is this day of 5 Iyar. After all, at first glance the only thing that happened on it was the act of declaring a state – mere words that **changed nothing** in reality. Absolutely nothing. No **territorial borders** changed from what had been the day before,

nothing changed as far as the **military reality**; even as far as the **prevailing regime** was concerned, nothing really changes, as the Provisional Government was virtually identical to the existing national institutions.

R. Zvi Yehuda analyzed the practical and spiritual ramifications of the declaration: the establishment of a sovereign national political entity by representatives of the people of Israel ended sovereign rule **and initiated the sovereignty of the Jewish people over the entirety of the Land of Israel**. This change had significant ramifications for one of the most central *mitzvot* of the Torah: **the mitzva to possess the land**, which is equal to the entire Torah. Ramban explains that this mitzva has two components: a. settling in the land; b. exercising sovereignty over the land.²¹ According to Ramban, **this is a central mitzva, which requires the political entity to even declare war, if necessary, to possess the land** – and such a war would be a *milhemet mitzva* – a war that is a mitzva – even if it would place the lives of soldiers at risk (of course, this refers only to reasonable endangerment of life, as determined in advance by the king and the leaders of the army). The mitzva of possessing the land is a unique mitzva that, unlike the Torah's other commandments, **is not superseded by *piku'ah nefesh***, the endangerment of lives. Thus, the great joy of Yom Ha-atzma'ut stems from our great fortune at the renewal of this mitzva: “Blessed is He who has supported us and sustained us and brought us to this time, to the true fulfillment of this great, holy, and fundamental mitzva.”²²

²¹ Commentary to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, Positive commandments omitted by Ramban, No. 4

²² R. Zvi Yehuda, note 1 above.

It is worth noting that commentators on Rambam explain that even according to Rambam exercising political sovereignty over the land fulfills a mitzva.²³

While R. Zvi Yehuda was still alive, some asked: **is it proper to rejoice over the renewal of rule and sovereignty** when this sovereign government uses its power **to go against the Torah**? R. Zvi Yehuda responded, citing Rambam, that the joy of Hanukah and the recitation of *Halel* on it were due to the great miracle of the restoration of Jewish sovereignty and dominion for two centuries:

The Hasmonean High Priests prevailed and killed them and saved Israel from them. They appointed a *kohein* as king, and **dominion was restored to Israel for more than two hundred years, until the second Destruction.**²⁴

It is well known that the Hasmonean dynasty did not always comply with the Torah (according to Ramban, appointing a non-Davidic king is a serious sin, for which the Hasmoneans were punished), and for a time was even Sadducee, waging war against the Torah. King Yannai murdered the entire Sanhedrin of his day! **And still, we rejoice and thank God for the miracle of restoring the monarchy.**²⁵

In this context, it is worth noting that the founding of the state and the approval of its institutions set the stage for the establishment of a unified military: the Israel Defense Forces (when earlier all of the underground militias operated independently). The establishment of the IDF significantly impacted how war was waged against the Arab

²³ See *Megilat Esther* on note 2 above, R. Tzadok Ha-cohen's *Divrei Soferim* §14, and *Responsa Yeshu'ot Malko* §66.

²⁴ Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Hanukah 3:1.

²⁵ Incidentally, this is also proof that independence has spiritual value. See Maharal, *Netzah Yisrael*, ch. 1.

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armies that attacked the nascent state with full force. It can be averred that this saved many Jewish lives. For this miracle of being rescued from slavery to freedom and from death to life, we must thank and praise God (according to Hatam Sofer, this obligation is *de-Orayta*, deriving directly from the Torah).

R. Zvi Yehuda also emphasized our debt of gratitude to God for the great miracle of the ingathering of the Diaspora. Although we no longer see how all of these exiles were brought into the fledgling state, and our daily troubles cause us to forget this great wonder, we must remind ourselves of this unprecedented miracle of the return of a people to its soil after thousands of years of exile.

We sometimes become obsessed with the current reality, so we must remind ourselves how much pain and travail the Jewish people suffered in exile, culminating in the terrible Holocaust, in order to appreciate the transformation wrought by the establishment of the state. **Then, even if we see that the glass is partially empty, we would not ignore the part of the glass that is full!** Was there ever a time in Jewish history when as many people studied Torah and there were as many Torah institutions? Doesn't the Jewish state maintain and support this system? The list goes on.

