

Hakarat Ha-Tov to HKB”H for the State of Israel

By: SHLOMO SPRECHER

On Monday, May 5, 2014, the Fifth of Iyyar, 5774, Dr. Shlomo Sprecher was the Master of Ceremonies at a gathering in Congregation Bais Moshe Shmiel of Flatbush to express hakarat ha-tov to HKB”H for the State of Israel. Shlomo spoke first, and what follows is a lightly-edited transcription of his address. Jason Koppel, then AIPAC Director for Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, spoke next. The Keynote Address was delivered by Malcolm Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. This was perhaps the first time a major gathering took place in a ḥaredi shul in Flatbush to mark an event commemorating the establishment of the State of Israel. There was much excitement among the overflowing crowd; all seats were taken and latecomers were clustered around the entrance.



Shlomo Sprecher speaking at Congregation Bais Moshe Shmiel, May 5, 2014

Shlomo Sprecher, ז”ל was on the Editorial Board of *Hakirah*. He passed away on March 15, 2017. See dedication at the beginning of this volume.

ערב טוב רבותי.

ברשות הרב שליט"א, ברשות הקהילה הקדושה, וברשות אורחים מכובדים:

Rabosai, undoubtedly the most hackneyed phrase in the realm of Jewish speechdom is the adaptation of the *Gemara* in *Berachos* "פותחים בכבוד אכסניא". I know from myself personally and I'm sure for many of the audience, as soon as you hear that, the auditory senses go on clampdown. The brain goes on standby. It's quite legitimate though, *rabosai*; I beg indulgence. If any event deserves "פותחים בכבוד אכסניא", it's tonight's *asifab*.

On behalf of all the *toshavei* Flatbush, ואת אשר ישנו פה עמנו היום ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום: I know the room is too small to contain everybody who would really like to be here. We would like to acknowledge the wisdom, the discernment, and above all the courage of the esteemed מרא דאתרא for hosting tonight's truly, truly historic event. I am sure that the *rav* will graciously share the credit with his esteemed congregation. We know every time you have a functioning *shul*, it's a symbiotic and a synergistic relationship between the *rav* and the *kehillah*. So again, a hearty *yasher ko'ach* to the whole *kehillah* for participating in this historic event and being the forum for the event.

Rabosai, when people ask me what exactly is transpiring, I refer them to the ad.¹ I think whoever wrote the copy of the ads should be congratulated. I don't know if it's an award-winning ad, but I think the unspoken, the unwritten word is that this *asifab* is designed as an affirmation both for ourselves, for our neighbors, and perhaps the Orthodox world at large that there really is no conflict, there is no dichotomy between what we all aspire to be, which is a *הרד בדבר ה'*, and being passionate, committed, devoted to the welfare and the well-being and the safety and the security of the State of Israel.

There really is no daylight between those two identities. There's no conflict. Now, you don't have to believe a non-entity like me when I say that, so *baruch Hashem* people have put together an anthology of *gedolim* and *da'as torah* who say that. Now, I'm not going back into the 19th century; you know, Zvi Hirsh Kalisher or Eliyahu Gutmacher. We're not even invoking Rav Kook. The *gedolim* that I'd like to invoke are *gedolim* whose *seforim* are *mekubal* in every *beis medrash*, both in the *litvish* and *chassidische velt*, and who are writing after *hakamas ha-Medinah*. And don't forget

¹ The header of the ad read: "A wall, where every crack holds a prayer; a city, where every stone tells a story; Eretz Yisrael, where every street is paved with Jewish history. Please join with our community as we gather to express *hakaras ha-tov* to HKB" who has blessed us with a thriving and dynamic homeland, the State of Israel, where all Jewish people are free to live their lives and pursue their ideals."

that when the *Medinah* was founded, May Day was as big a holiday as *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*.

The people who founded the *Medinah* by and large—when Stalin died in 1953, there was mourning amongst a large segment of the population. Yet, despite the *Medinah* having that *tzurah*, we're going to read together some passages that some of these *gedolei yisroel* wrote about what the proper attitude should be.

I want to thank Heshey Zelcer for putting together this pamphlet, so those of you who have a handout, let's read together; because, again, even if I had the capacity, I could not express myself the way these *gedolim* do. Everything that we're going to read tonight is post *bakamas ha-Medinah*, in the '50s when the red flag was right next to the blue and white.

