**Yariv Ben-Eliezer:** People started running in the street and dancing. He was alone in a room. My uncle Amos asked him, “daddy, why don't you go out with the street and dancing with the people?” He said, “I'm sad because I know how much blood will be shed for our independence.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by the Jerusalem Foundation and *The Times of Israel*.

So Israel is turning 75, and we feel this is a moment for us to step back and take stock. To ask where we came from, where we are, and where - for G-d sake - we’re going. And in order to answer those questions, we decided to go back to the basics. Our series - **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?** - looks at our founding moral compass - *Megillat Ha’Atzmaut* or the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence was forged amid strife and turmoil. It was a birth that, everyone knew, would trigger war. Yet it was also a rare moment of unity and agreement. A joint historical, cultural, legal and - to a certain extent - religious case for a Jewish State in the Land of Israel. Today, this document looms large once again, and has emerged as a central point of contention as we Israelis debate the future character of our country.

Thirty-seven people signed *Megillat Ha’Atzmaut*. There were no Arabs, and for that matter no non-Jews, among them. But the group that *did* sign represented many factions of the Jewish population: There were revisionists and Labor Party apparatchiks; capitalists and communists and socialists; *kibbutznikim*, *moshavnikim* and city-folk; charedi rabbis and atheists.

Over the course of the past several months, our team has diligently tracked down the closest living relative of *each one* of these signatories, and interviewed them. We talked about their ancestors and families, about the promise of the Declaration, the places in which we delivered on that promise, the places in which we exceeded our wildest dreams, and also about the places where we fell short.

And it is through these descendants of the men and women who - with the strike of a pen - gave birth to this country of ours, that we wish to learn something about ourselves.

Today we’ll meet David Ben-Gurion, and his eldest grandson, Yariv Ben-Eliezer. He’ll present one of the *many* political perspectives we’ll be featuring throughout the series.

We’ll be right back.

*[Ad]*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** OK, we’re back.

Ben-Gurion, perhaps the most influential Jewish leader since Moses, needs no introduction. Here though are a few facts about Israel's first Prime Minister:

It was he who on May 12th, 1948 advocated for what became the name of the State, dismissing the options of Judea, Zion, and Eretz Israel. It was he who pushed - more than anyone else - for the Declaration of Independence, even as Jerusalem and large swaths of the Galilee were cut off, Kibbutz Kfar Etzion had just fallen, and the US, days earlier, had explicitly warned that it would *not* come to the aid of a young state in the event of a military defeat, which - by the way - seemed entirely possible.

It was he who wrote in his diary on the day of the Declaration, quote, “at four o'clock in the afternoon, Jewish independence was declared and the State was founded. Its fate is in the hands of the armed forces.” It was he who - just five weeks after the founding of the State - gave the order to open fire on the Irgun's arms ship, the Altalena; a decision that some saw as a test of true leadership and others as a murderous act that would result in civil war. It was he who - though himself a socialist - charted Israel's course away from the Soviet Union and he who - years later - gave the order to capture Adolf Eichmann and bring him to trial in Jerusalem.

Finally, it was he who - while shepherding the State into existence and shaping more or less all of its institutions from the Mossad to the IDF, from the *Histadrut* Labor Union to the national Bible Quiz - was forced by his wife Paula to eat the same bland porridge, a blend of applesauce and sour cream that she called “cooch mooch,” every day for breakfast.

Here’s Ben-Gurion addressing the Knesset and discussing Israel’s future on the occasion of his 85th birthday, in 1971, two years before his death:

**David Ben-Gurion:** We cannot boast that the nation in Israel is already an exemplary nation. And our international status will be determined neither by our supposed material wealth, nor by our military might, but by the moral light of our undertaking. And though there are menacing shadows, significant ones, above us right now, we have grounds to believe that we can be an exemplary nation!

**Yariv Ben-Eliezer:** My name is Dr. Yariv Ben-Eliezer. I'm a professor of communication. The State was created when I was eight. I didn't know anything. I mean, I didn't know that my grandfather is such an important person. When I started elementary school, I realized that I belong to a very famous family because kids were teasing me and singing songs about my grandpa, and I would fight them. It was not so easy. Then I started dating. If after a week the girl would say, “let's see your grandpa.” I said, “then she doesn't like me, she likes my grandfather." Dropped her. After a couple of cases like this, I met my late wife. She said something good about Begin, I said, ‘OK, she doesn't love my grandfather, she loves me.’ So I offer her to marry and we got married after six months. We were children. She was nineteen, I was twenty-and-a-half, I was still in the military. And I would run through the fences almost every night to see my wife, and paid for that in prison, but that's a different story. My grandfather has a problem with height, because he was a short guy. So when he saw her, he said “wow, good, you brought a tall girl to the family and a beautiful one.” And there was a love affair between them. I remember that one day we came for a visit. And my grandma asked her, “Dalia, there is no clothing in Israel that you have to go with a mini?" So my grandfather said, “it's nice, she has beautiful legs.” I loved him so much. He was a great person. On top of everything, he was a genius in many respects. He knew many languages. He learned Spanish just to read Don Quixote. He learned Greek just to read Aplaton. I mean, he's crazy, but unique. He has a great personality when he talks. aAnd I’m sure that if he had been here today, he could have been a great contender to Prime Minister as far as media is concerned.

