

## *When Unity Reigned: Yom ha-Azma'ut 1954*

By: ELAZAR MUSKIN

A number of years ago while I rummaged through a box of old papers and memorabilia that belonged to my late father, Rabbi Jacob Muskin z"l, of Cleveland, Ohio, a stained yellow mimeographed paper fell on my lap. As I picked it up, I began to realize that I was holding an historic document.

The paper was folded in half and on the front cover it read, "Sixth Anniversary Celebration Israel Independence Day, Sunday May 9, 1954, Iyar 6, 5714." The front cover also indicated the location of the celebration, The Taylor Road Synagogue Auditorium in Cleveland Heights, Ohio and noted that the event was sponsored by an organization called "The Orthodox Jewish Association of Cleveland."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In my letter to Rabbi Shubert Spero dated 2 July, 1997 I asked him a number of questions including: What was this sponsoring organization "The Orthodox Jewish Association"? How long did it exist? Who was Dr. David Magid, its President?

In his letter dated 19 August, 1997 Rabbi Spero responded: "Shortly after my arrival in Cleveland I was called to a meeting with Rabbis E.M. Bloch and C.M. Katz z"l (who were very close to my late uncles, H.I. and B.E. Spero z"l, who were instrumental in bringing the Yeshiva to Cleveland) who told me that the Roshei Yeshiva did not wish to isolate themselves from the 'city' but rather saw themselves as a part of the general community and, given the sad state of Orthodoxy, felt a religious obligation to work for the ideals of Torah. They added that with the arrival of us young 'spirited' rabbis, there was an opportunity to work together and to achieve. (My own 'credentials' as a Torah Vodaath *musmakh* and son of an Agudath Israel activist helped inspire such confidence.)

"Towards that end it was agreed to set up a broader-based organization called 'The Orthodox Jewish Association (OJA)' to which all sorts of organizations would be invited to join. This was to include educational or-

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When I opened the folded flyer my interest piqued. On the left-hand side the flyer announced a “Social Hour Following the Program” and listed as co-chairs of the Hospitality Committee Mrs. Sol L. Bloomfield, representing Mizrachi Women, and Mrs. Mordechai Gifter, the wife of the late Telshe Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, representing N’shai Agudath Isarel.

On the right side of the flyer was the detailed program for the evening that included my late father and many community rabbis. The Program began with “Presentation of Colors” by B’nai Akivah, the religious Zionist youth group, and Pirḥai Agudath Israel, the youth group of Agudath Israel. What fascinated me most, however, was the fact that among the speakers addressing the topic, “Looking Ahead with Religious Zionism,” was the founding Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, the late Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch, representing Agudath Israel.<sup>2</sup>

This indeed amazed me. I am a native Clevelander and grew up in the Orthodox community during the 1960s and ‘70s when tremendous tensions existed between the anti-religious Zionist Telshe Yeshiva and the religious Zionist community. Yom ha-Azma’ut, Israel Independence Day, was not celebrated or even noted at Telshe Yeshiva, and all Judaic Studies teachers at the Hebrew Acad-

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ganizations such as Telz, Hebrew Academy, Yeshivat Adath, service organizations such as the Mikveh Association, synagogues, and also Agudah and Mizrachi. This saved the Roshei Yeshiva (in their view) from having to ‘recognize’ synagogues with dubious mechitzas or rabbis with dubious *smichas* (which they would have had to do had this been an organization of synagogues or of rabbis; Dr. Magid was a non-controversial observant dentist — member of Taylor Rd. Synagogue). Telz had no problem ‘affiliating’ with this OJA since all it implied was that the various collectives involved wished to further Orthodoxy.”

