Rabbi Hershel Schachter on the deeper significance of the 5th of Iyar

Rabbanit Shani Taragin compares our situation this year with Bnot Tzelofchad

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks offers a fascinating overview of Israel and the Middle East

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrahi reveals the significance of Israel’s 72nd birthday

Rabbi Shalom Rosner with a wonderful explanation of the Israeli flag

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir touch our hearts with words from the soul

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Golda Meir writes in her memoirs – “My Life” – that the most moving part of the Declaration of Independence in Tel Aviv in 1948 was when Rabbi Maimon, the Head of Mizrachi at the time, sitting immediately to the right of David Ben-Gurion, made the Shehechiyanu blessing.

It was at that moment she understood the true meaning of what the establishment of the State signified.

It was not just another modern national movement of the 19th-century European secular ilk but a distinctly Jewish one. A fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and a link in the chain of Jewish destiny.

Ben-Gurion’s political proclamation and Rabbi Maimon’s religious enunciation echoed almost concurrently from Independence Hall on that momentous day. This duality of voices captures the indispensable role of the Mizrachi Movement in the Zionist endeavor.

What is that role?

In 1897, the Zionist Movement was founded. Barely 50 years later, with G-d’s help, they had remarkably created a sovereign state. The collective physical body of the Jewish people had somehow been resurrected.

But would it also receive a soul? Would its collective fate turn into spiritual destiny? Could the national secular movement – which had achieved so much for the Jewish nation – also become a spiritual and sacred enterprise?

In the religious world, many were skeptical. They were understandably ambivalent to the Zionist Movement as it appeared to be just another transient secular ‘ism,’ hence they kept it at arm’s length.

However, a group of leading Eastern European rabbis, led by Rabbi Ya’akov Yitzchak Reines, thought otherwise. They answered an emphatic ‘yes’ to the above questions, believing they could and should strive to build bridges – between physical and spiritual, body and soul, national and religious, democratic and Jewish.

And to support their beliefs, in 1902 they formed “Mizrachi” as a distinct yet integrated part of the Zionist Movement, thus blazing a trail of partnership and collaboration still thriving today.

They acted as they did because they felt the only way to impact is from within.

From the outside you cannot influence; from the inside, you can transform.

The Mizrachi leaders then blazed a remarkable trail which we remain ever so devoted to – one of collaboration and partnership for the greater good; a commitment to our joint fate and dedication to shape our collective spiritual destiny.

The very name – Mizrachi (מזרחי) – captures its core mission. It as an acronym for MercaZ RuChanI (Media) – a spiritual center, striving to bring the timeless values of Torah to the heart of the Zionist enterprise.

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

Our first HaMizrachi publication was published exactly two years ago as a Yom HaAtzmaut edition celebrating 70 years since the establishment of Israel. Its aim as articulated then remains today – to be a platform for relevant, inspiring and unifying ideas and insights in the spirit of Torat Eretz Yisrael for communities in Israel and across the Jewish world.

As Israel celebrates her 72nd anniversary at this time of global uncertainty in the challenging Corona era, we wish one and all the very best of health, resilience and success and a very special Yom HaAtzmaut Sameach!

Rabbi Doron Perez is Chief Executive of the Mizrachi World Movement
Throughout history, the Jewish people have always been a symbol of extreme resilience. One of the greatest testaments to this resilience is the rebuilding of the Jewish State in our ancestral homeland after nearly 2,000 years of exile, commemorated and celebrated on Yom HaAtzmaut each year.

What is the source of this supernatural strength, this hope amidst the darkness?

In Bereishit 15, we witness a fascinating conversation between G-d and Avraham, who was recently tasked with building the Chosen People. Avraham was promised children and the Land of Israel; however, many years had passed, and this promise had not yet come to fruition. Now, after the war between the four kings and the five kings, G-d promises Avraham an abundance of reward.

Unabashedly, Avraham questions this promise and inquires what use is a reward if it cannot be passed down to the next generation. G-d once again promises a child, but also takes Avraham outside:

“...וַיֹּאמֶר הַבֶּט נָא הַשָּׁמַיְمָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם תּוּכַל לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ.”

And He said to him, take a look at the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them, and He said ‘So will be your children.’

Avraham believed G-d after this – and this was considered to be a great merit to him.

Why was there a need to give Avraham a sign? And how was taking him outside and showing him the stars proof of future children?

The Ramban additionally challenges why Avraham’s belief in the promise after this sign would attribute merit to him; if G-d revealed Himself and made me a promise would I not believe?

The Maharal of Prague (Gevurot Hashem 7) points out that for Avraham, having children was not so simple: he was quite old, and his wife was evidently barren. Reality was telling him that children were impossible, but he still believed, and thus the merit.

The Maharal then brings one of the most powerful statements in Chazal. The Midrash says, “And [G-d] took him outside – He took him outside of everything and said to him you are no longer an astrologer, you are a Navi, your children will not be astrologers they will be Nev’im.”

Astrologers explain reality. They look around them and deduce the way the world is – for Avraham that meant no children. However a Navi looks at how reality should be and lays the path for it.

Avraham was told that reality should no longer dictate his life, but rather as a Navi, he should live as reality should be.

For thousands of years, “reality” has dictated that the Jewish people should no longer exist. Reality said that a people crushed by the horrors of the Holocaust could never get back up, or build a country of their own, especially when on a small sliver of land with no natural resources, and surrounded by enemies. Reality definitely would not make room for this people to rise from the ashes to become a strong and prosperous nation.

However, learning from Avraham, the Jewish people never took cues from “reality.” As Nev’im and children of Nev’im, we looked out and lived our lives as reality should be.

So too today, the world is in crisis. Yom HaAtzmaut should be a reminder to us that our role as the Jewish people is not to be broken down by reality, but to see how to build a greater reality for all.

Chag Atzmaut Sameach!

Rabbi Elan Mazer is the National Director of Mizrachi Canada
The Fifth of Iyar

Many questioned the Rabbanut’s decision to establish the fifth of Iyar as Yom HaAtzmaut, thinking it would be more appropriate to celebrate the day that the Milchemet HaShichur, the War of Independence, was won.

The answer to this question is based on the Gemara in Megillah (17b) that makes the following observation in reference to atchalta deGeulah: מלחמה זכרה אתatee דרך יראתיה איה — “War is also considered the beginning of the redemption.” Rashi1 explains that this refers to wars between Jews and non-Jews. Presumably, it is the final war relating to control over Eretz Yisrael that will take place close to the time of the arrival of Mashiach.

It would seem obvious that the War of Independence, which broke out immediately after hakamat haMedina, is the war the Gemara was referring to. Indeed, the fact that the outbreak of the war and the declaration of independence occurred simultaneously serves as a sign that the hakamat haMedina itself was truly an atchalta deGeula. If a Jewish government is established and this leads to the outbreak of war with enemies of the Jewish nation, it is the beginning of the war that is the atchalta deGeula.

In 1948, when the Medina was established, the fifth of Iyar was a Friday and the British Mandate was to conclude at midnight. Therefore, legally, it was only possible to establish the Medina on Shabbat, the sixth of Iyar. Because some of those who signed the Declaration of Independence were shomer Shabbat, they signed the statement of hakamat haMedina on Friday, the fifth of Iyar, although the documents became legally binding only on the sixth.

The celebration of the Chashmonaim’s victories recorded in Megillat Ta’anit did not commemorate the victories per se. The Chashmonaim celebrated in existence at that time, and their victory served to preserve the Beit HaMikdash and spare it from destruction or defilement. Therefore, it was logical to celebrate the Yom Tov on the day of the victorious conclusion of the battle.

In contrast, if the Israeli Army is victorious over the Arab nations, though it would be appropriate to celebrate with seudat hoda’a and the recitation of Hallel on that occasion, we should not establish a Yom Tov that entails annual observance, since the victory did not preserve a Beit HaMikdash. The reason to establish a Yom Tov is to mark the historical event of the atchalta deGeula. Therefore, it was appropriate to institute the Yom Tov of Yom HaAtzmaut on the date of the outbreak of the War of Independence, as that day marks the hakamat haMedina, which was the atchalta deGeula.

In 1948, when the War of Independence was won, it was logical to celebrate the outbreak of war with enemies of the Jewish nation, it is the begin of Independence, which broke out immediately after hakamat haMedina, is the war the Gemara was referring to. Indeed, the fact that the outbreak of the war and the declaration of independence occurred simultaneously serves as a sign that the hakamat haMedina itself was truly an atchalta deGeula.

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

1 Sanhedrin 97a, s.v. milchamot.
2 See Beikvei HaTzon, pp. 220-221; The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society XVI, pp. 81-95.
3 5:1; also see 2:2.
4 Sukkah 52a.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter is Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.
M any Jews celebrate the State of Israel from a secular perspective – much like citizens of other nations celebrate their own countries. As religious Jews, we relate to Eretz Yisrael and the State of Israel as religiously significant and part of the redemptive process.

Though Jews throughout the ages would have seen 6.5 million Jews living in Eretz Yisrael under Jewish self-rule as Geula, they definitely did not expect the Geula to include a mostly non-observant population, a government that does not function according to Jewish law, and a mosque on Har HaBayit. So how are we meant to view our situation where these descriptions are also part of our complex reality?

Although clearly the redemption is not yet complete, there are four central components of the State of Israel that support seeing it as religiously significant and even as the beginning of the redemption process.

Sefer Devarim presents exile and the associated suffering as the climax of the tochacha punishments and the ingathering from it as the expression of Hashem’s accepting us back.

Understandably, many of our prophets describe the eventual ingathering in vivid terms. Yeshayahu HaNavi described it in most detail, including a prophecy depicting a return from the four corners of the Earth. His words have been fulfilled in our times with Jews returning from more than 102 different countries!

Geonim and Rishonim also wrote about the ingathering as part of the redemption process. In fact, a talmid of the Ramban wrote that Mashiach can only come once Jews have returned to Israel and to Yerushalayim.

If we only merited to see the ingathering, dayeinu, but there is more!

Children playing and the elderly sitting in the streets of Yerushalayim may not seem extraordinary, but they were mere dreams for Jews exiled and often barred from entering the city.

Zecharia prophesied this reality and Yirmiyahu spoke about a time when the noise of joyous wedding celebrations would once again ring out in the cities of Yehuda and Yerushalayim. These scenes and others like them are the daily reality in the State of Israel. The Midrash Tanchuma emphatically states that the Jewish people will not resettle in their Land until the time of the eventual Geula.

If we only merited to see the ingathering and the return of normal daily Jewish life in the Land of Israel, dayeinu, but there is more!

Bechukotai describes how the Land lies desolate while we are in exile. Nitzavim describes how surprised visitors are by the Land’s absolute desolation. We have testimonies about this stark reality from throughout the millennia of our exile.

Understandably, many Nevi’im prophesied about the Land once again flowering as the Jewish people return to it. In fact, Rebbe Abba pointed to the flowering of the Land as the clearest sign of the end of days.

Based upon this and the reality already in his time, Rav Kook concluded that the Geula had already started at the beginning of the 20th century. The Land’s increased production (both agriculturally and otherwise) in our times seems even more significant.

If we only merited to see our return to the Land and the Land’s return to us, dayeinu, but there is more!

The State of Israel is also intrinsically significant as an expression of Jewish independent self-rule in Eretz Yisrael.

Living in an age of democracies, we may not fully appreciate the significance of self-rule. Shmuel felt that our freedom from foreign monarchs was the only change to take place at the times of Mashiach. The Rambam adopted Shmuel’s position and used it to explain the ultimate significance of the Chashmonaic dynasty and the Chanukah miracle.

The realization of these four components identified over thousands of years by the Torah, Nevi’im, Amoraim, Geonim and Rishonim as Geula signs gives much reason to celebrate the State of Israel as a significant part of the Geula process.

1. 28: 64-68.
2. 43:5-6. See also 11:10-12 (the customary reading for Yom HaAtzmaut), 27:2-13, 52:12, 56:7-8.
3. Emunot VeDeot 8:1.
4. Ramban Shir HaShirim 8:12, Meiri Tehillim 107. See also Yeshuot Malko (YD 66) who felt the level of return in the 19th century already constituted an atchalta deGeula.
5. 8:4-5.
6. 33:10-11.
7. Shoftim 9.
8. See, for example, the description of Mark Twain who visited in 1867 (Innocents Abroad, Vol. II).
10. Igrot HaRav 3:155.

Rabbi Reuven Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and Dean of the Yeshivat HaKotel Overseas Program
This year, in the wake of coronavirus restrictions, the government of Israel has placed a lockdown on Yom HaAtzmaut, thereby limiting the scope of annual celebrations and public ceremonies. For many, this may depress and detract from the meaning of the day set aside for recognizing and appreciating modern miracles and national pride.

Nine days following Yom HaAtzmaut, we celebrate Pesach Sheini, a Divinely- instituted opportunity for those who were in a state of impurity or unable due to travel restrictions to sacrifice the Korban Pesach on the 14th of Nissan to sacrifice it on the 14th of Iyar. The allowance to celebrate a month later came as a response to the cries of people in the desert: “We are ritually unclean as a result of contact with the dead, but why should we lose out (lamah niga’ara) from among his family because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father’s brothers.” Just as the impure members of Israel did not want to “lose out” on the Pesach ceremony celebrating historical-national identity, too, the daughters of Tzelofchad did not want their father’s family name/legacy to “lose out” on national identity through the Land. Both groups approached (“Vayikrevu”, “Vatikravnu”) Moshe Rabbeinu to request participation in celebrating two aspects of national identity – the people and the Land; G-d answered affirmatively to both.

We often regard the celebration of Yom HaAtzmaut as a continuum of Pesach, marking independence as a nation from oppression and exile. We express gratitude to G-d through public Hallel for the salvation of the people of Israel and marvel at the renewal of modern nationhood. This year, we long for Pesach Sheini – an opportunity to celebrate national Independence Day with the multitudes – “among the Children of Israel.”

Bnot Tzelofchad, however, remind us of another aspect of national identity achieved through the Land and perpetuated through the continuum of families rooted and inheriting the nachala of their ancestors. This year, we may “lose out” on celebrating our national Independence Day with the throngs of people of Israel, but we have an opportunity to recognize that we are not “losing out” on celebrating the Land of Israel! We may focus on appreciating and continuing the legacies of our ancestors, who like Tzelofchad, longed for, but did not have the zechut, to enter and inherit the Land.

