Welcome!

Rabbi Doron Perez
Head, World Mizrachi

This inaugural edition of “HaMizrachi” echoes its namesake of exactly one century ago. In 1918, Rabbi Nissenbaum, Head of Polish Mizrachi, launched the first “HaMizrachi” publication. His aim was to connect Polish Jewry to the resurgence of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael (Israel), following the Balfour Declaration.

Today, in 2018, we are grateful to present you with the new “HaMizrachi,” in honor of Israel’s 70th anniversary. Our aim is to bring Torat Eretz Yisrael – in all of its depth, variety, and veracity – to Jews across the globe. Yom HaAtzmaut Sameach!
Mizrachi is the global Religious Zionist movement, driven by its mission to disseminate Torat Eretz Yisrael around the world, and strengthen the bond between the international Jewish community and the State of Israel, in the spirit of the verse, “For the Torah shall go forth from Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem.”

The re-energized Mizrachi World Movement aims to inspire people with a deep sense of commitment to the Torah, the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

Yom HaAtzmaut Sameach!

The very name – Mizrachi (מִזְרָחִי) – captures its core mission, It is an acronym for Merkaz RuChani (מֶרְכָּז רוּחָנִי) – a spiritual center, striving to bring the timeless values of Torah to the heart of the Zionist endeavor.

Torat HaMizrachi is Torat Chaim – a Torah of Life – committed to bring Torah values and vibrancy to all areas of human and Jewish life. Aiming to fuse sacred and secular, soldier and scholar, settler and sage, to come together to create a synergistic whole and uplift all areas of Jewish collective and national life.

That is our prayer too for this new publication. It is our hope that its message and spirit of Torah thoughts and ideas from Israel will become a relevant, inspiring, and unifying platform between Israel and Jewish communities all over the world.

1 The thanksgiving blessing upon acquiring new items or on living to see auspicious times.

2 Literally “settlement,” but a term used to describe the early community in pre-State Israel.

Rabbi Doron Perez is Head of the Mizrachi World Movement
W e often recite this verse in liturgy and song, but for this Yom HaAtzmaut (Independence Day) in particular, it conveys unique significance as we celebrate 70 years of modern Jewish statehood. This year we not only recall the sentiments of gratitude and awe expressed in this psalm, but also revisit the ‘original’ 70-year historical context: “When God brought back those who returned to Zion, we were like those who dream.”

Unfortunately, political, economic, demographic and religious tensions deterred the Jews from rebuilding the Mikdash upon returning to Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) in 535 BCE. Disillusioned, they began to wonder whether the time was indeed ripe for reconstruction and fulfillment of prophecies.

So what happened to the promises of 70 years of exile and return? Following the appointment of Judah leader Zerubavel as satrap (governor) over the province of Judea, Haggai and Zechariah appear on the prophetic stage in 520 BCE, to encourage the people to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash based on a new 70-year prophecy:

Zechariah (Zechariah 1:12-17) explained that these 70 years began 19 years after the Babylonian invasion, with the actual destruction of Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash in 586 BCE. He thereby encouraged the fledgling Jewish state to build with confidence so that by 516 BCE, 70 years of destruction in Jerusalem would also come to an end! And they were like dreamers once again, because 19 years after their initial return to the Land, this prophecy of rebuilding the Temple was fulfilled.

I am perpetually inspired as we relive this time period of Shovet Hayom (Return to Zion) 2,400 years later. In 1948 we returned like dreamers to Jewish statehood (this time after nearly 2,000 years of exile), built homes and communities throughout the Land and witnessed the re-establishment of numerous prophecies, although Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) was not yet in our hands.

But once again, it took us exactly 19 years from the re-establishment of the Land and their Temple (Ezra 1:1) – fulfilling the words of God as prophesied 70 years earlier by Jeremiah (25:11-13).

How dream-like it must have been for the 42,360 Jews who returned (Nehemiah 7:66) to see their homeland once again and begin to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash (Temple) 70 years after losing sovereignty!

