

Resources and suggestions for Yom Ha'Zikaron ceremonies and programs

Opening Remarks

Today we commemorate Yom Ha'Zikaron

Since the day of declaration, 14 of May, 1948 we have been constantly fighting for the right to live with peace and security in our land.

Yom Ha'Zikaron, a day in which we honor those who fell in the struggle to establish and protect the idea of a Jewish state in the land of Israel, is marked during these 24 hours preceding Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel's Independence Day).

In Israel, on Yom Ha'Zikaron, the entire nation remembers its debt and expresses eternal gratitude to its sons and daughters who gave their lives for the achievement of the country's independence and its continued existence.

As a result of the many acts of terror against Israeli civilians, the Israeli parliament decided to include the memory of those who were victims of terror alongside those who died fighting them. Yom Ha'Zikaron is a day of collective and personal anguish mingled with awe and honor for the fallen. It is a day on which the living rededicate themselves to the State of Israel, so that they may be worthy of the sacrifice of those who died for its survival.

In Israel, Yom Ha'Zikaron commences countrywide with the sound of sirens proclaiming a two-minute silence during which all activity cease. Flags are flown at half mast and memorial ceremonies are held all over the country. PLEASE RISE.

Candle lighting

Here you've got the option to light two candles symbolizing remembrance and continuity.

One candle is in memory of the soldiers who died during their service in the Israeli army and the second candle for those who were victims of terror.

Yizkor

Yizkor, which means remembrance in Hebrew, is Judaism's memorial prayer. There is a special *Yizkor* memorial prayer for members of the Israeli Defense Forces who died in the line of duty, which is read at many of the Yom Ha'Zikaron ceremonies and it is much recommended to read the Hebrew origin too for this part.

English

May G-d remember His sons and daughters who exposed themselves to mortal danger in those days of struggle prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and [may He remember] the soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces who fell in the wars of Israel. May the people of Israel keep them in their memory – and blessed with their seed; let them mourn the splendor of youth, the charm of valor, the holiness of will, and the devotion of sacrifice which came to an end in the heavy battles. May the loyal and valiant heroes of freedom and victory be sealed forever within the hearts of Israel

Hebrew

יזכור עם ישראל את בניו ובנותיו אשר
חרפו נפשם במאבק על המדינה - בדרך ואת
חיילי צבא - הגנה - לישראל אשר נפלו
במלחמות ישראל . יזכור ישראל ויתברך
בזרעו ויאבל על זיו העלומים וחמדת
הגבורה וקדושת הרצון ומסירות הנפש אשר
נספו במערכות הכבודות . יהיו גיבורי הדרור
והניצחון הנאמנים והאמיצים חתומים בלב
ישראל לדור ודור .

Different Readings

Articles which were written by some Israeli personalities, which are often read at Yom Ha'Zikaron ceremonies nationwide:

It is not true that life goes on\ Yair Lapid (a well known journalist in Israel)

It is not true that life goes on, they always say that but it is never true.

When you lose someone, your life, the way you knew it, will never be the same. Your family is still yours but it is different now. Your parents are different. The way you sit around the table ,

the way you remember the trip to Greece, with the photo album of all the hilarious pictures you took, which has now changed into a memorial document.

I really don't think that life goes on. People keep asking you the same simple questions such as "how are you"? and you know they actually mean either "we know" or "we're here for you".

Every time you're sad, they all stop by to cheer you up and you don't know how to tell them you definitely don't need a support –group but you just want to hide under your blanket for an hour.

Who can possibly think that life goes on...? even **you** can never be the same .You are the one who lost a relative .You are the one who watches alone the old TV show which you always used to watch together.

You're the one that when you laugh they say you managed to get over it. When you're busy, they say you are really o.k. and if you leave home for more than two weeks, they say you probably ran away.

It's not true that life goes on, even your past is being edited. Every time you tell them how you took the bus together on some trip, you find yourself debating whether to mention him as "my brother" or, "my late brother". Sometimes you just leave him out of the story because you don't want any embarrassing moments.

Sometimes, when you meet someone who was out of the country for a long time and he asks you how your brother is feeling and you just answer "he's not feeling anymore", it's you who need to comfort the shocked guy and say that "life goes on". but it doesn't..

It is not true that life goes on, it stops and then re-starts, differently.

The young soldiers who died\ Haim Hefer (an Israeli poet and writer)

The young soldiers who died will not speak and will hear them nonetheless.

The voice is strong and piercing and it speaks to me and to you – to all.

