



Religious Zionism: Tzvi Yehuda Kook on Redemption and the State

Raina Weinstein

Wednesday, Aug. 18 at 11:00 AM EDT

Course Description:

In May 1967, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook delivered a fiery address criticizing the modern state of Israel for what he viewed as its founding sin: accepting the Partition Plan and dividing the Land of Israel. “Where is our Hebron?” he cried out. “Where is our Shechem, our Jericho... Have we the right to give up even one grain of the Land of God?”

Just three weeks later, the Six Day War broke out, and the Israeli army conquered the biblical heartlands that Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda had mourned—in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights. Hebron, Shechem, and Jericho were returned to Jewish sovereignty. In the aftermath of the war, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda’s words seemed almost prophetic. His spiritual vision laid the foundation for a new generation of religious Zionism and the modern settler movement, and his ideology continues to have profound implications for contemporary Israeli politics. In this session, we will explore Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook’s 1967 speech, his teachings, and his critics—particularly Rabbi Yehuda Amital.

Guiding Questions:

1. How does Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook interpret the quotation from Psalm 107: "They have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep"? Why do you think he begins this speech with this scripture?
2. In the section, "They Have Divided My Land," Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook tells two stories about responses to partition. Based on these stories, what do you think is his attitude toward diplomacy and politics is?

3. Rav Tzvi Yehuda lays out four programs for redemption: 1) from Ezekiel 28, 2) from Rabbi Elliyahu Guttmacher, 3) from Psalm 19, and 4) from Ezekiel 36. What are each of these programs? What do they have in common and how do they differ?
4. How would you describe Rav Amital's approach to religious Zionism in "What Kind of Redemption Does Israel Represent"?
5. What is Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook's ideology according to Rav Amital? (See "The Origins of the Crisis" section.) Do you think this is an accurate description of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook's beliefs based on your understanding "Mizmor 19"? Why or why not?

“The Nineteenth Hymn”

Rabbi Tzvi Tehuda Kook

May 1967

On Israeli Independence Day in May of 1967, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook gave the following address to the community members of his yeshiva in Jerusalem.

The Righteous and Upright See the Works of the Lord

The nineteenth year. We are accustomed from time to time—we must become more accustomed—to act in accordance with the closing lines of Psalm 107, the Psalm which the rabbis have decreed that we are to say on Israel's Independence Day:

"They have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep... The upright see it and rejoice; the mouth of all wrongdoers is stopped. The wise man will take note of these things; he will consider the steadfast love of the Lord." (Ps. 107:24;42-43)

The upright see the works of the Lord. If only we might merit the right to be numbered amongst the "righteous and upright," in the words of the Netziv!

To the degree that uprightness is lacking, so too is the ability to see and recognize the works of the Lord. We must observe much, we must consider much the works of God and the workings of divine providence. We must look into our own inner life; we must examine the life of the Jewish people. We must become accustomed to opening our eyes and discovering the wonders of God's Torah and of His works.

The nineteenth year. Every day, things will be like new to us. We need to get used to feeling this way. It seems like we have made progress. We have established amongst us Torah scholars a celebration of accepting the holiness of the yoke of heaven, of the appearance of the gathering of the kingdom of Israel.

But there were times in the early years of the state, when the celebration [of Independence Day] in the yeshiva had not yet been established, and I would wander for one, two, or three hours in the streets of Jerusalem. Needless to say we don't want to encourage promiscuity in Jerusalem, but I felt obliged and commanded to be at one with the joy of our people, with the masses, with the boys and girls...

One matter, which borders on the desecration of God's name, caused me deep sorrow: where were the elders, the guides of the community, the great rabbis, when our people were celebrating in the streets of Jerusalem?

They Have Divided My Land

...Nineteen years ago, on the night when news of the United Nations decision in favor of the resurrection of the State of Israel reached us, when the people streamed into the streets to celebrate and rejoice, I could not go out and join in the jubilation. I sat alone and silent; a burden lay upon me.

