Joseph Tabory, “The Piety of Politics: Jewish Prayers for the State of Israel,” in Ruth Langer and Steven Fine, ...
The Piety of Politics: Jewish Prayers for the State of Israel

Joseph Tabory

A. Introduction

The traditional prayer book provides one of the most accessible battlefields for new ideas and concepts struggling to find their place in Judaism. It should almost go without saying that the founding of the State of Israel has left an impact on the prayer book—at least among those who recognize the cosmic importance of the founding of this State. There are two reasons for
this impact. One is the fact that people to whom prayer means something try to make their prayer reflect their actual concerns, either by introducing new prayers or by changing old ones. The second reason is that the synagogue serves as a house of gathering and not only as a house of prayer. Its function is not only that of a place in which one communicates with God; it also functions as a place where worshipers communicate with each other. Jewish liturgy itself has both functions: it is meant to deliver a message to God; but it also serves as a method of communication between the people who gather in the synagogue.

Perhaps the best example of this duality of prayer is to be found in the central prayer of Judaism, the Amidah. The Talmud tells us that Rabban Gamaliel, the “founder” of this prayer, decided to include in this prayer a malediction against the minim, an unidentified heretical group. It has been an axiom of scholarship that this was necessary in order to force these people out of the synagogue, to prevent their heresy from infecting “Torah-true” Judaism (to use an anachronism). It is not altogether clear whether this was a completely new addition to the Amidah or whether the Amidah already included such a malediction, originally referring to other groups, and Rabban Gamaliel decided to include these minim in this malediction. Nevertheless, it is clear that this prayer was not only meant as a statement to God; it was also meant as a statement to those who had gathered together in the synagogue.

Later generations still used this malediction against the minim for their changing needs. Versions of the Amidah from the Cairo Genizah mention Christians specifically in this “blessing,” and the assumption is that they did so in their need to create a clear distinction between the synagogue community and the Christians—thus ousting the Christians from the synagogue.  

Independence Day of Israel falls on a Friday. On that occasion, they do recite taharun for fear that not saying taharun might be considered recognition of the State.

2. It is possible that the Amidah was originally formulated not only with an eye to presenting a text for prayer but also for the purpose of presenting a set of values that were to be accepted by the praying community. For a discussion of Ezra Fleischer’s views on this, see Ruth Langer, “Revisiting Early Rabbinic Literature: The Recent Contributions of Ezra Fleischer,” Prooftexts 19 (1999) 186. The theory that prayer was meant mostly for the self-education of the worshiper rather than as a means of communicating with God was most strongly stressed by S. R. Hirsch. For a survey of those who felt that the purpose of prayer was to do something to the worshiper, see Issachar Jacobson, Netiv Binah (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1964) 31–38 [Eng. translation, B. S. Jacobson, Meditations on the Siddur].

3. For the most recent discussion of the Genizah material, see Y. Luger, The Weekday Amidah in the Cairo Genizah (Jerusalem: Orhot, 2001) 133–45 [Heb.]. For a survey of the literature on this subject, see P. W. van der Horst, “Birkat Ha-Minim in Recent Literature,” in Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994) 99–114. On the other hand, we find prayers for the benefit of people who practice certain customs, such as not talking during the services, which are meant to encourage correct behavior. For collections of such prayers, see my Jewish Prayer and the Yearly Cycle: A List of Articles (Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library, 1992–93); see also Ezra Fleischer, Eretz-Israel Prayer and Prayer Rituals as Portrayed in the Geniza Documents (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988) 248 n. 124 [Heb.].
In later generations, the *Amidah* could no longer serve this purpose, for its text had become fixed. Other opportunities in the liturgy were found for public statements. We find a positive expression of fealty to a spiritual leader inserted in the *Qaddish.* This prayer includes a request that the messianic era should begin within the lifetime of those assembled; it singles out by name the spiritual leader to whom respect was owed, apparently whether he was present or not. Ramban reported that the Jews in Yemen had mentioned the name of Maimonides in this context. Scholars thought that this was unique, but we now know that the inclusion of the name of the spiritual leader in the *Qaddish* was a common custom.

Two possible reasons enabled the *Qaddish* to become the place for this addition. First, the particular *Qaddish* in which this addition appears was not said in the context of prayer but, rather, in the context of a lecture or a study group. The lecture itself was not a fixed text, and its concluding prayer was thus probably considered less fixed than prayers recited in a more formal context. Second, and not unrelated, is that the *Qaddish* is fundamentally not a prayer to God but an expression by the community of its desire for the realization of the kingdom of God. Hence the *Qaddish* is not addressed to God; rather, it only refers to God in the third person. It employs second-person address only for the community itself: “may this come to pass in your lifetimes. . . .” Thus, it was relatively easy to add the specification “and in the lifetime of our teacher. . . .” Note that this addition did not in itself express fealty to the leader, but its singling him out among all the other people testifies to his special status in the community.

This custom fell into desuetude, due perhaps to the feeling that the text of the *Qaddish* was not really appropriate for an expression of fealty to a leader. The wonder of Nachmanides at the tradition about Maimonides seems to show that he did not know of any parallel to this custom. The liturgical locus for expressions of local communal ideas and ideals became associated with the reading of the Torah, especially on the Sabbath.

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4. See Mordechai A. Friedman, “*Beḥayekhon uveyomekhon veḥayye detahbana Moshe*,” *Zion* 62 (1997) 75–78. The most appropriate place for this within the *Qaddish* seems to be within the passage that prays for the health of the rabbis and their students, which is added to the *Qaddish* when the *Qaddish* is said after a learning session. However, the extant texts show that the prayer for the leader was inserted in the first passage of the *Qaddish.* Since this passage is always part of the *Qaddish,* the presumption is that the leader was mentioned every time *Qaddish* was said.


6. Friedman, ibid.

7. Abudarham reports that Mondays and Thursdays were also opportunities for these public prayers. He discusses the prayer for the ruler in this context (*Abudarham Hashalem* [Jerusalem, 5723/1963] 136). Others limited the frequency of these prayers. Some oriental communities recited the prayer for the rulers only on the Day of Atonement. Some of the communities that today regularly recite the prayer for missing soldiers do so only on the Sabbath before the New Moon. For evidence of a prayer for the ruler recited on festivals, see my *Jewish Festivals in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996) 62 and the literature cited there [Heb.].
explanations for this. One explanation is that it was customary, after study of Torah, to recite the Qaddish, which included the prayer for the scholars and students of the Torah. It was thus just a short step further to expand this moment with prayers for others who contributed to the community in their own ways and for the community as a whole.⁸