Does celebrating Yom Ha-atzma'ut mean that we should ignore the bad things that have happened or make peace with imperfections? Absolutely not! We do not ignore them, and we all experience their pain in full. Our joy stems from deep introspection that distinguishes between our duty to thank God for the miracles He wrought and the need to identify and fix imperfections – and certainly not to accept them. **We fight for the image and character of this country, trying with all our might to influence its course, but we do not**

disengage from it or from the Jewish people even if our path is long and frustrating!

R. Zvi Yehuda did not ignore the flaws and failures of the state and its functioning; he stood at the head of those who fought to fix it. But he emphasized that the flaws do not negate our duty to thank God for the great miracles He did for us at the time of the establishment of the state or to strengthen ourselves to fulfill our duty, doing as much as we can to advance the spiritual condition of the state and society of Israel. We must recall that independence and sovereignty are as hard to acquire as gold and as easy to destroy as glass (based on *Hagiga* 15a); we have only had them for a brief period of Jewish history, **so we must do our utmost to protect them.**

On Yom Ha-atzma'ut, the state's birthday, we must undertake to fix what needs fixing to the best of our abilities. By doing so, we will give strength to the State of Israel and bring the final redemption even closer.

In the prayers for Yom Ha-atzma'ut, we say: **“He Who performed miracles for our ancestors and redeemed them from slavery to freedom – may He soon redeem us and ingather those of us who have been pushed to the four corners of the earth. All Israel are comrades, and we say, ‘Amen!’”**

On this day, the entire community gathers together to pray and to thank God. We rejoice over the present, and we pray for the perfection of all flaws and imperfection as we greet each other by saying: “A happy holiday for a full redemption – *mo'adim le-simha le-ge'ula sheleima!*”

Yom Ha-zikaron Le-chalelei Tzahal **The Value of the Fallen of Israel's Wars**

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, our national day of independence, Yom Ha-atzma'ut, has been celebrated immediately after our national day of remembrance, Yom Ha-zikaron Le-chalelei Tzahal (literally: Memorial Day for the IDF Fallen). The proximity of these two occasions is unique. Yom Ha-zikaron is a day of linking the nation to those who sacrificed their lives in order to protect it; it is a sad day, full of grandeur and gratitude. On the other hand, Yom Ha-atzma'ut is a joyful celebration. The transition between these days, between sunset and nightfall, is not straightforward, particularly for the bereaved families.

The reason for this juxtaposition is to create awareness of the connection between freedom and its price, that "No country is handed to a people on a silver platter." The surety for the State of Israel's existence is the readiness to pay the price for it.

The Sages note a significant phenomenon: when one is going through an unsettled area and happens upon a cemetery, the nearest town cannot be far away!

Alternatively: "God will reply to you on your day of anguish" (Tehillim 20:2). This can be compared to a father and son travelling together. When the son became tired and asked the father how far they still had to go, he replied:
"My son, take the following as a sign: If you see a cemetery,

know that the
city is not far away.”²⁶

In our generation, we have applied this dictum, “**If you see a cemetery, know that the city (*medina* – which in modern Hebrew means “nation-state”) is not far away,**” in a way that goes beyond its simple meaning: as a national truism. This means that in order for a nation to exist, its citizens must be ready to pay the price for its existence, and this price is a costly one (in terms of resources and lives), heavy and harsh. Before we reach the *medina*, we reach the cemetery; at its gate, we see the heavy cost. This is truly incalculable, since the loss of every individual is the loss of an entire world, as the Mishna notes:

For this reason man was created one and alone in the world: **to teach that whosoever destroys a single soul is regarded as though he destroyed a complete world, and whosoever saves a single soul is regarded as though he saved a complete world;** and for the sake of peace among created beings that one man should not say to another, "My father was greater than yours," and that heretics should not say, "There are many ruling powers in heaven"; also to proclaim the greatness of the blessed Supreme King of kings! For a man stamps a hundred coins with one seal, and they are all alike, but the Supreme King of kings stamps every man with the seal of the Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. **Therefore, every single person must say: “The world was created for my sake.”**²⁷

²⁶ *Midrash Tehillim*, ch. 20.

