



AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT שבת ציון

Lech Lecha to Vayishlach • לך-לך - וישלח

November 9-December 14, 2019 / 11 Cheshvan - 16 Kislev 5780

 American
Zionist
Movement
התנועה הציונית האמריקאית

November 2019 - Cheshvan 5780

AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT - שבת ציון

The American Zionist Movement is pleased to update for 2019 -5780 and share again the **AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT** initiative which was launched in 2017. This project continues during the period from Parshiot Lech Lecha (November 9/11 Cheshvan) to Vayishlach (December 14/16 Kislev), 2019-5780.

Below you will see resources for discussing Zionism in synagogues, schools and the community during this period, including links to materials easily available on the internet.

In May 2018 AZM added a Jerusalem Shabbat Supplement in partnership with the World Zionist Organization and this addition is included here as well at the end of the Source Book.

During 2017 and 2018, the American Zionist Movement (AZM) launched a series of programs in honor of several Zionist anniversaries. At the time, it launched a new **AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT** initiative covering the period of Shabbat *Lech Lecha through Vayishlach*. The edition you will find below had been updated for 2019, running from November 9 to December 14, 2019 (11 Cheshvan - 14 Kislev 5780).

AZM has resumed the Zionist Shabbat/Shabbat Tzion program that AZM and the World Zionist Organization conducted in the past, in order to have greater dialogue within American Jewry on the significance of Zionism and its continuing relevance to our people and community. We hope the commencement of Parshat Lech Lecha – the beginning of Abraham and Sara's journey to what would become the Land of Israel – will inspire Rabbis will speak about Zionism in their sermons, drashot, and writings; day schools, yeshivot and Hebrew schools to connect their students to Zionism through the Parshiot; and congregations, community organizations, and Jewish institutions to share materials through programs and discussions on Zionism.

AZM has compiled this Source Book, drawn from materials developed and shared by our AZM organizations and others, to whom we express our thanks and appreciation for their leadership and dedication, in order to provide a resource for conversations on Zionism during this period of **AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT**. We will continue to grow and expand this guide and program through the years, and encourage others to share sources with us at AZM@AZM.ORG.

As we have seen Zionism attacked from various groups and people in America, we believe in the importance of coming together to discuss and support the State of Israel. Herzl's

Basel Congress in 1897 brought Jews from three continents together in a discussion of Zionism. In the spirit of discussion, we present the following material as an aide to furthering Zionist discourse in the United States. By connecting Jews worldwide with our homeland continuing to support the vibrant democracy, culture and contributions of Israel and the Jewish people, we hope to play our part in maintaining the vibrancy of Zionism today and in the future.

Below, please find materials covering a wealth of Zionist content including:

- Shabbat in Israel
- Divrei Torah
- History
- Art

Please share, forward, and implement your own thoughts in celebration of Zionism and the **AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT**.

The American Zionist Movement wishes to thank the leaders of each of the AZM organizations who have contributed materials, ideas, and thoughts in developing the **AMERICAN ZIONIST SHABBAT SOURCEBOOK**.

Special thanks to Danille Hoffer, AZM's 2019 summer intern for her work on this material.

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Please note: materials have been presented to AZM by our member organizations and others as resources and "food for thought" on Zionism. Inclusion of these resources here does not imply any official or full endorsement by AZM of all of the content.

The American Zionist Movement (AZM) is comprised of 33 national Jewish Zionist organizations and works across a broad ideological, political, and religious spectrum linking the American Jewish community together in support of Israel, Zionism, and the Jewish people. AZM is the U.S. Zionist Federation in the World Zionist Organization.

The Sourcebook can also be found at WWW.ZIONISTSHABBAT.ORG and at [HTTPS://WWW.AZM.ORG/ZIONIST-SHABBAT](https://WWW.AZM.ORG/ZIONIST-SHABBAT)

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT ZIONISM?

Rabbi Paul Golomb

AZM Vice President for Programming

Rashi, in his initial commentary to the first verse of B'REISHEET, indicates that God's commandments to the people Israel commence with the establishment of the new moon as the first of the month (EXODUS 12). He then quotes the midrash that the acts of creation are nonetheless appended to Torah in order to establish God as the proprietor of all the earth, and thus able to assign pieces of land – specifically, the land of Israel to the Israelites – as a divine right.

Israel, as a covenanted people, comes into being in the BOOK OF EXODUS. There are no Jewish people in Genesis. There is rather universal humankind (Adam through Noah), the peoples scattered by diverse languages as a result of the tower of Babel, and a certain family. As there is no People Israel in Genesis, there is no Land of Israel either. I leave this point for later.

Genesis, therefore lays out themes that are not specifically pertinent to the Jews as Jews. They are deeper and broader than the fate and obligations of one people. Among the most fundamental of these themes – an idea that courses through this Book, and then through the rest of *Tanakh* – is that of responsibility. The first man and woman are banished from the primordial Garden. The reason for this punishment, which entails pain and labor, is not due to disobedience. Defying God's prohibition is treated with the loss of immortality. The punishment of banishment arises because the man blames the woman, and the woman the snake. Neither person is willing to take responsibility for their own actions.

Cain is condemned to wander landless and homeless as much for his unwillingness to take responsibility for his brother, as for killing him in the first place. Noah descends from the Ark with the mission to repopulate the earth. Yet he shirks from the task and rather drinks himself into a stupor. His son, Ham, in turn, shows disrespect for his father as he lies in drunken nakedness. Finally, although the plain text is not explicit, midrash explains that the builders of the Tower were far less concerned for the welfare of the workers than for the material they were carrying.

With the appearance of the Abraham saga, the theme of responsibility is continued, but it is no longer instances of irresponsibility that are highlighted. Of many examples, I offer these two. The brothers seal the longstanding rift they opened with Joseph, when they step forward and accept responsibility for Benjamin, even at the peril of their own lives. Abraham argues with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of those who ought not be doomed to destruction. The family of Abraham and Sarah is distinguished from the peoples of the world by the merit of responsibility. [We might add that Esau drops out of the line. Spurning the birthright is a form of refusing to take responsibility.]

Coming as it does at the climax of the Genesis narrative, the encounter among the brothers in the court of the Egyptian Vizier completes the transformation of a family into a people, a nation. The Genesis narrative reminds us further that responsibility is not limited to kin alone (whether conceived as familial or national). Abraham's merit was sealed in his defense of the inhabitants of Sodom. Responsibility is unlimited. It is to be extended beyond those to whom one is naturally tied, either by shared history or ideology.

Although Torah emphasizes that fundamental obligation to be responsive to the will of God, (we recite after all, the *Shma* twice each day) the responsibility to each other tends to arise within ourselves. Abraham challenges God. The story of Joseph and his brothers unfolds independent of divine presence (God is not perceived as present, but is not absent either!).

And this is what we talk about when talk about Zionism. Zionism is rooted in the acceptance of unlimited responsibility exemplified in Genesis. It is initially formed by recognizing and accepting one's unbreakable relationship with one's kin, even –especially – those who are difficult and irritating. The impulse to this responsibility is not external. It is not commanded. It arises from within our own souls. The fate of the Jewish People, both those with whom we feel compatible and those not, is also our fate. And ours is theirs.

Responsibility begins with peoplehood, but does not end there. In *parashat K'doshim* (LEVITICUS 19), we are first enjoined to love our neighbor as ourselves (v. 18), and then to love the stranger who resides among us as well (v. 34). As for the Land, the BOOK OF GENESIS begins somewhere in the East. A family is drawn to the “*land I (the Eternal) will show you,*” but concludes in Egypt, west of that land. Torah itself concludes with the people arrayed on the other side of the river. The Land, like God, is never absent, but not present either.

When we talk about Zionism, we begin with a people formed by a sense of responsibility. And we begin with ourselves, our own very human needs and interests. Yet, when we talk about Zionism, we cannot end at the beginning. Responsibility cannot be limited to just the people, and both Torah and history attest that being on the Land is not sufficient.

Theodore Herzl most famously declared, “*if you will it, it is no dream.*” If *you*, not God alone; *will it*, draw from your own sources of responsibility; *it is no dream*, but it does remain a work in progress. When we talk about Zionism, we are not merely extolling an achievement of a State regained, we are expressing our commitment – our unlimited responsibility – to be a people truly worthy of God's blessing.

As an addendum: Herzl initially planned for the first World Zionist Congress to be in Munich. There as too much local opposition, and so the venue was moved to Basel. Zionism was not naturally or intrinsically popular among Jews, whether religious or secular, at the end of the nineteenth century. The course of Jewish identity presented itself to most Jews as resting on other foundations than nationalism. Although the conditions and realities of over a century ago have changed dramatically, it is worth being sensitive to thoughtful Jewish non- or anti-Zionism.

To this end, consider Franz Rosenzweig (1888-1929), one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the last century. (In a significant symposium organized by *Commentary* magazine in the mid-1960s, Rosenzweig was the individual most cited by participants ranging from Reconstructionist to Orthodox.)

Rosenzweig was, at best, a non-Zionist. He firmly believed that Jewish thought and practice placed the Jew outside the forces of normal political history. Thus, any organization toward the building of a Jewish State was anathema. He expressed this idea in his major work, *The Star of Redemption*. Then, he had a change of heart. In his devotion to Jewish learning and practice, he realized he could not ignore the constant daily liturgical wish to be gathered to the land of Israel. At that point, he began to rethink his attitude toward Jews and Judaism

Rosenzweig did not become a Zionist activist. Perhaps the disabling illness he endured through the final eight years of his life contributed to his quiescence. His move from opposition to acceptance however remains instructive. He wrote, "*nothing Jewish is alien to me.*" It is a powerful and enduring dictum, especially for those who feel in the current political climate that the reality of the Jewish State is so distant from them. Rosenzweig's personal example is of one who cut through the limitations of ideology; a well formed philosophy, and opened himself up to everyday reality of being a Jew; a reality that entailed being open to Zionism as well.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Sermons of Rabbi Vernon Kurtz (Past President of AZM & Past President, Mercaz USA, the Zionist Organization of Conservative Judaism)

- Lech-Lecha: <https://www.azm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Lekh-Lekha-Rabbi-Vernon-Kurtz.pdf>
 - Toldot: <https://www.azm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Toldot-Rabbi-Vernon-Kurtz.pdf>
-

World Zionist Organization (WZO)

Links to selected parshiot:

- Shabbat Lech-Lecha: <http://www.wzo.org.il/Shabbat-Lech-Lecha>

Zion in the Sources: Yearning for Zion

- <http://www.wzo.org.il/index.php?dir=site&page=articles&op=item&cs=3318&langpage=heb>

Chagim Center - Home for the Holidays - WZO Department for Education:
<https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/>

Association of Reform Zionists in America (ARZA)

- Israel in the Parasha: <http://us8.campaign-archive2.com/home/?u=f7d47da986d48ddb1933530b5&id=16d74d637d>
 - I'm A Zionist Because.... by Rabbi Josh Weinberg: <http://arza.org/blog/post/i-m-a-zionist-because->
-

Bnei Akiva – Cheshvan “Choveret Chinuch”

<http://www.bneiakiva.org/uploads/pdf/ChoveretCheshvan5774BWsmall.pdf>

Hadassah - The Women's Zionist Organization of America –

Defining Zionism in the 21st Century - Link to various resources and video presentations:

<http://www.hadassah.org/connecting-to-israel/defining-zionism/>

Herut North America

- Zionism and The Rabbi's Ancient Word Code: <https://herutna.org/zionism-and-the-rabbis-ancient-word-code/>
 - The Season For Jewish Unity: <https://herutna.org/kol-nidre-and-jabotinsky-the-season-for-jewish-unity/>
-

Israel Forever Foundation

- Shabbat Tzion - Connecting To Israel Through Torah And Shabbat: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/
- Shabbat Talks - Keep the conversation lively and bring a touch of Israel into your Shabbat with these great discussion resources: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_talks/

Links to each Parsha:

- Parashat Lech Lecha: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/lekh_lekha/
 - Parashat Vayera: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/vayera/
 - Parashat Chayyei Sarah: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/chayei_sarah/
 - Parashat Toledot: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/toldot/
 - Parashat Vayetzei: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/vayetzei/
 - Parashat Vayishlach: https://israelforever.org/programs/shabbat_tzion/vayishlach/
-

Religious Zionists of America (RZA)

Parshat HaShavua - featuring a different Religious Zionist rabbi each week from around the country to share a Dvar Torah.

- <https://rza.org/american-rabbis/>
 - <https://rza.org/category/american/>
 - <https://rza.org/hesder-yeshiva-rabbis/>
-

Zionism - Reclaiming an Inspiring Word - Rabbi Alan Silverstein (President, Mercaz Olami, the Masorti Zionist Organization)

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/zionism-reclaiming-an-inspiring-word/>

New Light on Zion – A Sermon by Rabbi Elliot J. Cosgrove, Park Avenue Synagogue

<https://pasyn.org/print/resources/sermons/new-light-zion>

Zionist Organization of America

[Statement on Genesis and the Golan Heights](#)

Ameinu

[Personal Stories of Zionism, Israel and Progressive Identity](#)

The iCenter - Israel@70 Resources

<https://www.theicenter.org/compilation/israelat70>

Center for Israel Education Resources

<https://israeled.org/resources/>

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

[About Israel](#)

JERUSALEM SHABBAT - שבת ירושלים - RESOURCES

Note: click on each hyperlinked listing to open the webpage

[Greetings from the Gusti-Yehoshua Braverman, Head of the WZO Department for Diaspora Activities](#)

[WZO-DDA Resource Guide “Beit Ha’am Z-Talks - My Jerusalem: An Anthology for Yom Yerushalayim \(Jerusalem Day\)](#)

[ARZA \(Association of Reform Zionists in America\) - Yom Ha’Atzmaut - Israel Independence Day - Supplemental Readings](#)

[RZA \(Religious Zionists of America\) - Parshat Behar-Bechukotai: “The Holiness of the Land of Israel”](#)

[WZO Jerusalem Day Supplement](#)

[Israel Forever Foundation - Resources for Yom Yerushalayim \(Jerusalem Day\)](#)

[Truman Presidential Library – May 1948 Recognition of the State of Israel](#)

EXPANDED RESOURCE MATERIALS

Sermons of Rabbi Vernon Kurtz (Past President of AZM & Past President, Mercaz USA, the Zionist Organization of Conservative Judaism)

[HTTPS://WWW.AZM.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2017/10/LEKH-LEKHA-RABBI-VERNON-KURTZ.PDF](https://www.azm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/LEKH-LEKHA-RABBI-VERNON-KURTZ.PDF)

Lech Lecha: The Promised Land, Then and Now

Parashat Lekh Lekha marks the beginning of the narrative of the Jewish people. Abram, as he is called at the beginning of this *parashah*, takes center stage along with his wife, Sarai, as they form the first family of our people. Their behavior continues to serve as a model of people of faith.

The first verse in the *parashah* begins the story: "*The Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you'*" (GENESIS 12:1).

Abram journeys from his familiar ancestral homeland and follows a God he does not know to the Land of Canaan. We may ask ourselves why Abram's journey is necessary. After all, if Abram was such a great individual and natural leader, could he not have brought monotheism to the world from his ancestral home-land? It should have been possible for him to accept the true God and follow God's dictates in any land.

If one assumes a Zionist mode of interpretation, the response is clear: Abram can only reach his full potential in the Promised Land: "*Go forth ... to the land that I will show you.*" It is only there that Abram can raise his physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional status. God tells Abram that his physical presence in the Holy Land will enhance his ability to be a person of faith and a leader of his nation.

Abram was the first *oleh*, the first immigrant to Israel. *Aliyah* should be considered one of the highest *mitzvot* of our generation. For 2,000-years, our people yearned to return to its ancestral homeland, to follow Abram's path. Today, we can live in a free democratic Jewish state that challenges us to build a society based upon Jewish values and democratic ideals. For those of us who live in the free world, this is an *aliyah* of choice whereby we take upon ourselves the special responsibilities and privileges of living in the land that God promised to Abram and Sarai. Within the Conservative movement, we have always been proponents of Zionism. We need to talk openly of the possibilities of *aliyah* within our congregations, institutions, and organizations and stress our ability to formulate a unique society that can serve as a model to Jews and non-Jews throughout the world. Abram and Sarai were the first to make *aliyah*, and we should at least contemplate following their example.

There are other interpretations to this verse. Hasidic teaching suggests that this verse be read: "*Go to yourself, go back to your roots,*" examine your past, and let it have an impact upon you in the present. As a people of history, it is essential that we know from whence we have come, for only in that manner can we begin to plan the future.

For those of us who decide to stay in North America, in the Diaspora, opportunities for a significant attachment to the State of Israel and its people should be a *sine qua non* of our ongoing activities. In order to understand our Judaism and the message of the Jewish people, we must have a constant attachment to the land, its history, and its destiny. Today we are accorded that possibility.

It is very easy today to be a participant in either short- or long-term programs in the State of Israel. Our own Conservative movement offers significant programs of which we can avail ourselves. Our Masorti movement in Israel is always ready to receive guests who can become part of Masorti congregations and communities on a short- or long-term basis. Our young people are afforded the opportunity to participate in programs during the summer, as well as semester and year-long programs.

To be actively engaged in Jewish life today means that we must have an ongoing attachment to the State of Israel and its people. If we truly want to understand what it means to be a Jew and to appreciate our ancestral roots, we should try to study in Israel or plan to spend significant time there as often as possible.

The Biblical commentator Rashi offers yet another interpretation of the verse. He suggests that Abram was asked to go to this new land for his "*personal good and benefit*." Abram's engagement with the Land of Canaan would be of great help to him in the establishment of his leadership and in the maturation of his character. The same can be said for us as well; attachment to the Land makes us better Jews and can make us better human beings.

If we don't make *aliyah*, or if for some reason we are not able to take advantage of long-term programs in Israel, we can still be actively involved with the State and its people. We should plan trips to Israel, either through our congregations or privately with our families, in order to feel connected to the Land. We can work on behalf of the institutions that serve our movement's needs in the State of Israel. We can be involved with the Zionist movement to promote Zionism as a vision to be actualized in a Jewish, pluralistic, democratic state. We can support Israel financially and politically from this side of the Atlantic and feel part of its ongoing enterprise. No task is too small in order to guarantee the safety and security of our people in the State of Israel and to assert our attachment to the Land.

Abram and Sarai were the first Jews to take a journey to the Promised Land. As the first family of the Jewish people, they serve as our models. May we take their lessons to heart and follow their example.

[HTTPS://WWW.AZM.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2017/10/TOLDOT-RABBI-VERNON-KURTZ.PDF](https://www.azm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/TOLDOT-RABBI-VERNON-KURTZ.PDF)

Toledot: Jacob or Esau?

From the opening verses of *parashat Toledot* through the end of the Book of Genesis, Jacob is a central figure in the patriarchal narrative. His father, brother, children, uncle, and wives each have their distinct personalities, yet their individual tales are intertwined with Jacob's life story.

In the opening verses of the *parashah*, Rebecca and Isaac are presented with twin boys. Even before their birth, Jacob and Esau commence their rivalry: "*But the children struggled in her womb*" (GENESIS 25:22). The Midrash suggests that the characteristics of these two young children were already present in utero: "*When Rebecca stood near synagogues and schools, Jacob struggled to come out; when she passed idolatrous temples, Esau eagerly struggled to come out*" (GENESIS RABBAH 63:6).

As they grew up, Jacob and Esau's lives took on different patterns. The Torah tells us: "*When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp*" (GENESIS 25:27). Though twins, Jacob and Esau were very different from one another. Esau was known as a hunter, a person of the field, and a violent individual who used his wiles and hunting expertise to bring game home to his father. Jacob was mild-mannered and, unlike his brother, not a man of the outdoors.

In works of Rabbinic exegesis, Jacob and Esau are portrayed as the ancestors of two different peoples. Esau represented Rome: conquerors and warriors who used the clash of arms to gain their victories. Jacob represented Israel. According to Rabbinic understanding, Jacob spent his time in study, living in the tent, and learning the ways of the Lord. Jacob, the ancestor of the Jewish people, set the stage for those who would follow him. He became a role model for those whose lives were filled with Torah study and pious behavior.

But the story does not end there. Jacob, on the advice of Rebecca, is told to take from Isaac the blessing that was rightfully Esau's. In a very dramatic scene, Jacob dresses up like his brother and approaches his blind, aged father. Isaac, sensing that something has gone awry, asks, perhaps in innocence, "*Who are you my son?*" (GENESIS 27:18). Jacob replies, "*It is I, Esau your firstborn*" (GENESIS 27:19). Rashi, not wanting to view Jacob as a cunning liar, interprets this text to mean that Jacob was saying to his father, "*Father, it is I, your son Jacob; Esau is your eldest.*"

Avivah Gottlieb Zomberg points out that some commentators understand this statement as suggesting that Jacob has now become Esau. The *Or Ha-Hayim* suggests that since Jacob has bought his birthright from Esau, he has also acquired some essential attributes of his brother. The *Sefat Emet* suggests that when Jacob assumes the costume of Esau, he takes on what has been Esau's role. In assuming the clothes, smell, and character of his brother, Jacob actually becomes Esau.

For centuries, the Jewish people have identified with Jacob, "*a mild man, who stayed in camp*" (lit. "abiding in tents"). The Torah was our life and our refuge. We were pleased to abide in tents, to be secreted away from the impurities that were part of the society in which we were not welcome. We stayed apart from worldly affairs.

However, history has shown that there have been those who have invaded those tents and refused to allow us to dwell in them safely and securely. The greatest catastrophe that ever befell our people occurred relatively recently. The Shoah was the worst possible

nightmare of the Jewish people. No place was safe to hide; no land was secure. We wanted to remain mild-mannered, abiding in tents, but were forced to recognize that we became the hunter's prey.

The year 1948 brought a new situation to the Jewish people. Through the visions of builders, the declaration of the United Nations, and the blood and sweat of soldiers and fighters, a new state was established. The Jewish people returned to our ancient homeland, and once more we were counted among the nations of the world. For 2,000 years, we never had to deal with power, and we were confined to tents, living apart from society. Then the situation changed, and a new ethos was presented to the Jewish people.

