

# The Meaning of the Establishment of the State of Israel

For many Religious Zionist thinkers, the meaning of the modern State of Israel is tied to an assertion that its establishment is a manifestation of the miraculous Divine hand in history. The historical events leading up to and following the State's establishment are understood in light of classical Biblical and Talmudic passages. In this approach, the State of Israel is significant because it is the embodiment of a supernatural process of Biblical redemption. This outlook has two significant drawbacks. First, in this approach, the State itself is ancillary (if not worse) in significance to the supernatural processes that led to its establishment. This allows us to ignore the tremendous religious value that the democratic process the State of Israel embodies irrespective of any miraculous dimension. Second, the attempt to equate modern Israel with the Messianic visions of our sacred texts doesn't always flow. Often, linking these texts to Israel's reality rings hollow. Therefore, I would like to share an alternative perspective that calls upon us to appreciate the State itself, independent of prophetic visions and miraculous interventions that the State may or may not reflect.

The encounter between man and God's creation often arouses extraordinary feelings. The magnificent beauty of nature — a majestic waterfall or a meadow filled with spring blossoms — has the capacity to sweep us away.



Rabbi David Bigman

Rosh Yeshivat Maale Gilboa

Like nature, human ingenuity expressed in works of art, literature, and music can similarly arouse powerful feelings. Though one might distinguish between appreciation for God's Divine creation and man's earthly creativity, from the Torah's perspective, such a distinction is artificial. Scripture charges us to "remember the Lord your God, who gives you the power to achieve" (Deuteronomy 8:18). In this light, we turn to evaluate the achievement of the human endeavor that has built the modern State of Israel.

The democratic nation state is the culmination of a 200-year process of human organizational and social experimentation. Its achievement is worthy of recognition. Biblical notions of equity, social justice, and fairness are embodied in the modern democratic nation state. Moreover, it allows individuals and groups to accept responsibility for their destiny. It is befitting for a ben Torah to recognize the spirit of the prophets that drives this new political entity, even if this model of a national polity diverges from the one described in Maimonides' *Laws of Kings*.

What has been noted here is true for any of the healthy modern democratic states. Yet when it comes to the State of Israel, our appreciation reaches another level altogether. For 2,000 years, Jews lived as a minority group with limited political and civil rights, our lot largely contingent on a dominant host community. Is it possible to ignore the excitement that beats in our hearts over our success in establishing, with God's help, a political framework that allows the Jewish people to improve and take responsibility for its destiny after nearly 2,000 years of exile and destruction? Against the darkness of the culmination of this long exile in the Shoah, the light of Israel appears all the brighter.

This appreciation for the State does not mean that we are blind to its faults. While inspired by the prophet call for justice, Israel has not yet established full equality for all of its citizens. The tensions created by our tenuous security situation have interfered with our ability to fulfill the Biblical charge to love the stranger. As in days of old, we still struggle with corruption in the government and the religious

establishment. Social and economic justice have not been fully achieved. And yet, despite its imperfections, Israel's achievements are awe-inspiring.

How are we to express this awe? Appreciation for the encounter with the Divine presence in the world, whether through the beauty of nature or human genius, has always given rise to a need to thank the Creator. Therefore, religious poetry throughout the ages, from the Biblical Psalms to contemporary *piyyutim*, has an important role.

Yet it is crucial to remember that this poetry is not a replacement for the unmediated encounter between man and the creation. When one meditates upon nature and looks for a medium of expression, the verse "How numerous are your deeds oh God, you have created all of them in wisdom" (Tehillim 104:24), can partially give voice to the experience. However, when language becomes routine or when it loses resonance with the spirit of the people, instead of serving as an expression of sensitivity, it stifles it. A religious verse can become a trite slogan and then it loses its charm and turns vacuous.

As our generation searches for the words to express the intense appreciation in our hearts for the establishment of the State of Israel, we must admit that we cannot fully understand the events that our people have experienced in the past few decades and those that we are in the midst of living through now. Can the vision of the prophetic redemption or the Talmudic passages concerning the End of Days express it?! One thing is clear: when religious language belittles the religious experience it should not be used. Therefore, the attempt to judge our State by the measure of the vision of the redemption may be inappropriate. We need to strive to find the appropriate expression of gratitude for the wonderful gift and responsibility bestowed upon our generation. So too, we must continue to strive for a world of justice where "the earth is full of knowledge of the Lord as the water covers the sea."



## The future is in your hands.

Meet Shlomo Anapolle of Edison, New Jersey. When it comes to a love of Israel, few college students can match the Sabra passion of this Yeshiva University junior. A pre-med, biology major with plans to attend an Israeli medical school, Shlomo balances his time between neo-natal diagnostic research, intensive shiurim and a commitment to Israel advocacy.

Whether it's planning lobbying missions to Washington, D.C. with YUPAC or teaching English to teens in the Negev through Counterpoint Israel, Shlomo brings to bear his leadership skills for the sake of the Jewish people and homeland. He is proud to invite Israeli diplomats to YU to help his peers contextualize current events. Shlomo chose YU because, to him, Torah Umadda isn't merely the convergence of science and our mesorah—at Yeshiva University, it is the formula for a values-driven preparation for life. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

Picture yourself at YU. #NowhereButHere



Yeshiva University

[www.yu.edu](http://www.yu.edu) | 212.960.5277 | [yuadmit@yu.edu](mailto:yuadmit@yu.edu)

[www.yu.edu/enroll](http://www.yu.edu/enroll)