



# Oasis

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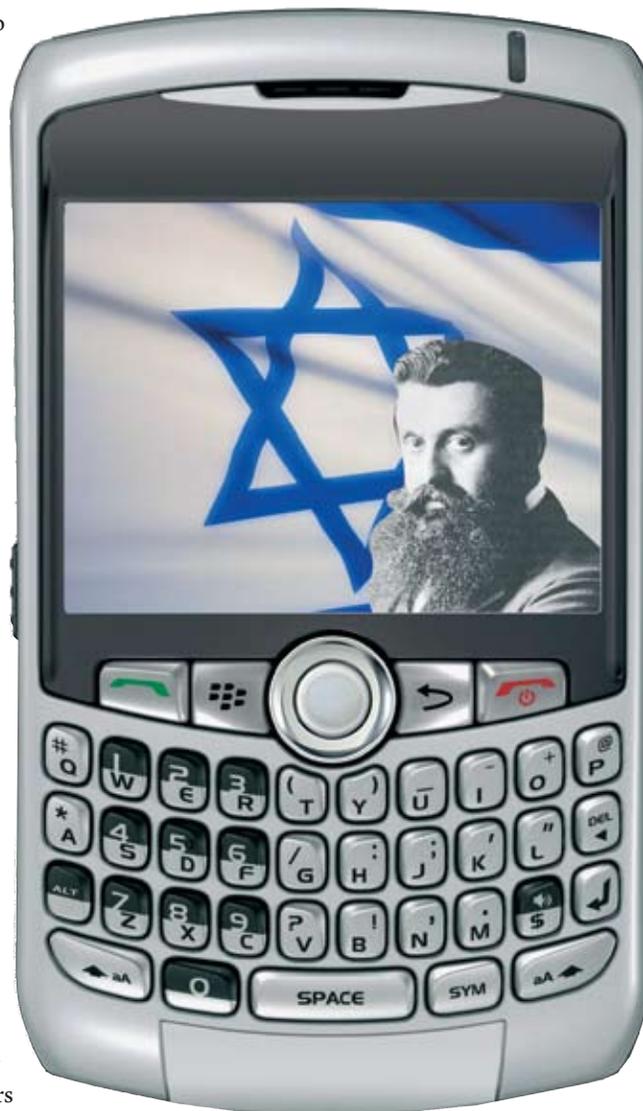
## Yosi and Yom HaAtzma'ut

By Eitan Shishkoff

Yosi sat down right next to me at a beachside café to put on his shoes. I'd never seen the guy before - but that's the way it works in Israel, everyone is somehow related and takes family liberties. At first I was offended, thinking "What chutzpah! This guy has a lot of nerve." Then he saw me writing in my journal and asked "Is that Russian you're writing?" "No, it happens to be English." From there we struck up a conversation that I've had with a number of veteran Israelis.

Because we're approaching this year's celebration of Israeli Independence Day (Yom HaAtzma'ut) I'd like to explore the implications of my chat with Yosi. How do the Israelis who came around the time of statehood (1948 and after) see the country's current condition? Are we veering off the course set by the pioneers who sacrificed so much to see modern Israel rise out of the ashes of the Holocaust?

Yosi told me the outline of his story and offered his assessment of Israel's social climate today. He arrived in 1948 from Lebanon. The Jewish community in Beirut was wealthy. But there was nothing here when his family and many others arrived. "People were idealistic then, and



worked for the common good. Now that we are a prosperous country there is a lot of selfishness and competition."

### FOUNDERS' IDEALISM

The socialist origins of Zionism are well documented. The twin movements of the late 1800's (modern nationalism and idealistic socialism), combined to create a robust movement of European Jews determined to return to Eretz Yisrael. They were filled with zeal and self-sacrificial commitment to re-establish in Palestine a permanent home for the Jewish people. While in retrospect we may say that Socialism has not succeeded as the utopian solution it claimed to be, the values of shared resources and the willingness to give one's life for the community remain worthy hallmarks of Israel's chalutzim (pioneers).

In sharp contrast to the city-bound Jews of Russia, Poland, Rumania, Germany and Ukraine, divorced from fields and hills, the pre-state "settlers loaded their packhorses with tents, tools, and supplies of food and drinking water"\* ready to pitch camp in places like Rishon leTzion and Petach Tikva. These became the first of many collective and semi-collective enterprises

Continued on page 6

Grandparents that fought in wars and then worried about their children now worry about grandchildren. For most people around the world “peace in the Middle East” has become a far off dream – very few are optimistic that we will see the longstanding conflicts resolved in our lifetime.