<sup>2</sup> See Jacob J. Schacter, “Facing the Truths of History,” *Torah U-Madda Journal* 8 (1998-1999) 224-225. In note 107 on p. 262, Schacter writes, “My thanks to Rabbi Solomon F. Ryback for bringing this to my attention. Rabbi Elazar Muskin, whose late father, Rabbi Jacob Muskin, served as a rabbi in Cleveland and participated in this program, is preparing an article about this entire remarkable episode.” Schacter reproduces a copy of the program on pp. 274-275. This is a reproduction I gave the author from the copy I found among my father’s papers.

emy of Cleveland espoused negative feelings towards religious Zionism, its youth movement B'nai Akivah and Yom ha-Azma'ut, echoing the Yeshiva's attitude.<sup>3</sup> My amazement was shared by Rabbi Shubert Spero, rabbi of Young Israel of Cleveland during this period, and a participant on the program. Rabbi Spero wrote a personal letter to me dated August 19, 1997, from his home in Jerusalem, responding to a letter I wrote him asking for some information about this extraordinary event:

I can well appreciate your amazement at the sight of Agudah and Mizrachi, Bnai Akiva and Pirchai appearing on the same program to celebrate not the anniversary of the Telz Yeshiva (even that would have been most unusual!) but the sixth anniversary of the reestablished State of Israel!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I vividly recall how in 1964, while I was in fourth grade, I was dismissed from my class by the teacher when I, asked to list Jewish holidays, included Yom ha-Azma'ut as one of them. My father ז"ל, upset over this reaction, insisted that the teacher apologize to me and my father, which she was forced to do in front of the then principle of the school, Rabbi N.W. Dessler.

It is interesting to note that a year later the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland ran a Yom ha-Azma'ut program in the school and featured it in a newsletter called "Inside the Hebrew Academy" vol. 1, no. 3, May, 1965. The school reported, "450 students of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland from Kindergarten through High School, plus parent visitors participated in our Yom Hoatzmouth assembly on Friday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, commemorating the seventeenth anniversary of Medinas Israel." The school never celebrated Yom ha-Azma'ut as a religious holiday; rather they recognized it as they did Thanksgiving, which also had its own assembly and performance.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Bloch's approach to the State of Israel and the celebration of Yom ha-Azma'ut was not adopted by his successors at Telshe Yeshiva. Rabbi Spero, in the aforementioned letter, wrote the following: "In May 1968 (after '67 I had become more aggressive in my views on Israel), Young Israel sponsored three lectures on the question of how to celebrate Yom ha-Azma'ut. The first two were given by Rabbi Gluestien and Rabbi Gifter which I, of course, attended. At the third lecture given by myself (not attended by the other two), a handbook of source material (prepared by Rabbi Zvi Yehudah and myself) was distributed. "After the event, I received a rather harsh letter from Rabbi Gifter, mixing Halakhic arguments with a general accusation that our handbook did not show proper deference towards 'other' opinions. This led to several

This extraordinary document testifies that in 1954 Yom ha-Azma'ut was celebrated in Cleveland not only by Mizrachi, but together with the spiritual leadership of Telshe Yeshiva representing Agudath Israel. How could this be?

The answer to the riddle is found in the towering personality of one man—the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch.<sup>5</sup> In the short entry on Rabbi Bloch that appears in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, the editor indicates that Rabbi Bloch was a leader in the Agudath Israel and “resisted every attempt at compromise with the Reform elements in the community.” The article, however, ends by stating, “Bloch actively supported Israel.”<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Spero, in the

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exchanges between us of essentially a Halakhic nature. When I told Rabbi Gifter I was planning to publish the entire exchange of letters (I still have them), he prohibited me from doing so, saying that he considered himself a teacher and not a posek! He insisted that I confirm in writing that I would never publish these letters, which I did.

“In the end, Rabbi Gifter conceded that a Kehillah such as Young Israel, led by a duly accredited Orthodox Rabbi, had the Halakhic right to rule that his Kehillah abide by the rulings of the Chief Rabbi of Israel on the matter under discussion.”

