

Yom Haatzmaut

- David Gutterman.

The 5708th verse of the Torah reads: "Hashem your G-d will bring you to the Land that your forefathers possessed and you shall possess it; He will do good to you and make you more numerous than your forefathers." And so it was, on 5 Iyar, 5708, Hashem, our G-d, held our hand and walked us home. How to describe that feeling, at least a semblance of a feeling? In a way, this story helps.

In his book, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, Amos Oz sums up the present Jewish condition succinctly yet sharply. "In the 1930's, they said, Jews to Palestine. Now they say, Jews out of Palestine. They don't want us to be here. They don't want us to be there. They simply don't want us to be."

But, my friends, isn't it true that home is the place that, when you need to go, they must take you in. And so it was on this date, the prayed and pined for event of two millennia materialized. On the 5th day of Iyar 5708, David Ben Gurion surrounded by most of his provisional government, and no doubt by the 95 or so preceding Jewish generations, stood up with pride and dignity in the Dizengoff house in Tel Aviv to proclaim a Jewish state. On Friday, erev Shabbat at 4:00 pm, the birth, really the rebirth, of Medinat Yisrael - the State of Israel, was announced.

In short order Jews from 103 lands speaking 82 diverse languages came home to Eretz Yisrael. Modern historians are astounded with this phenomenon. Never had there been a people who rose like a phoenix from literal ashes, renewed their spirit, revived their ancient language, and returned home after suffering 1,900 years of forced exile and unspeakable atrocities. But many great sages and mystics of that era were comforted when they noticed that the 5708th verse of the Torah reads:

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What do you Jews want - the proverbial "they" ask? I think Eliezer Melamed, a survivor of Poland, stunningly answers this question. He recounts an incident from September 23, 1942. The Germans were surrounding his ghetto. He and his girlfriend ran into a house and hid behind some sacks of flour. A mother and her three children followed. She hid the children in one room and then hid herself behind the sacks of flour. Soon, the Germans came, found the children and viciously dragged them out. One child started to shout, "Mama, mama." His brother took his hand, covered his shrieking brothers mouth and said, "Shrei nisht mama - Don't call out mommy - Men vel ir oykh tzunemen - they'll take her as well."

What do Jews want, they ask? We simply want to be able to call out, without fear, "Mama."

On 5 Iyar 5708 - this day, we Jews returned to the embrace of our mother and she called out to us: B'rukhim haBaim kinderlach - Welcome home, my children.

Rabbi David Gutterman