



Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day) in Israel

Suggested Men's Club Activities

- Plan an Israeli style BBQ with Israeli / Middle Eastern food
 - Use pita instead of bread
 - Include many types of finely diced Israeli salad
 - Include falafel and kabobs
 - Have Israeli music playing in the background
- Have a program about Israeli music and dance
- Ask club members in different professions to give a 5 – 10 minute presentation about Israeli innovations or inventions that had an impact on *their area of expertise*.
(www.israel21c.org)
- Have a quiz about the history of modern Israel (See samples at end)
- Invite Israeli army veterans to speak of their experiences and feelings about their country
- Invite an Israeli to talk about Yom Ha'atzmaut in Israel
- Have a speaker about Israeli culture and how it differs from ours
- Show a film about Israel, like “Exodus”, or Israel advocacy, like “The Case For Israel”
- Hold an Israeli products fair



(Remember that you can't have too many Israeli flags during your program)

- **What is Yom Ha'atzmaut?**

Yom Ha'atzmaut (Hebrew: **יום העצמאות** *yōm hā-'atz mā'ūt*; is the national independence day of Israel, commemorating when David Ben Gurion publically read the Proclamation of the establishment of the State of Israel.



- **When is it celebrated?**

Israel's Independence Day is celebrated on or about the fifth day of the month of Iyar, which is the Hebrew date of the formal establishment of the State of Israel, when members of the "provisional government" read and signed a Declaration of Independence in Tel Aviv. The original date corresponded to May 14, 1948.

If the 5th of Iyar falls on a Friday or Saturday, the celebrations are moved up to the preceding Thursday. If the 5th of Iyar is on a Monday, the festival is postponed to Tuesday.

- May 10, 2011 (Tuesday, postponed one day to *Iyar* 6)
- April 26, 2012 (Thursday, advanced one day to *Iyar* 4)
- April 16, 2013 (Tuesday, postponed one day to *Iyar* 6)

Many North American Jewish communities hold the public celebrations on a following Sunday in order to attract more participation.

- **How is it celebrated in Israel?**

In the State of Israel it is a formal holiday, so almost everyone has the day off.

The religious character of Yom Ha'atzmaut is still in the process of formation. The Chief Rabbinate (which consists of Orthodox rabbis) has decided that this day should be marked with the recital of *Hallel* (psalms of praise), similar to other joyous holidays, and with the reading of a special *haftarah* (prophetic portion).

On the other hand, *HaKibbutz HaDati* (Modern Orthodox Kibbutz Movement) initiated a version of the prayer *Al HaNissim* ("Concerning the Miracles") to be added to the *Amidah* (the central prayer recited while standing) on Yom Ha'atzmaut, as it is on Hanukkah and Purim. This special addition to the liturgy of the day was not approved by the Chief Rabbinate but was adopted by the *Masorti* (Conservative) and the Progressive (Reform) congregations in Israel. The Conservative Movement instituted the reading of a Torah portion for the day as well as the inclusion of a version of *Al Hanisim* (for the Miracles...), which is commonly recited on Hanukkah and Purim since all three commemorate a "miraculous" victory of the Jews over an

enemy of superior military might. Some places also read the haftarah Isaiah 10:32–12:6, which is also read on the last day of Pesach.

Most Israelis do not consider Yom Ha'atzmaut a religious holiday.

Official Observation: Yom Ha'atzmaut in Israel is always preceded by Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day for the fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism. The message of linking these two days is clear: Israelis owe their independence--the very existence of the state--to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for it. Israelis are taken from the lowest emotional point to the highest.



The official "switch" from Yom Hazikaron to Yom Ha'atzmaut takes place a few minutes after sundown, with a ceremony on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in which the flag is raised from half staff (due to Memorial Day) to the top of the pole. The president of Israel delivers a speech of congratulations, and soldiers representing the army, navy, and air force parade with their flags. In recent decades this small-scale parade and fireworks displays have replaced the large-scale daytime parade, which was the main event during the 1950s and '60s. The evening parade is followed by a torch lighting (*hadlakat masuot*) ceremony, which marks the country's achievements in all spheres of life.