During those first hours I could not resign myself to what had been done. I could not accept the fact that indeed "they have...divided My land." (Joel 4:2)! Yes, where is our Hebron—have we forgotten her?! Where is our Shechem? Our Jericho? Where? Have we forgotten them? And what about all the land beyond the Jordan—each and every clod of earth, every region, hill, valley, every plot of land, that is part of the Land of Israel? Have we the right to give up even one grain of the Land of God?

On that night, nineteen years ago, I sat trembling in every limb of my body, wounded, cut, torn to pieces—I could not rejoice.

The next day the great Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap came to our house. He felt the need to come, and how could he not come? We sat together, the two of us, in that small hallowed room in "Beit HaRav."¹ Where else if not there? We sat shocked and silent. Finally, regaining our strength, we said, the two of us as one: "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes." (Ps. 118:23)

There comes to my mind another incident: in the later part of his life, Rabbi Meir Bar Ilan was present at an important dinner held by the "Mizrachi," of which he was then the Chairman. Mr. Berl Locker, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, was invited to speak. It was at that time that the debate on the internationalization of Jerusalem was being held at the UN.

Berl Locker mentioned the discussion concerning Jerusalem in his speech, describing it as a delicate problem, requiring much tact and careful treatment, etc., etc. Upon hearing these words Rabbi Meir burst out in Yiddish, calling out from his seat in a voice of thunder: "Vehr Hirt Zei?!" Who is listening to what they are saying? Who cares what they think? Will they determine for us what we will do in Jerusalem?

That was the reaction of a political leader imbued with the greatness of spirit that comes with belief and faith in God, instilled with the sacredness of the Eternal Jerusalem, the City of our Holiness and our Glory.

The Order of Redemption

The question has been asked, "Is this the state that our prophets envisioned?" And I say: This is the state that the prophets envisioned. Of course, it has not yet attained perfection. But our prophets, our sages, and those who followed them, said: The seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will return and will reestablish settlement and independent political rule in the Land.

¹ "House of the Rabbi," the room that had been the study of Tzvi Yehudah's father, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook].

We were not told whether those who return will be men and women of righteousness.

The prophet said: "When I shall have gathered the house of Israel...then shall they dwell in their own land...And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards..." (Ezek.28:25-26) The prophet is speaking of real vineyards, not symbolic ones. As a result of the return of Israel to their Land, there will come about the increase of Torah and its glorification. But the first step is the settlement of Israel on their Land!

Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher wrote: "It is clear to me that if 130 families of Israel begin to till the land in our holy land, this will be the beginning of the redemption (Geulah) even if the people are not yet worthy." Certainly, this great saint desired the increase of Torah and its glorification, but the order of redemption is: (1) agricultural settlement, (2) the establishment of the state, and as a consequence (3) the uplifting of that which is sacred, the dissemination of the teaching of Torah, its increase and glorification.

This Year, We Sing the Nineteenth Song

The true Israel is Israel redeemed, the kingdom of Israel and the armies of Israel, a people in its wholeness and not a diaspora in exile. Thus, when Israel was sent into exile, heavens and earths throughout the universe trembled. And so it was with the coming of the redemption. A tremor spread through the universe, billowing from step to step, the chain of Torah, until it reached us. The process is gradual and continuous, and each and every year [of Israel's independence] is a new hymn, a celestial song, another link in the chain. This year, we sing the nineteenth song.

Psalm 19 is comprised of two sections. In the first section we perceive the wonders of God in nature and see Him manifest in the Creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork..." (Ps. 19:2).

The second section depicts God's pure and illumining Torah—His commandment—and the awesome fear of God: "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever." (Ps. 19:8-10)

Both the Kuzari and the Maharal expound upon this parallelism: the power of God is revealed in the majestic world of nature. But, as we rise in holiness, immense is the measure of the force of His revelation through the Torah and the awesome fear of God which has been given to Israel. "And He said unto me: Thou art My servant, Israel in whom I will be glorified." (Isa. 49:3) Such is our Mizmor 19.