²⁷ Sanhedrin 4:5. In this context, we may note the words of Maharal in *Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 3, on one who dies before his time, not allowing him to realize all of his potential:

Let us consider the meaning of Yom Ha-zikaron from the viewpoint of faith.

On this day, we trumpet the self-sacrifice of the fallen, the terrible price which they paid for the existence of the nation and the state. The individual's selflessness allows the community to survive, which is a divine, heavenly form of kindness, **bodily kindness**, "**true kindness**". The Sages associate this with our patriarch Avraham, who excelled in all three dimensions of the virtue of kindness:

There are three types of generosity: first, **financial generosity**; second, **bodily generosity**; third, **intellectual generosity**. **Our patriarch Avraham** had all three of these: **financial generosity**, as it says (Bereishit 21:33), "And he planted a tamarisk;" **corporeal generosity, for he saved his nephew Lot and went to war for his sake; intellectual generosity for he taught all of the people** the just path, until they converted...²⁸

Bodily generosity and kindness is expressed by going to war. It is connected to the highest level of kindness, true kindness.

"And deal with me in kindness and truth" — **now is there**

Do not err in these matters, thinking that completeness is impossible for someone who cannot realize his potential because he has passed away before he might realize his potential; we do not deny the World to Come to him at all, if he has prepared himself for completion. His death is beyond his control, so that he could not realize his complete potential. Indeed, the Sages have said (Berakhot 6) that one who plans to perform a mitzva but is unable to do so due to events beyond his control is rewarded as if he has fulfilled the mitzva. This is because the future reward is for the soul, and when one is subject to forces beyond his control, this is not a deficiency of soul but a deficiency of body, and therefore the soul receives the reward as if it fulfilled the mitzva. One is liable only if one fails to do so willfully, intentionally, consciously, for this is a reflection of the soul; this is one who had the possibility to realize his complete potential but did not.

²⁸ *Orhot Tzaddikim* p. 119.

false kindness, that he must say “kindness and truth”? A common proverb says: When your friend's son dies, share his sorrow; but when your friend dies, cast off your sorrow. He said to him, in other words: "If you are kind to me after my death, that would be true kindness."²⁹

“True kindness” is done when the giver cannot hope to receive any compensation.

“Kindness and truth” — kindness that is done with the dead is true kindness, **for one does not expect any payment or reward.**³⁰

In doing “true kindness”, one may emulate God, following the Creator who bestows kindness upon all of His creations, knowing that they can never repay Him:

The eighth mitzva is that we are commanded to emulate God, blessed be He, to the best of our ability. The source of

²⁹ *Midrash Tanchuma*, Vaychi, ch. 3.

³⁰ Rashi on Bereishit 47:29. Malbim on Mishlei explains the meaning of unrequited kindness (20:6):

“Hesed” (kindness) denotes what is done not out of a sense of obligation or promise, but rather generosity of spirit, while “*emuna*”(trust) denotes that which is done out of a sense of obligation or promise. One who observes the former should certainly observe the latter *a fortiori*, for if one volunteers, all the more so one should do what is binding and obligatory. However, in the nature of people, it appears that the opposite is the case: few people are trustworthy. Most do not do what is binding, easily cheating, defrauding and stealing the property of others! However, when one comes to doing kindness, many are available, **and this is because they do not do good altruistically, but rather for praise and glory. They know that kindness is more highly regarded,** for then they will proclaim his kind deeds. This is what the verse means by saying: “Most men will declare every one his own kindness” — **many people will perform kindness, so that each and every person may announce and publicize his kind act.** “But a trustworthy man who shall find?” — because there is no glory and honor in this. It also indicates that it is difficult to find **a trustworthy man who will perform true kindness, kindness done in private, without great publicity and acclaim, for all acts have their roots in love of honor and recompense.**

