YOM HAATZMAUT: 66 years of reconciliation

The 5th of Iyar, or May 14th, 1948, was one of the greatest days in the history of the people of Israel. That day, Israel's Independence Day or Yom haatzmaut, we regained our political independence and sovereignty over the land of Israel. After almost 1900 years of exile, at the mercy of uncountable tyrants, we finally are able to determine our own destiny, have our own army and defend ourselves from our restless enemies.

But there is more to Yom Haatzmaut: the establishment of the State of Israel is the *atchalata de-gueula*, the first step toward our redemption. A very important Sephardic rabbi, rabbi Yehuda Bibas, (1776-1852) explained that the return to the land of Israel is our return to HaShem, and His return to us. A *reconciliation*between HaShem and His chosen people.

What is the source of this beautiful idea? Let's read carefully the first 5 pesuqim of Debarim (Deut.) Chapter 30.

In the previous verses, the Tora anticipated that if the people of Israel abandons God's Tora, they will be taken to exile and live oppressed and persecuted among the nations. Now, the Tora says, a new thought might awake inside you. 30:1 *"And when all these things come upon you* (=the exile, the captivity, the suffering)… *and then you introspect in your heart, while you are among all the nations where HaShem your God has driven you…*". This pasuq describes the beginning of Teshuba, our return to HaShem. Teshuba begins from us. First, with a new thinking: all this suffering, what is happening to the nation of Israel, was predicted by the Tora thousands of years ago! If abandoning haShem has caused all this suffering, coming back to Him will redeem us.

This thought has to awake a feeling (…*in your hearth*…), the feeling of longing to HaShem, our Father who loves us and whom we love.

30:2 *and then, if you return to HaShem your God, and obey His voice, as all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul*. These thoughts and emotions are translated into actions. Now, we are coming back to HaShem. With heart and soul. With passion. We are back in track. Reengaged in God's covenant.

Then is HaShem's turn. The biggest miracle is about to be described: 30:3 *then HaShem your God will bring back those captives*(=the Jews who were exiled among all the nations of the earth),*and He will have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where HaShem your God has scattered you*. God's response to our Teshuba is "gueula", gathering us from among all the nations. 30:4 *Even if your*

captives are in the ends of the horizon, from there HaShem your God will gather you, and from there He will take you. No matter how far we are, He will make it happen. He will bring us back from the “galut”
30:5 *and HaShem your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, so that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your ancestors.* The process of Teshuba is taking place in our days. More and more Jews are coming back to haShem, to His land or to His Tora, or to both. Israel is prosperous, and growing in numbers. Every year tens of thousands of Jews come back from the end of the planet. Our reconciliation with haShem has began. We are the most privileged generation of Jews. We are living the fulfillment of prophecy. We ARE this prophecy.
Yom HaAtzmaut Sameah!