We begin reciting Mikra Bikkurim, our religious-national “pledge of allegiance” and gratitude to G-d (Arami Oved Avi) on the night of the Pesach Seder. We are commanded to recite the declaration in its entirety when we bring our first fruits of the Land (Bikkurim), commencing with Shavuot when we thank G-d for our national Homeland. This year, our Yom HaAtzmaut should be celebrated not just as a continuum of Pesach redemption, but also as a prelude to Chag HaShavuot, grateful that we, like Bnot Tzelofchad, may perpetuate not just a national, but also a family legacy of connection to our Land.

2. See Ramban, Bamidbar 9:1 regarding the importance of commemorating our national independence.
4. Rambam 27a.
5. See Sefat Emet, Chanukah 1880, alluding to the creation of a Pesach-like holiday.

Rabbanit Shani Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and the Director of the Mizrachi Matan Lapidot Educators’ Program
I only discovered the story of Chaim Russo last year, as I was delving into the archives at Yad Vashem. Chaim was born and raised in the Kastoria region of Greece, son of a wealthy family of furriers. The Nazis invaded Kastoria and little Chaim was taken to work shoveling excrement in cattle cars. He managed to survive although he didn’t know what had happened to his family. However, when he got to Auschwitz, the other prisoners from Europe heard him pray in a way they had never heard before, and told him, “You’re not a Jew.”

Chaim Russo did not survive Auschwitz. He couldn’t bear this new pain, as a stranger among his Jewish brothers.

Chaim’s brother, Benzion, survived the war and his first grandson was named Chaim, Chaim Mizrachi, the man I married.

Nevertheless, as I said, I only discovered this aspect of the story last year. On that very day, I lit a candle in Chaim Russo’s memory and I promised him the following: “Chaim, we have no control over those who hate us from the outside, but I promise you, for your sake, that I will do all I can so that we don’t have enemies on the inside. That no version of prayer should divide us, that no thick walls should prevent us from praying together on the balconies.”

When G-d takes Yechezkel to the Dura Valley, he shows him a vast amount of bones, which “behold, were very dry,” and He asks him, “Can these bones come to life?” And Yechezkel answers with an answer that breaks our Sages’ hearts: “You know.”

“How could it be that at a time of great plague, of a valley full of death, precisely then all the individuals would come together?

Yechezkel already knew that in Heaven, there was a Divine Chariot and “a voice of great noise” of angels, but what is that noise he hears coming from the balconies? “And I looked, and behold, there are sinews and flesh on them, and the skin covers them… and the spirit entered them and they lived and they stood on their feet, a very great force... And He said to me, ‘Son of Man, these bones are the whole House of Israel… and I have put My spirit into them and revived them and placed you on your Land...’

This year marks Israel’s 72nd year of independence. According to the Kabbalists, 72 is a very sacred number, representing the 72 names of G-d. The “Name” of G-d is His expression in the world, or in other words... us. “And each of us has a name,” hence G-d has a name in Hebrew, in Yiddish, in Ladino, English, French, Russian, Amharic... The Kabbalists say G-d has 72 names because the gematria of 72 is חסד – chessed, kindness.

For it is only this trait that can bind individuals, with individual names, into one together, which is the name of His Majesty. Chessed will be the only expression for the independence of Truth. When a bone draws near to its matching bone, it shows that it is capable of the “Divine Chariot,” capable of growing sinews and flesh, because all of us – yes, all of us – are one big human tissue.

Even in a place which seems to you so far away, “in exile... Tel Aviv,” the people are full of chessed and love. Just go out onto your balcony in 2020 and see “a very great force.”

“You will yet see, you will yet see, how good it will be...” Why? “Because I am G-d, I spoke and I acted.”

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1 Line from an Israeli folk song: “Next year we will sit on the balcony / And count the migrating birds / Children on vacation will play tag / Between the house and the fields / You will yet see, you will yet see / How good it will be / Next year.”

2 Yalkut Shimoni, Yechezkel 37.

3 Famous poem by Israeli poetess, Zelda, often recited at Holocaust Day ceremonies.

4 Yechezkel 3:15.

5 See footnote 1.

6 Yechezkel 37:14.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi is a popular Israeli teacher, speaker and writer
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L’chaim! For those happy moments
A vessel made by or bought from a non-Jew needs immersion in a kosher mikveh. What can one do today, during the lockdown, when the keilim mikvehs are closed?

In practice, the Biur Halacha (323:17) and many Acharonim rule that it is a rabbinic prohibition to use a vessel without immersing it first.

**What if one cannot immerse a vessel?**

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l rules that when it is impossible to immerse a vessel, it is exempt from immersion. This is understood on the basis that immersion is a mitzvah, in which case the inability to perform the mitzvah exempts one from it. But if we say that immersion is the act that permits the use of the vessel, one cannot use it until it has been immersed, so even if there is no way it can be immersed, it is still forbidden to use the vessel.

Our current reality is one in which we are unable to immerse our dishes and so there is definitely a case for using a vessel without immersing it first.

1. The Gemara (Avodah Zara 75b) learns that one only needs to immerse a vessel belonging to a Jew and not one on loan from a non-Jew. What’s the logic here? After all, a vessel on loan is a non-Jew’s vessel being used by a Jew! The Yerushalmi (end of 77) says that the aim of immersion is equivalent to the conversion of the vessel. Just as a human convert needs immersion, so a vessel that passes from the ‘impurity’ of a non-Jew to the sanctity of a Jew needs immersion. Therefore, when the vessel is only lent to the Jew, there is no transition from impure to pure and so immersion is unnecessary.

Hence, in our reality, we can suggest giving the vessel to a non-Jew as a gift and then using it on loan. Once the mikvehs are re-opened, one should immerse the vessel without a blessing or ask the non-Jew to ‘give it back’ so that it is now his and immerse it with a blessing.

2. When a Jew buys the vessel, he should intend not to own it until after immersion, and so since the vessel is not his, it does not need immersion. But one should not do this lechatzila, since once one takes the vessel and uses it, it looks as though it is his.

3. In Minchat Shlomo (2:16), Rav Auerbach writes that in a time of need, when there is no possibility of immersion, one can make the vessel hefker (ownerless). When taking it after that, a person should not intend to make it his own. This solution works because one is not the owner of the vessel and so it does not currently need immersion. However, or the same reason as solution 2, this is not a recommended lechatzila option.

**Can one make a vessel hefker via Zoom?**

How does one make a vessel hefker? Ideally, in front of three people, one of whom can theoretically own the vessel, and two witnesses (Nedarim 45a). There are differing opinions as to whether actual testimony is needed or that the need for three people is simply to publicize the declaration.

Therefore, if it is only for publicizing, one can make a vessel hefker via the phone or Zoom, for he is making it known in exactly the same way he would as if three people were physically with him. But if we need qualified witnesses, are voices over the phone or Zoom considered accepted testimony?

There are various discussions in halachic literature regarding the validity of voices in testimony, and in monetary cases voice identification is generally acceptable. Yet one could argue that phone testimony is not sufficient because it is open to deception, hence Zoom could be a solution because it involves seeing the person and not only hearing.

In practice then, one should preferably make the vessel hefker in front of three people. If that is not possible, since the use of non-immersed vessels is rabbinical, it is possible to make the vessel hefker via Zoom (with three people witnessing the act). Here too though, having one person next to him when doing this is preferable. Once it is allowed to immerse vessels in a mikveh again, he can then reclaim ownership and immerse the vessel with a beracha.

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1. Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah, 120.
2. Ma’adanei Aretz, Shvi’it 16, se’if katan 10, and Minchat Shlomo 2:66.)
3. Shemirat Shabbat KeChilchatah 12, note 89.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is Head of Mizrachi’s Shalhevet Educational Advisory Board and Chairman of Sulamot
The Declaration of Israel’s independence on the 5th of Iyar, 1948 moved Jews all over the world and gave validity to the revolution that had been gradually taking place for years beforehand: the Jewish people returning to its Land and making it bloom again, after thousands of years of exile.

The connection between people and Land was not new of course. The roots of this relationship were already planted at the time of Avraham, who followed G-d’s command “to the Land that I will show you.” When he got there, G-d promised him – For all the land that you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever (Bereishit 13:15).

Nevertheless, the generation that left Egypt did not reach the Promised Land, but the process was completed by the next generation. Entry into Eretz Yisrael, under the leadership of Yehoshua, brought Am Yisrael to a more complete position, of an independent people dwelling in its own Land.

It is interesting to note that this too, the entry into the Land, was also in Nissan (Yehoshua 4:19). And immediately upon entry, the people perform Brit Mila and celebrate Pesach (Ibid. 5:3-10).

It appears to me that Am Yisrael’s entry into Eretz Yisrael in Nissan expresses the fact that this act represented the completion of the process that began with the Exodus, continued with the giving of the Torah on Har Sinai, and ended with the entry into the Promised Land. A process of transformation – from a group of individual slaves into a people, blessed with spiritual freedom and national independence.

(Not only was the entry in Nissan, but on the 10th of Nissan, the very date the Jews in Egypt took the Egyptian’s lambs for their Korban Pesach, thus expressing their freedom from their oppressors – their ability to do what G-d commanded them to do against the will and beliefs of the Egyptians.)

So, in describing the Brit Mila in Yehoshua, the verses make clear that this circumcision completes the process of the Exodus: “And G-d said to Yehoshua, today I have rolled away the disgrace of Egypt from upon you…” (Ibid. 5:9).

Therefore, there are three elements to Am Yisrael’s freedom and independence: the connection between Am Yisrael and G-d (expressed through Brit Mila), the connection between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael (expressed by the entry into the Land), and Israel’s national freedom (expressed by Pesach). These three are inextricably intertwined. Am Yisrael’s national freedom at the time of the Exodus would have had no significance in itself. The aim was to “serve G-d on this mountain,” (Shemot 3:12) and “to raise it up from this land to the good Land,” (Ibid. 8).

Now, during the spring, we celebrate these three holidays – Pesach, Yom HaAtzmaut and Shavuot, which represent the three solid pillars supporting our existence – the People, the Land and the Torah.

Pesach and Yom HaAtzmaut

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These post-Pesach weeks are marked by special commemorative days meant to preserve some vestige of important Jewish memory for later generations. Thus Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day for the Fallen Israeli Soldiers and Israel Independence Day all somehow convey an identity with the Jewish people and its history to new generations that have not experienced the actual events these days commemorate.

Unfortunately, the Day of Remembrance for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror needs no memory recall, for it is a continuing reality in Israeli life. However, the alienation of a large section of world Jewry from its faith, practices and traditions has created a dangerous state of amnesia amongst this group. There are already Jews who are Holocaust forgetters, even doubters, who wish the whole subject of the Holocaust to be forgotten and ignored. Enough already! is their cry. This will eventually lead to Jewish Holocaust denial in the name of solidarity with the more radical “progressives” of the Western and Moslem world.

As far as Israel Independence Day is concerned, there are large sections of the Jewish world that pay it no heed out of theological, political and deep psychological motives. The Jews of the far Left call the creation of Israel a “mistake,” and many of the Jews of the ultra-Orthodox religious right consider it to be a false messiah. The Jews who are in foreign governments seemingly always act against the interests of Israel when in power and later write books about why their peacemaking efforts bore no substantial fruit. There are therefore many Jews – and certainly many more non-Jews – who would simply wish to erase the past century of Jewish and world history and start all over again as though none of it ever happened.

In the real world though, the fate of the Jewish people as a whole is inextricably bound to the wellbeing of the Jewish State of Israel. Almost half of the world’s Jews live here and to a great extent, it provides the teachers, scholars, political and social leaders for the entire Jewish world. Thus, attachment and loyalty to the existence of the State of Israel would seem to be a self-understood requirement in the societies of all types of Jews.

Sadly, this is not present even here in the State of Israel itself. Reading some of Israel’s newspapers, listening to portions of the radio or viewing television programming would convince an alien visitor from Mars that Israel is the chief villain of the world and responsible for all problems currently facing humankind. The entire concept of Jewish loyalty has become foreign to large sections of Jewish society. It is not taught in many Jewish schools here and abroad, it is absent from the programming of Jewish organizations operating on many college campuses, and it is absent in the spirit of many nominally Jewish households. In fact, loyalty is viewed as being anachronistic, passé and not in the spirit of current civilized society.

When Yehoshua bin Nun entered the Land of Israel with the Jewish people millennia ago, the Tanach records for us that he encountered a stranger (who later turned out to be an angel sent by Heaven). Unaware of his identity or his intentions, Yehoshua asked him only one question: “Are you with us or are you with our enemies?” Apparently there is no middle ground allowed in answering this question. It poses the harsh reality of Jewish life and does not allow for the illusions of a utopian, even-handed, collateral-damage free, morally perfect but unobtainable world to interfere with the stark and truthful answer required to this question. Loyalty to our Torah and its commandments, to our fellow Jews the world over, to our Land and State, are the guarantees of our survival and continued accomplishments. It may be old-fashioned to espouse loyalty in today’s weird world but loyalty to the concept of loyalty itself is an inextricable component of Jewish life.

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There is a saying in the Gemara that sometimes words or actions bespeak prophecy, without intention – מיתנבי ואינו יודע מה יתנבי. There are words, actions or events, that at times reflect something much deeper than the players involved even realize. During the time of haKamat haMedina (the establishment of the State) the blue and white colors were decided on to make up the newly crafted Israeli flag. Although the founders were not wary of all the deep significance of their choice, I think we can appreciate it even more, with 70 plus years of hindsight.

What is it about the flag that gives us an emotional tug whenever we see it waving in the wind, or being held by young schoolchildren performing dalganut (a flag dance)? Why is our heart touched when we see our public areas bedecked with the flag? Maybe we can suggest two ideas to help explain this intense feeling.

Rav Soloveichik writes about the symbolism of these colors: “The color white denotes clarity, distinctiveness, rationality, that which is self-evident. White symbolizes purity in the Navi. The expression haDevarim melibanim means the subject is crystal clear. Techelet, the blue, in contrast, focuses our thoughts on the grand mysteries of human experience which elude our precise understanding. The seas and heavens are boundless and beyond human reach.”