<sup>5</sup> See Jacob J. Schacter, “Torah u-Madda Revisited: The Editor’s Introduction,” *Torah U-Madda Journal* 1 (1989) 16, note 3. Schacter recounts that Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch was raised in a tradition of tolerance for modernity. His father, Rabbi Joseph Leib Bloch, who served as the head of the Telshe Yeshiva in Lithuania from 1910–1930, instituted the study of secular subjects, against many rabbinic voices, as part of the formal curriculum in the Yeshiva’s “mekhinah” (high school) program and appointed his sons, R. Avrohom Yizhak and R. Eliyahu Meir, as its heads. See D. Katz, *Tenu’at ha-Mussar V* (Tel Aviv, 1967), 40-1. See also Shaul Stampfer, *ha-Yeshivah ha-Litait be-Hithavutah*, 252–292, for his section on the description of Yeshiva in Telshe and its structural and organizational innovations. On p. 286 Stampfer mentions that Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines, founder of the Mizrachi, wrote in 1905 to the Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe, Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, asking him to join the Mizrachi. Stampfer remarks, “It is difficult to imagine that Rabbi Reines would have approached someone he was certain would be totally antagonistic to the idea.”

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica* entry on Rabbi Bloch (vol. 4 [1971] p. 1097).

aforementioned letter, also wrote, "Rabbi Bloch was quite tolerant of the Israeli flag."<sup>7</sup>

I found collaboration for this statement from a number of people in Cleveland who remembered Rabbi Bloch and shared their impressions with me. In a telephone conversation on May 28, 1997, native Clevelander and long time resident Mrs. Florence Spero mentioned that above the entrance to the original building of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, the community day school created and run by Telshe Yeshiva, is a reproduction of the emblem of the State of Israel.<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Spero reminisced that Rabbi Bloch was the one who instructed that it be installed, wanting to create a bond be-

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<sup>7</sup> In a telephone interview with Rabbi Moshe Kolodny, Archivist for Agudath Israel of America, 9 June 1997, he told me, "The famous quote about Rabbi Bloch was, 'The left of me is a Zionist.'"

<sup>8</sup> The State of Israel Emblem contains a Menorah surrounded by olive branches on each side and the writing YISRAEL below it. The background is blue and the Menorah can be either white or golden. The white and blue version appears on the presidential standard and is the one on the front of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland. See *The Flag & Emblem: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs* < [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern History/Israel at 50/The Flag and the Emblem](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern%20History/Israel%20at%2050/The%20Flag%20and%20the%20Emblem) > .

See also Daniel Sperber, *Minbagei Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1995), V, 205–212 for a critical discussion on the design of the Menorah that appears on the emblem of the State of Israel. Sperber quotes the late Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzhak (Isaac) Halevi Herzog, who was critical of the choice. Rabbi Herzog wrote,

"It is not good what our government does today. Just when we have merited once again the light of Zion that is symbolized by the menorah, [the state] chose specifically the image of the menorah that is on the arch of Titus, which, it appears, was altered by foreigners . . . And not only this, but an expert in the science of antiquities has testified to me that the menorahs that are formed on the graves in [Jewish] catacombs in Rome . . . are all with three legs, as are all those formed on the mosaics in the remains of ancient synagogues that are in the land of Israel. All of this is clear to me."

Sperber concurs with Rabbi Herzog and argues that the Menorah on the Arch of Titus is designed based on Roman influence. Also see, Meir Soloveichik, "Mysteries of the Menorah," *Commentary*, March, 2008.

tween the school and the new State of Israel. To this day that emblem can be seen close to the top of the front of the building.

In a conversation on May 28, 1997 with another longtime Cleveland resident, Asher Rabinsky, a religious Zionist leader, Mr. Rabinsky reminisced that “Rabbi Bloch was a renaissance man. He loved to speak modern Hebrew with my father, Frank Rabinsky Z”L.”