And it calls out the pain of wounds inflicted and the darkness of the senses – and the nothingness of blood.

And it calls out the books that will go unread and the movies that will go unseen and the love that will never be known.

And it calls out the brothers and sons and wife and his mother to whom none will return.

And the smell and the color and the taste that will never be tasted.

And it is the voice that simply answers the questions.

And it is the voice that knows better than we how to understand homeland, *eretz*, and nation.

The soldiers have given us this with their dying breath.

The young soldiers who died will not speak and will hear them nonetheless.

And we who stand facing their names and bidding farewell to their dust must swear that there is truth in the testament they leave us

And that we will live life as they have commanded us to do by their deaths.

For the sake of these dead, for the sake of these who live.

For the sake of the beautiful dreams that have chased away the nightmares.

For the sake of future days that are clearer, more wondrous, and more pure

Pathways to Valor\ Yitzchak Sadeh (one of the founders of the Israel Defense Forces)

Heroism is not the pinnacle of achievement. It is a pathway towards a goal, a path that allows for no shortcuts. Like all paths, it has its branches, and sometimes those branches lead downwards. The way of valor is ultimately a process of purification. The true path always leads in one direction: to the top of the mountain. We try to find the path to heroism for ourselves, despite the risk falling off course, of falling into the abyss.

Let us note that the essence of heroism is not bravery, but rather a readiness to sacrifice oneself.

Heroism can even manifest itself in the coward, so long as he is willing to make such a sacrifice.

Indeed, true valor reveals itself in the how we live our lives each day. We normally associate the term “heroism” with those in the military, for understandable reasons: is not a prerequisite for the soldier the willingness to offer the ultimate sacrifice?

This, however, is far from the only pathway to the pinnacle of valor. It may be a pathway that we idealize, but recall that there are thousands of trails to the top of the mountain.

Heroism takes precedent over all moral values in that the sacrifice that it demands is not a cruel or selfish one, but is rather the ultimate form of giving. At its core, heroism is the love of the other.

Personal Stories

Some personal stories of Israelis who have lost their lives or their loved ones in wars or terrorists attacks:

A. The letter of Sergeant Gadi Ezra to his fiancée Galit Meislik.

Dear Galiti, if you receive this letter, it is a sign that something has happened to me. This morning we received the news that the military operation that was planned for yesterday will take place, with God's help, today. I told you that the operation had changed and that it was different than the one originally planned - I told you this, dearest, because I did not want to worry you. It was very hard for me to not tell you the truth, but I preferred this than to cause you worry. The Gemara says one may distort the facts for the sake of peace - also the inner peace of someone you love more than anything on earth.

My beloved, on one hand I feel that there is nothing more that I want than to be with you—to love you and to establish with you a home and a family. But on the other hand, there isn't anything that I would want more than to participate in this military operation and strike those terrorists a blow so strong they will never again even consider carrying out a terrorist attack. To do this there is a price that we must pay—and I am willing to be this price.

Don't be angry with me, my love, but at moments like this your feelings for Klal Yisrael are supposed to guide you—and you must relate to this evil as if your private life does not exist. "Men in King David's army divorced their wives before going off to war" (SL'emunat Iteinu – Part 4).

My beautiful one, my only distress is that you will be sorry; and that I will not be the one who will make you happy. Because there isn't anything in the world you deserve more. I therefore request, my beloved, that you should be happy! That you will be joyful, that you will love and that you will blossom—because that is what you deserve. I will always watch over you and I will make sure that you will meet the man who will give you more happiness than I have given you.

My darling, everything that happens is ultimately for the best, and if this is the will of the Almighty, then that's the way it has to be. What is left for us is to accept it with love.

I want you to know that you will be my last thought at that moment. And I will leave this world with the knowledge that I was the happiest person I possibly could be—due to you.

I thank you for all the good and happiness you have inspired me with when we were together. It is not that we were together, but we are always together—we were together before we came into this world, and we are also together when we separate from it. Remember this, my dearest; we are always, always together, because the root of our souls is one.

Please spread this message, my dearest, "Don't despair—be always happy." This is what I request of you, even if it is difficult. I know that I am able to ask this of you, because I know the natural happiness and joy that shines from within you always. It is your joy and happiness which I so much love in you.

