

.....
“Not by negation and neglect of our Jewish souls, but by contributing what is finest in us to America and by taking the finest in America unto ourselves can we become loyal to America.”

—EXCERPT FROM A DINNER SALUTING
ABRAHAM LINCOLN’S LEGACY,
CENTRAL JEWISH INSTITUTE,
NEW YORK CITY, 1918
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CLAL-The National
Jewish Center
for Learning
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July 4th

WHAT ARE WE CELEBRATING?

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THE EVENING DESCENDS, and beside the smoldering smoke of barbecues and the last slices of watermelon, people are waiting for the first fireworks shell to explode. “Bombs bursting in air” may stream through your mind, or perhaps the melody of a Sousa march, as you sit, one among millions of Americans, on beach blankets, folding chairs, and rooftops. You might even pause to wonder: What are we celebrating tonight? Is it the acts of men in the late 18th century? A superpower at its height? A melting pot of possibilities? On your blanket or rooftop, you may be asking:

*What is my
connection to
this celebration?*



As you wait for the fireworks to begin,

you might take a moment to reflect on the following:

PART ONE

Trace your family's story.

Do you know who were the first in your family to come to America? What brought them here? Where did they come from and where did they arrive? What else do you know about them?

Who were the first in your family to have American-born parents? Grandparents? Great-grandparents?

Recall a major historical event

or trend in America that had an impact on your family.

PART TWO

"...that all are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

—FROM THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Reflect on the past year:

What has been the biggest divide in American life?
Race? Class? Gender? Ideology?

Though we cannot wish away those divides, imagine for a moment that you could put aside the tensions. When have you experienced a sense of unity in America? Revisit a moment when you felt connected to being an American in a way that affirms its diversity.

What could you do in the coming year to celebrate and foster the diversity of America?

PART THREE

Seasonal celebrations are marked with two blessings,

one for the holiday and one that acts as a general blessing for special occasions. As you watch the fireworks, and celebrate another year of freedom, you might pause to recite the following:

יְבָרַךְ אֱתָּךְ כָּל הַמְּסֻבִּין כָּאֵן אוֹתָם וְאֵת
בֵּיתָם וְאֵת זְרַעָם וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם

Yevarach et kol ha-msubin kan, otam v'et baytam, v'et zaram, v'et kol asher lahem.

Bless all who are assembled here, their homes, their children, and all that they have.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנָה הַזֶּה

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam, shebecheyanu, v'keyemanu, v'begeyanu lazman ha'zeh.

Blessed are You who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to reach this moment.



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What's Jewish about July 4th?

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THERE WAS A TIME when you could separate things Jewish from things American as easily as you could separate milk from meat. Bagels were Jewish, white bread American. Stand-up comedy was Jewish, monster movies American. But over the years, as Judaism has become more American, and America has been influenced by Jewish directors, writers, doctors, lawyers, business innovators, and politicians, we've entered a world where bagels are eaten in Idaho and Jurassic Park is a bar mitzvah party theme.

In short, in one century in America we have gone from being “poor, huddled masses” to movers and shakers. Once outsiders, now we are among the key figures in every aspect of American life—from politics, to business, to culture and the arts.

Inevitably, we are American with a different mindset from the first Jewish immigrants. Imagine the first members of your family coming to America, walking into a voting booth and casting a ballot for the first time. They experienced democratic power as an affirmation of their Jewish values; some even called it a mitzvah. For them, singing “God Bless America” in Yiddish was a natural expression of an integrated identity.

(continued)

CLAL's work reflects the idea that we are now returning to an era when our Jewish and our American identities can be expressed fully. After a century in which most Jews viewed integration into America as a retreat from traditional Jewish religious life, we are now beginning to see a Jewish renaissance made possible only because we have integrated into America so successfully. As a result, Judaism is once again becoming a lens through which people are envisioning purpose in all aspects of their lives.

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By using this card, and the other cards in this series, you join with us in affirming that the strongest Jewish identities and communities are ones that integrate the wisdom both of our inherited tradition and of our American experience. Today we celebrate the values of diversity, democracy and freedom that make America and the Jewish people great.

MANY VOICES. STRONG COMMUNITIES. ONE PEOPLE.



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