

# YOM HAATZMA'UT Israeli Independence Day

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*THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.*

- From the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, May 14, 1948



## ISRAEL'S FOUNDING

Zionism, the belief that a Jewish state should be established, gained strength in the 1800s, when nationalism was high in Europe. Many minority groups believed their survival as a people was predicated on having their own state. While some Zionists were drawn to the notion of a state where Jews could live free from anti-Semitism, others wanted to establish a modern Jewish state that would allow Jews to create their own culture free from the old ways of the Diaspora.

Jews began establishing settlements in Palestine, which fell under Turkey's jurisdiction. However, Turkey refused to cede the land for the establishment of a new state for Jews. The British took control of Palestine when the Ottoman Empire collapsed following World War I. After the Holocaust, new momentum gathered for the creation of a Jewish state.

Responding to Jewish and Arab nationalist claims over the same land, the British partitioned the territory into separate states on November 29, 1947. Arabs reacted with violence, which the British were unwilling or unable to quell. On May 14, 1948, the British pulled out at 8:00 a.m.; at 4:00 p.m., the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel was signed by David Ben-Gurion and thirty-six others, making nationhood a reality.

Declaring an independent state only led to more violence between Jews and Arabs, however. Before statehood, small groups of Palestinians had fought Jews in the British partition. After independence, the armies of five neighboring Arab states invaded Israel, and what became known as the War for Independence continued until 1949.

## CELEBRATING

Yom HaAtzma'ut is a public holiday in Israel full of rejoicing. Towns all over Israel teem with revelers partying, dancing, spraying cream and streamers, bopping passersby with toy hammers and enjoying live concerts. The entire country is decked out in blue and white, and Israeli flags fly from every car. Parks and beaches (and even the nature strips along the highways) overflow with picnicking families and friends. The Israeli Navy and Air Force put on special shows for the public.

In the United States, Yom HaAtzma'ut may be celebrated by eating Israeli foods and singing Israeli songs. Giving *tzedakah* to organizations that support and strengthen the State of Israel affirms the unity of the Jewish people.

For the most part, however, Yom HaAtzma'ut is celebrated in public worship services. The Reform movement has published a special service to mark the day. Celebrating Yom HaAtzma'ut is a *mitzvah* that affirms the bond between Jews in the Diaspora and Jews in Israel.

## Acknowledgements

Yom HaAtzma'ut: Israel Independence Day by Richard J. Israel, [www.jewishva.org/content\\_display.html?ArticleID=282](http://www.jewishva.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=282); *Gates of the Seasons*, Peter S. Knobel, ed., Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, 1983; *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary*, by Michael Strassfeld, Harper & Row, New York, 1985; World Union of Jewish Students, [www.wujs.org.il/activist/yom\\_haatzmaut/index.shtml](http://www.wujs.org.il/activist/yom_haatzmaut/index.shtml); Virtual Jerusalem, <http://207.168.91.4/vj/holidays/independence/>. The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel can be found at [www.israel.org/mfa/go.asp?MFAH00hb0](http://www.israel.org/mfa/go.asp?MFAH00hb0).