



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Hillel Gold

Friday May 17, 2024 ~ Parsha: Emor

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Thoughts And Feelings Generated By *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* 5784 - Israel Independence Day 2024

I share these thoughts as I composed them on *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, Israel Independence Day. It marks the conclusion of the period from *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day) to today, what has become known in Israel as the secular High Holy Days. From an emotional standpoint, these days mimic the solemnity of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Like everything else that has happened, or marked, or celebrated since October 7, these two days, *Yom HaZikaron*, (on Sunday night and Monday) memorializing the fallen soldiers and citizens murdered in terrorist incidents since the founding of the State, and *Yom HaAtzmaut* (Monday night and Tuesday) have felt different.

Many have opined that in essence, Israel has been observing one long *Yom HaZikaron* since the indescribable and indefensible atrocities of October 7 were perpetrated. There was still a sense of shock when *Hanukkah* rolled around in December a mere two months after the attack. But then came *Purim*, which was muted in its celebration, followed by *Pesach* and the *Seder* (we have only one here, a GREAT reason to make Aliyah!) which included discussions not only of the Exodus from Egypt but of the current day *matzav* (the “situation”, as it is referred to here).

And as the days passed from one to another, and this current week approached, lingering in the back of everyone's minds was the question: how would the realities of today affect *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom HaAtzmaut*. The ceremony on Sunday night was longer and more deeply poignant than I recalled from last year. One speaker asked the rhetorical question, "do we even **need** *Yom HaZikaron* this year when in fact every day since October 7 has been *Yom HaZikaron*?" His answer was yes, by the way.

On Monday night, I went to a large outdoor location, in the shadow of the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, for the transition period between the two days and for the festive *Maariv* (evening) service inaugurating *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*. The assembled group, some 2,000 in number, heard from Sarit Zusman, the mother of Ben, who was a soldier killed in Gaza last December defending Israel. Her moving message articulated the plea that Israeli society remain unified during these difficult and uncertain days.

It is quite a challenge to maintain that unity as Israeli society is divided into two camps. One camp wants the government do everything necessary to bring the hostages home even if it requires the cessation of activity in Gaza (which would lead to the continued existence of Hamas and a potential repeat of October 7, for that is Hamas' stated goal). The other camp wants Israel to bring home the hostages and finish the job in Gaza to ensure that Hamas is destroyed and can never perpetuate harm on Israel – its citizens and its land - ever again. To stop now would be an affront to all the soldiers (and their families) who have given their lives protecting and defending Israel in this war, as cessation without victory would mean they died in vain.

And so, that led me, like many others I am sure, into *Yom HaAtzmaut* with a heavy heart. How does one celebrate this day when so many are bereaved? And if so, how? The congregation of 2,000 gave its answer as we engaged in a spirited and festive davening. *Hallel*, the series of celebratory prayer and psalms recited on many Jewish holidays was joyous and lasted nearly 30 minutes! It was as if the crowd was conveying the message to the world that "you won't stop us, you won't intimidate us,

you won't dictate to us what we know is right and what needs to be done." Later, after the service ended, I went downtown to compare the festivities of this year to last. The crowds were smaller, security was a bit tighter, but the mood remained festive. There were modifications to the communal celebration. There would be no flyovers by the Israeli Air Force as happens every year. Fireworks had been canceled in almost every municipality (for fear of it being a) inappropriate and b) insensitive to those who are suffering PTSD). Large gatherings and barbecues were more limited or simply family events. But, even subdued, the nation expressed its thanks for the 76 years of statehood as year 77 begins today.

The crowd at the service sang the words of *V'he She'amda* from the Passover Haggadah. "In every generation will be those who rise up to destroy you." But it concludes, *V'Hakadosh Barukh Hu matzeelaynu me-yadam* – But the Holy Blessed One will save us from their hands. May the words of *V'he She'amda* (the first half of which has happened) come true and that God grants us the salvation and security that we all desire, hope and continue to pray for.

And now, it's off to make some important decisions.... how many hotdogs and hamburgers to eat later today at the family barbecue?

From Jerusalem...

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Hillel Gold

I'd love to hear from you and get your reactions.... ravhillel@yahoo.com