A second explanation, related to the first, is that the Torah reading and prayer are essentially two independent elements, and the seam between them could be used for expression of communal needs without interrupting the liturgical pattern. Thus, the sermon was usually delivered either before the reading of the Torah or immediately after it.⁹ One of the well-documented moments for righting wrongs done within the community was just before the reading of the Torah, when men or women who felt themselves injured had the right to prevent the reading until they were promised that the matter would be examined.¹⁰ This was an appropriate place to insert public announcements, including blessings for people who have contributed to the synagogue or the community. Some of these formulae are quite ancient and are clearly related to those inscribed in synagogues from Late Antiquity.¹¹ At this point in the liturgy we find, in one community, a special prayer for those who refrained from drinking wine that had been handled by non-Jews; many communities inserted here a prayer for those who refrained from speaking in the synagogue.¹² In a similar vein, some communities have recently added here prayers for Israeli soldiers missing in action and for women whose husbands have refused to grant them divorces. All of these were and are, of course, more in the nature of announcements and exhortations than real prayer. It would seem that the true thrust of these prayers is to keep these issues before the public rather than to actually implore God for his help in these matters.¹³

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⁹. Shem Tov Gagin remarks that the custom in London was to pray for the king after the reading of the Haftarah, but in Amsterdam, according to its early custom, they did so when they took the Torah out of the ark preparatory to reading it (Keter Shem Tov [Kaidan, Lithuania, 1934; Jerusalem, n.d.] 1.417). It is not surprising that the later Amsterdam custom was to pray twice: one prayer said while the ark was open and the other recited after the reading (p. 419).
¹². Abraham Ya’ari, “Mi Sheberakh Prayers: Their History, Customs and Versions,” Kiryat-Sefer 33 (1957–58) 122 [Heb.]. Ya’ari lists prayers on this subject from several European communities: Worms, Krakow, Konitz [Poland], and Buczacz [Galicia]. Another version of this prayer, used in Lublin, was published by Solomon Baruch Nussenbaum, “Un manuscrit de la ‘Gueniza’ de Lublin,” Revue des études juives 50 (1908) 89.
¹³. In a similar fashion, fasting, which was once a method of communication with God, is today used to arouse public sympathy—in the form of hunger strikes. See my Jewish Festivals, 391.
One of the most common prayers offered at this junction was a prayer for the health and welfare of the leader and/or the government of the country in which the Jews were living. Historians of prayer have traced such a prayer back to Jeremiah, who called to his people, “seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you, and pray to the Lord in its behalf: for in its prosperity you shall prosper” (Jer 29:7). It is clear from the context that Jeremiah is not composing a prayer book; he is making a political statement. He thought it necessary to reconcile the Jews with the reality of exile. In a similar vein, many generations later, R. Hanina, the Vice-Priest, stated: “pray for the welfare of the government for, if not for its fear, people would swallow each other alive” (m. Avot 3:4). This is not to be considered a halakhic dictum but rather a rationale for not rebelling against a government that, by its very existence, prevents anarchy, which was thought to be much worse. Thus, both of these calls for prayer seem to be political statements rather than liturgical proclamations.

By the same token, the demand of Cyrus that the Jews pray for his health and the health of his children (Ezra 6:10) was not made because he felt that Jewish prayers were especially efficacious but because he considered it an expression of their loyalty to his government. The message of the apocryphal book of Baruch, which may have been composed after the destruction of the Second Temple, is no different from that of Jeremiah, the teacher of the reputed author of the book. Baruch sent a message to the Jews of Jerusalem, asking them to pray for the health of Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar (Bar 1:11). There is some evidence that Jews offered sacrifices for their non-Jewish rulers, but there is no conclusive evidence that this was done on a regular basis. Of interest in this context is the prayer for the health of “Ye-honathan the Priest” found in Qumran, although it has been argued that this is not a prayer for his health but, rather, a curse.

The earliest conclusive evidence for the regular recital of a prayer for the rulers seems to be the translation of the book of Esther known as the Second Targum, although the dating of this translation is not absolutely

clear. Here (3:8) it is reported that Haman accused the Jews that, after the reading of the prophets, they cursed the king. This is obviously a distorted version of the blessing for the king, although later liturgical poetry does include curses in a call for revenge on the enemies of the Jews.

The earliest extant text of a prayer for the ruler is in a Genizah text from the beginning of the twelfth century. This prayer was apparently recited on the Day of Atonement, but the great number of abbreviations in the text have led Paul Fenton to surmise that it was probably recited frequently. Several other Genizah texts preserve prayers for the ruler and for the Moslems, in Arabic, that may have been recited on Simhat Torah, and it has been suggested that Moslems were present during their...
Indeed, it has been suggested, in this context, that in times of strife between the leaders of the civil state, the necessity of praying for the health and success of the leaders might force the Jews to take sides in the strife. A parallel to the use of the vernacular is found in later times. In nineteenth-century England it was customary to mention the names of the rulers in English, even though the rest of the prayer was in Hebrew. The names of the sovereigns were of course in English but they added titles, such as “Our Most Gracious Sovereign Lord King George the Third, our most Amiable Queen Charlotte . . . ” It is of interest to note that prayers for the state, which are at the same time expressions of allegiance, are not unique to Judaism. S. D. Goitein, writing about the prayer for the state in the twelfth century, points out that “mosques contained a kind of sermon declaring the congregation’s allegiance to the incumbent ruler.” He mentions that the Nestorian church was also required to pray for “the Commander of the Faithful.” It has been suggested that the institution of the prayer for the rulers in the mosques was influenced by the existence of Jewish prayers for the rulers.

Although the tradition of praying for the ruler seems to have been well established, there was apparently no standard text for this prayer. What became more or less a standard text, a prayer beginning with a call to God describing him as “He who gives victory to kings” (Ps 144:10), first appears in the sixteenth century. The earliest texts of this prayer seem to derive from Spanish emigrants but it rapidly spread throughout the Jewish world.

23. Fenton, “From the Genizah,” 14 n. 43. Four other texts were published by Fenton. Goitein published one additional Arabic text about which he stated that it had apparently been dictated by a Moslem official (“Prayers from the Genizah,” 57). Ya’ari has suggested that the reason for the custom of blessing the rulers at the Simḥat Torah festival was that they were present on that day, coming to watch the Jew’s custom of rejoicing in the Torah (Abraham Ya’ari, The History of the Festival of Rejoicing in the Torah [Jerusalem: Mosad HaKav Kook, 1964] 257 [Heb.]).