Let's start with *Ha-Ga'on Ha-Rav* Tzvi Pesach Frank. It's page 1 of the handout. We will start with the underlined segment, the left-hand column. By the way, I should say a word about where this material comes from, two volumes called *אתחלתא היא* which is an anthology.² I'm only going to choose just a few *Rabbonei Ashkenaz* who are familiar to most of the audience.

The person who put together these two volumes is someone whose name should be celebrated, Rav Yitzhok Dadon. Some of you might remember that a few years after he put together these two volumes, he ran to Mercaz HaRav, into the library where a *rotzei'ach* with an AK-47 Kalashnikov with 600 rounds had already murdered eight children while they were learning *mishmar* night, and he pulled out his revolver, his personal *neshek*, and he made sure that the victim count would stop at eight. So this is the person who put together this anthology. Not even Rav—plain Yitzhok Dadon, but certainly...

We are going to read what Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank wrote. It says: ראה רבינו זצ"ל את (it's the underlined on page 1) אתחלתא דגאולה בהתממשותה, והיה חוזר ומשנן באזני שומעיו כי 'הקמת מדינת ישראל היא ישועה גדולה לעם ישראל'. Okay. The translation: that he saw 'the realization of the State of Israel as being a great salvation for the Jewish people' and as *אתחלתא דגאולה*.

We will read this paragraph—I'm going to translate it for those who...³ He says every eye can appreciate the *hashgachah* of *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu* to give us an existence in this land of our forefathers. After so

² אתחלתא היא: יחסם של גדולי ספרד ואשכנז לציונות ולהקמת המדינה, ליקט וערך יצחק דדון, ירושלים תשס"ו.

³ Sprecher was a brilliant scholar, meticulous in his writing. In this address, however, he is speaking without a prepared text to friends, for whom he lovingly

much time, the extended exile when the *goyim* challenged us, what hope do you have? Two thousand years where אשר דם ישראל נשפך כמים המוגרים, Jewish blood flowed like water and נתונים למשיסה ביד זאבי טרף כשה לטבח, He's using the phrase that Jewish lives were like sheep to the slaughter and we found no מנוח, but then *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*— ניצוצי וכמו השחר עלה על שמי ארצנו הקדושה וכבוד, G-d shone a light unto us, וה' עלינו זרה להרמת קרן ישראל לעיני הגויים, and G-d shone His magnificence on us to raise up the קרן ישראל in the face of the *goyim*, שיכירו וידעו כל, כל יושבי תבל בזכותינו לבנות את בית ישראל בארצנו.⁴

By the way, the next paragraph, also underlined, you should know that the הובא על ידי רבינו—I didn't know this—מי שברך לחיילי צה"ל *nussach* Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank wrote that *nussach* which some are still *mefak-pekim* whether to say it in a traditional *beis knesses* or not. It's לא יאומן, לא יאומן. By the way, there's a very famous photograph of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank with his son—one of his sons—in uniform, I think in 1950. I should have brought the picture in, but it's a phenomenal picture. So we see again Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank writing that; he's using this terminology, and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank—his *sefarim* find an honored placed in every *beis medrash*, in every *beis medrash*. He's not a far-out figure. He's mainstream *she-bab*, mainstream.

dedicated his time and talents. The uneven transliteration of the Hebrew words reflects the vernacular of his *hareidi* community, and his choppy sentences—certainly in this case—are a reflection of his sensitivity toward others. Having started this sentence, he must have realized there was no good way to end it and thus—it was left incomplete. We have therefore decided to print his words as they were spoken to enable the reader to 'hear' his voice and experience his precious personality (ed.).

"כל עין רואה בזה יד ההשגחה העליונה הנטויה עלינו לחונינו ולתת לנו מחיה בארץ האבות. שאחרי עבור עידן ועידנים לגלותנו הממושכת ונאמו גויים אבדה תקותם. קרוב לאלפים שנה אשר דם ישראל נשפך כמים המוגרים, נתונים למשיסה ביד זאבי טרף כשה לטבח יובל, ולא מצאה היונה מנוח לכף רגלה... והנה פתאום, מתוך החושך והערפל אשר כיסה את עין הארץ נתבקעו ניצוצי אור וכמו השחר עלה על שמי ארצנו הקדושה, וכבוד ה' עלינו זרה להרמת קרן ישראל לעיני הגויים, שיכירו וידעו כל יושבי תבל בזכותנו לבנות את בית ישראל בארצנו." שם עמ' רלה-רלו.

