

David M. Weinberg



Truly at Home

Yom HaAtzmaut is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of “home” in grand historical perspective; to assess the modern Jewish, Zionist and democratic home in the State of Israel. That perspective inevitably begins with the fact that, until 73 years ago and for the last 2,000 years, the Jewish people had no national home. Instead, it suffered Diaspora, dispersion, degradation and disaffiliation, even near-extirmination. Alas, attempts to annihilate the Jewish people in Israel and to persecute them abroad continue apace, but the People of Israel are no longer defenseless.

Despite the many current and looming challenges, Israel’s dramatic drive to succeed in all aspects of life continues relentlessly, with spectacular results: outstanding science and top-notch technology; excellent doctors and (despite acute deficiencies) first-class health care; high levels of Torah study; vibrant democracy, and a constantly expanding world of diplomatic ties – even with Arab countries.

Israel boasts a strong currency; massive foreign investment; innovative water desalination and natural gas solutions; multiple humanitarian commitments abroad; continuing (although slow) aliyah and immigrant absorption, and most of all, sensational youth activism and undimmed patriotism. Indeed, the polls affirm the optimism and patriotism of Israelis. Most Israelis (63%) believe that the country’s successes outweigh its failures. Only 8% believe the situation is the other way around, while 22% say that failures and successes are equal.

Israel also is, more than ever, a nation of believers. A renaissance of Jewish identity is underway. There is a reawakening

which can be heard in popular music based on traditional prayer, seen in outdoor *kabbalat* Shabbat celebrations in public entertainment spaces, and felt in all-night Torah study sessions on Shavuot – even in Tel Aviv.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 80% of secular Israelis “believe in the G-d of Israel.” Eighty percent! In my view, that means that 80% (of the 40% of Israelis who define themselves as secular) are not truly secular. They believe in the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov. They believe in Divine Providence over the Jewish people and a Divine presence in Jewish history. When you add to the mix the 20% of Israelis who call themselves *dati* (religious) and *charedi* (ultra-orthodox), and the 40% of Israelis who describe themselves as *dati-masorti* or *masorti* (religious-traditional or traditional), this means that Israel is a deeply believing nation.

In other words, while not everybody practices traditional Judaism, just about everybody in Israel religiously senses that this nation is on a grand meta-historic journey which is connected to spiritual powers and moral heritage invested in the Jewish people. These assets have sustained Jews through the centuries and brought them home to the Land of Israel.

This belief in the power of Jewish history animated by ancient faith explains much about Israel today. It explains the willingness of Israelis to sacrifice for independence. It underlies the willingness of Israelis to use military force to defend the country, especially against genocidal enemies like Iran. It explains their drive to succeed in the arts and sciences and to share their advances with the world. It explains their resolute

attachment to Yerushalayim. It explains why Israeli leaders sometimes stubbornly refuse to accept rational calculations of diplomatic cost/benefit that are politely or impolitely impressed on them by allies. It explains why Israelis can shake off the bleak and sinister prognostications sometimes advanced by both friends and enemies. It explains why those who consider history only in terms of national politics and international relations underestimate or misjudge Israel. They apply temporal yardsticks of measurement to Israel but fail to fathom the processes at work behind the curtain of current affairs. They are confused by Israel’s deep sense of historical mission, which blurs the lines between imagination and reality, between the possible and the feasible. They fail to understand that Israel is guided by an astral calculus that is not always perceptible. As Ambassador Rabbi Dr. Ya’akov Herzog (1921–1972) said, “In the sweep of history, there have been greater battles, larger transfers and emigrations of populations, bigger construction and technological projects, more eminently impressive displays of might. So, in secular terms, Israel is not that big a deal... But as vindication of spirit, as validation of tenacious faith, as proof of the Jewish people’s right of return to its indigenous home, Israel’s establishment and advancement is a very big deal indeed.”

The Jewish people has come home, in every sense of the word.

David M. Weinberg is vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, jiss.org.il. His personal site is davidmweinberg.com.



A member of the Mizrahi Speakers Bureau
mizrachi.org/speakers