

# From Israel's Day of Independence to Chag Ha'atzmaut

As the flurry of activity surrounding Israel@60 would indicate, there is a significant amount of consensus in North America around the value of 'celebrating Israel'. The blithe combination of an arbitrary round number and a symbol of the modern world, seems to have done more for Israel engagement than many learned books and heart-felt speeches. In the spirit of Jacob rather than Esau, it would seem appropriate to see what long-term benefit we may acquire with such a seemingly thin 'bowl of lentils'.

## Celebrating Israel every year

Just as Israel@60 galvanized North American Jewry, so Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations bring together Jewish communities throughout the world every year. Though its actual date is very often shifted, Yom Ha'atzmaut is rarely cancelled or ignored. Indeed, it is often remarked that Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations are the most likely to produce a cross-community, multi-denominational coalition than any other event in the Jewish calendar. Standing, as we are, at the heart of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> year, it would seem appropriate to assess to what extent the we are maximizing the educational potential of Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations: the only celebrations that will live on for Israel@61 and Israel@62...

"Yom Ha'atzmaut is a festival that is struggling to be born," opines R. Irving Greenberg in *The Jewish Way*. While there is of course an element of excitement in this image of battle and birth, there is also a hint of pain and uncertainty. Though Yom Ha'atzmaut may be celebrated with enthusiasm and commitment, it is as yet unclear what it means, what form it should take, and how one might decide. We would suggest that the struggle Greenberg refers to might be due to the difficulty of knowing **where** the 'birth' is taking place, **who** is the parent waiting with open arms, and **what** creature is due to be born.

It is our intention in this paper to suggest a way of easing the delivery. We shall suggest the root causes of the struggle, that play out within Israel and in the Diaspora. In our analysis, in the description of the problem may lie the solution: we have not yet transformed Yom Ha'atzmaut from a State's Birthday Party into a festival of the Jewish People. We shall then play out a suggested route for developing such a Jewish festival of Independence, mapping out the 'genetic heritage' - the requisite form - of the new-born. Finally we shall offer some practical applications of this thinking.

## Yom Ha'atzmaut in North America

When a social group... celebrates a particular event or occasion, such as birth, harvest, or national independence, it also "celebrates itself." (Victor Turner)<sup>1</sup>

Though perhaps the situation was once different, recent research into Israel engagement in North America<sup>2</sup> would lead us to accept that Yom Ha'atzmaut is currently far from being an event through which the Jewish community "celebrates itself". While Chanukah, a festival marking momentous events in the land of Israel, is celebrated in the home and in the community with comfort and ease, Yom Ha'atzmaut, another festival marking momentous events in that far-away land, is neither comfortable nor homely. Chanukah has become a festival that is 'owned' by the local population, no matter where in the world they live. **Yom Ha'atzmaut is and has always been owned by Israelis.**

It is very rare that the job description of a community shaliach does not include responsibility for Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations. The shaliach, or the local Israeli involved in community affairs, is seen as the *ritual legitimator*<sup>3</sup> - no matter if the person has arrived in the community only a few months previously. Almost like an external adjudicator, the 'local Israeli' is there to make sure that Yom Ha'atzmaut is 'done how it should be done'. As such, the standard local Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration, with its Israeli dance performances, its youth choirs sent from Israel, and its Israeli craft fairs, becomes a **pageant of exile**. It is a celebration of where and who the community is not. These intriguing paradoxes, of a community celebrating its 'not-self' and rejoicing an absence - so educationally rich - find no expression either in the form of the day or in its surrounding discourse.

"To what shall I liken thee?"