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Choni HaMa’agel (Tanna, 1c. BCE) does not understand how 70 years of Exile followed by a return to Israel can be compared to a dream, if the latter is brief and fleeting. For Choni, whose detailed demands for rainfall are immediately answered by God, 70 years seems like an eternity and the simile of a dream – an oxymoron! His philosophical outlook is underscored in a conversation he has with his family for 70 years, the farmer plants seeds every year, and his son’s son. ‘Choni said to him: ‘I can learn from this that I have slept for 70 years, and indeed saw that his donkey had sired seven yoke of donkeys during those many years.’

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Rabbanit Shani Taragin is a senior teacher and educator in various women’s higher educational institutions in Israel.

The goal of a prophecy is not to predict what will be... but to charge Am Yisrael with what can be.
There are different customs as to when, during Sefirat HaOmer, to apply the customs of mourning. According to all opinions, the fifth of Iyar – Yom HaAtzmaut – is one of those days that we do apply the customs of mourning. These customs of mourning include not being able to marry, have a haircut, dancing and listening to music.

Are these prohibitions allowed on Yom HaAtzmaut?

Shaving

If a person makes a simcha during the Omer, such as a Brit Mila or Sheva Berachot, he is allowed to shave (Rama 493:2). This is because it is a festival for him and so the laws of mourning do not apply (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 559:9).

We can therefore apply a kal vechomer. On a day which is itself a festival, such as Yom HaAtzmaut, it is permissible to shave (Rav Yitzchak Nissim – Yayin HaTov II, Orach Chaim paragraph 11; Rav Avraham Shapira – Sefer HaRabbanut HaReisi, page 878 note 83 and see Shachar Ahalelcha III, paragraph 36).

We can suggest a new idea too. There are those who say that Rabbi Akiva’s students, for whom we mourn during the Omer, died in Bar Kochba’s rebellion (Rav Moshe Tzvi Neria – Emanut Ibcha 41, page 5). In other words, they died while trying to establish a state.

According to this, all our mourning is based on the fact they were not able to establish a state. Therefore, we could certainly say the customs of mourning do not apply on the day we did establish a state! In practice, since Yom HaAtzmaut is a day of rejoicing, we do not mourn and it is permissible to shave. One can even shave before nightfall in preparation for Yom HaAtzmaut (Shachar Ahalelcha III, paragraph 37). Likewise, it is permissible to dance and listen to happy music (ibid. paragraph 40).

Weddings

According to Rav Yitzchak Nissim (ibid.), it is permissible to get married on Yom HaAtzmaut, because it is a day on which a miracle occurred and so the customs of mourning do not apply. However, the Yaskil Avdi (III:10:2:7-8) rules that it is forbidden to marry on Yom HaAtzmaut, since the essence of the miracle was not the declaration of the State but either the day of the ceasefire or the day of the UN’s decision.

In practice, the accepted custom is not to get married on Yom HaAtzmaut.

Celebrating Yom HaAtzmaut when it is not the 5th of Iyar

Usually, Yom HaAtzmaut is not celebrated on the 5th of Iyar (but close to it). This is to avoid desecrating the Shabbat with celebrations and ceremonies. This is an exalted expression of the the State of Israel’s independence and a huge Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of God’s Name)!

Indeed, this is true independence – a decision by the ‘Kingdom of Israel’ based on considerations of the Jewish Shabbat. So on whatever day that is each year, that is the day we recite Hallel and do not observe the customs of mourning.

1 Literally ‘light and heavy’. It is one of the principles of determining halacha. Simply, it means that what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important one.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is the Chairman of the Halacha Education Center
Greetings from Israel’s Leaders

My Heart is in the East

I was pleased to hear that World Mizrachi is producing a new publication in English for the benefit of Jewish communities around the world.

This first issue is appearing in honor of Israel’s 70th Yom HaAtzmaut. A few weeks later, we will be celebrating Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day), and then Shavuot.

