

The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School  
Section: Rhythms of Jewish Living  
<http://mcohen02.tripod.com/rhythms.html>  
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**Topic: *Yom HaZikaron* (Israeli Memorial Day)  
and *Yom Ha-Atzma-ut* (Israel Independence Day)**

**Key Idea:** On the 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar (May 14<sup>th</sup>) 1948, the modern State of Israel proclaimed its existence and independence, as British troops prepared to withdraw from mandatory Palestine. The new state was immediately attacked by the armies of its Arab neighbors—Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq—in a war for survival which lasted until a ceasefire became effective on Jan. 7, 1949. Since then Israel Independence Day has been observed as a national day of revelry and/or religious observance in Israel and the Diaspora.

In 1963, Israel's Knesset passed the Memorial Day Law for the Fallen of Israel's Wars, which is normally observed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of Iyar, the day before Israel Independence Day. The Memorial Day law is very reminiscent of the one mandating the observance of *Yom HaShoah*.

***Our discussion of the texts:***

**Text 1: Memorial Day Law for the Fallen of Israel's Wars, March 28, 1963, modified on Oct. 27, 1980.** Although not regarded by most Israelis as a religious commemoration but as a part of their civic culture, Israel's Memorial Day begins, as do religious holidays, the previous evening. The sound of sirens is intended to emulate the sound of the *shofar*.

**Text 2: Nathan Alterman (1910-1970), The Silver Platter.** This poem, which derives its theme from Chaim Weizmann's 1947 statement that "a nation is not presented with a state on a silver platter," served as the liturgy for *Yom HaZikaron* in the 1960s, and it is still at the center of many diaspora *Yom HaZikaron* observances.

**Text 3: Aharon Megged (1920- ), The Four Sons of the Haggadah for Yom Ha'Atzmaut, 1951.** Designed to parallel the classic Pesach Haggadah, the controversial Haggadah by Megged depicts *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* as a secular nationalist event in which Israeli soldiers are the heroes, rather than the hand of God. The Israeli Chief Rabbinate deemed the Haggadah inappropriate and prohibited its use.

**Text 4: Excerpt from the Yom Ha'Atzmaut Service, Rinat Yisrael Siddur (Israeli modern Orthodox).** The festival service for *Yom HaAtzmaut* includes passages from Hebrew liturgical texts and psalms, and instructions for ritualized recitation of prayers of thanksgiving and praise to God for the beginning of messianic redemption heralded by the establishment of the State of Israel.

**Text 5: Special Yom Ha'Atzmaut Addition to the Modim Prayer of the Sim Shalom Siddur (contemporary Conservative movement).** This liturgical insert is modeled after those for the non-biblical holidays of Chanuka and Purim. Hallel is also recited by many Conservative Jews on *Yom HaAtzmaut*, as well as by Modern Orthodox Jews and Religious Zionists.

**Text 6: Excerpt from the Yom Ha'Atzmaut Service, Mishkan T'filah Siddur (contemporary Reform movement).** This original liturgy for *Yom HaAtzmaut*, built around the themes of Israel Declaration of Independence, structured around candle lighting, emphasizes Israel as a light to

the nations, and the Jewish state's obligation to pursue, justice, freedom and equality for all peoples.

**Text 7: Mark Washofsky, *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*.** The *mitzvah* of celebrating the establishment of the State of Israel, and its role in Jewish life, with liturgy and rituals.

**Text 8: Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1993-1904).** A professor of biochemistry and, in his later years, of philosophy, at Hebrew University as well as a religious commentator and the brother of Bible commentator Nechama Leibowitz, Leibowitz challenged the religious significance of the State of Israel and rejected any messianic implications of its establishment and 1967 expansion.

**Text 9: Justice Louis D. Brandeis (1856-1941), *Zionism is Consistent with American Patriotism*.** The outspoken of the American Zionist Federation between 1914-1918, Brandeis, a U.S. Supreme Court Justice 1916-1939, is believed to have played a major role in persuading US President Woodrow Wilson to pressure the British to issue the Balfour Declaration.