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this commandment is His statement, "And you shall walk in His ways" (Devarim 28:9). This commandment is repeated in the verse (Devarim 11:22), "To walk in all his ways." This is explained in the words of the *Sifrei (Ekev)* "Just as God is called merciful, so too, you must be merciful. Just as God is called kind, so too, you must be kind. Just as God is called righteous, so too, you must be righteous. **Just as God is called kind (*hasid*), so too, you must be kind.**"

This commandment is also repeated in the verse (Devarim 13:5), "Walk after God your Lord." This too is explained (Sota 14a) **as emulating the good deeds and fine attributes which are used to allegorically describe God**, Who is immeasurably exalted over everything.³¹

When Israel returned to its land and was forced to return and fight for its existence – **we contemplate, with boundless esteem and amazement, the sons of our nation who gave their lives to save the community. This is true kindness; this is bodily kindness.**

When a soldier or officer endangers his life and his body in combat for the sake of the community or for the sake of another soldier, this is true *hesed*. There is no expectation of being compensated, for if one is injured or killed in this endeavor, there is no way to repay him in this world.

However, **this is not only kindness on the individual level; this is kindness on the national level.** War is not an issue of one individual or another, but rather of the nation as a whole, for no individual can wage a war. **Even the enemy soldier has no intent to harm an individual soldier on the battlefield; he aims to**

³¹ Rambam, *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, Positive commandment no. 8.

undermine the whole, politically and territorially, not a collection of individuals. An individual who risks his life in war and protects the nation from its enemies does kindness for the nation as a whole. This is therefore a unique type of *hesed*; it is not limited to the individual, but expanded to the nation as a whole. **In going out to war, the combatant must focus on a specific target. Indeed, the Rambam writes in his Laws of War:**

Once a soldier enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the Hope of Israel and their Savior in times of need. He should realize that he is fighting for the sake of the oneness of God's Name. Therefore, he should place his soul in his hand and not show fright or fear. He should not worry about his wife or children. On the contrary, he should wipe their memory from his heart, removing all thoughts from his mind except the war...

However, anyone who fights with his entire heart, without fear, with the intention of sanctifying God's name alone, can be assured that he will find no harm, nor will evil overtake him. He will be granted a proper family in Israel and gather merit for himself and his children forever. He will also merit eternal life in the world to come as I Shmuel 25:28-29 states: 'God will certainly make my lord a faithful house, for my lord fights the wars of God and evil will not be found with you... and my lord's soul will be bound in a bond of life with God.'³²

The soldiers who gave their lives to save the public and fell in Israel's conflicts sanctifying God's name are considered to be of the highest caliber, reserved for the wholly righteous. As explained in

³² Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars 7:15.

the Talmud, R. Yosef b. R. Yehoshua b. Levi was ill and fell into the state of a coma. When he recovered, his father asked him, "What did you see?"

"I heard it stated, 'Happy is he who comes here possessed of learning, and I **further heard it said that martyrs (*harugei malkhut*) occupy an eminence which nobody else can attain.**'" Who are they? If Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, are they merely *harugei malkhut*? Rather, the martyrs of Lod.³³

The Talmud explains how R. Yehoshua b. Levi overheard in the highest realms that the highest level there is reserved for *harugei malkhut* (literally, "those put to death by the crown"). We are talking about those who have no other spiritual high degree than their having surrendered their lives in order to save their people, as Rashi explains:

"Are they merely *harugei malkhut*" — do they have no other high degree to their credit aside from this alone?³⁴

The martyrs of Lod were two brothers who sacrificed their lives for Israel by confessing to the murder of a princess, of which all Israel had been accused.³⁵

³³ Pesahim 50a; see also the parallel passage in Ta'anit 18b, and Rashi *ad loc.*

³⁴ **Rashi, Pesahim 50a. Compare this to Rashi comments on Bava Batra 10b: "The martyrs of Lod' — Lulianus and Pappas were brothers executed by the evil Tinaeus Rufus in Laodicea, as we say in Ta'anit (18); he had decreed the destruction of Israel because they were suspected in the murder of a princess. These brothers arose and said: 'Why are you going on about Israel? We are the ones who killed her!'"**

³⁵ See *Hiddushei Ha-Ran* on Pesahim 50a, where he explains that they did not save the community; rather, they gave up their lives to defy a persecutory decree, akin to the shoe-straps of Sanhedrin 74b, an ostensibly trivial custom for which a Jew must be willing to die in a time of persecution: "These are the martyrs of Lod' — in aggadic sources, it is mentioned that they did not want to drink from vessels of colored glass, and it was a time of persecution and it was like shoe-straps; but Rashi does not explain it in this manner."