Were the locals to search for a more 'American' way of marking this day, they would be hard pressed to find an applicable analogy. Without doubt, Yom Ha'atzmaut could not be marked like July 4<sup>th</sup> is often marked by Americans abroad. Most North American Jews were not born in Israel, do not necessarily miss it, and have little intention of 'returning'. Nor, for example, is St Patrick's Day to those of Irish descent what Yom Ha'atzmaut is to Jews. First, Yom Ha'atzmaut has no deep religious heritage and authority, while St Patrick's Day celebrations began some three hundred years ago as a Feast of the Catholic church. Second, St Patrick's Day has now moved far beyond

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<sup>1</sup> *Celebration, studies in festivity and ritual* ed. Victor Turner, 1982

<sup>2</sup> Cite Steve Cohen

<sup>3</sup> Ritual Legitimizers: "Actors who authorize, validate, or accredit what ritualized symbolic practices are associated with a particular group or collectivity... their judgments and opinions usually carry more authority than others..." *Strategic Ritualization and Ethnicity*, Knottnerus and Loconto in *Sociological Spectrum*, 23: 425-461, 2003

being an Irish Catholic event. The largest St Patrick's Day Parade now takes place in Chicago not Dublin. The slogan throughout the States, "Everyone's Irish on St Patrick's Day", marks its ecumenical, non-ethnic intentions, as the festival celebrates more the sale of Irish-style goods (mainly great beer) than the promotion of Irish life and authentic culture. Despite this gradual draining of the festival's content, St Patrick's Day nevertheless celebrates a more authentic, less complicated sense of exilic longing, than does Yom Ha'atzmaut for Jews. Israel is not 'home' to a Jewish New Yorker in the same sense that Ireland might be 'home' to a fourth generation Irish New Yorker. Perhaps a 'Shtetl Day' might be more attractive in this sense..

We might turn to Kwanzaa, a fascinating exercise in ritual creativity, that was invented in the late 1960s to celebrate 'African' culture. This is a festival that only exists in the United States, in order to commemorate a culture and a land to which many African Americans in the States have an undefined and indirect connection. Historical or geographical authenticity is not part of its discourse, and as such its nature is widely variable and constantly changing. The brainchild of radical Black activist Maulana Karenga, this festival is now largely a middle-class black event, valued in particular by those who have escaped the poverty and suffering associated with the black experience but who wish nevertheless to celebrate their ethnic identity. Similar to Yom Ha'atzmaut for North American Jews, Kwanzaa acts as a *recommitment holiday*<sup>4</sup>, attempting to strengthen the ethnic identity of the community by celebrating an indirect connection to a 'homeland'. But of course Kwanzaa, unlike Yom Ha'atzmaut in Israel, does not exist in Africa. The name itself is "a product of creative cultural synthesis"<sup>5</sup>, and the festival's ritual is a conglomeration of harvest festivals marked throughout the African continent. By contrast - no diasporan invention - Yom Ha'Atzmaut arose and is perpetuated first and foremost in order to mark the ongoing significance of a particular historical and geographical event.

Knottnerus and Loconto have pointed out how this tension between the celebrators and the celebrated can often develop in the opposite direction. While in Kwanzaa, African-Americans celebrate their 'African heritage' with little clear reference to Africa, in Krebs the celebration of 'Italian heritage' takes place with no reference either to Italy, or to the local Italian-Americans themselves! Knottnerus and Loconto describe how the immigrant Italian community in the town of Krebs celebrated their homeland in a festival that was gradually taken out of the hands of the ritual legitimators and given over to what they term the *ritual entrepreneurs*. The Italian Festival moved town (better parking) and found its ethnic content and

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<sup>4</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *We Are What We Celebrate*, 2004

<sup>5</sup> "It is a made-up word, from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, which, according to Karenga, means 'first fruits'; an extra 'a', he writes, 'has become convention', though he does not explain precisely why." Anna Day Wilde, "Mainstreaming Kwanzaa", in *We are what we celebrate*, ed. Amitai Etzioni 2004

participation gradually diluted. "As the public appeal and overall success of the venture has increased, the significance of the event for the members of the ethnic group has decreased."<sup>6</sup>

Given this plethora of examples of similarity yet difference, it is perhaps no great surprise that Jewish communities celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut look to Israel. Yet in Israel too, we find a festival in flux, and in question.