"נוסח 'מי שברך' לחיילי צה"ל חובר על ידי רבינו זצ"ל אשר ראה באור חיובי את הנוער המתגייס לצבא הישראלי לחרף נפשו בעד הצלת ישראל, ועל ידם עשה ה' תשועה גדולה ונמסרו רבים ביד מעטים. וכה כותב על תשועת המלחמה: " (שם רלו)

"זכינו לראות כי פקד ה' את עמו להושיענו באתחלתא דגאולה ורובה של ארץ-ישראל המערבית נכבש על ידי צבא ההגנה לישראל... ומעין זה שהיה בגאולה הראשונה על ידי יהושע בן נון, כן ראינו שנית בהתחלת גאולתנו האחרונה הזאת...! (כרם ציון תרומות כרך א עמ' לח).

Let's turn to page 3, *rabosai*. Page 3, this is a *besped* that Rav Herzog gave on Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer of course was a great *gadol be-yisrael*, also the father-in-law of Rav Aharon Kotler. The right-hand column, the underlined segment, Rav Herzog in the *besped*, he recounts that in the 1930s the Peel Commission... that the British government was willing to give a small slice of Israel—a small slice to the Jewish entity to create a Jewish state. Of course a much larger slice—besides Jordan, but within Israel itself, within Israel itself—a much larger slice would go to the Palestinian state and the *rabbonim* did not agree to it. But Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer went to Rav Herzog and he said, “You’re wrong.”

Let's read the underlined passage—the bold underlined passage.⁶ This is what Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer told Rav Herzog in the 1930s. He says, דבר שלא היה לישראל - כלומר מדינה - זה קרוב לאלפים שנה, ועתה מציעים זה לפנינו. The British government is willing to give us even a small slice *אם כי במידה*, it may be very small, *זעומה לעת עתה*, *נא ונא שלא לדחות*, not to push it off. *ניכר שזה מן השמים וזה סימן של אתחלתא דגאולה*. So Rav Isser Zalman tells Rav Herzog that it's a mistake. Whatever the British give us, no matter how small it is, let's accept it. Let's accept it.

Turn the page, *rabosai*, to page 4.⁷ This is the testimony of *Ha-Ga'on* Rav Reuven Katz on his *rebbe*, Rav Isser Zalman. I'm going to read the underlined passage. Again, this is a direct quotation from Rav Reuven Katz. *מה רבה וגדולה היתה שמחתו של זקן גאון הדור שזכה לראות בעיניו את יסודה*. Not to deny that there are problems between irreligious factions, et cetera, but let's skip to the middle of the column underlined.⁸ *אף על פי כן*, despite knowing—again, you have to understand what the *Medinah* was like at its foundation where the anti-religious elements were at their peak—were at their peak, *אף על פי כן עלץ ורחב ליבו*, nevertheless he celebrated the foundation of the State of Israel despite the partners who we had to celebrate with.

Let's turn to page 5, *rabosai*. Again, this is Rav Reuven Katz. The photograph is on the previous page. *Rav Rashi* of Petach Tikvah, a noted *poseik*

⁶ "לפתע פתאום בא אלי הגאון ז"ל כשהוא כולו רועד בבקשה נפשית עמוקה שלא להמשיך בתנועה האנטי-חלוקתית ההיא. זכרוני מקצת דבריו: 'דבר שלא היה לישראל - כלומר מדינה - זה קרוב לאלפים שנה, ועתה מציעים זה לפנינו, אם כי במידה זעומה לעת עתה, נא ונא שלא לדחות. ניכר שזה מן השמים וזה סימן של אתחלתא דגאולה!...' (שם).

⁷ שם רמד.

⁸ "אף על פי כן עלץ ורחב לבו לקראת המאורע הגדול של קיום המדינה" (שם רמד).

of *Degel Reuven* and this is what he's writing. The underlined left-hand column of page 5. במאמר לרגל 'יום העצמאות' בשנת תשי"א. I told you when Stalin died in 1953, there was mourning in the Land of Israel. Black border. I still have the [inaudible 00:11:37] with a black border. That was the kind of country that it was, and still 1950 he's writing, ברוך שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה, לחוג את יום העצמאות של מדינת ישראל. יום העצמאות הוא יום של תפלה והודיה על הניסים ועל התשועות שנעשו לנו בתקופה רבת הוד ותפארת זו. 1951.⁹

