On December 15th, 1947, two weeks after the historical resolution of the United Nations in which the issue of the partition of Palestine was resolved, the tension and conflict between Jews and Arabs was increasing. On those days, Dr. Chaim Weitzman (Russia 1874-Israel 1952) who was the chairman of the World Zionist Organization and who would become the first president of the State of Israel, addressed the assembled members of the United Jewish Appeal in Atlantic City. In his emotional and moving address to the representatives of the American Jewish community, while trying to motivate the people to participate in the construction of a Jewish State, he said: “A state is not given to a people on a silver platter.” With this expression, Weitzman was able to deliver a feeling and a reality: The State of Israel would only be viable through the joint effort of all the Jewish people. Inspired by this powerful sentence, the poet Nathan Alterman (Warsaw 1910-Israel 1970) wrote the poem “Magash Hakkesef” “The Silver Platter”:

The Silver Platter
By Nathan Alterman

“"A state is not given to a people on a silver platter." - Chaim Weitzman

The Earth grows still.
The lurid sky slowly pales
Over smoking borders.
Heartsick, but still living, a people stand by
To greet the uniqueness
of the miracle.
Readied, they wait beneath the moon,
Wrapped in awesome joy, before the light.
– Then, soon,
A girl and boy step forward,
And slowly walk before the waiting nation;
In work garb and heavy-shod
They climb
In stillness.
Wearing yet the dress of battle, the grime
Of aching day and fire-filled night

Unwashed, weary unto death, not knowing rest,
But wearing youth like dewdrops in their hair.
– Silently the two approach

And stand.
Are they of the quick or of the dead?
Through wondering tears, the people stare.
"Who are you, the silent two?"
And they reply: “We are the silver platter
Upon which the Jewish State was served to you.”
And speaking, fall in shadow at the nation’s feet.
Let the rest in Israel’s chronicles be told.

Like this poem expresses, and with the same deep feeling of respect and love, Yom Hazikaron was sanctioned as a memorial day dedicated to all those that fell in the struggle for the establishment of the State of Israel and its defense until our days. It is commemorated 24 hours before Israeli Independence Day. In this day, all the nation remembers and expresses eternal gratitude to its sons and daughters that sacrificed their lives for the attainment of Independence and the existence of the country. Yom Hazikaron is a day of deep collective and personal reflection.

The fourth of Iyyar, the eve of Independence Day, was fixed in 1963 by the government of Israel as the Memorial day for those fallen in the battles for the establishment of the State of Israel in its territory and homeland, in the War of Independence and those that followed it. But in practice, it started in 1951. According to the law, the night of the fourth of Iyyar all entertainment establishments in the country close. Flags are flown half mast in all public spaces and synagogues, and people gather at military cemeteries where State acts of remembrance are held. Before noon, throughout the country a two minute siren is heard and all of the inhabitants of Israel stop their activities and stand in silence. With the evening, the sad day of Yom Hazikaron ends and gives way to the celebrations of Yom Haatzmaut.

Rabbi Dr. Gabriel Mincowicz
Translated by Rabbi Juan Mejía