### Whose festival is it anyway?

Though an outsider might be amazed, popular Israeli culture still does not understand or accept why Arab Israelis do not tend to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut<sup>7</sup>. Though the establishment of the State of Israel most certainly features prominently in the Palestinian national narrative, it would be very difficult to expect the significance of this event to engender rejoicing and merriment! As long as the majority in Israel are still keen to "gather in families and settlements for rejoicing and gladness, for memorial and thanksgiving, for unity and inspiration"<sup>8</sup>, then this day's festivities will never draw the majority of Israeli Arabs. For entirely different reasons, the ultra-religious Jewish community in Israel generally does not mark Yom Ha'atzmaut, either. Thus even before looking for nuance, we know that more than a quarter of Israel's citizens are not touched by the joyous nature of its own Day of Independence.

Beyond this, the Orthodox Jewish community is far from unified in its relationship to this day. While celebration is by no means frowned upon, there is no consensus about the religious significance of the day. R. Ovadia Yosef<sup>9</sup> among others has ruled that Hallel should be recited, but without its blessing. This ambivalence points to Zionism's key challenge to the orthodox world: was the establishment of the Jewish State a human achievement, or a divine one? One internet Rabbi protests the implication of this indecision: "Either *Medinat Yisrael* isn't such a great historical event for *Am Yisrael*, or God didn't have a hand in it!"<sup>10</sup> Doubt on either of these issues leads the orthodox world to remain not fully committed to the redemptive nature of Yom Ha'atzmaut. It is certainly a day for celebration, a day that over-rides

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<sup>6</sup> *Strategic Ritualization and Ethnicity*, Knottnerus and Loconto in *Sociological Spectrum*, 23: 425-461, 2003

<sup>7</sup> An entire program on Reshet Bet in early December 2007 was given over to the question of why the Arab Members of Knesset were not present at the ceremony marking the UN decision of 29<sup>th</sup> November 1947.

<sup>8</sup> From the original governmental proclamation of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

<sup>9</sup> R. Ovadia Yosef. Teshuvot Yabia Omer (Orach Chaim 6:41)

<sup>10</sup> R. Alex Israel.

[http://www.torahcurrents.org/index.php/article/yom\\_haatzmaut\\_and\\_the\\_obligation\\_of\\_praise/](http://www.torahcurrents.org/index.php/article/yom_haatzmaut_and_the_obligation_of_praise/)

the restrictions of the Omer period, but the **extent** to which one should thank God for the creation of the State of Israel, will remain in question.

As Schweid comments, it would be unrealistic to expect religion to take a lead in the shaping of a festival that by its very nature takes place in a non-religious realm. As many other modern scholars do, he compares the establishment of the State to the festival of Pesach, yet Schweid does so to draw difference and not similarity:

בפסח עם ישראל חווה את חירותו כ"עם סגולה", ואילו בחג  
העצמאות הוא חווה חירות של עם ככל העמים עם מדינני<sup>11</sup>

The very 'normality' of the event, its very universality, Schweid argues, would work against the particularity of the Jewish tradition.

Although military parades, a celebration of that which enabled the establishment of the state and a symbol of the Jewish return to power, were a standard aspect of Israel's Yom Ha'Atzmaut, they are no longer in vogue. No doubt to leave Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a secular celebration of the attainment of collective power, would have been to ask for trouble. Eventually either the historical perspective would be lost, thus transmuted into might and those who wield it into a form of militaristic idolatry, or the realization of the cost of wielding collective power might dull any sense of celebration. As Schweid pointed out, while joy is a key component to this festival, it must somehow arise 'spontaneously' and without prior intention, divine or personal. What happens when a people no longer enjoys its collective responsibility for military action, poverty, oppression, corruption and the like? What happens to the party when no one feels like partying?