In an essay, "THE ETHICS OF JEWISH POWER," Rabbi Irving Greenberg suggests that 1948 brought an entirely new scenario to the Jewish people, a scenario filled with challenges and, yet, great hope. We assumed power, and with that power came new responsibilities. Rabbi Greenberg suggests that it is better to assume that power with all of its tremendous challenges and paradoxes than to be powerless once more. He writes, *"The creation of the State of Israel places the power in the hands of Jews to shape their own destiny and to affect and even control the lives of others. This is a revolutionary 180-degree turn in the moral situation. The dilemmas of power are far different from the temptations and problems of powerlessness."*

The challenges of power have undergone many tests since 1948. A minority people dwells among those who live in the State of Israel. Demands for security are constant, and not a day passes without the possibility of terrorism or all-out war.

Many challenges confront Israel and the Jewish world at this juncture in our history. On the one hand, we cannot afford to be the simple, mild-mannered Jacob, and, on the other hand, we must not become Esau, the hunter. We need to live in the field, using power wisely and prudently, and in the tent, dedicating our lives to Torah values. We need to live in both places at the same time.

We possess the characteristics of both a Jacob and an Esau. We must use each judiciously for the betterment of our people and work toward a time of peace and security for all.

World Zionist Organization (WZO)

[HTTP://WWW.WZO.ORG.IL/INDEX.PHP?DIR=SITE&PAGE=ARTICLES&OP=ITEM&CS=3318&LANGPAGE=HEB](http://www.wzo.org.il/index.php?dir=site&page=articles&op=item&cs=3318&langpage=heb)

Zion in the Sources: Yearning for Zion

BRIANA SIMON

Have you ever wondered where the word 'Zion' actually comes from? This article explores Zion in the Bible, aggadot, customs and laws, ancient and modern poetry, and through the Zionist movement itself.

Foreword

Yearning for Zion is the root of what it means to be a Jew.

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee" (GENESIS 12:1) this is the Divine command to our Father Abraham; this is where the connection between being a Jew, and being a person whose homeland is the land of Israel, begins. For Jews all over the globe, the Land of Israel is the spiritual homeland. For those of us who live in the State of Israel, the land of Israel is our spiritual and physical home.

After 2000 years of exile, we have arrived in our homeland a homeland which was not handed to us on a silver platter. Another people also loves this land, and fate has brought them to live here for hundreds of years. For decades we have extended a hand in peace and partnership.

It is our hope that love for the Land of Israel will bring to all those who live within it, and those who love from afar, a life of peace, fraternity and prosperity. Indeed, may it be that *"From Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of G-d from Jerusalem."* Amen!

Introduction

The compelling magnetism which Zion as the land of Israel, as Jerusalem, or as the site of the Holy Temple has for the people of Israel, called so though they are scattered all over the world, is as puzzling as it is strong. What is it that draws Europeans and Ethiopians, Australians and Yemenites, rich and poor, to the same Wall in the same city in the Middle East? It is our common history and our common heritage which leads to our common yearning.

Our longing for Zion has been expressed in many different ways over the centuries since the First Temple was destroyed. The Hassidic Rabbi Yerahmiel of Koznitz, who thought constantly of the Land of Israel, used to say, *"The Torah forbids jealousy, and, thank G-d, I envy no person, except for those Jews who travel to Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel)."* Rabbi Nachman of Breslau maintained, *"Wherever I travel, my destination is always Eretz Yisrael."*

In our collective Jewish memory, we hold Zion, and all that it stands for, dear. Nahum Sokolow, in his book **THE HISTORY OF ZIONISM 1600-1918**, wrote:

The Jews never forgot their old nationality. They never forgot that they were a nation apart, distinct in morality, in learning, in literature, in social arrangements and in agriculture; a civilized nation at a time when Western civilization was still unknown. For two thousand years after the loss of political independence, they believed with passionate intensity in their future as a nation in Palestine.

Leon Feuer, in "WHY A JEWISH STATE," expands on this idea:..the Jews retained a powerful national sentiment and never abandoned the hope of the restoration of their national existence in Palestine. This hope has held a consistently central place in Jewish thinking and aspiration throughout the ages. No one can be acquainted with Jewish literature without realizing how profound it was...

The prayerbook devotedly expressed the pleas for Zion restored and the Temple rebuilt. *"The acclamation of the Passover Haggadah, 'Next year in Jerusalem,' was far more than a pious wish. It was a life-sustaining vision."*

The Biblical base for this strong attachment is The Promise, given by G-d to the Patriarch Abraham: *"Unto thy seed will I give this land"* (GENESIS 12:7). Theologian Martin Buber comments: *"The eternal meaning of the Promise of this land is grounded in the mutual relation between emunah (faith) and emunah (belief), between G-d's faithfulness and the people's trust."* Our belief that we would be able to return one day to Zion, as promised in our sacred texts, was inseparable from Jewish memory: *"I will gather your seed from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north 'give up' and to the south 'keep not back.' Bring my sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth."* (ISAIAH 43:5-6).

Jewish prayers perpetuated Jewish memory. Abba Eban writes:

The effect of these myriad repetitions day by day over the centuries was to infuse Jewish life with a peculiar nostalgia, strong enough to prevent any sentiment of finality or permanence in any other land. But it was not only a matter of prayer and hope. The physical link was never broken. A thin but crucial line of continuity had been maintained by small Jewish communities and academies in Jerusalem, Safed, Jaffa, and Hebron. Palestine never became the birthplace of any other nation. Every one of its conquerors had his original home elsewhere. Thus the idea of Palestine as the Jewish land had never been obscured or superseded (**"HERITAGE: CIVILIZATION AND THE JEWS"**).

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin writes:

Wherever they were, Jews dreamed of someday returning and reestablishing their independence, of restoring their national existence. They dreamed of it and prayed for it; never for a day was the Holy Land out of their thoughts... While not all Jews were involved in the organized struggle to

achieve these aims, every devout, believing Jew was in faith a Zionist, since the aspiration to return to Zion is built into the very fabric of traditional Jewish faith...

"The historic Jewish Messianic vision was expressed by Isaiah in his prophecy in terms of Zion and Jerusalem, namely that 'out of Zion shall go forth the Torah and the word of G-d from Jerusalem'" (ISAIAH 2:3). To eliminate such aspirations would be tantamount to emasculating the religious faith of Israel. The passage from the Book of Psalms sums up the religious and historic attitude toward Jerusalem, the historical capital of Eretz Yisrael, and all it symbolized: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; If I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy" (PSALMS 137:5-6)...

Of how many nations of the world today can it be said that they speak the same language, profess the same faith, and inhabit the same area that they did over 3,000 years ago? It may therefore be understood why the Jewish people are so emotionally attached to the Land of Israel. It is a land possessed not only by right of conquest and settlement, but also as a fulfillment of history, faith, and law. (**"TO BE A JEW"**)

After Titus razed Jerusalem, the Jews father, son, great-grandson persisted in looking toward Zion as a traveler looks toward home. The rolling centuries never crushed this quixotic dream of a scattered fragment of a nation that it might someday return to the soil G-d had appointed for it. 'Next year in Jerusalem' was the motto that kept the dispersed people in hope. I can remember hearing that refrain at the Passover table in my childhood, and wondering at the empty dreaminess of it. I have lived to see the state come to pass, all the same" (HERMAN WOUK, **"THIS IS MY G-D"**).

Zion: Different Contexts

Origin

The origin of the word Zion is uncertain. It may have originally meant a rock; a stronghold; a dry place; or running water. The name Zion was first used for the Jebusite fortress (*"the stronghold of Zion"*), on the southeast of Jerusalem, below the Ophel (part of the eastern fortifications of Jerusalem) and the Temple Mount. The Jebusite tower could be seen for

a considerable distance; perhaps this is why the word "Zion" shares the same root as the modern Hebrew word for sign or landmark. When King David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites, he chose to live in "*the stronghold of Zion*," calling it "*the City of David*." (II SAM. 5:7; I KINGS 8: 1). In the course of time, "Zion" came to refer not only to the hill but to the Temple, to Jerusalem and indeed, to the whole of the Holy Land. In poetry Zion was used for the whole of Jerusalem, and "*daughter (or virgin) of Zion*" referred to the city and its inhabitants. Zion was often used as a figure of speech to denote Judea or the people of Judea. Sometimes Zion referred simply to the Temple Mount, and it was this use that became the regular one by the Maccabean period, when the Temple Mount was called "*Mountain of Zion*."

Zion came to be identified as the spiritual center of Judaism, as in the verse: "*For out of Zion shall go forth Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (ISA. 2:3). It had a special meaning as far back as after the destruction of the First Temple in expressing the yearning of the Jewish people for its homeland. Thus "Zion" is found in the Psalms, "*By the rivers of Babylon, / There we sat down, yea, we wept, / When we remembered Zion*" (Ps. 137:1); in the prayer, "*And let our eyes behold Thy return in mercy to Zion*;" in the poem, "*Zion, will you not ask if peace be with your captives / Who seek your welfare, who are the remnant of your flocks?*" (JUDAH HALEVI); and frequently elsewhere in religious and secular literature.

It is believed that Zion is the very center of the world, the place where the Shekhinah (Divine Presence) dwells and from where the world is sustained by the power of G-d. Perhaps it is for this reason that Jerusalem has such deep spiritual significance for Christianity and Islam as well.

Zion as Israel

Zion eventually evolved into a national concept, one named after a place rather than a people. The name of the former stronghold of the Jebusites which David made his residence, which was applied by poets and prophets to the whole city of Jerusalem, to the sanctuary, and to the holy mountain on which it stood, acquired deep spiritual significance. Martin Buber, the renowned philosopher and theologian, noted:

Quite early on the name was construed as that of a holy place. Zion is '*the city of the great King*' (PSALMS 48:3), that is of G-d as the King of Israel. The name has retained this sacred character ever since. In their prayers and songs the mourning and yearning of the people in exile were bound up with it, the holiness of the land was concentrated in it, and in the Kabbala (mystical writings), Zion was equated with an emanation of G-d Himself. When the Jewish people adopted this name for their national concept, all these

associations were contained in it..."("ON ZION/THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA").

Zion in the Bible

Though the word "Zion" appears approximately 150 times in the Bible, it does not appear at all in the Five Books of Moses, but is first mentioned in Second Samuel during the reign of King David. It is found primarily in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micha and Zechariah, and in the Books of Psalms and Lamentations.

In Psalms, Zion figures particularly in a group of Psalms designated "Zion Songs," glorifying G-d's city: *"Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth; Even mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the north, The city of the great King."* (Ps. 48:3)

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her; Count the towers thereof" (Ps. 48: 13)

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, G-d hath shined forth. " (Ps. 50:2)

It appears in psalms dealing with national misfortune, notably those concerning the captivity: *"By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept, When we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst thereof we hanged up our harps. For there they that led us captive asked of us words of song, And our tormentors asked of us mirth: 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion,'"* (Ps. 137:1-3)

Finally, it appears in psalms which invoke blessing: *"The Lord bless thee out of Zion; And see thou the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life; And see thy children's children. Peace be upon Israel!"* (PSALMS 128:5-6)

In the BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS, traditionally ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah, the writer laments the destruction of the Temple, and the way of life it symbolized: *"And He hath stripped His tabernacle, as if it were a garden, He hath destroyed His place of assembly; The Lord hath caused to be forgotten in Zion Appointed season and sabbath, And hath rejected in the indignation of His anger The king and the priest,"*(LAMENTATIONS 2:6)

"For this our heart is faint, For these things our eyes are dim; For the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, The foxes walk upon it." (LAMENTATIONS 5:17-18)

Prophets Establish the Precedent

It is in the writings of the prophets that the gradual development of Zion portrayed as the heart of the redeemed world yet to come takes place. The connection between the people of Israel, their unique mission, and their land was strengthened and deepened after the destruction of the First Temple, during the Babylonian exile, and with the building of the Second Temple. Rather than concentrating exclusively on beliefs and ethical conduct, the prophets were concerned as well with the survival of the Jews as a nation, on their own soil. Thus, the vision of Zion surfaces repeatedly throughout their revelations.

"Within their ample world outlook the prophets found room for man, nation and humanity...They agonized over their people's misfortunes. They wept over the destruction of their country. They ached for their ruined city of Jerusalem, 'the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth'" (Ps. 48:1-2).

"They prayed for its restoration. They comforted their people in their exile. Their world outlook was inextricably bound up with the political rehabilitation of Israel and the upbuilding of Zion and its recognized role of leadership among the nations of the earth" (MARTIN BUBER, "ON ZION/THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA").

When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 586 BCE, he exiled both the king and the high priest to Babylon. He gave the prophet Jeremiah the choice of either joining those in exile or remaining *"with the poor of the people who had nothing,"* who were permitted to remain in the land of Judah (JER. 39:10,40:4). The prophet chose to remain in Jerusalem, providing the remnant of the beaten nation with the leadership and encouragement required to sustain their feeling of unity as a people, in spite of the fact that they were no longer sovereign. Jeremiah, who until the conquest had been a prophet of doom, now became a prophet of hope. He began to implant within those who remained the knowledge that the exile would not last forever - on the contrary, the bond of the people of Israel to the land of Israel was eternal, and could not be undermined by their being expelled from it.

To those in exile, Jeremiah sent an encouraging message. Speaking in G-d's name, he counseled them to settle down in the land of their dispersion, saying *"Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them, take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters,. and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not diminished" (JER. 29:5-6).* In no way did this advice imply that their present location was permanent, or that there was no hope of their return to Zion. The opposite was the case: in establishing themselves as a cohesive community, they would avoid assimilating in their country of exile, and preserve their distinct national affiliation through the maintenance of their own institutions. In this way, they would be prepared for their eventual return to their own land: *"For thus saith the Lord: After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will remember you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (JER. 29: 10).* Jeremiah conveyed an additional message to the exiles four years later, with a vivid account of the calamity which would inevitably occur in Babylon and which would herald the return to Zion.

In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek the Lord their G-d. They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces hitherward: 'Come ye, and join yourselves to the

Lord in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten
(JER. 50:4-5).

There was a prophet in Babylon also: Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest. He lived in Tel Aviv in Babylonia together with the majority of his compatriots, and prophesied soon after Jeremiah. Like him, Ezekiel had been a prophet of doom before the destruction of the Temple, and became a harbinger of hope and encouragement afterwards. He prophesied both a material and a spiritual re-establishment of the nation in its land, with renewed building and planting and plentiful harvests. Ezekiel prophesied that the miraculous nature of Israel's restoration would hallow G-d's name in the eyes of the nations of the world: *"Thus, I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself (vehitgadalti vehitkadashti) and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord"* (EZEKIEL 38:23). The words vehitgadalti vehitkadashti (I will magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself), immortalized in the sacred Kaddish prayer, *"have become the classic expression of hope for the final and ultimate redemption of Israel"* (MENDELL LEWITTES, "RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF THE JEWISH STATE").

Chapters 40-66 of the prophet Isaiah are also addressed to the Jews in exile, giving a message of encouragement, support and hope. He summons the Jewish exiles to shake off their despondency, and to prepare for the redemption to come. In earlier chapters of Isaiah, Zion is also mentioned in ringing, poetic terms:

"For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they that shall escape, the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this." (SECOND KINGS 19:31 ISAIAH'S PROPHECY)

"And many peoples [nations] shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, [And] To the house of the G-d of Jacob; And He will teach us of His ways, And we will walk in His paths;' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (ISAIAH 2:3) [MICAH 4:2]

"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written unto life in Jerusalem" (ISAIAH 4:3)

"For; O people that dwellest in Zion at Jerusalem, Thou shalt weep no more; He will surely be gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry, When He shall hear, He will answer thee." (ISAIAH 30: 19)

"I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, And My salvation shall not tarry; And I will place salvation in Zion For Israel My glory." (ISAIAH 46:13)

"How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of the messenger of good tidings, That announceth peace, the harbinger of good tidings, That announceth salvation; That saith unto Zion, 'Thy G-d reigneth !'" (ISAIAH 52:7)

"And a redeemer will come to Zion, And unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, Saith the Lord." (ISAIAH 59:20)

So moving are Isaiah's words that seven chapters have been chosen as the prophetic readings (haftarot) of consolation for the seven weeks following the Ninth of Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temples and of Jerusalem.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who preached during the return of the Babylonian exiles around 520 BCE, during the reign of Darius I, king of Persia, laid the foundations for the restoration of a dynamic Jewish presence in Israel in their own era, and in our age as well.

Haggai's prophecies dealt mainly with the construction of the Temple, and with the great events which the nation would experience in the future as a result of it. He encouraged the authorities and the people not to postpone the construction of the Temple, but to begin immediately. He claimed that all the mishaps poverty, famine and drought which befell the nation, were caused by the delay in this work. The people listened to Haggai's words despite their fears (1:13, 2:5), and began work on the 24th of Elul.

Although the new Temple seemed small and poor *"and as nothing in your eyes"* (2:3), Haggai encouraged them by saying that the size of the building would not determine its value for future generations. He proclaimed that with the renewal of the Temple construction, G-d's covenant with His people would be renewed, as in the days of the exodus from Egypt. The prophet also had a messianic vision of the time to come: G-d would shake all the universe and the wealth of all the nations will come to the Temple; and its glory would be greater than the glory of the First Temple.

Zechariah, in all probability a younger contemporary of Haggai and probably a priest (NEH. 2:4, 16), prophesied concerning contemporary events and foretold material prosperity, the ingathering of the exiles, liberation from the foreign yoke, and the expansion of Jerusalem. Zechariah also was instrumental in encouraging the people to conclude the rebuilding of the Temple, and his prophecies include eight visions aimed at inspiring the people to this end. The book also predicts the coming of a kingly messiah and the end of the Diaspora. Zechariah esteems the Temple service, and at the same time considers the observance of the precepts of righteousness, truth and peace most important. Jerusalem is G-d's chosen city and He is jealous for its honor. The future of the non-Jewish nations is also connected with the city, for they will eventually be joined to G-d, worshipping Him as does Israel. *"Again, proclaim, saying: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.'"* (ZECHARIAH 1: 17)

Though the Second Temple, too, eventually fell, these prophets had prepared the Jewish people for a unique history, one experienced by no other nation: a history of nationhood without sovereignty, of nationhood in dispersion. Two basic commitments kept the Jewish people alive: the maintenance of their separate and distinct character through the observance of their faith and cultural heritage through the centuries; and the

maintenance from generation to generation of their belief in G-d's vow that they would be redeemed; specifically, that they would return to the land of their fathers: "*And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, And come with singing unto Zion...*" (ISAIAH 51:11).

From the Aggadot

The aggadot (moral and ethical principles presented by the sages in an artistic or poetic form) include many passages which reflect the Jewish people's longing to return to Zion. Some are statements about the spiritual advantages of living in Israel:

Said Rav Yose bar Halafta to his son Rav Yishmael: *If you wish to see the Divine Presence in this world--involve yourself in Torah in the Land of Israel* [SHOCHER TOV 105].

Interpreting the verse, "*And spirit to them that walk therein*" (ISAIAH 42:5), Rav Yirmia bar Abba quoted Rav Yohanan: *whoever walks four amot (cubits) in the Land of Israel is promised a share in the world to come.*

Other comments involve additional non-material benefits:

The air of the Land of Israel makes one wise. [BABA BATRA 150:8]

There are aggadot which extol the agricultural produce in Israel: "*...the wine from a single vine fills six hundred casks a year; one peach feeds four men; and a fox can build its lair in the upper part of a turnip...the grains of wheat were like kidneys, the grains of barley like olives.*"

Some aggadot indicate a preference for people living in the land of Israel over those living abroad:

Said the Holy One, Blessed be He: A small group in the land of Israel is more beloved by Me than the Great Sanhedrin outside of Israel. [YERUSHALMI, NEDARIM 80:6, 5:8]

Even if there are righteous and wise people outside the land of Israel and shepherds and cowherds in the land of Israel, the leap year is not calculated except by shepherds and cowherds; and even if there are prophets outside the land of Israel and laymen in the land of Israel, the leap year is not calculated except by laymen in the land of Israel [PIRKEI D'RAV ELIEZER 8].

The eminent suitability of the Land of Israel for the Jewish People is described impressively in the following homily:

Rav Shimon ben Yochai commented on the passage "*He stood, and measured the earth*" (HABAKUK 3:6):

The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the peoples and did not find a people who were worthy of receiving the

Torah except Israel; and the Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the generations and did not find a generation that was worthy of receiving the Torah except the generation in the desert; The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the mountains and did not find a mountain suitable for giving the Torah upon it except Sinai; The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the cities and did not find a city that was worthy of having the Sanctuary built within it except Jerusalem; The Holy One, Blessed be He, measured all the countries and did not find a country that was worthy of the people of Israel except the Land of Israel [VAYIKRA RABA 13; YALKUT SHIMONI ON HABAKUK 3].

Among the most poignant aggadot are those in the form of monologues by Knesset Yisrael (the People of Israel as a collective entity) addressed to G-d which describe the difference between life in Israel before and after the Temple's destruction:

Knesset Yisrael said before Him: Master of the world! My soul is desolate when I pass by Your House and it is destroyed...A still voice within it says: 'In the place where the seed of Abraham brought sacrifices before You, and the priests stood on the dais, and the levites played on harps will foxes dance there?' [LAMENTATIONS RABA 4].

One touching commentary involves an extensive play on the words in Psalm 42, verse 5: "These things I remember; and pour out my soul within me, How I passed on with the throng, and led them to the house of G-d, With the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping holyday." (PSALMS 42:5) Knesset Yisrael says to the Holy One, Blessed be He: *In the past I would go up to Jerusalem basach (in procession), and the roads would be in good repair before me, and now [I go up] basach (hedged in) [fulfilling the prophecy, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns" (HOSEA 2:6);] in the past I would go up and trees would shade my path, and now I am exposed to the sun; in the past I would go up in the shadow of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and now [I go up] in the shadow of mortal kings* [LAMENTATIONS RABA 4].

Rav Brachya said:

Knesset Yisrael says before the Holy One, Blessed be He: In the past I would go up with baskets of first fruits on my head, and now "adadem" I ascend and descend in silence; in the past I would ascend with songs and hymns before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and now I ascend crying and descend

crying; in the past I would ascend "a multitude keeping holyday"...and now I ascend stealthily and descend stealthily [LAMENTATIONS RABA 4].