27. See Fenton, “From the Genizah,” 14 n. 44.

28. For the early history of this prayer see Barry Schwartz, “Hanoten Teshuaº: The Origin of the Traditional Jewish Prayer for the Government,” Hebrew Union College Annual 57 (1987) 113–20. This prayer seems to be no longer a part of the standard ritual. Rabbi Mazeh reported that this prayer was no longer said in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century (see Aaron Ahrend, “Pirqui Meḥkar le-Yom Haazmaut: Hashlamot [Selected Studies for Independence Day: Additional Material], Derekh Efshat 8 [1999] 120–21). In the facsimile reprints of Seligmann Baer’s Seder Avodat Yisrael (Roedelheim, 1868) published in Israel (I have an edition printed in Tel-Aviv in 1957), the prayer has been eliminated.
B. The Prayer for the State of Israel: Origins

Already in 1924, long before the establishment of the State of Israel, the founders of the Jeshurun synagogue in Jerusalem searched for a way to express the fact that they were a Zionist community. The way they did this was to include a memorial prayer for Theodore Herzl as the opening prayer of every memorial service. It was only natural, after the founding of the State, that Jews who considered prayer an important part of their life should seek to express their feelings about this event and their identification with it in their prayers. The earliest exemplars generally followed traditional forms, simply changing the specific content to fit the new circumstances. Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman, then Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, employed the *mi sheberakh* form for a blessing for the state, which was recited on the first Sabbath after its declaration. Although it was labeled a prayer for the State, its *mi sheberakh* pattern made it actually a prayer for the “members of the government and council of the State of Israel.”

Dov Sadan composed a prayer for the State on the Sunday following its declaration, which was sung once on Independence Day by the cantor, Benjamin Unger. Yaaqov Berman, rabbi of the synagogue connected to Yeshivat Ha-darom in Rehovot, composed a totally new prayer for the State immediately after the declaration. A prayer leaving part of the page blank. I wonder if it was erased because it was not relevant in the State of Israel or because somebody was afraid that it would be thought relevant. In the scholarly editions of the Mahzor published by Koren in Jerusalem, edited by E. D. Goldschmidt and his son-in-law, Yonah Frankel, the *Hanoten Teshu’ah* prayer is printed either before or after the prayer for the State of Israel, preserving scholarly accuracy while facilitating the use of the *mahzorim* for praying in the synagogue (E. D. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor La-yamim Ha-noraim* [Jerusalem: Koren and the Leo Baeck Institute, 1970] 1.142; 2.320; Yonah Frankel, *Mahzor for Sukkot* [1981] 151; *Mahzor for Pesach* [1993] 199). Ruth Langer tells me that *Hanoten Teshu’ah* appears in the Birnbaum siddur and that it is still said in some communities in the U.S.A. The Birnbaum *High Holyday Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing, 1951), does not contain the prayer on Rosh ha-Shannah or on Yom Kippur.

30. Aqiva Zimmerman, “Tefillot Li-shtom Ha-medinah Ve-hamalkhuyot” [Prayers for the Peace of the State and for the Kingdoms], *Hazofe* 3 (Iyyar 5752 / May 1992) 6. The article includes a facsimile of the prayer in Rabbi Unterman’s handwriting. Rabbi Unterman had earlier written a prayer for the nations who had voted in the UN for the establishment of the State of Israel. See A. Zimmerman, *Bron Yaḥad* (Tel Aviv: Central Archive for Hazzanut, 1988) 182.
31. Dov Sadan, *Aharon Mirsky Jubilee Volume: Essays on Jewish Culture* (ed. Zvi Malachi; Lod: Habermann Institute for Literary Research, 1986) 550. In a telephone conversation with Aqiva Zimmerman held on Oct. 12, 2000, Mr. Zimmerman told me that he thought that this had taken place in the 1970s, but he was not sure. He also informed me that this prayer had been sung at a convention of *hazzanim* in Israel, held in Heikhal Shlomoh, to a melody composed for it by Yehuda Leib Ne’eman, but he could not tell me when this had taken place.
32. For the text of his prayer, see Ahrend, “Pirqei Mehkar le-Yom Haazmaut,” 123–24.
for the State was recited by the *hazzan* in the Jeshurun synagogue in Jerusalem on Shavuot 1948, just one month after the State had been declared. The report of this prayer appeared in the weekly *Ha-Hed* (June, 1948), which published the text and reported that this was not the final version of the prayer, which was still the subject of discussion. This prayer modified the traditional version of the prayer for the State, *Hanoten Teshu’ah*. Its devotion to tradition was so great that it did not really take into consideration the reality of the State of Israel. It was not really a prayer for the Jewish State but rather, following the ancient tradition, it was a prayer for the president of the State of Israel, his ministers, and armies. Indeed, it did not even take into consideration the fact that the president was only a figurehead and that the true head of the government was the prime minister.

It was not until September 1948 that the Chief Rabbinate of Israel met the challenge of composing and promulgating an official prayer for the State of Israel. On 17 Elul 1948 (Sept. 21, 1948), the Orthodox Zionist newspaper *HaSofe* and the general paper *Ha’areẓ* reported that the Chief Rabbis of Israel, Isaac Herzog and Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel, had composed and established a prayer for the State that was to be recited on Sabbaths and festivals. The report noted that they had the approval of the [Rabbinical Council and the Chief Rabbis of Tel-Aviv, Haifa, and Petaḥ Tiqva. This was followed by the prayer itself, and a note was added at the end stating that, at the request of Herzog, S. Y. Agnon, the well-known writer who was later to receive a Nobel Prize for Literature, had also participated in the composition of this prayer. The two reports were in almost identical language; the only differences were due to the religious newspapers’ more respectful attitude to the Chief Rabbis. It would thus seem that the report was based on a communiqué of the Rabbinate.

The text of the prayer, which has become the standard text for this prayer, was innovative. Although the Rabbinate was following the tradition of praying for the state discussed above, they recognized the fact that there was a distinct difference between praying for the welfare of the rulers of the state in which Jews lived in the Diaspora and praying for the Jewish State. Therefore, although they based the idea of praying for the State on tradition, they also found it necessary to break with that tradition and create an entirely new prayer for the State of Israel. Besides abandoning the traditional opening formula, they formulated the prayer as one for the State

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33. According to Barry L. Schwartz, “Praying for Israel: The Liturgical Imbroglio,” *CCAR Journal* 38/3 (1991) 47 n. 1, this was the earliest publication of this prayer.
34. This was apparently not the first time that Agnon had collaborated with Rabbi Herzog in composing a prayer. Jacob Katz mentioned that Agnon had assisted Rabbi Herzog some years before this in writing a memorial prayer for the Jews murdered in the Holocaust (*A Time for Inquiry—A Time for Reflection: A Historical Essay on Israel through the Ages* [Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1999] 124 [Heb.]).
itself, beseeching God to give wisdom to its leaders and strength to its defenders.  