Thus, these two colors symbolize what is clear and understandable in our lives, as well as what is beyond our comprehension, the realm of a chok, what will remain a mystery to the human condition. When we see the flag, we recognize both the grandeur and the sacrifice, the redemption and the accompanying pain, the Yom HaAtzmaut and the Yom HaZikaron of this historical process.

But there is another element to our feelings, maybe even opposite in a certain sense. The mitzvah we associate with these colors is, of course, the mitzvah of tzitzit. We find this mitzvah, one of the few equal to all mitzvot, juxtaposed specifically at the end of parashat Shelach. It appears that it somehow closes and fixes the sin of the spies. But in what sense? Even the same words are used to link these sections, לָתוּר אֶת הָאָרֶץ and וְלֹא תָתֻרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם. What exactly is the underlying connection? We know that the sin of the spies, at root, was a rejection of Am Yisrael’s unique hold in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Zalman Melamed suggests that everything our enemies see in our flag, we need to recognize in it as well.

“In their eyes, the Israeli flag symbolizes the yearning of the Jews to return their homeland, to Yerushalam, to Har HaBayit … to build the Beit Hamikdash, to ingather all the exiles, and to settle Jews in the entire Land of Israel… They see in the flag a dream of the Jewish nation to continue its unique path of Divine connection. They see an alive and vibrant nation that wants to capitalize on all of its spiritual potentials…”

The message is that it cannot just be what they feel, but what we believe. We believe in the ingathering of exiles, of taking part in the Divine plan of rebuilding the Land of Israel. We believe we need to actively acquire G-d’s three special gifts to the Jewish people – Torah, Olam HaBa, and Eretz Yisrael. We believe – as the Kuzari writes – that the more we want it, the sooner it’ll happen. When will קרינ חוס ויצהוק be? When יקנוע ירח ימעיקם.

Yehi ratzon that we recognize the gift that is the Land of Israel, and the modern physical symbolism of our connection to it. May it be His will that all Jews return to their Homeland, in health, peace and unity.

1  Sotah 12a.
2  LaZman HaZeh p. 48.
3  Translation by Rabbi Rosner.
4  Berachot 4.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner is a Rebbe at Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh and Rabbi of the Nofei HaShemesh community.
The idea that Jews came to Israel as outsiders or imperialists is among the most perverse of modern myths. They were the Land’s original inhabitants: they have the same relationship to the Land as native Americans to America, aborigines to Australia, and Maoris to New Zealand. They were ousted by imperialists. They are the only rulers of the Land in the past 3,000 years who neither sought nor created an empire.

In fact, no other people, no other power, has ever created an independent state there. When it was not a Jewish State, Israel was merely an administrative unit of empires: the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Umayyads, Fatimids, Abbasids, Crusaders, Mamluks and Ottomans. The existence of Israel, in ancient times and today, is a sustained protest against empires and imperialism: against Mesopotamia of Abraham’s day and the Egyptians of the Exodus.

Do we really need a Jewish State? Yes. There must be some place on earth where Jews can defend themselves, where they have a home in the sense given by the poet Robert Frost as “the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” Every nation has the right to rule itself and create a society and culture in accordance with its own values. That right, to national self-determination, is among the most basic in politics. Today there are many Christian and Muslim nations, but only one Jewish one: in a country one-quarter of one percent of the landmass of the Arab world.

Long ago, Jews recognized the right of the Arab population of the Land to a place of their own. There were various plans for the partition of the Land into two states, one Jewish, one Arab, in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Jews accepted them; the Arabs rejected them. In 1947,
the United Nations voted for partition. Again, Jews accepted, the Arabs refused. David Ben-Gurion reiterated the call for peace as a central part of Israel’s Declaration of Independence in May 1948. Israel’s neighbors – Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq – responded by attacking it on all fronts.

The offer was renewed in 1967 after the Six-Day War. The response of the Arab League, meeting in Khartoum in September 1967, was the famous ‘Three Noses’: no to peace, no to negotiations, no to the recognition of the State of Israel. The call was repeated many times by Golda Meir, and always decisively rejected.

The boldest offer was made by Ehud Barak at Tab’a, 2001. It offered the Palestinians a state in the whole of Gaza and 97 percent of the West Bank, with border compensations for the other three percent, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Many members of the Palestinian team wanted to accept. The Saudi ambassador at the time, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, said, “If Arafat does not accept what is available now, it won’t be a tragedy, it will be a crime.”

Tragically, the Palestinians have been betrayed by those who claimed to be their supporters. They were betrayed in 1948 by the Arab states who promised them that if they left now they would return soon, all Jews having been expelled. They were betrayed by the Arab nations to which they fled, who refused to grant them citizenship, in marked contrast to Israel and its treatment of Jewish refugees from Arab (and other) lands.

They were betrayed by countries that encouraged them to pursue violence instead of peace, bringing poverty to an entire population that, under Israeli rule from 1967 to 1987, had achieved unprecedented levels of affluence and economic growth. They are betrayed today by those who encourage impossible expectations – Palestinian rule over the whole of Israel – thus condemning yet another generation to violence, poverty and despair.

The Egyptians, who ruled Gaza between 1949 and 1967, could have created a Palestinian state, but did not. The Jordanians, who ruled the West Bank during the same years, could have created a Palestinian state, but did not. Instead, Egypt persecuted its Islamist intellectuals, sentencing many to death. The Jordanians expelled the Palestinians in 1971, after killing almost 10,000 of them in 1970 in the massacre known as ‘Black September.’ The only country that has ever offered the Palestinians a state is Israel.

What has systematically derailed Israel’s efforts for peace is the fact that every concession it has made, every withdrawal it has undertaken, has been interpreted by its enemies as a sign of weakness, and has led to more violence, not less. The Oslo process led to suicide bombings. Ehud Barak’s offer led to the so-called El Aqsa Intifada. The withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza led directly to the onslaught of Katyushas and Kassams. How does any nation make peace under these conditions? Hamas and Hezbollah have made it clear that they do not seek peace. They seek Israel’s destruction.

Under constant threat of violence or war, Israel’s achievements have nonetheless been immense. It has taken a desolate landscape and turned it into a place of farms, forests and fields. It has taken immigrants from more than 100 countries, speaking more than 80 languages, and turned them into a nation. It has created a modern economy with almost no resources other than the creative gifts of its people. It has sustained democracy in a part of the world that had never known it before. It has taken Hebrew, the language of the Bible, and made it speak again. It has taken a people devastated by the Holocaust and made it live again. Israel remains a Petach Tikva, a gateway of hope.

Is criticism of Israel antisemitism? No. Criticism is a legitimate part of democratic politics and free speech. Many of Israel’s most acute critics are Israelis. No nation is perfect; no nation can be perfect; a good society is one that makes space for, and listens to, constructive criticism. That is something with which we must live. The Hebrew Bible is the most self-critical document in religious or national history.

What we must challenge are the blatant falsehoods: that Israel is the aggressor, that it has not sought peace; above all the idea that it has no right to exist. Equally, we much challenge the false paradigm that the Israel-Palestinian relationship is a zero-sum game in which one side loses and the other wins. It is not. From peace, both sides gain. From war, violence and terror, both sides lose. Peace is sacred, violence a desecration. Too many lives have been lost, too much blood has been shed. Eventually, both sides must recognize the other’s right to be – and if not now, when?

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1 A complete treatment

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth
In these complex times of battling COVID-19, Israel is once again at the forefront of developing technologies to help stem the spread of the virus and treat it.

Here are just some of the Israeli “Coronavations” currently being used and developed.

**ASSESSING AND DIAGNOSING COVID-19**

**BATM**, a leading provider of real-time technologies for networking solutions and medical laboratory systems, has entered into a collaboration with Novamed Ltd, an Israeli life sciences company operating in the in-vitro rapid diagnostics market, for the joint development and marketing of a rapid testing kit for home use for diagnosing COVID-19. The new kit allows people to test a sputum sample at home and receive results within a few minutes. BATM has also started shipping its new diagnostic kit for COVID-19, developed by Adaltis, for use by medical facilities, which provides results in under one hour on COVID-19 and other variants of coronavirus using real-time PCR (polymerase chain reaction), a molecular biology diagnostic lab technique.

**The Defense Ministry’s Directorate for Defense Research and Development** is working with Vocalis Health to deploy a state-of-the-art Artificial Intelligence method and technique to correlate voice with COVID-19 symptoms. This will enable an alert about early symptoms and monitoring at home by only using a smartphone. The study is being conducted under IRB approval, as required for clinical research.

**Ichilov Tel Aviv Medical Center**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Health**, the **Innovation Authority**, the **Rambam Medical Campus in Haifa** and the startup **Geneyx** – backed by **BATM** – will collect samples from Corona patients and sequence their whole genomes in
search of innovative ways to diagnose and treat COVID-19, by identifying which genetic factors protect against the virus and which ones increase the risks.

**MANAGING COVID-19 PATIENTS**

**Biobeat** developed a wearable device for continuous, noninvasive, accurate, medical-grade monitoring of vital signs including blood pressure, oxygen saturation, respiratory rate, heart rate, consciousness, cardiac output, stroke volume, body temperature, steps, and sweat in COVID-19 patients at several Israeli hospitals and at home. The wearable device automatically uploads the recorded data to a smartphone-based app and to the cloud, where it can be monitored remotely. Caretakers can intervene if needed, and users can receive alerts directly from the app.

**RenalSense**, a technology that continuously measures urine flow, automatically transmits real-time data and notifications of fluctuations to medical staff, 24/7. Urine output is a key metric in monitoring a patient’s fluid state, especially in COVID-19 patients who suffer from pneumonia, which can jeopardize their kidney function. Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) is a severe symptom of COVID-19, especially for patients in a critical condition.

**TytoCare**’s modular device and telehealth platform is allowing healthcare organizations in the US, Europe and Israel to remotely examine and monitor potential and actual COVID-19 patients at home and in hospitals. TytoCare exams of lungs, heart and temperature fully replicate an in-person checkup.

**TREATMENTS, VACCINES**

**Kamada** is working to develop a “passive vaccine,” a polyclonal immunoglobulin treatment for severely ill COVID-19 patients, using purified blood and plasma samples from recovered patients.

**Enlivex Therapeutics** is developing Allocetra, a drug for treating patients with multisystem failure related to sepsis, a deadly pathological syndrome that resembles COVID-19.

**MIGAL Galilee Research Institute** is reformulating a poultry coronavirus vaccine under development as an oral vaccine against human COVID-19 that could be adapted to future forms of the virus.
The Mishkan (Tabernacle) and its vessels were *hekdeš*, from the word *kadash*, sanctified and dedicated exclusively for use in the *Mikdash*. Any personal use of *hekdeš* unrelated to the Mishkan or Mikdash violates a prohibition from the Torah called *meila*, as delineated in the Mishne Torah. The Talmud asks how Bnei Yisrael could avoid committing *meila* during the construction of the Mishkan if inevitably, workers would come to sit on or under one of the Mishkan’s beams during construction, thereby benefiting from *hekdeš*.

The Talmud¹ explains that during its construction, neither the Mishkan nor its materials were holy: “They would construct with the mundane and only afterward sanctify.” Only upon its completion was the Mishkan dedicated to G-d’s service, and only then did it become holy. Therefore, during the construction process, there was no prohibition of *meila*. On the spiritual plane, only after the arduous, physical labor was completed did the Mishkan’s spiritual attributes manifest themselves. At this point, the Mishkan became G-d’s dwelling place, as the Torah attests: “So Moshe finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle.”²

Rav Shlomo Aviner, based on the teachings of Rav Kook, says that the practice of “constructing with the mundane and only afterward sanctifying” teaches that attaining holiness is a gradual process, often starting with the mundane. After investing one’s energies to ensure a project comes to fruition, one appreciates the final product and the benefits derived from it all the more. Sometimes one cannot recognize what spirituality has to offer without first engaging with the physical world.

On a conceptual level, explains Rav Aviner, this lesson applies to Medinat Yisrael as well. At times we have trouble recognizing the spirituality inherent in today’s Israel, for the religious and spiritual potential of the Land and its infrastructure is far from realized. However, we must not forget that the Shechina, the Divine Presence, dwells in Israel, and any developments in the Land, even physical material ones, eventually have a spiritual impact. In Eretz Yisrael, a Jew can contribute to the physical infrastructure of the country and reap spiritual benefits, as opposed to other lands, where the Jews’ physical contributions have no spiritual components or consequences.

G-d never promised Am Yisrael a rose garden. Quite the contrary. The Land of Israel is referred to in Devarim as where, “the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” While we welcome the consistent connection with G-d that Israel facilitates, the Sifrei explains we also pay a price for benefiting from the relationship. The Midrash explains that G-d takes upon Himself the unrelenting constant vigil over the Land: at times, for the better and at times, for the worse (depending on Am Yisrael’s loyalty to Him).

One of the reasons why G-d has to keep constant vigil on His land is precisely because it invites challenges and obstructions, as we have seen throughout its arduous, tortuous history. Experiencing the challenges which come with building the Land of Israel, we may become discouraged. However, we can find solace and comfort in knowing that the country we appear to be constructing is in reality also a permanent dwelling place for G-d and His people. It is a country in which the Temple service of previous ages is reflected in the service of the millions of Jews who live here today, secular and religious alike.

I have been privileged to head an organization called Makom Meshutaf — Unified Place, which has recently joined with and is under the auspices of World Mizrachi. Makom Meshutaf offers secular kibbutzim and moshavim educational workshops and unique programming which promote Jewish values, history, tradition, and textual study, advocating tolerance and unity between Jews in Israel. I want to thank World Mizrachi for affording all Jews in Medinat Yisrael the opportunity to “construct in order to sanctify.”

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¹ Meila 14a.
² Shemot 40:30.

Rabbi Shalom Hammer serves as a senior lecturer for the IDF’s Jewish Identity Branch. He is the founder of Makom Meshutaf, under the auspices of World Mizrachi (www.makommeshutaf.com), has authored five books and is a sought-after lecturer.
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(Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, the Laws of Charity 10:7-14)

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In my forthcoming book, Yeirei bemesubah – Seventy Conversations with HaGaon HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l, (Urim Publications and OU Press), I deal with 70 conversations I held with the Rav during my 1974-76 tenure as the Rav’s chauffeur in New York City. In the following excerpt of this edited conversation, it appears that the Rav did, indeed, entertain an official position on the question of Hallel for Israel’s Independence Day.