But in the end, Zion is the source of all good:

Rabbi Levi said: *All blessings, consolations and bounties which the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings upon Israel, emanate from Zion. Torah from Zion, as it says: "For out of Zion the Torah shall go forth" (ISAIAH 2:3). Blessing from Zion, as it says: "The Lord bless thee out of Zion" (PSALMS 134:3). Revelation from Zion, as it says: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, G-d appeared" (Ps. 50:2). Support from Zion, as it says: "Send forth thy help from the sanctuary, and support thee out of Zion" (Ps. 20:3). Life from Zion, as it says: "Like the dew of Hermon, that comes down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever" (Ps. 133:3). Greatness from Zion, as it says: "The Lord is great in Zion" (Ps. 99:2). Salvation from Zion, as it says: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" (Ps. 14:7).*

Prayer

Nowhere is the Jews' yearning for Zion expressed more consistently and fervently than in the prayer book. Throughout the centuries of exile and to this day, devout Jews have continued to pray for the return to Zion, for the restoration of Jerusalem to its former glory, and for the rebuilding of the Temple. In prayer, the Jewish worshipper is instructed to face east, towards the Land of Israel. In the morning service, Jews say, *"Bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land."*

Worshippers repeatedly recite, *"Blessed are You, O Lord, Who builds Jerusalem,"* and *"Blessed are You, O Lord, Who returns His presence to Zion."* The grace after meals includes a blessing which ends with a prayer for the rebuilding of *"Jerusalem, the Holy City, speedily and in our days."*

The Amidah (Silent Prayer)

In the Amidah, also known as the Eighteen Benedictions, which is the core of morning, afternoon and evening prayers, there are several blessings relating to the religious and national requirements and desires of Israel: a prayer for the ingathering of the exiles; a request for the institution of G-d's sovereignty and for *"the rule of justice and righteousness through upright leaders;"* and prayers for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Zion.

In the blessing after the reading of the Haftorah (prophetic reading) on Sabbaths and holidays, we find: *"Be compassionate toward Zion, for it is the fountain of our life, and do Thou grant deliverance speedily, yea, in our own time, to the Holy City that has long been grieved in spirit. Praised be Thou, O Lord, who renewest the joy of Zion at the return of her children"* ("THE PRAYER BOOK," TRANSLATED AND ARRANGED BY BEN ZION BOKSER).

In the Sabbath Liturgy

At the beginning of the Friday night prayer service welcoming the Sabbath, the famous hymn "Lecha dodi"(Come, my beloved) is sung. It, too, contains references to the rebuilding of Zion:

City of holiness, filled are the years;

Up from thine overthrow! Forth from thy fears!

Long hast thou dwelt in the valley of tears;

Now shall G-d's tenderness shepherd thy ways.

'Be not ashamed,' saith the Lord, 'nor distressed;

Fear not and doubt not. The people oppressed,

Zion, My city, in thee shall find rest

Thee, that anew on thy ruins I raise.'

Zemirot (Sabbath Table Songs)

Zemirot are the songs traditionally sung at home during Sabbath meals. Though based by and large on themes directly related to the day of rest, they often include a plea for G-d's return to Zion as an event which would make the singers' Sabbath joy complete. For example, in the song Tsur Mishelo (Rock from Whose [Bounty]), the final verse entreats:

May the Temple be rebuilt; the City of Zion replenished.

There we shall sing a new song, with joyous singing ascend.

May the Merciful, the Sanctified, be blessed and exalted

Over a full cup of wine worthy of G-d's blessing.

Ya Ribon Olam (O Master of the World) ends:

To Your Sanctuary return, and to the Holy of Holies,

The place where spirits and souls will rejoice and utter songs and praises

In Jerusalem, city of beauty.

The Sabbath hymn Baruch El Elyon (Blessed be G-d Most High), begins:

Blessed be G-d Most High Who gives repose, To our soul relief

from dismay and woe; May He seek out Zion, the outcast city...

The Grace After Meals

The Grace after Meals includes three passages dealing with the land of Israel. The first, instituted by Joshua, deals with the whole country. The second, instituted by King David, is a prayer for Jerusalem; and the third, established by King Solomon, is for the Temple.

The Torah injunction to bless G-d "*for the good land that He has given you*" as part of Grace after Meals has led to a ruling by our sages that '*anyone who does not mention the "desirable, good and spacious land" when giving thanks does not satisfy the requirement of saying the Grace*' (BERACHOT 48B). This implies that an additional purpose of the Grace after Meals was to instill in those saying it a deep love for the land of Israel, and to bring them to understand that, as food is necessary for the existence and growth of each person, so the Land of Israel is necessary for the existence and growth of the Jewish People. The Land of Israel can provide both material and spiritual nourishment for all Jews.

Although it is certainly true that the Jewish people and the Jewish religion managed to survive for many centuries without the land, it is no less true that they were sustained by the deep belief that they would someday return. The Jewish people never relinquished their claim to the land, and although it was settled by others, it somehow never yielded its best to them. Only when the Jews returned did the desert bloom. "*And if for many centuries most Jews did not live in Eretz Yisrael, it lived within them: in every prayer, in every holiday, in every ceremony, day in and day out. It remained for them 'our land,' for which they never ceased to offer daily thanksgiving to G-d...*" (H. DONIN, "TO PRAY AS A JEW")

Customs and Laws

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the individual Jew's longing for Zion has been expressed in certain customs and laws, many of them serving to inject a measure of sadness into an otherwise joyful occasion-for with Zion destroyed, how can any member of the Jewish people feel complete happiness? For those who would say that the establishment of the State of Israel has changed the situation, the reply would be a qualified "yes"- though we are once again sovereign in our own country, with Jerusalem as its capital, Jerusalem's final status is still in dispute; and in any case, the Temple has yet to be rebuilt. Therefore, these customs are still observed.

Mourning for Jerusalem and the Sanctuary

When the Second Temple was destroyed and the Jews exiled in 70 CE, the Jewish people were deeply affected. Some people observed private fast days; others foreswore meat

or wine. Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai: *'It is forbidden to a man to fill his mouth with laughter in these days.'* Homes were left unadorned; singing and the playing of musical instruments was frowned upon.

As the Sages searched for a suitable way to commemorate the Destruction, Rabbi Joshua offered words of moderation to his disciples:

My sons, come and listen to me. It is impossible not to mourn at all, since the blow has fallen; and it is impossible to mourn excessively, since one does not impose on the public more than most of them can bear. However thus said the Sages: When a man plasters his house, he leaves a small space [unplastered]; when a man makes preparations for a festive meal, he leaves something out; when a woman adorns herself with all her jewelry, she leaves something off, as it is said: "If I forget thee, Jerusalem...may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth..." And all those who mourn for Jerusalem merit seeing her joy, as it is said, "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem... rejoice for joy with her, All ye that mourn for her" (ISAIAH 66: 1 0) [BABA BATRA 60; AYN YAKOV].

Fast Days

All together, the Sages instituted four fast days to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples:

1. The 10th of Teveth (December-January) commemorates laying siege to Jerusalem, leading to the destruction.
2. The 17th of Tammuz (June-July) commemorates the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem, preceding the destruction.
3. The 9th of Av (July-August) commemorates the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the Second Temple in 70 CE.
4. The Fast of Gedaliah (the day after Rosh Hashana), on which Gedaliah, the provisional governor of the remaining Jews of Jerusalem, was assassinated in 585 BCE.

During the three week period between the 17th of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av, additional customs of mourning are observed: no haircuts are taken, no weddings are celebrated, and no new clothing is purchased. From the 1st of Av through the 9th, as mourning intensifies, additional strictures are observed.

Additional Customs

Other customs developed which signified the prominent place of Zion in Jewish life, even as the exile continued. All over the world, Jews turn toward Jerusalem when they pray, and synagogues are built so that when the congregants face the Holy Ark, they will be facing Jerusalem. In the marriage ceremony, the bridegroom seeks to "elevate Jerusalem to the forefront of our joy" by breaking a glass under the wedding canopy. In addition, the passage from Psalms, "*If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning,*" is often recited or sung. At the conclusion of the Passover seder and at the end of Yom Kippur, every Jew declares, "*Next year in Jerusalem.*" At times of mourning, the bereaved are consoled with mention of the Land of Israel: "May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

The Rabbis determined that even the prayer for rain, wherever it was said, had to take conditions in Israel into account:

Even if men of eastern lands and those banished [to the islands of the sea] require moisture during the Tammuz (summer) season, they must not pray for rain except when the Land of Israel needs it, too. For if one were to permit them to pray whenever they need precipitation, even during the summer, they might believe that they are living in a country of their own. But they ought to look upon themselves as living in a hostelry [temporary shelter], while their heart turns to the land of Israel. Prayers for rain must come, therefore, in their stated time (ABBA EBAN, "**MY PEOPLE**").

Over the centuries, Jewish law took into account, and gave high priority to, the deep desire of individual Jews to visit Jerusalem and to live there, though it was not often practically possible to realize these hopes and dreams. When a marriage was arranged, Rabbi Levi Yitshak of Berditchev would write: "*The wedding will take place on such and-such a date in Jerusalem. However, if by then the redemption has still not come, it will take place in Berditchev.*"

Mitzvot (Commandments) which Can Be Kept Only in Israel

The most important justification in Jewish law for wishing to return to Zion is the fact that there are many commandments which can be fulfilled only in the Land of Israel. Moreover, in the view of some of our sages, the main purpose of keeping any of the commandments outside of Israel is so that, when the Jew observing them returns to Israel, he will not be "out of practice" or unfamiliar with them. What is undisputed is that there are many mitzvot which can only be observed in the Holy Land. These include obligations which hold only when the Temple exists, such as most of the sacrifices; as well as commandments still kept today, such as the observance of the sabbatical year and

tithing produce. Four such areas of obligation will be expanded upon in this chapter, as will the question of whether or not living in the land of Israel is itself a commandment.

Establishing cities of refuge: (NUMBERS 35:13, DEUT. 19:9) Upon their settlement in the Land, the Children of Israel were instructed to single out six cities from among the cities of the Levites, to be designated as cities of refuge for those individuals who had killed someone by accident. (It should be noted that not all accidents were involved, but those which were caused by carelessness and might have been prevented). The roads to each of these cities were required to be straight, unobstructed, and in good repair, with clearly marked signs at the crossroads; thus there would be nothing to prevent such a person from fleeing from pursuers, usually relatives of the victim, intent on taking revenge. The ethical implications of the duty to establish cities of refuge include the necessity to protect the unintentional murderer from being murdered in turn; and on the other hand, to prevent him from continuing to live out his life as if nothing had happened, though his carelessness had caused someone's death. Moses designated three such cities in his lifetime in the area settled by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh east of the Jordan River, and others were set apart by Joshua west of the Jordan after the conquest.

The Sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee (EX. 23:10, LEV. 25:2-7) In the Sabbatical year, each Jewish landowner was required not only to abstain from working his land, but to renounce ownership of all that the land produced in the seventh year, the year of shmitta (remission). Anyone who wished could partake of the produce: *"but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat," and what they leave the beast of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with your vineyard, and with your olive yard.*" (EXODUS 23: 11). This commandment forced both the renewal of the land, and the renewed recognition of its erstwhile owners that the land which produces fruit for them each year does not do so out of its own power, but that there is a Lord over it and over its owners. According to Rabbi Aharon Halevy, another benefit of this commandment is that it aids a person to acquire the trait of *vatranut* (concession), because there is no one who is more generous than he who gives with no hope of receiving a reward. It also increases his faith in G-d, who must provide for him and his family while his land lies fallow.

Similar to the sabbatical year is the jubilee year, which occurred once every fifty years (Unlike the sabbatical year, the jubilee year has not yet been re-established). During this fiftieth year, all the laws regarding the sabbatical year applied. Additionally, in the jubilee year all lands reverted back to their original owners, slaves were liberated, and debts remitted.

Hakhel (Assembly):

This is a commandment to assemble the people during Sukkot at the conclusion of the sabbatical year, and to read to them from the Torah. All of the people of Israel, men, women and children, were to come together at the end of

the sabbatical year on the holiday of Sukkot, on the second day of the holiday, and to have read to them a portion of the Torah, from the book of Deuteronomy: *"And Moses commanded them, saying: 'At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy G-d in the place which He shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn..."* [DEUT. 31: 10-13]. When there is a king in Israel, it is his duty to read on this occasion. The basis of this commandment is that the mainstay of the people of Israel is the Torah; therefore it is suitable for all of them -men, women and children -to come together at one time to hear its words. This inspiring event will hopefully create within all of them a longing to learn Torah. In recent years, an attempt has been made to commemorate this assembly, and on Sukkot at the close of the last sabbatical year (September 1994/ Tishri 5755), many Jews came to the Western Wall to hear the reading of the designated passages from the Torah.

The Bringing of the First Fruits

'I have been brought by Him into this fruitful land and now I bring Him of its fruits....' One of the most moving ceremonies to take place in the Temple was the bringing of the first fruits, as recounted in DEUTERONOMY 26: 1-11. Each inhabitant of Israel who farmed his own land was obligated to bring the first of its produce to the Temple in a basket, present it to the officiating priest, and offer a prayer thanking G-d for having given him the land. This is the first instance where *"G-d is glorified for His gift of a land to the worshipper."* The prayer recited on this occasion is a yearly, obligatory prayer--one of two in the Bible--and begins with a history lesson:

A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down to Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. And we cried unto the Lord, the G-d of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our

affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. And He hath brought US into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me (DEUTERONOMY 26:5-10).

If this declaration has a familiar ring, it is probably because it has been incorporated into the text of the traditional Passover Haggadah.

A description of how the offering of the first fruits was celebrated has come down to us from early Talmudic times. The people from the surrounding country came to Jerusalem with the first fruits, those living close at hand with fresh fruits, those far away with dried. In the early morning the procession entered the city, headed by pipers, then the sacrificial bull with gilded horns, and behind it the men, bearing baskets filled with fruits and garlanded with grapes, each according to his wealth, golden baskets, silver baskets, and baskets woven from stripped willow twigs. The artisans of Jerusalem came out to greet them, greeting those from each place in turn: *'Brothers, men from the place of such and such a name, may you come in peace!'* But when they stood by the temple hill the king himself took his basket on his shoulders and entered in with them. In the forecourt the Levites sang the verse from the Psalms: *'I will exalt Thee, G-d, for Thou hast drawn me up'* (Ps. 30:2). The verb described the lifting of the bucket from the well. In the context of the action and the prayer that follows, which gives thanks for the deliverance from Egypt, the quotation came to mean: *'Israel gives thanks to G-d for raising it from the well of Egypt into the daylight and freedom of its own land.'* (BIKKURIM III).

Martin Buber comments:

The report of the Mishna sounds as though the intention was to preserve something lost and past for the memory of future generations. What emerges from the Mishna is the living unity --from the small peasant to the artisan right up to the king --of a people experiencing and glorifying the blessings of nature as the blessings of history. Thus we appreciate the full meaning of the passage on the offering of the first fruits, the unique document of a unique relationship between a people and a land.

It is interesting to note that many kibbutzim have adapted this ancient ritual to their Shavuot celebrations, holding processions in which the participants (especially the

children) dress in white, and, with wreaths of flowers on their heads, parade with baskets of kibbutz produce.

Is Settling the Land of Israel a Mitzvah?

And the Lord spoke unto Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying: *Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When ye pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images, and demolish all their high places. And ye shall drive out the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein; for unto you have I given the land to possess it.* (NUMBERS 33:50-53)

Nahmanides [Rabbinical scholar Moses ben Nahman, known also as the Ramban (1194-1270)] interprets the last verse in the passage above as follows:

In my opinion, this constitutes a positive command of the Torah wherein He commanded them to settle in the land, and inherit it; for He gave it them; and they should not reject the heritage of the Lord! Should it enter their mind, for instance, to go and conquer the land of Shinar (Babylon) or Assyria or any other country and settle therein, then they would have transgressed a commandment of the Lord....

Nahmanides discusses the obligation to settle Eretz Yisrael in more detail in his comments on the **SEFER HA-MITZVOT (BOOK OF DIVINE PRECEPTS)** of Maimonides [physician and renowned Rabbinical scholar Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204)] where he explains the cases in which he differs from Maimonides in his method of numbering the 613 precepts of Judaism. Here, Nahmanides objects to Maimonides not counting the duty of settling Eretz Yisrael as a separate commandment. Maimonides devotes a considerable amount of discussion in many of his works to the supreme and essential importance of Eretz Yisrael in Judaism, but does not designate its settlement as one of the 613 precepts referred to in the Torah.

In the words of Nahmanides:

We have been commanded in the Torah to take possession of the land which the Lord, Blessed be He, granted to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and not to leave it in the hands of others or allow it to remain desolate...A proof

that this is a special mitzvah can be adduced from the Almighty's order to the spies, *'Go up and possess it, as the Lord hath spoken to you, fear not and be not dismayed'* (DEUT. 1:21)...And when they refused to go up, it is written, *'And you rebelled against the word of the Lord...'* (DEUT. 1:26). This indicates that we are dealing with a specific precept and not merely a promise. I consider that the hyperbolic statements of our Sages regarding the greatness of the mitzvah of residing in the Holy Land proceeded from their concern to carry out this explicit command of the Torah...

The mitzvah applies for all time, even during the exile, as is evident from many places in the Talmud. For example: *"It happened that Rabbi Judah ben Batira and R. Matya ben Harash and R. Hanina the nephew of R. Joshua and R. Yohanan were journeying to the Diaspora. On reaching Palatium (a place outside Eretz Yisrael) they recalled Eretz Yisrael and their eyes filled with tears and they rent their garments and applied to themselves the following verse: 'Thou shalt possess them and dwell in their land' (DEUT. 11:31), whereupon they retraced their steps and went back home, saying: Residence in Eretz Yisrael is equal in weight to all the mitzvot in the Torah" (SIFREI). In another place we find: "At all times should a man reside in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city inhabited mostly by heathens. Let him not reside outside the Land, even in a city mostly inhabited by Jews" [KETUBOT 110B] ("AL HATORAH").*

Contemporary Torah scholar Nehama Leibowitz (1905 -1997) notes that it is easier to appreciate the force of these rabbinic statements if we bear in mind that there can be no complete observance, in all spheres of life, of the precepts of the Torah except in the Land of Israel. That is why King David is held to have implied that his expulsion from the Holy Land by Saul was tantamount to telling him to go and worship idols (I SAMUEL 26: 19), since the Torah cannot be observed in its entirety except in a society wholly governed by its precepts and not in an alien framework ruled by other ideals. *"Admittedly there are personal religious obligations that can be observed anywhere, even by a Jewish Robinson Crusoe on his desert isle, but the Torah, as a whole, implies a*

complete social order, a judiciary, national, economic and political life. That can only be achieved in the Holy Land and not outside it."

According to Jewish tradition, it is the Almighty who designates national boundaries. ("Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?") [AMOS 9:7]. He assigned Israel its place in the world, as He did for other peoples: How, then, does Israel's relationship to its homeland differ from that of other nations to theirs? The difference lies in the fact that Israel is aware that this land was granted it by the Almighty. It is not just a matter of history for the Jewish people, but includes a moral commitment, the responsibility of maintaining a particular way of life in that land. According to Nahmanides, the Israelites were specifically commanded to take possession of Eretz Yisrael and live there to fulfill their religious mission.

Perhaps, says Leibowitz, this is the implication of the statement in the Midrash concerning the Almighty's words to Jacob, ordering the Patriarch to return to his homeland after twenty years of exile and servitude in Laban's house:

"Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (GENESIS 31 :3) -Your father is waiting for you, your mother is waiting for you -I Myself am waiting for you' (GENESIS RABA 77).

Poetic Yearnings

There is no more poignant expression of the people of Israel's yearning for Zion than their poetry. Since the destruction of the First Temple, the Jews both in exile and in the land of Israel under foreign rule have applied their considerable talents to the subject. The approaches to composing poetry about Zion are as varied as the personalities of the poets, their countries of residence and the political climate of the times in which they wrote.

Early Poetic Themes

Perhaps the earliest songs of Zion, following the biblical Psalms, were the kinot (dirges) written to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Many of these poems, also known as Zionads, have been incorporated into the prayer service for the Ninth of Av. They address Zion, often personified as a woman, and voice fervent longing, reverence and love for the site of the ruined sanctuary. One lament describes the outcry of the signs of the Zodiac upon the destruction of the Temple: *"The host of heaven sounded a dirge...Aries (the Ram) wept bitterly... Taurus (the Bull) howled on high...Gemini (the Twins) were seen to split asunder..."*

Eleazar Ben Kallir (c. 570- c. 630) of Tiberias, the preeminent liturgical poet of the Gaonic era, portrayed Israel as an abandoned wife and G-d as the husband to whom she appeals.

G-d reassures her that her prayers will be answered:

"My dark one, I shall never desert you;

I shall reach out again and take you to myself.

Your complaint has come to an end:

My perfect one, I shall not forsake you or forget you.

Another poem, written between the 9th and 11th centuries, depicts Zion as a mother whose children, chased away by watchmen, view her longingly from afar.

Spanish poet and philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol (c.1020 -c.1057), one of the greatest of the medieval Hebrew poets, wrote, among many other types of poetry, national verse in which he deplored the situation of the Jewish people in their exile and expressed his longing for redemption and the advent of the Messiah. Gabirol's national poetry emerged from a combination of the traditional longing for deliverance and the particular fate of Spanish Jewry. Political events, the fate of his patron Jekuthiel, and the murder of an anonymous Jewish statesman by Christians in the forests along the border must have reinforced Gabirol's awareness of the dangers of exile. In his poems "Geulot" (Redemptions) and "Ahavot" (Loves) the people of Israel speak to their G-d as a woman to her lover, telling of her sorrows, while her lover comforts her with promises of her deliverance.

Isaac ibn Ghiyyat [Ghayyat] (1038-1089), halachic authority, commentator, poet, and head of the yeshiva of Lucena, his home town, wrote allegories of Israel as a forsaken bride, entreating G-d, as her beloved, for a return to favor. His reply:

"O you who call out in distress, why should you fear?"

You will again be carried on eagles' wings.

I shall again call you 'My youthful bride'."

Philosophy, Poetry, and Aliyah: Judah Halevi

The literary output of Judah Halevi (c.1085 -1141) represents the high point of Spanish Jewish cultural creativity. A physician, poet and philosopher, Halevi was an early theorist of Zionism and Jewish nationalism, though he lived some 750 years before the word "Zionist" came into use. The political conditions of his time led him to the conclusion that many future Zionist theorists would ultimately reach: that life in the Diaspora, even at its most comfortable, was not only insecure but also destructive of Jewish spiritual creativity.

Halevi is probably best known for his "Shirei Zion" ("Songs of Zion," or Zionides), approximately 35 in number. In them, he transformed a motif of medieval spiritual works -the sense of alienation from this world- into a proto-Zionist theme. Instead of longing for another-worldly existence, Halevi's poems see Israel as the only place where a Jew can feel rooted. While the poems lament the barrenness of the land of Israel, they praise its spiritual splendor. Life in Spain, by contrast, may seem more luxurious, but in fact it is a life of bondage to empty temptations. The poems argue that there is no physical security for

Jews in other lands they call home. Furthermore, only in Israel can the Jewish people realize their spiritual potential.