Yom Ha'atzmaut is concluded with the ceremony of granting the "Israel Prize" recognizing individual Israelis for their unique contribution to the country's culture, science, arts, and the humanities. The finals for the International Bible Contest are also held.



Merkava tank decorated with flags, in an open military exhibition for Independence Day

Shaving cream and silly string wars are a common way of celebrating the day in Israel, as seen on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem on the holiday in 2006





Private houses in Holon, Israel decorated with Israeli flags and emblems on the occasion of Yom Ha'atzmaut

Unofficial Observation: Other than the official ceremonies, Israelis celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut in a variety of ways. In the cities, the nighttime festivities may be found on the main streets. Crowds will gather to watch public shows like plays, musicals, patriotic poetry reading, and sing-a-long karaoke offered for free by the municipalities and the government. Many spend the night dancing Israeli folk dances or singing Israeli songs. During the daytime, thousands of Israeli families go out on hikes and picnics. Army camps are open for civilians to visit and to display the recent technological achievements. Soldiers wear their hats on their heads instead of the more common way of in their uniform epaulets. On some bases have soldiers take turns as flag honor guards and stand still for 10-15 minutes.

Many Israeli families regardless of religious affiliation celebrate this day with picnics and barbecues (known in Israeli slang as a *mangal*). Sing-a-longs are common at parties, especially old Zionist patriotic songs and dances. On the eve of the holiday, people sing and dance in the streets. Israeli flags are everywhere: Windows; balconies; utility poles; Attached to car windows; flags on clothing, etc. Some people leave the flags hoisted until after Israel Day (Yom Yerushalayim).

There are many outdoor activities and a general back to nature theme. There is a display of the Zionist love of the land (Ha-Aretz). Hiking is very common and it's not unusual to find crowded hiking trails everywhere. Many families make visits to historical sites.

- **How is Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrated in North America?**

Most of the Jewish communities in the Western world have incorporated this modern holiday into their calendars. For Diaspora Jews, celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut has been a way to express solidarity with the state of Israel and to strengthen their alliance with it.

In many communities, it is one of few occasions in which Jewish organizations and synagogues of different ideologies and denominations cooperate in forming a common celebration. In many North American congregations, the joint public celebration often is augmented by a religious service. In some cases, this would occur on the Shabbat closest to Yom Ha'atzmaut and would

consist of additional readings added to the service and, usually, the singing of *Hatikvah* (the Israeli national anthem).

There is not yet an accepted "tradition" of how to celebrate this holiday and only time will tell whether certain customs, foods, prayers, and melodies will be linked in the Jewish mind with this holiday, as with holidays that emerged many centuries before Yom Ha'atzmaut. For Jews around the world, joining with Israelis celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut has become a concrete link in the Jewish connection to the land of Israel.

Note: Contents adapted from personal interviews and various internet sites including the following:

www.myjewishlearning.com

www.mfa.gov.il

www.allrecipies.com

www.wikipedia.com

FJMC Yom Ha'atzmaut Quiz

- 1- Who is the current President of Israel?
- 2- Who is the current Prime Minister of Israel?
- 3- Name a Israeli Prime Minister or President who is believed to be a Palestinian
- 4- Which form of government is closest to Israel? United States/ England/ Saudi Arabia
- 5- What are the three times in history that Jerusalem served as a capital city?
- 6- What orchestra played Hatikvah when Israel's independence was announced?
- 7- Who was the last internationally recognized head of state for region of Palestine?
- 8- What's the active legal document concerning Jewish settlement in the West Bank?
- 9- What is Israel's official language(s)?
- 10- What is Israel's official state religion?
- 11- What US state is approximately the same size as Israel?
- 12- Which cities have more people than the entire country of Israel?
 - A) New York/ Tokyo/ Mexico City
 - B) Los Angeles/ Shanghai/ Calcutta
 - C) Paris/ Seoul/ Beijing
 - D) London/ Istanbul/ Moscow
 - E) All the above
 - F) None of the above
- 13- Approximately what percentage of Israeli citizens are Jews?
- 14- Name two western countries that had an arms embargo against Israel which lasted more than five years after independence.
- 15- Which country(s) have preferential laws of return for specific categories of people?
 - A) Israel
 - B) Israel/India/Italy/Turkey
 - C) Israel/Denmark/Norway/Sweden
 - D) Israel/France/Spain/Germany
 - E) Israel/Bahrain/Liberia/Poland
 - F) All the above
- 16- Approximately what percent of Israel's security barrier is a wall?
- 17- What country did Israel assure it would not attack if it didn't fire first in 1967?
- 18- What Israeli General captured Egyptian land across the Suez Canal in 1973?