These dates represent the essence of the Jewish nation. Because our story – of a people returning to its homeland after thousands of years of Exile – would not have been possible without two crucial conditions.

First, our acceptance of Torat Yisrael at Mount Sinai.

This acceptance was also an acknowledgment of the fourth expression of redemption – “And I will take you to Me as a people, and I will be a God to you.” We are God’s people.

After cementing our unbreakable connection to God and to Torah, the fifth expression of redemption could be fulfilled: “I will bring you to the Land, regarding which I raised My hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage; I am the Lord.”

We are to live in God’s Land.

Praying and yearning for Zion and Jerusalem have always been part of a Jew’s daily life, whatever the circumstances. Even the Mizrahi Movement’s name was and is a constant reference to this dream – “I am in the west, yet my heart is in the Mizraich – the east (Eretz Yisrael).”

Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef
Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel

Chief Rabbi David Lau
Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Of Israel

Living in Israel Around the World

On my visits to different Jewish communities around the world, I am always warmed to see the tremendous spirit and love for Israel. Everyone is party to it – young, old, religious and less religious. Of course not everyone is able to achieve the great aspiration, and simply leave their lives and immediately make Aliyah. Despite that, even while living in Melbourne, Los Angeles or Paris one can still merit the segula (unique qualities) of the Holy Land.

It is well known that Israel has many segulet. Twice a day in the Shema we read the promise of long life made to those who dwell in the Holy Land: “That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the Land which God swore unto your fathers to give them” (Deuteronomy 11:21). The Babylonian Talmud in tractate Megillah teaches us that there are places outside of Israel which have the same holiness as the Holy Land: synagogues and Betai Midrash (houses of learning) anywhere in the Jewish world, and they too will be moved to Israel when the Final Redemption arrives.

So, when you sit in your synagogue in New York or London, you too are granted the promise of long life as well as all the blessings promised to one living in Israel.

A synagogue is not only meant for prayer. Each and every Jew should set aside time for learning Torah, particularly practical laws such as those of Shabbat and family purity, either in classes at synagogue or with a family member. This is so important because the future of the Jewish world lies in the hands of every single Jew.

My best wishes and blessings to World Mizrachi for this publication and for spreading the Torah of Eretz Yisrael in communities around the world.

Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef
Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel

Memorial Day

Four years ago, my son Naftali was murdered by Palestinian terrorists.1

Yom HaZikaron (Israel’s Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Terror Victims) was initiated in recognition of terror being an integral part of the ongoing war against Israel’s existence.

Nevertheless, my own Yom HaZikaron has hardly changed since the murder.

Sure, life has changed. Every day of it … but Yom HaZikaron has hardly changed at all.

It did not suddenly become mine. Because it always was mine. I always knew Yom HaZikaron was mine; ours, the closest thing to a sacred day a secular calendar can produce.

Why? Because my parents made Aliyah before I was born, and I had the privilege of growing up in Israel.

This day of remembrance was never meant to be a tribute to or a time for the bereaved families. We never felt it was commemorating someone else’s loss.

In Israel, Memorial Day is the time we congregate around the loss we all experience.

You don’t have to lose a loved one to feel that this date is part of your personal and family calendar. We are a small society, and everyone knows a fallen soldier, a terror victim or a bereaved family.

Everyone knows it could have been them or their loved ones ...

Year after year, a diverse and oft-divided Israeli society stands in solidarity around the shared memory of the price we pay for the right to exist.

Yet our culture is not one of martyrdom. We will always cherish and celebrate life rather than death. And when we remember, we remember in totality, in depth, and in context – a few days after Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), a few moments before the joy of independence. Read Tzur Ehrlich’s poem on this page, which expresses this juxtaposition so poignantly.

Eeducator Avraham Infeld says, “Jews have no history. They have a memory.” History is the collection of facts, a volume on a shelf. Memory is an experience, an identity – constantly alive, forming, and being formed.