The laconic report in the newspaper that Agnon had participated in the composition of the prayer was destined to be a source for an extended argument in the Israeli press and in some scholarly discussions about the actual contribution of the collaborators to the prayer. The notice in the newspaper seems to imply that the prayer was mainly composed by Herzog or Uziel. This is supported by a letter written in 1975 to Emunah Yaron (Agnon’s daughter) by Yaakov Goldman, Herzog’s secretary. Rabbi Goldman wrote that one day he found Herzog perturbed over the fact that he had been asked to compose a prayer for the State that was to be recited at an important national ceremony. Goldman suggested to him that Herzog should do the best that he could and that Goldman would bring the prayer to Agnon, asking him to revise whatever was necessary. According to Rabbi Goldman, Agnon made only minor revisions to the prayer, but he added the phrase that describes the State of Israel as reshit zemihat geulatenu (“the beginning sprout of our redemption”). Goldman attached to this note a prayer for the State in the handwriting of Agnon, which is different in some minor details from the version that was promulgated by the Chief Rabbi. Chaim Herzog, son of Rabbi Herzog and a past president of Israel, is reported to have said that his father was proud of his composition of the prayer for the State and took special pride in the fact that Agnon changed only one word in it. 

Rabbi Herzog himself stated that he was responsible not only for the establishment of the prayer but...
also for the designation of the State of Israel as “the beginning sprout of our redemption.”

Nevertheless, others maintain that the prayer was actually composed by Agnon and approved/revised by the Chief Rabbinate. This last contention is held primarily by David Tamar, who has written many times about this subject in the daily press. One of his main points is the existence of the prayer in Agnon’s handwriting. Tamar claims that it is inconceivable that Agnon would have copied a prayer written by others. Support for this claim may be found in the fact that there is some evidence that other people were invited to submit suggestions for the prayer and the final version was an eclectic one, based on several of the submissions. Agnon’s suggestion may have been the basis for the final version, which is, as stated above, somewhat different from the copy found in his handwriting.

This question is not purely an academic-historical problem. A prayer composed by Herzog is much more authoritative than one composed by Agnon. After Tamar had announced that the prayer had been composed by Agnon rather than by the Chief Rabbis, the ultra-Orthodox paper Hamodia claimed that this was an additional reason to refrain from reciting this prayer. In the polemical atmosphere surrounding this prayer, historical facts (or what were thought to be historical facts) were wielded, ignoring the point that the prayer had definitely received approval of the Chief Rabbis and was promulgated by them.

C. Messianic Issues

A particular focus of polemical debate was the prayer’s description of the State as “the beginning of the dawn of our redemption” (reshit zemiḥat geulatenu).

39. The earliest evidence of this is a lecture given in the month of Av 5709 (August 1949), almost a year after the promulgation of the prayer. The lecture was published in his collected writings Huqah Leyisrael (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1989) 1.222. A further statement of Rabbi Herzog to this effect appeared in an article that he published about divorce issues (“B’inyan Hashash Leget Me’useh,” Hadarom [Shevat 5717 / February 1958] 3). My thanks to Rabbi Yehudah Zoldan, who brought these sources to my attention.


41. In Tamar’s first presentation of this subject in Maariv, he published a facsimile of Agnon’s copy, but only of the first three lines, which are identical with the official version of the Chief Rabbinate. Aaron Ahrend (“Pirqei Meḥkar le-Yom Haazmaut,” 123) suggests that a study of Agnon’s writings shows that he did not have such a positive attitude toward the State of Israel.

42. This translation is based on that of Emil Fackenheim, The Jewish Return into History (New York: Schocken, 1978) 273. This term was translated as “the first sprout of our redemption” in a brochure published by the Office of the Chief Rabbi of England (London, 1949), while Schwartz suggested “the first flowering of our redemption” (“Praying for Israel,” 48 n. 9).
phrase to the prayer. This phrase has definite messianic overtones, and some have used its attribution to Agnon to justify its elimination from the prayer. Some people have suggested that this messianic interpretation of contemporary history originated with Rabbi Abraham I. Kook, who had referred to the Balfour Declaration as “the beginning of the dawn of our salvation” (reshit zemi'hat yeshuatenu). Herzog himself was a little more restrained. Shortly before the founding of the state, in a letter to S. Z. Shragai, he described the situation as being “the beginning of the Redemption” (athalta degeulah) or perhaps only “the beginning of the beginning” (athalta de-athalta). An even more hesitant description was used in a public manifesto issued on 20 Tevet 5709 (1949), three weeks before the elections for the first Knesset. All the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox parties had joined together and presented a united front for these elections. In their joint manifesto, signed by the Chief Rabbis and over two hundred other rabbis, they requested giving thanks for “the first sprouts of the beginning of the Redemption” (ha-ni'anim ha-rishonim shel ha-athalta degeulah). In another broadside, just three weeks later (14 Shevat 5709), they thanked God for the privilege of having laid the foundation for the “the beginning of the dawn of the redemption” (reshit zemi'hat ha-geulah). However, these broadsides could not have been the source of the expression, because they appeared several months after the prayer had been promulgated. They may, rather, be used as evidence about how widespread the recognition of the State of Israel as the beginning of redemption had become.

Opposition to the use of this phrase appeared in other circles. Rabbi M. M. Schneersohn, the leader of Chabad, specifically criticized the use of this phrase, arguing that using this phrase actually delayed the redemption. One

45. See ibid., 115 n. 4.
46. Ibid., loc. cit. Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli reported that the expression reshit zemi'hat geulatenu had been used in a broadside published on 14 Shevat 5708 (Jan. 27, 1948), almost three months before the declaration of the State (“Le-altar Li-geulah” [An Immediate Redemption], Barqai 5 [1989] 231). There seems to be a misprint in the date. The 14th of Shevat in 5709, a year later, was the date of the above-mentioned broadside (cf. David Tamar, “Keter Torah,” Hazafe [18 Tamuz 5749 / July 21, 1989] 8). This would also be more in line with the continuation of Rabbi Yisraeli’s statement that this definition was given within the first year of the State. On the basis of this, Rabbi Yisraeli declared that the term had first been used by Rabbi Frank and the sages and rabbis of Jerusalem.
48. Tamar, “Keter Torah.”
49. His writings on this subject have been collected in Yagdil Torah: Teshuvot Uveurim Beshulhan Arukh Meluqtam Mimikhtavei . . . Menahem Mendel . . . Schneersohn [Responsa
of his followers actually wrote a letter to the Chief Rabbinate insisting that this expression be removed from the prayer to avoid delaying the redemption. Rabbi Feivel Rimler, the rabbi of the New Brighton Jewish Center in Brooklyn, wrote to the Chief Rabbis in 1983, trying to get them to remove this expression from the prayer, in accordance with the ruling of Rabbi Schneersohn. Rabbi Ben-Dahan, the secretary of Rabbi M. Eliyahu, replied that the Chief Rabbinate did not review earlier decisions of the Chief Rabbinate. This ruling was reiterated in a letter written in 1989 by the assistant to the then Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Shapira. He maintained that it is obligatory to recite the phrase “the beginning of the dawn of the redemption” because it is a fulfillment of the obligation to anticipate salvation. Anybody who objects to the use of this phrase should not be permitted to recite this prayer publicly, but he may put his hands over his ears during the recital of this phrase.