R. Akiva, his students, and his colleagues indeed “sacrificed their lives for Israel,” but they had the additional merit of Torah study, and therefore there is no great innovation in saying that they have a uniquely high position in the upper spheres. Lulianus and Pappas, on the other hand, did not have great spiritual merits, but they merited this high position because of the noble act of sacrificing their lives for the Jewish people.³⁶

In addition, the Talmud says about *harugei malkhut*, killed for no other reason than that they were Jews, that all of their sins are atoned for, and they are considered supremely righteous.³⁷

Since they were killed unjustifiably, they have atonement.

From this, we may derive that any Jew killed by non-Jews receives atonement for his sins. Indeed, this is the ruling of *Shulhan Arukh* – an apostate, for whom one does not mourn by the letter of the law, has a different status if killed by non-Jews. In this case, he is mourned.

One who is accustomed to commit sins is not mourned, all the more so if he is an apostate for idolatry. There are those who

The same is found in Yerushalmi Shevi'it 4:2: “If a non-Jew demands that a Jew violate any of the commandments of the Torah... he should violate it and not be killed. However, this only applies when no one else is present. In public, on the other hand, he must not obey him, even for a minor mitzva. Thus it was with Lulianus and Pappas his brother, who were given water in colored glass vessel, and they refused to accept it.” *Penei Moshe* explains that the brothers refused to drink from the glasses because they were decorated with idolatrous illustrations.

³⁶ In the Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah (5:4), Rambam states:

These are those put to death by the crown, above whom there is no higher level. Concerning them, Scripture (Tehillim 44:23) states: “For Your sake, we have been slain all day, we are viewed as sheep for the slaughter,” and (Tehillim 50:5): “Gather unto Me, My pious ones, those who have made a covenant with Me by slaughter.”

³⁷ According to Sanhedrin 47a-b, the verse (Tehillim 79:2) “They have given your servants’ carcass as food for the bird of the heavens” is applied to them.

say that an apostate killed by non-Jews should be mourned.³⁸

Elsewhere he rules:

There are those who say that an apostate killed by non-Jews has Kaddish recited for him.³⁹

Hatam Sofer terms one who is killed by non-Jews for being a Jew is called a “holy one”:

One killed by non-Jews is called a “holy one.”⁴⁰

In light of this law, R. Kook eulogized two Ha-shomer members who were not Torah-observant, but were killed by Arabs before World War I:

O illustrious author, Mr. A.Z. Rabinowitz, you asked one simple thing of me, a request which any man who is not obstinate could not fail to fulfill. You think, rightly so, that one must fulfill it immediately, soberly and with alacrity: one tear, for the bottle of tears, **for the slain of our people. A new bottle, new tears, new slain, fresh and young slain, whose blood was spilled in the land of the patriarchs.** They are not simply young people, but youths with heart and emotion, souls afire, who came here in order to revive the nation and the land, who rejected every ideal of life, choosing one alone: to build a nation, returning it to its soil. What heart would not melt, what eye will not tear up at these beloved sons of Zion, reckoned like so many potsherds!...

These are the beloved slain, despite the fact that I do not

³⁸ *Shulhan Arukh* YD 340:5; *Hagahot Asheri* Moed Katan (§38): “If one is killed by a non-Jew out of wickedness, he has achieved atonement, and he must be mourned.”

³⁹ *Shulhan Arukh* YD 376 and *Shakh, Taz,* and *Ba'er Heitev, ad loc.*: “This is specifically if he is killed, not if he passes away in his sleep.”

⁴⁰ *Responsa Hatam Sofer* YD, §433.

know their private lives. They deserve all glory of the fallen: we must mourn them and eulogize them, not only by the feelings of the heart, but by the dictates of *halakha*...

