

'One Nation Under G-d' – For Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israel Independence Day

Eli Lipshitz

Former Shaliach in Washington (2003-2004)

Currently Spokesperson and Head of public Diplomacy at the Embassy of Israel in Canada.



From the very founding of the State of Israel, the question of the significance and meaning of Israel's Day of Independence has been the topic of many books, academic papers and articles, primarily within the framework of religious discourse. Questions such as how the day is to be observed, which special prayers should be added to the daily services and how the new modern holiday fits into the Jewish calendar quickly became topics of discussion and, at times, heated debate amongst leading Rabbis and community figures.

This phenomenon, of trying to create a religious framework for a national celebration, is something that is unique amongst the nations of the world. In any other country, the day signifying national sovereignty or the nation's political independence is a day of national pride celebrated by the citizens or residents of that country, who are proud and thankful for their countries achievements to date. It seems that this is not the case with regard to the Jewish State, the State of Israel.

Any '*Torah Mitzion*' shaliach, when asked what was the busiest and most meaningful time during their tenure in a community, will most probably answer that it was the days and weeks leading up to Yom Ha'Atzmaut. The classes and discussions, the celebrations and ceremonies and finally the festive and special atmosphere during the services in the communities and synagogues. When we think about it, this joyous and meaningful experience is taking place in a foreign country that most probably has their own national day of independence, and yet here we are celebrating Israel's Yom Ha'Atzmaut in our community outside of Israel.

The explanation of this is the fact that Judaism and the Jewish people are, to a certain extent, both a religious and a national identity. This combination allows religious Jews to view the founding and existence of a Jewish state as a miracle worthy of praise to G-d, and allows Jewish citizens of other nation-states to celebrate their own connection to the Jewish State.

On another more fundamental level, the connection to the Land of Israel and the Jewish State is something that seems to be an integral part of the Jewish DNA, beyond our religious or national identity.

Before Zoom became synonymous with the COVID era, a Hungarian animator, named Istavan Banyai, illustrated a wordless children's book titled 'Zoom'. In this book, as the pages turn, the reader zooms out the previous picture and beholds an entirely different perspective of the picture in question until all previous convictions to one's viewpoint are changed. A similar pattern can be seen when looking at Jewish history, especially in our age of conflicting narratives.

Viewing the State of Israel from different starting points in history or from different vantage points around the globe can give different pictures to the story and potentially lead to conflicting identities or sympathies. Possibly, zooming out to a much broader and more collective viewpoint can shed light on the People of Israel's common DNA.

Zooming out to Avraham, we can notice two very significant character traits. First, Avraham's willingness and ability to stand out and be different. In the Torah, he is called *Avraham Ha'Ivri*; our Sages explain that *Ivri* in Hebrew means the opposite side. Avraham is on one side acknowledging a monotheistic belief in G-d, and the rest of the world is on the other side. Avraham is not afraid of being different and he teaches us, his descendants, that belief in what is true and right can withstand any peer pressure and any foreign influences.

Second, Avraham hears a calling of '*Lech Lecha*' – go, leave, move forward to a place that G-d will show you, to the Land of Israel. From this viewpoint, our collective journey to Israel begins.

Throughout the generations, some of us made it to the Promised Land, both physically and metaphorically, and some are still on the move. Avraham teaches us that this journey never ends. Synagogues around the world face the direction of the Promised Land, reminding us that no matter

where we are physically, we are continuously moving forward towards the Land of Israel. Coincidentally or not, our Sages, when expounding the chronological history of the Torah tell us that Avraham Avinu was born in the year 1948 after the creation of the world. In many ways, 1948 was a pivotal year in history. Both a year that the Jewish people began their journey on the stage of history introducing belief in one G-d to the world, as well as the year that the Jewish State began its quest in becoming an '*Ohr La'Goyim*' – A Light Unto the Nations.

As the Jewish people, on a personal and individual level, continue their journey in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu, always hearing the call of 'Lech Lecha', so too, the Jewish people on a national and collective level should contribute to the physical and spiritual strengthening of the State of Israel so that it will in fact become a true beacon of light to the world.

comments: elilip@gmail.com