### Yom HaZikaron issues

In the early days of the State, there was Independence Day, but no Memorial Day. *Hey B'lyyar* 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'. In contrast to the United States, where Memorial Day stands separate from Independence Day and originally commemorated a different war, Yom HaZikaron is fused with Yom Ha'atzmaut for they are both sides of the same coin. The miracle of Yom Ha'Atzmaut, according to Schweid, is a

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<sup>11</sup> "At Pesach, the nation experienced liberation as a "unique nation", whereas Chag Ha'atzmaut is experienced as a "nation like any other", as a nation-state." Eliezer Schweid, *Sefer Machzor HaZmanim*, Am Oved

man-made miracle<sup>12</sup>, and so the human cost of such a miracle must be marked as part of the same festival.

This fusion of Yom HaZikaron with Yom Ha'Atzmaut enforces three difficulties: First, it raises sacrifice for one's country as a supreme value and in so doing shadows all other values that might be associated with the establishment of the State of Israel. Second, it will constantly, annually, threaten to overwhelm the "collective effervescence" that the festival was created to engender. Third, the fusion of Yom HaZikaron with Yom Ha'Atzmaut makes it even harder for Diaspora Jewry and Israeli Jewry to share an equivalent emotional attachment to this period.

Unfortunately for the Jewish community in North America looking for the 'real Yom Ha'Atzmaut', beyond Yom HaZikaron, there are few Israeli rituals and public events that are constant, or replicable. The Bible Quiz, The Torch lit Procession, and the announcements of the Israel Prize are the honorable exceptions. Fireworks displays are not an Israeli invention, nor are family barbecues in public areas is not yet a custom that resonates in the Jewish communal world. As a result, even when the Jewish community looks to Israel for a lead in the nature of Yom Ha'Atzmaut celebrations, it is liable to attempt to echo an original which is somewhat hollow itself.

### What's the story?

Beyond, or perhaps underlying this lack of deep form to Yom Ha'atzmaut lies the difficulty in defining the festival's narrative. If we see the form of a festival as a manifestation of a master narrative, then an unclear or unresolved narrative might lead to a form that is confused. Professor Michael Rosenak refers to Rotenstreich's two ways of conceptualizing and reading modern Jewish history<sup>13</sup>. The first he characterizes as "*The Jewish Problem*" and *the Jewish reaction*, and the second as *Jewish Cultural Distinctiveness and Ingenuity*. The first approach would be to see the history of the Jewish people in the light of the behavior of the non-Jewish world towards us; the second would be to read Jewish history 'internally', looking to Ahad Ha'am rather than Herzl, for example. These two approaches to what we might even call 'Narrative style', tends to make our search for a consensus on Chag Ha'atzmaut's narrative somewhat elusive.

For example, during MAKOM's Chag Ha'atzmaut seminars, each participant is asked to note down the seven plot-points to his or her 'Yom Ha'atzmaut narrative'. Point one would be the start of the story, point seven would mark its ending. Beyond the fact that so many of the participants' stories begin at such varying places: Abraham's promise, Jacob's move to Egypt, destruction of the second Temple, Dreyfus trial, 1948... the most surprising

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<sup>12</sup> "זהו נס התחדשות כוחותיו של עם חלש" "This is a miracle of the renewal of the powers of a weak nation"

<sup>13</sup> *The Problem of Jewish Peoplehood*, Michael Rosenak

discovery was that at least fifty percent of participants at seminars throughout the States and in Israel did not place the Holocaust in their story of Yom Ha'atzmaut. When telling the story, when creating the emotional context<sup>14</sup> for the establishment of the State of Israel, over half of these Jewish professionals did not see the Holocaust as having a role to play.

Yet for Greenberg and others, the significance of the establishment of the State of Israel cannot even begin to be understood without appreciating the horrors and helplessness of the Holocaust taking place in the same decade. Whether or not divinely inspired or encouraged, the establishment of the State so shortly after the Jewish people's near-complete destruction, tells a mythically-proportioned story of redemption from darkness into light. This deep schism in narrative assumptions would seem to arise from the dichotomy described by Rotenstreich, that has yet to be overcome.

The very nature of the Zionist revolution was the way in which its proponents called for a 'return to history'. Understood in Rotenstreich's terms, we may say that the early Zionists wished to forge the two narrative streams into one. Indeed this interplay between the external and the internal, the universal and the Jewish, the historic and the cultural, continues to resonate and rebound throughout the past sixty years of Israel's existence. Until we find a way to harmonize these two narrative perspectives, we will find a consensual form to Yom Ha'atzmaut difficult to reach.

### Celebration of rupture?

We might, however, point to a third overlapping narrative that plays out throughout Jewish life: That of the establishment of the State of Israel as a rupture. After the establishment of the State, the collective identity of the Jewish people was changed beyond recognition. The establishment of the State did not only symbolize a transformation from weakness to power, or from destruction to victory; it also engendered a stunning change to the nature of the Jewish people.

An entire ethical framework needed (and still needs) to be reworked, now that the Jews had returned to power ("Ethical muscles not flexed for centuries are now used; sometimes they are stiff and sore" Greenberg). A whole religious code needed (and still needs) to face the far-reaching consequences of no longer living in exile. At least half the Jewish People needed (and still needs) to learn what it means to be a majority with collective responsibility. All these changes are to be celebrated and rejoiced, but they have without doubt presented a huge challenge to a People whose entire identity was built on powerless, helpless exile. While growth is positive, it is also painful and irreversible, as any snake can tell you.

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<sup>14</sup> REF AND QUOTE EGAN

Given this narrative of forced growth, this story of positive yet painful transformation, we find ourselves wondering whether Yom Ha'atzmaut needs to be built more as what Turner calls a 'life-crisis ritual', rather than a festival? If the establishment of the State of Israel were to be seen as a rite of passage for the Jewish People, a moment when the nature of the Jew is permanently and dramatically transformed, then very different energies are running beneath this 'festival', that call for a very different form of ritual commemoration.

Since life-crisis rituals emerge in situations of already heightened emotion and energy, the task of ritual is to "provide an organizing set of principles, traditional ways of binding for the moment the opposing forces within the community and tying together the past with the present." Abrahams, cited by Turner<sup>15</sup>

Of course the establishment of the State of Israel took place sixty years ago, and in that sense we might argue that one does not go through a life-crisis ritual every year. Yet at the same time we might say that the Jewish People are still in the throes of the growth pains that ensued. The events of 1948 are still reverberating through the world, their consequences too close, too exhilarating, too painful, and too deep to be fully appreciated. This crisis of post-Israel Jewish identity did not end in 1948, but is ongoing.

In order to allow this added narrative weave to our Yom Ha'atzmaut, we might do well to follow Abrahams' guidelines, and look for a reassuring ritual that offers "an organizing set of principles", and "traditional ways" of temporarily holding together opposing views, and uniting past with present. In short, we need to revision Yom Ha'atzmaut as a 'traditional' Jewish festival, as a Chag.

### Chag Ha'atzmaut

In the "Building Jewish Community through Culture" seminar of July 2003<sup>16</sup>, Shoshana Pakciarz the then-Executive Director of Boston's New Center for Arts and Culture, complained about the Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations in Boston: "This is the most seminal event in recent Jewish history, and only 10,000 people showed up out of 250,000 Jews in the city... 10,000 people coming to a poor shopping experience is dismal." Though many other communities would be proud to number their Yom Ha'atzmaut participants in the thousands, Pakciarz' frustration touches on our larger task: Yom Haatzmaut should mark a landmark in Jewish History, and not just in the history of a 60 year old state.

Inspired by R. Joseph Soloveitchik, R. Irving Greenberg is convinced that the creation of the State was 'the New Exodus': "The creation of the state was an act of redemption of biblical stature... The sweep from the degradation of slavery in Egypt to the heights of Sinai and the Promised Land had a

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<sup>15</sup> *Celebration*, ed. Victor Turner

<sup>16</sup> Convened by Oranim College and the Jewish Agency's People to People Center.

shorter arc than the swing from the depths of Auschwitz to the heights of Jerusalem". Indeed the key reference point in the Rabbinic debate over reciting Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut is, quite fittingly, the response to the miracle of the Parting of the Red Sea.

The time may have come for us to begin draw inspiration not from other nationalisms, nor from other ethnicities, but from our own. We need to begin to see and develop Yom Ha'atzmaut as a Jewish holiday: a chag. Paradoxically, because Yom Ha'Atzmaut is such an established yet unclaimed festival in the orthodox world, we may find ourselves with a great deal of room for maneuver. We may draw from religious wisdom without committing to its authority: we may refer to religious constructs without commenting on their essence.

Many scholars wiser than us have attempted to draw on Jewish religious forms and symbols for this day. Yom Tov Lewinski proposed that Yom Ha'atzmaut take the form of "Shabbat HaMedina": a day of rest, with candles lit Hanukkah style, on the window-sill. Professor Ben Zion Dinur called for candles, family meals, and a reading of the Declaration of Independence<sup>17</sup>, and others have produced Haggadot for Yom Ha'atzmaut. It is not our intention to critique these approaches, but rather to understand the underlying structure these scholars sought, in order to offer an additional approach.

Drawing gratefully on Greenberg's exploration of the festivals as "the unbroken master code of Judaism", we can begin to appreciate a basic underlying structure to our chagim, that can be usefully applied to Yom Ha'atzmaut. Learning from Greenberg, and the in-depth research and analysis of Esti Kalman-Moskovitz<sup>18</sup>, we can determine a framework that most chagim are 'built' on. Each chag has a **narrative** and a **theme** that express themselves through a **designated experience**, **structured reflection**, and **symbolic action**<sup>19</sup>. Having already discussed the complex nature of interweaved and contradictory narratives, we shall now address a possible theme for Yom Ha'atzmaut, or what Abrahams terms "an organizing set of principles".

### The organizing theme of Yom Ha'atzmaut

There are thousands of details and practices associated with each Jewish festival. Though customs have grown and changed over millennia, and each community and every age has added its own special flavor and detail,

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<sup>17</sup> Both scholars cited in Greenberg's *The Jewish Way*

<sup>18</sup> Esti Kalman-Moskovitz, *ושמחת בחגך* – working source document utilized in numerous seminars across North America in 2007.

<sup>19</sup> For more in-depth analysis of this structure, please also refer to the working document *Chag Ha'atzmaut* by Gringras and Moskovitz, 2007.

Each holiday has one central metaphor that orchestrates myriad details into one coherent whole. (Greenberg)

Faced with a festival whose narrative meaning is still being contested and lived through, what kind of metaphor might we find? Is there a way to evocatively and succinctly summarize and focus at least three sometimes-contrasting narratives? Greenberg's task is perhaps beyond us. It may be that a single "central metaphor" is too much to ask. (In our defense we might also ask whether there is a consensus on the central metaphor of Purim, for example?) Instead we should aim for an organizing theme. A set of principles to give shape and depth to this annual celebration.

In other words, what should Yom Ha'atzmaut be 'about'? It is clear that "Israel's Independence Day" is insufficient. This standard secular 'like any other nation' approach ignores the extreme nature of the Jewish People's lack of independence prior to 1948, and does not sufficiently address the connection between this event and the rest of the Jewish world. "The emergence of the Jews from powerlessness" (Greenberg) would certainly touch on an aspect of the creation of the State, but could equally refer to Jewish political power in USA. It makes no reference to the specific place called Israel. "The significance of the establishment of Jewish Sovereignty in a place of ultimate importance to the Jewish People" would not be far off, but is thoroughly uninspiring. We need a theme that is intellectually engaging, broad enough to address all possible narratives of Chag Ha'atzmaut, and resonant enough to inspire the imagination.

We would suggest that Yom Ha'atzmaut should mark the following theme:

**להיות עם חופשי בארצנו - To be a free people in our land**

This would allow us to focus on the four areas of Zionism that together would suggest a unique aspect to Jewish existence.

