

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY



RABBI AVI BERMAN

Executive Director, OU Israel



From the time I was Zoche to move to Israel at the age of nine, I experienced Yom HaZikaron, Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim as an Israeli boy, as a young student in Yeshiva, as a soldier in the army, as an adult, parent and now grandparent. Both days have a formulaic rhythm to them that I took for granted until a few years ago.

For me and my family who have lost loved ones, Yom HaZikaron is a busy - and somber - day. There are Tekesim to go to, graves to visit, families to call with comforting words. We find Yom HaZikaron a meaningful day as we stop and appreciate the sacrifices of those who died Al Kidush HaShem and contemplate how to live a life of purpose and meaning in their merit, and in their absence. For Israelis, Yom HaAtzmaut is a busy - and joyous - day. Since I was a child, Yom HaAtzmaut celebrations often included some mixture of a Tefillah Chagigit, watching the Chidon HaTanach Olami on a live stream or with my family in person, and a barbeque or two.

But while my connection to these days is deeply rooted, it became clear to me that many Olim don't connect to Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut the way Israelis do. Yom HaZikaron presents some obvious challenges. The lack of familiarity with the way Israelis commemorate those lost in comparison to Memorial Day and the overall feeling of distance when watching others

be reminded of a lost loved one, when they themselves cannot relate. Yom HaAtzmaut can also be a struggle. While the day might be filled with fun activities and great food, many Olim find it challenging to feel a personal connection to the day coming off of Yom HaZikaron.

With our commitment to the future of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael and serving as a source of inspiration for Olim, the OU Israel team committed ourselves to helping Olim connect with each day appropriately and meaningfully. It took some time before we found the right format but in time it became clear that Olim were looking to walk away from these events feeling connected, purposeful and inspired. Over the last 20 years we organized a Leil Yom Yerushalayim Tefillah Chagigit, followed by a dinner. We also tried a morning Yom Yerushalayim Tefillah Chagigit followed by breakfast. Finally, we found a format that checked all the boxes - a Tefillah Chagigit on the morning of Yom Yerushalayim at the Tayelet.

The positive feedback we received was reassuring and it begged the question, why not organize something for Yom HaZikaron or Yom HaAtzmaut?

So in 2018, the OU Israel team approached our friends at the Iriyat Yerushalayim to see what kind of program we could put together, and organized a Yom HaAtzmaut Tefillah Chagigit featuring Rabbi Shlomo Katz at Tachana Rishona. The first year, we expected about 600 people. 1,000 people

attended. The second year, the crowd of 1,000 grew to 2,500 people. The third year, Israel was mostly in lockdown due to Covid, so OU Israel shared a recording of the 2019 event to help Olim connect to the day from their respective homes. In 2021, due to Covid restrictions, we hosted 500 people in an outdoor tent, with the remaining crowd of 1,000 people standing outside. It was clear that we were onto something.

Thanks to all of your donations and support, I feel that OU Israel has been able to bring meaning and simcha to the masses this year, as we put together meaningful programs for all three days.

Yom HaZikaron: In an initiative led by Rabbi Moshe Taragin, OU Israel partnered with Yeshivat Har Etzion and Moetzet Gush Etzion to host an English broadcast of the Yom HaZikaron ceremony that took place at the Gush Etzion cemetery, where many heroes are buried. Together we hosted a pre-TeKes discussion and created an English translation of the ceremony to help Anglo-Israelis feel connected to the day. With the help of Chaim Snow, the event was live streamed and recorded for those who could not attend in person. Visit our Facebook page for a link to the recording.

Yom HaAztmaut: Thanks to the tireless efforts of the OU Israel team and our wonderful volunteers, we returned to Tachanah Rishonah and gathered a crowd of 3,500 to

4,000 people. You could feel the ground shake with joyful dancing of the crowd as the singing, led by Rabbi Shlomo Katz and his band, took us to new heights. As I looked around I saw faces of Yeshiva and Seminary students, families, Olim young and old, each brimming with emotion as they connected to the Tefillot. The overwhelming responses the team and I have been receiving since the event has been unbelievable. Needless to say, we certainly need to find a much bigger venue for next year... and the funds to pay for it!

Yom Yerushalayim: We will once again be hosting our annual Yom Yerushalayim Tefillah Chagigit this time the musical Tefillah and Hallel will be led by Rav Noam Koenigsberg at 7:30 am on Sunday, the 28th day of Iyar (May 29th), on the Tayelet and look forward to sharing in the beautiful experience with all those who can attend.

I continue to be grateful for all the responses we receive - each one inspires us to push the limits even further for next year. I look forward to seeing you all at the Tayelet on Yom Yerushalayim. B'ezrat HaShem, we will be singing Shirah together, looking over at the Beit HaMikdash as it stands proudly on Har HaMoriah.



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