

Rabbi Noah Arnow  
Kol Rinah  
Yom HaAtzmaut 5778 / 2018

I miss hearing and speaking Hebrew. I miss Israeli salad, ubiquitous at every meal, including breakfast. I miss the views and vistas and landscape, which somehow in a small country is more dramatic and beautiful than much of what I see in St. Louis.

I miss hummus, and techina, and falafel and shawarma, shakshuka and bourekas and labneh, fresh pita. I miss the closeness, the rhythm that develops between people when you travel in a group.

I miss eggplant eleven different ways, and the scent of the air in Jerusalem in the early morning, and the sun setting over the Mediterranean in Tel Aviv.

I missed Tammy, and my kids, and all of you. But now, I miss Israel.

You create a different bond with people, and with a place, when you visit versus when you cry and celebrate. We didn't just visit—we cried, and mourned with Israel, and we celebrated with Israel too over the past two weeks, and it's on these public observances that I want to focus this morning.

We observe Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, communally, on the day that is convenient for us—on a Sunday usually, and at a communal but private Jewish space—often a synagogue. And it's not America that mourns, that tells stories of the Holocaust, that commemorates. It's Jews, for the most part. And we don't even do it all together—the Orthodox community doesn't come to the “community” event, and we don't go to Orthodox community events (if we're even invited).

For Yom HaShoah ve-haGevurah, the day that commemorates the Holocaust and heroism in Israel, we were at a communal observance that began at 8pm—it was young and old people, more secular, more religious, the whole community—all there in one shared space. It was done with dignity, and respect, and patience, and not moved to a more convenient day, because what could be more important than this?

Israel takes its ceremonies very seriously. An American I know who made aliya was complaining somewhat that it seems that so much of school in the spring in Israel is focused on kids memorizing things for ceremonies. I don't know if that's a good thing or not, but it does signal the importance that the society places on these communal observances.

For Yom HaZikaron, Israel's memorial day, we gathered with thousands of Israelis in Kikar Rabin, Rabin Square (renamed from Kings of Israel Square to Rabin Square to honor Yitzchak Rabin, who was assassinated there in 1995 just after speaking at a peace rally). It was a young gathering—some older folks, but mostly Israelis in their 20s and 30s, for whom serving in the military is a very fresh memory. The ceremony started with a broadcast of the national ceremony, at the Western Wall, in Jerusalem. Politicians made speeches, and it was all very proper. But people in Tel Aviv were talking quietly through it, smoking, checking out their phones. It's very hard for a crowd to pay attention to a screen broadcasting something predictable taking place in another city. It ended with Kaddish, for which people quieted down, and then Hatikvah, which everyone sang, but quietly, and so gently.

We waited a few minutes, to see what would happen next. But nothing happened. Many of our group left—it was 8:45, and there was a 20-minute walk back to the hotel, after a

long day. But I stayed with our guide, Meir, and we sat down in the square, with many others, and waited. And at about 9pm, a ceremony began on the stage there in front of us. Poems and songs, read and sung live, were interspersed with video presentations about fallen soldiers. And no one was talking; people were paying attention, were respectful, a few were softly crying.

Soldiers from different eras—the 60s, the 90s, 2012, the 70s, were all being remembered. It's not easy to get 20-somethings to take something seriously, all together. But this did it.

By the next afternoon, restaurants and stores were opened up, and people were busy preparing for Yom HaAtzmaut, Independence Day.

A few of us went back to Kikar Rabin. At 8pm, we got good seats in front of the same stage as the night before, and waited. Nothing was happening. I went to get a burger and fries (Magic Burger, so good), and by the time we were back at about 8:45, there was a very brief ceremony, and then a show. And the square was packed, more now with older folks, and thousands of families with young kids, many with spray cans of silly string or other spray things, inflatable hammers for bonking people, flags, and other toys. The show began, and consisted of different dance troupes dancing to classic Israeli songs from the seven decades of Israeli history.

It was punctuated by singers singing songs too, and then they introduced Kobi Oshrat, who composed the 1979 Eurovision song contest-winning "Hallelujah." The whole crowd practiced singing it, as well as two new verses written for the occasion, and then a little later that evening, they linked up a whole bunch of cities around Israel, maybe even around the world, singing at the same time. And both times we sang it—practice, for real, everyone went crazy. The old lyrics are at the bottom of the e-mail, but here are the new verses, in Hebrew and English:

הללויה ישראל  
הללויה הלב מתפעל  
ממדינה קטנה בודדה  
הפכת בן ליל אגדה  
ואלייך שבנו מקצווי תבל  
הללויה שאי ברכה  
יום הולדת  
הוא יום הבטחה  
של מולדת ועם ותקווה  
נשיר לך באהבה  
הללויה

Hallelujah Israel  
Hallelujah The heart marvels  
From a small, alone country  
You have become a fairy-tale night  
And we have built from the ends of the earth

Hallelujah lift up blessing  
A birthday is a promised day

Of homeland and nation and hope  
We'll sing to you with love  
Hallelujah

By the time we left, it was 11pm, there were fireworks, and some people were leaving, but the party was only getting started. There was music booming throughout the streets, clubs and bars were packed, with people spilling out into streets and sidewalks—it was a city-wide festival.

The next day, the only stores open were ice cream shops, because ice cream, and grocery stores—it's the biggest day for butchers in Israel because everyone grills in the park on Yom HaAtzmaut, and ice cream shops. Most everything else was closed. I met a friend in the park with his family; kids were everywhere and the smell of grilling was inescapable.

There's something powerful about a national celebration of events still within people's memory, of history that still require enormous sacrifice and thus allow greater celebration too.

Most of everything else we did while in Israel, you could already have done, or could still do. And I was, frankly, worried that these would be wasted days, where we couldn't tour, couldn't go anywhere. But it was the opposite—it almost felt like by touring, we were missing things. When was the last time you felt that?

Yom Huledet Sameach, Israel—Happy 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Israel. Let's celebrate together again soon!

HALELUYAH (Eurovision)

HALELUYA LA'OLAM

Haleluya la'olam,  
haleluya yashiru kulam

bemila achat bodeda

halev male behamon toda

veholem gam hu - eze olam nifla.

HALLELUYA

HALLELUYA TO THE WORLD

Haleluya to the world,  
every one will sing

One word only

and the heart is full of thanks

And beats as well what a wonderful world

Haleluya im hashir,

haleluya al yom sheme'ir ,

Haleluya al ma shehayah,

umah she'od lo hayah - haleluya

Haleluya with the song,

for a day that shines

For all that has been

and for all that is about to happen

Haleluya la'olam

haleluya yashiru kulam

Vehainbalim hagdolim

yehadhedu bahamon tzilim

Veitanu hem yomru - haleluya.

Haleluya to the world,

every one will sing

And the big bells

will be echo in a lot of notes

And together with us they will say - haleluya

Haleluya al hakol

halelu al machar ve'etmol

Haleluya for every thing,

yesterday and tomorrow

Haleluya utnu yad beyad  
veshiru milev echad – haleluya

Haleluya hand in hand  
and sing in one heart - haleluya