Turn to page 6, *rabosai*.¹⁰ Again, Rav Reuven Katz. ברוך ה' שהפליא את חסדיו עם עמו וארצו. והשנה - עם כינון המדינה עם ביסוסה - ניתנה לנו היכולת לערוך ברוך פאר והדר את שמחת הבשורה של יום עצמאות ישראל דורנו—this is all a direct quotation from Reuven Katz—דורנו זכה לראות האתחלתא דגאולה 1951. And then he writes (we'll skip to the next underlined passage): ומשום חירוף הנפש שאין תיאור ודומה לו: because of the sacrifice of people, הדור הזה עמד בפני סכנה עצומה, the generation was under a tremendous threat, כולו התיצב כדי להגן ולבצר על נחלתו וגאולתו, the entire nation mobilized, 600,000 Jews. The יישוב mobilized to defend itself.

He continues in this vein – I'll skip a few lines. כי על עם ישראל לדעת, חירות ועצמאות ישראל הושגו בתוקף גבורת ישראל על פי ייעודי ההשגחה... of course *bashgachab* of *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu*, and we have to ביום העצמאות, נזכור ברטט של קדושה וגאון את נשמות המגינים והלוחמים אשר נתנו את חייהם קודש לגאולת ישראל. Again, we have to acknowledge the sacrifice. One percent of the *yishuv* died. One percent of the *yishuv* died in the *Milchemes ha-Shi-chrur*.

Then he mentions of course we have to acknowledge the *kibbutz galuyos*. It was amazing that Jews were brought from all Arab countries. Again, I know that some people say, well, if there hadn't been Zionism then those Jews in the countries would be living very well. We see today, we see *b'chush* what tender mercies by which Assad gasses and bombs and tortures his own Arabs. Can you imagine what 600,000 Jews would be doing in Arab countries with or without Zionism? I mean it's beyond belief that people can make that mistake.

Rabosai, turn to the next page, page 7. There's another famous *poseik*, Rav Meshulam Roth, *Kol Mevasser*. I am just reading two lines from the left-hand column.¹¹ ואני תפילה, כאשר זכיתי אחרי השואה הנוראה לראות באתחלתא

9 שם רמז.

10 שם רמח.

11 שם רעז.

דגאולה. Again, he's expressing himself in his הקדמה to שאלות ותשובות calling the המדינה – "אתחלתא דגאולה" – Believe me, *rabosai*, the *Medinah* had quite a different *tzurab* in the 1950s than it has today.

We turn to page 8. We have just a little representation of the *chassidische velt*. Until now these were all *litvishe gedolim*. In the *chassidische velt* we have *Ha-Ga'on Ha-Tzaddik* Rav Yaakov Friedman, the *Admor* of Husiatyn. Again, we'll read the underlined passage in the left-hand column. והרבי! השיב: יסוד מדינת ישראל היא האתחלתא דגאולה! This is from the *sefer Oholei Ya'akov*.¹²

Turn to page 9.¹³ This is the *Admor Mi-Sadigur*. Also a *Ruzhiner einikel*, and we could read the bracketed paragraph. Again, it mentions the dedication—he's again—he's writing about non-*frum* people, but the dedication that they had in sacrificing their lives to found the *Medinah*, and of course he's sensitive to the religious issues. Again, no one has to discount the fact that we can disagree with the *Memsalab* regarding approaches to religious issues, and we can be *mitvakei'ach*. We can press our [case], but this should not change the fundamental dynamic, the love and appreciation that we should have for *Artzeinu Ha-Kedoshab*.

Now, for many of us, and myself in particular, it's very good to have this *da'as Torah* on a cerebral level, but I believe for many of us, the love and appreciation for *Eretz Yisrael* comes from an earlier and a deeper place. In my particular case, and I think for many who are here, it comes from our parents and those of us who are lucky to have grandparents. Both my parents and my mother's parents who survived—Polish Jews. My father is a sole survivor as a family except for a half-sister who spent six years of her childhood in a convent because she had blond hair. This is something that we were raised with.

These are people who experienced that Jewish life had no value whatsoever. To say that Jewish life is cheap is a way overstatement. It's over-inflated. It's less than cheap. Valueless. Valueless. What kind of *chillul Hashem* is that? There can't be any greater *chillul Hashem* that the *Am Ha-Nivchar* is *hefker*, that a Jewish life accounts for nothing. Killing a mosquito probably had more significance than killing a Jew.

Then to go from a state of absolute powerlessness, to go to a situation where we have, *baruch Hashem*—there's someone to defend Jewish rights.

12 אהלי יעקב עמ' צא.

