



Sowing in Tears, Reaping with Joy

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 eliciting memorial day to the immensely joyous celebration of a nation returning to its homeland and establishing a Jewish State?

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.

Israeli 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 richest 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. merit.

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

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