

CyberTorah: Yom HaZikaron

The great blessing of Israel is to be in control of our own destiny. Herzl dreamed of a day when we could be a “normal” people. He meant a nation that existed in the political and economic world, rather than a people condemned to dwell on the outskirts of Europe. We have lived to see that dream realized, but it has been realized at a cost.

Loss of life is terrible, the loss of a young person doubly so. The Mishnah teaches that when a single person dies, it is as if a whole world dies, for they and all their future descendants perish in that moment. Israeli military service begins immediately upon High School graduation. Most soldiers in the IDF are young people giving away three years of their life before they figure out education, career, and family. For a young person to lose their life before it truly begins is a tragedy beyond measure.

In this country, defending Jewish existence means affiliating with a Synagogue or donating to Federation. Israeli's are called upon in a much more visceral way to defend the land of Israel. Further, everyone knows or is related to someone who has lost their life in the IDF. Unlike the United States, where Memorial Day is as much about picnics as remembering those who have given their lives in the service of this country, Yom Hazikaron is a true day of remembrance.

There is a point during the day in Israel when the sirens sound and everything stops. In that moment everyone in Israel remembers. Some remember a child lost. Others, a friend or sibling. It is a communal moment that allows Israelis to draw strength from one another as they remember the lives cut short. The worlds that could have been but are no more, lost to us in this veil of tears.

I believe Yom Hazikaron inspires many Israelis to yearn all the more for peace. Yes, we want a strong and secure Israel. But that security and strength can come in the presence of a flourishing Arab world, provided that those who foster violence and hate are overcome. It is hard to see that world, or how we get it to it but Yom Hazikron makes us crave it all the more. Israelis mourning the loss of their loved ones want to be the last people crying for such reasons anywhere in the world. To me, the message of Yom Hazikaron is: we stand ready to defend ourselves, to preserve this land, and we wait every day of peace.

I suggest the following prayer to be recited at some point tomorrow to remember the dedication and sacrifice of Israeli soldiers.

God filled with mercy, may you remember and hold safe the souls of those who have given their lives in defense of the Land of Israel. May the memory of their loss and sacrifice inspire us also to protect and defend the Land of Israel in ways that echo their bravery. May their memory also inspire us to pursue peace. For we yearn for the day when “violence will no longer be heard in the courts of Jerusalem, but only the sounds of young people in song.” We cannot imagine such a world on this of all days, but we turn to You in hope and prayer for it is You who make peace in the heavens. We pray that those who stand in the way of peace, those who foster violence and bloodshed, shall have their hands weakened and their heads confused. May You hold these young people in Your sheltering embrace, and may their memory be for a blessing. Amen.

Please note that there are two ways of commemorating Yom Hazikron publicly this year in our area. At 7pm tomorrow (Wednesday) at Gunn in Spangenberg is a Yom Hazikron service. In addition, our evening minyan tonight will also include a special Yom Hazikron prayer.

God's comfort to all those who have lost loved ones in the service of Israel,

Rabbi David Booth



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