Answers: FJMC Yom Ha'atzmaut Quiz

- 1- Shimon Perez**
- 2- Benjamin Netanyahu**
- 3- All but a few had Palestinian birth certificates and passports as citizens of the Mandate for Palestine**
- 4- England**
- 5- Pre-Babylonian exile – Post-Babylonian exile until Roman conquest – Modern Israel**
- 6- Palestinian Philharmonic Orchestra (all Jews)**
- 7- Sultan Mehmet VI of the Ottoman Empire**
- 8- Mandate of Palestine**
- 9- Hebrew and Arabic**
- 10- Israel has no official state religion**
- 11- New Jersey**
- 12- E) all the above**
- 13- 80%**
- 14- United States and Great Britain**
- 15- F) all the above**
- 16- Less than 5% is a wall for locations where a fence offers no protection from snipers**
- 17- Jordan**
- 18- Ariel Sharon**

FJMC Yom Ha'atzmaut Matching Quiz

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|---------|---|----|---|
| 1 ____ | Became the Jerusalem Post | A- | Adolf Eichmann |
| 2 ____ | Israel's first Prime Minister | B- | Ahmad Shukairy (1 st PLO pres) |
| 3 ____ | Israel's first President | C- | Balfour Declaration |
| 4 ____ | Father of modern Zionism | D- | British |
| 5 ____ | Promise for a Jewish homeland | E- | Chiam Weitzman |
| 6 ____ | Legal basis for state of Israel | F- | Czechoslovakia |
| 7 ____ | Legally responsible for Jewish settlement | G- | David Ben Gurion |
| 8 ____ | Became Israel's army | H- | Haganah |
| 9 ____ | Only execution carried out in Israel | I- | France |
| 10 ____ | Called Judea and Samaria until 1948 | J- | Jewish Agency |
| 11 ____ | Israel's Parliament | K- | Knesset |
| 12 ____ | Israel's declaration of Independence | L- | Mandate for Palestine |
| 13 ____ | Represented Mandate Jews to British | M- | Middle East & North African |
| 14 ____ | Heritage of largest group of Jews in Israel | N- | Palestine Post |
| 15 ____ | Denied existence of state of Palestine | O- | Tel Aviv May 14, 1948 |
| 16 ____ | 1950's primary supplier of small arms | P- | Theodor Herzl |
| 17 ____ | 1950's primary supplier of tanks & planes | Q- | United States |
| 18 ____ | First country to recognize Israel | R- | West Bank |

Answers: FJMC Yom Ha'atzmaut Matching Quiz

- 1- N) **Palestine Post**
- 2- G) **David Ben Gurion**
- 3- E) **Chaim Weitzman**
- 4- P) **Theodore Herzl**
- 5- C) **Balfour Declaration**
- 6- L) **Mandate for Palestine**
- 7- D) **British**
- 8- H) **Haganah**
- 9- A) **Adolf Eichmann**
- 10- R) **West Bank**
- 11- K) **Knesset**
- 12- O) **Tel Aviv- May 14, 1948**
- 13- J) **Jewish Agency**
- 14- M) **Middle East and North Africa**
- 15- B) **Ahmad Shukairy (1st PLO president)**
- 16- F) **Czechoslovakia**
- 17- I) **France**
- 18- Q) **United States**

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