



# ASK HERZL

Program Title: Yom Ha'atzmaut 2019

Program Tagline: In honor of Yom Ha'atzmaut, we offer a program based on Israel's Declaration of Independence. We travel back in time to the magical moment of the establishment of the State of Israel, when David Ben-Gurion read Israel's Declaration of Independence in Independence Hall in Tel Aviv.

Target Audience: Middle School and High School

Grades: 6-12

Length of Program: 45 minutes

5 Minutes: Introduction and video

10 Minutes: Discussion in small groups

25 Minutes: Each group shares their paragraph

5 Minutes: Facilitator Wrap Up

Goal: Use the Megillah as a platform to talk about the vision of the State of Israel, and connect it to our values in a way that will be relevant to our participant's lives.

Materials: Print out [puzzle pieces](#)

Implementation:

1. Start with a short explanation about Israel's Declaration of Independence and its background
2. Show a three-minute video of the miraculous moment when David Ben-Gurion read the declaration aloud. (There are several versions available on YouTube).
3. Divide the class into six small groups. Each group receives a piece of the puzzle with the text in English on one side, and questions on the back
4. Each group will have a period of time to read the paragraph of the Megillah that they received and discuss the guiding questions
5. Bring the groups together and ask each group to present their paragraph and their main thoughts about it.
6. Close the discussion and show the following video: <https://vimeo.com/246119994>
8. We highly recommend that when celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut in your school, synagogue or community, that you include a ceremony where you read aloud sections of the Megillah, thereby starting a new Jewish ritual of reading Megillat Ha'atzmaut on Yom Ha'atzmaut.



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## MAIN THEMES AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

For your reference, below you will find the questions for each section of the Declaration of Independence, as well as some additional information that may be helpful.

### SECTION 1

The first paragraph describes the historical and spiritual connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. The students should use this paragraph to discuss their personal connection to Israel.

Here are the questions that the students have on the back of the puzzle piece:

1. Based on the first two paragraphs, what connections do the Jewish people have with the land of Israel?
2. Do you personally connect with any of these elements?
3. If you could list one thing that connects you to Israel, what would it be?

Questions for additional class discussion:

- How can you identify with the types of connections that David Ben-Gurion describes?
- Do you have family in Israel?
- Have you ever visited Israel?
- Do you care about Israel?
- Are you involved with Israel activities?
- Why do Jews pray facing east?
- What things in your daily lives are connected to Israel? For example, reading the bible, learning Torah stories, using Israeli products (technology), watching Israeli tv shows, etc.

### SECTION 2

The second paragraph speaks about the beginning of the Zionist movement with Theodore Herzl, the Balfour Declaration, and the Holocaust.

Here are the questions that the students have on the back of the puzzle piece:

1. What is the connection between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel?
2. How do you think the Holocaust should impact our ethical and moral values in terms of the way we treat others?
3. Considering our history as victims of persecution, should Israel have a moral or ethical obligation to help others who are in similar situations?



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Questions for additional class discussion:

We would like the students to discuss the connection between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel.

- Is there a connection between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel?
- Would we have the State of Israel if the Holocaust had not occurred?
- Does the fact that Jews were a minority that were often persecuted affect the way we help other minorities?

## SECTION 3

In this paragraph Ben-Gurion added two additional justifications that give the Jewish people the right to have their own state (in addition to the spiritual and historical connection). The first was that the Holocaust survivors who came to Israel after the war greatly contributed as part of the Jewish effort to fight the Nazis, and second was the recognition of a Jewish State from the world through a vote at the UN. Based on all these rights, Ben-Gurion declared the State of Israel.

Here are the questions that the students have on the back of the puzzle piece:

1. According to these paragraphs, what gives the Jewish people the right to have their own state?
2. What does it mean to be a “master of our own fate” in Israel?
3. Do the Jewish people need to live in Israel to be “masters of their own fate”?

Questions for additional class discussion:

- When else in history were people not the “master of their own fate?” (e.g. African Americans during slavery, etc).
- Are the Jewish people required to live in Israel in order to be “masters of their own fate?”
- What does that mean for our community living in the United States?
- Are we masters of our own fate? If so how? If not, why not? What do we have to do in order to be “masters of our own fate”?

## SECTION 4

This paragraph speaks about Israel’s values and vision and describes its character as a democratic and a Jewish state.

Here are the questions that the students have on the back of the puzzle piece:

1. What are the values that the State of Israel is based upon?
2. Is there anything that surprised you reading this paragraph? Is there anything that you would add to this paragraph?
3. Given this paragraph, is the State of Israel a Jewish state, or a democratic state? Can it be both?



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Questions for additional class discussion:

- When you read this paragraph, how would you describe the character of Israel?
- Do you see conflicts in the text? (The word democracy is not there, but the ideas of democracy are there.)
- Is there a contradiction between a Jewish and a democratic state? (To answer this question, look at the symbols and flag of Israel. The flag and the seal of the state of Israel are inherently Jewish symbols, the flag is based on the traditional Tallit, and the seal of the state of Israel is the Menorah.)
- How should Israel balance between being a Jewish and a democratic state? Can you give examples of conflicts between these two ideas (being a Jewish state, being a democratic state)? What do you think should be the balance? (e.g. public transportation running on Shabbat, shops open on Shabbat, the Law of Return that allows any Jew to make Aliyah, etc.)

## SECTION 5

This paragraph speaks about the State of Israel striving for peace. Israel called for peace for the Arab residents of the State of Israel and for the Arab countries around Israel.

Here are the questions that the students have on the back of the puzzle piece:

1. What kind of different calls for peace are in these paragraphs? What was unique about Israel's circumstances at the moment of declaration that required them to call for peace?
2. How do you think that Israel can share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East?
3. What does it mean to be part of "the family of nations?"

Topics for additional class discussion:

- We have to remember that David Ben-Gurion read this document in the middle of the struggle for independence that started right after 11/29/47 (the vote for partition of the land into two states at the United Nations).
- Having just resolved World War II, the US was afraid the Declaration of Independence for Israel would provoke a new war.

## SECTION 6

This paragraph speaks about the relationship between the Jewish people living in Israel and those living in the diaspora.

Here are the questions that the students have on the back of the puzzle piece:

1. What does it mean to "rally"?
2. Do you feel that you personally fulfill this appeal?
3. How would you like to see yourself rally around Israel?



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Questions for additional class discussion:

- How do you interpret the words: “Rally” and “Stand by us?”
- Can one criticize Israel and still rally behind her? Do you feel that there is illegitimate criticism of Israel? Why does David Ben-Gurion invite Jews who don’t live in Israel to be involved in Israeli society? Should Jewish people living in the diaspora rally and be involved with Israel? If so, why? If not, why not?

## WRAP UP

After discussing these questions in small groups each group will present their own paragraph and share the discussions that they had. The facilitator can choose to further the discussion using the discussion questions above. Close the discussion by showing the video mentioned.



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