

YOM HA-ATZMAUT

Israeli Independence Day is celebrated on the 5th of Iyar. The establishment of the modern State of Israel is marked with festivities, fireworks, fun, and falafel. Whether or not they have visited Israel, Jewish students can express their joy that the State of Israel exists as a haven for Jewish people around the world. Any Jew has an unalienable right to make aliyah and settle in Israel. The phenomenon of immigration to Israel is well-documented, yet this is not an event of the past; rather, immigration is on going, with Jews from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and other countries still coming to Israel in great numbers. In order to successfully integrate into Israeli society, these immigrants need support not just from the Israeli infrastructure, but also from Jews around the world. During Yom Ha-Atzmaut, we can celebrate not only the successes of Israel's past, but also the potential of Israel's future. At the same time, along with our celebration comes our recognition that there are still issues within Israeli society that need to be examined and addressed.



Program: A Helping Hand

This Yom Ha-Atzmaut, celebrate Israel by celebrating one of its most valuable resources: its children. Through an arts and crafts party, you can begin to create toys, educational materials, and activities for the immigrant communities that do not have the essential resources. Create flashcards with Hebrew letters, or have a school supply drive. At the same time, you can facilitate a discussion about the positives and negatives of immigration in Israel.

What is my issue?

- Ethiopian children in Israel

Who can be my community partners?

- Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jewry (www.studentstruggle.org)
- North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (www.nacoej.org)
- Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies, History

What advocacy/awareness can I add to the program?

- Video of immigration process
- Have a speaker about the positives and negatives of immigration in Israel
- Invite immigrants who have gone through the process to speak on campus

What meaningful service components can I include?

- Many Ethiopian immigrant children cannot afford three meals a day; coordinate a fundraiser and send the donations
- Make black dolls for the Ethiopian community

How can I incorporate Jewish content?

- Have a teach-in involving these quotes pertaining to children and education.
 - “And teach them to your children . . . to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.” -Deuteronomy 11:19-21
 - “Educate a child according to his nature; when he grows old he will not abandon it.” -Proverbs 22:6
 - “Not the absorption capacity of the land, but the creative ability of a people, is the true yardstick with which we can measure the immigration potentialities of the land.” -David Ben Gurion
 - “Each child carries his own blessing into the world.” -Yiddish proverb

Program: The Land of Milk and Honey

Since Biblical times, Jews were promised “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). This phrase connotes the extent to which Israel can nurture anyone who seeks refuge in the land. However, the land itself lacks its natural resources to provide the essential nourishment to its inhabitants. Milk and honey aside, the land of Israel often faces a severe water crisis, which poses a threat to the land’s ability to sustain its agriculture as well as its people. Education about the geographic realities about the area, the environmental issues that arise as a result, and the economic impact is a way for students to better grasp the current dilemmas of the state that is celebrated on Yom Ha’atzmaut. In this program bring the issue of water scarcity and conservation to the local level. Begin with a discussion of the water crisis in Israel and then reflect on the way this issue comes into play within your daily life. Talk about simple steps you do or do not take to preserve water. Ask yourselves if you take water for granted and how you would alter your water usage if you lived in a country affected by a water shortage. As a group, come up with an action plan to make students on your campus more aware of the impact small actions can have on the larger water supply.

What is my issue?

- Water conservation

Who can be my community partners?

- Environmental Studies Department
- Student environmental groups
- Jewish National Fund (www.jnf.org)
- Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (www.coejl.org)

What advocacy/awareness can I add to the program?

- Campaign around campus to put reminders around faucets and showers to turn off faucets all the way, take quicker showers, etc.
- Look at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel’s Web site to learn about the problems and legislation facing Israelis, www.spni.org.

What meaningful service components can I include?

- Clean up a local river or creek.
- Do a drive for jugs of clean drinking water to do be donated to the Red Cross or other relief agencies for emergency purposes.

How can I incorporate Jewish learning?

- Begin your program by asking participants to come up with ways to compare the Torah with water. Then, pass around small pieces of paper with this quote:
 - Words of Torah are likened to waters: “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1). As waters reach from one end of the world to the other, so Torah reaches from one end of the world to the other. As waters give life to the world, so Torah gives life to the world. –Song of Songs Rabbah 1:2
- Include these texts in your flier campaign to remind students about the importance of conserving water:
 - Pour not out the water which others may need. –Judah HaNasi, Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 11b
 - The world may live without wine, but the world cannot live without water. The world can live without pepper, but the world cannot live without salt.
-Palestinian Talmud, Horayot 3:6