And when we gather to honor the names and faces we have known, it is not a macabre memorial or an addiction to pain. Our collective mission is to assure that life in Israel will be better. In their merit, the memory of their love will be embedded in our caring for others; their passions will live through our sincere but also loving and respectful disputations.

Their sacrifice brings us closer together. Their memory shapes our life.

Jews everywhere connect to the pulse of the State of Israel through the news, through prayers, through the Jewish calendar. We all join to celebrate the miracle of independence, but just moments beforehand, we stand together, united in awe and reflection, remembering the price, the promise … and how precious the mission is that still lies ahead.

Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel

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And when we gather to remember the Exodus from Egypt, we do so through dozens of practical mitzvot (commandments) – actions or thoughts that shape our memory, which in turn creates our consciousness, which then reshapes our actions, and builds our society.

Our memory is a living memory. A memory that builds life.

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1. Preparing for the Eighth

The Torah portion of Shemini, in which the Jewish people prepare for the eighth day of the Mishkan’s (Tabernacle) inauguration, is very appropriate for the week that ushers in the eighth decade of the State of Israel.

After seven days of inauguration, our ancestors were commanded to facilitate the Shechina (Divine Presence). We too should reflect upon how to strengthen God’s presence within our 70-year-old State.

The State of Israel has grown over the past 70 years. Its economy, security, and social structure are strong and admired throughout the world. Religiously, Israel is blessed with countless yeshivas, seminaries, and organizations. There are more Jews learning Torah, strengthening Jewish identity, and performing chessed in Israel than ever before.

As Religious Zionists, we aspire to something extra, something higher. Rabbi Soloveitchik, Rabbi Kook, and many others saw the return to and the establishment of the State of Israel as the beginning of the Redemption process. Rabbi Soloveitchik identified it as God’s call to us. 70 years and much miraculous development later, this call has grown louder.

We are even more convinced of the religious significance of our precious country. Appreciative of God’s gifts, we feel responsible to help Israel become the place in which the Shechina can fully reside. Not only in places of Torah and prayer, but throughout the entire country.

The Religious Zionist community has grown in number and influence in both, Israel and the United States. Let us create more space for the Shechina and help Israel become what God wants it to be.

2. Seventy for 70

This Shabbat’s “Seventy for 70” program expresses this goal. We prepare for Yom HaAtzmaut through nationwide Torah learning. Speakers are focusing on Torah Eretz Yisrael, reminding us of the sweet Torah emanating from Israel and emboldening us to continue our efforts on its behalf.

In Judaism, the number 70 represents the world’s nations. Our coming together as 70-plus communities is a statement about ourselves as the Religious Zionist Community of America. We come together as one community unified by our shared ideals and goals for the future of the State of Israel.

3. Aliyah

The end of this week’s Torah portion teaches us that Aliyah (literally, “ascent”) is more than just the action of moving to Israel and Jerusalem (Ketuvot 110b), but also a process of continued personal elevation. Rashi quotes our Sages (Bava Metzia 61b) who explain that our fulfillment of mitzvot (this one in particular and others in general) raises us above society’s norms. Our return to Israel is meant to be part of this process — not just a change in country code, but in moral code too.

Raising our sights, this Shabbat will hopefully help us elevate ourselves to God, thus allowing Him to reside within us. Through this we prepare for our parallel physical Aliyah to a State infused with the Divine Presence.

4. Thank You

It has been an honor to direct this special program. I thank the RZA and World Mizrachi, as well as the speakers, rabbis and representatives who made it possible.

May we all merit the blessing that Moshe and Aharon gave our ancestors in this week’s portion (Rashi 9:23): “May the sweetness of Hashem, our God, be upon us. May it be His will that His Presence infuses our efforts.”

