



On the

Path toward ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE

PEOPLE AND EVENTS THAT PAVED THE WAY

By Mordechai Naor

Israel's Independence Day marks the establishment of the State of Israel and the end of the British Mandate. In 1948, on the fifth day of the Jewish month of Iyar, David Ben-Gurion, the state's first prime minister, declared the country's independence in an historic announcement in Tel Aviv.

Israelis mark the holiday with various traditions, including scenic hikes, musical performances, and the well-known *mangal* (family barbecue). Many Israelis also visit sites of military or historic significance, seeking to infuse the day with an appreciation of the people and events that paved the path to independence.

JNF spoke to Dr. Mordechai Naor, an internationally renowned scholar of the life and history of Israel and the Jewish people. Dr. Naor shared valuable insight on the importance of historical sites in connecting Israel's past, present, and future:

Independence Day did not happen in a vacuum; a series of events led up to Ben-Gurion's Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948. Why is it important to remember these individual moments in Israel's history?

You probably know Yigal Allon's famous saying: "A nation that doesn't remember its past - its present is uncertain and its future is unclear." History is important not just for the sake of remembering, but also for comprehending the present and for building the future.

Every nation builds traditions based on its history. The Jewish nation in Israel has two histories, really. One is the ancient history, based on our understanding of archaeology and written descriptions. The other is modern history, from the first Yishuv communities that formed outside the Old City walls in Jerusalem to all the subsequent aliyot,

to this very day. When looking at our recent history, we can identify *tachanot baderech* (stations along the way) - people and places that, taken together, tell the story of Israeli independence.

When people visit these places, they understand the powerful drama that unfolded, the lives lived and lost, as the State of Israel came into being.

What should future generations take from the stories of the establishment of the State of Israel? How can we make Israel's history interesting and relevant for them?

Younger generations need to see that things did not happen "overnight" here, that the reality we see before us is not to be taken for granted. It is also important to understand that Israel's history is very, very recent, and therefore even more relevant to the ongoing development of the State, i.e., their present and future.

Site visits offer much more than even the best teacher can instruct in a classroom. They bring the personal stories and voices of the country's early pioneers, soldiers, and politicians to life, helping young people understand the sacrifice others made to create a Jewish state in the land of Israel - not for themselves as individuals, but for the sake and legacy of the entire Jewish people forever.

Amazing things happened in these sites. The experience of these places, mediated by well-trained guides and well-designed exhibits, speaks volumes. The historic site not only retells the story of what happened, but also provides a window into how and why things happened.

Are places like Independence Hall and Ben-Gurion's home in the Negev significant in telling his story? Should these sites be modernized, or should they be maintained to reflect that moment in time?

When people visit Ben-Gurion's home in the Negev, they see it just as it was when he left it. It makes him a real person. When they visit Independence Hall, everything has been restored to its condition at the moment Israel's independence was announced. Young people stand in the very place where their grandparents or great-grandparents stood, and they hear Ben-Gurion's voice announcing the establishment of the State. In such a setting, they feel a part of history, and get caught up in the wave of idealism that characterized that moment.

Once upgrades to the second and third floors are complete, visitors will find all sorts of interactive exhibits that smartly and effectively use modern technology. This is also important, it is their language.

Both of these experiences, the preserved past and the modern interpretations together, help us to make sense of the many-layered and continually evolving story of the State.

There are more than 150 heritage sites around the country that, thanks to JNF and the Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites (SPIHS), are open to the public to tell important stories of Israel's history. Each one of the sites was preserved, keeping in mind how to create an interesting visiting experience for the public. JNF and SPIHS are continuing to identify important places and are working closely together on developing them. To learn more and donate to JNF's work with SPIHS, visit jnf.org/heritagesites