



Reflections and
Inspirational Divrei
Torah from Reform
Rabbis from Israel
and the Diaspora





From Holocaust to Renewal / Rabbi Nir Barkin

Decades ago, the Israeli Reform Movement designated the *Shabbat between* Holocaust Memorial Day (27th of Nisan) and Israeli Independence Day (5th of Iyar) as Shabbat Tekumah.

The Israeli-Zionist discussion - which has been going on for nearly eight decades - has attributed the rise of the State of Israel to the Zionist activity that began in the 19th century and which led to the establishment of the State in 1948.

The phrase "From Holocaust to Restoration" (משואה לתקומה) highlights the period between 1933 and 1945 as a tragic and catastrophic, and important and dramatic stage towards the establishment of the State of Israel. This period is but one of many during the long era that began around the year 1860 with the precursors of Modern Zionism such as Judah Alkalai and Zvi Kalischer, Moses Hess, and Moses Montefiore, and continued until the end of the Israel's War of Independence in 1949.

In the 1980's, as Reform Judaism began to solidify its place in the State of Israel with its message of the importance of Jewish renewal based on liberal values and modern relevance, the rabbis of the Movement added special Shabbatot to those that were

accepted in the traditional Jewish world - among them Shabbat Tekumah.

With the addition of this special *Shabbat*, the Movement recognized the importance of adding a grass-roots commemoration of a critical milestone of the Jewish people's transition from freedom to independence. Thus, Shabbat Tekumah joins an intensive period of special days each with evocative liturgy, poetry, and songs – beginning with Passover and culminating with Independence Day – symbolically marking the milestones of this important historical journey.

- **Passover** is the festival of freedom. Its traditional liturgy - "We were Slaves..." (עבדים היינו), "Song of the Sea" (שירת הים) and others - marks this as the holiday of our liberation from slavery and as the harbinger of spring.
- **Holocaust Memorial Day** (יום השואה) Marked by poems and songs of the victims, survivors, and heroes, such as: "Song of the Partisans" (שיר הפרטיזנים), "Ash and Dust" (אפר ואבק) and others, Yom HaShoah is a solemn expression of Zionism's responsibility to this dark chapter in the nation's modern history.



- **Memorial Day** (יום הזיכרון). The memorial songs for Israel's Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers - for example: "They Say There is a Land" (אומרים ישנה ארץ), "I Have No Other Land" (אין לי ארץ אחרת), "Here, In Our Fathers' Land" (פה בארץ חמדת אבות), "Bear your Banner to Zion" (שאו ציונה נס) (ודגל) and of course "HaTikvah" – were the closing notes for these intensive three weeks in the Israeli calendar.
- **Independence Day**. The modern, massive immigration to the Land of Israel is honored with such songs as: "Sharlia" (שרליה), "Home, home..." (הביתה, הביתה) and others.

Ariel Hirschfeld wrote that "...the selection of HaTikvah as the national anthem was not an ideological gesture so much as a response to the hosts of singers that identified so deeply with it and valued it so dearly" – decades before the establishment of the State. His writing offers an insight to the selection of Israel's national anthem – chosen by the people and not for them.

The origins of *HaTikvah* may teach us about the significant connection of *Shabbat Tekumah* to the updated calendar of the Reform Movement. On the one hand, it is an emotional, nostalgic expression of the longing and yearning for the traditional spirit of the Jewish people, but on the other hand, it is an expression of a progressive movement – one that views the values of Israel's Declaration of Independence as iron-clad prerequisites for the existence of the State, for its continued prosperity, development, relevance, and national strength.

Rabbi Nir Barkin is the Senior Rabbi of Kehillat YOZMA in Modi'in.



Crying with Joy / Rabbi Na'ama Dafni Kellen

In the last few weeks I have found myself quite often on the verge of tears. The current situation in Israel is very worrying. It seems that the ground is shaking, and the future looks challenging and even frightening.

I read the news and my eyes are filled with tears of frustration, with tears of worry, with tears of sadness. I look at the growing gaps, the hatred and the possible loss of democracy and I want to cry.

I also find myself with tears in my eyes in very different situations. When I see so many people who were indifferent take action; when I see hundreds and hundreds of Israeli flags in the streets; when we are invited (for the first time) to join a demonstration for "Zionist, democratic and religious Jews" together with our Orthodox brothers and sisters; when I stand in Haifa surrounded by 50,000 people of all ages, singing our national hymn – "עוד לא אבדה" – "תקוותנו" – our hope will not be lost.

These are moments when the tears roll down my cheeks, and when the words of Pslams 126 comes to mind: "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy".

You can call my generation "accidental Israelis". Our grandparents founded this country, our parents defended its existence. We were born here, almost taking the State of Israel for granted. Now, we have a deep sense of meaning to being Israeli and Zionist. It is our role to make sure Israel remains a Jewish and democratic state.

May the challenges we face now create new meaning, build new bridges, and infuse new significance and commitment to our special and unique Israel.

As we approach Israel's 75th anniversary don't cry over us, cry out with us. We will eventually reap with joy.

Rabbi Na'ama Dafni Kellen is the Co-Senior Rabbi at congregation Or Hadash, Haifa.



All of Israel are Responsible / Rabbi Efrat Rotem

One of the most basic and historically significant values of Judaism is “all of Israel are responsible one for the other” (Safra, Behokothai, 7, 5), a principle that assumes a shared destiny and mutual reliance are the basis of relations in the collective. Much of the impressive survivability of Jewish individuals and Jewish communities stems from this rule. If a Jew can go almost anywhere in the world, find the local Jewish community, whether large or small, and be welcomed there, receive help and immediately participate in its rituals and community life, there is no doubt that this mutual guarantee works.