By the deep reckoning of a clear universe, we may hearken and listen to the voice in Rama, Rachel crying for her sons, refusing to be comforted. They are thought low and demeaned by so many of their contemporaries, by the great masses of the nation, **for whose hope they laid down their lives. How high they truly are, among the heights of the holy and the pure, shining like the glowing of the sky.** Together with the echo of the voice resounding with love of Torah and its deeds among Israel, “Happy is he who comes here possessed of learning,” but we also hear, that the martyrs of Lod “occupy an eminence which nobody else can attain.”⁴¹

Maharal expands on the inconceivable level of one who lays down his life to sanctify the name of God:

Of this they said, in Pesachim (50a), “Happy is he who comes here possessed of learning, and I **further heard it said that *harugei malkhut* occupy an eminence which nobody else can attain.**” It concludes that it is speaking of the martyrs of Lod. Now, what do these two things have to do with each other? Indeed, they are connected. ***Harugei malkhut* give up their lives in order to sanctify God’s name, and this makes a person totally separate from the physical world, until he gives himself over to death, to be removed from the world**

⁴¹ R. Kook, “*Al Bamoteinu Chalalim*.” This was published after it was delivered as a eulogy for two young men killed in the Galilee by local Arabs in the year 1911. Because of its sharp language, A. Z. Rabinowitz recommended that R. Kook not publish this essay. Indeed, it was only published after the latter’s death, in *Sinai* 17, 5705. It was included in *Maamarei Ha-Re’aya* I, p. 93.

for the sake of the holiness of His great name. Therefore, they “occupy an eminence which nobody else can attain” because no one can attach himself to this level, which is so far removed from those people who incline toward this world while they live in it. Similarly, “he who comes here possessed of learning” is a master of Torah, which is itself discrete and intellectual in its very essence. However, if one has no learning, his soul is not intellectual and separate; rather, it has associations and connections to the body, when the Torah is not with it. This is the comparison between the two issues; understand it.⁴²

R. Yonatan Eybeschütz writes of the holiness of those who sanctify God’s name in a particularly impressive way:

This is the meaning of the analogy (*Bereishit Rabba* 3:4) of the creation of light, that it was created by God when He **garbed Himself. It means to tell us something about the righteous, particularly those killed in order to sanctify God’s great name, who are essentially and wholly righteous, with *harugei malkhut* above them all — after all, we say (Bava Batra 10b) about *harugei malkhut* that they “occupy an eminence which nobody else can attain.”** Therefore, it is said concerning “And there was light” that every time it says “And there was,” it alludes to distress — in this case, the distress that they were killed to sanctify God’s name. **They are woven into God’s purple cloak,⁴³ upon which He gazes in order to shine light.**

⁴² *Derashot Ha-Maharal*, “Sermon on the Torah.”

⁴³ I saw that R. Eliyahu quotes this in the context of the greatness of the fallen in his commentary *Ohalei Yaakov* (46b) on the penitential poetry of Yom Kippur, “Glorious and enlightened... suppressing sins and dressing in righteousness.” This is what he writes:

This, then, is what they mean: God wrapped Himself in the garment and saw the righteous woven in there, and from them, by them, light shone forth... The same is true of the thirteen measures of mercy that God arouses, by way of the righteous, **particularly those killed in order to sanctify His exalted name. They arouse love, because they die with love of God, and they fulfill, “And you shall love Lord your God with... all your soul.”** This is the numerical value of thirteen, equivalent to the letters of “love” [*ahava* – 1+5+2+5] and “One” [*ehad* – 1+8+4], and they arouse the Supreme Love, that of the thirteen attributes of mercy. With this in mind, the Sages said (Rosh Hashana 17b) that the Holy One revealed these thirteen measures of mercy to Moshe when He wrapped Himself like a cantor, and this was with his purple cloak into which were woven the likenesses of martyrs and righteous. Had He looked at it at the time of the Destruction, the Temple would never have been destroyed, and therefore it says (Eicha 2:17): “He executed His proclamation” — i.e., He rent his purple cloak — “which He had commanded in days of old,” etc. From there, light shone forth, and at the Destruction, He rent it.⁴⁴

There is a special garb, the purple cloak, on which all of those put to death by the crown and all those who laid down their lives to sanctify God's name are drawn. Should the Accuser come to indict Israel for their sins, the Holy One gazes upon this purple cloak, then quashes and suppresses all of the sins. By what right does He engage in ‘suppressing sins’? Because He is ‘dressing in righteousness’ — this garb on which all of the martyrs are drawn.”

