

April 15, 2021

Tazria Metzora – Rabbi Wexler

I had a particularly unexpected, yet powerful moment this week. On Tuesday at 1pm EST, midway through our Lunch & Learn with educator and friend, Ilan Bloch, the clock struck 8pm in Israel and [a one-minute siren](#) sounded throughout the country to honor all of the fallen Israeli soldiers and terror victims on Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day). When the siren sounds in Israel on Yom HaZikaron, both in the evening and in the morning, the entire country pauses. Everyone stands at attention and in silence. As the siren sounded on Tuesday, Ilan paused his lecture and opened his window so we could all hear the blast of the siren, and we in turn stood in solidarity, with our brothers and sisters in Israel. It was a powerful moment; a moment that brought Yom HaZikaron to Cherry Hill for all of us logged onto Zoom. It also brought back memories for me of my rabbinical school year in Israel, the only time I have been in Israel on Yom HaZikaron. The sirens, the memorial ceremonies, and the solemnity of the day are chilling.

Naomi Shemer opens her song [Al Kol Eleh](#) with the words of *al ha'devash v'al ha'oketz*, 'the honey and the sting.' This notion of an Israel filled with joy and challenges, and even great burdens and difficulties, is actualized in the Israeli calendar. Yom HaZikaron is immediately followed the next day by Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day), creating a stark juxtaposition of pain and sorrow with celebration and rejoicing. The transition is marked in Israel by a ceremony called *Tekes Maavar*, a ceremony of transition. Israelis gather at dusk as Yom HaZikaron transitions into Yom Ha'Atzmaut. The ceremony begins with a dirge and ends in joyous singing and dancing.

To move from sorrow to joy in what seems like the snap of a finger initially feels disorienting and emotionally taxing. Yet, in truth, there is deep beauty to that moment and to the message behind it. Israel teaches us about the importance of memory. But it's not just remembering and sharing our stories that is important. It's also how we remember.

Sherri Mandell is an Israeli-American author of two books: [The Blessing of a Broken Heart](#) and [The Road to Resilience](#). Sherri's 13 year-old son was murdered in a terrorist attack in Israel in 2001. Yesterday, to mark Yom HaZikaron, and Yom Ha'Atzmaut, she published an article entitled: "Memorial Day and Post-Traumatic Growth." In the article she writes:

*Memorializing has the word "memory" in it. It's fixed in the past. Commemoration, on the other hand, is different, at least in Hebrew. (In English, it also involves the word "memory.") In Hebrew, hantzacha has the word netzach embedded in it. Netzach means "eternity." It looks towards the future. It's alive. Something gets passed down so that it can be learned from and built upon.*

Because, ultimately, it's what we do with the hard stories from the past that matter. Yes, many of the victims of the wars and terrorism in this country suffer from PTSD, but we also have tremendous post-traumatic growth.

You can say that this whole country, building this nation, is an example of post-traumatic growth. We're masters not just of remembering, but of transforming our pain into growth and joy and celebration.

Today is Yom Ha'Atzmaut. Today, Israel is 73. Today is a day of concerts, BBQs, and celebration, and it is also a day of transforming memory into growth, and ultimately, into joy. Today we say *Am Yisrael Chai*, the Jewish People Live!

Hag Atzmaut Sameah and Shabbat Shalom.