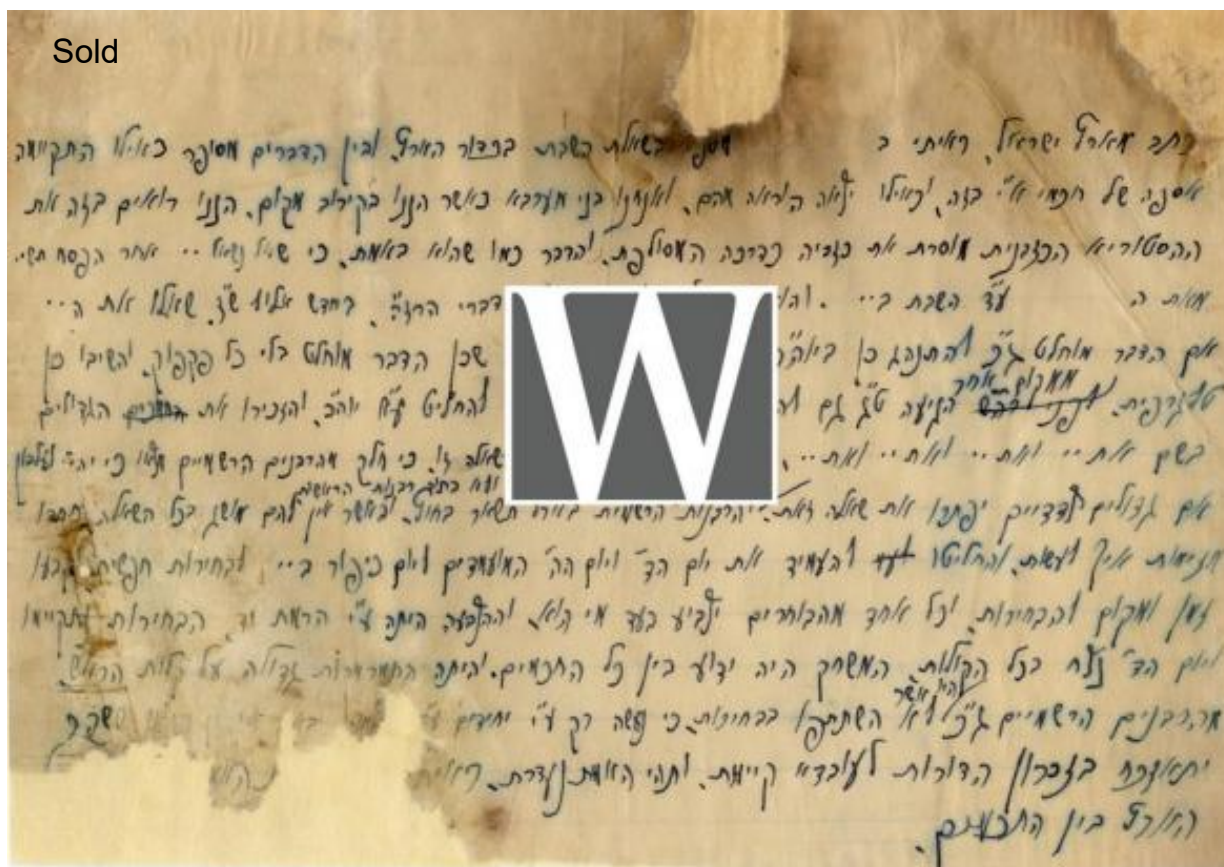


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56 . Discovery! Strongly Worded Letter from the Chazon Ish Regarding the International Date Line

The Chazon Ish's opinion about the session convened by the Chief Rabbinate to discuss the international date line and when Shabbat and Yom Kippur should be observed by the yeshiva students exiled to Kobe, Japan during the Second World War - in his own hand.

Specifications: [1] page, ink on paper. 14x20 cm. 14 lines in a clear, crowded hand. Purposely not signed.

Background: This was one of the stormiest episodes in the Torah world during the Second World War. It was one of the rare occasions during which the Chazon Ish left his quiet, modest habits and publicly expressed a sharp, independent opinion as a trustworthy individual posek - that contradicted the opinion of many other rabbis. The controversy surrounded the question of when Shabbat and Yom Kippur should be observed in Japan.