⁴⁴ *Ya'arot Devash*, Part II, Sermon 10. See Shela, Vol. II, ch. 5, where he deals with the prayer service and Torah reading. He includes a text to be recited by “one who gives himself over to death for the sake of the holiness of the name,” cited from “the notes of one of the punctilious who cleave to God”: You are Holy and Your name is holy, and holy ones from the holy of Israel have sanctified and will sanctify Your name, to suffer stoning, burning, execution and strangulation, along with all other cruel and bitter tortures, for the sake of the holiness of Your name and **for the sake of the salvation of the people of Israel.**

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In the future, God will settle the score with enemies of his people, those who took the lives of His sons — the sons who died sanctifying His name:

Rabbi Yochanan said: Woe to the idolaters who have no rectification for the verse says (Yeshayahu. 60:17), “In place of bronze I will bring gold, and in place of iron I will bring silver...” But, what can be brought in place of Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues? About these the verse says (Yoel 4:21), “I will not cleanse them of their blood.”⁴⁵

On Yom Ha-zikaron, we bind ourselves to the fallen, recognizing them for the kindness they bestowed upon the community. Their personal sacrifice is an important element in the existential struggle for Israel and its independence. On this day, we mention the unique position they have earned by laying their lives down. Together, we feel the pain of loss, as we lovingly embrace the bereaved families. All of these allow us to relate to our independence in an appropriate manner. On this day, we raise the following prayer⁴⁶:

With hope for consolation, that the future heroes of our resurrection will live good, long lives — that there will never again be loss and heartbreak in our borders. Together will all the nation which awaits salvation, we shall always respond: “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ Rosh Hashana 23a.

⁴⁶ HaRav Kook, “*Al Bamoteinu Chalalim*”, *Maamarei Ha-Raya*, vol. I, p. 93

⁴⁷ Devarim 32:43

My Longing for Zion

כמיהתי לציון

Composed by Staff Sergeant Meir Shenvald hy”d, age 18

⁴⁹The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 2a) derives that a woman can be betrothed with money by analogous use of the verb “*kicha*” in context of marriage and in context of Avraham’s purchase of a field from Efron. Thus, the bond between Eretz Yisrael and the nation of Israel is akin to the bond between man and wife

”מניין לומדים שאשה נקנית בכסף קיחה - קיחה משדה עפרון” גמל קידושין ב.
הקשר בין ארץ ישראל לעם ישראל כמו הקשר בין איש לאשתו.

I have longed for Zion like a man longs
for his wife
As one body
As two halves
As a body that clings, magnetized, as a
north-pointing compass
Every part
Every limb
In the genetic code
Limb from my sad body
Like the flesh of my flesh
My land-wife is sanctified unto me
With the bonds of holiness
With the bonds of blood
“Therefore every man shall leave his
father and mother – and cleave to his
wife.”

כְּמִיְהִי לְצִיּוֹן
כְּכַמְיֵהָת אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ
כְּגוּף אֶחָד
כְּשְׁנֵי חֲצָאִים
כְּגוּף שֶׁדָּבַק בְּקֶשֶׁר
כְּמִנְטֵי מִצְפֵּן
כָּל חֵלֶק
כָּל אֶבֶר
אֶבֶר מִגּוּפֵי הַדָּוָה
כְּצֶפֶן נְנֻטִי
כְּבֶשֶׂר מִבֶּשְׂרִי
אֶרְצִי-אִשְׁתִּי מְקֻדְּשֶׁת לִי
כְּקֶשֶׁר קֹדֶשׁ
כְּקֶשֶׁר דָּם
עַל בֶּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת אָבִיו
וְאֶת אִמּוֹ...
וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ.”

⁴⁹ (Meir, a Hesder student serving in the Givati brigade, fell in the line of duty at the gates of Kfar Darom on 9 Nisan, 5755)