

Seeking Redemptive Peace

Yom HaZikaron Yom HaAtzmaut
5767 2007



By [Rabbi Ellen Lippmann](#), Rabbinic Cabinet

Tonight sirens will sound across Israel calling the nation to a moment of collective reflection and sorrow for [Yom HaZikaron](#), Israel's Memorial Day, When the country was established, Israel's leaders were determined to link Yom HaZikaron to [Yom HaAtzmaut](#), as the sun sets on Yom HaZikaron, Yom HaAtzmaut begins, and slowly, Israelis begin their Independence Day celebrations.

I love [counting the Omer](#). This simple ritual that helps us count from [Pesach](#) to [Shavuot](#)— from freedom to responsibility — grounds me in those intervening weeks, reminding me that while *Pesach* and *Shavuot* are peak moments in our calendar, each and every day, each and every effort, counts. I am struck that the Omer count is the umbrella under which so much else takes place: ordinary days a-plenty, but also most of *Pesach*, [Yom HaShoah](#), *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom HaAtzmaut*.

Throughout these days in which we celebrate freedom, mourn our people's greatest tragedy, remember fallen soldiers and celebrate the independence of the State of Israel, we are also counting, night after night, day after day. As we count, we can imagine the Shoah's victims counting the days to deportation or barely imaginable freedom; the families of fallen Israeli soldiers counting the minutes after hearing the news of their loved one's death; the Israelis of 1948 counting the seconds until they heard the good news of independence.

As we move toward *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom HaAtzmaut* this year, we have so much sorrow to count: The numbers injured and killed in last year's war with Lebanon; the young women harmed in what became the Israeli presidential sex scandal; victims of official corruption; victims of rockets and bombs.

And as we count, we can't ignore the mounting suffering of Palestinians having their homes demolished, watching their olive groves — and livelihoods — uprooted by the route of the security barrier, experiencing lengthy checkpoint waits, struggling with growing poverty, and more. How will we find hope or joy as we count to this year's *Yom HaAtzmaut*?

Significantly, at *Yom HaAtzmaut*, many greet friends and family with the words "*moadim l'simkhah*" (happy season), the greeting traditionally giving during the intermediate days of *Pesach* and *Sukkot*. Expressed at *Yom HaAtzmaut*, it seems to imply that this day — despite much joy — is no full festival, whose appropriate greeting would be *hag sameach* (happy holiday). Further, the traditional response to this *Yom HaAtzmaut* greeting is *l'geulah shleimah* (to a complete redemption) — surely the joy of *Yom HaAtzmaut* cannot be complete until the hoped-for *geulah shleimah* has arrived.

Can it arrive when so much is so wrong in the state we love so well? How many changes would have to take place to bring about that time of true redemption, a time when the dual observances of *Yom HaAtzmaut* and [al Nakba](#) (the Palestinian Catastrophe) are blended into a harmonious end, a joint tale of two independent and secure states?

How many days and nights would we have to count to move from this isolated happy, not-quite-a-festival season, to that longed-for complete redemption? I suggest we let the Omer counting serve as a reminder and a model: Even in our most desperate moments, we must not forget that there is still hope, that there are many who continue to make the enormous effort that peace requires. Perhaps we should begin on *Yom HaAtzmaut* this year, the 5th of [Iyar](#), counting not measures of grain as with the *Omer*, but efforts toward redemptive peace. We can begin by counting from the first day of *Iyar*, [Rosh Hodesh](#) and count – along with our *Omer* – to the 5th day, *Yom HaAtzmaut*:

Count one for the first round of talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas with a second round already planned during the second half of May with Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice.

Count two for [H Res. 143](#) introduced by Congressional Rep. Susan Davis (D- CA), calling on President Bush to appoint a special envoy for Middle East peace in order to return Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table.

Count three for the the Arab League's unanimous endorsement of the Saudi Arabian peace initiative at their March meeting, which proposes a general Arab peace agreement with Israel in exchange for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just this week, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said: "I'm ready to accept the Saudi initiative as a basis for discussions with the Palestinians, together with the Saudis."

Count four for Syrian peace overtures, diplomatic indication that the Syrians themselves are willing to take the first step toward peace with Israel.

