The day before Israeli Independence Day, the fourth of the month of Iyyar, we commemorate Yom Hazikaron:

The memorial day for those fallen in defense of the State of Israel whether in wars as in military exercises or security details. On this day we also commemorate the victims of terrorist attacks inside and outside of Israel.

The sound of a siren on the previous day marks the beginning of this painful and sad day. Flags are flown at half mast as a sign of mourning, and remembrance ceremonies are held throughout the country.

As long as the siren wails, which is repeated at eleven in the morning the next day, people stop their activities, cars stop, their drivers get out and almost everyone, regardless of where they are, stand in silence, remembering the fallen.

At military cemeteries, special ceremonies are held with the participation of friends and family of the fallen, together with important national authorities. The media focuses its attention on the lives and stories of many of the fallen, to confirm that in the people Israel there are no “unknown soldiers” and that every single one of them was an important person to those around them.

Without a doubt, the most amazing part of the day is its end, the moment in which we transition from the sadness to the most joyful day of the year for Israeli society:

Yom Atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day!

The fifth of the month of Iyyar of the year 5708 of the Hebrew calendar- May 14th 1948-, the State of Israel was established by a provisional council headed by David Ben Gurion in the city of Tel Aviv.

One year later, after the end of the War of Independence, the Israeli Parliament declared that date as a “national holiday”.

It is considered like a Jewish holiday of thanksgiving which is celebrated in synagogues (with special prayers), on the streets (with flags, lights, dancing and fireworks) and with family (with songs and picnics).

The central ceremony happens on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, where the founder of Zionism as well as many important characters in the history of the country and its military are buried.

The ceremony includes the lighting of torches by citizens from all backgrounds, Israeli songs and dances, and it concludes with fireworks. The fun celebrations continue until the middle of the night in every neighborhood and in the downtown areas of every city.

Everything is festooned in blue and white. Flags can be seen on the streets, on cars, and on the outside of every house. Children usually wear these colors for the occasion.

In the synagogues we hold special prayers, including the Hallel (a set of Psalms recited on holidays), reading from the Torah, a festive Kiddush, blowing the shofar, and prayers for the peace and welfare of the State of Israel.

The Masorti Movement and Zionism

The Masorti Movement is the only religious movement that backed Zionism since its beginnings in the XIXth century.

The Masorti Movement believes that the Land of Israel, the State of Israel and Jewish sovereignty of the people in its land, are the necessary conditions for the physical and spiritual continuity of the Jewish People.

Our movement encourages aliyah (immigration to the Land of Israel) from all the corners of the Diaspora and works towards a proper integration of the immigrants when they arrive.

The Movement sees the building of the people and the land, as well as its defense, as a fundamental mitzvah, and holds that the State of Israel should be the cultural and spiritual center of the Jewish people, recognized the whole world over.

Chag Haatzmaut Sameach!
Rabbi Sandra Kochmann
Jerusalem, Israel
(Translated by Rabbi Juan Mejía, Southwestern Coordinator for Be’chol Lashon)