The position of HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l (popularly known as “The Rav”) regarding the recitation of Hallel on Israel’s Independence Day is somewhat ambivalent. Many have claimed to have witnessed the Rav do this or that (full Hallel, half Hallel, before Kaddish, after Kaddish, etc.). Some have suggested that this ambivalence demonstrated a less-than-enthusiastic attitude towards the State itself.

During the mid-1970s, Rabbi Louis Bernstein’s doctoral dissertation was accepted by the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University. This academic work dealt with the impact of the Rabbinical Council of America [RCA] on the formation of modern Orthodoxy in America.

This dissertation contained an appendix with eight printed halachic responsa from the Rav (as Chairman of the Halacha Commission) to the Executive Director and officers of the RCA. They were all questions dealing with public policy on the part of the RCA. One question, dated in the early 1950’s, sought the Rav’s opinion regarding the reaction and proper procedures of the RCA towards Israel’s Independence Day. Specifically, should Hallel be recited or not? The Rav’s extremely brief four-Hebrew-word response was: “They said and they said” (םה אמרו והם אמרו).

In conversation, I asked the Rav what he meant by using this Talmudic phrase. The Rav responded that he had nothing to do with the establishment of Israel’s Independence Day. It was the Chief Rabbinate of Israel that instituted the saying of Hallel that day. Therefore, they said – they have the authority to say what should be done or said on that day. The Rav explained that this was not a private halachic inquiry, but rather one of public nature. As a question as such emanated from Israel, the Chief Rabbinate must serve as the resident Rabinic authority (מרא דאתרא) in this case.

In his “Davening with the Rav,” 2006, p. 115, Rabbi Mendi Gopin reports on the Rav’s customs in Boston’s Maimonides School Minyan: “On Yom HaAtzmaut to recite the whole Hallel without a beracha, and on Yom Yerushalayim to recite whole Hallel with a beracha at the beginning and the end.” This is completely in line with the Rav’s directives to the Rabbinical Council of America from the 1950’s.


3 In his Thinking Aloud (2009), p. 199, Rabbi David Holzer (the Rav’s driver of the late 1970’s) published a 1978 un-edited convoluted open conversation on the Rav’s various opinions regarding Yom HaAtzmaut practices.

4 In 1976, Rabbi Bernstein, the veteran Rabbi, educator, and Jewish leader, was elected to the Presidency of the Religious Zionists of America - Mizrachi.


6 In Talmudic terms, the phrase, אמרו והם אמרו, means that the Sages who ordained a restriction also had the authority to relax this restriction in specific cases. See, for example, Mishnah Yoma 8:1 and Tosafot HaAtzmaut practices.

1 In conversation with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, I was told that the Rav did not grant the Israeli Chief Rabbinate status on all subjects. But he did agree that on questions regarding Hallel on Israel’s Independence Day, the Chief Rabbinate did serve in this function. So, too, regarding the Rav’s opinion on the personal status of the Ethiopian Jewish community immigrating to Israel in the 1980’s, the Rav opined that the RCA should follow the instructions of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler is a former student of, and special assistant to, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
SILENCE, SOLDIERS, AND SWITCHING GEARS

Shortly after our eldest son, Ari, fell in battle in Shechem-Nablus almost 18 years ago, I went shopping for a car. The salesman was quite surprised when I told him I wanted a manual shift rather than an automatic. He told me that while in generations past, virtually every car in Israel had a standard transmission, those days were long gone. “What you’re looking for is the ‘old Israel,’” he told me, sure that I was making some kind of mistake. “No,” I corrected him, “this car exactly represents the character and condition of Israel – then and now – and that’s why I insist on it.” And still drive it.

This is a country where, if we are to survive, we must be adept at switching gears – emotional gears. We are constantly, continually confronted by highs and lows, ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, and must be prepared to ride out those extremes of daily life. Even as we, along with the rest of the world, battle the deadly Coronavirus, we trumpet the rise of our Kinneret to its highest level in two decades. Even as we continue to be threatened by incorrigible Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists on our northern and southern borders, we are buoyed by the fact that Israel’s “satisfaction level” consistently ranks among the top 10 highest in the world.

How do we jump so effortlessly between the extremes and live in two radically different worlds at the same time?

This question is most acute this week when we make the transition between the somber sirens of Yom HaZikaron and the flag-waving festivities of Yom HaAtzmaut. In just a breath, a heartbeat, we are asked to dry the tears and shelve the painful memories of wars fought and loved ones lost, and celebrate the dream of Israel renewed and resurgent. The stick shift grinds, the gearbox smokes, but somehow we make the switch and Israel rumbles along.

For the bereaved families, every day is Memorial Day. We never blow out the candle or blot out of our mind that frozen picture of our soldier-son illuminated on the wall of Yad LaBanim on the night of Yom HaZikaron. We live and limp with that loss, as if with a limb blown away or a sense of sight impaired, and it is never more than a familiar song or deficient family picture away. And yet, we want to live, too. We don’t want to curl up and die or wallow in our grief. We still want to enjoy this wonderful world and country in which we live; we deserve to enjoy it.

So we grit our teeth, gather our courage and resolve to switch those gears, no matter how tough it may be. We dry the tears, embrace our kids and reach for the future, while never letting go of the past. We compart- mentalize, creating a sacred space for silence and sadness but reserving another corner for laughter and lightheartedness.

We try to stay positive, our eyes on the road ahead. We, the all-too-large community of bereaved families, try to bring some good out of the catastrophe by building synagogues and schools and day-care centers. We channel all our furious energy into social causes, fighting for justice by screaming our opposition to the freeing of sadistic Palestinian prisoners or the ceding of Israeli land to the very monsters who murdered our kids. We, whom G-d has seen fit to enter into the club that no one wants to join, try to prevent anyone else from becoming a member. And we try to put the best face on our situation, taking pride in the service and sacrifice of our sons.

Soon after I came to Israel, my sabra cousin picked me up early one March morning and said, “Today, you will learn all you need to know about this country.”

We drove to Mount Hermon, where we went sledding on a thin layer of snow. Then we caught a plane in Rosh Pina and flew to Eilat, where we went snorkeling off the sunny Coral Beach. “Israel is a land of colors and contrasts,” he told me, “a place where in the morning you can be shivering but in the afternoon you are sweating. It is a tiny country in kilometers, but a huge nation in experiences - and determination.”

But if you want to get from one end to the other, you had better learn to switch those gears.
The Radak offers an inspiring and insightful perspective into a verse we recite in Hallel: כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ וֶאֱמֶת ה' לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּ יָ—הּ, For His kindness has overwhelmed us and the truth of the L-rd is eternal (Tehillim 117:2). This verse, describing the Final Redemption, calls it a חַסְדּ, kindness and an אֱמֶת, truth. Seemingly these two descriptions are mutually exclusive, for one is not entitled to a חַסְדּ, kindness, yet one is entitled to an אֱמֶת, truth. Resolving this problem, the Radak (Tehillim 117:2) explains that due to the profound pain the exile has caused us, it is easy to become skeptical or doubtful. Because of this uncertainty, we perceive the redemption as a חַסְדּ, kindness as if it were not coming. Yet, once the redemption has arrived, looking back, it will be clear that it is, in fact, an אֱמֶת, truth. After all, G-d promised it in the Torah (Vayikra 26:46).

The Radak lays out the theological outlook for modern Religious Zionism. It requires patience and perspective. In any process, there are ups and downs, moments of idealism and setbacks. These are the normal and anticipated emotions in the long and critical spiritual process called Jewish history. Yom HaAtzmaut celebrates the highs. It reminds us that something mundane, like the declaration of the State, is a monumental חַסְדּ, kindness, which fulfills a promise, an אֱמֶט, truth.

Rav Soloveitchik astutely summarizes, “Our history is a strange one: it consists of Divine promises but at a slow pace. G-d promised Avraham the Land; it was not given to him. Hundreds of years passed but eventually, it was indeed fulfilled” (Festivals of Freedom 137).

Rav Dessler (Michtav MiEliyahu) notes that we should not go through the holidays but allow them to go through us. We should leave every holiday religiously advanced and elevated. This Yom HaAtzmaut should inspire us to continue hopefully looking forward, knowing that the ultimate promise will be fulfilled.

Rabbi Jesse Horn is a Senior Ram (Rosh Metivta) at Yeshivat HaKotel and the director of the Mizrachi/Yeshivat HaKotel Mechanchim program.
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Sadly, we tend to take this phenomenon – modern-day Israel – for granted. Yom HaAtzmaut is the perfect time to take a step back and reflect upon the magnitude of the event we are celebrating.

Rabbi Yaakov Emden, son of the Chacham Tzvi, also known as “Ya’avetz,” was a leading German Rabbi in the 18th century. A prolific writer, he published 31 works including a commentary on the “Siddur Beit Yaakov.” In the introduction to the commentary, “Sulam Beit El,” Rabbi Emden writes strong words regarding the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

After relating that one should face Jerusalem while praying, he writes: “And because of this, every single Jew must make a commitment in his heart to go up and move to the Land of Israel, and to desire to merit to pray there before the Sanctuary of the King because even though it is destroyed, G-d’s Presence has not moved from there… Therefore, listen to me, my brothers who are living in lands that are not ours, on impure lands, remember this: remember G-d, and Jerusalem should enter your hearts… and don’t think to remain in the Diaspora, G-d forbid… ‘For Zion’s sake, I will not be quiet’…and ‘for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be silent’ (Yeshayahu 62:1)... In truth, a strong question exists on the holy Jewish people. In every area, they are strict upon themselves with regard to some details of mitzvot which they took upon themselves, and they are extra careful about them, loosely spending a lot of money and going through great effort to fulfill them as completely as possible. So why do they disgrace and are lazy with this beloved mitzvah (living in Israel) which is a peg upon which the entire Torah depends?”

Rabbi Emden continues with this theme later on in his commentary. The second blessing of Birkat HaMazon, “Nodeh Lecha,” reads: “We give thanks to you, L-rd our G-d, for giving our forefathers as an inheritance a Land that is desirable, good and expansive. And for taking us out, L-rd our G-d, from the land of Egypt, and redeeming us from a house of slavery...” This list of gifts for which we thank G-d seems to be out of order. Shouldn’t we first thank G-d for taking us out of Egypt, then for giving us the Torah, and lastly for giving us the Land of Israel? That would be the correct chronological sequence.

Rabbi Emden answers: “The inheritance of the Land of Israel comes first from the perspective of the goal... The entire purpose of the Exodus was to enter the Land.” That, he explains, is where we can accept and connect to G-d in a complete manner. Therefore, we thank G-d for the ultimate goal first, and only afterwards we thank Him for the means which enabled us to reach that goal.

Despite the passion Rabbi Emden expresses for living in Israel, circumstances did not permit him to make aliya himself. However, in a lesson for all those who are not able to make aliya, he strongly urged his own children to do so in his introduction to the siddur: “And you, my children who G-d has given me with grace... listen... to what I instruct you regarding the Land of Israel... when you have in your hands blessing for the costs of the trip and to have some standing for a livelihood there even if it’s just a small amount... turn and travel to the Holy Land to live there permanently... and G-d won’t remove His kindness from you when you return to the Land of your forefathers.”

This is what Rabbi Emden taught his children in a time when both travel to Israel and living in Israel were filled with the greatest of dangers, and in an era when Jewish life was not flourishing in the Holy Land.

One can only imagine how he would have celebrated the establishment of an independent Jewish State and how strongly he would have educated his children to move to a free, strong and vibrant Israel.

How blessed we are to live in these magnificent times!

Rabbi Dov Lipman is a former MK and the author of seven books about Judaism and Israel.
Social Commentary

Rabbi Chaim Navon

There’s No Place Like Home

At the start of the 20th century, the Socialists argued that there would be no world war because the workers would refuse to fight. The German workers identify with their French counterparts – and not with the rich of their own people – and so they wouldn’t agree to march towards a national war.

And then, of course, the war began in 1914 and the German Kaiser proclaimed: “I no longer think in terms of parties... today we are all German brothers and only German brothers.” The President of the French Parliament, Deschanel, also declared: “Here there are no longer rivals, only French.” And once they understood their people were under threat, the Socialists toed the line, discarding their party membership books and enlisting to fight for their people.

The COVID-19 crisis is minuscule in comparison to the First World War but there are similarities nevertheless. Before Corona, we were witness to ongoing ridicule of national consciousness and its importance. Just two months ago, the Scandinavian airline, SAS, launched a campaign with the slogan: “What is really Scandinavian? Nothing. It’s all copied.” The ad continues by explaining how the Scandinavians took democracy from Greece, bicycles from Italy, windmills from Persia, and so on. The company was shocked by the negative reactions. After all, the European Union has gained more and more power at the expense of its member countries. National borders and currencies have disappeared and European leaders tend to agree that nationalism was the past and global awareness was the future, perhaps even the present.

And then COVID-19 appeared. When European countries found themselves with their backs to the wall, they suddenly discovered that national borders were extremely important. Italy begged the EU for medical equipment; Germany and France refused to send any. It was actually China that volunteered to send a plane full of respiratory machines, adorned with little Chinese and Italian flags. When Italy begged the EU for financial support, Holland and others vehemently opposed it. Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, published a letter of apology to Italy, complaining that when Europe’s countries need each other, they show that their own country comes first. Surprise surprise!

The most obvious expression of European unity is the Schengen Agreement, which ensured freedom of movement between EU countries. With the outbreak of COVID-19, more and more countries announced the closure of their borders. Even Angela Merkel, who had spearheaded the open border policy, had to recant.

Pesach is the time of our national covenant. When our forefathers were slaves in Egypt, they remembered they were not Egyptians but Hebrews. They were recognizable as a nation in themselves - “metsuyanim sham”. And when they left Egypt too, it was easy for them to remember their nationalism.

The test becomes harder once the crisis is over.

With G-d’s help, our crisis too will soon be over. And when the masks and alcohol will once again be Purim accessories, may we continue to remember – and to celebrate – who we really are.

Rabbi Chaim Navon is a renowned author and educator.
One enigmatic passage serves as the only biblical source cited directly in the Prayer for the State of Israel:

If your dispersed ones shall be at the ends of the heavens, from there the L-rd your G-d will gather you and from there He will take you. And the L-rd your G-d will bring you to the Land that your forefathers inherited and you shall inherit it... (Devarim 30:4-5)

Here Moses describes how the Jewish people will be redeemed, but why would G-d gather individuals from the holiest of all places – the heavens – to bring them to the Land?