From within our earthly natures, we reach out to the spiritual and the heavenly. We build with matter and afterwards consecrate what we have built. We are commanded to occupy ourselves in our earthly abode with the revelation of the Holy, in support of the divine work of creation. "Ascribe ye strength unto God;" (Ps. 68:35) "Exalt the Lord with me and let us extol His name together." (Ps. 34:4)

Sanctification of the Name is Greater than Desecration of the Name

In saying this, it is not our intent to flatter heretics and Torah scoffers. There are in the State of Israel many grievous things in which there is much Chillul Hashem (Desecration of God's Name). Nonetheless, with all that is shocking from the aspect of desecration, there is an enormous value of Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of God's Name) which cannot, by any account, be set aside in relation to the State and Israel's Day of Independence.

In Ezekiel, Chapter 36, the program for redemption is set out: "And I will sanctify My great name" this will come about because "I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land." Only afterwards will come "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your uncleanness...And I will...cause you to walk in my statutes." (Ezek. 36:23- 26)

The repentance of the people will come only after the Ingathering of the Exiles. At first glance, there is a balance between the sanctification of building of the kingdom of Israel, on the one hand, and the desecration involved on the other. But we are instructed by the Sages in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Kiddushin) that "Kiddush Hashem is greater than Chillul Hashem."

Certainly, the significance of this saying of the Sages is not an injunction that sanctification is more important than desecration. Rather when both are present together, when there is to be found an aspect of sanctification and an aspect of desecration, then one does not cast doubt or declare that we are at an impasse. For the aspect of sanctification is prominent, decisive, and obligatory.

How much more so in the great, divine sanctification involved in the rebirth of the Jewish people! And, as the fulfillment of the mitzvah of the settlement of the Land of Israel continues to grow within our midst, as the tens of thousands of members of Israel are gathered within the Land, out of the completeness and greatness of faith in the realization of the "works of the Lord," we may attain the right to see desecrations and profanations gradually be abolished and disappear.

“Let every valley be raised, every hill and mount made low. Let the rugged ground become level and the ridges become a plain. The Presence of the LORD shall appear, and all flesh, as one, shall behold—for the LORD Himself has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:4-5)

Adapted from translations by Rhea Magnes, access via Israel 613 and Yossi Klein Halevi's *Like Dreamers*. Full Hebrew text available at yeshiva.org.il.

“What Kind of Redemption Does Israel Represent?”

Rabbi Yehuda Amital

May 2005

On Israeli Independence Day in May of 2005, Rabbi Yehuda Amital gave the following address to the community members of his yeshiva in Alon Shvut, Gush Etzion. The mood was overcast by the impending evacuation of Gush Katif—the removal of over 8,000 Jewish settlers living in the Gaza Strip, part of Israel’s disengagement from Gaza.

Religious Zionism: A Movement in Crisis

"You shall say on that day: I will praise You, O God; although You were angry with me, Your anger is turned back and You comfort me."
(Jeremiah 12:1)

We experienced this verse on the day the State of Israel was declared. That was a day of God's anger, for we received the bitter news of the fall of Gush Etzion and the many victims who were slaughtered here. But it was also a day of God "turning back" and "comforting me."

Although intellectually I understand the importance of our celebration today, it is difficult for me to rejoice. One reason for this difficulty concerns upcoming events in Gush Katif. There is another factor that clouds my joy: we are all part of Religious Zionism, a movement that is currently in deep crisis.

But my difficulty is only emotional. From an ideological perspective, I have no problem rejoicing on Yom Haatzma'ut (Independence Day) this year. I danced and rejoiced when the State was declared—without Gush Katif, without Jaffa, without Nahariya, and without the Old City of Jerusalem – so why should I not rejoice today? We cannot deny that the current period is a bitter one, but then, too – when we heard about the fall of Gush Etzion – it was bitter, and nevertheless we rejoiced!

This year, however, some voices from within the Religious Zionist camp are calling on us not to celebrate Yom Haatzma'ut and not to recite Hallel. A small group of rabbis have even come out with a statement that "We have no portion and inheritance in the Lord of Israel." What is the origin of this confusion, which has completely reversed the attitude of many people towards the State?