## A PRAYER FROM SOMEONE WHO KNOWS

Last Shabbat I enjoyed lunch with a group of friends that included a dear 82 year old lady, herself a soldier in the War of Independence. Just as the traditional blessings over the bread and wine were concluded, this veteran who had seen so much war in her lifetime quickly added “and may God grant us peace and peace for our neighbors and for the whole world.” Those who know about war first hand are the ones who desperately hope that wars will cease. Indeed, peace is the dream of all Israel. We say “hello” and “goodbye” with shalom, our priestly benediction, the prayer Adonai promises will put His name upon Israel concludes, “**The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.**” (Numbers 6:26)

Yet war has always been our reality. The scriptures tell us, “**The Lord has sworn: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.**” (Exodus 17:16) Again and again Amalek has risen up to threaten the Jewish people and war on one level or another has ensued. No one should think this is some sort of cosmic grudge. There will be war with Amalek because until he is dealt with once and for all, Amalek (and the spiritual forces he represents) will always violently oppose the Jewish people. Israel serves as a geopolitical, historical reminder to the whole world that Creator God is the God of Israel. In a very real sense, Israel’s wars reflect the spiritual conflict being fought in the heavenly realms. This is not to say that there is perfect correspondence between God’s will in heaven and Israel’s behavior on earth – far from it. But the establishment and maintenance of the state is a testimony

to the faithfulness of the God of Israel to keep His covenant promises. The inexorable hatred against Israel finds its root in the shaking fist of those who rage against the Lord and His Messiah, “**Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.**” (Ps. 2:3) The spiritual forces that oppose the Lord and His Messiah oppose Israel because the nation of Israel is a testimony to the God of Israel’s political Lordship over the planet.

Yeshua told us not to be misled, “**Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.**” (Matt. 10:34) War is a feature of spiritual life. From the beginning there has been an enemy whose intent has been to kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10). We need to be on our guard because even if we are not looking for a fight, the fight will come to us. Just as Israel remains in a constant state of war, so too the spiritual battle requires constant vigilance. Our battle is not against “flesh and blood” but it is a real battle.

## A PROFOUND IRONY

We cannot escape conflict; we have no choice but to participate in a war. But the Lord does not leave us defenseless, in fact, “**He teaches my hands to war.**” (Ps. 18:34) He has equipped us with spiritual weapons for warfare that are “**mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.**” (II Cor. 10:4,5) Our warfare carries on until the day when Yeshua returns. He will do so as one who “**makes war**” and heaven’s armies will follow Him (Rev. 19:11,14).

There is a profound irony here. Yeshua is the Prince of Peace yet He returns as one who makes war. As sons and daughters of God we too place an extremely high value on peace and peacemaking. The spiritual conflict in the heavenly realms is an indication of the deep imbalance and suffering that sin has inflicted on all of humanity.

To vanquish the forces that inflict this suffering, Yeshua will return again to make war against them. But the prophetic hope is not one of final conquest but of peace. We all look forward to the day when “**They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.**” (Isaiah 2:4) We fight but we groan, longing for that day when the whole creation is “**delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**” (Romans 8:21) In other words, we groan with longing until the day there finally is peace. This hope is bound up with the destiny of the Jewish people. Whatever our people know or do not know about Yeshua’s redemption, they do understand that the final redemption of the world means peace for all. The Jews throughout the centuries have been praying that this will be so. On Yom HaZicharon we are faced with the stark reminder that that day has not yet come.

## A TIME TO MOURN AND A TIME TO DANCE

Before we celebrate our Independence Day with rejoicing, we mourn all those who have fallen on Yom HaZicharon. Mourning always carries the hope and sure destiny of the peace to come. On Yom HaZicharon Jews all over the world will gather in synagogues to chant the Kaddish for those who have fallen. The Mourner’s Kaddish is not a woeful lament such as David sang over Jonathan and Saul. It is not a dirge extolling the virtues of the “mighty who have fallen.” The Mourner’s Kaddish is an affirmation of life and a sure hope in the One who will make peace. On Yom HaZicharon may we all join in that prayer and sing:

*He who makes peace in His High heavens,  
May He make peace for us  
And for all Israel  
And say ye, Amen! ✨*

# REMEMBERING UNTIL SWORDS ARE BEATEN INTO PLOWSHARES

By Marty Shoub



In Israel, the day prior to Independence Day (Yom HaAtzma'ut) is Remembrance Day (Yom HaZicharon). As with all holidays in Israel, both these days are reckoned by the Jewish calendar. This year we commemorate these two important days on April 18th and 19th. Five years ago I attended my first Yom HaZicharon ceremony in Israel. Our neighbors had invited my wife and I to attend the local ceremony in our town. Together we walked the short distance to Kiryat Chaim's Memorial Plaza and found a spot to stand close to the cenotaph. Dignitaries made welcoming speeches, the Rabbi sung a prayer and at 8:00 PM the siren wailed mournfully for one minute. Shortly thereafter the official ceremony began. A screen next to the cenotaph flashed up a grainy image of a young man from over 60 years ago and the emcee somberly read out the fallen soldier's name. Thus began the long list of names read out and the corresponding images of young soldiers on the screen scrolling on through the evening. With every passing name every passing year was noted; 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952... Kiryat Chaim is a town of approximately 50,000 people, not large by any standards but the list of names kept rolling; 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967... the names covered almost every year from 1948 on.

