



## From Yom HaShoah to Yom HaAtzmaut: Appreciating our Abilities

Every year, upon the completion of *Ma'ariv* on Yom HaAtzmaut eve, a moment before the celebrations and performances, I rush up onto the stage and say the Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel and a few personal words of my own on the importance of the day. I am always moved to hear 40,000 participants answer “Amen!” Many of them would not otherwise be exposed to this prayer and to the religious meaning of this day. We all sing *Hatikvah* and only afterwards do the performances begin.

As a child in Tel Aviv, I remember asking my father, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, “What does Yom HaAtzmaut mean to you? What do you feel on this day?” My father answered, “I know that people are busy with the question: *Hallel* with a *bracha* or *Hallel* without a *bracha* – but it’s not relevant. Of course this is a *halachic* question that needs to be dealt with, but when they focus solely on this, the askers are mistaken and lose the *neschama* of Yom HaAtzmaut and the reason for giving thanks.”

The fact that Yom HaShoah is a week before Yom HaAtzmaut adds so much meaning and value to both of those days. Because when one knows where one comes from, one knows how to appreciate one’s abilities, and with them, to forge the path ahead.

This is a day of thanksgiving. This is a day when we stand up and say to G-d: You’ve returned us, and *malchut Yisrael* has returned to its rightful place. We’ve merited to return to the Land

and institute a government, establish *Beit Yisrael*. There are many things still to correct. For example, many Jews do not yet recognize the Hand of G-d that returned us to our Land. But for one day a year, we can stop and see the light. It’s not a cup half-full – it’s much more than that! Let us see the bigger picture, and say two precious, heartfelt words to G-d: “Thank You.”

**““““ The Jewish nation has gone through difficult times... On our way to independence, we have passed through all of these trials and more**

The Jewish nation has gone through difficult times. Times of imprisonment. Times of suffering. Times Jews were expelled from their homes and into the desert. Only 73 years ago, the Altalena approached the Israeli coast and was refused entry. On our way to independence, we have passed through all of these trials and more.

*Besha’a tova*, we have merited that we are now here, in our Land, in our home. We are here in our country, and we praise G-d who has stood and stands by us. We praise G-d who returned us to the Land of our forefathers, and we pray and ask: “Until now You have helped us and You have not relinquished us, our G-d. But now our request, our prayer,

is before You.” We praise Him for what we have. We express so much gratitude because there is so much to be thankful for. But we also ask G-d: “We want to praise You from *Har HaBayit*. We want to praise You from the rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*.” Just as we have been fortunate to reach these moments, so too may we merit a full redemption and a rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash* speedily in our days, *Amen*.

Let us pray that G-d will give Israel’s leaders guidance; that He aid all the IDF soldiers, the security forces, and the medical personnel - that they should succeed in their endeavors and return healthy and safely to their families. Let us pray that we should feel the Jewish atmosphere in our Jewish country, and experience and appreciate the Divine gift of allowing us to return home to the Land of our forefathers in our generation. May Israel grow and succeed, may the current situation only get better soon and may there be goodness, joy and peace for all the inhabitants of this Land. *Am Yisrael Chai!*

**Rabbi David Lau** is the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel.