

חג העצמאות Chag Ha'atzmaut

Blueprints for the
Jewish Festival of Independence

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Opening thoughts

Planning for Yom Ha'atzmaut is more challenging than many other chagim, because it is a **festival in process**. The State of Israel was only created just over 6 decades ago, and many would argue it is still in creation! This celebration of the establishment of the State of Israel, and of the Jewish People gaining sovereignty in the land of Israel – this festival is still "struggling to be born" (Greenberg). Though certain elements have begun to establish themselves - Yom HaZikaron on the previous night, the announcement of the Israel Prizes for achievement and the Bible Quiz in Israel, community-wide celebrations in the Diaspora – on the whole there is no consensus on what must or should happen throughout Yom Ha'atzmaut, in the Diaspora or in Israel. As a result, planning Yom Ha'atzmaut often seems daunting. We either find ourselves having to invent the wheel every year, or returning to past events that don't always seem to have the resonance and the symbolism that we feel they should.

Rather than starting from scratch, we believe we can greatly benefit from learning about those chagim in our Jewish calendar that found their stable form centuries ago. Are there any aspects of these chagim that can help us when approaching Yom Ha'atzmaut? Can we, in effect, turn Yom Ha'atzmaut into Chag Ha'atzmaut – turn Independence Day into the Jewish Festival of Independence?

This document takes you through three stages.

- An analysis and study of the way in which the chagim embody a central metaphor through three key elements. (Many thanks to Shalom Orzach and Abbi Adest for their help in this section.)
- An exploration of the way Chag Ha'atzmaut's central metaphor might play out for North American Jewry.
- Applying the key elements of the chagim to Chag Ha'atzmaut programming.

Please keep in touch with us through the site www.chaghaatzmaut.com – all comments are gratefully received.

And in the meantime, here's wishing you success in galvanizing efforts to celebrate Jewish independence in the State of Israel.

B'hatzlacha בהצלחה!

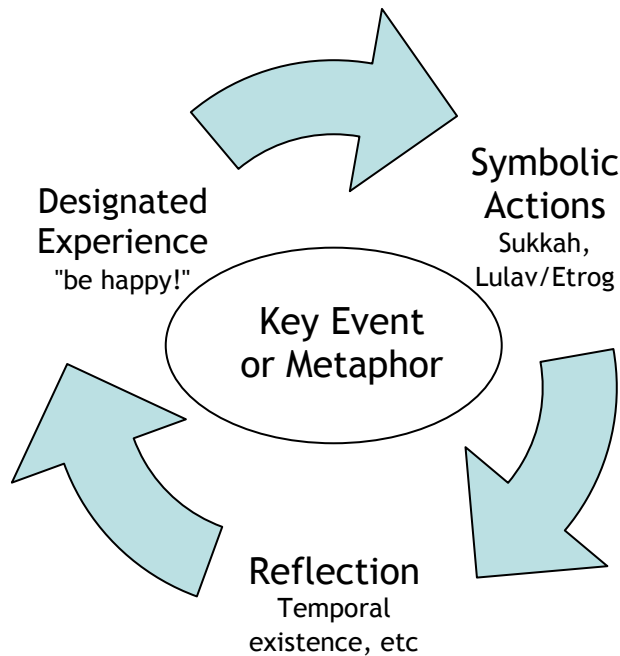
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Key features of Jewish festivals

Jewish holidays and celebrations allow us to instill and enrich Jewish memory and values through collective experiences. These experiences are collective in the literal sense, in that many symbolic actions are performed in public – be it in the home or in the community – but also in the global and temporal sense, in that these festivals take place throughout the world **at the same time**. Our symbolic actions reverberate historically, globally, and communally. For example when we light candles on Chanukah we relive and re-enact the story of lighting the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash while binding family members to each other, connecting the family unit to other Jews who see the candles from the street, and to other Jews around the world who are doing the same activity on the same night – and all this while adding light into a dark world.

From this seeming jumble of symbolism in this and other chagim we can draw out a few common elements, this time using Sukkot as an example:



1. Designated Experience

A fascinating aspect of Jewish celebration is epitomized by the biblical phrase referring to Sukkot: "And you shall be happy" (והיית אך שמח). We are 'legislated' to enter a certain state of mind, to have a particular emotional experience during the festival of Sukkot. As Deuteronomy instructs: "And you will be happy in your holiday" (ושמחת בחגך). This may be a personal instruction to all of us individually, just as we might be advised to shake off a bad mood before going to a wedding. But it also may be seen as an **instruction for the 'planners'**, or 'designers' of the festival itself. 'On Sukkot you shall make sure the flow and form of the chag – the nature of the experience - is one that puts people in a good mood'.

Not all chagim legislate for a joyful experience. While Chanukah is generally experienced as a festival of happiness, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are traditionally referred to in English as "The Days of Awe". Awe can be understood as intense seriousness - not necessarily sadness (these days don't involve mourning as does Tisha B'Av). These chagim are built to enable a particular kind of soul searching.

2. Reflection

Many holiday celebrations also involve some kind of reflection, whether about ourselves or our shared history. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the strongest examples of self reflection, where we look very carefully at ourselves and our behavior over the previous year, both towards our community and even at times towards God.

Historical festivals commemorate an **historical event** while **celebrating and reflecting upon that event's significance** today – for the world, for us as a People, and for me as an individual. This reflection means that the event's significance is never static. It can and should shift in the light of current events. Can we celebrate Purim – a festival commemorating the danger of Jewish annihilation in some Persian land – without casting a glance to Ahmedinijad? After the Second Lebanese War in 2006 could anyone in Northern Israel walk into a Sukkah without contrasting it with a bomb shelter? The beauty of our chagim is that they have developed into a form that allows us to reflect upon the **ongoing significance of an historical event**.

3. Symbolic Actions



Lighting a row of candles is just lighting a row of candles until they meet Chanukah. A unique combination of factors transform this event into a rich living symbol for the Jewish people.

1. Shared/stated historical context
2. Aesthetic event that allows for interpretation and personal connection to breathe within its form
3. Interpretation/elevation through an additional art form

Context

The lighting of the Chanukiah gains meaning through a **shared context**. The 'reason' for lighting the candles, and what they represent, are often taught to newcomers to the community (kids), and are also mentioned in the prayers and songs that accompany the lighting. *Maoz Tzur* in particular grants a broad historical context not only for the candle-lighting, but for Chanukah in the context of other chagim and events befalling the Jewish people through the ages.

Aesthetic form

At the same time, the Chanukiah's resonance is not only to do with its historical context, but also because candle light is a **beautiful** and accessible vehicle for people's dreams. No matter what prayers or songs may be sung, **biting into a doughnut has less resonance than lighting a candle**. The form of the act is important.

Maintaining the magic

On lighting the Chanukiah we do not read *Maoz Tzur*: we sing it. Jewish custom tries hard not to break the poetic with dull prose. History lessons may come during the morning at Hebrew school, and learned tracts may be studied deep into the night, but they must not break the spell, the magic, the **living symbolism** of the lighting of the Chanukiah.

Celebrating Balance

Each of these three core elements of Jewish festivals manifests itself to varying degrees. Each is critical to the observance of Jewish holidays, however large or small a role they play. For example, action without reflection or emotional experience robs ritual of symbolic meaning. Reflection or emotion experience without action can be self-indulgent and solipsistic. Reflection without action or emotional experience can lead to detachment and alienation from the community.

What symbolic actions do we associate with Yom Ha'atzmaut?
 On what might we choose to reflect during Chag Ha'atzmaut?
 What kind of experience would be most appropriate for
 Chag Ha'atzmaut?

Handout 1 – Sukkot

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Deuteronomy 16: 13-15

13: The festival of *Sukkot* - celebrate for yourself seven days, when you harvest your threshing-floor and your wine-press. **14:** You are to rejoice during your festival--- you and your son and your daughter, and your male slave and your female slave, and the Levite and the proselyte, and the orphan and the widow who are in your city. **15:** Seven days are you to be festive for Ad-noy, your G-d, in the place Ad-noy chooses, for Ad-noy, your G-d, will bless you in all your produce and in all your endeavors; and you shall experience pure joy.

דברים פרק טז: י"ג-ט"ו
יג חג הסוכות תעשה לך, שבעת ימים :
 באספך--מגרונך, ומיקבך. **יד** ושמחת,
 בחגך : אתה ובנך ובתך, ועבדך
 ואמתך, והלוי והגר והיתום והאלמנה,
 אשר בשעריך. **טו** שבעת ימים, תחג
 ליהוה אלהיך, במקום, אשר-יבחר
 יהוה : כי יברכך יהוה אלהיך, בכל
 תבואתך ובכל מעשה ידך, והיית, אך
 שמח.

- 1) Who is obligated to rejoice?
- 2) Why do you think the text mentions the different population categories instead of just a generic "Children of Israel"? How is that related to the communal celebrations of Yom Ha'atzmaut?
- 3) How can you be commanded to be happy? Why is there a need for commanding emotions in the first place?

Handout 2 – Purim

Esther 9:20-22, 27-28

20. And Mordecai inscribed these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, **21.** to enjoin them to make the 14th day of the month of Adar and the 15th day thereof, every year, **22.** as the days when the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month that was reversed for them from grief to joy and from mourning to a festive day-to make them days of feasting and joy, and sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor... **28.** And these days shall be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, in every family, every province, and every city, and these days of Purim shall not be revoked from amidst the Jews, and their memory shall not cease from their seed.

אסתר ט: כ"ב, כ"ג, כ"ד-כ"ח
 כ ויכתב מרדכי, את-הדברים האלה; וישלח ספרים אל-כל-היהודים, אשר בכל-מדינות המלך אחשורוש--הקרובים, והרחוקים. כא לקים, עליהם--להיות עשים את יום ארבעה עשר לחדש אדר, ואת יום-חמשה עשר בו: בכל-שנה, ושנה. כב כמים, אשר-נחו בהם היהודים מאיביהם, והחדש אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה, ומאבל ליום טוב; לעשות אותם, ימי משתה ושמחה, ומשלח מנות איש לרעהו, ומתנות לאבנים. כג... והמים האלה נזכרים ונעשים בכל-דור ודור, משפחה ומשפחה, מדינה ומדינה, ועיר ועיר; וימי הפורים האלה, לא יעברו מתוך היהודים, ונזכרם, לא-יסוף מזרעם.

- 1) How are the three elements of Jewish celebration manifested in these passages?
- 2) The Purim holiday was created by a person (Mordechai) as opposed to Pesach, which was commanded by God. Does the source of the holiday affect its essence?
- 3) What is the role of giving in the holiday? How does giving reflect the essence of the holiday? Should this element be incorporated into our Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations? Why?

Tractate Ta'anit 29	מסכת תענית כט:
When [the month of] Adar enters, we increase the joy	משנכנס אדר מרבין בשמחה

- 1) What about the Purim story and holiday should make us feel joyful?
- 2) How do we encourage all members of community to feel the joy of Purim?
- 3) How does the juxtaposition of the Fast of Esther right before the holiday heighten both the joy and the meaning of the holiday? In what way is that like the juxtaposition between Israel's Memorial Day (Yom HaZikaron) and Yom Ha'atzmaut?

Esther 9:12-17

13. And Esther said, "If it please the king, let tomorrow too be granted to the Jews to do as today's decree, and let them hang Haman's ten sons on the gallows." **14.** Now the king ordered that it be done so, and a decree was given in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons. **15.** Now the Jews who were in Shushan assembled on the fourteenth day of Adar as well and they slew in Shushan three hundred men, but upon the spoils they did not lay their hands. **16.** And the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces assembled and protected themselves and had rest from their enemies and slew their foes, seventy-five thousand, but upon the spoil they did not lay their hands

- 1) Does it surprise you that a holiday celebrated with such joy includes (what seems to our eyes) such a morally questionable act?**
- 2) In light of this segment of the story, is celebration invalid/appropriate?**
- 3) Can disagreeing with some choices of Israel's government make Yom Ha'atzmaut an invalid celebration?**

Handout 3 – Pesach

Exodus 12:3-14 (Metsudah Translation)

3: Speak to the entire community of Israel saying, 'On the tenth [day] of this month they shall take--- each man [shall take] a lamb for [his] family, a lamb for each household. **4:** If the household [members] are too few for the [eating of a] lamb then he shall take [a lamb] [together] with his neighbor, close by his house, according to the number of individuals. According to what the person eats shall you make your count regarding the lamb. **5:** A flawless lamb, a yearling male must be in your possession. You may take it from sheep or goats. **6:** You shall hold it in safekeeping until the fourteenth day of this month; they shall slaughter it--- the entire community of Yisrael --- between evenings [in the afternoon]. **7:** They shall take of its blood and place it on the side of the doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they will eat [the lamb]. **8:** They shall eat the meat during this night. It shall be roasted over fire. They shall eat it with matzos and bitter herbs. **9:** You must not eat it half-cooked or boiled in water, but only roasted over fire, its head with its knees and its inner organs. **10:** You must not leave any of it over until morning. Any of it left over until morning must be burned in fire. **11:** This is how you must eat it: with your waist belted, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You must eat it in haste; it is a Pesach-offering to Ad-noy. **12:** I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and I will strike [kill] every first-born in the land of Egypt, from man to beast; and against all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments, I am Ad-noy. **13:** The blood will be for you as a sign on the houses where you are [staying]. I will see the blood and I will pass over you. There will be no plague against you when I strike the land of Egypt. **14:** This day shall be for you a [day of] remembrance. You shall celebrate it as a festival to Ad-noy, throughout your generations. It is an eternal statute that you must celebrate it.

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שמות י"ב:ג-ד

דברו, אל-כל-עדת ישראל לאמר, בעשר, לחדש הזה: ויקחו להם, איש ששה לבית-אבת-ששה לבית. ד ואם-ימעט הבית, מהיות משה--ולקח הוא ושכנו הקרב אל-ביתו, במקסת נפש: איש לפי אכלו, תכסו על-השפה. ה ששה תמים זכר בן-שנה, יהיה לכם; מן-הכבשים ומן-העזים, תקחו. ו והיה לכם למשמרת, עד ארבעה עשר יום לחדש הזה; ושחטו אתו, כל קהל עדת-ישראל--בין הערבים. ז ולקחו, מן-הדם, ונתנו על-שתי המזוזות, ועל-המשקוף--על, הבתים, אשר-יאכלו אתו, בהם. ח ואכלו את-הבשר, בלילה הזה: צלי-אש ומצות, על-מררים יאכלהו. ט אל-תאכלו ממנו נא, ובשל מבשל במים: כי אם-צלי-אש, ראשו על-כרעיו ועל-קרבו. י ולא-תותרו ממנו, עד-בקר; והותר ממנו עד-בקר, באש תשרפו. יא וככה, תאכלו אתו--מתניכם חגרים, נעליכם ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם; ואכלתם אתו בחפזון, פסח הוא ליהנה. יב ועברתי בארץ-מצרים, בלילה הזה, והפיתי כל-בכור בארץ מצרים, מאדם ועד-בהמה; ובכל-אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים, אני יהנה. יג והיה הדם לכם לאת, על הבתים אשר אתם שם, וראיתי את-הדם, ופסחתי עלכם; ולא-יהיה בכם נגף למשחית, בהכתי בארץ מצרים. יד והיה היום הזה לכם לזכרון, וחגגתם אתו חג ליהנה:

1. How are Symbolic Action, Reflection, and Designated Experience-- manifested in this description of the first Passover?
2. Are all the elements equally represented? Are any stronger than another?
3. How does this celebration create/ unify the community?

Exodus 13:8

8: You must tell your son [child] on that day saying, 'Because of this, Hashem did [this] for me when I came out of Egypt.'

שמות י"ג:ח

ח והגדת לבנך, ביום ההוא לאמר: בעבור זה, עשה יהוה לי, בצאתי, ממצרים.

- 1) What is the most significant action in this verse?
- 2) How would you answer this question to your child in the context of Chag Ha'atzmaut?
- 3) What do you imagine should be the place of the family and home in the context of Chag Ha'atzmaut?

The form – embodying the festival

Here we begin to touch on the relationship between the **essence** of the festival, and its **form**. Between that which we **learn about the festival**, and our **physical experience** of it.

For example, we looked at the way in which Purim came about through an instruction from Mordecai. Now we need to address the connection between Mordecai's reference to "feasting and joy", and our experience of fancy-dress, getting drunk, and making a racket during the reading of the *Megillah*... How do these customs – organically or rabbinically developed – affect our experience of Purim?



The body

In his book *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton contrasts inscriptive practices (writing, reading, drawing) with incorporative practices (physically embodied actions) – pointing out the strength of the incorporative. The more the event is embodied, the more likely it will be remembered. As we have seen, Purim is a good story, but its annual embodiment in our communities is what makes it memorable.

Work your way through the three chagim we've assessed, answering the following questions about clothing, food, venue, movement, and people (we've filled in a few examples here, and have placed larger handout versions of the charts at the end of the document – Handouts 6 and 7):

	Purim	Pesach	Sukkot
What do you put on your body?	Costume...		
What do you put in your body?		Matzo...	
Where do you place your body?			Sukkah...
What do you do with your body?			Shake lulav, etrog...
With whom do you do it?		Seder night with the family...	

Questions:

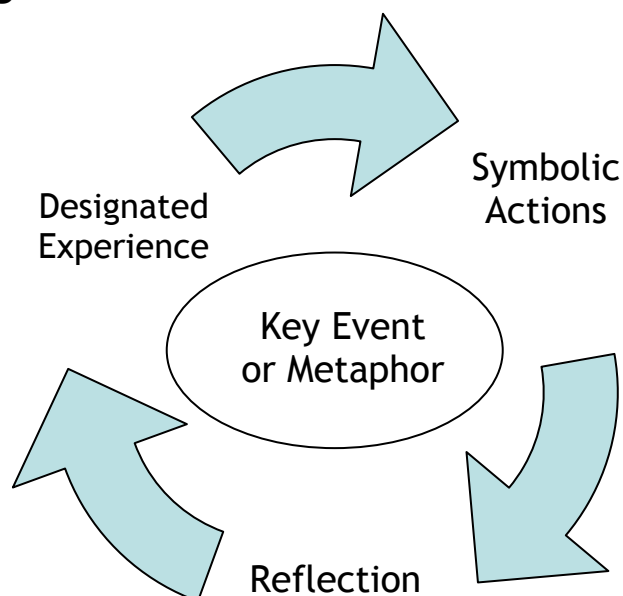
Can you see a connection between the experiences of the body, and the essence of the festival? Does one affect, alter, or symbolize, the other?

Now take three incorporative practices of each chag, and see how each one relates to the essential values of the chag. (Again, we have filled out a few possible examples.)

	Embodied	Relationship to Essence
Purim	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. Shouting over the name of Haman 3. 	The empowerment of the people, and the inversion of expected traditional power structures. ("reversed... from grief to joy...") Esther 9:22
Pesach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ma Nishtana 2. 3. 	And you shall tell your children...
Sukkot	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sitting in Sukkah 2. 3. 	Celebration of fragility under the stars



Designing Chag Ha'atzmaut



"Each holiday has one central metaphor that orchestrates myriad details into one coherent whole." (Greenberg) Around which key event and central metaphor must these elements cohere?

Clearly the key event being marked is the establishment of the State of Israel.

And we would suggest that we take our **central metaphor** from Israel's national anthem:

להיות עם חופשי בארצנו – *Lihiyot Am Chofshi b'Artzenu*
To be a Free People in our own Land

Built into this phrase from the Hatikvah national anthem, we can find a blending of central issues behind the establishment of the State of Israel:

- *Am* – connection to the beliefs, history, and aspirations of the Jewish People
- *Chofshi* – echoes of both historic liberation and responsibility for the future
- *B'Artzenu* – the playing out of Jewish fate in the land of Israel

Handout 4 – להיות עם חופשי בארצנו

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What does *Lihiyot Am Chofshi b'Artzenu* mean to you? We offer five different answers. You can find four of the answers below: The fifth you will have to provide yourself! (These texts are a temporary choice. We need younger voices too, more women, new approaches. If you know of a text that presents a cogent, inspiring, or challenging approach to this question, please let us know so we might include some paragraphs for the next 'edition'.)

a. The New Exodus – Rabbi Irving 'Yitz' Greenberg

The creation of the state was an **act of redemption of biblical stature**. The numbers of Jews involved... dwarf in their total, the number who were redeemed from Egypt. The sweep from the degradation of slavery in Egypt to the heights of Sinai and the Promised Land had a shorter arc than the swing from the depths of Auschwitz to the heights of Jerusalem. If ever such a swing were necessary to reassert the claim that history is the scene where God's love and redemption is manifest, it was in the 1940s, after Auschwitz. The redemption then was nothing less than a renewed witness in a world where all transcendence seemed to have collapsed.

In the case of the State of Israel... the **human role in redemption** is dominant and self-assertive... In this new era, God becomes even more hidden, the circumstances of redemption even more ambiguous. This ambiguity serves a twofold function: It allows those who prefer to interpret the activity as purely secular to do so, and it permits the religious soul to recognize the divine role out of mature understanding, and free will rather than out of "coerced" yielding to divine *force majeure*...

The State of Israel was designed to place **power in the hands of Jews** to shape their own destiny and to affect or even control the lives of others. Creating the state meant that Jews took on major responsibility for saving their own lives... Taking power and the costs of power in human lives and resources have become central concerns of the Jewish people. Inescapably, Jewish hands become dirtied with blood and guilt as they operate in the real world. The classic Jewish self-image – the innocent, sinned-against sufferer whose moral superiority sustained self-respect – is being tested and eroded. Ethical muscles not flexed for centuries are now used; sometimes they are stiff and sore...

It is a basic measure of human dignity that my life is not cheap, that I chose for whom it shall be given, that my family, not my enemies, inherit me. Thus, the power created by the state upholds the covenantal statement of **human dignity and the sacredness of life**.

The assumption of power – and therefore support of the State of Israel – has become central to Jewish life everywhere... After two decades of living vicariously through Israel, American Jewish came to see that they must also take responsibility for Jewish power. As a result, they and other Jews of the world have arrayed themselves for political activity and to influence the foreign policies of their national states in support of Israel. Thus, Galut Judaism is coming to an end – even in Galut!

The Jewish Way, Rabbi Irving Greenberg

b. Purpose and Continuity, not Survival – Rabbi Dow Marmur

The conventional view of contemporary Jewish history sees the Holocaust as a prelude to the creation of the State of Israel. This is the myth of Holocaust and redemption... When United Jewish Appeal missions stop in Auschwitz on their way to Israel and the March of the Living takes Jewish children to Poland for *Yom Ha'Shoah*, Holocaust Memorial Day, and then on to Israel for *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, Israel Independence Day, the message is that the Holocaust is a prelude to Israel and that the two must be understood together.

By contrast, I believe that the Holocaust is the last and most gruesome manifestation of the old paradigm, the one that left Jews to the mercy of others. I view Israel as the celebration of the **new paradigm**, the one that enables Jews to have as much say in their own destiny as any other free people. The conventional view regards Israel as a potential victim and equates anti-Zionism with the old anti-Semitism. My approach celebrates Israel as the victor and views Zionism as the liberation movement of the Jewish people. This means the Holocaust and Israel belong to different categories.

... the old paradigm is dead and the **return to the land**, as formulated by Zionism, is the new paradigm. The difference between the two approaches is fundamental. To view the Holocaust as a prelude to Israel leads to a very different perception of the Jewish state... The former sees Israel as a refuge for persecuted Jews and an avenue of escape in case life becomes difficult in the Diaspora. The latter sees the land of Israel as a place where the Jewish people, at last, can testify to the Jewish faith — just as the Bible has charged us to do, and as we have been unable to do because we have been persecuted. It is the difference between a Judaism based on **survival** and a Judaism based on **purpose and continuity**.

From *Judaism after the Holocaust*, 1994 <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=822>

c. America the Promised Land – Rabbi Jacob Neusner

If ever there was a Promised Land, we Jewish Americans are living in it. Here Jews have flourished, not alone in politics and the economy, but in matters of art, culture, and learning. Jews feel safe and secure here in ways that they do not and cannot in the State of Israel. And they have found an authentically Jewish voice – their own voice – for their vision of themselves...

America, the freest and most open society Jews have ever known, is not only good for the Jews, but better, for the Jews, than the State of Israel... Zionism promised that the Jewish State would be a spiritual center for the Jewish people. But today, in all the Jewish world, who... reads an Israeli book, or looks at an Israeli painting, or goes to an Israeli play, or listens to Israeli music?

Israel is a client state... the State of Israel depends upon a generous America. That's perfectly natural in a world divided between the superpowers. But it does not add up to independence... Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist as well as Orthodox Jews enjoy religious equality in America, but not in the State of Israel... non-Orthodox Judaisms dominate world Jewry, but the State of Israel treats them as heresies...

Jacob Neusner, *Is America the Promised Land for the Jews?*

In the final pages of her book, *The People on the Street*, British-Jewish writer Linda Grant, writes of her grandparents who emigrated to England from Lomza in Poland, and of her friend Samir el Youssef whose parents fled to a Lebanese refugee camp from the Arab village of Bassa in 1948. This section begins after visiting, with Samir, the site of the ruins of Bassa in Northern Israel:

d. I saw us all – Linda Grant

Samir had told me a little story as we walked through the streets of Jerusalem, about how, in his twenties, he had read a novel by Aharon Appelfeld, back in the days when the Palestinian national movement was reading Israeli writing as police readers... to take precious quotes as weapons in its struggle.

The novel was about two boys running through Nazi Europe, escaping for their lives, and at the end of the novel they escape, they board a boat for Palestine. 'And I was relieved. And then I thought, how can you be relieved? They're coming to steal your country!'

This little anecdote, about literature, about its subversive power of empathy, about how listening to the story of the other has its own power, is what remains.

The Zionists made something, they made a country and a story. Everything exists for better or worse, but everything exists, the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote. It exists, that Israel, it cannot be undone.

The village of Bassa no longer exists, it can no more be resurrected than the Jewish life of Lomza. Still, the story of both these places continues, stubbornly persisting, winding through the decades.

We drove back to Tel Aviv. Everything looked different. The night air blew in from the sea. The people walking through the streets, along Ben Yehuda, past the Supersol, the synagogue, Café Mapu, the silversmiths, the falafel café, the convenience stores – all looked more real than they had ever done before, more complicated, more interesting, more human. More frail and more tough, more of everything they were already, and even less capable of being the receptacles for slogans.

I saw my parents there, walking arm in arm, along the beach-front lights. I saw Samir's grandparents alighting from the bus that brought them south from Bassa. I saw Jaffa, I saw Jonah washed up on its shore from the whale's belly. I saw us all.

And I know I was among people who are not so pleasant and whom suffering has not improved. To love them is no easy thing, and so I thought that this is where I belonged, as a person who has come to understand that to love is not a sentimental matter. Love is pain and loss. It must end in grief and mourning because we will close our eyes one day and our beloved will vanish for all eternity.

But only in this city does life for me exist in each of its three dimensions, our human tragedy with all its comic elements. And still it does.

The People on the Streets, Linda Grant 2006

Yom HaZikaron issues

It has been taught: Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says: "Three good gifts were given by God to Israel, all of them acquired through trial and pain. They are: The Torah, The Land of Israel, and the World to Come." Brachot 5a

In the early days of the State, there was Independence Day, but no Memorial Day. *Hey B'Iyyar* was the holiday both to celebrate the 'birthday' of the state, and the day to remember its fallen. As death rates grew, and the pain of such loss became unbearable, it became clear that a country cannot celebrate its existence on the same day as it mourns the price it has paid for it. Hence Yom Hazikaron – Memorial Day – was born as a separate day from Yom Ha'atzmaut.

But not entirely separate. Even in this separation there is a curious bitter-sweet moment as the two days and two contrasting experiences meet when Independence Day kisses Memorial Day goodbye at the 'Transition Ceremony'.

As we contemplate our Atzmaut narrative, and the nature of the experience we wish to instil, we would do well to ponder this relationship between mourning and rejoicing. If there is anything that is constant in the form of Yom Ha'atzmaut, one element that is symbolic, emotional, and consensual, it is this tradition of a close and almost suffocating connection with Yom HaZikaron.



Micha Balf, former Education Shaliach in Greater Washington, once remarked that most American Jews will go to their local Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations as they might go to the wedding of distant relatives they hardly know. Obligation and alienation mix with mild amusement. But if this is the case, then we might suggest that many American Jews attend a Yom HaZikaron ceremony as if visiting a shiva house of honored yet unfamiliar members of the community, bearing witness to another's pain that is palpable but uncommunicable.

How can we ensure that Yom HaZikaron become a day of mourning and reckoning for all of the Jewish People – both in essence, and in practice?

www.chaghaatzmaut.com

Applying 'Chag' to your community

Having addressed our central theme of *Am Chofshi b'Artzenu*, we can now begin to think about the three key elements of chag that we have addressed: Symbolic Action, Reflection, and Designated Experience. How might these play out in our Chag Ha'atzmaut?

A. Planning Symbolic Action

How can we make sure that every event we program through Israel@60 is not only an **example** of a free people living in their own land, but also a **living inspiring symbol** of *Am Chofshi b'Artzenu*? As we noted earlier, we need to make sure that the **context** is shared, that the **form** itself lends itself to symbolism, and that we **don't choke** the event with too much prose...

Example 1: Idan Reichel Project

A community may choose to book the Idan Reichel Project to perform for their main event. How to ensure that the performance is not just an example of great Israeli music, but also a **living symbol of *Am Chofshi b'Artzenu***?

Shared context

Through a variety of events prior to the event we might wish to: examine the nature of the Jewish People in the light of the Ethiopian aliya (*Am*), explore diversity and race in Israel and North America today (*Am chofshi*), address the common and uncommon features of two immigrant societies – Israel and the US (*artzenu*), learn about discrimination and absorption of olim (*chofshi*), and/or explore the musicological background to Reichel's music (*Am Chofshi b'Artzenu*).

Aesthetic form that breathes

Allow the artist to do his thing, but project a simultaneous translation above the stage as he performs. The work of any lyric-based musician is stunted if the words have no meaning for the audience. Imagine Van Gogh in black-and-white, or lighting the Chanukiah inside a box...

Interpretation through art forms, not prose

Finally, in order to allow the symbolism to resonate, don't make speeches immediately following the event! Avoid discussions with the artist straight after the show (especially with a renowned non-conversationalist...) The reduction of the Israeli artist to 'just another girl/guy' does not necessarily serve any symbolic purpose. The desire to democratize and make accessible, often works against magic...

But what about a photographic exhibition of the Ethiopian aliya in the foyer as people emerge from the concert? Further – what about an exhibition exploring the history of aliya in Israel, thus broadening the symbolic echo of Reichel's music?

Example 2: The *mangal*/barbecue...?



How might we make the *mangal*, symbolic? As we know, on Yom Ha'atzmaut, a huge barbecue cloud hovers over the Middle East, as every Israeli family sets out for public places in order to have the traditional Yom Ha'atzmaut barbecue party. Once sniffed at by the Israeli elite, now the barbecue, the *mangal*, is a fixed element in Israeli Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations. So if it is fixed, is there a way we might approach the mangal through our understandings, and raise it to the level of symbolism?

Shared context

Can this essentially Israeli pastime be interpreted in terms of the Jewish People, its freedom, and its land? The carnivores among us might point to the joy and **celebration of life** involved in eating freshly cooked meat. And not any meat: **kosher** meat bought from Israeli butchers! As a family and as a nation one takes one's fate into one's own hands – a Zionist idea – when one prepares and cooks one's own food in the open. This is a family event celebrated in public – connecting the individual to the family to the collective **people**. In Israel, people deliberately set out to the **land**, to public spaces, to celebrate their freedom in their land.

Aesthetic form

Can eating a burger lend itself to symbolic interpretation? Well, if one stops to think about it, the answer must surely be yes. The act overflows with sensuality and passion: juices, tastes, food, fire, burning, life...

Maintaining the magic

Many families draw on the art of storytelling to enhance the event. Around the salads and the sausages the elders of the family recount tales of the early days of the State. A family in North America might tell tales of what they did to help Israel in 1948, or of the uncle who went to serve in the IDF in 1967...

Example 3: In the Home

Symbolic actions that take place inside the home must be developed for Chag Ha'atzmaut. What might we do with an Israeli flag in each home? In what configuration might we light candles? What should every family do, or say, or eat, or hear, or see?

The work on this crucial aspect of Chag Ha'atzmaut has now begun...

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B. Planning for Reflection

It has been written that the three foot-festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, are accompanied by a very specific kind of *megillah*. Pesach, the festival celebrating the power of God's outstretched hand, power that did not stop even at the killing of innocent Egyptian children, is accompanied by *Shir HaShirim* – Song of Songs. Lest we forget that while power is necessary, so too is compassion and love. On Shavuot, when the Law was given to our people, the Book of Ruth is read. This *megillah*, placed in the context of overarching Law, celebrates characters – Ruth, Boaz – who go beyond the law, raising up its spirit. And as we enter our Sukkah, celebrating the lightness of being, commanded to be happy, what is the text we read? *Kohelet* – Ecclesiastes – the ultimate text of weight, disappointment, and tired realism.



Each *megillah* acts as a commentary on the festival itself. In effect, through the reading of these *megillot*, these festivals have a **built-in reflection mechanism**. These megillot address the central message of the festival and suggest not its opposite, but a deliberate balancing factor, presenting a parallel value that tempers that of the festival's itself.

What might be the *megillah* of Chag Ha'atzmaut?

The temptation to reach for one's Tanach, and to search for the specific *megillah* appropriate to our Chag Ha'atzmaut, is great. But before doing so it would be useful to increase the breadth of our options. Perhaps a piece of literature from beyond the Tanach might be equally appropriate? What might the story of the Golem of Prague reflect on Israel's narrative of sovereignty, power, and tradition? How could a biography of Albert Einstein – an individual, Diaspora-dwelling, light unto the nations, almost-President of Israel – comment on *Am Chofshi b'Artzenu*? Must we choose only one text?

And if literature, then why not any other art form? Perhaps our guiding criteria for programming Israeli arts events should be: Each event should act as a potential *megillah* that casts the reflective light of commentary upon our central metaphor.

We might say that Yom HaZikaron, in this sense, does not act as a *megillah*. Yom HaZikaron is the deep shadow cast by the light of Yom Ha'atzmaut, the negative or opposite of our celebration. Yom HaZikaron, in honoring those who gave their lives to defend Israel, does not question the value of the State – rather it increases our appreciation of its value by emphasizing the sacrifices we make for it.

C. What experience to designate? Looking to the narrative

What is the story of Chag Ha'atzmaut? This is an important question to consider because the story we tell of an event, and the way in which we structure it, offers us many clues as to how to **designate the experience** of the chag and set the right mood.

One of the most essential aspects in approaching a story is in choosing **when the story begins, and when it ends**. This is a value-laden, educationally-weighted decision. Does the story of Pesach end with the Hebrews successfully fleeing Egypt? Or does it end with the receipt of the Torah at Mount Sinai? Is this about freedom *from*, or freedom *to*? We can see that the makers of the movie, *Prince of Egypt* struggled unsuccessfully with this question. On the one hand, they knew that the dramatic climax to their story was at the crossing of the Red Sea. The Hebrews were finally free from slavery, free from terror. But clearly some of the scriptwriters were not satisfied. And so a strange epilogue scene is tacked on to the end of the film, where Moses gazes on Mount Sinai. By altering where the story ends, The Exodus becomes, in this scene, about a journey from slavery to divine covenant, not just a tale of escape. (Here we can appreciate the way in which Pesach – Exodus - and Shavuot - Mt Sinai - are so firmly linked through the counting of the Omer)



Joseph and his Technicolored Dreamcoat is a wonderfully successful telling of the Joseph story. But does the story of Joseph really begin with his birth? Can we fully understand the story without knowing how Joseph is the son of beloved Rachel, while the other brothers are born from other wives, less desired? What about the simmering tensions that precede his birth, when Jacob condemns Shimon and Levi's massacre of the town of Shechem?

And so to our appreciation of Chag Ha'atzmaut. **Where does our story of becoming a free people in our own land, begin?**

Does the story begin with the Exodus – when as a people we first set off for the Promised Land? Or does it begin with the destruction of the Second Temple – when we lost our freedom and many were banished from our homeland? Or with the Holocaust – the catastrophe that preceded a miraculous rebirth that Yitz Greenberg names a 'new Exodus'? Or as Dov Marmur half-suggests, does the story begin in 1948?

If our story begins with the Exodus, we might then choose to embed the beginnings of our Chag Ha'atzmaut in our Seder night celebrations. Just as Pesach is the beginning of the Omer countdown to Shavuot, perhaps we might also see it as the heart of the story of our independence? If the Holocaust is the beginning of our story, then a deliberate nine-day flow from Yom HaShoah to Ha'atzmaut might be more in keeping with our approach.

And where might our story end? Are we celebrating an isolated incident in history: The establishment of the State of Israel? In which case, we might argue the story should end in 1948. Or is the creation of a free people in our own land an ongoing process, a story that has not yet reached its ending? If we decide our narrative ends with the establishment of the State, then the story has a clear happy and victorious ending. The nature of the experience we choose to design for this chag should be of **triumph and joy**. But if the story ends later, and includes not only the establishment of the state, but also its ongoing struggles, then we might choose for the experience to be more varied, **making celebration a combination of rejoicing and reflection**.

Exercise: What would be the seven key events that you feel are essential to the telling of the Chag Ha'atzmaut narrative – that without these events the story would have no meaning for you? (Place them in order...)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

Given the feel to this narrative flow, how might you summarize the nature of the experience you want to designate to this chag?

Handout 5: Embodying Chag Ha'atzmaut

1. What will you put on your body?
2. What will you put in your body?
3. Where will you place your body?
4. What will you do with your body?
5. With whom will you do it?

Beginnings of a checklist:

Am Chofshi b'Artzenu

1. How can we define the experience we would like to designate?
2. What kind of reflection should be incorporated into the Chag?
3. Which symbolic actions are we elevating during the Chag?
4. Which populations do we wish to aim for?
 - Early childhood?
 - Russian speakers?
 - Whole community?
 - Ex-Israelis?
5. What kind of event are we talking about?
 - Parade, or pageant?
 - Religious ritual?
 - Lecture series?
6. Where will the events take place?
 - Camp?
 - Outside the Jewish community?
 - In the home?