For me, as a queer lesbian, this ability to go anywhere in the world, find the local community and immediately feel some sense of belonging, is very familiar. Identifying as a Jew, and identifying as a sexual and gender minority, creates beautiful worlds that are not necessarily familiar to those who belong to the majority. Just as historically this Jewish superpower of mutual guarantee got twisted into conspiracy theories about the global power of the Jews, LGBTQAI communities around the world are being attributed to have enormous global power to change the “natural order”. These fantasies, of course, have nothing to do with the daily life of the minority.

The strength of the sexual, gender, and religious minority lies in the definite knowledge that community is valuable, and

that the network of connections that bind us to each other often give meaning to our lives, provide support and inner strength, and celebrates who we are, whether as Jews or as LGBTQAIs.

The State of Israel, however, is not a Jewish collective. It is a modern country where Jews and members of other religions and other nationalities live. The unifying force in the country cannot be based only on “all of Israel are responsible one for the other”, first of all because this beautiful sentence itself excludes women (in Hebrew) and can even be harmful if interpreted as referring only to the shared destiny of Jews in the Israeli context.

Because of this, I offer we use the value of solidarity at the state level. Solidarity results from choice and is not based only on similarities or on belonging to the same community. In Israel, we need solidarity everywhere: standing in line at the supermarket, on the roads, in the schools, and on the streets. Solidarity transcends communities and identifications. It is similar to the way Rabbi Ben Azzai adds to Rabbi Akiva’s statement that “love your neighbor as yourself” is a great rule in the Torah the statement that “this is a book of human history” is a bigger rule (Safra Kdoshim 2, 4).

I wish us all solidarity that will stem from love for ourselves and grow into love for others.

Rabbi Efrat Rotem is a queer environmental activist who integrates pluralist Judaism, critical feminism, and queer identity and worldview into her work as a rabbi.



Od Lo Avdah Tikvateinu – Our Hope is Not Yet Lost / Rabbi Lea Mühlstein

These words by Naftali Herz Imber are best known for their inclusion in HaTikvah, the national anthem of the State of Israel. Throughout Jewish history, hope has been a driving force that has sustained the Jewish people through difficult times – whether it was the hope to return to the land of Israel, as expressed in HaTikvah, the hope of our Israelite ancestors to be liberated from slavery in Egypt, or the simple hope that things would get better. But hope is not the same thing as optimism. Hope is a state of mind, not a state of the world. As the Czech playwright, revolutionary, and ex-president Václav Havel put it: “Hope is not a prognostication – it’s an orientation of the spirit.”

Zionists around the world have been looking forward to celebrating Israel at 75 with light-hearted joy and pride. Yet, the past few months have seen our hopes for our Jewish homeland trampled by those in government. But as the words of HaTikvah

remind us – our hope is not yet lost. Even when we experience setbacks, as Jews we know that we must translate our hope into action, even when it looks like we might fail. And so, as we support our Israeli siblings in their struggle to defend Israel as envisaged by her founders, this Yom HaAtzmaut especially, we pray in the words of the great Israeli poet Leah Goldberg that hope shall always remain our orientation of the spirit:

Lamdeini Elohay - Teach me, my God,
to pray

For freedom to see, to feel, to breathe

To know, to hope—and to fail.

Instruct my lips in blessing, song
and praise

When time renews itself each dawn
and night

That my today be not as yesterday.

Rabbi Mühlstein is the International Chair of ARZENU, the political voice of Reform, Progressive and Liberal Religious Zionists, and one of the senior rabbis of The Ark Synagogue (NPLS) in London.



Two That Are One / Rabbi Josh Weinberg

The State of Israel has been an unparalleled tremendous success story, and continues to be a source of inspiration for Jewish life around the world. Despite the current political crisis, and the years of war and conflict that continue to plague us, the establishment of a Jewish State in our ancestral homeland has dramatically changed Judaism and Jewish life – for both Israelis and Diaspora Jews in a way that cannot be sufficiently measured. Jewish life for the millions of Jews living around the world would be simply unimaginable if it were not for the contributions of Israeli Judaism from the revival of the Hebrew language, the life and relevance breathed into the Hebrew bible, and evolved into modern Jewish and Hebrew poetry, literature, and song. At the onset of the Zionist Movement Ahad Ha'am, the great visionary of spiritual/cultural Zionism wrote that:

“This Jewish settlement will become in course of time the center of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable.”

125 years later, his vision has been magnificently manifested. And yet, as we

celebrate Israel reaching its miraculous milestone, this moment in time calls for a reassessment of the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. The now old model which Ahad Ha'am offered must evolve. The “center which will radiate to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, to inspire them with new life and to preserve the overall unity of our people,” is still true, but today, the inspiration goes both ways. Simon Rawidovitch, a disciple of Ahad Ha'am offers a different model. He saw the people of Israel as a whole, as an ellipse with two foci (rather than a circle with one center), the State of Israel and the Diaspora of Israel. This model should be given the symbolic title of “Israel is One: the State and the Diaspora of Israel - Two that are One.”

As we work together to forge the future of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, may we see ourselves as co-creators of Jewish life, learn from one another's shared experience and together shape the Jewish future לתקן עולם במלכות שדי – to create a better world under God for the Jewish people and all of humanity.

חג עצמאות שמח!

Rabbi Josh Weinberg is the Vice President, Israel and Reform Zionism and Executive Director, ARZA



Israel's Declaration of Independence

Translated excerpts from the Declaration of Independence:

ERETZ-ISRAEL (the Land of Israel) was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books. After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

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.

To hear the Declaration of Independence read with Hebrew cantillation of the Torah, visit:

<https://www.megila.org/hamegila>

For the full text of the Declaration of Independence, visit:

<https://m.knesset.gov.il/en/about/pages/declaration.aspx>