

Israeli Independence Day (Yom Ha'atsmaut)

The fifth of Iyar, has been designated the official day for celebrating Israel's independence, for it was on the fifth of Iyar, 5708, that Israel's independence was declared. In Israel it has become both a national and religious holiday.



Yom Ha'atsmaut is significant to virtually all Jews. Secular Jews in Israel mark the importance of an independent Jewish state, while most religious Jews commemorate the establishment of the state as another step in the ultimate redemption, the coming of the Messiah. There is, however, a small minority of Jews who do not celebrate Yom Ha'atsmaut at all. Known in Israel as Haredim, or Ultra-Orthodox Jews, these Jews believe that the modern State of Israel was established prematurely without G-d's blessing. As a result, they refrain as much as possible from matters of the state.

When the fifth of Iyar falls on a Friday or Shabbat, Yom Ha'atsmaut is moved up to a Thursday, to prevent any celebrations leading to desecration of the Shabbat.

In Israel the day preceding Independence Day is called Yom Hazikaron, a day of remembrance for all those who made the supreme sacrifice during the War of Liberation in 1948 and subsequent Israeli wars.

Most Jews generally agree that, even in the absence of a causal connection with the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel so shortly after having emerged from the depths of tragedy, horror and despair represents the great triumph of hope. The opportunity was embraced to build a nation that would reflect the accumulated dreams, ideals and aspirations of the Jewish people for justice, human dignity and peace. Some even envisioned that Israel would restore our status as a holy nation that would shine our light as an example for the rest of humankind. But the constant daily preoccupations and, indeed, the significant challenges of building the nation have caused their weight to be felt and according to some, has for the most part given way to "let us just be *kekhol hagoyim* - like the other nations, that is, without the added pressure of having to be morally better."

Yom Ha'Atsmaut is a day of searching for the meaning of the State of Israel and of exploring the place of Israel in our Jewish identity and in our Jewish vision. For some, Israel represents *reshit tsmihat ge'ulateinu*— the dawning of our redemption—while for others, Israel has no religious or eschatological meaning whatsoever. Let us pray that Israel will take courage and be strengthened to take her rightful place as HaShem has defined in His covenant with the descendants of Israel.