



THE INDEPENDENCE OF INTERDEPENDENCE

Yom HaAtzmaut is unparalleled in the annals of history, constituting a remarkable demonstration of the eternal uniqueness of the Jewish nation and our centrality within world history. The root of the word עֲצֻמָּאוּת first appears in Bereishit (2:23–24), during which G-d fashions the world's first two human beings and they become aware of each other's existence for the very first time:

And the man said, “This one is bone of my bone (עֵצָם מֵעֵצָמִי) and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman, for from man she is taken.” Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they shall be as one flesh.

These two verses tell a very curious, even paradoxical story. On the one hand, it is the story of the creation of Adam and Eve, each of whom is endowed with their own individual personhood. Yet, at this moment of initial independence, Adam recognizes they are of the same flesh and bone, and his duty requires him to “cling to his wife.” These two human beings understand their independent individuality, yet, at the very same moment, also intuit the urgent, primal need for relationships and interdependence.

What causes Adam and Eve to forgo their individual independence in favor of marriage?

While the survival of every being is dependent on something or someone else, the greatest expression of independence is the *choice* of who and what we want to depend on. This act of free will

is manifest in who we choose as a partner in marriage. Here it becomes clear that instead of being “in dependence,” to be independent is to choose the right people on whom to depend.

This tension lies at the heart of the Hebrew term עֲצֻמָּאוּת. The definition of independence is as true for the nation as it is for the individual. For one glorious moment in 1948, the Jewish nation declared national self-determination, permanently closing the disastrous chapter of Jewish powerlessness. While remembering when we were strangers in different times, no longer would Jewish blood be considered “cheap,” and no longer would Jews across the world depend upon the precarious benevolence of other host nations.

While this is of course an incredible, miraculous achievement, it is but the beginning of an entirely new set of challenges. Now that we are autonomous, what kind of country will the State of Israel become? Who shall be our friends? For which principles shall we fight? Which cultural influences should we promote, and what kind of culture will we export to the community of nations? Achieving independence means summoning the strength to fully face up to the challenges of interdependence, to recognize our role within the international web of relationships. This is a lesson that must be internalized by all supporters, defenders and citizens of the Jewish State.

Of course, Yom HaAtzmaut will always be a moment of great celebration – but we owe it to ourselves to preserve it as a moment of introspection. Freedom

and independence (both individual and national) are two of the greatest gifts, yet they are only a means to a greater end.

In taking note of the element of strength reflected by the root עֲצֻמָּה or עֲצֻמוֹת within the word עֲצֻמָּאוּת, we reach a deeper understanding of the true essence of independence. Through internalizing our responsibilities as an independent sovereign state interacting with others, we can legitimately strive towards a position of strength and self-reliance, the likes of which our ancestors could only dream about.

It is up to us to take the raw materials represented by the blended root meanings of the Hebrew term עֲצֻמָּאוּת – bone, essence, core, strength, force – and fashion them together into a harmonious independent society worthy of the Jewish nation. Through doing so, we transform the State of Israel into a model of goodness and justice for the entire world. It is this vision, this striving towards ethical excellence, that is truly worthy of the eternal people, and that underlies the unmistakable joy and exuberance expressed far and wide on Yom HaAtzmaut, Israel's Day of Independence.

Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy is the Co-Founder of Israel Impact Partners, working with philanthropists to optimize and scale up impact in the non-profit sector. He was previously CEO of Mosaic United and Dean of Moriah College.



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