



Interview with Rabbi Goren

Hello Rav Goren, how are you?

Excellent, thank you. Thank G-d.

You were the Chief Rabbi of the IDF in the days of the foundation of the State of Israel. Could you tell us how it came about that Memorial Day and Independence Day fall out so close to one another?

It is an interesting story. In the first year after the state was founded, it was clear that there needed to be a Memorial Day for the many fallen soldiers who died when fighting for the establishment of the state. However, we could not agree on a date.

Was this because of the different opinions of the people who had founded the state?

Absolutely, yes. Then Independence Day came and three days before Independence Day, I decided that it could not happen without a Memorial Day! I turned to the IDF Chief of Staff, and we made it official, from one day to the next, that there shall be a Memorial Day- and this was how the day was decided upon.

Do you mean to say that the proximity of the two days is incidental? It was not premeditated to have them so close to one another?

Exactly! All the nice explanations for why this is the case came later.

Honored Rav, did everyone agree to the closeness of the days or was there opposition in the general public?

Truthfully, there was quite a fiery discussion around the issue and throughout the year there were opinions for and against it among the country's leaders. The forum of bereaved parents from the war of independence were very against the closeness of the days. They claimed that it did not honor the memory of the fallen.

If so, when was the decision made? When was the final discussion in which it was decided that the two days will fall out one after the other?

To be honest, I do not remember such a discussion ever taking place. I think people's minds changed three years after the establishment of the state in 1951 when David Ben-Gurion wrote, "Regarding the proximity in time of Memorial Day and a Day of Festivities – there is no need to be concerned. They are destined to be close to one another."

It is fascinating to hear from you, a person who was close by when decisions were being made, how everything happened incidentally.

It is just important to remember that we are speaking about pre-State days when there were many challenges and a lot of uncertainty. We had to cope in unclear circumstances, and we were trying to do the best we could. I think that that which started by chance became intentional.

And of course, the main thing is that we honor the memory and legacy of the fallen.

Rabbi Shlomo Goren was the Chief Military Rabbi at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel. He served for a short time as the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yafo and then served as the Chief Rabbi of Israel.