Around the country in small communities and large cities the names will be read and the years will be counted. Every community has lost sons and daughters, every generation from statehood to the present has been represented. In Israel's short sixty-two year history she has fought seven wars, but the truth is, war in Israel began before 1948 and has continued on almost unabated ever since. It is a sad dimension of this country that war weighs heavy on our collective memory and culture. We are either in a war, in the aftermath of a war or anticipating a war. It is an undercurrent that pervades the nation and unconsciously influences every Israeli.

scattered throughout Israel. Malaria, Arab attacks, disease and exhaustion took many lives. But the nearly 2000 year wait to return to the land of promise fueled a passion, a blazing fire in their hearts that could not be extinguished.

## MUTUAL DEPENDENCE vs. INDIVIDUALISTIC CONSUMERISM

By the time of our War of Independence (1948-1949) the 1881 population of 25,000 had grown to 500,000 Jewish Israeli residents. The decades that followed were still marked by an indifference to material ambition and a high commitment to mutual assistance. The neighborhood our family has lived in since 1997 was built before personal automobile use was prevalent. Our apartment buildings are four deep between streets, with many walking paths joining the apartments to streets where it was assumed all would travel on buses. Our daughter-in-law, Orit, still remembers growing up in the 70's and 80's when no one locked their doors, teen fashion competition was virtually unknown, there was only one TV station in the entire country and the favorite vacation was to stay in a simple cottage on a kibbutz.

Today, as Yosi observed, Israel has largely gone the way of the "prosperous, developed" West. Though we are thankful for the high standard of living our nation enjoys, we are appalled at the mass-advertising appeals to sensuality, the heavy emphasis on consumerism and the self-focused outlook of many with whom we share this land. Yosi bemoans the change, as do many Israelis who took part in forging the new nation from the 50's through the 80's. Interestingly, a turning point in the old value-system seemed to correspond with the massive wave of aliya that brought us to Israel in the early 90's and continued for the next fifteen years. New apartments, highways, cell phones, cable TV, internet, booming car sales and shopping malls dotting the Israeli landscape all contributed to an economic boom and a new life style of greater comfort and privacy.

## RESPONDING to YOSI'S LAMENT

But the question is, have we remained true to the original Zionist vision? Yosi and many other old-timers would say "No, we are now very much like every other nation." This opinion contains a truth... one that many Israelis are uneasy about because they know intuitively that more is expected of us. This is true even if the vast majority of our population is secular and does not acknowledge an active role for God or the Hebrew Scriptures in their daily lives. In response to his lament I told Yosi that without faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we cannot really succeed in maintaining the idealism that founded the state. Socialistic humanism wears thin after a generation or two. We are only two generations away from the David Ben-Gurions, the Chaim Weizmanns, and the Menachem Begins. If we do not reconnect with our heaven-born covenant mandate we cannot persevere through the internal opposition of materialistic hedonism and the external threat of Islamic jihad.

Yosi and I enjoyed our exchange. He, the veteran from the ancient Near Eastern Jewish enclave up the coast in Lebanon, and me, the relatively recent arrival from the modern Far Western Jewish community across the sea in America. I had to smile at the bond we experienced within a few short minutes: two Israelis from very different points of view, both loving our country. Our spiritual perspectives were far apart (I'd like to say that I explained to him about Yeshua being our Messiah, but that will have to wait for another visit to the beachside café), yet we were linked by the outlandish project of a people supernaturally resurrected after nearly 20 centuries.

This is a good way to head into Israeli Independence Day, appreciating the price paid by our founders. I am inspired by their example again and again. Yom HaAtzma'ut is an appropriate day to renew our determination to give our lives and share our possessions in order to see the spiritual resurrection of Israel that will surely follow the physical one (see Ezekiel 37). ✨

\* The Israelis, Amos Alon, 1971, p.95

## EITAN SHISHKOFF IN THE USA - May-June 2010

**May 21st - 23rd:** Israel Mandate Conference in Kansas City, MO

**May 28th & 29th:** Congregation Beth Hallel in Atlanta, GA

**May 30th:** Beltway Baptist Church in Abilene, TX

**May 30th & 31st:** Abilene Area (meetings to be announced)

**June 3rd - 5th:** Tikkun America Conference in Ellicot City, MD

**June 5th & 6th:** Belmont Church in Nashville, TN



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**Our Vision:**

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