Finally, in speaking with Esther Estreicher z”l on September 15, 1997, she recalled how she remembered Rabbi Bloch visiting her parents Isaac and Sarah Feigenbaum in 1939. Rabbi Bloch had come to Cleveland to collect money for Telshe Yeshiva in Europe and stayed for Shabbat with the Feigenbaums, leading religious Zionist leaders. When the family sang “Shir ha-Ma’alot” to the tune of HaTikvah, Rabbi Bloch joined in and sang with everyone else.

Although Rabbi Bloch was warmly embraced by the religious Zionist community of Cleveland, his participation in the Sixth Yom ha-Azma’ut celebration which took place, according to Rabbi Bloch’s own estimation, in front of over one thousand people, was criticized by those who felt he compromised his position as Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland and as one of the major rabbinic leaders of Agudath Israel.

A Mr. David Ulman sent a letter to Rabbi Bloch expressing this criticism.<sup>9</sup> We don’t have Mr. Ulman’s letter to Rabbi Bloch but we do have Rabbi Bloch’s response to Mr. Ulman dated May 16, 1954, which was exactly one week after the event took place. It appears from Rabbi Bloch’s letter that Ulman criticized Rabbi Bloch even before the event occurred. Ulman wrote to Rabbi Bloch after seeing an advertisement for the event and challenged the propriety of the Rosh Yeshiva’s participating in such a celebration. Rabbi Bloch’s response was published sixteen years later, in an encyclopedic work

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<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Kolodny informed me, in the aforementioned telephone call, that “David Ulman emigrated from Germany and lived in Washington Heights, New York. Ulman often wrote *Gedolim* whenever he thought their actions needed clarification.”

called *Mitzvot ha-Shalom* written by Rabbi Joseph David Epstein, a prolific author of numerous rabbinic works.<sup>10</sup>

Rabbi Bloch's letter appears only in the first edition of *Mitzvot ha-Shalom* printed in 1969. When, in 1986, Rabbi Epstein printed a second edition, he chose to delete the letter out of concern for personal safety. After the first edition was published, many unsold copies were vandalized and burnt by some who felt it an affront to publish any letter suggesting Yom ha-Azma'ut should be celebrated. In the second edition Rabbi Bloch's missing letter is noted on page 604 where it belonged, with the words in Hebrew, "*lo nigmar*," "not completed," indicating to the astute reader that something is missing from the text.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald Parkoff, "Letter to the Editor," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 9 (2000) 272, describes Rabbi Epstein's scholarly achievements: "Rabbi Joseph Epstein was one of the most prominent students in the Mirrer Yeshiva at the outbreak of World War II in 1939. He travelled with others from the Mirrer Yeshiva as they fled Hitler across Russia to Japan and finally to Shanghai, where they stayed for the duration of the war. Rabbi Epstein was part of the yeshiva's administration during their travails in this period. When he finally came to the United States after the war, he was appointed librarian of Yeshiva University's Talmudical Academy in Brooklyn (BTA). This appointment gave him ample time to write major articles for the *Enzyklopediyyah Talmudit*. He was also able to compose his masterful works, including *Mizvot ha-Shalom*, *Mizvot ha-Bayit*, *Mizvat ha-Ezah*, *Mizvot ha-Musar*, and *Ozar ha-Iggeret*."

Both Parkoff and Schacter (see above n. ii) note that the book contains *haskamot* from leading rabbis including: Dayyan Yechezkel Abramsky, R. Shlomoh Zalman Auerbach, R. Moshe Feinstein, R. Avrohom Jofen, R. Yehezkel Levenstein, R. Yehezkel Sarna, R. Elazar Menahem Shakh, R. Hayyim Leib Shmuelvitz, and R. Shlomoh Yosef Zevin, among others. Schacter observes that these *haskamot* do not mean that these rabbis saw Rabbi Bloch's letter and endorsed it. Rather, he writes (n. 106), "I doubt, however, that they saw every page of the book in advance."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* p. 273. Parkoff, who underwrote the publishing of the second edition, describes why Rabbi Epstein felt it was unsafe to reprint Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch's letter in the 1986 second edition. "When the first edition of the *Mizvot ha-Shalom* was published, the unsold inventory, which represented most of the extant copies, was kept in Rabbi Epstein's garage. As it turned out, the *sefer* came to the attention of some misguided people who were particularly upset with Rabbi Epstein's association of Rabbi Eliyahu

