

Israel Bonds Appeal on Yom Kippur
Delivered by Daniella Friedman October 12, 2016

Israel

For each one of us Israel means something different. For me, Israel is a home. A place that transcends its government's politics that often make me uncomfortable, the divisive rulings of its Rabbinate or the Ministry of Religious Affairs that always anger me, or many other aspects that make us sometimes ask "why?".

When I close my eyes, I smell the orchards, the falafel at the street corner, the amazing scent of coffee. I hear the Israeli music so ingrained in all of us and the soothing of the sound of waves along Tel Aviv boardwalk. I embrace the free spirit, the spontaneity, the vibrant and the liberal society, in spite of the dark forces that try to pull it down.

I also cherish the people, the prickly warmth of the man on the street, the passionate lovers of this hard country, the creative and brave young men and women. I keep its people close to my heart. The memory of people long gone, those who are still with us, though not for long, and those who continue to dream and to do.

Let me tell you the story of one such amazing man.

He was born in Lodz, Poland and at the age of 18 he decided that he wanted to study law in France. His father, who originally objected to this idea, agreed to abide by the ruling of a Beit Din to let his son study abroad, as long as he promised to keep kosher. He moved to Paris, where he studied law at the Sorbonne. Then he transferred to the University of Grenoble, where he earned his PhD in Economics. The subject of his thesis was: "The Zionist Organization, its finances and its work." It was 1930. We don't know much about this time in his life, but we do know fundraising for Palestine was in his blood. A man who was luckier than his sister to escape the Holocaust, understood the necessity of a Jewish State. He moved back to Paris and worked for Keren Hayesod, The United Appeal, fundraising for Palestine. He continued to do it when he later settled in Tel Aviv, where he was responsible for running the national fundraising campaign with the goal to raise 5,000,000 lirot.

He was charismatic, handsome, a taskmaster with an imposing personality.

It was the spring of 1948. Clandestine plans started to form; the temporary government of Israel was putting together the plans to establish a Jewish State. Ben Gurion and other people, soon to become the members of the first government, were planning the next steps, knowing that within hours of Israel becoming an independent state, seven Arab countries would launch a war to destroy the young state.

It was also clear that someone had to plan the ceremony. Zeev Sherf, who worked closely with David Ben Gurion, approached him and asked him to take on this huge and historic task. He agreed as long as he had a free hand to make all the decisions. He had 24 hours

to find a place, prepare the list of guests, have the invitations printed and envelopes addressed. The ceremony of the declaration of the state of Israel was planned in secret. After checking several places, he decided that the Tel Aviv museum was an appropriate place to hold the historic ceremony. He then started working on the list of guests. He knew that feelings would be hurt, people would be insulted. He was right. The list was comprised of heads of organizations, rabbis, poets and writers. The historians are still looking for this list. The names of the guests were handwritten by him and his then girlfriend addressed the envelopes. The invitations were ready the night before, but it was decided not to deliver them at night, for fear that the secret would be discovered.

While the preparations were under way, the members of Mo'etzet Haa'am were gathered in the Keren Hakayemet building trying to finalize the text of the declaration. They argued at length whether God's name should be mentioned in the declaration. Finally, they reached an agreement to mention God as "tzur Israel"- the rock of Israel.

The deadline was approaching. They finally made their decision. But it was too late to prepare the scroll. The sofer stam (the scribe) whose task it was to write the text on the scroll did not have enough time to accomplish this task. After pondering what to do, he came up with the brilliant solution: he would unroll the blank scroll just enough, and they would sign the bottom.

In spite of best efforts to keep this ceremony a secret, Heftman, a well-known journalist, knocked on his door late that night, asking him for all the details. He agreed to share the plans with him, as long as the journalist agreed to keep it a secret. He agreed and kept his promise.

Hey bey'iyar, May 14th, 1948. The ceremony started exactly at 4:00 and lasted 32 minutes, Ben Gurion read the declaration from a typed copy, and then each of the members of the temporary government signed the scroll, a blank scroll. If you look at the pictures of the signing of the declaration, you see Golda Meir or Moshe Sharet or Ben Gurion signing the scroll. Next to them stands a man holding the scroll, a man that until recently was labeled, "the unknown man." Making sure it all went smoothly. The historic ceremony went as planned, with one exception: the orchestra, did not get the signal on time and did not play the Hatikva as planned.

When it was all over, he went home. He walked in and she said to him: I heard it on the radio it was so moving, so special. I wish I was there. And he said: why didn't you tell me? You could have come along with me!!

And why am I telling you this story? Because this amazing man was my dad, Dr. Avram Rywkind. My dear abba who died when I was merely seven years old. A man who took part of such a historic moment in the life of Israel. A man who was asked to become the minister of protocol of the first government of Israel but turned down the offer saying he was not a man of "high hats". He was then asked to start an airline. His reaction was: I

am a lawyer, not an aviation specialist. David Remez, the minister of transport, answered him – nobody is, and we need you. So he said ok. But that's a story for another time....

For me, he embodies the giants who founded Israel. Those people who stepped up and applied their skills wherever needed to build our country. But he is also my dad. Very few memories, pockets of time with little information about his life, some pictures, and a life full of stories that my mother kept telling me, trying to keep the love of her life in my own life. And I believe and I hope I did the same for my own kids and for Marc.