



YOM HA'ATZMA'UT and YOM HAZIKARON

Yom Ha'atzma'ut is Israel's Independence Day. Israel became an independent State on May 14, 1948. Like all Jewish holidays, *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* is celebrated according to a date on the Jewish calendar (the 5th day of *Iyar*). The Hebrew date of Israel's birthday generally corresponds with a date between the end of April and the middle of May.

Customs

Because it celebrates a recent historical event, this is one of a handful of Jewish holidays without a basis in ancient Jewish religious texts. There are no religious restrictions, as there are with some other Jewish holidays. *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* is often celebrated with parades, lectures, Israeli food and dancing. For more information on community celebrations, including the annual JUF community-wide "Walk with Israel" go to www.juf.org/walk. Some CJE SeniorLife sites will also hold "Walk with Israel" events.

For more information check out this great on-line resource:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Modern_Holidays/Yom_Haatzmaut.shtml

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YOM HAZIKARON (Day of Remembrance)

The day prior to Israel's Independence Day was declared by the Israeli Parliament to be a Memorial Day for those who lost their lives while in active duty in Israel's armed forces. Joining these two days together conveys the message that Jews owe the independence, and the very existence, of the Jewish state to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the State of Israel.

Yom Hazikaron, is different in character and mood from the American Memorial Day. For 24 hours (like all Jewish holidays, from sunset to sunset) all places of public entertainment (theaters, cinemas, nightclubs, etc.) are closed. The most noticed feature of the day is the sounding of a siren that is heard throughout the country. During the siren sounding, all of Israel observes a two-minute "standstill". Literately, everyone in all

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schools, places of business and the traffic on the street, stands still. The first siren marks the beginning of Memorial Day at 8:00 P.M., and the second is at 11:00 A.M., before the public recitation of prayers in the military cemeteries. All radio and television stations broadcast programs portraying the lives and heroic deeds of soldiers.

Some high schools organize their own *Yom Hazikaron* ceremonies and invite the families of the fallen graduates to participate. The unique atmosphere of the day is enhanced by the sight of children, often all dressed in white shirts, on their way to school, and thousands of soldiers in uniform on their way to military cemeteries.

Yom Hazikaron is not conceived as a religious commemoration by the majority of Israelis, but as part of the civil culture. The siren sound seems to inspire awe and sanctity no less than any traditional religious ceremony.

Outside of Israel, *Yom Hazikaron* is commemorated as part of the Israel Independence Day observance. There is usually a short memorial or a moment of silence preceding the communal *Yom Ha'atzmaut* celebration.
(Adapted from www.myjewishlearning.com)