It seems to me that the main problem stems from doubts about the expression, "reishit tzemichat ge'ulateinu," the beginning of the flowering of our redemption. What is the source of these doubts? They arise from the philosophy of a great man, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, and principally from the philosophy of his students. I believe that most Religious Zionists do not identify with that philosophy, and I count myself among that majority, but I feel a need to express that position and my opinion.

The Origins of the Crisis: The Beginning of the Redemption

The concept of the "beginning of the redemption" (atchalta de-geula) was spoken about long before the establishment of the State. Before the founding of the State, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook decided that we are living in the time of the "beginning of the redemption."

His son, Rav Zvi Yehuda, also spoke about this – but in his time the State was already established. And so the question arose: what was so special about the establishment of the State? If the land began to give its fruit to the Nation of Israel before the creation of the State, and the "beginning of the redemption" was already upon us, then what great change came about with the State's birth?

The students of Rav Zvi Yehuda had an answer to this question: indeed, the establishment of the State brought about something new. In light of Nachmanides' teaching in his comments on Maimonides' Sefer Hamitzvot, they explained that the "beginning of the redemption" refers not to the Jewish nation dwelling in the Land of Israel, but rather to the absolute sovereignty of the Jewish nation over all parts of the Land of Israel. I heard this for the first time many years ago, and I was astounded to discover that they believed that a major component of the significance of the State was that it facilitated the fulfillment of the command to dwell in the Land of Israel and to conquer it. If a major aspect of the purpose of the State is the fulfillment of the command to exercise sovereignty over Land of Israel, then a State that hands over territories betrays its purpose, and we must question whether it is still "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption." The State is thus invested with significance by virtue of its exercising sovereignty over all areas of the land. To my mind, this is the source of the doubts among the Religious Zionist public today concerning the significance of the State.

I do not believe in this approach. I can testify concerning myself that I recited the blessing of "Shehechyanu" and I danced on the 29th of November 1947, at Be'erot Yitzchak, even though the U.N. had partitioned the land, and likewise in 1948. Our feeling was one of elation; it was as though there was an intoxicating drug in the air – Israeli independence. We weren't rejoicing because of what the Nachmanides taught, but rather because of the fulfillment of Herzl's vision. At that time, Rav Zvi Yehuda recounted: "I could not go out and participate in the festivities... for indeed, God's word – 'They have divided My land' (Joel 4:2) – was being fulfilled... In that condition – my whole body shaken, wounded all over, cut up into pieces – I could not rejoice." We – the simple Jews among whom I regard myself – didn't know about the Nachmanides. We knew that there was Israeli independence, Jewish sovereignty in our land – and we rejoiced over that.

Jewish Sovereignty: The Beginning of the Flowering of Our Redemption

In the previous generation, there were rabbis who spoke about the "beginning of the redemption," the "revealed end," the "footsteps of the Messiah" – and a few years later came the greatest Holocaust that had ever happened in Jewish history. Anyone who thought that he was witnessing the signs of the complete redemption was proved wrong in the Holocaust. When the State was established, some of the greatest Torah Sages in the world declared that although we are not living in the time of the "revealed end," there is still great importance to the political freedom of establishing a State.

When Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog spoke of "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption," he did not mean the messianic redemption; rather, he meant the simple redemption consisting of Jewish sovereignty in the land. The Chatam Sofer comments that several times in history, the Holy One wanted to redeem Israel with an incomplete redemption – as during the period of the Second Temple – but the nation of Israel refused, for we have no desire for an incomplete redemption, without the Messiah. The Chatam Sofer wrote this prior to the Holocaust, but after that terrible period during which people sailed aimlessly in boats, with no home, we understand that there was never any Chillul Hashem – desecration of God's Name – like the Holocaust, nor any Kiddush Hashem – sanctification of God's Name – like the establishment of the State. Praise and thanks should be offered for the establishment of the State, even if it is not a messianic redemption.

Indeed, in 1948 we did not speak of the Messiah. We prayed for the Kingdom of Israel and sufficed with sovereignty comparable to that of the Second Temple period. During Ezra's time, very few people came back; in our time – thank God, we have reached five, six million. We never had such numbers here!

