

The Translation of an Ideological Worldview into Halakhic Language: Ransoming Captives and the Changing Relationship between Individual and Society in R. Shaul Yisraeli's Writings

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Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli was one of the religious-Zionist community's leading halakhic authorities during the first half-century of the existence of the State of Israel, as well as one of the individuals most commonly identified with the attempt to renew *Hilkhot Medina*, or Laws of State. Rabbi Yisraeli would regularly analyze the major events of the day from the halakhic perspective, and thus in the wake of the Yom Kippur War, he turned his attention to examining and defining the state's obligation to secure the release of its prisoners of war.

This paper presents a close study of the halakhic decision R. Yisraeli penned on this matter (*Chavot Binyamin*, 16). It analyzes the manner in which R. Yisraeli anchored his innovative ruling in the traditional halakhic proof-texts and, more specifically, the manner in which his ruling 'translates' an ideological worldview into halakhic language. In R. Yisraeli's view the state's responsibility towards a soldier it sent into battle cannot be compared with that of the community towards a regular member in need. Whereas, at first glance his argument may seem unremarkable, a close reading of his position reveals the ideological underpinnings that directed his choice of halakhic precedent, as well as the difficulties met on this path which led to a later reformulation of his view.