



How We Know

Many 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* punishments¹ 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.² His words have been fulfilled in our times with Jews returning from more than 102 different countries!

*Geonim*³ and *Rishonim*⁴ 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 reality⁵ 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.⁶ These scenes and others like them are the daily reality in the State of Israel. The Midrash Tanchuma⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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).

9 Sanhedrin 98a.

10 *Igrot HaReiya* 3:155.

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Bnot Tzelofchad Style



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 nigarah*) and not be able to present G-d’s offering at the right time **among the Children of Israel?**”¹ Their argument is not based on their appetite for a delicious Paschal lamb dinner. Rather, they are unsettled by their absence from the most significant national ceremony – the sacrifice and celebratory feast of the *Korban Pesach*, signifying the birth of the nation upon our miraculous salvation on the eve of Exodus from Egypt!²

Chazal debate³ the identity of these righteous impure people. According to Rabbi Akiva, they are Mishael and Eltzafan, Moshe Rabbenu’s first cousins, the two *levi'im* implored by Moshe to remove the corpses of Nadav and Avihu from the *Mishkan*, and thereby became defiled. The *levi'im*, who were recently chosen to represent *Bnei Yisrael* in the Mikdash and assist with sacrificial worship,

cannot fathom not participating with the people. G-d concedes, and assures them that the national celebration of the Pesach sacrifice may be celebrated exactly a month later in a state of purity (*Pesach Sheini*).

Perhaps their argument serves as a basis for the five daughters of Tzelofchad to approach Moshe Rabbeinu 39 years later: “Why should our father’s name be lost out (*lamah yigara*) from **among his family** because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father’s brothers.”⁴ Just as the impure members of Israel did not want to “lose out” on the Pesach ceremony celebrating historical-national identity, so 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*,” “*Vatikravna*”) 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.⁵ 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 Shavuot⁶ 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. merit.

1 Bamidbar 9:7.

2 See Ramban, Bamidbar 9:1 regarding the importance of commemorating our national independence.

3 Sukkah 25a-b.

4 Bamidbar 27:4.

5 See Sefat Emet, Chanukah 1880, alluding to the creation of a Pesach-like holiday.

6 Devarim 26: 5-11.

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