After the Six Day: The Messianic Feeling

The messianic feeling started after the Six Day War. It was difficult to understand how we had defeated seven Arab armies with such ease. For a large sector of the public, the Six Day War strengthened the view that the significance of the State of Israel is bound up with ruling over the Land of Israel, rather than with the actual fact of Jewish sovereignty, autonomy, and freedom. These people regarded the war as a revealed miracle, and as proof of the imminent messianic redemption.

After the Six Day War, some Jews – both religious and secular – stood up and said that the partition of the land that had been forced upon us by the U.N. during the British mandate should be nullified. These people began to speak about a vision of the complete Land of Yisrael, but they didn't notice the Arabs living within the borders of that "Whole Land of Israel." Today, after our conquest of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, there arises a risk that the State will not remain Jewish. In a Jewish country there must be a Jewish majority, and this is diminishing with time.

[Some proponents of annexation who do not see Arabs as a demographic threat], claimed that the solution would be found with the coming of the Messiah, and since the Messiah is already knocking at the door, there is no need to worry about the pragmatic ramifications of our actions. This messianic thinking is what led to this crisis.

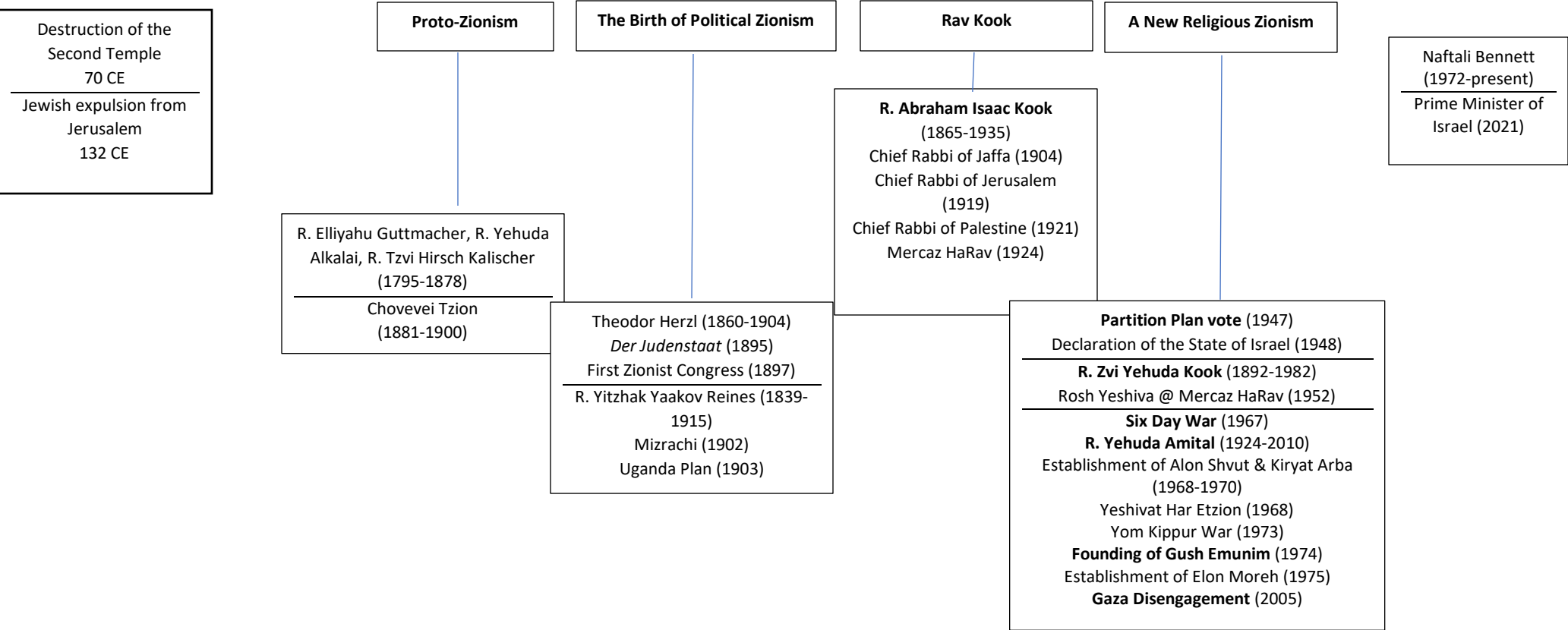
To my sorrow, I have not merited divine inspiration. I have never met a prophet who fit Maimonides' identifying criteria, who told me that the Messiah is already on the way. When I established the yeshiva, the architect planned the beit midrash [study hall] without windows. I told her about the tzaddik [righteous man] in whose town a shofar blast was once heard, and the whole community thought that the Messiah had arrived. The tzaddik poked his nose out of the window, sniffed gently, and said: "No. When the Messiah comes, it will be