The originality of these "Songs of Zion" is evident in the very topic, which was at that period an uncommon one, but even more so in their varied and beautiful artistry. Several categories of these poems can be differentiated, although they were written over several decades, and contain recurring motifs and similar tones.

(1) The poems of longing for Eretz Yisrael express the inner tension between love and pain, between the dream and the reality, and the effort required to bridge the West and East.

(2) It was in his poetic disputations that his doctrine on Eretz Yisrael was developed. Thus in the 12th century he was able, as a result of reasoning and clear political understanding, to argue that there is no secure place for the Jewish people except Eretz Yisrael. As for its being desolate, it was also given that way to the forefathers.

(3) Some of the poems of the voyage were actually written aboard ship; others are imaginary descriptions composed before the journey, while still others were written after it. Prior to his voyage, Judah Halevi lived it in his imagination and poetry, overcoming deep fears in this way; he even taught himself to anticipate happily and excitedly the dangers of the future. The poems begin with a description of the world, but subsequent descriptions diminish in perspective: the stormy Mediterranean Sea, the weak ship at its mercy, and finally the poet himself in prayer.

In his numerous works, Judah Halevi employed many voices, sometimes writing from the point of view of Israel, sometimes from that of G-d. In some of his verses, Israel complains to G-d, or laughs at the rivals who would presume to take her place in G-d's affections. In other poems, notably the renowned "My Heart is in the East," he spoke in his own name:

My heart is in the East and I am at the edge of the West.

Then how can I taste what I eat, how can I enjoy it?

How can I fulfill my vows and pledges while Zion is in the domain of Edom, and I am in the bonds of Arabia?

It would be easy for me to leave behind all the good things of Spain; It would be glorious to see the dust of the ruined Shrine.

[Note: * Edom symbolized the Christian Crusaders, who held the Land of Israel at this time; Arabia symbolized the Moslems, who ruled Spain.]

The most famous of Judah Halevi's Poems of Zion: "Ziyyan ha-lo tishali" ("Zion, will you not ask if peace be with your captives") is chanted each year in congregations around the

world as part of the service for the 9th of Av. In it, the poet laments the destruction of Jerusalem but looks forward to its restoration in the future:

Zion, will you not ask if peace be with your captives
Who seek your welfare, who are the remnant of your flocks?
From west and east, north and south, from every side,
Accept the greetings of those near and far,
and the blessings of this captive of desire,
who sheds his tears like the dew of Hermon
and longs to have them fall upon your hills.
I am like a jackal when I weep for your affliction;
but when I dream of your exiles' return, I am a harp for your
songs... If only I could roam through those places
where G-d was revealed to your prophets and heralds!
Who will give me wings, so that I may wander far away?
I would carry the pieces of my broken heart over your
rugged mountains...

Numerous imitations and translations of this poem have appeared. By virtue of its inclusion (according to the Ashkenazi rite) in the kinot for the Ninth of Av, many generations have lamented the destruction of the Temple and dreamt their dream of redemption in the words of this poem. All aspects of the poem focus on Zion. The holy qualities of the land are specified at length with a lyric feeling which imaginatively transplants the poet to places of former revelation, prophecy, monarchy, and to the graves of the forefathers. In a unique poetic outcry, he expresses his grief at its destruction, and expresses the happiness of his hope in the quiet lines which end the poem, where he blesses those who will be fortunate enough to see the real redemption in the dawn. More than 800 years later, a popular song written to celebrate Jerusalem in 1967, on the eve of the Six-Day War, used some of Halevi's words as its refrain: "*I am a harp for your songs.*"

Decision to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael- Judah Halevi's passionate love of Zion drove him finally to abandon his home, his family, and his friends, and to set out via Egypt for

Jerusalem. His decision to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael, a gradual one, reflected the highest aspiration of his life. It resulted from a complex of circumstances: intense and realistic political thought; disillusionment with the possibility of secure Jewish existence in the Diaspora; intense longing for a positive, redeeming act; and the prevalent messianic climate, which so affected him that he once dreamt that the redemption would come in the year 1130 CE. The decision was strengthened by his religious philosophy, developed at length in his book the *Kuzari* and in many of his poems. Throughout the philosophical and poetic work of Judah Halevi, as in his life, one can sense the intellectual effort to make other Jews conscious of his outlook. In his philosophical work as well as in his poetry, Judah Halevi spoke out harshly against those who deceived themselves by speaking of Zion and by praying for its redemption while their hearts were closed to it and their actions far removed from it.

Great difficulties lay before him. The long journey by both sea and desert was perilous. He knew that he would encounter very difficult living conditions in Eretz Yisrael, which was under Crusader rule at that time.

Moreover, Judah Halevi had to counter the arguments of his friends who tried to deter him; he had to overcome his attachment to his only daughter and son-in-law, to his students, his many friends and admirers; and he had to give up his high social status and the honor which he had attained in his native land. He struggled deeply with his intimate attachment to Spain, the land of "*his fathers' graves*:" At one time he had even looked upon Spain with pride and thankfulness, as a homeland for the Jews. On the other hand, Judah Halevi was encouraged to make the journey by his friend Halfon ha-Levi, whom he met in Spain in 1139.

On the 24th of Elul (Sept. 8, 1140) Judah Halevi arrived in Alexandria. Several months later he went to Cairo where he stayed with Halfon ha-Levi. The scenery, pleasures, the admiration and honor generally accorded him everywhere, and the friendships he enjoyed all served to prolong his stopover in Egypt so that he began to fear that he would die before reaching his destination. Finally, however, Judah Halevi boarded a ship at Alexandria, bound for Eretz Yisrael; but its departure was delayed by inclement weather. From the elegies written in Egypt and from the Genizah letters which mention his death, it could be concluded that he died about six months after reaching Egypt and that he was also buried there. What was denied him in life, however, the famous legend, first mentioned in *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah*, and later by Heinrich Heine in his *Hebraeische Melodien*, has supplied. It relates that he managed to reach the city of Jerusalem, but, as he kissed its stones, a passing Arab horseman trampled on him just as he was reciting his elegy, "*Ziyyon ha-lo tishali*."

ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA

The Circle Widens

As the exile continued, poetic yearnings connected descriptions of the sufferings of the Jews in the Diaspora with a wish to return to the glory of Israel in Temple times. Ephraim of Bonn (b. 1132), in his "LAMENT FOR THE MASSACRE AT BLOIS," pleaded for the restoration of

the fortunes of the Jewish people, a return to Jerusalem and to the Temple sacrifices. Other poets praised Israel for remaining faithful despite all their tribulations. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 led to a new flourishing of the Hebrew Spanish styles of poetry in such widely dispersed Jewish communities as those in Turkey, Greece, North Africa, Eretz Yisrael and Holland, during a period which extended from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

Judah Aryeh Modena (1571-1648), child prodigy, Italian rabbi, scholar and writer, in his "SONG FOR THE MINOR DAY OF ATONEMENT," voiced a plea for redemption. *"And through Your great love, my King, You will arise and have mercy on our holy Zion. You will restore Your glory to Your dwelling, and there we shall present the burnt-offerings of the new month. O G-d, pray send the bearer of our royal honor, for it is there, in Zion, that our hearts yearn to shine."*

Shalem Shabazi (1619 -after 1680), the greatest of the Yemenite Jewish poets, lamented the exile of Yemenite Jewry to Mawza, near the eastern shore of the Red Sea, in 1679-1680 in his poems. Living in a period of persecutions and messianic anticipations for Yemenite Jewry, Shabazi gave faithful poetic expression to the suffering and yearning of his generation, whose national poet he became. His poetry deals primarily with the religious themes of exile and redemption, the Jewish people and G-d, wisdom and ethics, Torah, and the life to come. Many of his poems deal with the glorious past of the Jews in their own land, from which the author drew faith and hope for renewed greatness in the future. In his ode "THE SEAL," the poet describes himself as bound in love to Israel though *"my feet are sinking in the depths of the exile."*

Yearning is not Enough

Living during the height of the controversy over false messiah Shabbetai Tzvi, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1747), the kabbalist, writer of ethical works and Hebrew poet, felt that it was necessary to work toward the redemption. *"The healing of the Divine presence"* (tikkun ha-Shekhina) was the aim of Luzzatto's "Society of the Seekers of G-d," who studied the Zohar day and night in shifts in order to bring about the redemption. Suspected by some of the rabbinical authorities of the time of being aligned with Shabbetai Tzvi, Luzzatto was driven from Padua, where he grew up, to Amsterdam, and ultimately reached Israel.

There are those who consider Luzzatto the father of modern Hebrew literature due to his complete mastery of the language, his expressive style ("vivid, direct, and fully modern") and the ideas he addressed. His Palestinian poem, "SHIR AL HAMEI TVERYA" (SONG OF THE TIBERIAS SPRINGS), contains a graphic description of the desolation reigning everywhere at that time, and a minerological description of the springs of Tiberias. Luzzatto drew a parallel between the healing mineral waters of Tiberias, emerging from the soil after having overcome many obstacles, and the people of Israel who will likewise emerge victorious from their trials.

Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934), Hebrew author, father of modern Hebrew poetry, and poet-prophet of Jewish nationalism, inspired Zionists and revolutionaries in Russia, pioneers in Palestine, and thousands of schoolchildren who studied his poetry wherever modern Hebrew was taught. His influence was immense. Born near Zhitomir in the Ukraine, Bialik spent time in Volozhin (Lithuania), Odessa, Kiev, Warsaw and Berlin before settling in Tel Aviv in 1924.

His first published poem, "EL HATZIPPOR" (TO THE BIRD), was a song longing for Zion. In 1894 he wrote "AL SAF BEIT HAMIDRASH" (ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE HOUSE OF STUDY), which predicts the ultimate triumph of Israel's spirit.

In the hymn "BIRKAT AM" (THE BLESSING OF THE PEOPLE, 1894), which is permeated by intricate allusions to Temple ritual, the poet metamorphosed the builders of Eretz Yisrael into priests and Temple builders. Other poems indicate his preoccupation with the implications of the First Zionist Congress. In "HA-MATMID" (THE TALMUD STUDENT, 1894-5), Bialik traced the inner struggles of the dedicated student who represses his natural inclinations and sacrifices life, movement, change, nature and family for the ascetic study of Torah. This was an ideal figure who captured the imagination of the reader, since he embodied the moral qualities that build societies and preserve cultures.

Bialik despised Jewish apathy and many of his poems criticized his fellow Diaspora Jews for their humble acceptance of the negative aspects of their existence. Most notable was "IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER," written after the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev, in which he both expressed his sorrow and attacked the cowardly, parasitical survivors. This poem was a major stimulus to the Jewish self-defense movement. "MEGILLAT HA-ESH" (THE SCROLL OF FIRE, 1905), his most enigmatic and experimental work, fused elements drawn from Jewish legend (aggadah) and Jewish mysticism. Its overt theme is the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem, and the exile which followed. The destruction of the Temple appears to represent the destruction of the poet's soul on one level and that of the religious faith of an entire generation on the other.

After "MEGILLAT HA-ESH," Bialik fell into a period of silence, writing few poems and becoming occupied with manifold activities, including public lectures, essays, criticism, translating, and editing. He devoted his abundant vigor, vision and charm to the preservation and advancement of Jewish culture, participating in four Zionist Congresses, and the Congress for Hebrew Language and Culture in 1913. His cultural missions took him to the United States and to London. From 1928 on, ill health forced him to spend his summers in Europe and these trips also became occasions for the promotion of Jewish culture. He was active in the work of the Hebrew University, served as president of the Hebrew Writers Union and of the Hebrew Language Council, and initiated the popular Oneg Shabbat, a Sabbath study project. He was often sent abroad as an emissary of the Zionist organization. His death of a heart attack in Vienna, at the height of his fame, was seen as a national tragedy.

Bialik, who more than any other Hebrew poet since Judah Halevi, had a thorough command of Hebrew and the ability to use the many resources of the language, forged

a new poetic idiom which enabled Hebrew poetry to free itself from the overwhelming biblical influence and yet, at the same time, retain its link with "*the language of the race*." Bialik's dominant theme was the crisis of faith which confronted his generation as it broke with the sheltered and confined medieval Jewish religious culture of its childhood and sought desperately to hold on to a Jewish way of life and thought in the new secularized world in which it found itself. Despite his moments of despair, Bialik did not completely abandon the hope of reconciling modernism with tradition within the context of a new national Jewish culture. Searching out new and further vistas yet rooted in the rich Jewish heritage, Bialik was both the product and the dominant motivator of the cultural revolution of his age, embodying its very essence to carve out of the past the foundation on which the people might build with dignity in the future. In answering the silent cry of a people needing articulation in a new era, he has gained its permanent recognition. As a poet his genius and spirit have left an indelible imprint on modern Hebrew literature.

Coming Home

The poetry under discussion in the following section was written by poets who yearned and returned. Though modern Zionism had come into existence when these poets wrote, the Jews were just beginning to make their presence felt in the land of Israel. During their lifetimes, the gradual buildup of a Jewish presence in Palestine began: the establishment of Jewish settlements, Jewish agriculture, roads, schools and other institutions; the revival of the Hebrew language and the development of a national, modern Jewish culture. Born in Europe, they came to settle in pre-state Israel in the 1920s. Some of them changed the way they wrote when they reached Israel, either by switching from the East European Ashkenazi pronunciation to the Sephardic pronunciation used in modern Israeli spoken Hebrew; or by addressing subjects other than those they had written about in Europe, treating instead those of paramount importance to the inhabitants of the Yishuv, the Jewish community in pre-state Israel.

Yaakov Fichman (1880-1958), born in Bessarabia, was a follower of Bialik's school of thought. After his immigration to Palestine in 1925, Fichman became increasingly absorbed with the Palestinian landscape. He was a member of a transitional generation whose attitude toward the new landscape is basically secular; he did not view it through the Biblical-Zionist romanticism of some of his other contemporaries. In this he was a forerunner of the changes in Hebrew poetry, some of which he witnessed in his own lifetime. He expressed fascination with and reverence for Jerusalem, and anticipated its reconstruction.

Yehuda Karni (1884-1949), born in Pinsk, Poland, settled in Palestine in 1921. He was one of the first Hebrew poets to abandon the Ashkenazi accentuation and shift to the new Sephardi accent. Particularly distinctive is his volume "SHIREI YERUSHALAYIM" (SONGS OF JERUSALEM, 1948). Jerusalem in this volume looms as the eternal symbol of the people and its destiny.

Although he encountered a city in apparently hopeless stagnation and decay, he sensed the deeper, historical levels of consciousness of eternal Jerusalem. At the same

time, he captured the concrete beauty of the Jerusalem landscape: *"To be one of the stones of my city is all my desire. Were my bones knitted in with the wall, how glad I would be."* (WEDGE ME INTO THE FISSURE)

David Shimoni (1886-1956), born in White Russia, came to Israel in 1909 for one year, and settled in the country in 1921. He belonged to the circle of leading Hebrew poets who were under the influence of Bialik and were the chief spokesmen of Hebrew literature for more than a generation. While in Europe Shimoni wrote nostalgic poems about the landscape of Eretz Yisrael, but he is known primarily through his **SEFER HA-IDYLLIOT (THE BOOK OF IDYLLS)**, which were avidly read by two generations of pioneers and are still an integral part of the Israel school curriculum. Written in Palestine, it deals chiefly with the idyllic character of the Palestinian landscape and the life of the pioneers of the various Aliyot, against a background of swamp and desert, memories of the past and present day ideologies. In later poems, the poet concerned himself more with public issues, contemporary problems, and the needs of the people.

Rachel (pseudonym of Rachel Bluwstein, 1890-1931), born in northern Russia, began writing poetry in Russian at age 15. In 1909 she emigrated to Eretz Yisrael, abandoned her native Russian idiom and learned Hebrew. She wrote simple, sensitive lyrics charged with delicate symbols and imbued with a love for the countryside and nature. Many of the poems, including the widely sung "KINNERET", have been put to music.

Poet and publicist Uri Zvi Greenberg (1897-1981), born in Galicia, settled in Palestine in 1924. His poetry is filled with pathos and keen sensitivity, with richness of language and forceful expressions; for, according to the poet, the main function of poetry is not merely aesthetic, but rather to stir the nation to battle for its liberty. His poems deal with such themes as the significance of life and death, Israel as the Chosen People, national pride and a vision of the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. In contrast to most modern Hebrew writers, who were committed to a secularist-humanist Zionism, Greenberg asserted a religious and mystical view of Zionism as the Jewish historical destiny.

Yitzhak Lamdan (1900-1950) born in the Ukraine, immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1920. He spent his first years as a halutz (pioneer), building roads and working on farms. His poetry, imbued with a pioneering spirit that grew out of his experience, aroused great interest since it reflected the hopes and despair of the Third Aliyah and the struggles and conflicts of the individual halutz. Expressionist in nature, his poetry is wholly devoted to the fate of the Jewish people at its decisive hour.

Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973), Hebrew poet, editor, and translator, was born in the Ukraine and settled in Palestine in 1921. Shlonsky holds a central position in the development of modern Hebrew poetry and modern Israeli poetry in particular. The principal themes of his early verse are the harsh struggles of the Palestine pioneers, their arduous, monotonous toil, their loneliness and longing for the homes they left, set against their joy of creation, and the ennobling sorrows of self-sacrifice.

Levi Ben-Amitai (1901-) was born in White Russia, and moved to Palestine in 1920. His verse is devoted to the humble tiller of the soil, the Jewish farmer in his homeland, whose creative work the poet places on a level with the duties performed by the Priests and Levites in the Temple. The poet identified himself with the pure simple lives of the ancient Essenes, whose modern counterparts are the kibbutz members:

Mother Sabbath! Do you hear the pounding of hearts

And the silence of lips this night on the Jordan?

They thirst for prayer. Spread your hands over this bread

And bless them.

Bless the faithful, the sowers of light in the fields of man

And put the world's joy into hearts longing for brotherhood.

More will yet come, all to sit together like brothers

At the Sabbath of rest... (SABBATH IN THE KIBBUTZ)

Envisioning a Jewish State: Zionist Utopias

As Jews led their lives in the Diaspora, they held on to a vision of the Zion of old -- a vision of splendor in which Jewish kings reigned, the Temple was the center of Jewish life, and priests and prophets filled their respective functions in a free and sovereign Jewish state. The more difficult conditions were in the Diaspora, the more attractive this image of Zion past became. However, with the first stirrings of modern Zionism, there were those who envisaged other versions of the Zion of the future.

"EIN ZUKUNFTSBlick" ("A LOOK AT THE FUTURE") BY EDMUND EISLER, written in 1882, describes both the Jewish exodus from Europe and the creation of the state of "Judah" in Eretz Yisrael, which has Hebrew as its official language. The fledgling state is attacked by its neighbors, but vanquishes them all. Eisler includes a nightmare vision of Germany. In the main, the book reflected the background of European anti-Semitism and the pogroms in Russia.

Herzl's **"DER JUDENSTAAT" (THE JEWISH STATE, 1896)** is a classic example of a book in which both Zionist ideology and utopian visions are present. His **"ALTNEULAND" (OLD-NEW LAND, 1902)** sought to indicate the way in which Herzl visualized the realization of Zionism: a Jewish state in which technology would be developed to the highest degree and in which the Jewish intelligentsia would find unlimited opportunities. The new culture, however, would be essentially a European culture, based on a medley of languages and devoid of distinctive Jewish character.

Another Zionist utopia, "**MASSA LE-ERETZ YISRAEL BI-SHENAT TAT**" ("**A JOURNEY TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL IN THE YEAR 5800 [2040]**," 1893), by the Hebrew writer Elhanan Leib Levinsky, which preceded "**ALTNEULAND**" by ten years, reflects the Zionist dream of East European Jewry, rooted in Hebrew culture. The Hebrew language and the fostering of Hebrew culture occupy a central place in the book, and Ahad Ha-Am's vision of Eretz Yisrael becoming the spiritual center of the Jewish people reaches fulfillment.

Edward Bellamy's book "**LOOKING BACKWARD, 1887-2000**" (1888) had a profound influence on Zionist utopias. One example was a political -Zionist utopia by Max Austerberg-Verakoff, "**DAS REICH JUDAEA IM JAHRE 6000(2241)**," published in 1893. The author envisaged a mass exodus of Jews from Europe, their settlement in Eretz Yisrael, and the founding there of a Jewish state with Hebrew as its official language. He discusses the attitude of the Jewish state toward the European power that had been guilty of persecuting the Jews (Russia) and the relations between the citizens of the Jewish state and the Jews who stayed behind in the Diaspora.

Another Zionist utopia inspired by Bellamy was "**LOOKING AHEAD**" (1899) BY HENRY PEREIRA MENDES. He was one of the first American Jews to respond to Herzl's call, and his book expresses the essence of the Zionist vision: the Jewish state and Jerusalem, its capital, would be the center of world peace, and by the creation of the state, the nations of the world would redress the wrongs they had perpetrated against the Jews throughout the ages. There is also a description of the mass exodus of Jews to Eretz Yisrael; those who stay behind are enjoined to be loyal citizens of their countries, without losing awareness of the temporary nature of their residence outside of Eretz Yisrael.

Two utopias describe a Jewish state bearing the name "**ISRAEL**." One, written by the Hebrew author Isaac Fernhof (1868 -1919), describes the ascent of the poor and downtrodden Jews to Eretz Yisrael, where they create an independent state to which they give the name the State of Israel. The book is called "**SHENI DIMYONOT**" ("**TWO IDEAS**") one being the reality as experienced by the author, the other his vision of the Jewish state. The second utopia that refers to the Jewish state as the State of Israel was the work of the Hebrew Yiddish writer Hillel Zeitlin. Written in 1919 under the name "**IN DER MEDINAS YISROEL IN YOR 2000**" ("**IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL IN THE YEAR 2000**"), it reflects the tremendous impact of the Balfour Declaration upon the Jewish masses. The author foresees the establishment of the state and its growth and development. During the British Mandatory period (1918-48), a number of utopias were published in Hebrew as "**YERUSHALAYIM HA-BENUYAH**" ("**REBUILT JERUSALEM**") BY BORIS SCHATZ, in 1924. They often reflect the critical issues of that period: the struggle for Jewish labor and the opposition to the Mandatory regime. When the Jewish state is founded, the problems are solved and all unjust decrees abolished.