Below is the text of Rabbi Bloch's response to Mr. Ulman. This letter, which I have translated in full, explains the seemingly revolutionary attitude that Rabbi Bloch had towards the controversial celebration of Yom ha-Azma'ut, which influenced him to join with Mizrahi in recognizing the sixth Israel Independence Day.<sup>12</sup> I begin the translation with Rabbi Epstein's introductory note expressing his admiration for Rabbi Bloch's perfect model for articulating one's own ideas while at the same time relating to those with whom one sincerely disagrees.

*The letter of the late great Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe, in Cleveland, is an instructive example for us, pertaining to the Torah's attitude concerning how one is to relate to opposing parties and with those whose positions we do not agree with.*

*As one of the architects of building Torah in the new country, he was an example of self-sacrifice in protecting the sanctity of the Yeshiva so that it would not be affected in any way, especially in the midst of his battle for an organized ultra-Orthodox front against any concession*

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Meir Bloch with *Yom ha-Azmaut*. They proceeded to burn the first edition of *Mizvot ha-Shalom* in Rabbi Epstein's garage. Subsequently, the perpetrators of this dastardly act were found and brought to a *Satmar Bet Din*. Financial restitution was then made to Rabbi Epstein. However, the *sefer* thereafter remained out of print...In the course of re-editing the *sefer*, Rabbi Epstein advised me that, in view of the book burning of the first edition, he wanted to make a deletion. His wife was sick and infirm at that time, and, fearful of another confrontation with hot-headed extremists, had asked to have the deletions made. Rabbi Epstein acceded to her wishes."

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Bloch's letter has been translated, in part, by two previous authors. Neither attempted to translate the letter in its entirety; rather both freely translate excerpts from the letter that reflect Rabbi Bloch's positive attitude towards the founding of the modern State of Israel and the value of celebrating together with the Mizrahi *Yom ha-azma'ut*:

David Hillel Nadoff, [toratimecha.com](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/toratimecha/message/521) [blog on the Internet cited 2007 April 20] available at: <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/toratimecha/message/521>>. A much shorter translation was made by Baron Phillip, [hashkafah.com](http://www.hashkafah.com/index.php?/topic/6903-telz-on-zionism/) [blog on the Internet cited 2005 January 9] available at <[www.hashkafah.com/index.php?/topic/6903-telz-on-zionism/](http://www.hashkafah.com/index.php?/topic/6903-telz-on-zionism/)>.



and compromise. In view of this, how amazing is his moderation, his listening to others' reactions and his consideration of every detail in this serious and multi-faceted question.

Indeed, it is the responsibility [upon all of us], for the honor of the Torah, and honor of Heaven, as the result of clear thinking emanating from the lucidity of the wisdom of the Torah, to carefully weigh each issue and to give it its proper weight and limitations.

With great courage, he expresses these ideas with total resolution, both regarding the intricacies of this problem and as concerns establishing relations with other groups. His courage is manifested several-fold in his openness about his internal depression resulting from the last "note" that closes the letter – "We lost a lot from the fact that we refrained from recognizing the true things etc..."