Rav Saadia Gaon interprets this as a metaphor. The Torah paints a picture of a people who, albeit in exile, will live holy and devout lives, who will ‘return unto G-d, listen to everything He commands’ and serve Him wholeheartedly (30:2). Throughout our history, Jewish people strove to fulfill this imperative. They formed insular communities of piety, where study houses were full and adherence to Jewish law was systemic. These were times of education and spiritual self-growth, and the resulting scholarly achievements were extraordinary.

But, much like one’s time at university, study is a lofty ideal in and of itself, but also a means rather than an end alone. We acquire knowledge in order to apply it. In the World to Come, or heaven, Torah study may be exclusively viewed as an end, but here it is more, helping us to sanctify the mundane, to live a life of holiness, and in doing so, to elevate the world into a sanctified, heavenly place.

It is fine, in our private lives, to retreat from societal influences and to create a holy space in which we can focus on our own personal spiritual journey. However, all too often people get stuck in this inward focus, losing sight of the ultimate goal – our responsibility to bring the world with us on our path of spiritual growth.

Perhaps, therefore, by saying that G-d will gather the people from ‘the ends of the heavens,’ the Torah is implying that G-d will draw the people back from their solely spiritual pursuits, and bring them ‘to the Land’, back to reality. By specifically mentioning the Land, the Torah teaches that G-d will indeed bring the people to deal with the nitty-gritty practicalities of planting seeds and working the physical land. And what better time to remember this than Yom HaAtzmaut amidst the Coronavirus.

For the first time in 2,000 years, we have been afforded the opportunity to build a Jewish homeland. Israel is ultimately meant to be built into a beacon for the world, as an inspiration nation. In order to actualize this, each one of us needs to recognize our responsibility of applying our Torah knowledge to the real world. Each one of us has a role to play in building this great nation, a thread to weave in the creation of our national and even international tapestry.

This message applies even beyond the building of a national homeland. The Talmud (Niddah 30b) teaches that before a person is born, we are taught the entire Torah while still in the womb. And at the end of our lives, we pass on to another idyllic spiritual existence – heaven. While our lives are bookended by these two blissful realms of elevated holiness, a few verses after this passage we are reminded that the Torah is ‘not in the heavens’ (30:12). It is not meant to be confined to the study house but must be constantly implemented, to shape every facet of our day-to-day lives.

There are those who build a spiritual ‘cocoon’ around themselves. They attempt to connect to the untainted pre-life (womb) and post-life (World to Come) spiritual heights. Between the womb and the tomb, the Torah commands us to find the courage to rise to the challenges of this world. The miracle of the State of Israel, the return of our people to its ancestral home despite the seemingly insurmountable odds, is the ultimate example of this. Though we may be susceptible to failure along the way, it is incumbent upon us to embrace the real world with these values, in other words, as it says a few verses later to ‘choose life so that you may live!’ (30:19)
Throughout S.Y. Agnon’s wide repertoire of writings, we can sense the presence of a comic mode. Known as a master ironist, comedic irony was a tool always in Agnon’s mind, alongside other humorous tones that Hebrew literature’s only Nobel laureate could strike at will. However, when looking at his entire canon, we must recognize that – unlike his Yiddish counterpart, Sholem Aleichem – comedy was not his specialty, no matter how entertaining we find much of his writing. When examining the ethical or moral problems facing the Jewish world, he wrote in the tragic genre. This is not to say that his darkest works are without humor, but he knew well how to marshal comic relief to diffuse tension even in his most bleak depictions of Jewish history.

His anthology of satirical pieces on life in the Jewish State, entitled “Per-akim shel Sefer HaMedina,” has been translated recently as The Orange Peel and Other Satires. These stories, while not components of the backbone of Agnon’s oeuvre, have significance and enduring appeal to contemporary readers for a variety of reasons. They demonstrate the artist taking his craft in a new direction – political satire. The satirist’s aspiration is to amuse while arousing the reader’s disapproval of societal vice by holding it up to ridicule (with a presumed didactic and remedial goal).

The short stories in the collection are send-ups of a variety of human flaws, less of the State itself than of its pompous politicians and shortsighted citizens, touching on topics ranging from taxes and trash collection to the windbaggery of speechmakers unable to effect useful action, and tensions arising from the religious-secular divide. Part of the collection’s significance is in how it provides a measure of insight into Agnon’s mind.

Following a medieval tradition of a poetic “peticha” (opening) to prayer, in which the themes of the piece of worship to be introduced are highlighted or expanded, Agnon prepared this introduction to the Mourner’s Kaddish in 1947, to be recited “for the fallen defenders of the Land of Israel.” Some have observed that the expansion of the well-known Kaddish was necessary in 1947, as the tally of the Six Million was still being undertaken, and the human sacrifices in defense of the fledgling Jewish homeland were growing day by day. It is composed in answer to the question of what it means to salvage the religious metaphors of serving and standing guard at the palace of a King who may have appeared to have abandoned His troops.

But even in this most serious of works, the themes of “The Book of State” are reflected, albeit in a wholly distinct tone: the sanctity and supremacy of each individual, even when he is marshaled as part of an army arrayed in defense of the collective body politic.

Each one of us is as important in His eyes as a whole regiment.
For He does not have many to set in our place.
Thus if one Jew dies (G-d forbid),
Distress falls upon the regiments of the King,
And a weakening comes to the kingdom of He who is Blessed,
For His kingdom lacks one of its regiments
And the greatness of He who is Blessed is lessened.

The death of each individual causes a lessening of G-d’s kingdom on earth, therefore we recite the Kaddish, imploring Yitgadal veYitkadash shemei raba – praying that His name should be magnified on high to rectify His own diminution caused by the loss of each member of the collective below.

As opposed to treatments of this theme in his works of fiction, this is Agnon’s attempt to compose liturgy (indeed, it is still ceremoniously recited at Memorial Day events throughout Israel). Unlike so much of his writing, here he does not create a pastiche of holy source material in an ironic subversion of those pious texts. Writing in Jerusalem in 1947, as the ashes in Europe were first settling, and the conflagration in Eretz Yisrael was just beginning, he set satire aside.

1 Literally, Chapters of the Book of State, published in his volume Samuch veNireh.
2 Toby Press.

Rabbi Jeffrey Saks, founding director of ATID and its WebYeshiva.org program, is the series editor of the Agnon Library at the Toby Press, and editor of the journal Tradition.
The One and the Whole

Rav Kook, in Orot, described the establishment of the State of Israel as “The foundation of G-d’s throne in the world, the only desire of which is that G-d should be One and His Name One.”

Rav Kook’s greatness – at a time of immense complexity – was his insistence on seeing the whole picture, the whole process, with all of its complexities and challenges – rather than focusing on any particular aspect of Israel’s return to its Land.

To a large extent, the Israeli flag integrates this intricacy. An individual tallit and national belonging. The tallit as correction for the collective sin of the Spies and a personal reminder to every individual.

Blue and White

The Israeli flag – two blue horizontal stripes above and below a central blue Magen David – was adopted by the First Zionist Congress and later, as the official flag of the State of Israel – by Israel’s Knesset.

The Magen David is an ancient Jewish symbol, used frequently in Judaica and synagogues throughout the ages. Its source is unknown and its actual connection to King David and his shield unclear.

The colors are the colors of the tallit, the tzitzit. David Wolfson, the second President of the Zionist Organization, designed the flag for the First Zionist Congress in Basel: “And behold! The idea lit up in my mind that we already had a flag, blue and white. The tallit with which we wrap ourselves in prayer... that is our symbol! Let us remove the tallit from its bag and roll it out for the eyes of Israel and the eyes of all peoples. So I ordered a blue and white flag with a Magen David drawn on it, and thus the national flag was born.”

Sea, Heaven and the Throne of Glory

The Torah does not explain why the color blue was chosen for the tzitzit. However, the Gemara tells us it had nothing to do with considerations of design and fashion. This color was designated to remind the Jewish people of their Father in Heaven: “Rabbi Meir said: ‘Why is blue different from all the other colors?’ Because blue is comparable to the sea, and the sea is comparable to the sky and the sky to the Throne of Glory...” (Sotah 17a).

Blue skies remind the Jewish people of their Father in Heaven not only because He is in Heaven, but also because of their unity and eternity. The one color of the sky reminds us that G-d is One and His Name is One, and that He sees all and looks from Above upon everything below.

Blue and white together remind us of cloudy skies, producing rain at the appointed time when we listen to G-d’s mitzvot and observe them. For that purpose were we given Eretz Yisrael – so we can observe G-d’s mitzvot in G-d’s Land. Indeed, the rain falling on the land in Eretz Yisrael is the direct expression of our people’s connection to G-d (Devarim 11).

Hence the color of Heaven symbolizes the fact that accepting the mitzvot is an obligatory condition for inheriting the Land. Hence it is also the color chosen for the tzitzit, for that too is slated to remind us of G-d’s mitzvot – “למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצותי.”

So on the one hand, the tzitzit reminds us of our great love for Eretz Yisrael, while on the other, the obligation of mitzvah observance. This is the bond between Land and Torah. And this is why the flag is also blue and white, expressing the Jewish people’s independence in the Land G-d gave us and in which we are obliged to listen to His commands.

From Corona to Renewal

This year, during the days commemorating Holocaust and Renewal, the whole world is as “one bundle,” passing before Him like sheep. How appropriate it is to see the Israeli flag flying over the buildings in Israel, and on the balconies of Your people, next to Jews praying to G-d – each in his own space, enveloped in a tallit – to speedily send succor to His world and thanking Him for the merit we have of living in a generation in which the Jewish people has a State capable of defending and protecting its citizens from every threat.

May He bless all of Am Yisrael to be able to celebrate Torat Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael together, with great joy, in good health and economic strength, speedily in our days.

Based on an essay by Rabbi Ya’akov Medan in the Be’er Miriam anthology for Yom HaAtzmaut.

Gael Grunewald is Head of the Rural Growth and Development Division of the WZO, former Director of World Bnei Akiva and one of World Mizrachi’s representatives in the National Institutions.
Meir Bar-Ilan (Berlin) was born in Volozhin, Russia, son of the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zevi Yehuda Berlin). Undoubtedly, the young Meir was influenced by his father’s deep commitment to the settlement of Eretz Yisrael. When the Netziv died in 1894, Meir began to travel from yeshiva to yeshiva; first to Telz, then Brisk and finally to Novardok, where he learned with his grandfather, the renowned Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein.

In 1905, Rabbi Bar-Ilan participated as a delegate to the Zionist Congress for the first time. Unlike many of his other colleagues within Mizrachi, he voted against the Uganda Plan, convinced that Eretz Yisrael was the only possible homeland for the Jewish people. From this point on, Bar-Ilan began to devote his entire life and activities to the development of the Mizrachi party in the Diaspora and in Eretz Yisrael.

To further his studies, Bar-Ilan moved to Germany, where he was deeply influenced by the religious community and its ideology of Torah im Derech Eretz – a synthesis of traditional Jewish law and study with contemporary culture. There, Rabbi Bar-Ilan was involved in the daily affairs of the Zionist community and within Mizrachi in particular. In 1911, he founded “Halvri,” the first Hebrew weekly newspaper. It became recognized as an open forum, enabling leading Zionists to express the questions and challenges that faced the Zionist Movement as well as serving as an outlet for literary articles on Zionism. Although he held no official position within Mizrachi, Rabbi Bar-Ilan became its traveling spokesman, helping to establish Mizrachi groups in other countries in Western Europe.

Prior to World War I, Bar-Ilan visited the United States for the first time and laid the groundwork for the American Mizrachi party, becoming the central figure in the Mizrachi Convention held there in 1914. He returned to Europe after a stay of many months, but when World War I engulfed Europe in 1915, he traveled back to the United States, where he resided for the next 10 years. He became the recognized head of the Mizrachi party and established an American equivalent to Halvri.

In 1920, at the First Mizrachi Congress, he served in the capacity of President and from that time on was recognized as the world leader of Mizrachi. In 1926, he made aliyah, one of the first Zionist spokesmen from the United States to realize the dream of living in Eretz Yisrael. In Israel, Bar-Ilan carried a strong voice within the Mizrachi leadership and served in the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund. In 1937, at the 20th Zionist Congress, he was among the few who fought against the plan to partition Eretz Yisrael.

Bar-Ilan left an indelible impression upon Mizrachi in Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora, being the first to coin the phrase Am Yisrael BeEretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael – The Nation of Israel in the Land of Israel according to the Torah of Israel. In regard to this statement, he wrote: “The direction of the Mizrachi Movement is not to remain hidden within Judaism, nor to seek out a hidden corner even if that is where the Torah can be found, but to capture the Jewish way of life, to spread the spirit of Torah in the thoroughfare, on the street, upon the masses and within the State.” He understood that the spiritual composition of the Jewish State must be decided not through ideas and advice, nor through promises or decisions made from afar, but rather through the participation of the religious community in building the Land itself. He also understood very clearly that future generations would base their dedication to the State and the values of Judaism upon the participation and contribution of the religious community towards the re-establishment of the State and the national reawakening.

In 1927, Rabbi Bar-Ilan said that Mizrachi would see the fruits of its labor not when most Jews were living in Eretz Yisrael, but when Judaism would be visible in most places in Eretz Yisrael.

Before his death, Rabbi Bar-Ilan saw the realization of his dream – the establishment of a Jewish State in the Land of Israel. In the last year of his life, the first of the new State, he fought hard to have Jerusalem declared the capital of Eretz Yisrael. His name has been memorialized in various places in Israel, such as Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, and Moshav Beit Meir, in the Jerusalem Hills.
Israel’s War of Independence was the first war between the State of Israel and its neighboring Arab countries. It started on the eve of the establishment of the State (May 14, 1948) and continued until January 1949. The war broke out following the rejection of the United Nations’ Partition Plan, Resolution 181 of the General Assembly (November 29, 1947), by the Arab states and the Arab Higher Committee.

Israeli forces were led and commanded by many brave men. Here are just some of them.
DAVID BEN-GURION was the primary national founder of the State of Israel and the first Prime Minister of Israel. He was the preeminent leader of the Jewish community in British Mandate Palestine from 1935 until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, which he led until 1963 with a short break in 1954-55. Ben-Gurion led Israel during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War and united the various Jewish militias into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

YISRAEL GALILI was an Israeli politician, government minister and member of Knesset. He was appointed Chief of Staff of the Haganah in 1946 and served in that capacity until June 1948.