**להיות** - To be - would address the way in which the creation of the State of Israel served and serves the survival or the Jewish people. To be in the sense of 'exist'. It would likewise explore the idea of 'normality' that Israel was expected to engender. To be in the sense of 'let it be'...

**עם** - People - would address the way in which Israel is connected to the Jewish People culturally, historically, religiously. Where Israel expresses its connection to the Jewish world and its meaning. At the same time this sub-theme would address the nature of Jewish collectivity.

**חופשי** - Free - would address the nature of freedom as embodied in the creation of the State. Not simply the freedom of Pesach, which celebrates a freedom from suffering and persecution, but also the very particular form of freedom that Statehood has brought: the freedom to take responsibility for oneself, the freedom to grant or refuse freedoms to others. Freedom would also refer to the freedom to create, to innovate, and to renew.

בארצנו - In our land - would address the specificity of Israel as a geographical, political, and historical entity with deep significance to the Jewish People. This sub-theme would also address the question of ownership: the proof of ownership and the expectations and responsibility of 'owners'.

Were we to remove the word People - עם - from this phrase, we would be left with what was the Meretz slogan in favor of the Gay Pride March in Jerusalem 2006. To be free in our land is a worthy aspiration that pays no heed to a shared Jewish collective. Were we to remove the word Free - חופשי - we might sum up the cultural non-military approach of R. Yochanan ben Zachai, establishing Roman protection of Yavneh's scholars. And removal of In Our Land - בארצנו - would leave our Chag Ha'atzmaut theme with no reference to Israel!

To our mind, the other advantage of this four-point organizing theme, is that it can give respect to unresolved questions and concerns. To what extent Israel has ensured the continued survival of the Jewish People (להיות), how far Israel has strayed from or developed its culture (עם), whether Israelis take full responsibility for their collective and individual actions (חופשי), and a Diaspora Jew's connection to the land (בארצנו) - all these are issues that can be aired and housed within this overall structure. In this way we bind "for the moment the opposing forces within the community". Approaching this framework from the narrative of rupture, or painful growth, we manage to draw our concerns for Israel into a higher and deeper realm of consideration, so that the rupture aspect of the Israel narrative need not be suffered or ignored, but honored.

This four-point set of principles can also offer us an effective pathway into rejoicing. For no matter how one chooses to define our current situation, the Jewish People is closer to normality and more equipped to survive and fend for itself than it was before 1948 (להיות), is more capable of acting as a collective (עם), more free than ever in history (חופשי), and living in the land of our forefathers (בארצנו). Looking at Chag Ha'atzmaut through these principles, we can find reason for joy as well as reflection.

### Designated Experience

As Schweid has pointed out, unlike other chagim, there is no commandment for the participants to enjoy themselves at CH. While we bow our heads with a smile before the stern Sukkot order "ושמחת בחגך" - "And you shall be happy in your festival", there is no God-given instruction for the experience of Yom Ha'atzmaut. This is, however, only half the story. The orthodox Jew nevertheless does not recite any prayers of contrition, and suspends the strictures of the Omer for this day. No one has ever thought that Yom Ha'atzmaut should be anything other than a party: emotionally it is almost seen as the positive to Yom HaZikaron's negative.

According to Schweid there are two ways to ensure a festive "collective effervescence". One way is, as he says, to make sure that participants come armed with a divine conviction to rejoice. Given that this is not apparent for Yom Ha'atzmaut, the other choice is for the State to 'make them happy'<sup>20</sup>. "Festivals... must initiate their own energies." (Abrahams) The onus for rejoicing falls on the official organization, and not upon the participants themselves. They are 'to be aroused' into joy and merriment, rather than to arrive 'in a good mood'.<sup>21</sup> This approach would suggest that the success of a Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration will stand or fall on the budget set aside for the fireworks display.

We would suggest that there is a third way, that the joy can emerge not only through the predisposition of the participants, and not only thanks to spectacular pageantry, but also through the power of a dramatic or intellectual design.