Gadi Ezra died on April 4 in the battle of Jenin. The letter was provided by Dr. David Zangen of Hadassah Hospital, who was with him in his final moments

B. The helicopter disaster

On the 4th of February in 1997, two Israeli helicopters which were on their way to a military activity in Lebanon, collapsed over an Israeli 'Moshav' in northern Israel. All of the 73 soldiers who were on the helicopters were killed in the disaster. 17 year old Shani Ben Shem, wrote in memory of her brother, Kobi Ben Shem, who was killed in the helicopter disaster on the 4th of February, 1997:

8 memorial days have passed, and you Kobi are no longer with us.

I can't understand, how does time fly so fast?

The memories are becoming distant.

It's hard to find the words that can explain the pain and the yearning for the loving, funny, caring brother, who is missing from my life.

Every year when memorial day is approaching, the atmosphere around the house becomes weird, pressure mixed with suffering.

But for me, this year is even stranger.

Although it sounds ridiculous, today I'm celebrating my 17th birthday. Yes today, Kobi, on this very day.

What kind of a reality is this?

How am I supposed to celebrate and be happy on the same day which is yours and for your memory?

Just like the transition between memorial day to independence day, that will come in a few hours, the happiness and the pain that are in every moment in our lives.

I'm 17 years old today, but still can't understand what's going on in this world.

And how to deal with this kind of reality.

The hardest thought is that I probably won't get a real answer that can explain to me, What's going on in the world and why?

The books that I will read, and all that I will learn could help, could direct, but there will never be a real answer to my questions-

Why you are gone?

Why now?

And who is responsible for that?

I have so many questions and no one to answer them.

Kobi-

I miss being with you even more, now that I have grown up and I can understand.

I would have wanted to hear your opinion on many things, I would have wanted you to know my friends, to be with me.

But time flies so fast, and the world continues, your friends are already married, and will soon have children.

But you, you stay 21. And I remain here with a lot of questions and no answers.

C. Only 5 Minutes\ Yfat Nagar

G-d, if you allowed me
To choose only one wish
From a sea of wishes,
I would have one meager request:
“Give me back five minutes with him.”
In the first minute I would tell him that
I know he had to leave.
And in the second minute I would tell him that
I will never accept his going.
And in the third minute, I am angry about him being chosen.
And in the fourth minute I would tell him that I love him so much.
And in the fifth minute, G-d, I would beg of you;
Don’t take him away from me.

Videos

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76dzPeU_DCY&feature=related

Recording of Yom Ha’Zikaron Siren: In a nation where army service is mandatory and terrorism is a realized threat, everyone knows what it is like to lose a loved one or to fear for the safety of those they hold dear, so when the siren sounds each person stands at attention for the fallen. We ask that you please do the same as the video plays.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5sE4BaoCcM&feature=related>

Video which describes Israel struggle throughout its history, in a tribute to all those who have fought and fell over the years for the Jewish homeland of Israel

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncdtJfvXrQI&feature=related>

Emotional clip including archive footage of Israel's wars, which commemorates Yom Ha’Zikaron

Poems

A selection of poems by Israelis written in commemoration of particular battles or wars can be found at:

<http://www.bje.org.au/learning/judaism/holydays/zikaron/poems.html>

Closing Remarks

The decision to commemorate the fallen soldiers the day before the day of independence was not an easy one but very symbolic. On this day we remember those who gave up their lives so that we could celebrate this day peacefully.

In one of the transition ceremonies between the memorial day to the independence day, David Ben Gurion- the first prime minister of Israel once said: "there is only one drop of consolation : their lives and death weren't for nothing- and as long as Am Israel is alive, he will carry their memory in his heart forever."

In honor of our heroes, please rise for Hatikvah - Israel's National Anthem.

English translation

As long as in the heart, within,
A Jewish soul still yearns,
And onward, towards the east,
An eye still gazes toward Zion;

Our hope is not yet lost,
The hope of two thousand years,
To be a free people in our land,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Transliteration

Kol 'od balleivav penimah
Nefesh yehudi homiyah,
Ul(e)fa'atei mizrach kadimah,
'Ayin letziyon tzofiyah;

'Od lo avdah tikvateinu,
Hatikvah bat shnot alpayim,
Lihyot 'am chofshi be'artzeinu,
Eretz-tziyon (v)'Y(e)rushalayim.

Hebrew

כל עוד בלבב פנימה
נפש יהודי הומיה,
ולפאתי מזרח, קדימה,
עין לציון צופיה;

עוד לא אבדה תקותנו,
התקוה בת שנות אלפים,
להיות עם חפשי בארצנו,
ארץ ציון וירושלים.

- * These resources were added and edited here by Roey Shiff - Israel programs and NFTY Shaliach. For clarifications and additional information please contact Roey at rshiff@urj.org.