The Balfour Declaration also inspired "**KOMEMIYUT**" ("**UPRIGHT**"), a comprehensive work written in Russia in 1920-21 by the Hebrew author Shalom Ben Avram. This utopia contains an astoundingly accurate vision of mass aliyah, the founding of the Jewish commonwealth, and the Jew at living with pride in the young and vibrant state.

Conclusion

Yearning for Zion is an ongoing process, both for those Jews who continue to live in the Diaspora, and for those Jews in Israel and abroad who aspire to a more perfect state.

In 1883, Emma Lazarus wrote of what she felt was needed in order to make renewed Zion a reality:

... What we need today, second only to the necessity of closer union and warmer patriotism, is the building up of our national, physical force. If the new Ezra rose to lead our people to a secure house of refuge, whence would he recruit the farmers, masons, carpenters, artisans, competent to perform the arduous, practical pioneer work of founding a new nation? We read of the Jews who attempted to rebuild the Temple using the trowel with one hand, while with the other they warded off the blows of the molesting enemy. Where are the warrior-mechanics today equal to either feat? Although our stock is naturally so vigorous that in Europe the Jews remain after incalculable suffering and privation of the healthiest of races, yet close confinement and sedentary occupations have undeniably stunted and debilitated us in comparison with our normal physical status. For nearly nineteen hundred years we have been living on an idea; our spirit has been abundantly fed, but our body has been starved, and has become emaciated past recognition, bearing no likeness to its former self.

Let our first care today be the re-establishment of our physical strength, the reconstruction of our national organism, so that in future, where the respect due to us cannot be won by entreaty, it may be commanded, and where it cannot be commanded, it may be enforced. (**"AN EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS"**)

Emma Lazarus realized, almost prophetically, that a renewed Zion would have to be based upon people who could both build and fight in order to realize the ancient ideal which nourished their souls. In today's modern, flourishing Zion, we still require builders and fighters; and the new Jewish nation still aspires to provide the Jews of the world with the spiritual base, the spiritual nourishment, which will safeguard and strengthen their Jewish identity, their sense of community, and their sense of continuity. The bond between the

people of Israel and Zion can and must be dynamic, interactive, constantly flowing and mutually beneficial.

Perhaps it is Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine from 1921-1935, who provides the most appropriate "last word" on the Jewish people's continuing, deep connection to its ancestral homeland:

Eretz Yisrael is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people, it is no mere national possession, serving as a means of unifying our people and buttressing its material, or even its spiritual, survival. Eretz Yisrael is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of Eretz Yisrael; it cannot stir the depths of love that are dormant within our people.

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/STUDY/SABBATH/SOURCES-AND-PHILOSOPHY](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/study/sabbath/sources-and-philosophy)

Discussion on Blessing over the Candles

ELI ALON – EIN SHEMER, 1979 (5739)

We are free people here, in a corner of our beautiful Israel and we are not commanded by G-d or by man to light candles. Out of our own free will do we light you, Shabbat candles. From the depth of our souls, from weekdays filled with creativity and actions – you arouse in us the sanctity of the day of rest.

We watch you and feel ourselves as part of a hundred generations of a separated and pursued nation, which is our nation.

The tears of a Jewish mother sparkle to us from within your flames.

Your pure illumination glowing to us from its halo like two stars in the darkness of the world implant in our souls hope for the beautiful, faith in goodness, in light, which shall ultimately overcome the darkness.

We sit here in unity, a community of believers with no religion nor Lord – we sit here across your light, longing for light, praying for light and vowing to kindle this pure light in our hearts and our homes, and to carry it within our souls wherever we go.

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/LITERATURE/SABBATH/LITERATURE-AND-POETRY](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/literature/sabbath/literature-and-poetry)

Shabbat in the Group

LEVI BEN AMITAI – DEGANIA II

The mother of Shabbat lit her candles on the table,
and spread out a white tablecloth with fingers of a disappearing hand.

From the six days of work she gathered her sons to rest and to take part in family meals.
 The light of Shabbat is on the table, a shadow hidden on the walls.
 Light glistens on suntanned arms and the shadow – on face wrinkles.
 And whitens the shirt on the back and on the shoulder as a Tallit in an old age home.
 A warm dark night –wrapped the valley scenery with the universe,
 And the Kineret breathes in the rustle of soft waves.
 The night song in the cornfields, and the voice of the cricket saws into the dance of the butterflies.
 What shall the ancient image bring up: the seating of shepherds? the family feast of the nation? the beauty of a holiday in Israel?
 Why should the heart throb in memory of the Essene party, who have lived in Jordan ever since?
 And there are those whose eyes have sought out the future trees,
 and there are eyes filled with joy and trembling,
 and someone (feminine) whose soul was sad in secret
 and her tears – a remedy.
 Light is planted on the table and it rises and is enhanced:
 As eyes peek – sparks are created.
 The shadows flee from the wall, and the white image of a hand goes, if Shabbat disappears.
 If Shabbat! Listen to the throbbing hearts
 and to the silence of the lip that prevails tonight on the Jordan.
 Spread out your hands over the bread of their table
 and recite a blessing over the peace.
 Bless the faithful, those seeding light in man's fields,
 And may world – joy rest in hearts yearning fellowship.
 All humans shall yet arrive as brothers seated for the Shabbat of rest.

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/SONGS/SABBATH/SONGS](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/songs/sabbath/songs)

The Song of a Clean Nation

EHUD MANOR & MATTI CASPI

Friday evening
 from five till six
 and almost everyone
 is renewed once again.
 On all seven days
 the showers sang,
 the waters are once again hot in the
 pipes.

Chorus:

A part in the middle, a part on the side,
 everyone is showered.
 What cleanliness and order
 what a beautiful parade.

Water and soap,
 The electricity meter rushes
 and no calculations are made
 concerning the bill.
 Faces perfumed,
 A nice Shabbat shirt
 and a pair of underclothes
 to change.

A part in the middle, a part on the side...
 A dreamy moment
 for body and soul,
 Everyone says, "Shalom"

and "How are you"?
Even a creaky body,
suddenly feels refreshed,
And everyone whistles

the song of a clean nation.

A part in the middle, a part on the side...

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/SHABBATH-PARASHAT-HASHAVUA](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/shabbath-parashat-hashavua)

Lech Lecha

EDITED BY BINYAMIN YUGEV (BUJA)

Summary of the Portion

The portion of Lech Lecha opens with a crucial event in Abram's life. Following G-d's command, Abram leaves his land and his birth place and ascends to the land of Canaan. In Alon Moreh, Abram builds an altar to G-d, who promises him that he will give the land to his descendants. Due to the immense hunger in the land of Canaan he leaves for Egypt, and he divides the land between himself and his nephew, Lot, since the territory was too narrow for both of their flocks. Lot goes southward to the Plain of the Jordan and Abram remains in Bet El and the Ai. For the second time, G-d tells Abram that the entire land shall be given to his descendants, the land stretching out "*north, south, east and west*" and his seed shall multiply as the dust of the earth.

The portion tells us about the battle between the four kings of Aram Naharaim and the five kings of the Jordan plain. In this war, Lot is taken captive and Abram gets involved in the battle and releases his nephew. He does not take any of the spoils.

Malchizedek the King of Shalem is mentioned in the portion for the first time in the Torah as a priest to the sublime G-d, and he greets Abram with bread and wine and blesses him.

Further on in the portion Abram asks G-d how he will inherit the land while he is childless, and the scripture states: "*Please look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them.*" And He said to him, "*So will be your seed and he believed in G-d and he accounted it to him as righteousness.*" (GENESIS 15:5-6)

At the Covenant of the Pieces, the promise is reiterated, containing the detailed borders of the land and there is mention of the subjugation his descendants are destined to undergo in a foreign land, and the redemption at which G-d shall redeem them. Sarai the wife of Abram gives him her maidservant, Hagar, as a wife. Yet with her zealousness, she harasses Hagar and the latter flees. An angel of G-d is revealed to her and notifies her about the predicted birth of her son, Ishmael.

G-d changes the spelling of Abram's name to Abraham and commands him to perform a circumcision. He promises a son for Sarai and his name would be Yitzchak (Isaac) and her name is also changed by G-d to Sarah. Abraham performs a circumcision on himself, and on Ishmael, his son at the age of 13, and – also circumcises all males of his household.

Topics of Discussion in Class and Groups

- Abraham – the father of monotheism (belief in one G-d)

- The beginning of Hebrew settlement in the land of Canaan
- Abraham: The father of the nation or the father of many nations?
- "Lech Lecha": Various interpretations from Abram till today
- Abraham's nature
- The complex moral image of our matriarch Sarah
- The Covenant of the Pieces
- The scripture's attitude to Ishmael
- Circumcision

A Passage of the Portion – Genesis 12:1-6

And G-d said to Abram, 'Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you'. And Abram went as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him, and Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had acquired, and the souls they had acquired in Haran, and they went to go to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land, until the place of Shechem, until the plain of Moreh, and the Canaanites were then in the land.

Excerpts of the Midrash

"And Abram went as G-d had spoken to him and Lot went along with him". (GENESIS 12:4)

Rabbi Levi said: When Abraham was travelling in Aram Naharaim and in Aram of Nahor, he saw the people eating, drinking and behaving wildly, and he said: I wish I have no part in this land! And when he arrived to the outskirts of Tyre, he saw the people weeding at the weeding season, hoeing in the hoeing season, he said: I wish I have a part in this land! Thereupon, the Holy-One-Blessed-be-He told him: "To your seed – shall I give this land".

"And he told Abraham the Hebrew" (In Hebrew – 'Ivri' stemming from the root meaning 'on a side'), Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah and Rabbis (have different opinions) - -- Rabbi Yehuda says: The entire world is on one side and he is on the other side; Rabbi Nehemiah says: That he was from the descendants of Ever (which sounds like 'Ivri' and stems from the same root); And the Rabbis say: That he is from the other side of the river and that is Messiah in the Hebrew language.

Points for Discussion

- Do the aforementioned Midrashes view Abraham as a forefather to the Hebrew nation alone, or as a forefather of many nations?
- What are the various interpretations of the word "Ivri" – Hebrew? Try to come up with other interpretations.

- What are the different aspects that arise from these Midrashes in regard to the Land of Israel and its uniqueness?
- Why does the first Medrash associate its contents particularly to this verse (GENESIS 12:4)

From Hebrew Literature – A. Eli

And Abraham is old, sitting in a shop,
which he inherited from Terah, his father and he will
inherit it to his son. On the shelves lie ---
the idols, their insipid faces laugh mockingly
"Go forth"...

Yes, he recalls very well. Until his dying day
will it scorch his heart.

"Go forth".

He already lost his count of years since then.
He shut the door. Thought about the children
that would be lost in the throes of the journey, about hunger
"I'll wait in the meantime", he thought. And after years
"Had I been younger"...

And now Abraham is old. Sitting in the shop
among the idols, doomed for an eternal hell
where those locked in their homes are roasted
with a wail of "go forth" in their heart.

And Something Else: Abraham and Sarah/Itzik Manger (Translated from Yiddish)

"Avermel, when will we have
a son?

we are an elderly couple.

Any woman my age had
become pregnant at least
eight -ten times".

Abraham our forefather smiles in silence
and sucks his pipe heartily:

"Faith, my wife, when G-d wills
it,

Even a broom could shoot".

"Avermel, every night I listen --
-

my flesh weeps bitterly.

And Hagar is no more than
your maidservant

and I am your kosher wife.

I sometimes imagine, the star
in the window pane
is the soul of our child. Every
night

it moves to and fro restlessly
in wind, rain and shade".

Abraham our forefather smiles in silence
and sucks his pipe heartily:

"Faith, my wife, when G-d wills
it,

Even a broom could shoot".

"When I sometimes see, how
in the sun, in the sand
does Hagar's son play,
and I pat his small head,

my hand--- is filled with a
strange grief.
And when I take the child on
my lap,
and his smile is wise and
endearing,
My eyes feel weirdly damp
and my blood is gloomy and
miserable.

"Avermel, when will we have
a son?

From the Kibbutz's Festival Archive – Michael, Kfar Blum, 1995

The portion opens with an extremely weird instruction: "go forth from your land, your birth place, from the home of your father, to the land I will show you". What has preceded this command? When have they "met" previously? All of this is concealed. What's important is ---"And Abram went as the Lord spoke to him". There are no comments: questions, wonders, requests for directions, the location of the land? Nothing! Is Abram such a naïve person that he goes without asking a thing?! Nowadays he would probably be tagged with the title – "sucker". This is not how the Torah and the tradition conceive it till today. The concept focused on in the instruction ---- is the test of his degree of faithfulness to his understanding --- meaning that of Abram, to the idea he covets, and that he must fulfil.

We too, members of the Zionist-Pioneer Youth Movement (in the Diaspora), heard the same voice as Abraham our Forefather had heard, and also we went following that command, to the land "that I will show you". And we are here, like him. This has also been our profound human challenge till this very day.

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/SHABBATH-PARASHAT-HASHAVUA](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/shabbath-parashat-hashavua)

Chayei Sarah

EDITED BY ANAT HADAR

Summary of the Portion

- Sarah's death and Abrahams mourning
- Abraham buys the Cave of Machpelah and buries Sarah there.
- Abraham sends his son to Aram Naharaim to search for a wife for his son Isaac.
- Abraham's servant arrives at the city of Nahor and meets Rivka near the well.
- The family agrees that Rivka may become the wife of Isaac and he returns with her to the land of Canaan.
- Rivka's encounter with Isaac.
- Abraham takes Keturah as a wife – Keturah's descendants.
- Abraham gives all of his possessions to Isaac and sends away the children of the concubines with gifts.

We are an elderly couple.
Any woman my age had
become pregnant at least
Eight -ten times".
Abraham our forefather smiles in silence
And sucks his pipe heartily:
"Faith, my wife, when G-d wills
it,
Even a broom can shoot".

- Abraham's death.
- The descendants of Ishmael the son of Abraham.

Topics for Discussion in Class and in Groups

- The death of Sarah – There are homiletic interpretations that explain the death of Sarah that occurred following the binding of Isaac (in the portion of Vayera) – to the binding of Isaac. Why was Sarah's voice not heard in the incident of the binding?
- What did Sarah feel, think, say?
- What is the significance of purchasing the plot as a burial site designated for the forefathers in Israel, what does the burial in the land of Israel signify?
- Why did Abraham insist on paying for the grave rather than to receive it as a gift from Ephron?
- Why did Abraham have his servant take an oath to obtain a wife for his son from the land of his family origin rather than from the daughters of Canaan?
- Why, did Abraham have the servant take an oath to refrain from settling his son in Aram Naharaim, the home of the woman he would marry.
- What characteristics of Rivka's personality are revealed in this portion? (compared to additional traits of hers to be revealed in oncoming portions)?
- What happens to Rivka when she falls off the camel? Is this love at first sight?
- Is there such kind of a love, and what is its essence?
- What is the meaning of the act of Isaac bringing Rivka and thereby consoling himself of the death of his mother?
- What psychological dynamics occur here? What does this act symbolize?
- What is your opinion about Abraham giving all he had to Isaac, his son, while sending off the children of the concubines? What problems could arise from such a situation? What is its meaning?

A Passage of the Portion Bereishit 24:61-66

And Rivka and her maidens arose and rode on the camels, and they followed the man; and the servant took Rivka and left. And Isaac was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i, and he dwelt in the land of the south. And Isaac went forth to pray in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching. And Rivka lifted her eyes, and saw Isaac, and she let herself down from the camel. And she said to the servant, *"Who is that man walking in the field towards us?"* And the servant said, *"He is my master."* And she took the veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted for [the loss of] his mother.

The encounter between Rivka and Issac is described artistically and symbolically:

- What is Issac doing in the field?
- Why does Rivka lower herself from the camel?
- Why did she cover herself with a shawl?
- What is the significance of bringing Rivka to the tent of Sarah?

- It is worth rereading the Biblical texts well before going on to the homiletic interpretations.

Excerpts from the Medrash

And Issac went out to 'speak' in the field – the term 'speech' here means prayer as it is written (PSALMS 120:1) "*A prayer for a poor man when he enwraps himself and pours out his speech before the Lord*", and so it is written: "*evening, morning and afternoon I speak and moan and he hearkened to my voice*".

(BEREISHIT RABBA 60:14)

And Rivka lifted her eyes and she beheld Isaac – Said Rabbi Huna: She saw his hands lifted in prayer – and she said: He is probably a great man, therefore she inquired about him. And she fell from the camel – she lowered herself (she bent down)

(BEREISHIT RABA, 60:6, 15)

And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah, his mother – all of the days that Sarah lived, there was a cloud resting near the entrance of her tent. Since she died, the cloud disappeared. And when Rivka arrived, the cloud reappeared there: All of the days that Sarah was alive the doors were widely open and ever since Sarah died that abundance came to an end and when Rivka arrived it returned. Throughout the lifetime of Sarah, there was a blessing in the dough, and ever since she passed away that blessing ceased. When Rivka arrived, the blessing returned. While Sarah was alive, a candle that was lit lasted from one Friday night to the following Friday night, and ever since she passed on, the candle ceased to burn, when Rivka returned, this wonder resumed.

And since he saw that her deeds are similar to those of his mother: She handles the Challah in purity and handles the dough in purity, then: '*He brought her to the tent of Sarah, his mother*'.

(BEREISHIT RABA 60:16)

And the Zohar Continues to Expound

At the time a person is in his house, the center point of his house is his wife, since the Divine Presence does not remove from the house due to his wife. As we learn, as it is written: "*And Issac brought her to the tent of Sarah, his mother, that the candle was lit. For what reason? Because the Divine Presence had settled on the house.*"

(ZOHAR, PART 1:5-1. TRANSLATED BY TISHBI, "MISHNA HAZOHAR", P.643)

From the Kibbutz Festival Archive – A. Kibbutz Ginagar, 1993

"*And Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother and he took Rivka and she became his wife and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted for the loss of his mother.*" The love to his new wife consoles Isaac for the loss of his mother. (Freud did not invent the Oedipus complex!)

Toldot

EDITED BY MORDY STEIN

Summary of the Parsha

- The barren Rivka gives birth to twins: Esau and Jacob. Isaac favors Esau while Rivka favors Jacob. Esau comes exhausted from the field and sells Jacob his birthright for a pot of lentils. Due to a famine in Israel, Isaac sets out to Egypt, yet the Lord stops him, saying: *"Live in this land"*.
- Isaac sows the land and reaps a hundred-fold and he digs water wells. Isaac orders his beloved Esau to bring him a meal of an animal he would hunt and he, Esau, would in turn receive the blessing of a firstborn.
- Rivka initiates a scheme, and Isaac, whose eyesight was failing, gives Esau's blessing to Jacob (*"The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are those of Esau"*). Esau threatens to kill Jacob. Isaac and Rivka urge Jacob to flee from the land to the family of Rivka in Paddan Aram to escape from Esau and to prevent the former from marrying a woman from the land of Canaan.

Topics for Discussion in Class and in Groups

- The image of the barren woman in the Bible.
- *"Two nations in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from your innards"*
- Esau – materialism / Jacob – spirituality Is this the case?
- Does the relationship between Esau and Jacob reflect the typical attitude between Israel and the nations?
- Differences between the blessing of Isaac to Jacob to the blessing – to Esau – birthright vs. preference. Isaac: born in the land, a farmer, who did not leave the land. Esau selects wives among Canaanites.
- Deception in the Bible (especially in the book of Genesis): Does the act (end) justify the means? (Note: Due to Jacob's maneuvers, he is also deceived by others later in life)

A Passage of the Portion, Genesis 25:29-34

And Jacob cooked a pottage, and Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, *"Pour into [me] some of this red, red [pottage], for I am faint"*; he was therefore named Edom. And Jacob said, *"Sell me as of this day your birthright."* Esau replied, *"Behold, I am going to die; so why do I need this birthright?"* And Jacob said, *"Swear to me as of this day"*; and he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and a pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank and arose and left, and Esau despised the birthright.

What is the Benefit of Birthright? – Sayings of the Sages

Bar Kapparah says: And since [Esau and Jacob] were behaving as in a game, the Holy-One-Blessed-be-He agreed and played along with them and agreed that the birthright

be transmitted to Jacob, as it is written: (EXODUS 4, 22) "So said G-d, my first born, Israel". (Israel = Jacob)

(MEDRASH BEREISHIT RABA, CHAPTER 63, 14)

That entire sale did not benefit Jacob with any preference or advantage. On the contrary, Esau became a high-ranking officer, while Jacob was still struggling with the flocks. Which teaches us that the birthright was not connected with any material gain. There was no discussion other than the spiritual management of the household.

(RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, GERMANY, THE 19TH CENTURY)

Points for Contemplation and Discussion

Actually, there is a preference in the scripture for a firstborn. It is worthwhile to struggle over the birthright. It is worth to take the trouble to obtain it from the biological first born. But actually, the scripture does not prefer the first born. It never does!

The following are some examples in which the firstborn is always mentioned first, and the "preferred" brothers are mentioned afterwards:

Cain – Abel
Ishmael – Issac
Esau – Jacob
Leah – Rachel

Reuven – Yehudah – Joseph – Benjamin
The seven dons of Yishai – David
Adonijah – Solomon

*Abraham Kariv Discussed this in his Book **THE SEVEN PILLARS OF TANAKH***

It is the confrontation between birthright and preference. The advantage of the merit of the first born is recognized in legal systems of nations and the Torah also gives it an importance. Yet particularly the younger brother is the chosen one in almost the entire chain of biblical stories (with an exception of Noah's sons). These two positions are distinguished in that: the firstborn son has a human advantage; the younger brother has a G-dly merit. In a deeper sense, the one who has the advantage and the one who has the merit are both firstborn: the former is the firstborn of the past, who inherits from the granaries who were filled behind him, and the latter is the firstborn of the future, who has an impact on the future. So being a firstborn and being the chosen are actually two types of birthright, but while one of them is consciously conceived, has a stronghold, and has validity in the world and the second is – as if received from man and its value has yet to be proven...

And in the core of the matter, every war between power and spirit is a battle between 'firstborn' and 'chosen', since power precedes spirit in the world systems and that is manifested in the firstborn, yet spirit is the chosen, and whichever loses in the battlefield - has preference in the future.

From the Holiday Kibbutz Archive – Kibbutz Gazit, 1996

The difficulty reflected in this story is the severing of family association. Although a son remains, and a brother shall always remain a brother, a chasm was created and there is such a great feeling of alienation that "Esau said in his heart, as soon as the days of

mourning of my father shall come to an end, I shall kill Jacob, my brother". Jacob flees to the family of his mother in Paddan and Esau, to his father's family, Ishmael. Now try to untangle the knots of such deep-set conflicts to make peace!