YAAKOV DORI was the first Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). He was also the President of the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology. When the IDF was formed, Dori took over as its first Chief of Staff.

YIGAEL YADIN was an Israeli archeologist, soldier and politician. He was the second Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces and Deputy Prime Minister from 1977 to 1981. He served as Israel’s Head of Operations during the War of Independence and was responsible for many of the key decisions made during the course of that war.

DAVID DANIEL “MICKEY” MARCUS was a United States Army colonel who assisted Israel during the War of Independence, and became Israel’s first modern general. He was killed by friendly fire when he was mistaken for an enemy infiltrator while returning to Israeli positions at night.

YIGAL ALLON was an Israeli politician, a commander of the Palmach, and a general in the IDF. He served as one of the leaders of the Achdut HaAvoda party and the Israeli Labor party, and acting Prime Minister of Israel. He was a Knesset member and government minister from the third Knesset to the ninth.

YITZHAK RABIN was an Israeli politician, statesman and general. He was the fifth Prime Minister of Israel, serving two terms in office, 1974–77, and 1992 until his assassination in 1995. As a teenager, he joined the Palmach, eventually rising through its ranks to become its chief of operations during Israel’s War of Independence. He joined the newly formed Israel Defense Forces in late 1948 and continued to rise as a promising officer.

DAVID SHALTIEL was an Israeli military and intelligence officer, later also diplomat, most well known for being the Jerusalem district commander of the Haganah during the War of Independence.

MOSHE DAYAN was an Israeli military leader and politician. As commander of the Jerusalem front in the War of Independence, Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (1953–58) during the 1956 Suez Crisis, but mainly as Defense Minister during the Six-Day War in 1967, he became a fighting symbol of the new State of Israel. In 1947, Dayan was appointed to the Haganah General Staff working on Arab affairs, in particular recruiting agents to gain information about irregular Arab forces in Palestine.

SHIMON AVIDAN was an Israeli soldier and officer, the commander of the Givati Brigade during the War of Independence. During the war, he was the operational commander of Operation Nachshon, Operation Bark, Operation Pleshet and Operation An-Far. His troops also fought at Nitzanim as well as joining Operation Death to the Invader and Operation Yoav.

MOSHE CARMEL was an Israeli soldier and politician who served as Minister of Transportation for eight years. During the War of Independence, he was commander of the Carmeli Brigade, which was especially known for Operation Hiram, aimed at capturing the Upper Galilee region from the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) forces led by Fawzi al-Qawuqji and a Syrian battalion. The operation, which lasted just 60 hours (October 29–31), was marked by heavy fighting between Arabs and Jews and ended just before the ceasefire with the neighboring Arab countries went into effect.

YITZCHAK SADEH was the commander of the Palmach and one of the founders of the Israel Defense Forces. At the beginning of 1948, Sadeh was in command of the Haganah training camp at Mishmar HaEmek. In early April he successfully defended the kibbutz against a full-scale attack by the Arab Liberation Army. In the counter-attack that followed, his troops conquered a large section of the Jezreel Valley. At the end of April, he commanded two Brigades in a series of attacks on strategic areas in and around Jerusalem, Operation Yevusi.

Three Ceremonies for These Special Days

This year there will be none of the normal ceremonies on Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut. It is, however, an opportunity to remember some highlights of years gone by.

One moment that particularly spoke to me was when Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi spoke to hundreds of women in Tel Aviv on *Erev* Yom HaZikaron: “It is no coincidence that these special days, Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut, fall out during the week of the *parshiot* Acharei Mot–Kedoshim. What is *acharei mot,* after the death? What does the Torah tell us to do after someone dies? Live! Enhance life! And how do we do that? Again, it is not by chance that in these *parshiot* – and in this particular week – we read אַחֲרֵי-מֹט אֲרוּם – And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Those holy souls are looking at us from Above and asking themselves: ‘Why were we sacrificed, if they down there are still arguing about nonsense, still hating each other?’ Why are they not respecting each other? Their wives, their husbands, their children, the elderly, teachers, soldiers, Torah students? Respect!”

And then she asked something of the crowd.

“Place one hand on the shoulder of the person next to you. Come on! Don’t be embarrassed, don’t be shy. Now put one hand on the other and say together with me: ‘I hereby take upon myself the positive mitzvah of אַהֲבַת-לְרֵעְךָ כְּמֹךְ.' Go!”

And approximately 250 women, young and old, secular and religious, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, in the middle of Tel Aviv on *Erev* Yom HaZikaron, put their hands on the shoulders of a complete stranger, and chanted after her word for word, taking upon themselves to try and love a little more.

Last year, Rabbi Eliyahu Merav spoke at the ceremony that opened Yom HaZikaron at Yad LaBanim in Jerusalem. He talked about his adopted son, Yossi Cohen, who had fallen in active service in the Nachal HaHaredi Unit:

>“Every Jew has a connection of blood and spirit to the sanctity of the Land. And we sitting here – the bereaved families – have something else in common: we have buried part of our own flesh in the clods of this earth.

Five months ago, Adele, my wife and I lost our Yossi, a cute kid murdered by a vile creature in a terror attack at Givat Assaf. Nine years ago, on the very same date, we lost our beloved son-in-law, Rabbi Meir Chai, in a terror attack in Shavei Shomron.

In the hearts of many, Yossi left the feeling that behind all the differences between us – however clear and sharp they may be – behind all the walls, lies a much broader and meaningful foundation that unites us, whether we like it or not. Each and every one of us possesses this foundation, and when we allow ourselves the opportunity, we will excitedly reveal just how much brotherhood and sisterhood – and only that – is our most basic and common nature.

On behalf of Yossi, I allow myself to turn to you, the guides of future generations – teachers, principals, youth movements, heads of pre-military academies – and beseech you: adopt and pass on Rabbi Nachman’s concept of *neku-da tova,* of every single person having something good in them.

How do we do that?

Let us start by finding the good in ourselves. Let us highlight every good thing we do. And then, let us widen the circle and find the good in those close to us, our family, friends and neighbors.

And then let’s widen it even further and find the good and the special in those ‘invisible’ souls – the weak kid in school, the old neighbor, the person who’s a little different to us, the teenager going through crisis...

Let us get to know those people we don’t know personally, but about whom we do hold some prejudice.

…I have got to know these soldiers personally and I have to tell you that not only are they young men prepared to sacrifice their lives, but human beings for whom life is sacred. For while our enemies sanctify death, we first and foremost sanctify life. Look around you. We are an island of sanity amidst the chaos of blood, fire and brimstone. Why?

Because for us, self-sacrifice is no contradiction to life. Almost 46 years have passed since the Yom Kippur War, since my comrades and I were rushed to enemy lines to face the Arab armies. We suffered heavy losses back then, and with G-d’s help, we were victorious.

But that is not our final victory. The victory we are hoping for. That will be when the words of Isaiah are realized, “And they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. Amen.”

And from memory to independence. Miri Ehrental, Israel Prize Laureate and founder – with her husband, Chaim – of the NGO *Zichron Menachem,* a charity supporting child cancer sufferers and their families, said...
the following on Yom HaAtzmaut last year:

“Menachem was a year old when he became ill. Chaim and I were a young couple, and our world was turned upside down in a second. Very quickly we learned to navigate the hospital corridors, become familiar with medical terms, the medical teams and we witnessed firsthand just how important their work is. We memorized the shift hours, the drug dosages, the different types of treatment and the list of severe side effects. We experienced the difficulties of running a home when a child is fighting for his life – the challenge of keeping our marriage together, the difficulty in even smiling. We had to live with the feelings of guilt, fear, loneliness.

Alongside all that, we also discovered the power of faith and soul in coping with disease. We saw that when Menachem wanted life, he fought and beat the illness even when the doctors expected the worst. Sadly, after 15 years of coping, 15 years of struggle, we saw that when our son finally gave up and asked them to stop the treatment, he didn’t even last a week…

I was thrown into darkness, but the Creator of the World had other plans.

Our journey began when my husband had a dream that sparked an idea. Chaim said to me then: “Miri, it’s not right that all the knowledge we’ve gained and stored, the experience we’ve accumulated over these last 15 years, should go to waste. We have been given a Divine mission to pull ourselves together and give others what we didn’t have: accompaniment, support, good advice, an ear to listen and a shoulder to cry on. While they’re fighting for their sick child, we must help parents to care for their healthy children too. We must sit by the sick child in the hospital so that the parents can take a break. We can supply information on processes, both medical and bureaucratic, offer family members the chance to enjoy themselves, the space to pour out their hearts, without going to pieces.

So we began.

And what we had learned, we tried to pass on. To make life easier for others.

This year we’re embarking on Zichron Menachem’s 30th year, the name of which reminds me every day – and comforts me – why we’re doing this in the first place. We have been able to provide for others everything we did not have ourselves: a warm home for the sick children who can’t go to school, enrichment activities, help with studies and hot meals. The evening hours are dedicated to the parents – meetings with psychologists, support groups, mini-vacations and more.

My blessing to us all this Yom HaAtzmaut is this: proportion. I listen to the news on my way to Zichron Menachem. Every morning the country is collapsing, everything is gloomy and hopeless. And tomorrow we segue into the next storm, and again it’s all dark. My recommendation to you is this: Come in to Zichron Menachem for a day, and get a lesson in proportion. You’ll be grateful for what you have, for your health… you’ll see how all the different sectors are working together in a remarkably diverse tapestry, and how giving is simply the best possible action strategy you can adopt.

Chaim and I are up here on stage, but Zichron Menachem is not just Chaim and Miri Ehrental. Thousands of volunteers are the real winners of the Israel Prize tonight. They give up their leisure time to give, or actually, their idea of leisure is giving up their time for others.

The real prizewinners are all those, young and old, who are not fazed by visiting these children in hospital. On the contrary. They can’t wait to go and help.

The real prizewinners are the National Service girls who choose to serve with us in a very challenging and demanding environment, often experiencing heart-breaking situations most of us won’t see in a lifetime.

The real prizewinners are those who donate their hair, something they have nurtured for years, just to bring a smile to the face of some other girl they don’t even know.

The real prizewinners are the medical teams that donate their free time to us on our fun trips at home and abroad for the children, and our dear supporters and the heads of our “Friends of” organizations overseas.

Here tonight, Zichron Menachem represents hundreds of other great NGOs and chesed organizations working in Israel – innumerable initiatives of goodness, of people enlisting for others. They are the true Am Yisrael. That even if the spotlight doesn’t pick them up, they’ll still stretch out their hand to a stranger, contribute, help, with no thoughts of any reward.

Our son Menachem is not with us here this evening, but in a certain sense he very much is. Not a day goes by when I don’t think about the silent legacy he left us:

Grow from the pain.

Turn bitter into sweet.

Exchange loss for meaning.

Yom HaAtzmaut Sameach!”

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir are popular Israeli media personalities and World Mizrachi’s shlichim to North America.
A knock on the door.

What does that mean to you? Perhaps a friend coming to visit? A child coming home? A delivery?

For many families in Israel, that simple phrase carries an entirely different meaning, bringing them back to a world of pain, loss and sadness.

For the Golovensitz family, the knock on the door came in July 2017, and their world changed forever.

David Golovensitz, an officer in an elite Golani unit, was killed on active duty in Hebron.

It was an IDF delegation that knocked on the door to break the news to the family.

Their son would never knock on their door again.

David epitomized the best of our youth, constantly searching for ways to contribute to society. Together with his friends, he founded an organization to dispense food to needy families, as well as arranging a cadre of volunteers to dance and add joy at weddings of couples who couldn’t afford a large celebration.

Shimon and Esther, David’s parents, felt that David’s light must continue to shine, so both the weekly food packages and the wedding dancers continue all over the country, the latter group now called “Mesamchei David” (David’s happiness-bringers).

Apart from his social activities, David loved the mitzvah of tefillin, he even requested an extra set of Rabbeinu Tam tefillin for his bar mitzvah. Esther felt she wanted to donate a pair of tefillin to a soldier who could not afford to purchase his own and who would use them daily.

She contacted Yossi Nachshon, who distributes tefillin to soldiers all over Israel, and within weeks, one pair of tefillin became two, 10, 20, hundreds. As word got round about the project in David’s memory, people began donating tefillin.

The Golovensitz family were very surprised to see just how many people had old pairs of tefillin lying around
the house – the uncle or grandfather who passed away, the boy who got them for his bar mitzvah and never wears them...

Imagine, instead of your grandfather’s tefillin sitting in a drawer, an IDF soldier has committed to putting them on every day in memory of that grandfather and in the merit of David Golovensitz.

The response was incredible.

One woman showed up with a pair of tefillin returned to her by the army in 1973 after her brother fell in battle on the Golan Heights; they’d been sitting on a shelf in their original IDF bag for over 40 years! The woman was so excited that a soldier on active duty would be honoring her brother’s memory every single morning. And the recipient soldier, currently serving in a combat unit, was equally inspired by the opportunity to perform such a meaningful mitzvah.

And that’s not all.

The recipient was a lone soldier with no family in Israel, so the family of the fallen soldier from the Yom Kippur War decided to ‘adopt’ him and offer him a warm and hospitable home for his vacations and weekends.

Think about it – this pair of tefillin, left behind by a soldier who gave his life in defense of the State of Israel, has now passed on to a soldier who left his home and family behind to dedicate his life to that same purpose, the defense of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.

Every pair of Tefillin has a story that needs to be told.

And every Israeli soldier, doing his part to protect us all, deserves the opportunity to wear the eternal Jewish symbol of Divine connection and protection.

To date, the Golovensitz’s initiative has repaired hundreds of pairs of tefillin since distributed to IDF soldiers in need.

If you would like to participate in this incredible mitzvah, in memory of Lieutenant David Golovensitz, please contact his father, Shimon, on +972 (0)50 251 2665 or simongolo@gmail.com
For Israel’s 70th birthday, the city of Tel Aviv inaugurated a one-kilometer long path called the Independence Trail, Shvil HaAtzmaut. The idea was modeled on Boston’s famous Freedom Trail and – like that walk – includes many sites significant to our country’s early history. The trail begins in the heart of today’s financial district, at the intersection of Rothschild Boulevard and Herzl Street. The names of the streets are significant: Herzl was the visionary and Rothschild was the banker. Ideas and dreams may drive innovation but without the money man, you won’t get far! This was the core of the Achuzat Bayit neighborhood, the seed from which Tel Aviv grew. Achuzat Bayit was founded in 1909 by 66 families, and eventually adopted the name Tel Aviv, a reference to a site in the book of Ezekiel but also a play on Herzl’s famous book Altneuland: a tel (an archaeological site) is old, while aviv (spring) is new.