It was apparently the description of the State as “the beginning of the dawn of our redemption” and its potential to suggest erroneously that the redemption was actually fulfilled rather than still to be awaited that led the Chief Rabbis to introduce a change in this prayer. In a second publication of this prayer in Hazofe, just about three weeks later (Oct. 12, 1948 / 9 Tishri 5708), they added to the prayer the plea “and send us speedily the son of David, your righteous Messiah.” They noted that this phrase had been omitted from the earlier publications by a printer’s error. It is of interest to note that this phrase does not appear in the copy of the prayer in Agnon’s handwriting. In a handwritten note in the archives of the Chief Rabbinate, it is reported that this correction must be made to combat those who claim that the prayer denies one of the thirteen principles of Judaism—the anticipation of the Messiah. Adding the reference to the Davidic Messiah was so urgent that a note was added after the emended prayer specifying that the earlier version that did not include this phrase should be corrected.

50. Rabbi Ben-Dahan’s reply is dated 4 Kislev 5744 (Nov. 10, 1983), numbered 44/500–1 (”44” is actually the Hebrew letters mem-dalet).
52. One wonders how accurate this statement is. A typewritten page found in the archives of the Chief Rabbinate does not have this phrase, nor does it appear in a pamphlet entitled Tefillah Lishlom Hamedinah published in Elul 5708 (copy in Jewish National and University Library, 1898). If it is to be considered a typist’s error, the error must have occurred very early in the history of the transmission.
53. As a side note we might mention that the earlier version survived. Ha’arez of Nov. 25, 1949 published a communiqué of the Ministry of Religions calling on synagogues to recite the prayer for the State on the occasion of the 75th birthday of the president of the State, and they published the earliest version of the prayer. The Chief Rabbis did not totally succeed in correcting the first version—even in their own house. The publication Shanah Be-Shanah, issued by Heikhal Shelomoh, the seat of the Chief Rabbinate, continued to publish the shorter version until much later. Dov Rosen, in his book Shema Yisrae...
addition was made even clearer in later versions of this prayer that expanded this plea by adding the phrase “to redeem those who are waiting for the completion of Your Salvation.”

D. Implementation of the Prayer

The prayer for the State, as proclaimed by the Chief Rabbis, quickly became an expression of identification with the State of Israel. In 1949, the Chief Rabbinate of Tripoli, Libya, published a broadside in Hebrew in which they declared that 5 Iyyar was to be a day of special prayer for generations. The special ritual consisted of reading from the Torah (both in the morning and evening) and the recitation of two prayers, one apparently composed by the rabbis of Tripoli and the other, the prayer of the Chief Rabbis, in its early version.

54. The Reform movements, both in Israel and in the United States, composed prayers for the State of Israel that show clearly the influence of the prayer of the Chief Rabbinate. For American Reform, see: Gates of Prayer (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1975) 609; for the Israelis, see Haavodah She-balev (Jerusalem: Hatenuah Leyeaḥadut Mitqademet Beyisrael, 1982; repr., 1991) 129. Neither of them, of course, includes a request for the Messiah, but they both incorporate what might be called messianic hopes. The American version calls for the establishment of the kingdom of God, while the Israeli version ends with the Isaianic vision of a world in which there will be no more war. The Israelis do refer to Israel as reshit geulatenu, a term lacking in the American version. One small textual difference serves to point out the different political theologies of both movements. The Americans call upon God to strengthen the defenders of the State, while the Israeli version calls upon him to strengthen the defenders of “our holy land.”

55. An aspect of the nature of this prayer as a statement of identity is the way in which it is recited. In many synagogues, the prayer is “announced” before its recital, and people are required to stand while it is being said. There is, of course, no halakhic reason for this (for a discussion of the obligation to stand during prayer and the significance of this attitude, see Uri Erlich, The Nominal Language of Jewish Prayer [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004] 9–28). Standing during this prayer is more in the nature of standing during a pledge of allegiance than anything in the nature of prayer. (For this type of “standing” in Jewish liturgy, see: Israel Knohl, “A Parsha concerned with Accepting the Kingdom of Heaven,” Tarbiz 53 [1984] 11–31 [Heb.]). Many people who regularly talk during prayers will refrain from doing so here because talking during this prayer is not considered a breach of liturgical custom but an expression of civic disloyalty. Unfortunately for history, this type of conduct is not usually documented.

56. I saw a photocopy on A4 paper. It is possible that the original publication was a flyer rather than a broadside, but its format seems more appropriate for a broadside.

Rabbi Herzog tried to use this concept of prayer as fealty not only as an expression of identification with the State but also as an expression of acceptance of the spiritual hegemony of the Chief Rabbinate over Diaspora Jewry. In a letter addressed to the Rabbinical Council of America in late 1948, he argued that recognition of the Chief Rabbinate by this group would be a great force in enabling the Chief Rabbinate to influence the development of the State in the spirit of the Torah. Rabbi Herzog stated that he had no immediate thoughts about how to implement this recognition, but he thought that the American rabbinical organization should institute a special blessing for the State of Israel, to be recited immediately after the prayer for the State that he had just sent them. A report on this dialogue in Ha'aretz, some months later, stated that recognition of the Chief Rabbinate might even provide a solution to the dual-loyalty problem for American Jews. Their relationship to Israel would be religious rather than political, and the newspaper even compared it to the way that American Catholics relate to the Vatican.

However, the authority of the Chief Rabbinate was not sufficient to force the acceptance of their prayer for the State, even within the circles of the Chief Rabbinate. Rabbi Reuven Katz, a member of the Chief Rabbinate, had composed a prayer for the State that followed the Hanoten Teshu’ah pattern. This prayer, originally composed before the founding of the State, referred to “the kingdom of Israel that is in the process of being established” (malkhut yisrael ha-mitkonenet). In a letter to Rabbi Herzog dated Dec. 1, 1947, just several days after the historic vote in the UN on the establishment of a Jewish State, Rabbi Katz asked that this prayer be promulgated throughout the world by the Chief Rabbinate.

Rabbi Katz continued using his prayer even after the Chief Rabbinate had published its own prayer, as Rabbi Herzog discovered, to his chagrin, on a visit to Petah Tiqva in 1954, where Rabbi Katz served as Chief Rabbi. The prayer had been rewritten to fit the new circumstances. It now referred to the State of Israel, and it included a prayer for the soldiers of the Israeli army that was taken from the official prayer of the Chief Rabbinate. Rabbi Herzog wrote a letter to Rabbi Katz in which he remonstrated with him about this. Rabbi Herzog pointed out that Hanoten Teshu’ah was not appropriate, because it had not been composed by rabbis; it was composed for rulers of foreign countries, possibly at their request.

Rabbi Herzog’s letter was published, together with the response of Rabbi Israel Tabak, the president of the RCA, in the RCA Bulletin, p. 5 (I have a photocopy of this page, but the exact bibliographical reference for this is unavailable to me).