possible to sense it in the air." A beit midrash needs windows, in order to be able to sense when the Messiah is coming. If I haven't yet sensed the Messiah's footsteps – it is a sign that the Messiah hasn't yet come...

So we must rejoice today just as we rejoiced in 1948. We must recognize that just as the Holocaust was a gargantuan Chillul Hashem, so the State of Israel is the greatest Kiddush Hashem. We have a problem with giving away parts of Land of Israel, but look at what the Holy One has done for us! We have an independent State, we are a prosperous country, and we are militarily strong. True, there is poverty and plenty of other problems, but it is difficult to conceive of the magnitude of the change that has been wrought in our condition over the past sixty years.

We are permitted to rejoice wholeheartedly on Yom Haatzma'ut. Despite our pain, we must follow Rashi's words, "At a time of mourning – one mourns; at a time of joy – one rejoices" (Gen. 6:6). This is "a time of joy," and therefore let us declare without reservation: "This day is the day God has made; let us celebrate and rejoice in it!" (Ps. 118:24).

Adapted from translation by Kaeren Fish, Shaul Barth, and Reuven Ziegler, accessed via the [Israel Koschitzky Torat Har Etzion Virtual Beit Midrash](#).



See next page for index of people mentioned in both speeches in order of appearance.

The Netziv-Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin(1816-1893)

- Polish rabbinic scholar
- Famed Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin-the most prestigious Lithuanian yeshiva

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap (1882-1951)

- Student of R. Abraham Isaac Kook
- Rosh Yeshiva of Mercaz Harav (R. Kook's yeshiva) from 1924-1951

Rabbi Meir Bar Ilan (1880-1949)

- Born Meir Berlin in Lithuania, son of the Netziv (Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin)
- Emigrated to Jerusalem in 1923
- 1920-elected president of Mizrachi

Berl Locker (1887-1972)

- Born in Galicia, joined the Poalei Tzion Marxist-Zionist movement in law school, emigrated to Israel in 1936
- Chairman of Jewish Agency from 1948-1956
- MK for Mapai (1955-1959)

Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher (1795-1874)

- Polish proto-Zionist

The Kuzari-Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (~1075-1141)

- Great Hebrew poet and philosopher

- Author of the Kuzari, a philosophical text that explains and defends Jewish the fundamentals of Jewish
- Made pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the end of his life

The Maharal-Rabbi Yehuda Leow (~1520-1606)

- Polish born rabbi and scholar
- Leader of several Jewish communities around central Europe, including the community of Prague
- The creator of the Golem according to Jewish folklore

Nachmanides-Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman-(1194-1270)

- Medieval Sephardic scholar, made pilgrimage from his native Catalonia to the Holy Land

Maimonides-Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon-Rambam-(~1135-1204)

- Medieval Sephardic scholar and philosopher. Born in present-day Spain, died in present-day Egypt.
- Probably the most important Jewish philosopher in all of Jewish history

Rabbi Isaac Herzog (1888-1959)

- Chief Rabbi of Palestine after Rav Kook's death, first Chief Rabbi of Israel after establishment of state
- Helped established the liturgy for the State of Israel, including
 - the prayer for the state of Israel, where the phrase "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption comes from"

- Hallel and the special Psalms recited for Israeli Independence Day

Rashi-Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105)

- Medieval French scholar who wrote comprehensive commentaries on the Bible and Talmud