13 "כשנסב גם השתא לעריכת הסדר במדינתנו נעביר בדמיוננו את אבותינו הקדושים בכל הדורות עברו. את גדולי וענקי הרוח בני חורין האמיתיים, שלא נשתעברו לכל מיני רוחות הרעות של אליליות ולכל רוח זר ושמרו על עצמאותנו הרוחנית שלא נבלע בין הגוים... הנוער הזה, הנותן נפשו על הגנת מולדתנו, לא יודע, שנשמה לעם הזה, נשמה מיוחדת במינה שגם להגנתה כדאי להקריב את החיים..." שם רצג.

Remember in the '30s, the Jews—there was no place in the world to take a Jew—to get an affidavit to come to this country. I mean people with PhDs from the best German universities, but if you couldn't have someone here who had x number of dollars in the bank account, it was meaningless. Then to go to a state that says every Jew is welcome. Every Jew is welcome.

I can still remember the terror of 1967. My father, my mother, my grandfather, you know the *pachad*. They thought, *chalilah*, this is being taken away from us and we're going to go through again another *churban*. I remember going to *yeshivah* the day—Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, right? Somebody told me last night in *shul*: “A *boger*, someone who went to Torah Vodaath should come to a meeting like this?” That's what someone told me in *shul* last night. I said, “פונקט פארקערט.” I remember Torah Vodaath in 1967. We went to *yeshivah* in 1967. All the *rabbeim*—it was a unanimous decision that there was no *limudei kodesh*. There was no *limudei chol*. Everybody out in the streets. Go and gather money. Emergency campaign for Israel. Remember emergency campaign. I can speak for Torah Vodaath. I can imagine that the same was true for other *yeshivos* as well. Am I correct?

So I am hoping—the function of this *asifab*, *rabosai*—let's go back to those days. We're going to hear from the professionals tonight, but on the existential level, things should not be perceived as any different. We want to go back to that—again, we can have our differences, political differences. The *Memsbalah* is making terrible mistakes releasing Palestinian prisoners, cutting the *taktzin*, et cetera, et cetera. But when a member—when our children, they don't always do what we would like them to do, I can imagine, right? I mean I speak for myself. I'm sure. But nevertheless it's still your child. It's still your family. Your loved one.

This year has been very difficult for me personally. I mean starting really last spring with the elections and I don't think I personally have lived through such a difficult year and the kind of rancor and rhetoric—it's unbelievable. So we're hoping, we say **חדש ימינו כקדם**. Let's hope that tonight's *asifab*, in contradistinction to other *asifos*, will bring back together that kind of sensitivity. [Inaudible 00:19:57] first we'll tone down the rancor. I see already that there are many—there are some small steps being taken.

Last week, *Mishpacha* published a survey in which they were astounded that the *chiloni* attitude towards Orthodox Jews was much more favorable than they had imagined, and voices today, *Yom Hazikaron*—not to desecrate *Yom Hazikaron*. Not to desecrate in the *chareidi* community. Tonight's historic event—in order to change directions, first you have to

start with a small step. *Baruch Hashem* it's a much larger step than I thought.

Again, I hope I didn't overstay my introductory remarks, but I would like to call upon the first speaker, Mr. Koppel. He is from AIPAC. Now *rabosai*, as far as AIPAC—you know, you can open any of our local papers and there's advertisements for every *tzedakah* imaginable, really from A to Z. But AIPAC is not on our radar. AIPAC is not on our radar. The fault is with us. *Rabosai, baruch Hashem* here we have a representative of AIPAC who's one of our *anshei shlomeinu* and will explain to us that we can't rely on other circles of the Jewish community to be the sole supporter of AIPAC. If you accept the results of the Pew Survey, unfortunately other parts of the community are shrinking and support for Israel is definitely on the decline. We have to step up.

Rabosai, American Jewry should not fail world Jewry a second time. All right. I still hear Reb Yoshe Ber [Soloveichik]'s personal anguish. He said how American Jewry failed. American Jewry failed—failed European Jewry during World War II. You can't allow *chas v'shalom*—and the only thing that keeps the American government in sync, more or less of course, the current regime might be out of sync, but AIPAC is a very strong component of that relationship.

I would like to—before I introduce the speaker, he reminded me that what's said in this room, stays in this room. He also asked that there are sign-in sheets and that please fill them out because it's important for him to show the leaders in AIPAC that the Orthodox community is behind and fully supports the organization. Thank you very much. ❧