One way of applying this approach would be to adopt a narrative of Yom Ha'atzmaut that is already reflected in the three ritual days of this period. R. Avram Infeld argues that Yom Ha'atzmaut concludes a process of collective awareness that begins at Yom HaShoah. For him the collective drama of the redemption of the Jewish People lasts nine days, taking in Yom HaZikaron, and ending with an celebration of life at Yom Ha'atzmaut. In this instance, the 'happy-ending' of the drama explodes out of the pain and loss that precedes it.

Another application might be to address the more reflective aspects of rupture, before reaching the more effervescent aspects of success. It may well be that once the life-crisis aspects of the establishment of the State of Israel have been aired and given form, the 'demons' will have been banished from the hearts of the participants and spontaneous rejoicing might be easier. In this sense Yom HaZikaron serves an entirely different purpose. As a day of mourning, and a day for giving honor to the fallen, Yom HaZikaron does not offer any constructive outlet for questioning the nature of the Zionist idea.

[Needs more work...] [and examples...] [and more on dramatic structures and their application...]

### Structured Reflection

As Van Gennep originally pointed out<sup>22</sup>, life-crisis transitions or "passages" can be dangerous and tend to be mediated by rites. In "binding for the moment the opposing forces within the community and tying together the

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<sup>20</sup> "אין זו "שמחת מצווה" ואין זו מצות שמחה שכל יחיד מתחייב בה ... מוסדות השלטון משמחים את העם"

<sup>21</sup> It has become customary to add on to party invitations the injunction: "come in a really good mood!" "תבוא עם המון מצב רוח!"

<sup>22</sup> *The Rites of Passage*, Arnold Van Gennep, 1960

past with the present" (Abrahams), these rites can provide stability and reassurance to the bewildered or concerned, and can give form and legitimacy to disagreement within the community.

Indeed a very carefully structured form of reflection is built into most of our chagim. 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, we read *Kohelet* - Ecclesiastes - the ultimate text of weight, disappointment, and tired realism.

Each *megillah* acts as a commentary on the festival itself. 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. For Chag Ha'atzmaut it might be tempting to reach for the Declaration of Independence, or for one's Tanach, to find the specific *megillah* appropriate to our Chag Ha'atzmaut. 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 for Chag Ha'atzmaut should be: Each event should act as a potential *megillah* that casts the reflective light of commentary upon our central metaphor.

In the meantime MAKOM is creating a Chevruta booklet, similar to those created annually by Limmud Conference UK, that will be comprised of texts and questions arranged according to the principles of להיות עם חופשי בארצנו. Our suggestion to communities and organizations will be to make use of these booklets in a mass-chevruta event, that will contain within it the energies and excitement of collective learning. In this way the airing of questions can be enjoyable and even cathartic for the community. It might be that this chevruta session ought to immediately precede the fireworks and music party...?

### Symbolic Action

As we have stated, there may be value in drawing on Jewish 'traditional forms' of ritual so as to lend - not necessarily authority - but contextual

familiarity to our Chag Ha'atzmaut rites of passage. One such form might be the Seder Plate, as applied to the four principles of Chag Ha'atzmaut. At MAKOM we have so far thought that one might raise and drink a glass of water to mark the life-giving simplicity of להיות, to cut open a pomegranate to mark the unified and diverse nature of עם, to eat a wild sabra fruit to mark the prickly yet sweet ambivalence of חופשי, and to light a vial of olive oil to mark ארצנו.

Coming to the final deadline for sending off this piece, I would say that the underlying drive of this work is to suggest that any artistic performance, pageant, or celebration must first establish a shared context, a shared philosophy among its participants, before starting to think about its most resonant or powerful form. Call it 'exposition', or 'setting the scene', the successful play will do this as part of the ongoing action, pulling the audience into a commitment to the characters' needs and restrictions in their particular environment. In order for Chag Ha'atzmaut to bring participants in the Diaspora and Israel to a collective effervescence, it must clarify the way in which its narrative speaks to the commonality of all, and ensure that this commonality is persuasively laid out for all - *before* the champagne corks are popped.

Dec 2007  
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