Rabbi Epstein then prefaces Rabbi Bloch's letter with a short description:

*A letter from the great Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch, may his memory be a blessing, the head of Yeshivas Telz, and among the leaders of Agudas Yisrael, pertaining to his attitude towards Yom ha-Azma'ut.*

My translation of the letter itself is as follows:

*With God's help, Sunday, Parashat Be-Hukotai, 5714*

*My respected friend, Mr. David Ulman, Shalom and with eternal blessing!*

*First I would like to express my gratitude to you for contacting me to request clarification with regard to the holiday of Independence without judging or criticizing from afar. Now let me respond to the matter with clarity.*

- a) *The copy of the advertisement that you sent to me is indeed correct. Furthermore, this event was attended by the Women of Agudath Israel and Pirhei Agudath Israel. The reason that their attendance was not mentioned [in the ad] is simply due to the fact that they decided to attend later [after the flyer was published], and they became an official part of the evening's program.*
- b) *Before we discuss the actual matter we must first clarify the following questions: 1) Is Yom ha-Azma'ut a worthy matter for the Ultra-Orthodox community to deliberate and to express a stance regarding it[s celebration]? 2) Is it worthy of celebration? 3) Is it worthy for*

*the members of Agudath Israel to unite with the members of Mizrachi in a fashion which allows us to express our approach and influence others to act according to the spirit of Agudath Israel?*

*In my humble opinion, one must respond to these questions as follows:*

- 1) *The independence of Israel and the establishment of the State are important events in the life of our nation. It is worthy for members of Agudath Israel to participate when there is a possibility to express their thoughts and views before a large forum in order to influence them regarding the approach of the Agudah and to refute the negative sentiments against Agudath Israel.*
- 2) *In my opinion, despite all of the defects and deficiencies in the leadership of the State of Israel, its mere existence, which happened via revealed miracles, is of great significance that deserves recognition and appreciation. This recognition must be publicly expressed for two reasons: First, because the truth must be expressed. Second, that all should know and recognize that our war against the Government of Israel is not targeted against the existence of the State.*
- 3) *Participation with Mizrachi in a fashion that Agudath Israel is free to express its views was recognized as the correct approach by creating a religious front that Agudath Israel is always willing to renew.<sup>13</sup> Although I know that we disagree with Mizrachi on our fun-*

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<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Bloch is referring to the The United Religious Front (חזית דתית (מאוחדת). It was a political alliance of the four major religious parties in Israel (Mizrachi, Hapoel HaMizrachi, Agudat Yisrael and Poalei Agudat Yisrael) as well as the Union of Religious Independents, formed for the first election to Knesset after Independence in 1949.

In the elections the list won 16 seats, making it the third largest in the Knesset. The initial allocation of seats among the parties saw Hapoel HaMizrachi take seven seats, Mizrachi take four, Poalei Agudat Yisrael three and Agudat Yisrael two. It joined David Ben Gurion's Mapai party in forming the coalition of the first government of Israel.

After elections were called for the second Knesset in 1951, the group disbanded into its individual parties and each ran for the election separately. See Menachem Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah*, Torah Shelemah Institute (Jerusalem, 1968) p. 374–391 for a listing of all the Rabbis, Roshei Yeshiva and Chassidic Rebbes who supported the United Religious Front. He reproduces a letter that all the rabbis signed, dated Friday, 20 Tevet, 5709

*damental beliefs, and in no way are our views consistent with each other, and consequently our actions are totally different, still there are many issues on which we can work together and, through this, strengthen the ultra-religious and its influence on the life of the nation.*

*After this preface let's discuss the issue of our participating in the celebration of Yom haAzma'ut. The collective meeting for Yom ha-Azma'ut was not particularly festive; it was simply a symposium conducted by all the Orthodox factions and gave everyone the opportunity to express their views. Of course, if we would not have attended, the meeting would have turned into a platform focused on criticizing Agudath Israel and its leaders who are the "Gedolei ha-Torah." Our participation on the other hand caused the speakers to speak politely and allowed Agudath Israel to express its views in front of more than one thousand people. Hence even if we would not have related to the State of Israel in a positive fashion, our participation would still have been of value. However, in my view since the creation of the State of Israel is indeed an important milestone in the life of our nation, our relationship to it, therefore, is positive, and our participation is obligatory.*