Rabbi Reuven Taragin is Director of “Seventy for 70” and Dean of the Yeshivat HaKotel Overseas Program

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel, World Mizrachi and Religious Zionists of America – Mizrachi are partnering with over 70 communities across North America for a massive, multi-state Scholar-in-Residence Shabbaton the weekend before Yom Ha’atzmaut, Parashat Shemini, April 13-14, 2018. www.mizrachi.org/70for70
The Heart of Judaism

If there were only universals, the world would consist of empires, each claiming the totality of truth and each demonstrating that truth by attempting to conquer or convert everyone else. If there is only one truth, and you have it, then others do not. They are living in error. That has been the justification of many crimes in the course of history.

If on the other hand there are only particulars – only a multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities with no universal moral principles to bind them – then the natural state of the world is a ceaseless proliferation of warring tribes. That is the risk today, in a post-modern, morally relativist world with ethnic conflicts, violence and terror scarring the face of many parts of the globe. The Abrahamic covenant as understood by Judaism is the only principled way of avoiding these two scenarios. Jews belonged somewhere, not everywhere. Yet the God they worship is the God of everywhere, not just somewhere. So Jews were commanded to be neither an empire nor a tribe, harbouring neither universal aspirations nor tribal belligerence. Theirs was to be a small land, but a significant one, for it was there, and there alone, that they were to live their destiny.

That destiny was to create a society that would honour the proposition that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. It would be a place in which the freedom of some would not lead to the enslavement of others. It would be the opposite of Egypt, whose bread of affliction and bitter herbs they were to eat every year on the festival of Passover to remind them of what they were to avoid. It would be the only nation in the world whose sovereign was God Himself, and whose constitution – the Torah – was His word.

Judaism is the code of a self-governing society. We tend to forget this, since Jews have lived in dispersion for 2,000 years, without the sovereign power to govern themselves, and because modern Israel is a secular state. Judaism is a religion of redemption rather than salvation: it is about the shared spaces of our collective lives, not an interior drama of the soul, though Judaism, in the books of Psalms and Job, knows this as well.

The Jewish God is the God of love: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. You shall love the stranger. The Hebrew Bible is a book suffused with love – the love of God for humanity, and the love of a people for God. All its tense emotions of anger and jealousy are part of the story of that often un reciprocated love.

But because Judaism is also the code of a society, it is also about the social emotions: righteousness (tzedek/tzedakah), justice (misiphat), loving-kindness (chessed) and compassion (rachamim). These structure the template of biblical law, which covers all aspects of the life of society, its economy, its welfare systems, its education, family life, employer-employee relations, the protection of the environment and so on.

The broad principles driving this elaborate structure, traditionally enumerated as 613 commands, are clear. No one should be left in dire poverty. No one should lack access to justice and the courts. No family should be without its share of the land. One day in seven, everyone should be free. One year in seven all debts should be cancelled. One year in 50 all land that had been sold was to revert to its original owners. It was the nearest thing the ancient world had ever seen to an egalitarian society.

None of this was possible without a land. The sages said, “Everyone lives outside Israel as if he had no God.” Nachmanides in the 13th century said that “The main purpose of all the commands is for those who live in the land of the Lord.” These are mystical sentiments but we can translate them into secular terms. Judaism is the constitution of a self-governing nation, the architecture of a society dedicated to the service of God in freedom and dignity. Without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself. God may still live in the heart, but not in the public square, in the justice of the courts, the morality of the economy, and the humanitarism of everyday life.

Jews have lived in almost every country under the sun. In 4,000 years, only in Israel have they been able to live as a free, self-governing people. Only in Israel have they been able to construct an agriculture, a medical system, an economic infrastructure, in the spirit of the Torah and its concern for freedom, justice and the sanctity of life.

The reborn State of Israel in a mere 70 years has surely exceeded even the highest hopes of the early pioneers of the return to Zion, and this despite the fact that it has had to face almost ceaseless threats of war, terror, delegitimization and defamation. Despite all this, it stands as a living testimony to Moses’ great command: “Choose life, that you and your children may live.”

May the light of the State of Israel, which shines a little brighter each year, continue to be a blessing, not just to the Jewish people, but also to the world.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is the Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. @RabbiSacks - www.RabbiSacks.org

Without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself.