The trail meanders down and around Rothschild Boulevard. One significant site is the house of Akiva Aryeh Weiss, a religious Jew who was the force behind the new neighborhood. He gathered the group of 66 families, laid out the plots and organized the lottery (with the plot numbers written on seashells!) that assigned each area to a family. Imagine the vision it took to lay the plans for a full-fledged neighborhood, with a school, homes and main streets, when all he saw were sand dunes.

Speaking of the school, the trail also passes by the Shalom Tower, a few decades ago the tallest building in the Middle East, today not even the tallest building on its block! The structure that originally stood here, at the center of Achuzat Bayit, was the most important building in the neighborhood, the Gymnasia (Hebrew high school). The importance of Hebrew to the founders of Achuzat Bayit cannot be overemphasized. The rebirth of the Jewish people had to be accompanied by the rebirth of its language and culture. Near the Shalom Tower is the magnificent mosaic fountain created by Nachum Gutman, a child of Achuzat Bayit. It depicts scenes from Jaffa, Tel Aviv’s much older sister, and Tel Aviv itself.

The trail encompasses many other important sites but its last stop is the most significant. This is the modest house at 16 Rothschild Boulevard, formerly the Dizengoff family home, today known as Independence Hall. Meir and Zina Dizengoff were among the first families of Achuzat Bayit. Meir became Mayor of Tel Aviv in 1911, and until his death in 1936 he was actively involved in building up the city. When his wife died, he donated the main floor of his house to become the Tel Aviv Art Museum and he lived upstairs. But the building is not famous for its art and culture. On May 12th, 1948, a meeting of the Minhelet HaAm, the People’s Council, was held to decide whether to create the Jewish State upon the withdrawal of British forces a few days later. After hours of debate, the faction that wanted to declare the State immediately, rather than waiting, won by a single vote. Invitations were sent out to a ceremony declaring independence to take place two days later, Friday the fifth of the Hebrew month of Iyar, in this building. Why was it held in Tel Aviv in this particular building? Because Jerusalem was under siege and inaccessible to many members of the proto government. The art museum was essentially a bunker, located underground and thus safe from enemy attacks.

There are many other fascinating aspects to the story of the Declaration of Independence. To me though, the most significant one is what I just mentioned: despite the festive atmosphere, Israel was in mortal danger on May 14th. Gush Etzion had just fallen, Jerusalem's Old City was under siege, Jerusalem itself was blockaded, and the Egyptian army was advancing on Tel Aviv. Battles were raging all over the country. There were no guarantees this audacious gamble would work. And yet it did and we are here to tell the tale 72 years later. Although Independence Hall is not mentioned in the Gemara in Brachot, it seems an eminently appropriate place to recite the blessing "sheAsah nes laAvoteinu baMakom haZeh," blessed are You, O G-d, Who performed a miracle for our forefathers in this place!

Shulie Mishkin is an Israel tour guide who specializes in “back to the sources” tours.
Now, when we all appreciate just how important and dear our parents and grandparents are to us, it's time to celebrate their lives in a family legacy book!

Most of us lead ordinary lives and yet, each and every family has a story to tell that is uniquely their own.

Having a book compiled for the benefit of my children and grandchildren and future generations was indeed the right decision, and I would encourage others to do the same before all is forgotten.

Working with Danny Verbov was a great source of joy and at the same time fun. His sensitivity and humor enhanced our working relationship and most importantly resulted in a book that I am truly proud of.

Sandy Collins, London

“... I cannot stop being amazed at how much you really live the story. I could not have chosen a better person to share this phenomenal experience of writing a book...”

Prof. Noah Stern, Jerusalem

“It is the most well-done book I have ever read, in every way. What a masterpiece — the layout, the print, the coloring, the photos... brilliant!”

Sandra Lippy, Ohio, USA

“These untold secrets have monumental significance to me and my family and have had a huge impact on our understanding of my mother's difficult war experiences.”

Evelyn Nuszen, Jerusalem

To discuss your ideas and wishes for a book to immortalize your loved ones and leave a meaningful legacy for your family, please contact Danny Verbov at dannyverbov@gmail.com or call +972-523115682 www.dannyverbov.com
WHAT ARE WE Celebrating?

“Olmert is not a run-of-the-mill criminal, mired in the crime world, but rather a criminal who operated while working in his public roles, for the public good. His talents and the important work he did propelled him to summits – but were used as a platform for the corrupt offenses he engaged in, in parallel to his normative work.” (The Judge’s words at the sentencing of former Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert)

In the past 12 months, we have witnessed our current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, be indicted for bribery. In the last decade in Israel, a former Prime Minister has been convicted and received a jail sentence, many public officials have been accused and in some cases convicted of bribery, major scandals involving different types of abuse have broken out in the highest ranks of the police force and a former Chief Rabbi has been charged and jailed for money laundering. All of these incidents must make us ask what are we celebrating this Yom HaAtzmaut? Is this the State we and our ancestors prayed for on a daily basis? Is this the “Light unto the Nations” we were taught was the point of our existence?

“Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ households, the old men who had seen the first Temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy.” (Ezra 3:12)
This sentence was often quoted by my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yehuda Amital z”l, when explaining the attitudes of the older and younger generations to the State of Israel. Rav Amital would explain that when it came to the State of Israel it was exactly the opposite of what is described in Ezra. In our generation, it is the elderly who shout with joy at the mere fact that Israel was created.

Many years ago, there was an elderly European chassid who worked in a certain yeshiva. He was not raised on the values of Zionism, yet he danced with tremendous fervor on Yom HaAtzmaut. He would say, “After what I went through in Warsaw, how could I not dance?” The younger generation, however, who did not experience the horrors of the Holocaust, are not always as ecstatic when they see the country not living up to its potential.

Nevertheless, I believe one does not have to have experienced the Holocaust to feel great joy and gratitude to the Almighty on Israel’s Independence Day. This can be expressed in three different ways.

On the first level, for the first time in over 2,000 years, the Jewish people have a sovereign government. Israel has taken its place among the community of nations. Jewish men and women now fight in the Israeli Army which is protecting the Jewish people. No longer is our fate determined by other nations and peoples.

Secondly, this Jewish sovereignty is happening in the Land of Israel. The Land promised to our forefather Avraham and the Land Moshe pleaded to enter after guiding the Jewish people through the desert. This sovereignty is not happening in Australia or Uganda but in Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital. Our dream has not just been fulfilled through sovereignty but through sovereignty in a Land that has been in the thoughts and prayers of generations for thousands of years.

Lastly, I believe the creation of the Jewish people created a major shift in the mentality and identity of Jews worldwide. After the Holocaust, when one-third of our people was annihilated, we were downtrodden and embarrassed. Many people expected us to quietly disappear. Yet the exact opposite occurred. Barely three years later, we managed to beat back numerous Arab armies and declare a State of our own. Once again, the Jewish people are proud of who they are. Once again, they stand tall amongst the nations. Still today much of the Jewish pride of so many of us is based on the existence of the Jewish people. We feel tied up with the destiny of this little country, no matter what.

The former Chief Rabbi of Britain, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, put it beautifully while describing his experiences during the Six-Day War as a university student in England: “It was then that an extraordinary thing began to happen. Throughout the university Jews suddenly became visible. Day after day they crowded into the little synagogue in the centre of town. Students and dons who had never before publicly identified as Jews could be found there praying. Others began collecting money. Everyone wanted to help in some way, to express their solidarity, their identification with Israel’s fate. It was some time before we realised that the same phenomenon was repeating itself throughout the world. From the United States to the Soviet Union, Jews were riveted to their television screens and radios, anxious to hear the latest news, involved, on the edge, as if it were their own lives that were at stake. The rest is history. The war was fought and won. It lasted a mere six days, one of the most spectacular victories in modern history. We could celebrate and breathe safely again. Life went back to normal.

But not completely. For I had witnessed something in those days and weeks that didn’t make sense in the rest of my world. It has nothing to do with politics or war or even prayer. It had to do with Jewish identity. Collectively the Jewish people had looked in the mirror and said, We are still Jews. And by that, they meant more than a private declaration of faith, ‘religion’ in the conventional sense of the word. It meant that they felt part of a people, involved in its fate, implicated in its destiny, caught up in its tragedy, exhilarated by its survival. I had felt it. So had every other Jew I knew.”

We are all part of this collective miracle of the Jewish people. Whilst there are things that happen in this remarkable country that leave much room for improvement, we must also remember how much it has achieved in such a short time. So this Yom HaAtzmaut, let us celebrate this incredible and ongoing miracle. Let us continue to pray for the State of Israel, “the first manifestation of the approach of our redemption.” Let us ask G-d to bestow His “light and truth upon its leaders, ministers, and advisors, and grace them with Your good counsel.”

Rabbi Shua Solomon is the Rabbi of Mizrachi Bondi
Is Jewish Independence Relevant For The Rest of the World?

The Jewish people sing G-d’s praises... this is [their] destiny. They recognize the power of G-d’s work and bear witness to the Mighty One, Creator of all... ‘And you are my witnesses, says G-d’ (Yeshayahu 43:9).¹

When arranging his seminal book Orot, Rav Kook chose to open the section entitled “The Jewish People and their Revival” with the above words. By doing so, Rav Kook highlighted that our ultimate mission is to be G-d’s witnesses for all of humanity by bringing the entire world closer to the one true G-d and His values. Throughout this passage, Rav Kook references verses from Yeshayahu 43, in which the redemption of the Jewish people is cast as an event with universal significance. According to Yeshayahu, as channeled by Rav Kook, the Jewish people can only be true witnesses for G-d when they are gathered in redemption and live independently in the Land of Israel.

This idea, however, can be challenged by a crucial question. If our mission is to be a beacon of light for humanity, is not the Diaspora the ideal setting for the Jewish people? In the Diaspora, there are a glass ceiling on the Jewish people’s ability to represent G-d’s full vision to the world at large.² In the Diaspora, there is a glass ceiling on the Jewish people’s ability to represent G-d’s full vision to the world at large.³

In addition, Rav Kook offers another layer of meaning to being G-d’s witnesses. This approach is rooted in an astonishing Midrash, which portrays G-d Himself as raising the stakes of the Jewish people’s status as His witnesses: “When you are My witnesses then I am G-d, but if you are not My witnesses then it is as if I am not G-d.”⁴ What is the meaning of this startling and cryptic statement? How can the Jewish people’s behavior impact whether G-d is G-d?

On a basic level, the function of a witness is to accurately and effectively relay information. In this mode, the Jewish people are meant to live in such a fashion that they accurately represent the wisdom and beauty of G-d’s Torah for the world at large. While this can occur to a degree in exile, Rav Kook emphatically argues that the true breadth and depth of G-d’s vision can only be fully modeled when the Jewish people are living as an independent society in the Land of Israel. So many parts of the Torah can be fulfilled only when the Jewish people are living as a redeemed people in their own Land. In the Diaspora, there is a glass ceiling on the Jewish people’s ability to represent G-d’s full vision to the world at large.⁵

In numerous passages, Rav Kook explains that the Jewish people’s relationship with G-d goes beyond the fact that G-d chose them to live according to His Torah. Rather, in a way we cannot possibly understand, G-d Himself is present in the collective “soul” of the Jewish people. Thus, we find Rav Kook writing: “The Jewish people... are not separated from G-d at all, [rather they] are the clothing through which divinity is revealed in this world.”⁶ Similarly, “The light of the Shechina is itself the Jewish people...”⁷ The Jewish people bear witness to G-d not only by modeling His values, but also through their very existence as a nation. Simply by living in accordance with their national character, the Jewish people draw more of the Divine Presence into this world.

We can now understand the universal significance of the Jewish people living as an independent nation in their own Land. When they are scattered, persecuted and unable to live as a nation, G-d is simply less present in this world – “it is as if I am not G-d.” In contrast, when Jewish peoplehood is manifest in the form of a nation in its own Land that lives fully Jewishly, then more of divinity is drawn into the world. In this sense, the State of Israel can truly be “the foundation of G-d’s throne in the world,”⁸ and bring blessings to all of humanity.

¹ See, for example, Orot HaTechiya, piska 5.
² Or at least they are living as a redeemed people in their own Land.
³ This advantage of living in exile is highlighted by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (Nineteen Letters, letter 9; Horeb, 13) and the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Torat Menachem 5743:2, 636).
⁴ See, for example, Orot HaTechiya, piska 5.
⁵ Elsewhere (Ma’amarei HaReiyah p. 150-151), Rav Kook adds that the Jewish people will only have the self-confidence to proudly share their message with the world when they are redeemed.
⁶ Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu, remez 455.
⁷ Orot Yisrael 1:4.
⁸ Ibid 1:8.

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein is a faculty member of Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim and Yeshiva University
“Now that the Cabernet vines have grown older and our knowledge has improved, one can say that the Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve is reaching new heights every year.”

Golan Flam, Winemaker
When the Label Sticks

When we learn from the Torah that effective criticism emphasizes the misdeeds without attaching labels and passing judgment on the person. When Ya’akov Avinu criticized the actions of Shimon and Levi, for example, he was careful to direct his tochacha only to their anger. He did not insult them. He directed his criticism toward their actions.

Labeling children can often result in the children internalizing the message, but with quite disastrous consequences.

Several summers ago a young man came to see me. He was very well dressed and driving an expensive car. He sat down and I asked him a casual question, “How are things going at home?” His answer was anything but casual. “You know, Rabbi, I don’t get along with my parents. It’s my father. He’s so different than I am. He is driven, and I am chilled out. He’s up at five in the morning; he works all day and learns Torah at night. Besides that, he’s involved in a hundred tzeda-kah projects.”

“And, you are...???” I asked.

“Me? I’m a lazy, good-for-nothing bum.”

That was his self-image. Obviously, he had not arrived at it himself—it was a label that someone, perhaps his father, had inadvertently given to him. And, sadly, it stuck. What had happened?

