

Reflection from Rabbi ...

When I reflect back on the times that I have lived in Israel there is nothing more special than Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day and Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. Growing up in The United States of America, I celebrated Memorial Day like many other families. I had off of school, my parents had off of work. It was the perfect opportunity for a family day at the beach and maybe an afternoon barbeque. I spent very little time thinking about those brave men and women who sacrificed their lives to ensure our freedom.

In Israel, Yom Hazikaron is a very different type of day. The entire country observes a solemn day of memory and remembers all the soldiers who have ensured Israel's survival. A few years ago, Talia and I began Yom Hazikaron at Mount Herzl, Israel's national cemetery. Almost every grave was packed with family and friends. There were Israeli youth movements passing out flowers and candles to place on the graves. We read a number of tombstones for the name, the age of the soldier, and when they were killed. When we came to a grave that did not have anyone standing next to it, we placed our flowers and lit the candle. We remained standing there for the entire ceremony. While I stood next to a fallen soldier's grave, I understood the importance of this day. These soldiers should be our heroes. The soldiers of Israel and America ensure our freedom and protect the countries that we so deeply love.

After the rest of a somber day we were present at a Yom Hazikaron-Yom Ha'atzmaut *tekes ma'avar*. The *tekes ma'avar*, which means ceremony of passage, marks the transition from Yom Hazikaron to Yom Ha'atzmaut. At the beginning of the ceremony it was easy to feel the sadness that was present in the room. As the ceremony continued, the sad songs were replaced with faster songs and the children began to dance. People began singing and dancing, putting on blue and white accessories, and waving Israeli flags. And in that moment, the transition from loss to joy was evident to everyone in the room.

As it became night, the sad memories began to disappear and massive celebrations took place throughout the country. The quick change of emotions is startling, but forces everyone in Israel to recognize the link between the soldiers and Israel's independence. As we approach both Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut may we remember those who have fought for Israel's survival, and then immediately after, experience the joy of Israel's existence. It is a special and brilliant decision by the Israeli government to link the emotions of these two days and one that can help us better appreciate these days in our own country as well.

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