At the height of the Second World War, a few hundred Lithuanian and Polish yeshiva students miraculously escaped the Nazi beast and arrived on the safe shores of Kobe, Japan. This generated the relevant question of when they should observe Shabbat, since the day in Japan starts eighteen hours after it starts in the Land of Israel (Kobe is east of Jerusalem; more than 100-135 degrees east of Greenwich). To be stringent, they could observe two days of Shabbat and the holidays, but, on Yom Kippur, they couldn't fast for two days straight - since this would entail endangering their life to some extent. The question was, which day was appropriate.

Many Torah scholars debated this question, starting with Rabbeinu Zeraycha HaLevi who spoke at length about this question, through the Rabbi of Harbin, Rabbi Aharon Moshe Kisilov, who arrived in China together with other refugees during the First World War. They observed Shabbat like it was kept in the Land of Israel. However, now, with the Second World War refugees, the question cropped up again and generated tremendous confusion amongst the rabbis and yeshiva students in Japan.

The halachic discussion regarding the international date line is very extensive and much has been written about it. (Refer to: Encyclopedia Talmudit, in the supplement to the entry "Yom"). We will just mention a few points regarding the polemic between the rabbis in Palestine.

On the 12th of September, 1941 - Friday, 20th of Elul 1941, a telegraph was received in Jerusalem. It was addressed to **"The rabbis Mishkowsky, Alter, Herzog, Soloveitchik, Finkel, Meltzer of Beit Orenstein, Jerusalem with an urgent question from 350 Jews begging: Help! Answer immediately regarding which day we shall fast for Yom Kippur."** It was signed, **"Agudat Rabbanim U'Baalei Batim MiKobe."**

Rabbi Herzog convened a meeting of rabbis, whose identities are still not 100% certain today. They took a vote and sent a telegraph with their decision to Kobe on the 7th of Tishrei, 1942. It stated **"The meeting of the rabbis have decided that the fast of Yom Kippur is on Wednesday, according to the calculation customary in Japan."**

At the same time, the Chazon Ish sent a short telegram with an unequivocal message: **"Eat on Wednesday and fast for Yom Kippur on Thursday, and don't worry about anything."**

Unlike his usual habit, the Chazon Ish strongly defended his opinion and even sent letters to Jerusalem debating with Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer and Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Toledano to prove that his opinion was correct. The correspondence is recorded in a special booklet *Shemona Esrei Sha'ot* published in 1943.

Unique features: In this rare, special leaf, the Chazon Ish expresses his bitterness about the rabbinical session, its character, format and decision. "It is related as if a session of the sages of the Land of Israel was convened, and as if the "halachic authority" issued them, and we are ... when we are close by, we see this as hypocritical history transmitting its hypocrisy in its distorted manner ..."

In his letter, he notes that this episode also involved political motives, that only the official Chief Rabbinate should decide this question. He detailed, "and therefore a political aspect is inserted into this question, because some of the official rabbis decided it would be insulting if outside rabbis would resolve this question, because it was also asked on a personal level, and not as the Chief Rabbinate, and the official rabbinate should remain uninvolved."

He then blames the decision on how events unfolded, when he writes "and they don't have any idea about the entire question, they plotted how to do it, so they decided to make Wednesday and Thursday candidates for Yom Kippur and they voted freely and decided the time and place according to these votes. And each one of the voters could decide which day he chose by raising his hand, and Wednesday received all the votes. The game was known by all the sages and there were many grievances about this lightheadedness of these official rabbis ... and the truth is not found ..."

[For further reading: *Halsh V'Chazono* by Rabbi Kalman Kahana; the introduction to *HaYomem* by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tokatchinsky; *Peer HaDor*, chapter 24; and *Miktzeh Haaretz*, p. 231, with comprehensive details about the session and its participants].

Condition: Moderate. Restored tears with loss of a number of words at the end of the letter. Stains.

Estimation : \$30,000 - \$40,000

AUCTION HAS FINISHED



Opening price: \$10,000