

Transition to *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*

As night falls, bringing relief from the agony of Remembrance Day, Israelis come out to celebrate Israel's birthday, in their own way.

The official Independence Day opening ceremony takes place on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem, the burial place of Theodor Herzl, the visionary of the State of Israel, and of Israel's leaders and fallen soldiers. The President of Israel, together with members of Knesset, Supreme Court judges, foreign dignitaries, and invited guests, participate in a celebration of Israel's achievements.

Torches are lit by 12 citizens from all walks of life in Israel. Every year, a different aspect of Israeli life is highlighted, and twelve individuals, who have excelled in their chosen field, light twelve torches; 12 symbolic of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel.

In all the cities, moshavim, and kibbutzim, there are big celebrations.

The following day is a national holiday and everyone heads to the parks and beaches for the traditional "mangal," or barbecue. There are regular radio updates of the traffic gridlock converging on the most popular destinations in the country. By mid-day, several national parks close because there's just nowhere to squeeze in another vehicle.

It's the one day in the year for pure recreation, a holiday celebration with few added religious obligations. No newspapers, banks, or mail to take the mind off finding the best place to set up the portable barbecue with friends and family.

There are several major events on Independence Day. The prestigious Israel prize is awarded for outstanding lifetime achievements in the fields of literature, music, Biblical and Talmudic research, as well as in scientific achievements is awarded on this day.

If you ask any Israeli what major event comes to mind on Independence Day, he or she will most probably mention the International Bible Contest for Jewish Youth. This can best be compared to a huge trivia event with an audience that includes both religiously observant and secular Israelis. As the name implies, contestants in the International Bible Contest are from all over the world.

Other events on this day include long-distance races, soccer matches, theatrical performances, dance pageants, and art exhibitions. Several Israel Army and Air Force bases are open to the public. One of the major events of Independence Day is a slow fly-by over the country's cities and town, by Israel Air Force (IAF) aircraft.

On the radio there's a special edition of a program where Israelis around the world call in. Michael, from Tokyo, calls to wish us "chag sameach," in Japanese. Yossi, from Denver, reports that he's going to a *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* program at the JCC, and Etti checks in from Amsterdam, to let us know she's thinking of us.

It's a day of Celebration!

In our ceremony we have chosen 12 people from the community who have
_____ Each person represents

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