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/SHABBATH-PARASHAT-HASHAVUA](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/shabbath-parashat-hashavua)

Vayetze

EDITED BY BARRY ZIMMERMAN

Summary of the Portion

The portion begins with the tale of Jacob leaving the house of his father in Be'er Sheva to search a wife among the family members of his mother in Harran, and which terminates twenty years later. In the interim, Jacob dreams the "dream of Jacob", he builds an altar, he removes the rock from the mouth of the well, he marries Leah and then Rachel, gives birth to children, is employed with Laban his father-in-law, receives a message from the Lord that time has come to return to his home and he does that expansively with cooperation of his wives who had turned against Laban, their father.

Topics of Discussion in Class and in Groups

- *"...The land you are lying on – I shall give you and your descendants" (28:13)* – Is the Lord's promise to Jacob relevant to today's political dialogue in the State of Israel?
- *"And Jacob worked for Rachel for seven years, but they appeared to him like a few days because of his love for her" (29:20).* The power of love.
- *"And (as) Laban had gone to shear his sheep and Rachel stole the teraphim (idols) of her father and Jacob concealed from Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing" (31:19-20).* Why does the Torah insist on describing the less positive sides of our patriarchs and matriarchs? What do they teach us?

A Passage of the Portion, Bereishit 29:1-11

And Jacob lifted his feet and went to the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and behold! a well in the field, and behold! three flocks of sheep lying beside it, because from that well they would water the flocks, and a huge rock was upon the mouth of the well. And all the flocks would gather there, and they would roll the rock off the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and [then] they would return the rock onto the mouth of the well, to its place. And Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." And he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know [him]." And he said to them, "[Are things going] well with him?" And they said, "[Things are going] well, and behold, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep." And he said, "The day is yet long; it is not the time to take in the livestock. Water the sheep and go, pasture." And they said, "We cannot [do that], until all the flocks are gathered together, and they will roll the rock off the mouth of the well, and we shall [then] water the sheep." While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob drew near and rolled the rock off the mouth of the well, and he watered the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he raised his voice and wept.

From the Medrash

"And Jacob approached and rolled the rock off" – Rabbi Yochanan said: As removing a cover from the top of a saucer."

BEREISHIT RABBA, 70, 12

From the Kibbutz's Festival Archive

"And behold, there was a ladder fixed on the ground and its head reaching the heaven".

Rabbi Jacob "Baal Haturim" (1270-1340) says: *"the numerical value of the word "Sulam" (the Hebrew word for ladder) is the same as that of the word "money".*

Both have the numerical value of 136. From here we learn that money is likened to a ladder, sometimes you ascend it and can reach the heavens with it, yet it can also degrade a person to the lowly abyss. And this does not only apply to humans, even "angels of the Lord", when concerning the "ladder" of money - also they "ascend and descend it".

Poetic Excerpt: "Rachel" by Rachel

Her blood flows in my veins
Her voice chants within me
Rachel the shepherdess of Laban's flock
Rachel the mother's mother.
Thereupon the house is too narrow for me
and the city – foreign,
Since her shawl would wave
in the desert winds;
Thereupon I'll pursue my path
with such confidence,
since my legs have safeguarded memories
From then, from then!

*"And behold a ladder fixed on the land and its head reaches the
heaven"*

When the nation of Israel was in the Diaspora
Its head was in heaven,
But its legs did not touch the ground.
When the nation of Israel returned to its land –
its feet were on the ground, planted in the ground,
Yet its head did not reach the heavens.

Nowadays,
the upper steps of the ladder broke and the lower ones broke too,
And we stand in the middle,
With no inclination to the above or to below.
So we must stretch our wings
and build the steps
towards the bottom – to the land,
and also towards the top – to the heavens.

(MIRIK GARZI, FOLLOWING A CONVERSATION WITH ARYEH BEN GURION)

[HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/SABBATH](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/sabbath)

Shabbat in Zionism

Indeed it is doubtless that throughout the years of exile Shabbat and the holidays are what contributed more than anything else to guard and sustain the life of the Jewish nation, as Rabbi Yehuda Halevi had mentioned in his famous Kuzari book:

When contemplating your situation, I realized that the Lord had a secret reason for your perpetuation and that the Lord positioned the Shabbats and holidays among the mighty reasons for the preservation of your image and character, since the nations would divide you up among them and capture you as slaves, due to your wisdom and fineness of mind, and they would assign you to be warriors if not for those dates that you faithfully guard , being that they are sacred days given to you by the Lord and since their reasons are so important being they are remembrances for the acts of creation, and remembrances for the exodus of Egypt, and – for the giving of the Torah, all these are G-dly matters that you were commanded to recall always and if not for these days none of you would wear clean garments and you wouldn't convene together to read your Torah, due to the state of despondence brought about by the length of the period of your subjugation and if not for them, you wouldn't have enjoyed even a single day throughout your entire lifetimes. Now though, you are able to spend a sixth of your lifetime in restfulness of body and soul (THIRD ESSAY PP. 104-105)

When the pioneers returned to Israel and abandoned the Jewish lifestyle of the Diaspora, Shabbat was altered from a holy day to primarily a day of rest. Many times, in the pressure

of work and the busy agricultural seasons at the era of early settlements, Shabbat was utilized as a day of work as well.

There is an interesting letter sent by the poet, C.N. Bialik to a friend in the Ginegar Kibbutz, condemning the work done on Shabbat. Also, in Tel Aviv as well as in other cities, there are ongoing arguments regarding opening shops and supermarkets on Shabbat. In areas out of cities many shopping malls began to open on Shabbat and lots of civilians turned the day of rest into a day of entertainment, shopping and marketing. This resulted in a social situation by which a significant amount of the Israeli work power was employed on Shabbat and forfeited the day of rest they were entitled to. This is a heavy price to be paid by a large number of disadvantaged employees for such a type of entertainment on Shabbat.

Following struggles, in the early years of the establishment of the state, there were coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas and pubs that opened on Shabbat. Although there was a general sense of a Sabbatical, there were quite a few cultural and entertainment centers opened. In cities like Jerusalem, Bnei Brak and Safed, Shabbat is observed according to tradition. This is definitely one of the issues that warrant a discussion by the Israeli society.

For similar resources, visit: [HTTPS://WWW.ENG.CHAGIM.ORG.IL/](https://www.eng.chagim.org.il/)

Bnei Akiva & WZO

[HTTPS://WWW.HADRACHA.ORG/EN/VW.ASP?METHOD=R&ID=342&TITLE=CHUTES%20AND%20YAACOV%27S%20LADDER](https://www.hadracha.org/en/vw.asp?method=r&id=342&title=Chutes%20AND%20Yaacov%27s%20Ladder)

Chutes and Jacob's Ladder

ACTIVITY: AGES 1-12, 10-50 PEOPLE, 45 MINUTES

Resource Goal

Goal: To review the story of Yaacov and his dream and some trivia about Israel, and of course to have fun!!

Required Props and Materials

Materials: a large remake of the chutes and ladders game board, pieces

Resource Contents

Shortly talk about Yaacov's sleep and dream. Discuss things like the angels from Israel changing with those from out of Israel, speak about how all the land of Israel gathers up under Yaacov, and how he is promised the land of Israel forever. Then get to the game with questions about Israel that is so spoken in this Parsha.

We're playing chutes and ladders!!!! Only with ladders

Remember that the parsha begins with Yaacov's Ladder.

Split them up into a few teams, and use keys or something for pieces. When a team arrives at the top/bottom of a ladder, they answer a question. If they get it right, they either go

up the ladder, or stay at the top (depending on where they are), and if they get it wrong they either stay where they are, or go down (once again, depending on where they are). That's it.

Here are some optional questions, they are at different levels so choose according to the group or make up more of your own:

- Where did Yaacov leave from? (Beer Sheva)
- Where did Yaacov sleep? (Beit El)
- What direction did he walk in? (from south to north east)
- How many stones did Yaacov have under his head in the morning? (1)
- How many flocks of sheep were waiting by the well when Yaakov arrived? (3)
- How long did Yaacov work for Lavan for free? (1 month)
- How many steps did the ladder have? (no answer just see what they say)
- Where did Yaacov go after he left Lavan? (Machanayim)
- Where is Machanayim? (between the Galil and the Golan)
- Which is further north - Haifa or Yerushalayim? (Haifa)
- Order these from north to south: negev, shomron, galil, golan
- What is the southernmost city in Israel? (Eilat)
- In what year did Israel gain its independence? (1948)
- In what war did we recapture Yerushalayim? (6 day war, 1967)
- What is the Hebrew word for the Bnei Akiva symbol? (semel)
- What is the capital of Israel? (Jerusalem)
- What do the two lines on the Israeli flag symbolize? (Talit)
- Name 2 Israeli Prime Ministers
- Name 1 woman prime minister in Israel (Golda Meir)
- Name 5 Israeli cities
- Who is the biggest airport in Israel named after? (Ben-Gurion)
- What is moving to Israel called? (Aliya)
- What is the southern desert in Israel called? (Negev)
- What is the lowest spot in the earth? (the Dead Sea)

[HTTPS://WWW.HADRACHA.ORG/EN/VW.ASP?METHOD=R&ID=3520&TITLE=TZIONUT](https://www.hadracha.org/en/vw.asp?method=r&id=3520&title=tzionut)

Tzionut

AGE: 8-15, GROUP SIZE: 5-30, ESTIMATED TIME: 90 MINUTES

Resource Goal

To teach the chanachim that the source of "tzionut" in Hebrew literally is "tzion" – one of the names of Yerushalyim. Tzionut is a longing for Yerushalyim. But that is not how we have come to understand it. We understand it as a love of Israel, (Yerushalyim included in that) encompassing that of both modern day Midinat Israel and of the "Old" Israel.

Required Props & Materials

- Card each with Israeli events and on a separate card their dates.
- Story (attached)
- Ball

- Props for Jeopardy

Resource Contents

Topic

The source of "tzionut" in Hebrew literally is "tzion" – one of the names of Yerushalyim. Tzionut is a longing for Yerushalyim. But that is not how we have come to understand it. We understand it as a love of Israel, (Yerushalyim included in that) encompassing that of both modern day Midinat Israel and of the "Old" Israel.

Tzionut: A movement whose goal was return of Jews to Eretz Israel or Tzion, Jewish synonym for Jerusalem and the land of Israel. (Definition taken off the "100 years of Zionism website.)

Tzionut Datit: The belief that Jewish nationalism is a religious as well as a political goal, to be realized as Jewish homeland in Eretz Israel based on Torah V'avodah – a synthesis of Torah with practical labor. (taken from "100 years of Zionism" web page)

1st to 3rd Grade

For discussion. Don't take too long, and make it interesting, as you know they get bored easily...

- Play Word Association with them. Madrich/a starts with a word (about Israel, Zionism, BA, of course!) and the next person in the single says the first thing that comes to mind. Continues. Try to keep all the words Zionist. (Examples: Yerushalyim, Israel, Magen David, Hertzl, Tzionut...)
- Discuss with the chanichim typical Israeli "symbols". What makes them typical Israel? Jewish? Examples: Magen David, The Knesset, Shelet of Yerushalyim, Menorah, etc...

Games

Word Chain: Madrich/a chooses a word (related to Israel/Zionism) and says it out loud. The next person in the circle says another word that begins with the last letter of the previous word, and so on. Objective: Keep the words to Israel/Tzionut.

Line up by Israeli History: Madirch/a gives each chanich/a a card with the name of an event and its date. Chanichim have a time limit in which they must line up from earliest date to the latest date. When the time is up, go through with the chanichim the events.

(examples: 1948 – Milchemet Ha'Atzmaut, 1967- Milchemet sheshet Ha'Yamim, 1897 – 1st Zionist Congress (convened by Theodore Hertzl) in Switzerland, 1909 – establishment ong Deganya, the 1st Kibbutz, 1947 – The UN vote, 1973 – Milchemet Yom Kippur, 1979- Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty signed. Etc...

Story

"ON EAGLE'S WINGS" BY LASZLO HAMORI (FROM FLIGHT TO THE PROMISED LAND)

Thrilling news swept through the Yemenite town where twelve-year-old Shalom lived. The Jews in the marketplace whispered excitedly to each other, *"Israel has arisen again*

after 2,000 years. A new David rules in Jerusalem!" As the news spread throughout Yemen the Jews gathered their household goods and children and began a long trek through the desert toward Aden. From British-controlled Aden they would somehow find a way to reach the Promised Land. God would provide a miracle.

One scorching hot morning a glistening silver airplane appeared over the El Hasched settlement in Aden. Flying low, it circled the tent city.

The people rushed out of their tents, turned their faces upward and stared at the circling plane.

A shrill voice shouted, *"The L-rd G-d has sent us a silver bird."*

And as if on command, four thousand Yemenite Jews – men, women and children – bowed to the ground and, with their arms lifted up, recited the creed of their faith:

"Hear O Israel! The L-rd our G-d; the L-rd is one."

A few days later Shalom and his fellow-villagers climbed calmly aboard the huge plane. The only sign of emotion they showed was that the men covered their heads with their shawls and prayed aloud during the entire trip. Shalom spent every minute looking out of the round window of the plane. He could see the Red Sea below and the reddish-gold coast lines of Arabia and Africa.

When they were about three hours out of Aden the little children began to complain that they were hungry. The mothers, who were dressed in their best clothing festooned with silver jewelry, tried to calm their youngsters, but not even a nasty look from the head of the family helped. The women decided to take things into their own hands.

At that point the stewardess was sitting in the pilot's cabin writing a report for the airport officials in Israel. Suddenly the captain sniffed the air.

"Harry, Leah," he said to the others. *"Don't you smell smoke?"*

"By golly, you're right," the copilot agreed. He quickly checked his instruments and found everything normal. The noise of the engines was even and quiet. Nothing seemed to be wrong.

A sudden hunch made Leah jump up from her seat. As she opened the door leading to the passenger cabin, smoke began to pour through. The stewardess and copilot rushed out. In the aisle between the seats they discovered a small burning pile of newspapers and little pieces of wood. One of the women squatted beside it holding a kettle of food over the fire.

The copilot did a wild war dance with his size thirteen shoes and managed to stamp out the fire. The women with the kettle screamed wildly and tried to shove aside the gangly American.

"Idiotic women! You'll set the whole plane on fire. I've seen some stupid things in my life, but never anything to equal this!" shouted the copilot.

Leah quickly poured water on the dying embers. Then she explained to the women that it was dangerous to build a fire on the airplane. Finally she pushed the angry copilot back into his own cabin and began to pass out sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs and tea to the passengers.

Having eaten, Shalom made his way up to the door between the passenger cabin and the cockpit. Each time anyone opened the door he stared longingly at the pilots, the strange steering mechanisms, and all the buttons surrounding the pilots' seat. Yitzhak, an Israeli truck driver he had met in Yemen, had told him about motors and airplanes. He would give anything in the world to be able to watch the pilots fly the plane. But he didn't dare ask.

So much changed in a short time, thought Shalom. At one time back home he had dreamed of the day when he would be a teacher and would interpret Jewish law for his congregation. But Yitzhak had told him there were many rabbis in Israel. Now Shalom began to dream of a different future. One day he would be a pilot whose plane would bring Jews to Israel from all over the world.

4th-6th Grades

Peuleh

The goal of this peulah is to break down some of the stereotypes our chanichim hold concerning Israelis.

- Assign each chanich/a role. Eg: Israeli bus driver, soccer player, student, plumber etc.
- Tell each chanich/a to become his character and have them act out a meal or a typical day in these characters' lives.
- Discuss how each chanich/a portrayed his/her character. (Deal with the character, not the acting techniques...) Explain to them that Israelis do not conform to the stereotypes which some of us have. They are just like us, only they live across the Ocean.
- Play the game again, except this time change the parts to a Religious Israeli bus driver, soccer player etc.
- Discuss how being religious changes your life in America and how it changes your life in Israel.

Sicha

One question: How is being religious in Israel different from being religious in America?

1. Buses don't run on Shabbat.
2. No public sports on Shabbat.
3. Shabbat is the national weekend-not Sunday.
4. Only Kosher food is served in the parliament (Knesset).
5. Every corner has someone selling flowers on Erev Shabbat.

6. Newspapers dated by the Jewish as well as the secular date.

Stress: No separation of Church and State in Israel. Religion is part of our national as well as our personal lives there.

Games

Teacher: Be the teacher/guru/wise person. Throw a ball/small object to someone in the circle. Ask him to be the teacher and tell all he knows about Zionism, Hertzl, Israel, anything. Let each chanich/a assume the role of teacher. Give time limits, and make it fast moving. Have everyone else move around when the “teacher” is talking.

I Am Taking a Trip to Israel: Chanichim sit in a circle (or any fun formation for that matter). “*I am taking a trip to Israel and in my bag I packed _____*” Go around the formation repeating the statement, saying at the end what everyone else took, and adding your own thing to it. To make it more interesting – have a “punishment” when someone gets something wrong (run around the circle, stand up and do a silly dance...) Continue with the game.

Etz, Pri, Perach: Madrich/a assigns each chanich a name (etz, pre, perach, for example). Stand in middle of circle and call one of the names. Everyone with that name gets up and trades seats. Person in middle also tries to get a seat. Person left standing calls the next group up. Try calling “Eretz Israel”, everyone gets up and has to trade seats. None of this sitting in the seat right next to you – that’s cheating!!

7th-8th Grade

Debate: Does Tzionut exist today or did it end with Hertzl?

Why is Herzl considered the “father of Zionism”?

About Herzl. Hertzl turned Zionism into an integral movement. His famous quote about Zionism – “*Im Tirtzu, Ein Zo Agada!*” “*If you wish it, it’s not a fantasy!*” Herzl was bothered by anti-Semitism. Originally he thought if all Jews converted publicly to Catholicism, it would end anti-Semitism. But he realized that this “end of Judaism” was neither practical nor moral.

Herzl was turned to Zionism as an answer to anti-Semitism because of the Dreyfus case. (Dreyfus case – Dreyfus was accused of being a spy to his homeland – France. Condemned to life imprisonment. After death, discovered that he was really innocent.) Herzl concluded from the events that as long as Jews lived in non-Jewish societies they would be the scapegoats. (If “Death to the Jews” shouts was the reaction to the Dreyfus trail in France, the 1st European country to grand equal rights to Jews, Jews not safe anywhere.) Therefore, Herzl became obsessed with the vision of a Jewish state.

Herzl laid the foundations for all the major structures of the Zionist movement. In 1887 the 1st Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland.

Tzionut HaDatit

How did Hertzl affect Tzionut HaDatit? Approximately the same time as Hertzl Rav Kalisher and Rav Alkali were beginning the ideals of Religious Zionism. They were the real starters of Tzionut HaDatit.

Rav Kook – pre-eminent hero of religious Zionists. He became a passionate Zionist when most Orthodox leaders were denouncing it. Believed in not relying on the miracle of Messiach coming, we've got to get started and pave the way. Rav Kook made aliya in 1909. In 1921 he became the Chief Rabbi of Palestine.

Tzionut HaDatit became big for almost all committed Jews, only after the Nazi rise to power.

Hatikva

Analyze Hatikva. Is it a Zionist anthem? Can it be a Religious Zionist anthem?

Yet deep within every heart

Our hope is not yet lost

The soul of the Jew is yearning

The hope of thousands of years

And to the East

To be a free people in our land

The eye seeks out Zion

The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

According to Hatikva, how has Zionism in general changed since the time of Hertzl?

Game

Play Jeopardy, general knowledge about Israel game. Make teams. Get them into it. *Take time to prepare it!*

[HTTPS://WWW.HADRACHA.ORG/EN/VW.ASP?METHOD=R&ID=3729&TITLE=RACHEL%20IMENU,%20LEARNING%20TO%20FORGO](https://www.hadracha.org/en/vw.asp?method=r&id=3729&title=RACHEL%20IMENU,%20LEARNING%20TO%20FORGO)

Rachel Imenu, Learning to Forgo - רחל אמנו ומידת הויתור -

AGES: 8-14, GROUP SIZE: 4-40, ESTIMATED TIME: 70 MINUTES

Resource Goal

To teach the chanichim about (1) Rachel's unique character, therefore (2) why she's the only one of our Avot and Imahot who is buried in a different place, as well as (3) why Rachel was the only one who was able to convince Hashem to bring the nation out of exile.

Required Props and Materials

Appendix 1

- Because they couldn't take Rachel's body to Maarat Hamachpela because it was too far.
- Because Binyamin was only a baby and they couldn't leave him alone.
- Because Yaakov was too old to travel all the way to Maarat Hamachpela.
- Because Yaakov knew that when the nation would be exiled into galut they would pass by her grave and would want to pray that Hashem would listen to their tefilot.
- Because Rachel's father wanted her to be buried in Charan, while Yaakov wanted her to be buried in Eretz Yisrael so they compromised on a place in the middle.
- Because there was no more space in Maarat Hamachpela
- Because Yaakov couldn't delay burying Rachel and Maarat Hamachpela was a lot closer.
- Because Rachel asked to be buried in Maarat Hamachpela and they were obeying her wishes.

Appendix 2

The Midrash tells us that God sends the prophet Jeremiah to the Patriarchs, Avraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to Moshe - all of whom have left the world - to ask their participation in mourning and pleading for a better future for the Jewish people. Each advocates for Israel, attempting to appease God by asking Him to reciprocate for his past good deeds.

Avraham reminds God of his willingness to have sacrificed, Isaac, his only son. In essence he says to God, *"When You told me to sacrifice my son, I became like a cruel person. I did not pay attention to my merciful feelings as a father. I put Isaac on the altar and tied him down in order to sacrifice him. Why will You not reciprocate by having mercy on Your children, Israel?"* But God does not respond.

Next, Isaac reminds God of his willingness to have allowed himself to be sacrificed by his father, Avraham. He asks that God reciprocate by having compassion for and saving the Jewish people. Again there is no response. Then Jacob comes forward and essentially says, *"When I came out of Laban's house where I had worked for twenty years, I was with my family and we met my brother Esav along the way. Esav intended to kill me, and I was ready to have myself killed, in order to save my children. Please remember my deed and, in return, save Your children the Jews."* No answer.