Only in Israel can Jews today speak the Hebrew of the Bible as the language of everyday speech. Only there can they live Jewish time within a calendar structured according to the rhythms of the Jewish year. Only in Israel can Jews once again walk where the prophets walked, climb the mountains Abraham climbed and to which David lifted his eyes. Israel is the only place where Jews have been able to live Judaism in anything other than an edited edition, continuing the story their ancestors began.

Seventy years since the establishment of the modern State of Israel is a fitting moment to remind ourselves of a mystery at the heart of Judaism.

Why Israel? Why does the Hebrew Bible so resolutely and unerringly focus on this place, what Spinoza called a mere ‘strip of territory’? The God of Abraham is the God of the whole world, a God unbounded by space. Why then does He choose any particular space, let alone one so small and vulnerable?

The question, ‘Why Israel?’ is the geographical way of asking, ‘Why the Jews?’ The answer lies in the duality that defines Jewish faith and constitutes one of its most important contributions to civilization. Judaism embodies and exemplifies the necessary tension between the universal and the unique, between everywhere in general and somewhere in particular.

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“Doing good” for the elderly in Lod

Cherry tomatoes, an Israeli innovation (GPO)
Israel was born only three years after the Holocaust, with Jerusalem as its capital. Indeed, it was the collective memory of the Holocaust that helped connect Jews to each other and to Israel. The knowledge of what our grandparents went through each other and to the Holocaust that helped connect Jews to Jerusalem as its capital. Indeed, years after the Holocaust, with Israel stands firm with the strongest military in the Middle East, and with steady, experienced hands at the helm. Vigilance, patience, and diplomatic nimbleness are seeing Israel through the regional storms.

Israel is no longer the young, fragile and weak country it once was. Israel is a hi-tech powerhouse exporting life-saving medical, agricultural and cyber technologies to the world. There is good reason to say Hallel and give thanks on this special day.

Many people worked hard and many died so that we could stand on our own two feet. Now it’s up to us – Jews all around the world – to write the next chapter in Israel’s history.

Israel exists because the Jewish people dreamed of returning home for generations.

Israel exists because we never forgot Jerusalem, and “Next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem” echoed every Yom Kippur and every Passover from one end of the earth to the other.

Israel exists because the Jewish people want to govern themselves, with a Hebrew-speaking parliament and society and a life based around a Jewish calendar.

Israel is Winning

A cold strategic assessment leads to the conclusion that the State of Israel at 70 is winning.

Statehood
Across Arab expanses, countries are crumbling, borders are being erased, and societies are being torn apart. In contrast, the nation state of Israel is resolute, its borders unyielding, its society robust.

Security
In the face of Iranian ambitions, Russian adventurism, and American retrenchment, Israel stands firm with the strongest military in the Middle East, and with steady, experienced hands at the helm. Vigilance, patience, and diplomatic nimbleness are seeing Israel through the regional storms.

Territory
Israel knows how to defend its borders, and hasn’t made any serious withdrawal mistakes lately. Can you imagine the suffering Israelis would be experiencing had we withdrawn from the Golan Heights or Samaria? Palestinian leaders can bellow away at the UN, but everybody knows that Palestinians and Israelis (and others) are better off with the current situation in which Israel controls Judea and Samaria.

Diplomacy
North American public opinion remains staunchly pro-Israel – which means Washington and Ottawa can be expected to stand by Israel’s side. Moreover, Israel’s diplomatic horizons are expanding to include allies beyond North American and Europe. Trade and security delegations are beating a path to Jerusalem seeking opportunities to cooperate with Israel, not isolate it. Behind the scenes, Israel’s relations with Egypt and key Gulf states have never been better.

