

Reinvent Yom HaAtzmaut?

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Robbie Gringas **makes a case:**

Yom Ha'atzmaut is currently far from being an event through which the Jewish community "celebrates itself". While Chanukah, a festival marking momentous events in the land of Israel, is celebrated in the home and in the community with comfort and ease, Yom Ha'atzmaut, another festival marking momentous events in that far-away land, is neither comfortable nor homely. Chanukah has become a festival that is 'owned' by the local population, no matter where in the world they live. **Yom Ha'atzmaut is and has always been owned by Israelis...**

Nor, for example, is St Patrick's Day to those of Irish descent what Yom Ha'atzmaut is to Jews... St Patrick's Day has now moved far beyond being an Irish Catholic event. The largest St Patrick's Day Parade now takes place in Chicago not Dublin. The slogan throughout the States, "Everyone's Irish on St Patrick's Day", marks its ecumenical, non-ethnic intentions, as the festival celebrates more the sale of Irish-style goods (mainly great beer) than the promotion of Irish life and authentic culture. Despite this gradual draining of the festival's content, St Patrick's Day nevertheless celebrates a more authentic, less complicated sense of exilic longing, than does Yom Ha'atzmaut for Jews...

The time may have come for us to begin draw inspiration not from other nationalisms, nor from other ethnicities, but from our own. We need to begin to see and develop Yom Ha'atzmaut as a Jewish holiday: a chag. Paradoxically, because Yom Ha'Atzmaut is such an established yet unclaimed festival in the orthodox world, we may find ourselves with a great deal of room for maneuver. We may draw from religious wisdom without committing to its authority: we may refer to religious constructs without commenting on their essence...

Each chag has a **narrative** and a **theme** that express themselves through a **designated experience, structured reflection, and symbolic action...**

We would suggest that Yom Ha'atzmaut should mark the following theme:

.To be a free people in our land – This would allow us to focus on the four areas of Zionism that together would suggest a unique aspect to Jewish existence...

For Chag Ha'atzmaut it might be tempting to reach for the Declaration of Independence, or for one's Tanach, to find the specific *megillah* appropriate to our Chag Ha'atzmaut. But before doing so it would be useful to increase the breadth of our options. Perhaps a piece of literature from beyond the Tanach might be equally appropriate? What might the story of the Golem of Prague reflect on Israel's narrative of sovereignty, power, and tradition? How could a biography of Albert Einstein – an individual, Diaspora-dwelling, light unto the nations, almost-President of Israel – comment on Am Chofshi

b'Artzenu? Must we choose only one text?...

As we have stated, there may be value in drawing on Jewish 'traditional forms' of ritual so as to lend - not necessarily authority - but contextual familiarity to our Chag Ha'atzmaut rites of passage. One such form might be the Seder Plate, as applied to the four principles of Chag Ha'atzmaut... one might raise and drink a glass of water to mark the life-giving to cut open a pomegranate to mark the unified and , simplicity of to eat a wild sabra fruit to mark the prickly yet , diverse nature of . and to light a vial of olive oil to mark , sweet ambivalence of

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There are several worthy observations here, but color me skeptical about any attempt to create a really meaningful ritual celebration intentionally and all at once. Isn't it possible that the ancient festivals are so rich with meaning precisely because no one human individual (or, God save us all, *committee*) designed them? Do we really want to perform rituals born in a brainstorming session and tailored to express themes X, Y, and Z, as defined by seventeen bullet-pointed specifications? Aren't the contradictions and opacities and confusions of the classic Jewish holidays a significant part of the reason we'll never exhaust the ways they can be meaningful? It's not that I disagree with Gringas that Yom HaAtzmaut ought to develop further, but perhaps it will best do so if we let it do so in unexpected and unplanned ways.