On the other hand, acceptance of
the prayer authorized by the Chief Rabbinate would serve to unite the community of Petah Tiqvah with all those who had already accepted this prayer, and it would give great satisfaction to the Chief Rabbis and the members of the Chief Rabbinate. Rabbi Katz’s reply is not available, but some of his arguments are obvious from another letter by Rabbi Herzog to him. Rabbi Katz argued that Hanoten Teshu’ah was a better version of the prayer, for it did not mention the name of God, while the Rabbinate’s prayer did. Rabbi Katz felt, apparently, that the halakhic proscription of mentioning the name of God unnecessarily was a sufficient reason to prefer a prayer without the name of God. Rabbi Herzog argued, on the contrary, that it was preferable to compose a prayer mentioning the name of God, and the fact that Hanoten Teshu’ah did not mention the name of God was proof that it was not truly a Jewish prayer. Rabbi Herzog mentioned that he thought that Rabbi Katz’s true reason for preferring Hanoten Teshu’ah was apologetic. Using a prayer based on a traditional prayer would make it more difficult for ultra-Orthodox circles to refrain from participating in the prayer. If Jews had used this prayer for so many years to pray for non-Jewish leaders, how much more should they do so to pray for Jewish leaders.

It is in light of Rabbi Katz’s position that we may understand an event that took place several years earlier. In 1951, a weekly newspaper for Yemenite immigrants to Israel reported on a visit of Yemenite rabbis and dignitaries with the prime minister. Among their complaints was the fact that there were no Yemenite officers in the army. The article reported that the meeting concluded with the recital of a blessing and Hanoten Teshu’ah for the government of Israel and its president. Although Hanoten Teshu’ah seems to have originated in Europe, it was imported to Yemen with the influx of siddurim printed in the Spanish-Oriental version known in Yemen as Shammy. Yosef Kafi writes that it was not actually recited even in these communities. However, the Tikhlal of Rabbi Yihya Salah, written according to the Baladi tradition, does include Hanoten Teshu’ah, both on weekdays (Mondays and Thursdays) and on Shabbat, and a printed Tikhlal includes this prayer, mentioning specifically Abd Alhamid Khan. It seems that there were vari-

60. Maslul 1/14 (July 26, 1951) 3.
61. See Yosef Kafi, Ketavim (ed. Yosef Tuby; Jerusalem: Havaad Hakelali Liyehudei Teiman Biyerushalayim, 1989) 492–93. Dr. Moshe Gavra informed me that a prayer for the Imam was customary in Yemen, but it was recited in Arabic. However, after finding no evidence for this in the siddurim, he began to doubt whether this was
ous customs about reciting this prayer in Yemen. In the Tikhal Shivat Ziyon, first printed in Israel in 1952, we find the prayer for the government in the version of the Chief Rabbinate. Thus, it seems somewhat strange that the Yemenites recited Hanoten Teshu’ah at this meeting. This may have been influenced by Rabbi Katz. A large Yemenite settlement, Rosh Haayin, is very close to Peta Tiqvah, and this may have been a factor in their use of this prayer. However, a version of Hanoten Teshu’ah, somewhat different from that of Rabbi Katz, appeared in a prayer book according to the custom of the Jews of Haban that was published in 1972. This version appeared again in a Baladi prayer book published in 1992, and this may have been the version used by the Yemenites in 1951.

Hanoten Teshu’ah was preserved in other circles. E. Z. Melamed, professor of Talmud at Tel Aviv and Bar-Ilan Universities and one of the leading spiritual leaders of the Persian community in Jerusalem, published a small volume of Jewish laws and customs in 1954, with a second edition in 1960. This book was meant to be a general book for Israeli schools, and he included in it a chapter on prayer in which he offers several suggestions for new prayers. One of them is a version of thanks for miracles, which he suggested, be inserted in the regular Amidah on Independence Day. A second one is a short prayer for the State to be said when opening the ark. A third one is a prayer for the State that is to be said on Sabbaths and festivals, and this one opens with Hanoten Teshu’ah. His version is significantly different from the ones we have already mentioned. The influence of tradition in this prayer may also be discerned in the fact that he actually included the names President I. Ben-Zvi and Prime Minister Moshe Sharett. Melamed’s political insight

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64. Tikhal Ateret Zeqenim Keminhag Adat Haban (ed. Shalom Yizaq Matof; Jerusalem: The Family of the Editor, 1972) 241. This version is, apparently, an independent adaptation of Hanoten Teshu’ah. The traditional prayer included a request to God that he turn the mind of the king and his advisers to be good to the Jews. This was, of course, ridiculous in this context. However, this version included the request that God turn the minds of the kings of the nations of the world to be good to us and to all the Jews. For other evidence of this prayer in Yemen, see Ahrend, Israel’s Independence Day, 185–86.


66. This is significant because it demonstrates the ambivalence about adapting traditional prayer to new realities. Traditionally, the most essential prayer is the Amidah. The Amidah was considered by the Sages to be the only prayer in which one stood immediately before God in an I-Thou relationship. Special requests were considered most efficacious if they were incorporated into this prayer. However, the text of the Amidah had been hallowed by tradition, and it was very difficult and daring to add something to it. It is ironic that it is only the Reform movement that included such a prayer in the Amidah (see Schwartz, “Praying for Israel,” 46). The Religious Kibbutz movement originally included such a prayer on Independence Day, but it seems to have abandoned it. See Ahrend, “Pirqei Mehkar le-Yom Haazmaut,” 27–29.
was expressed in his including the members of parliament among those for whom he prayed, but he added, in parentheses, “those who are loyal to the State.” His penultimate request is that these leaders be permeated with the love and fear of God, that they may lead the State according to the law of the Torah.67

Hanoten Teshu’ah was revived in a somewhat unlikely context. One of the ways that the ultra-Orthodox expressed their attitude toward the state was by not praying for it. Since there had been a tradition for many hundreds of years, at least, of reciting a prayer for the state, this was, in a way, more of a break with tradition than a decision to accept the Chief Rabbinate’s text would have been. Having abandoned the traditional prayer for the state, the ultra-Orthodox did revert to it in a remarkable context. During the Gulf War, in which Israel itself was subjected to attacks by rockets from Iraq, Rabbi Elazar Menahem Shach, arguably the main leader of the Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox, ruled that in such circumstances one should pray for the state: the United States and its allies! Their newspaper, Yated Ne’eman (Feb. 2, 1991), reported that when Shach was informed that the United States had declared a day of prayer for those on the battlefront, he ruled that Jews in Israel should do the same. The report was careful to note that this conformed to the ancient tradition of praying for the state. The paper promulgated the traditional version of this prayer, Ha-nosen Teshu’ah, including the phrase “the government of the United States and its partners.”68

In general, it is accurate to say that the Orthodox worshipers who identify with the State of Israel recite the prayer for the State in the version of the Chief Rabbinate, while those who oppose the State refrain from reciting any prayer for the State. An intermediate measure of identification is found in some communities that refrain from reciting this prayer but do include a public prayer for the welfare of Israeli soldiers.

