

The Silver Platter¹

"The state will not be given to the Jewish people on a silver platter." These were the words of Israel's first President, Chaim Weizmann. He said this in December, 1947, soon after the UN decision to partition Palestine.

War between the Arabs and the Jews broke out almost immediately. The poet Nathan Alterman put into words the tragic understanding of the sacrifices that would have to be made for independence. He wrote a poem published on December 19, 1947.

The title of his poem is "The Silver Platter." It is recited in Israel every year on Yom HaZikaron, Israel's Memorial Day.

And the land grows still, the red eye of the sky
slowly dimming over smoking frontiers
As the nation arises,
Torn at heart but breathing,
To receive its miracle, the only miracle.
As the ceremony draws near,
The nation will rise, standing erect in the moonlight in terror and joy,
When across from it will step out a youth and a maiden
and slowly march toward the nation
Dressed in battle gear, dirty,
Shoes heavy with grime, they ascend the path quietly
To change garb, to wipe their brow,
They had not yet found time.
Still bone weary from days and nights in the field
Full of endless fatigue and unrested,
Yet the dew of their youth
Is still seen on their head.
Thus they stand at attention, giving no sign of life or death.

¹ Poem that concluded the service at Temple B'nai Shalom in Braintree, Massachusetts, on April 29, 2017 – Israel Memorial Day and Israel Independence Day were observed and celebrated, respectively, on May 1 and May 2, 2017.

Then a nation in tears and amazement
will ask: "Who are you?"
And they will answer quietly,
"We are the silver platter on which the Jewish state was given."
Thus they will say and fall back in shadows
And the rest will be told
In the chronicles and generations of Israel.