Strategy
Key global players have come to accept Israel’s strategic platform, i.e. that main conflict is no longer Israel versus the Palestinians or Israel versus the Arabs. Instead, the main axis of diplomatic activity in the Middle East is an unofficial alliance between Israel and most of the Arabs (together with Western powers), against the Iranians and the jihadis. The forces of stability and moderation (with Israel leading) are arrayed against the forces of radical Islamic revolution. So there is an Israeli “grand strategy” of sorts, and it has largely been successful. It involves being both flexible and firm. It involves positioning Israel as a regional anchor of sanity and a global source of ingenuity.

Economy
Israel science and technology is in high demand. Israel’s foreign currency reserves are deep, its debt manageable, its banks solvent, its public educated and productive (although the ultra-Orthodox and Arab sectors do lag behind). The country now has natural gas and desalinated water riches, which should make Israel self-sufficient as well as a strategic player in the regional resources market.

Aliyah
There are three million refugees on the roads and high seas, and another 30 million could yet follow – all fleeing Africa and Arabia. Only Israel is attracting immigration: about 30,000 olim (immigrants) a year. Most of them could go elsewhere but they are choosing Israel!

Identity
One of the strengths of Israeli society is the attenuation of the religious-secular divide, and intensification of faith as an anchor in the country’s ouvre. Israel is increasingly a nation of believers, with a mass spiritual searching underway. This too is ultimately a source of solidarity and strength.

Overall, Israel is stronger than any of its enemies. Neither the perpetual Palestinian conundrum, nor the Iranian threat to Israel, nor the unstable regional situation – dim my optimism. Israel is winning on all fronts, even though there are inevitable conflicts ahead.

Furthermore, life in Israel is full of meaning – adorned by sacrifice, commitment, achievement and joy; ingredients that make life satisfying and exciting; particularly for Jews who have long awaited a national return to Zion. And this gives Israel fortitude for the long haul ahead.

David M. Weinberg is the Vice-President of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies

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One-Way Ticket

Rachel and Judith (Yehudit) Flohr were two young Hungarian sisters who survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Rachel takes up the story from the day of the liberation:

... My sister was still on her feet. I remember the spark in her eyes, the joy, as she said to me, “The British are here! The Germans are fleeing!”

I was on all fours by then. I weighed 25 kilos and couldn’t hold myself up any more. I was just too weak. But at last I could believe we might get out of there. We would live! We would reach Eretz Yisrael! The two of us. Together. As we had been until that day. If we had reached this moment and nothing had separated us – what could separate us now?

However, it quickly became clear that the very compassion, mercy, and the will to free us had arrived, but only for an instant… Of deliverance had arrived, but only for an instant…

A little later, the British carried me to one of their makeshift field hospitals. I shuddered along and suddenly fainted over. That was the end. I knew it. I heard one of the doctors say to a colleague, “Why did they bring her here? She won’t hold out till morning.”

Hospital in Sweden A Belgian doctor came and asked me if I wanted to go to a hospital in Sweden, where they could treat me properly in Bergen-Belsen and I couldn’t return to Hungary in the state I was in. I told him I didn’t want to go back to Hungary anyway.

Lying there in Belsen, I met Agi (Agnes) Biro, and we became firm friends. She was the only person I felt close to then and we decided we would stick together.

They put us on a boat and we sailed to Sweden. The locals met us at the port and gave us milk chocolate. That was the first time we had ever seen milk chocolate but we didn’t eat it. We feared we would never see it again so we hid it under our pillows.

Deep down we were still prisoners. For the next four weeks, Agi and I lay side by side and our relationship deepened. I was suffering from heart failure, and my lungs were in a bad way. But I received good treatment and gradually began to gain weight.

Perhaps I would have ended it all there. Who knows how many like me finished like that? How many were slain by despair even though their bodies were still there – battered, scarred and depressed?

A New Start Agi had been exchanging letters with Miklos, a young man in another hospital she had not yet met. He came to visit one day and it certainly wasn’t love at first sight. Like us, Miklos looked like a typical Holocaust survivor and Agi was not impressed.

A few weeks later, Miklos came again with five friends. It was a freezing cold December night. One of his friends was Mena (Menscham), who asked me out for dinner in the hospital dining room.

