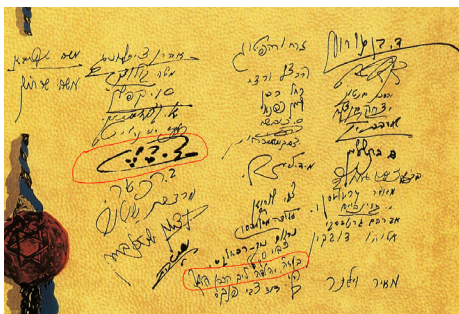


RAV YEHUDA LEIB FISHMAN MAIMON: LEAVING HIS MARK

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Tel Aviv, British Mandate Palestine; Thursday, May 13, 1948, 6 pm: With less than twenty-four hours until the 4 pm, erev Shabbat scheduled declaration, a massive debate broke out among the committee of writers of the Megilat Ha'Atzma'ut, the Israeli Declaration of Independence. Aharon Zisling (a left pro-Soviet politician) argued against putting G-d's name into the constitution. However, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman¹ (1875-1962) contended that a document signed on behalf of world Jewry could not possibly omit G-d's name. After much contention and heated voices in both directions, they reached a compromise to use the ambiguous phrase "*mitoch bitachon b'Tzur Yisrael*" — [We sign this document,] trusting in *Tzur Yisrael*. The religious group members interpreted *Tzur Yisrael* as referring to G-d (as we do in numerous places),² while the secular affiliates understood it as referring to the "might of the people of Israel."



Rav Fishman's signature with the words "בְּעִזֹּרַת הַיְהוָה" before it.

But Rabbi Fishman was not satisfied. He wanted an explicit mention of G-d in the paper, which he firmly believed would be of historic proportions in the annals of Jewish history. Realizing

he would not be able to change the text of the declaration itself, he would have to find another way to sanctify the declaration with the name of G-d.

Twenty-two hours and seventeen minutes later, at exactly 4:17 pm on erev Shabbos, Parshas Kedoshim, upon David Ben Gurion's finishing his recital of the declaration,³ the opportunity arrived for everyone on the council to sign their name. One by one in alphabetical order, all the signatories came up. With the Hebrew letter פ being toward the end of the alphabet, Rabbi Fishman was one of the last ones to sign. However, when his turn finally arrived, he left an indelible mark on the document. He gracefully took the pen and added not only his name, but four letters before it as well. He wrote, "בְּעִזֹּרַת הַיְהוָה לִיב פִּישְׁמָן" — adding the acronym for בעזרת השם, with the help of G-d, ensuring that for all of eternity the Megilat Ha'Atzma'ut contained within it an explicit and undeniable reference to G-d.

However, the story does not end there. Although the State was declared, there was not yet a tefillah written on behalf of its welfare. Rav Fishman, who after the state was formed became the Minister of Religious Affairs, commissioned Rav Yitzchak Herzog and Rav Ben-Zion Uziel, the chief rabbis at the time, to write such a tefillah. Rav Herzog (who was a close confidant of Rav Fishman and who took the lead role in the project) viewed the writing of the tefillah as an opportunity to provide an Orthodox Torah translation of the



**Rav Yehuda Leib
Fishman Maimon zt"l**
1875–1962

Megilat Ha'Atzma'ut.⁴

It is perhaps no coincidence that the opening phrase of the Tefillah L'Shalom HaMedinah is "Avinu Shebashamyim, Tzur Yisrael," our Father in heaven, the Rock of Israel. Whether done intentionally or not, using those words makes it abundantly clear to every Jew for all of eternity, that when the Megilat Ha'Atzma'ut says we have confidence in our country, because of our trust in the Tzur Yisrael, it is not referring to the might of the Jewish people or our army. Rather, we place our trust in one being, and one being only, Avinu Shebashamayim, our Father in heaven.

Endnotes

1 Moshe Shapiro was also one of the people aligned with Rabbi Fishman.

2 For example: In the bracha right before Shmoneh Esrei of Shacharit we pray "Tzur Yisrael kuma b'ezrat Yisrael" — Rock of Israel, arise to help the Jewish people.

3 Immediately after Ben Gurion finished his recital, before anyone had the chance to sign the declaration, Rabbi Fishman stood up and in a voice choking with emotion recited the bracha of Shehechyanu.

4 Interview with historian Dr. Yoel Rappel found on <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/judaism/39237/>