**David Ben-Gurion:** So I thought the attitude to all Germans as to Nazis is wrong. It's unjust. I couldn't say that Adenauer is a Nazi, he was not a Nazi.

**Broadcaster:** Violent demonstrations throughout Israel today. “Blood money, guilt money,” screamed the crowd, as stones were thrown at the parliament building.

**David Ben-Gurion:** I wish the chancellor every success in his efforts to guide Germany in its path of democracy and international cooperation. Thank you very much.

**Yariv Ben-Eliezer:** Begin was considered to be a great democrat. He gathered thousands of his supporters, like the Bibis today, each of them holding a rock. And he said to them, “because of the agreement Ben-Gurion made with the Germans, I'm telling you today, ‘blood!’” And they all went to the Parliament — to the Knesset — and threw rocks at the Knesset.

**Broadcaster:** At the center of the storm are the negotiations between Israel and Western Germany on reparations to compensate the survivors of Hitler's concentration camps. The survivors insist genocide has no price.

**Yariv Ben-Eliezer:** I couldn't forget it to Begin. All the *shtick* that he did? Fine with me, but trying to throw stones and rocks at the Knesset?! The same situation occurs in Israel today. Binyamin Netanyahu is in power fifteen years. He divided Israel to those who are his followers, we call them ‘*Bibistim*,’ and those who don't. Luckily, most of those who don't live in Tel Aviv, so I'm living in a bubble, and I live my life quietly. I'm considered to be *[in Hebrew]* a leftist, because I believe in equality and socialism and freedom to the Palestinian and everything. So I'm a traitor. I went to school at NYU for six years, and I wish Israel will be like Manhattan - live and let live, liberal, patient, tolerant. I envy them. I mean, I would say in one sentence: The country is beautiful. The people of Israel are shit. He was very realistic. He had vision. He was like a prophet in this case. I remember very well the last chapter — he wrote it not just signed it — and it says, Israel will take care of equality between people based on age, gender, ethnicity, nationality. You see, he believed that Israel would be an example to the other nations, and the people of Israel will be what he called *[in Hebrew]* ‘a treasured people.’ And this is not! Israel became now a state of apartheid. It was a vision that went down the drain. This is not the dream of the beginners of Israel, and it was not the dream of my grandfather. It's a nightmare. Half of the people will go to the army, and half of the people will study Torah. Fuck! I don't want it. I have grandchildren. They're going to the army, fight for what? For the Hasidic who are sitting masturbating and getting money from my taxes. This is not the people I want to live with. When I see what's happening in Israel, I'm so proud of my grandfather and sad for him. I'm glad that he didn't see that troubled country now. I'm glad that he can't see that. It would have killed him. I'm an optimistic person. I never give up. I believe that eventually *[in Hebrew]* “the glory of Israel will not lie,” we will survive all the troubles and win.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Mitch Ginsburg and Lev Cohen are the senior producers of **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?**

Our staff also includes Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Adina Karpuj, Jamal Risheq, Hadas Kidron, Shoshana Sarah, Shira Shankhalil, Ross Bordow, Yael Ben Horin and Rotem Zin. Sela Waisblum is our sound engineer. Zev Levi scored and sound designed the episode with music from Blue Dot Sessions. Our music consultants are Tomer Kariv and DJ Yoni Turner, and our dubber is Yoav Yefet. The episode was recorded in our very own Nomi Studios.

You can catch up on all our regular Israel Story episodes, as well as all the other **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?** mini-sodes on our site – israelstory.org – or by searching for Israel Story wherever you get your podcasts. You can, and should, also check out our home at timesofisrael.com/podcasts. And of course, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. If you're interested in sponsoring episodes of Israel Story, email us at [sponsor@israelstory.org](mailto:sponsor@prx.org).

This series is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, David Harman, who was a true believer in the values of the Declaration of Independence, in Zionism, in democracy and - most of all - in equality.

I’m Mishy Harman and we’ll be back next time with another installment of **Signed, Sealed, Delivered?** and a completely different perspective on Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye.*

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