E. Political Issues

Since the prayer for the State was also a medium for expressing political identification with the State of Israel, political changes caused people to reconsider their use of the prayer. This began in 1992, with the founding of a leftist government that had no representation of the Religious-Zionist party. At that time, Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, one of the leading teachers in the Merkaz Ha-Rav Kook yeshiva, called upon the Chief Rabbinate to consider a change

67. Ezra Zion Melamed, Pirqei Minhag Vehalakhah (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1954; repr., 1960) 193. There was another “traditional” aspect of this publication. Moshe Sharett was prime minister of Israel from January 25, 1954 to March 11, 1955. Although he was no longer prime minister at the time of the publication of the second edition of Melamed’s book, his name was nevertheless retained in the prayer.

68. Rabbi Zoldan informed me that this prayer was also recited in a special prayer gathering held in the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem in the presence of the Chief Rabbis, the president of the State and the prime minister.
Jewish Prayers for the State of Israel

in the prayer. He maintained that, in these circumstances, it was inappropriate to pray for the ministers of the State, and he asked that this phrase be omitted from the prayer. There is no evidence that any action was taken on this issue, although it may be assumed that some people responded to the notices in the newspaper and followed Rabbi Yisraeli’s suggestion.

The public struggle about the Oslo agreements signed with the Palestinians in August 1993 found its reflection too in the prayer for the State. Several months later, on Jan. 3, 1994, the daily newspaper Maariv reported that Rabbi Shlomo Goren, a former Chief Rabbi of Israel, had ruled that Jews should desist from reciting the prayer for the government. His reasoning was that it is forbidden to pray for the leaders and ministers of a government that opposes the rule of halakhah by its willingness to give up parts of its homeland to others. Goren had been one of the foremost leaders to call upon Jews to recognize the religious significance of the founding of the State of Israel. In his term as Chief Rabbi of Israel, he tried to establish religious innovations in the celebration of the Israeli Day of Independence to stress this point. The fact that the Israeli government was never loyal to halakhah and had often participated in public desecrations of halakhah had not brought Rabbi Goren to such drastic action. Land concessions to the Arabs disturbed him greatly, and he expressed this concern in terms of the prayer for the State. There was no follow-up on this. It seems that in Rabbi Goren’s own synagogue the congregation did stop reciting this prayer, but his injunction had little impact elsewhere. Rabbi Goren’s intent in refraining from reciting this prayer may be better understood in the light of a comment that he made to a rabbi who lived in the West Bank area. He wrote that Rabbi Goren told him that one could continue reciting the prayer if one omitted mentioning “the leaders, ministers and councilors” of the State. In a purely liturgical context, this would be a much better solution; but omitting the prayer entirely would make a much stronger political statement.

The distinction between the State and its government was expressed explicitly by Rabbi M. Z. Neriyah some months later, just before Independence Day 1994. Neriyah, founder and leader of the B’nei Aqiva Yeshiva network and one of the major spiritual leaders of the Religious Nationalist movement, published an article encouraging people to rejoice in the existence of the State, clearly distinguishing between the State of Israel and its political leaders. From the tone of the article it seems that it was meant as a reply to those who

71. Gilyon Rabbanei Yesha 26 (Av 5755) 2. This reaction is not unique. There is an interesting historic parallel to this situation in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. It seems that church liturgy included a prayer for the president of the United States and, after the election of Lincoln, some churches omitted this prayer (Carl Sandberg, Abraham Lincoln: The War Years 1861–1864 [New York: Dell, 1959] 2.90).
did not intend to rejoice on Independence Day due to their dissatisfaction with the government. Rabbi Neriyaah stressed that the State of Israel, granted by God, is a source of joy, even though many are disappointed with the government, which is in the hands of human beings. At this point, there was no mention that he heeded the call of Rabbi Goren or that he contemplated any change in the wording of the prayer.

However, in October of that same year, shortly after the autumn festivals, a report was published in an Israeli newspaper stating that R. Neriyaah had asked the Chief Rabbinate to change the text of the prayer. Instead of the standard version that asked God: “Protect her [the State of Israel] beneath the wings of Your love and send Your light and truth to her leaders, ministers and councilors,” he suggested that the prayer should now read “send Your light and truth to the state and protect her from her leaders, ministers and councilors.” He claimed that the present government no longer represented Zionist ideals and therefore people should pray that the state be protected from them.

The reporter, Dov Elboym, quoted Neriyaah as saying that even if the Chief Rabbinate did not act on his request, everyone was entitled to change the prayer on his own. The import of this attitude was reinforced in the headline of the article that identified Neriyaah as one who had received the prestigious national Israel Prize. The reporter added that in Goren’s synagogue the prayer was no longer being said on Sabbath.73

The discussion about the prayer for the State was once again brought to public attention about ten months later, shortly before Independence Day of the following year, 1995. It was reported, both in the National Religious newspaper, Ha’azofeh, and in the general paper, Maariv, that Rabbi Neriyaah had now ruled that the prayer for the State should be changed. Ha’azofeh’s enterprising reporter, Shlomo Cezna, also reported the responses to this ruling by the Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Baqshi-Doron, and by Rabbi A. Ravitz, an ultra-Orthodox member of the Israeli Parliament. Baqshi-Doron simply said that now was the time that the government should be strengthened, while Rabbi Ravitz said that it was inconceivable that this prayer should be changed every term. The response of Ravitz is rather remarkable. Looking at it superficially, it seems to present an ultra-Orthodox antipathy to any type of change in the liturgy. However, the ultra-Orthodox never recited this prayer, and thus the response should not be understood as an endorsement of State policy but as part of the ultra-Orthodox objection to the National Religious movement.

The reporter for Maariv followed up on this issue. It turned out that this was not a new ruling by Neriyaah but only a recycling of his earlier statement. Neriyaah’s family protested the report, claiming that he had never made such a ruling and that to claim that he had done so was just a misleading use of his earlier remark. Rabbi Ḥayyim Druckman, one of the leading heads of the

Hesder Yeshiva movement, who was later to inherit the mantle of Rabbi Neriyah as the head of the B’nei Aqiva Yeshivah movement, responded to this issue in a somewhat fundamentalistic approach. He stated that no one had a right to change the text of the prayer, implying that the text had become sacred and could not be changed, even though it was no longer appropriate. However, he added that the text was still appropriate because it expressed the wishes of the people exactly, that God should shed His light and truth over the leaders of the State.74

A Jerusalem weekly paper that tries to cater to both Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox circles discussed the issue at length two days later. Here we find another version of the prayer, attributed to the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Avraham Shapira. He is said to have introduced another sentence into the prayer, calling on God to annul the advice of anyone who gives the people bad advice. The paper reported that the ultra-Orthodox were following the disagreement with great interest,75 apparently feeling that the Orthodox were beginning to see the light and that they would eventually abandon this prayer.

