

Yom Haatzmaut: Israel's Independence Day

Having lived most of my life in the United States, I knew Israel's independence was not something to take for granted, and indeed to be celebrated at every opportunity. Nevertheless, with the pace of life there not focused on Israeli holidays, the ability to celebrate Israel's independence sometimes conflicted with business meetings, kids' activities, and other day-to-day challenges.

I lived in a vibrant Jewish community that held annual community-wide celebrations for Yom Haatzmaut (independence day). But, remember even in a community as rich in opportunities to live a full Jewish life as it was, the attendance at these events struck me as being far from that which the significance of Israel's rebirth warranted.

Living in Israel now, I see something new. Even amid the differences within Israeli society and overall challenges of life in Israel, celebrating Israel's independence is done with a sense of pride, joy and a level of spirit that is simply inspiring.

Beginning at Passover, Israel starts to get decked out in blue and white. Highways are lined with flags. Kites fly bearing the blue and white. Kids sell small flags with plastic clips for your car at major intersections. To celebrate Israel's 60th, I adorned my car with 60 flags to the delight of many passers-by. Newspaper ads become patriotic, and weekend papers have free Israeli flag inserts.

The celebration in my new community is emotional. It leaves a lump in my throat from the feeling of pride and awe at being able to live in Israel, to raise children here, and to build for our future. Fireworks are seen throughout the country,

just as on July 4 in the U.S. Other than religious holidays, when work is prohibited, this may be the only day that no newspapers are printed.

Family celebrations are varied, but many involve finding a patch of grass somewhere and setting up a portable barbeque to picnic into the night. We add special Scriptural passages to our daily prayers, offering God special thanks for this milestone.

In the United States, where it was often a challenge to carve out time to acknowledge the profound prophetic and nationalist significance of Israel's rebirth, much less actually celebrate the holiday, it strikes me that there are no formal rituals associated with celebrating Israel's independence.

So I started wondering, what could be done after six and a half decades to mark Israel's independence in a way that is perhaps more universal; if even to facilitate a five-minute pause in the life of someone overseas who wants to celebrate Israel's independence? What about the person for whom the pace of life is more about the daily grind rather than the festive nature we have in Israel?

Thinking about the meaning of what we are celebrating, and the message I hope my children will take with them forever, I adapted an element of the Passover Seder—"Dayeinu"—when we sing praise to God for all the wondrous things He's done for us.

I hope these thoughts help bring you to a place of reflection and appreciation as we mark Israel's 65th anniversary this week, and I look forward to others sharing the ways they celebrate or commemorate Israel's independence, whether on the anniversary of that milestone in 1948, or in general. Please email me at FirstPersonIsrael@.

Yom Haatzmaut Dayeinu

- IF God had only given us Herzl's will to dream, and not given us the Zionist Congresses, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only given us the Zionist Congresses and not given us the 1917 Balfour Declaration affirming the re-establishment of a Jewish home in the Land of Israel, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only given us the Balfour Declaration and not created the spark for early waves of aliyah to dry the swamps, irrigate the land and build our country, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only given us the spark to ignite waves of early aliyah to build our country and not taken us out of the ashes of the Holocaust, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only taken us out of the ashes of the Holocaust and not continued the ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the earth, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only continued the ingathering of the exiles and not given us the 1947 U.N. Partition Vote to create the State of Israel, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only given us the 1947 U.N. Partition Vote and not enabled our victory in the War of Independence and our Declaration of Independence, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only enabled our victory to establish and declare independence, and not restored Jewish sovereignty to the land for the first time in 2000 years, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only restored Jewish sovereignty to the land and not built us a thriving democracy, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only built our democracy and not helped us overcome our enemies' attempts to destroy us in 1956, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1982, 2006 and even today, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*

- IF God had only helped us overcome our enemies' attempts to destroy us and not returned the Jews of Ethiopia to their homeland, rescuing black Africans from slavery in Africa to freedom, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only returned the Jews of Ethiopia to their homeland and not enabled the aliyah of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only enabled the aliyah of Soviet Jews and not reunified our Holy City, Jerusalem, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had reunified Jerusalem and not made Israel a world leader in medical, biotech and high tech fields—a modern light unto the nations—it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only made Israel a light unto the nations, and not continued to bless Israel with His promise to build Jewish life for eternity, it would have been enough. *Dayeinu.*
- IF God had only blessed Israel with His promise, and not given us the blessing of Christians who stand with Israel unconditionally and forever, it would have been enough.

So, let us pause to remember these and many other miracles that God has done for Israel, and that we magnify Him every day just by living as Jews in our homeland or praying for and blessing Israel every day. *Dayeinu.*

Happy Independence Day, Israel.

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