And finally, count five for Brit Tzedek, which celebrates its fifth anniversary this month. Five years of hard work and dedicated hearts have made an enormous impact on the Jewish American scene. In 2002, those of us who would seek peace with the Palestinians felt isolated and silenced, but in no small part due to the efforts of Brit Tzedek, we now know that we are part of a growing group of Jewish Americans who have understood that to be pro-peace is to truly be pro-Israel. Congratulations to Brit Tzedek, and to all of us who are involved. *Yeshar koah!*

Surely we can all think of more signs of hope, and keep this count going.
How should we count?

Begin by reading or singing Psalm 122:6-7 in English or Hebrew:

*Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem;
May those who love you be at peace.
May there be peace within your walls,
Equanimity within your enclosures.*

Add this prayer, adapted from [The Book of Blessings](#), by Marcia Falk:

*Nish'al mei-ain ha-shalom
Let us request of the source of peace?*

*For nothing is whole
that is not first rent*

*and out of the torn
we make whole again.*

*May we live with promise
in creation's lap,*

*redemption budding
in our hands.*

Then say, "This is the first (second, third...) night of the count toward *geulah shleimah*, complete redemption in Israel. May redemption bud in my (our) hands."



To make that last phrase real, make a donation to and/or volunteer your time for an organization working for peace.

*Od yavo shalom aleinu
Salaam, aleinu v'al kol ha-olam
Salaam, shalom*

*Peace will yet come to us
Peace: on us and on the entire world
Peace, peace*

Suggestions for Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut:

- Light a yarhtzeit candle (long-burning candle in a glass used for mourning) and hold a minute of silence in honor of Yom HaZikaron at gatherings of friends, family or Brit Tzedek members. End with something celebratory, perhaps sharing memories of positive attachments to Israel.
- Make a call to the Parents' Circle - Families Forum Peace Hotline and/or share the hotline information with friends and family. Given that this group is made up of individuals who have lost loved ones in the conflict and "have chosen to channel their grief into the pursuit of reconciliation and tolerance, rather than to look for a path of revenge and further bloodshed," it is an appropriate way to mark Yom HaZikaron. The hotline offers Americans the chance to call individual Israelis and/or Palestinians. For more information go to: www.hellopeace.net/callusa.htm
- Hold a ceremony between Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut. You might choose to excerpt one or two poems or readings or use the entire [ceremony written by Brit Tzedek Rabbinic Cabinet member Rabbi Rebecca Lillian](#). Be sure to edit the materials to reflect that this year is the 59th anniversary of Israel's independence.
- Participate in community celebrations of Yom HaAtzmaut, including your local "Walk for Israel," wearing Brit Tzedek buttons and t-shirts. Show your community that you stand with them in support of Israel, even though you may have an alternative vision of what it means to be pro-Israel. For more information about acquiring Brit Tzedek paraphernalia, please write to info@btvshalom.org.
- Gather together with a *hevruta* (study partner) or better yet, a group of people, to discuss [Israel's Declaration of Independence](#). Use this time as an opportunity to connect with the ideals of the founders of Israel, to share what those ideals mean to you, and to recommit to fulfilling the dream by supporting efforts in Israel that move it toward justice and peace.
- Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel has created [Masechet Haatzma'ut](#), a Talmudic style commentary on the Declaration of Independence, which can be used to guide such discussions. RHR's discussion questions include: How has this vision of the founders of Israel inspired me? In what ways does it reflect my vision of Israel and in what way is it different from my own? How did the authors of the Declaration envision creating a state that is at one and the same time a Jewish state yet also a state that affords equality to all its citizens? How can we build a state that is both Jewish and democratic? What am I prepared to do over the coming year to help fulfill the vision of a state that is based on freedom, justice and peace, as envisaged by the prophets of Israel?

Please send any additional suggestions you have about commemorating Yom HaZikaron or celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut to Rabbi John Friedman, chair of Brit Tzedek's Rabbinic Cabinet at rabbifriedman@btvshalom.org.

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Rabbi Lippmann was ordained in 1991 by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and also received there the degree of Master of Hebrew Letters. She holds a BA in English Language and Literature from Boston University and an MS in Library Science from Simmons College.

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