Several months later, in August 1995, another attempt was made to cancel the prayer, this time evoking the authority of Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, who had just recently passed away. A newsletter published by the Rabbis of the Judaea, Samaria, and Aza quoted a letter written by Yisraeli at the time of discussions about inviting the chairman of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, to visit Jerusalem on a Shabbat. Yisraeli thought that it would be a travesty of prayer to bless those who were honoring a “war criminal” at the very moment of the blessing. The editor of this newsletter added a note, suggesting some of the variant texts that we have mentioned above76—probably intending to lessen the drastic step of abandoning the prayer entirely. The publication of this letter was objected to by some of Yisraeli’s disciples. Just a month later, the newsletter published a “clarification.” This note stated that, although Yisraeli had protested the actions of the government, he never meant this letter to be publicized. The note ended with the statement that Yisraeli always tried to prevent schisms, implying that he would have thought it better to retain the prayer than to create a point for argument in the synagogue.

Several other leaders, among them Shlomo Aviner who was rabbi of the settlement Beth-El in Samaria (West Bank), called for an end to the argument about the prayer for the State. The prayer was for the State, not for its

74. Menahem Rahat, Ma’ariv, 3 Iyar 5755. An interesting parallel to this situation is found in the American Colonies in 1770. It was argued that “praying for His Majesty and Parliament to inspired with wisdom should be considered an act of disloyalty” [sic] (Dorothy Clarke Wilson, Lady Washington: The Story of America’s First First Lady [Reader’s Digest Condensed Books 3, 1984] 493; I have not yet found a more reliable historical report of this).

75. Kol Bi, Jerusalem, 5 Iyar 5755.

76. Gilyon Rabbanei Yesha 26 (Av 5755).
leaders, and one should not let any political disagreement about the political situation lessen the identification with the State as expressed in this prayer.

An interesting development in the history of this prayer occurred after the appointment of Shimon Shitreet as Minister of Religion (1996). He was the first appointee to this point who was not a representative of one of the religious parties. His ministry published an edition of the traditional siddur that was a photocopy of an earlier edition. As such, it did not include the prayer for the State of Israel. National Religious circles made an issue of this.

Although the argument about the prayer seems to have dropped out of public discussion in the newspapers, it has not really come to an end. One of the factors in the muting of this discussion was the assassination of Rabin, which occurred several months later, November 4, 1995. Some people seem to have recognized that divisiveness had gone too far and that it was time to reunite under the flag of the prayer for the State. Nevertheless, there are still arguments in synagogues about the use of this prayer and its text, arguments that reflect politics much more than they reflect questions of piety.

Prayers for the State have long been an element of Jewish prayer. The rise of the State of Israel led to renewed liturgical activity in this area. After surveying the earlier history of Jewish prayers for rulers, I have focused on liturgical responses to the State of Israel among Orthodox Jews living in Israel. The context of the writing of the modern prayer for the State was explored, as well as recent discussions of the “received” prayer in light of the Oslo process. The prayer for the State of Israel is an excellent point from which to survey religious responses to the Zionist project within the religious Zionist community.

Postscript

At the time of receiving the page proofs of this article (January, 2005), the prayer for the state seems to have received a degree of canonization. The political arguments about the policy of the Sharon government in removing Jewish settlements from the Gaza strip have not been reflected in this prayer. However, prayer continues to play a part in the political world. A new prayer has been composed that reflects support of those Jewish settlements, and it is recited, in many synagogues, after the prayer for the State of Israel.

77. See Ze’ev Harvey, HaNevi, 30 Teveth 5755 (Nov. 24, 1995).

78. Aqiva Zimmerman informed me (in the telephone conversation mentioned above) that he prayed in a synagogue in Antwerp on Yom Kippur, Oct. 9, 2000, in which they recited the prayer for Israeli soldiers but did not recite the prayer for the State of Israel. Instead of this, they recited a prayer for the welfare of the residents of the land of Israel composed by Saadyah Gaon.
Liturgy
in the Life of the Synagogue

Studies in the History of Jewish Prayer

Edited by
Ruth Langer and Steven Fine

Winona Lake, Indiana
Eisenbrauns
2005
Prayer as a "service of the heart" is in principle a Torah-based commandment. It is not time-dependent and is mandatory for both Jewish men and women. You shall serve God with your whole heart. Deuteronomy 11:13. Synagogues may designate or employ a professional or lay hazzan (cantor) for the purpose of leading the congregation in prayer, especially on Shabbat or holidays.

YouTube Encyclopedic. The Jewish prayer book is a receptacle for the memories of the good and bad times that have passed through the people of Israel, the Land of Israel, and the Diaspora. Isaac Herzog, Chairman of the Executive of The Jewish Agency for Israel. Learn More About Us. Dr. Yoel Rappel is the founder and former director of the Elie Wiesel Archive at Boston University.

Then, he became the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine. Finally, he was the Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel from 1936 until his death in 1959. The Prayer for the State has been repeatedly modified by Jewish communities in Israel and worldwide who recite it in synagogue on a weekly basis. It continues to serve as an important symbol of Jewish and Israeli unity, solidarity, and peoplehood. Encyclopedia of Jewish and Israeli history, politics and culture, with biographies, statistics, articles and documents on topics from anti-Semitism to Zionism.

Our Father in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel, the first manifestation of the approach of our redemption. Shield it with Your lovingkindness, envelop it in Your peace, and bestow Your light and truth upon its leaders, ministers, and advisors, and grace them with Your good counsel. Strengthen the hands of those who defend our holy land, grant them deliverance, and adorn them in a mantle of victory. Ordain peace in the land and grant its inhabitants eternal happiness.

Politics. Jews of UAE Tweet Prayer for State as Ties with Israel Warm. An older Jewish community in Dubai that has existed for 10 years also says a prayer for Emirati rulers. The UAE, too, is being more open about the warming ties, and is building a synagogue in Abu Dhabi that is to be part of an interfaith complex including a mosque and a church.

The UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, tweeted this week that continued Israeli talk of annexing Palestinian lands must stop because such a move would constitute a rejection of the international & Arab consensus towards stability & peace. (Updates with details of Jewish group in second paragraph, adds second group in seventh). Have a confidential tip for our reporters? Politics of Piety consists of two almost entirely disconnected texts. The first is an anthropological field study carried out by the author over a period of two years in three mosques in Cairo where female "preachers" address congregations of women. In Sunni Islam especially, the mosque has generally been an almost exclusively male domain where men congregated, socialized, and commanded all relevant roles: public religious practitioner, prayer leader, preacher, interpreter, and authority. The entry of women into that space within the context of a conservative, regional religious revival is an