*Our participation together with Mizrahi is despite the fact that the religious political front was canceled. In Cleveland there is a religious front by the name "Orthodox Jewish Association" comprised of representatives of ultra-orthodox synagogues, Agudath Israel, Mizrahi, Young Israel and representatives of the educational institutions of the ultra-orthodox. A condition was established that if there is any issue with which one of the participants disagrees, the organization cannot act. For example when rabbi... came here as the representative of the so called Jewish Agency's Torah Department, during their month of propaganda, and most of the organization's members were willing to participate in an open forum, Agudath Israel and our educational institutes did not agree, despite our personal relationships with rabbi.... Of course Mizrahi acted independently, but not in the name of our joint religious*

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(January 21, 1949), in support of the United Religious Front. In the opening sentence the letter declares that they are grateful to the Almighty for all of His kindness in allowing us to see the "First blossoming of the beginning of the redemption (*athalta d-Geulah*)."

organization. Due to this organization, thank God, we were able to eliminate non-kosher at United Jewish Appeal banquets and gatherings and accomplish other positive outcomes that strengthened the religious position and its respect in the community. Therefore, if we would not have agreed to organize the Yom ha-Aazma'ut gathering of course we could have stopped the organization from attending. However, our view is positive [towards Yom ha-Azma'ut] and therefore we did attend. It is noteworthy that nothing was done without consulting with us. We oversaw all preparations to insure all would be in accordance with our interests. For example, no irreligious attended and all women sat in a separate section behind a mehitzah etc....


To summarize, I feel it correct to clarify why this was conducted this year and not in previous years. The reason did not emanate from our side but from the side of the other factions. In past years all the Zionist factions would conduct the gathering in accordance with their approach and of course we are neither part of them nor their ways. But this time they approached us with a proposal that the gathering would be only with religious people in accordance with the spirit of Torah and asked us if under these conditions we would be willing to participate. And thus, despite the fact that this year we are actually at war with the Mizrachi even more so than in previous years, we still feel it was the correct approach to demonstrate to them that on issues on which we are in agreement we can work together.

In general, I already expressed my view that we lost a great deal by refraining from recognizing correct issues just because the irreligious and those manipulated by them, the Mizrachi, agreed to them, because through agreeing with them we would have strengthened their false opinions. In my opinion, our views did not find receptive hearts within the nation not because of our stance against their incorrect views; rather it is because of our negative position against the correct views such as learning Bible, speaking Hebrew and Erez Yisrael. The populace cannot understand our concerns and, moreover, when we emphasize our positive views they will accept us and allow us to fight the falsehoods. In addition, I must express that this attitude of ours is not unique to our life in America. We acted this way in Lithuania as well despite the fact that then, as now, we were totally zealous concerning anything that, God

*forbid, is not in accordance with the spirit of Torah.<sup>14</sup> We did not regress because of persecution, denouncement and sometimes even suffering, sorrow and much damage to our holy Yeshiva.*

*With this I am your friend, I respect you and bless you,*

*Eliyahu Meir Bloch*

In Rabbi Bloch's own words, we can see the philosophy behind one extraordinary Yom ha-Azma'ut celebration.\* 

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<sup>14</sup> Nadoff, *toratimecha.com* n. 3, notes that Rabbi Bloch's position is consistent with that espoused by his father, Rabbi Joseph Leib Bloch, and his brother, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, as expressed in *Shiurei Dat*, p. 80–93. He also demonstrates that it echoes the platform of Agudath Israel at its convention in Frankfurt in 1918. He quotes Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, p. 393 who demonstrates this. See also David Samson, *Torat Erez Yisrael*, p. 248. See also Shimon Apisdorf, *Judaism in a Nutshell*, p. 130 for Agudath Israel's 1947 statement about the United Nations partition plan and the establishment of the State of Israel.

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