4th OF IYAR: Why Do We Commemorate Yom HaZikaron Today?

INDEPENDENCE DAY

The English mandate in “Palestine,” which officially began in 1922, ended in 1948. The British announced that they were withdrawing from the territory on May 15, 1948. The Jewish leaders decided to declare the creation of an independent Jewish State, Medinat Israel, immediately after the British withdrew. However, May 14, 1948, was a Friday, and the British army was preparing to abandon their posts that Friday at 12 o’clock at night on May 15th. David Ben-Gurion and the other Jewish leaders, including many Rabbis, decided that to avoid the Shabbat’s profanation, the Declaration of Independence would be announced and signed on Friday at noon before the British left the country. And so it was! That day was the 5th of Iyar of 1948, 5708 of the Hebrew calendar.

THE ARAB INVASION

The Arabs, for their part, were also preparing for the departure of the English. They declared war and invaded Israel, with the purpose of “killing the Jews and throwing them into the sea”. During that War of Independence, the incipient Jewish state was more vulnerable than ever. Four thousand soldiers and 2,373 civilians, more than 1% of the total Jewish population (600,000) were killed in that war. Some of the fiercest fighting took place in Gush Etzion, particularly in Kibbutz Kefar Etzion. The origins of this religious Kibbutz date back to 1927 when 160 Jews from Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, established an agricultural colony there. In 1948 the inhabitants of this Kibbutz, together with some Haganah soldiers, tried to prevent the advance of the Egyptian

troops who were trying to reach Jerusalem. They knew this was a suicide mission, as they only had a few revolvers and very few bullets and were facing an army with tanks and artillery. But they had to do everything possible to stop or at least delay the Egyptian attack. On Thursday, May 14, 1948, Iyar 4, 5708, after a heroic two-day battle, the defenders of Kefar Etzion surrendered. Abraham Fischgrund, one of the fighters, presented the Egyptian commander a white flag of capitulation, but the enemies killed him on the spot. The Arabs entered the Kibbutz and killed everyone in cold blood, including 20 women who had taken refuge in a cellar. A total of 157 people were killed that day. Only three Jews survived. A day later, as we said, the independence of the State of Israel was declared.

MEMORIAL DAY

In 1951, when the 5th of Iyar was already celebrated as Yom HaAtzmaut, the Israeli government decided that the previous day would be commemorated as Yom HaZikaron, the day of remembrance for the soldiers and civilians who gave their lives fighting and protecting Israel. This date was chosen in honor of the fallen heroes of Kefar Etzion since that battle was emblematic of our people's sacrifice to obtain their independence.

The numbers speak with heartbreaking clarity.

According to Israel's Ministry of Defense, **25,644 soldiers** have fallen in the country's wars and military operations since 1860. In the past year alone, **170 more names** were added to that list, along with **54 wounded and disabled soldiers** who passed away as a result of their injuries and were posthumously recognized as fallen soldiers.

As Rabbi Eliezer Melamed says, *"These soldiers, most of them very young, sacrificed everything so that we can have our land, where we can fulfill our greatest dream: to return to our land to serve HaShem and observe His Tora… we must be*

inspired by their sacrifice and devotion to dedicate our lives to sanctifying HaShem’s name” (leqaddesh shem Shamayim).”

יהי זכרם ברוך.
May their memory be a blessing.

אל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בַּמְּרוֹמִים , הַמְצֵא מְנוּחָה
נְכוֹנָה עַל כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה , בְּמַעֲלוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים ,
טְהוֹרִים וְגִבּוֹרִים , כְּזֹהַר הָרָקִיעַ מַזְהִירִים .
לְנִשְׁמוֹת חַיָּלֵי צְבָא הֲגַנָּה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנָּפְלוּ
בְּמִלְחֲמוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּפְעֻלּוֹת הֲגַנָּה , תַּגְמוּל
וּבִטָּחוֹן , וּבְעֵת מִלּוּי תַּפְקִידָם , וּלְנִשְׁמוֹת כָּל
לוֹחֲמֵי הַמַּחְתָּרוֹת וַחֲטִיבוֹת הַלּוֹחַמִים בְּמַעַרְכוֹת
הָעָם שֶׁחֵרְפוּ נַפְשָׁם לָמוּת עַל קְדֻשַּׁת הַשֵּׁם
וּבְעֶזְרַת אֱלֹקֵי מַעַרְכוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵבִיאוּ לִתְקוּמַת
הָאֻמָּה וְהַמְדִינָה וְלִגְאֻלַּת הָאָרֶץ וְעִיר הָאֱלֹקִים .
בַּעֲבוּר שֶׁאָנוּ מִתְפַּלְלִים לְעִלּוּי נִשְׁמָתָם , לָכֵן
בַּעַל הָרַחֲמִים יַסְתִּירֵם בְּסֵתֶר כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים
וְיִצְרוֹר בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמוֹתָם , הַצְּדָקָה
תְּצַלֵּחַ תַּחַת לְרַגְלֵיהֶם וּתְשַׁמְעֵנוּ קוֹל מִמְּקוֹם
זָכוּתָם וְיֹאמַר לָהֶם אָמֵן וְיֵהִי רָצוֹן .