Finally, Moshe speaks. *"Wasn't I a loyal shepherd to the Jewish people for forty years? I led them in the desert and, finally, when they were poised to enter Israel, You told me I was to remain in the desert and die there. I was not allowed to enjoy the fruits of my labor and, now, You call upon me to join You in mourning for something I never had? Please remember my efforts and have mercy on Your people."* Again, no response.

Each of the Patriarchs, along with Moshe, argues that along with the justice God exacts by exiling the Jews from Israel, He should also show mercy and ultimately save them. But God does not respond.

Back to Rachel. The Midrash tells us that she appears in front of God and reiterates to Him how difficult it was for her to have participated in the plan of replacing herself with her sister, Leah, under the bridal canopy. Rashi from MEGILLAH 13B, gives us a background to this event: *"Living up to his reputation as a deceitful rogue, Laban substituted Leah for Rachel on the wedding night. Jacob and Rachel expected Laban to attempt such a deception, and they prepared against it by arranging a secret signal between them. Seeing that they were about to substitute her sister Leah for her, however, Rachel confided the sign to her sister so that Leah would not be put to shame..."* Rachel buries her desire to marry Jacob, and gives the signals to Leah. What's more, Rachel also buries her jealousy, in order to be able to carry out her plan with the purest intentions. Rachel asks God the following: *"If I, as a flesh and blood mortal, was able to transcend my jealousy and anger, how much more so should You, an immortal King, find compassion for Your people."*

The Midrash tells us that, as soon as she says this, God responds to Rachel's tears. He promises, for her sake, that He will ultimately redeem the Jews from their exile: *"Rachel recalled her own magnanimity to her sister, Leah. When Leah was fraudulently married to Jacob in place of Rachel, Rachel did not let jealous resentment lead her to protest. Why then, should God be so zealous in punishing His children for bringing idols into His Temple? God accepted her plea and promised that Israel would be redeemed eventually, in her merit."*

As it is written in JEREMIAH (31:14),

Thus said Hashem: A voice is heard on high, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeps for her children; she refuses to be consoled for her children, for they are gone. Thus said Hashem: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for there is reward for your accomplishment - the word of Hashem - and they will return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future - the word of Hashem - and your children will return to their border.

Why is it that God responds to Rachel and not to the Patriarchs or to Moshe? Certainly these were men of greatness and inordinate dedication to the Jewish people. Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin proposes that the difference lies in the initiative Rachel takes, without first having to be commanded by God. From this perspective, we can say that the Patriarchs and Moshe perform their acts of self-sacrifice in response to God's

command. Rachel, on the other hand, takes it upon herself to mastermind a plan that will save her sister's dignity, without any prior directive from God.

Had Rachel followed through with her own marriage to Jacob, God would not have held her responsible for Leah's embarrassment. This is because Leah's predicament would have been Laban's fault, since the plan was his. Nonetheless, Rachel takes it upon herself to act above and beyond her obligations. Accordingly, Rachel comes to God with a very strong argument for why her own actions should be a model for God in His treatment of the exiled Jewish people. She is able to say to God, "According to "halacha" (Jewish law) there is no reason why You should save Your people, since they have clearly transgressed. But, inasmuch as I acted with compassion to save my sister, You should do the same." And God accepts.

Appendix 3

יד כה אָמַר יְהוָה, קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים--רָחֵל, מִבְּכָה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ; מֵאַנְהָ לְהַנְחִים עַל-בְּנֵיהָ, כִּי אֵינָנּוּ.

14. So says the Lord: A voice is heard on high, lamentation, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children for they are not.

טו כה אָמַר יְהוָה, מְנַעִי קוֹלֶךָ מִבְּכִי, וְעֵינֶיךָ, מִדְּמָעָה: כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְּעֻלָּתְךָ נָאִם-יְהוָה, וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב.

15. So says the Lord: Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your work, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.

טז וַיֵּשׁ-תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֶךָ, נָאִם-יְהוָה; וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים, לְגִבּוֹלָם.

16. And there is hope for your future, says the Lord, and the children shall return to their own border.

Resource Contents

Progression of the Peula

Part 1 – It's Difficult to Forgo

Part 2 – What Made Rachel so Special

Part 3 – Why Was Rachel Buried on the Way

Part 4 – Kever Rachel

Part 5 – "Rachel Mevaka Al Baneha"

Part 1 – Forgoing (Younger ages: *Chair game*; Older ages: *any game that they have to give up something of theirs for someone else. Eg any game that when you're out, really the person to your left is out. You can stay in the game etc.*)

The Chair Game: Arrange chairs in a line, enough for one per person minus one. Every second chair is facing the other direction. Play the music or sing a song and the chanichim have to walk around the room. As soon as the music stops, each person has to find themselves a seat. The last one standing is out. Play again with one less chair, and repeat until there is a winner.

Give each chanich a paper with the name of another chanich in the group. (If not Shabbat, can ask each chanich to write their name on a paper and hand it back to the madrich. Shuffle and distribute). Play the chair game again but this time when he finds a chair he must give it to the chanich he has been buddied with. The winner is the last person standing.

Ask the chanichim:

- Which version of the game did you enjoy more?
- Was it difficult for you to give up what was yours?
- When is it hardest for someone to forgo what is theirs? (When it's something very important to him)
- Try to think of situations when you had to forgo something and you found it very difficult.
- How did you feel when someone gave up something for you?

Conclusion: Giving up something is difficult, particularly when you miss out on something important as a result.

Part 2 – Rachel's Unique Quality

Read the following. You can act it out as a play, or give everyone a copy with a different line highlighted. Each person must read their part when it's their turn. Think of any creative way.

Rachel's story – Yaakov Avinu was looking for a wife. He went to Charan where his father's family was. Yaakov arrived in Charan and asked Lavan to marry Rachel, his daughter. Lavan had two daughters – Rachel and Leah. Leah was the older one and Rachel was the younger one. Yitzchak had two sons: Esav, the oldest and Yaakov, the youngest. Since they were family, ever since they were young everyone said that the oldest boy would marry the older girl and the younger boy would marry the younger girl. Rachel was very happy about this because Yaakov was a Tzaddik, while Leah would cry all the time because she didn't want to marry Esav the Rasha.

Lavan, the girls' father, was a cheat and told Yaakov that he must work for seven years in Lavan's home and in return would be able to marry Rachel. Even though Lavan had tricked Yaakov a number of times, Yaakov wanted Rachel so much that he agreed and worked for seven years in Lavan's house. After seven years Yaakov and Rachel were ready to get married. Since they knew that Lavan had a history of cheating people, Yaakov asked Lavan to marry his younger daughter, Rachel, so that he wouldn't swap her for Leah. Additionally, Yaakov and Rachel came up with secret signs between

themselves so that under the chuppa, when it was dark, Rachel would whisper the signs to Yaakov and he would know that it was Rachel.

But Lavan swapped Rachel for Leah. Rachel knew that her father would trick Yaakov, but she didn't want her sister, Leah, to be embarrassed under the chupa when she didn't know the signs. So Rachel taught Leah all the secret signs. Rachel had waited seven years for the day she could marry Yaakov and she feared that if Yaakov married Leah, he would never marry her. Nevertheless, Rachel taught Leah the signs just so she wouldn't be embarrassed.

And what happened? Under the chuppa Leah whispered the signs to Yaakov so he was convinced it was Rachel. In the morning, when it became light, Yaakov saw that in fact he had married Leah! He immediately went to Lavan, "Why did you trick me?!" Lavan responded, "Here, we don't marry off the younger one until the older one is married. If you want to marry Rachel, you must work for me for another seven years." And so Yaakov worked for another seven years in Lavan's house, after which he finally married Rachel.

Ask the chanichim:

- What do you think about what Rachel did? Did she have to teach her sister the signs?
- What would you do if you in Rachel's situation? Would you give up something so precious to you for your brother or sister?
- What can we learn from Rachel Imenu?

Part 3 – Rachel is Buried on the Way

Set the scene: When Yaakov went to Eretz Yisrael with Rachel, Leah and all of their children, Rachel gave birth to her second son, Binyamin, who came after Yosef. Tragically, Rachel died during childbirth. Yaakov decided to bury Rachel on the way and not in Maarat Hamachpela with all the other avot and imahot. Why?

Spread out possible answers on the floor (appendix 1) and each chanich must choose the answer that they think is correct.

(*You can make multiple copies of each possible answer and then once chanichim have chosen theirs, get them to place their answers on the floor, grouping the same ones together as a bar graph. This way you can see which was the most popular answer).

The real answer is so that when the other nations would take Bnei Yisrael into Galut, they'll go past Bet Lechem and will be able to pray at Rachel's grave and in her merit they'll be saved.

Part 4 – Kever Rachel

Everyone gets a piece of a puzzle. The picture is of Kever Rachel. Explain that it is near Bet Lechem, many people go pray there.

Final conclusion: We say how hard it is for us to forgo something for someone else, especially when we lose out as a result. We learnt about Rachel and what she sacrificed

for her sister, just so she wouldn't be embarrassed. We saw how strongly Rachel feels for the nation, so much so that she was buried on the way so she could advocate for the nation to come home from galut. Only in her merit Hashem agreed to bring the nation home.

Part 5 – Rachel Cries for Her Children and Refuses to Be Comforted

Present the chanichim with the midrash (appendix 2)

Prepare hats with the names: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe and Rachel. Choose 5 different chanichim to wear the hats. Set the scene for the chanichim and each of the 5 chanichim have to try and convince Hashem to save the nation based on their own merits.

Eg. Avraham and Yitzchak use the story of the Akeida.

Read the words of the song (appendix 3)

Explain: When Am Yisrael go into galut and pass Kever Rachel they pray that they'll be saved in her merit. Hashem hears Rachel's tefilot and assures Rachel that because of her the nation will come home.

Teach the chanichim the tune (may use a CD/computer)

Conclusion: Each of the avot and imahot had different merits but Rachel's unique merit was that she gave up something for her sister, she's the one who stood up for the nation and because of her the nation is returning home.

Hadassah - The Women's Zionist Organization of America –

[HTTP://WWW.HADASSAH.ORG/ADVOCATE/FILES/HOW-TO-TALK-ABOUT-ISRAEL-GUIDE.PDF](http://www.hadassah.org/advocate/files/how-to-talk-about-israel-guide.pdf)

How to Talk About Israel

Know the Facts: Effective Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Israel

What Is Zionism?

Zionism, quite simply, is Jewish nationalism, or more elaborately, the Jewish movement of national liberation, first to build and now to perfect a Jewish democratic state in the Jewish people's ancestral homeland. Originating in the late 19th century, decades before Israel was established in 1948, Zionists maintained that the Jewish people, who had been subjected to discrimination, persecution and anti-Semitism in many lands, would be free to determine their own future only through the re-establishment of a Jewish state. Jews were, and are, a people bound by a common history traced back three thousand years with a common culture, a sense of communal destiny, a commitment to the land in Israel, and an overall sense of interconnectedness. The Zionist movement believes that Am Yisrael, the Jewish people, can find ultimate individual and collective fulfillment with a thriving, democratic, Medinat Yisrael, a State of Israel, in Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel.

Hadassah Zionism Shaped American Zionism

BY GIL TROY

Although there's not just one woman's take on Zionism, since 1912, there's been a clear Hadassah take. Hadassah Zionism sees Israel as central to Jewish life, wherever you live. It builds a democratic Jewish state through Practical Zionism to serve the citizens of that state—Jewish and non-Jewish—and the world. It is nonpartisan, welcoming all who support Israel. And it educates about Jewish peoplehood and statehood as active commitments, not passive sentiments.

When Henrietta Szold founded Hadassah in 1912, it was not at all likely that a women's Zionist organization would survive. Most American Jews were too busy building their own homes in their new country to help other Jews rebuild *the* homeland. But Hadassah's Practical Zionism, as a June 1914 resolution explained, was going *"to promote Jewish institutions and enterprises in Palestine, and to foster Zionist ideals in America."* Many Americanizing, prosperous Jews were happy to send nurses, start hospitals, feed schoolchildren and build playgrounds for their less fortunate fellow Jews in Palestine. At the same time, many assimilating Jews appreciated this nonreligious, nonpartisan way to be Jewish while expressing American liberal ideals.

When President Harry S. Truman recognized the new State of Israel in 1948, the resulting euphoria solidified American Jewry's new Zionist consensus: supporting a Jewish state for the millions of persecuted Jews who needed it. But facing Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's Israel-or-bust Zionism—insisting that every Jew had to immigrate to the nascent state—most American Zionists squirmed. Few dared to insult Ben-Gurion. But even fewer believed that America represented exile, or that it was not a viable Jewish home for them.

Enter Rose Halprin. Having lived in Palestine for five years after completing her first term as Hadassah national president in 1934, Halprin solved the problem by defining *chalutziyut*, pioneering, as Jewish, Zionist and American in spirit. This meant you could be a good Zionist by helping to build Israel, not necessarily living in it. Fluent in Hebrew, Halprin branded the Zionist mission as *"kibbutz galuyot,"* ingathering exiles, not *"kibbutz hagaluyot,"* ingathering all the exiles. And she defined Zionism emotionally, saying: *"A Zionist has more than platonic feelings. You are in his blood and bones, and he cannot get rid of you."*

Halprin's balance was Hadassah's balance—galvanizing millions of American Jewish women over generations in a nonpolitical, passionate, pioneering, state-transforming, American Zionist mission.

Today, Hadassah's Practical Zionism has expanded to include what I call Identity Zionism, defining what Zionism and Israel means personally. This approach sees Israel as an ideological anchor and an inspiring platform that shapes one's Judaism and one's

activism, bringing democratic Jewish values to life. Increasingly, American Zionists recognize that having this extraordinary Jewish democracy that is Israel helps not only “them” over there but also “us” here.

There's still a lot of clarifying to do: explaining that Jews are both a people and a religious community; articulating why proud American Jews benefit from having Israel—even when we disagree with it; and defining the missions that build identity and institutions in America and Israel, at home and in the homeland. And that is why Hadassah's Defining Zionism in the 21st Century initiative is so important.

To celebrate Israel's 70th, we need to learn about Zionism from experts who have participated in that video series—and we need to have Zionist salons to further personal conversations about what this movement means to each of us.

Some may argue that Hadassah could divorce itself from Zionism now that the State of Israel exists. But that would reject so much of its history, its ideology, its passion, and its glue—in short, its defining mission. Without Zionism, Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, wouldn't just stop being Zionist; it would stop being Hadassah.

[HTTPS://WWW.HADASSAHMAGAZINE.ORG/2016/08/04/DEFINING-ZIONISM-NEW-AGE/](https://www.hadassahmagazine.org/2016/08/04/defining-zionism-new-age/)

Defining Zionism in a New Age

BY RONDA ROBINSON

All registered conventiongoers proudly sported “I’m a Zionist” ribbons on their nametags—emphasizing Hadassah's role as The Women's Zionist Organization of America. Zionism also claimed center stage at the plenary session “What Exactly Does Zionism Mean to You?” featuring the divergent views of Caroline B. Glick, senior contributing editor at *The Jerusalem Post*, and Rob Eshman, publisher and editor-in-chief of the *Jewish Journal* of Greater Los Angeles. The session was moderated by Linda Scherzer, journalist and former Mideast correspondent for CNN.

“For Israelis, we live Zionism,” said Glick, 46, who followed the dream she had at age 12 to move to Israel. She now lives in Efrat. “I urge all of you to consider aliyah,” said the author of the 2014 book **THE ISRAELI SOLUTION: A ONE-STATE PLAN FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**.

Eshman, 56, described himself as “a 1967 baby” because of the indelible impression the Six-Day War made on him. He recalled feeling “home” the first time he visited Israel: “I connected to my soul, I connected to the people and I connected to my destiny.”

The panelists discussed their differing levels of concern over what Glick labeled the crisis of the American left and its support for Israel. They also shared their prescriptions for a one-state solution, two-state solution or some confederation of nations to resolve the political impasse. But Glick and Eshman agreed on one thing: It's important to spend time

and money telling your story to the next generation, teaching them about Judaism and Zionism.

The panel discussion at Hadassah's 98th national convention will be added to Hadassah's "DEFINING ZIONISM" web-streaming series, which provides free videos of engaging speakers talking about Zionism from their perspective. The aim is for these scholars, activists and community leaders to inspire new ways of thinking about Israel and Zionism and to spark local discussions that will contribute to greater involvement in one of Hadassah's priorities. Hadassah is also sponsoring, in partnership with **THE JEWISH WEEK** in New York, live "DEFINING ZIONISM" programs. The next one will feature human rights attorney and pro-Israel activist Brooke Goldstein, on September 12, at the Temple Emanuel Skirball Center.

What Does Zionism Mean to You?

CONVENTION PARTICIPANTS HAD THEIR OWN VIEWS ON THE TOPIC. HERE IS A SAMPLING.

"Zionism in my grandparents' generation was about having a country. Zionism in my parents' generation was about building a country. Zionism in my generation is about creating a country that is tolerant and in peaceful relations within and without and understanding how it can be." —NAOMI KATZ, 39, Moshav Amirim, Galilee, Israel

"It means you support Israel, believe it's the homeland of the Jewish people. Support it with your heart, with your mind, with your money." —GINA MALING, 58, Chicago, Ill.

"It's an understanding of what Israel is all about. Israel is a refuge, a place of excitement and innovation. There's a diversity of Jewish life, a little bit of everything. It's home to all." —SUE APPELBAUM, 75, San Diego, Calif.

"At first Zionism scared me, I had no idea what it was. My conversion class had a lot about Israel but we needed to be educated on what Zionism actually means. Even my Jewish peers knew nothing about it. I am now definitely a Zionist. As long as people are dying for being Jewish, Israel is needed. We need a safe place, we need a home." —DELANEY S. RIEKE, 32, Los Alamos, N.M.

"It is connection with my grandparents, my history. It is the manifestation of my commitment to the Jewish people. By being able to have an impact on Israel, I have successfully connected my children to their roots and people. Zionism has allowed that to be part of our lives." —MARCIE NATAN, 71, New York, N.Y.

"For me, it's a connection to what I believe the idea of Israel is really all about. A country that is so little but does so much for the rest of the world. I have a deep connection to wanting to help heal the world, and I feel it's through Israel that we can do that." —BONNIE BORING, 52, Knoxville, Tenn.

"When I graduated from Hebrew school, I gave a speech on what the State of Israel meant to me. I said I believed Israel is the building block to the future of the Jewish people. I think Israel isn't only for Jewish people, but for the whole world. We're seeing that played out, how Israel's innovation is transforming the whole world." —[EDIE BARR](#), 68, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

For Hadassa's Web Series on Zionism: [HTTP://WWW.HADASSAH.ORG/CONNECTING-TO-ISRAEL/DEFINING-ZIONISM/](http://www.hadassah.org/connecting-to-israel/defining-zionism/)

Herut North America

[HTTPS://HERUTNA.ORG/ZIONISM-AND-THE-RABBIS-ANCIENT-WORD-CODE/](https://herutna.org/zionism-and-the-rabbis-ancient-word-code/)

Zionism and The Rabbis' Ancient Word Code

Did the Rabbis of old who authored the classic Jewish Shabbat liturgy still used today embed certain Zionist messages in the prayers that were specifically intended to draw attention to specific ideas about the Land of Israel in general and the City of Jerusalem in particular?

Were these Zionist messages and ideas lost over time? The Rabbis inserted one phrase from the Torah over and over again in everyday Jewish prayer. It is recited twelve times by the praying Jew on Shabbat. One time for each of Jacob's twelve sons.

The verse is from [EXODUS 15:18](#) and is translated as "G-d Shall Reign For Eternity."

On a Shabbat the phrase is repeated many times: in the evening at Ma'ariv, in the morning at Shacharit and at Mussaf, and in the afternoon at Mincha for a total of 12 times. No other phrase from the Chumash (the Five Books of Moses) is repeated so often on Shabbat. The next most often repeated phrase is the Sh'ma and it is recited much less.

[EXODUS 15:18](#) is the final verse in the famous Song at the Sea, sung by Moshe [Moses] and the entire Jewish People after the crossing of the Red Sea in the weekly Torah portion Beshallah. We recite the full Song every Shabbat morning.

The entire Jewish People sang the Song. An interesting thing to note is that this was one of the moments in history when total Jewish unity was demonstrated. The people all sang the same song and everyone was singing it for the first time. Did the entire people experience a Divinely inspired vision? If they did, it must be pointed out that a part of the prophecy was the commitment to build a Sanctuary (Holy Temple, Beit HaMikdash) for G-d in the City of Jerusalem.

In the verse immediately before [EXODUS 15:18](#) the Temple Mount is described as the foundation (of the world) and the holy place of G-d.

The praying Jew is meant to internalize the message of the Song at the Sea many times throughout the year, and especially each Shabbat. The Song at the Sea is not just to be

recalled at the Pesach Seder. We don't even recite the Song at the Seder. But we do recite it every Shabbat. The message is: The earth is G-d's. The earth will always be G-d's. G-d as owner decides what part of the earth is designated for who and for what purpose.

G-d has chosen just one people to have a special, unique responsibility to worship Him with ritual sacrifice on His Holy Mountain in the Holy City of Jerusalem in His Holy Land, the Land of Israel.

This people – the Jewish People – were miraculously delivered from bondage in Egypt and we recall that every Friday night when we recite Kiddush over wine.

The Jewish People's reciting of “G-d Shall Reign For Eternity” twelve times every shabbat is undoubtedly meant to be a reminder that the Jewish People have a responsibility on the Temple Mount. Are we missing the message?

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Ideology Bank

What Is Zionism?

Zionism, by definition, is the belief in the right of the Jewish people to self-determination and sovereignty in their *indigenous homeland*, the land of Israel.

Zion (Hebrew: **יְרוּשָׁלַיִם** Tziyyon) is mentioned in the Tanakh over a hundred times, in reference to the center of Hebrew civilization; Jerusalem and the specifically the Temple Mount. In the golden age of ancient Israel, Zion represented Hebrew unity, national and spiritual oneness. So when foreign conquerors invaded our homeland (Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, or Brits), it was Zion that served as the Israelite national rallying cry for liberation. In 135 CE, when the Jewish general Shimon Bar Kokhva fought the Roman Empire and re-established an independent Jewish state for two years, the coins he minted read “*For the Freedom of Zion.*”

Naturally, when the “*children of Zion*” (LAMENTATIONS 4:2) were finally exiled by their enemies, Zion became a symbol for Jews in every corner of the Diaspora. A symbol of the homeland they longed for and prayed to return to, three times a day.

What Is Modern Zionism?