The Key: Moderation

It is interesting to note that character tendencies, especially in their extreme manifestations, often skip a generation — and for good reason. Please allow me to illustrate:

Take the example of a woman who is meticulously neat at home. She spends inordinate amounts of time tidying and making her home immaculate. Her daughter grows up and says to herself, “Mom has no life. All she does is walk around making beds all day. When I get older and have my own home, I’m not going to do that. I’m going to have a cup of coffee in the morning. I’ll relax, and if the house isn’t beautiful, we’ll get it cleaned up in time for Shabbat.” So she grows up and has a messy house.

Now, her daughter, growing up in a messy house and going to visit friends who have beautiful, clean homes, says, “I’m not doing this in my home. I’m going to have a clean house.”

An Inadvertent Message

The young man whose father was so driven was a perfect example of this pattern. This young man’s father grew up poor, and he made up his mind that he was going to work hard until he achieved his financial goals. His son, on the other hand, grew up in relative wealth. Why did he need to wake up early in the morning? His father, however, was understandably upset and frustrated by his son’s lack of focus. The words he spoke to his son were an outpouring of that frustration, “Wake up already, you lazy, good-for-nothing bum.”

The young man heard it for years while his father was trying to wake him in the morning. Unfortunately, he internalized it to such an extent that he used it when introducing himself to me. His father meant well. He was trying to get a message across; he was trying to teach his son zerizut, “get up and do something with your life.” This is a laudable goal, but the message that got delivered was anything but a positive one.

1 Bereishit 49:7, see Rashi and other commentaries.

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Marriage is defined in the English dictionary as: “a legally recognized relationship, established by a civil or religious ceremony, between two people who intend to live together as physically intimate and domestic partners.”

This mundane secular view of marriage is reflected in a narcissistic utilitarian arrangement, a proposition entered into by two people expecting to have all of their needs met, with a “what have you done for me lately?” attitude. If the answer is “not enough,” it’s time to move on to the next partner.

Not surprisingly, marriage around the world is on the decline as materialism is worshipped and the single-minded obsession with wealth, fun and the “easy life” are viewed as each person’s entitlement. Commitment and long-term devotion to a higher calling are passé.

Judaism takes a diametrically opposed approach to this devastating trend as evidenced by the Hebrew word for marriage: נישואין.

Nishuim is replete with profound truths and messages that teach us the purpose, objectives and deeper meaning of marriage.

The leading definition for marriage in the Hebrew dictionary is to “elevate.” We are charged by G-d to take the physical and material world, and sanctify it. We are elevated when we strive to restore our wholeness by re-connecting with our soulmate and becoming one again.

Despite the highest standards of living, happiness seems to elude the masses. When happiness is pursued through external objects and thrills, it dissipates quickly and leaves an emptiness and overall sense of futility.

With common spiritual goals, couples are strengthened. They uncover the true meaning of life while they grapple with their inner need to be the best that they can be. Each home is a satellite of holiness that brings us one step further to restoring G-d’s Unity, of which we are an integral part. Elevating marriage occurs when we buck the trend of focusing on me and constant reflections of “am I getting enough in this relationship?” by substituting questions like: “am I giving enough to my partner” and “am I doing acts of kindness for my partner that bring him/her happiness and contentment?”

Another definition of נישואין is “to carry.” Carrying something can be difficult and burdensome, even causing suffering at times.

It is important for couples to be aware that when difficulties arise in marriage, it is a G-d-sent opportunity to stretch one’s limits and transform that weakness in ourselves or in our marriage. It is a stepping stone to further our resolve and commitment to one another and to be actively engaged in choosing to be together rather than being on auto-pilot. This generates a very dynamic and invigorating component into the marriage.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a very lackadaisical attitude today toward long-term commitment and the will to work hard to solve marital problems through compromise and soul searching. Marriage is a work in progress with a lifetime contract!

As much as we try to marry people who are similar to us, we are each a world unto ourselves, with our own family backgrounds, personality traits, feelings and opinions. Merging these two worlds is a monumental, never-ending but gratifying endeavor. It requires great humility, an indispensable trait in healthy loving marriages. We have two eyes; one for seeing the good in our partners and the other to see our flaws and commit to changing them and growing as a result. Rav Avraham Twerski notes that the letters ש and נ are interchangeable, thus teaching that true שמחה and inner satisfaction are achieved by שגא and self-transformation.

This mundane secular view of marriage also connotes forgiveness; by forgiving ourselves for past mistakes and forgiving our partner for unintentional hurts we will forge the path to love, acceptance and unity.

Finally, there is a wonderful expression related to the passing of time: “don’t count your days; make your days count!”

Making marriage count is an awesome achievement requiring total commitment and complete investment of self as a giver and as someone who wants to bring out the best in his or her partner. When we do this, we are on the road to the ultimate commandment of "וְנִשַׁתֵּם לְנוֹכַר וְלֹא תְגַלֶּיתָם לְבֵית נָכָר" “and you shall teach your children.” By growing and developing ourselves and our marriages with these spiritual messages in the forefront of our consciousness, we are imparting the greatest legacy to our children and their children until the end of time.

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I know people who are perfectionists. They must do everything right. An error is intolerable and a failure is catastrophic. This becomes a way of life. They judge themselves very harshly, and because of this, they think others judge them harshly too.

What baffles me is, how can a person say the al chet 10 times on Yom Kippur and still think a human being can be perfect? G-d provided Teshuva precisely because human beings are fallible.

Of course it is wrong to sin, but “There is no tzaddik on earth who does only good and never sins” (Kohelet 7:20). If one has made a mistake, one should do sincere teshuva, but not see oneself as a failure because one erred.

Perfectionism is doomed to fail because no human being can be perfect.

Perfectionism may be the result of being put down by parents, or by parents having unrealistic expectations of their children. Or one suffering from low self-esteem from whatever cause may try to redeem himself by being perfect. Inasmuch as this is impossible, his low self-esteem is worsened when he makes a mistake.

Perfectionists are often extremists. Ironically, a perfectionist may resign himself to doing nothing, because if you do nothing, you can’t fail. They may never realize their potential because they cannot risk failing at anything.

Or, a perfectionist may become an overachiever, in the effort to prove to parents and self that one is a worthy human being.

There is a difference between a high-achiever and an overachiever. The model of a high achiever is a nursing mother, who has milk to give and can become very uncomfortable if the child does not nurse. She is relieved when the child nurses, but her milk is replenished, she is again uncomfortable.

I had teachers who loved to teach. They had knowledge and wished to impart it to others. A high-achiever is driven by the urge to perform and produce, because one has the potential to do so.

Not so the overachiever, who is driven to prove to others that he is not a failure, or to compensate for an unwarranted self-esteem. The overachiever is never satisfied. He can exhaust himself in the futile search for perfection.

We should regret our sins, and do a thorough soul-searching for why and how it was possible for us to sin. We ask G-d every morning for His protection. “Do not bring us to the hands of error, not to the hands of transgression and sin.” We are assured that if we try our utmost, He will assist us in avoiding error and sin.

Progress, not perfection, is the key.
One of the most difficult moments for Jews who live in the State of Israel is the transition from the sadness of Israel’s Remembrance Day, Yom HaZikaron, to the joy of Yom HaAtzmaut, Israel Independence Day, which begins immediately after.

As the memorial sirens sound on Yom HaZikaron, some find it difficult not to focus on specific names and faces. Who doesn’t have a personal connection with the heroes? They are the children, parents, siblings, cousins, neighbors, and role models of an entire population. Each face, each individual, irreplaceable and unforgettable.

Others try very hard not to attach any names to the pain over the murdered soldiers and citizens, or of their acquaintances and loved ones who continue to live in the hole in the hearts of the living. Each one is a complete world, each deserves recognition and a salute of pain and gratitude, and among the fallen are the unnamed Holocaust survivors who gave everything they had, their heart, soul and life, for us to live in our land.

One might wonder, what is the reason for juxtaposing the unthinkable pain of Yom HaZikaron’s past and Yom HaAtzmaut’s future? As a resident of Gush Etzion, the question hits close to home, but may also provide a glimmer of an answer. Historically, Yom HaZikaron is commemorated immediately prior to Yom HaAtzmaut as that is the day when in 1948, on the eve of Israel’s Declaration of Independence, the Etzion Bloc of settlements fell. The more than 100 surviving defenders of Kibbutz Kfar Etzion, who surrendered under the promise they would only be taken captive and not killed, were all brutally murdered immediately after putting down their weapons.

The courageous defense of Gush Etzion over more than six months prior to its surrender protected the southern road to Jerusalem, much of it being paved with the blood of Jews defending their historic Judea.

The news of Etzion’s fall reached Ben-Gurion as he put the finishing touches on the declaration, but his powerful words regarding the importance of the price these heroes paid still remains potent:

“I can think of no battle in the annals of the Israel Defense Forces which was more magnificent, more tragic or more heroic than the struggle for Gush Etzion...If there exists a Jewish Jerusalem, our foremost thanks go to the defenders of Gush Etzion.”

The “impossible” dream of Jewish return becomes a possibility and ultimately a reality due to the heroes whose memory we must never forget. They are the reason we can celebrate a Divinely miraculous reality a day later.

Yet Yom HaZikaron is much more than a memorial of the past. Zikaron is much more than recall, but an actual call to action. It is a charge to approach the future based on events of the past and to increase their meaning through the deeds we perform as a result of those events.1

Yom HaZikaron should not only be for remembering but a day on which we charge ourselves to give greater meaning to their sacrifice, by committing to appreciate and improve our Land and State.

One day a year, we put aside all our complaints about the State, focusing on the Divine miracles that founded it and sustain it while remembering the heroic partners whose lives were given for ours. The day beforehand we remind ourselves that their heroic death is a charge for us to live a heroic life, and increase Torah, chesed, agriculture, medicine, hi-tech, etc. in our Jewish State.

Island soil might have fewer natural resources than some other Middle Eastern countries, but the price of oil as we currently see comes and goes, while our soil is priceless. The soil is not only the spiritually rich land on earth, but is sanctified by the holy individuals buried in its dirt.

In Judaism, death is not the end, but a temporary status in which an individual’s body separates from its soul and awaits a future moment of reunification; as the Maharal explains, burial is essentially an act of planting for future growth... and what better place to plant than in the holy soil of the Land of Israel.

The transition from remembering the fallen and celebrating the past and present with tefillot for the future, is extremely difficult, but it is impossible to celebrate the dream we live without giving credit to the ‘planted,’ and in our Zikaron of them, we commit to act in a manner that will give more reasons for growth and celebration.

1 See Siftei Chaim Rosh Hashanah based on Rashi Bereishit 8:1.

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Go Up and Barbecue!

Aliyah

One of the miracles of the State of Israel is the immigration of millions of Jews from around the world to their ancestral homeland. We call this immigration “aliyah,” from the root עליות – “to go up, ascend.”

This concept was first used in the Torah in describing travel from Egypt to Israel, later to describe the return of Jews from Babylon to Israel, and today all immigration to Israel is known as aliyah. When a person is called for a reading of the Torah, it is also called an aliyah because they go “up” to the platform where the Torah is read – the bimah (which is unrelated to the similar-sounding word bamah, which meant “high place” in Biblical Hebrew, and “stage” in Modern Hebrew. Bimah entered Hebrew from Greek.)

The root progressed through a number of meanings, each giving us familiar words in Hebrew. From “going up” it took on the sense of “sprang up, shot forth” – which provided the Hebrew word for “leaf” – aleh, עלה.

The next sense is more metaphorical – “to rise, surpass, excel.” This may be familiar from the Esht Chayil song, originally from Proverbs, where the woman of valor is praised, “Many women have excelled, but you surpassed them (alit) all” – wedge mounted up on a hill is greater than others (Proverbs 31:29).

This sense is used commonly today in the word meluhah, מעלה – “excellent.”

And in post-biblical Hebrew, we find a newer meaning – “was reckoned, counted in, considered.” This is a development from the previous meaning since something that excelled would be counted in and considered. And because the price of something is how it is reckoned or considered, we get to the meaning “to cost.” So when we ask how much an item costs, we say, “Kama ze oleh?” And while the cost of living here might be expensive at times, the value is – priceless!

Mangal

One of the most widespread symbols of Yom HaAtzmaut, perhaps even competing with the flag, is the mangal, מגל – Israel’s barbecue. What is a mangal – and where does the word come from?

The word comes from Turkish, where they still call a portable stove a mangal. In Ottoman Turkey, the mangal was primarily used for heat, and cooking over it was a secondary function. Other regions under Ottoman rule also borrowed the word, and so we find in other regional languages that mangal means “charcoal.”

In modern Hebrew, mangal came to mean almost exclusively a stove for grilling and now refers also to the barbecuing event itself.

Where did the Turks get this word from? According to an article by Amnon Shapiro of the Hebrew Language Academy, the Turks borrowed it from the Arabic word munkal (מענקל), meaning stoves. The Arabic word comes from a root meaning “transport, transmit.” And this reflects the portable nature of the mangal.

That same Arabic root is the source of the Hebrew word nagla, נגל – which originally meant “load” (as in donkey-load) and took on the meaning “round” or “trip” in Modern Israeli slang. Another word deriving from the same root is the game mancala.

This game involves transferring stones around a board.

A biblical Hebrew word that may be cognate with this Arabic root is the word makel, מקשל – meaning “staff” or “walking stick” (it appears far less frequently than the words mateh, מטה, and shevet, שבט, of similar meaning).

The etymology of the word is unclear, and scholars offer many theories. One of them is that it is related to the Arabic root we’ve been discussing. One theory claims this because the stick was used to move animals from place to place, as in Numbers 22:27, רכז את האש כל מגל, “and he struck the donkey with his stick.”

Perhaps another verse that could show a connection would be Genesis 32:11, where Jacob says “with my staff I passed over this Jordan” – ובshownו עמה המגל, עשו over this Jordan.

Even though we’ve shown the long journey that mangal took to enter modern Hebrew, there are those that point out a connection to the haftarah read on Yom HaAtzmaut. It begins with this verse: לעזר הנופ והר בריה [נה] צון, “This same day at Nob He shall stand and wave his hand. O mount of Fair Zion! O hill of Jerusalem!” (Isaiah 10:32)

As anyone who has seen Israelis attending to a mangal can attest, standing and waving hands is a central part of the ceremony!

David Curwin is a writer living in Efrat, and the author of the Balashon blog, balashon.com
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