Quite a romantic setting… We then went for a walk in the snow. He told me all about his family and what he’d been through in the war and, before we parted, he asked if we could meet again.

This time it was New Year and Agi and I were going to their hospital, but we didn’t have enough money for the train. Thankfully, several passengers organized a collection to pay for our tickets.

Mena sent the ticket back to his uncle. Rachel and Mena married in Sweden and made Aliyah in 1947. They had a son, Uri, and a daughter, Yehudit, named after Rachel’s sister. Rachel passed away in 2017. This story is adapted from her and Mena’s memories and reprinted here with permission.
The Return to Zion in recent generations is one of the wonders of world history and of Jewish history in particular. The visions of our Prophets are coming true. And the process is just beginning!

Here are just some of the signs:

1. The Return to Zion after 2,000 years undoubtedly expresses a transformation in the Jewish people's standing in the world. There can no longer be such a thing as a full Jewish life in the Diaspora.

2. The "Green Revolution" in Eretz Yisrael is a realization of the prophecy "And you, the mountains of Yisrael, will produce your branches, and you will bear your fruit for My people Israel, because they are about to come." (Ezekiel, 36:8)

3. Jewish sovereignty. After so many years of subservience to foreign nations, the country is now under Jewish rule. This also has halachic implications.

4. The Ingathering of the Exiles. Today there are over 6.5 million Jews in Eretz Yisrael; almost the majority of the Jewish people.

5. Israel boasts economic, scientific, technological and military independence of the highest international standards.

6. Most of the world's countries acknowledge our sovereignty over the Land, despite it contradicting Christian theology.

7. The liberation of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount are the start of the preparations for the Third Temple.

8. Israel is the only place in the world where Shabbat is officially acknowledged as the national day of rest.

9. There have never been so many people studying Torah in Israel. Religious, Torah education is one of the official streams in the education system. Every day, at least one new Torah-related book is published.

It is indeed a miraculous beginning, but this initial 'planting' could – God forbid – dry up and shrivel if we do not work hard to nurture and cultivate its growth.

Here are three things we can do right now:

1. “Zion is redeemed in judgment, and her house shall be justice” (Isaiah 1:27). The foundations of Redemption are social justice, truth, and charity. There can be no Redemption in an immoral society.

2. The soul of the country’s existence is its Jewish identity. We need to reinforce this by minimal legislation, loving our fellow human beings, and sanctifying God’s name.

3. Communicating to all Jews the strong, historical, intrinsic connection between our people and our Land, and the importance of our nation remaining unique and united.

Instead of begging for it, we will be acting to bring it that much closer.

Rabbi Ya’akov Ariel

Rabbi Yuval Cherlow

Rabbi Ya’akov Ariel is the Emeritus Chief Rabbi of RamatGan

Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Amit Orot Shaul and a founding member of Tzohar

One on One

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These – and of course many others – will further increase our chances of a complete Redemption.

One – coming back – is used in the weekly portion dealing with the release of slaves and the return of land to its original owners. In this respect, the State of Israel is definitely the beginning of the growth of our Redemption.

We have an independent country; we have returned to our historical land, Hebrew has again become the language of life, and more. We are living in an ongoing miracle, and just think about where we were 75 years ago and where we are today.

The second meaning of redemption is looking ahead, to the future awaiting the Jewish people. Rabbi Soloveitchik taught us that the concept of Redemption should be understood as a knock on the gates, a wonderful, God-given opportunity.

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## ISRAEL: THEN and NOW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of Global Jewish Population</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Lifespan</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Men: 64.9</td>
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<td>Women: 67.6</td>
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<td>Women: 84.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutions of Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hesder Yeshivot (integrating Torah study with army service)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70 (approx. 10,000 students)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midrashot (women’s seminaries of higher Torah education)</td>
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<td>65 (19 of which are specifically for overseas students)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Product (GDP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exports</td>
<td>$29 million</td>
<td>$53 billion</td>
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