For nearly two thousand years of exile the Jewish people suffered terrible persecution at the hands of their host governments and peoples. In Arab/Islamic countries in both Africa and the lands of the east, Jews were relegated to second class status (Dhimmi in Arabic) where they were often victims of massacres and institutional (legal) humiliation. In Ethiopia, Jews were designated landless foreigners (Falasha in Ge'ez), and suffered innumerable genocides, enslavements, and forced Baptisms. In Europe, Jews were hounded as Semitic foreigners for their Hebrew faith, culture, and appearance. Pogroms (massacres) in Europe were a regular occurrence, and until the Emancipation movement in the 18th century, most Jews throughout Western Europe were legally confined to Ghettos, prevented from holding certain jobs and also from owning land. Informed by the spirit of the 19th century rise of nationalism in Europe, a number of Jewish spiritual

leaders and intellectuals responded to global anti-Semitism and the degraded and at-risk state of the Jewish people by advocating a return to their ancestral homeland: Zion.

In the 1840-60s Rabbis Yehudah Alkalai, Tzvi Hersch Kalischer, and Moshe Hess laid the ideological framework for motivating a mass return to Zion for the children of Israel in exile in based in both religious, socialist, and nationalist philosophical underpinnings.

Influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Alkalai and after witnessing French society (the birthplace of the Emancipation) both devolve and relapse into vicious anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair, Binyamin Ze'ev (Theodor) Herzl wrote the "**JEWISH STATE**" and began to rally Jewish leaders around the notion of a Hebrew Homeland as a solution to global anti-Semitism. Fourteen years earlier, after experiencing savage pogroms in Russia, Leon Pinsker likewise came to the conclusion that the answer to perpetual Jewish suffering in Europe was a Jewish return to national consciousness and self-determination. That Hebrew freedom can only be achieved through our own efforts; "auto-emancipation."

The World Zionist Organization was established in 1897 at the First World Zionist Congress where Jewish leaders set out the movement's short term goals in accomplishing a return to the Jewish people's ancestral and indigenous homeland, as well as re-establishing Hebrew sovereignty there.

Jews fleeing from a pogrom in Europe. The Holocaust, while unprecedented in its speed and scale, was only the most recent genocide suffered by the Israelites in Europe. From the Spanish Inquisition, to the hundreds of expulsions and pogroms, to the Cossack Massacre, even before the Holocaust began Jabotinsky and other Zionist thinkers knew that the Jewish wandering in Europe needed to end for the very safety and survival of the children of Israel.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Revisionist Zionism

Staunch anti-assimilationist Ze'ev Jabotinsky may have inherited the national pride and self-actualization tenets of the Zionist ethos from the likes of Herzl and Pinkser, but he quickly made it his own. Amidst the outbreak of bloody anti-Semitic pogroms that struck Russia in the turn of the century, Jabotinsky founded the Jewish Self-Defense Organization; where he began to preach his message of Jewish strength and honor in the face of our enemies as well as the personal struggle that the establishment of a Jewish state demanded from each individual Hebrew. His prolific writing and oratory skills propelled his election to the Sixth World Zionist Congress in 1903.

In 1923, Jabotinsky left the mainstream Zionist movement to found the Alliance of Revisionist Zionists. Jabotinsky revisioned the Zionist movement as one that was not only focused on re-settling the land of Israel, but was unequivocally advocating for the establishment of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan river and was preparing its people to defend themselves and fight for their right to their ancestral homeland. Jabotinsky's proudest achievement was the establishment of the Jewish Legion that fought alongside the British against the Ottomans in WWI. This and Jabotinsky's own military training of Jews in the land of Israel, infused the Jewish people with a warrior spirit

that inspired the Jewish Revolt against the British in the 1940s, which ultimately led to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Upon the reestablishment of the independent State of Israel, former Irgun leader Menachem Begin and his compatriots founded the political party Herut. Herut quickly became one of the nation's largest parties, winning 14 seats, 11.5% of the votes, in the Israeli government's first election in 1949. In 1965, to gain strength in the Knesset, Herut merged with several other liberal parties which shaped Gahal (Gush Herut Liberali), that developed into the Likud. In 1977 national elections, Gahal won and formed the government, making Menachem Begin Prime Minister. In 1988, the Likud dissolved its internal factions, including Herut, to become a unitary party. In 1992, the Labor party led by Yitzchak Rabin won elections and signed the Oslo Accords ceding large swaths of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza to the newly formed Palestinian Authority. In the aftermath of the Second Intifada and 1,000 murdered Israelis (organized by this same Palestinian Authority), the Likud returned to power in 1996. Instead of reversing the Oslo Accords, the government continued to cede land, including most Hebron and 2% of Samaria in 1999. Those true to the principles of Jabotinsky understood this as a violation of fundamental Jewish rights advocated by Zionism, and a dangerous chink in the "Iron Wall" strategy of deterrence and Israeli survival.

As a result, Benny Begin, Michael Kleiner, and David Re'em broke away from Likud during the 14th Knesset and formed the new Herut party in 1999.

The breakaway was explicitly caused by disagreements with the Likud leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, over these aforementioned compromises produced by the Wye River Memorandum and the Hebron Agreement.

The New Herut – the National Movement, as political party participated in 1999, 2003, and 2006 elections.

However, by 2009 the founders of the New Herut party reintegrated with the Likud.

Nevertheless, those true to the Herut ideology continued to advocate for the integrity of the land of Israel and the unity of the people of Israel. Herut continues to be registered in the Israeli government's Party Registry. The Herut party remains intact and reserves the right to compete in future elections, should suitable circumstances arise.

World Herut

In 1999, when Benny Begin and Michael Kleiner split from the Likud on the political level, Karma Feinstein-Cohen, along with other Jabotinsky ideological adherents, left the Betar youth movement to start World Herut and its youth movement, Magshimey Herut (achievers of liberty); the reborn Jabotinsky movement for Zionist education and activism.

World Herut has established itself as an independent non-profit organization in eleven countries throughout the world. Each separate organization provides educational services for the participants located in their respective host countries. World Herut initiates, promotes, and supports the activities of students, olim (Jews returning to Israel)

and social action groups which are consistent with the Movement's objectives. World Herut works in conjunction with the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and Keren Kayemet Lelsrael on projects that advance their common goals.

Eretz Yisrael: The Land of Israel

The land of Israel has traditionally been understood as one of the three pillars of Jewish civilization: The G-D of Israel, the People of Israel, and the Land of Israel. Regardless, of one's personal beliefs and/or level of observance, every Jew is connected by his/her roots to this land, the land of their recent and ancient ancestors. In this land we became a people, developed a rich culture/spiritual system, and established an independent state. In fact, the only sovereign states to have ever existed in this land have been Israelite ones: the Kingdom of Israel, the Hasmonean Kingdom, Israel under Bar Kochva, and the Modern State of Israel. Despite the fact that successive foreign conquerors and have invaded and colonized this land (the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, and Brits) sending most of our people into exile, the children of Israel have always maintained a presence in their ancestral homeland.

The cities of Tiberias, Tzfat, Hebron, Jerusalem, and a number of smaller villages always maintained Jewish communities inhabited by descendants of both the Judean (and Samaritan) inhabitants who avoided expulsion and Jews returning to Zion from the Diaspora. When the mass return of Diaspora Jewry began around the turn of the 19th century with the modern Zionist movement these two populations became one in an effort to demand the Jewish people's natural rights to self-determination and sovereignty in their indigenous homeland.

"There can be no forfeiture, no shortcut to Zion. Zion in its entirety belongs to us."

– ZE'EV JABOTINSKY

Aren't Jews a Race?

While Jews have certainly been labeled by certain leaders and societies as belonging to a specific "race", Jewish identity is rooted in concepts that are much deeper than blood and biology. While many Jews share genetic ancestry with the ancient Hebrew ancestors of the Jewish people, the heritage inherited from those ancestors defined Hebrew identity by tribal and spiritual continuity. In other words, the shared genetic ancestry between the majority of Jews living today is a mere byproduct of an ancient Semitic belief system and lifestyle that placed the highest value on family, national unity and continuity.

That being said, we are certainly an ethnic group. The primary difference between race and ethnicity is that the former emphasizes perceived physical and biological community, whereas ethnicity emphasizes a cultural community.

That is not to say that we aren't comprised of micro Hebrew ethnicities (i.e. Mizrahi, Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Beta Israel, Igbo, etc.) but as a nation/tribe (macro ethnicity) our root culture and national origins are in the Levant. As a result of the various exiles which produced core communities of sojourning Israelites and Judeans throughout the world,

influence and cultural diffusion (and genetic admixture) produced Diaspora Jews with identities distinct from one another. These identities are what I would define as a micro ethnicity. These Diaspora Jewish communities, when compared to their Gentile host population and each other, are more similar to their fellow Hebrews than different. It's this stratum of cultural, ancestral, religious, and linguistic similarity that ties them to their origins. This what I define as the macro Jewish ethnicity.

Where ever Jews are in the Diaspora we are a Semitic people. And like other ancient Afro-Asiatic (Semitic) peoples our national religion/spiritual system is an inseparable part of our identity, and for us the most meaningful aspect. So being an indigenous Levantine people who defines its tribal membership on cultural/religious terms, the Jewish people can and DO look like any of the artificial "races" that define diversity in the Western World.

Ok so maybe "race" isn't an appropriate term in that context, but what about xenophobia?

The assumption that Jewish people are racist or xenophobic, or more correctly, more xenophobic than other nations/ethnic groups is rooted some of the most ancient anti-Semitic tropes that have targeted the Hebrew nation since antiquity.

"For the Jews have long been in revolt [...] against humanity; and a race that has made its own a life apart and irreconcilable, that cannot share the pleasures of the table with the rest of mankind nor join in their libations or prayers or sacrifices, are separated from ourselves by a greater gulf than divides us from Susa or Bactra or the more distant Indies."

[PHILOSTRATUS, LIFE OF APOLLONIUS OF TYANA 5.33;]

The Jews, with their spiritual system, religion, philosophy, and way of life: Judaism, have long defined themselves as a nation apart. "Chosen" by the Creator of the Universe, and commanded by Him to be "different." And while from our modern, Western perspective this may appear on the surface to be a xenophobic (or at least a separatist) notion, its the Hebraic conception of what it means to be "Chosen" and "different" that precludes racism/xenophobia from an authentic expression of Judaism and Jewishness.

Judaism is defined by its litany of laws and customs the Jewish people have preserved and observed for thousands of years. While legalistic on the surface, the Mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah (Divine Instruction) are moralistic in character. Israel's prophetic tradition grant us insight into what purpose these commandments carry and the mission the Hebrew nation is tasked with by the performance of these cultural, spiritual, and moral imperatives. This created one of the most important maxims of Jewish civilization: that action defines who you are. Therefore Jewish "Choseness" and "difference" according to the wellsprings of Hebrew thought is predicated on Jewish action. The preservation of the Jewish nation is focused on creating an ideal society, defined by unity, love, and justice. As such, the Jewish people despite being a

particularist Semitic nation of the Levant, have always maintained universalist aspirations. A particularist goal of national sovereignty and security in its indigenous homeland so that it can fulfill its universalist aspirations of creating a strong example for the rest of humanity.

For some that may strike them as an arrogant notion. However, ultimately any claim to true speech, ideas, and behavior is subject to being criticized as arrogant. That being said, what makes Israel's "truth" unique in the history of national cultures and ideologies is the manner in which we "advocate" it.

A suitable metaphor is a gym. In every gym there are people who have dedicated significant time to fitness, naturally these people often stand out as extraordinarily fit. Often these individuals feel compelled to spread their knowledge to others, the less experienced gym-goers. In the most obnoxious case, this is expressed in a tyrannical manner whereas the fit feel entitled to compel others to train in what he/she sees as the "right" way.

Gym-goers are usually turned off by these individuals, and rightly so. However, there is another type of fitness expert that gym-goers tend to more readily learn from. This is the expert who leads by example. Confident in his/her path, his/her truth is clear for all who have eyes to see. If others want to adopt and integrate his/her lifestyle it's their prerogative.

Then Why Are Jews So Insular?

The insular character of the Jewish community, at home and in exile, can best be described in the form of analogy. Jews do not proselytize, but this age-old Israelite imperative not to proselytize isn't based in ethnic chauvinism. Rather, the aforementioned creed that character is based on action, dictates to us that proselytization is unnecessary. One need not be a member of our tribe or follow the rituals of our faith to be righteous. Judaism may be best described as the cultural expression unique to the nation of Israel which express a universal moral standard. So as long as people behave in a manner which aligns with this objective morality (SEE THE 7 NOACHIDE LAWS), they are our allies in the pursuit of justice. That being said, since the beginning of Israel's inception more than 3,000 years ago people of other nations have been able to naturalize and become Jews no different than anyone else (and our view no less a literal descendant of the Hebrew forefathers). Virtually every Jew alive today is the product of both descendants of native-born Hebrews and Gerim (naturalized members) who joined the nation in the ancient period.

But Wait, I Know There Are Racist/Xenophobic Jews, In Fact, I've Personally Met Some

Of course there are. Jews, like any other people, are prone to the same ills that afflict all of mankind. Judaism fundamentally rejects idol worship, yet Jewish history is replete with Jews relapsing into idol worship and other, far more immoral behaviors. A brief read through the books of the Judges or Prophets in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) reveals this. Likewise, many modern Jews (particularly those who were forced to sojourn in Europe and the Americas) struggle with the effects of colonialism, racism, and other social ills

that pervade our societies. As with most colonized, displaced nations, the people of Israel have internalized much of the same prejudices that persecuted them and their ancestors. Perhaps a great illustrative example is the great medieval Sephardic Rabbi, Yitzchak Abarbanel. Steeped in the Hebrew spiritual tradition, Abarbanel was a renowned commentator of the Tanakh. However, his greatness in the world of Torah did not preclude him from the influences of his day and age; positive and negative. And having grown up in the country (Spain) that invented the concept of biological racism (Limpieza de Sangre), Abarbanel internalized these notions. In his writings, Abarbanel referred to the general dark complexion of Jews (himself included) as reflecting the curse of exile. That the Gentiles (in his context the Spaniards) were pale because they experienced their joy at the expense of the Jews, and the Jews are swarthy because their blessing awaited their national redemption. This notion, and ones similar to it, was produced via the anachronistic imposition of contemporary Arab and European ideas of skin complexion and race on Judaism.

So while individual Jews have certainly introduced racist and xenophobic notions into Jewish thought, the power of Talmud Torah (the founding texts of Judaism and its study) is that its concepts and system has the ability to correct its own limitations.

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Vayera

The main personality in this week's Torah portion is our forefather Abraham. He is the central character though not the only one. There are others who accompany him on his geographical and philosophical journeys - Sarah, his wife; Isaac and Ishmael, his sons; and also Lot, his nephew.

G-d tells Moses to say to the Children of Israel, *"I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the Lord. But when Moses told this to the Children of Israel, they would not listen to Moses for their spirits were crushed by cruel bondage."* (6:8-6:9)

Thought and Discussion Questions

- Were we truly there in Egypt as slaves, would we have heeded Moses?
- Would we have joined Moses in demanding Pharaoh let us go?
- Would we have left our bondage, albeit oppressive and difficult, but also known and predictable in order to follow a man with a speech impediment out into the unknown and risky desert in the hopes of reaching some faraway place where our ancestors once lived?

As we all know, the Children of Israel did leave Egypt. But, it wasn't only faith or a sense of responsibility that compelled them. Rather, it took the ten plagues and Pharaoh himself practically kicking them out for the Children of Israel to finally leave Egypt and take their first steps toward the Promised Land.

'And the two of them went together... And the two of them went together'
(GENESIS 22:6, 8)

Abraham received the command directly from God, which made his acquiescence almost understandable; Isaac is even more praiseworthy, because he only heard the command from his father, yet he was still willing to submit himself to the sacrificial act. In doing so, Isaac becomes the paragon of the ideal Jewish heir, who continues the traditions of his father even though he cannot be certain of their truth because he himself has not heard the Divine command.

Why must scripture tell us that Terah had originally set out for the Land of Canaan if he never reached it because he died on the way in Haran? The Bible will soon record a fascinating meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, king of Shalem (Jerusalem, capital city of Canaan, see Ramban ad loc), and the text goes on to identify him as a *"priest of God Most High"* to whom Abraham gives tithes (GEN. 14:18, 19, 20).

- Is it not logical to assume that there was one place in the world where the idea of a single God who had created the world and created the human being in His own image was still remembered from the time of Adam, and that place was Jeru-Shalem, Canaan, Israel?
- And if Terah had left Ur of Kasdim to reach Canaan, might it not have been because he wanted to identify with that land and with that God of ethical monotheism?
- And if Abraham, Terah's son, had joined his father in the journey – while Nahor had not – may we not assume that Abraham identified with his father's spiritual journey even though his brother did not?

From this perspective, we understand why this story is followed by God's command to Abraham: Conclude the journey you began with your father and reach the destination, and perhaps the destiny, which unfortunately eluded him.

Abraham, then, emerges as the true continuator of his father's mission. The biblical message, through the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is that it behooves us to continue in our parents' footsteps and to pass down the mission of ethical monotheism from generation to generation. Indeed, we must even attempt to improve upon their vision and accomplishments and to take proper advantage of the new possibilities the unique period in which we live may provide for us. BY RAV SHLOMO RISKIN

Lot, Abraham's nephew, is with him from the moment he embarks on his journey toward the Land of Canaan, the land later promised to Abraham which will be called the Land of Israel, or Eretz Yisrael. He also goes south with him to Egypt during the famine, and afterward Lot returns with Abraham to Canaan, where our story reaches a turning point. Tension arises in the relationship between Abraham and Lot, which is expressed in the disputes between their shepherds. Abraham, recognizing that the dispute stems from their different characters, suggests that they part ways, and invites Lot to choose the most fertile place in Canaan during those days – Sodom.

Avraham feeds strangers and prays for the immoral city of Sedom. Amon and Mo'av, descendants of Lot, betray these values by denying help to the vulnerable and gratuitously cursing them. How could they possibly join a covenant whose founding vision is *"that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of God to do righteousness and justice"* (BEREISHIT 18:19)?

Conventional wisdom holds that acceptance of mitzvot is a problematic hurdle that blocks an otherwise clear and easy path towards Jewish citizenship. The lesson of Canaanite slaves (according to the Rambam), Amonites, Moabites, Netinim and others, though, is that being counted among the progeny of Avraham is an extraordinary privilege that even the most pious of converts may not be granted.

Citizenship amongst the people of Avraham is a precious commodity indeed that perhaps deserves more respect than it currently garners. According it such may lead us to reformulate the exact question we want to ask regarding the proper response to contemporary demographics in Israel. RAV DR. JUDAH GOLDBERG, EXCERPTED

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Chayei Sarah

BY RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Hopes and Dreams

The sedra of Chayei Sarah focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning "teaching." It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the "teaching" in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises – both stated five times. The first is of a land. Time and again he is told, by G-d, that the land to which he has travelled – Canaan – will one day be his.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, *"To your offspring I will give this land."* So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. (12:7)

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, *"Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north, south, east and west. All the land that you see, I will give you and your offspring for ever . . . Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."* (13: 14-17)

Then He said to him, *"I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to take possession of it."* (15: 7)

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, *"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."* (15: 18-21)

I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your G-d and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you; and I will be their G-d. (17: 7-8)

I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your G-d and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you; and I will be their G-d. (17: 7-8)

The second was the promise of children, also stated five times:

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." (12: 2)

"I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." (13: 16)

He took him outside and said, *"Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them"* Then He said to him, *"So shall your offspring be."* (15: 5)

"As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." (17: 4-5)

"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and as the sand on the seashore." (22: 17)

These are remarkable promises. The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham's and his children's as *"an everlasting possession."* Abraham will have as many children as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the sand on the sea-shore. He will be the

father, not of one nation, but of many. What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son (he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant).

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and mean another. As a group they say, *"Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of G-d in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs."* Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: *"Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead."* As the narrative makes clear, this elaborate generosity is a façade for some extremely hard bargaining. Abraham knows he is *"an alien and a stranger among you,"* meaning, among other things, that he has no right to own land. That is the force of their reply which, stripped of its overlay of courtesy, means: *"Use one of our burial sites. You may not acquire your own."* Abraham is not deterred. He insists that he wants to buy his own. Ephron's reply – *"It is yours. I give it to you"* – is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (23: 17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is all of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

The next chapter, one of the longest in the Mosaic books, tells of Abraham's concern that Isaac should have a wife. He is – we must assume – at least 37 years old (his age at Sarah's death) and still unmarried. Abraham has a child but no grandchild —no posterity. As with the purchase of the cave, so here: acquiring a daughter-in-law will take much money and hard negotiation. The servant, on arriving in the vicinity of Abraham's family, immediately finds the girl, Rebecca, before he has even finished praying for G-d's help to find her. Securing her release from her family is another matter. He brings out gold, silver, and clothing for the girl. He gives her brother and mother costly gifts. The family have a celebratory meal. But when the servant wants to leave, brother and mother say, *"Let the girl stay with us for another year or ten [months]."* Laban, Rebecca's brother, plays a role not unlike that of Ephron: the show of generosity conceals a tough, even exploitative, determination to make a profitable deal. Eventually patience pays off. Rebecca leaves. Isaac marries her. The covenant will continue.

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that G-d will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from G-d to Abraham and his children that they should act. G-d will help them. The outcome will be what G-d said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham's family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

A land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews throughout the world – the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people (“*Will we have Jewish grandchildren?*”). Abraham's hopes and fears are ours. (Is there any other people, I wonder, whose concerns today are what they were four millennia ago? The identity through time is awe inspiring.) Now as then, the divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future to G-d. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. To the contrary: the covenant is G-d's challenge to us, not ours to G-d. The meaning of the events of Chayei Sarah is that Abraham realised that G-d was depending on him. Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we – inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise—who must bring it about.

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Toldot

BY ALEX ISRAEL, EXCERPTED

The Strength of Yitzchak

Of all the Avot, the Torah's description of Yitzchak is the most concise. Avraham's life is charted with rich detail. We know of his journey to Egypt, his argument with Lot, his war, his hospitality, his covenants, Hagar Yishmael, the Akeida. We have a full description. Yaakov too; we know of his epic struggle with his brother, his many wives and the complicated events of the birth of their children. We follow his sojourn in Aram, and Lavan's trickery, we see his favouritism of Joseph, his descent to Egypt and his grand funeral. Abraham's story spans 14 Chapters, Yaakov spans 25, and Yitzchak spans maybe 6 chapters.

Rabbi Steinsaltz emphasized:

Isaac's essential problem: to find his own place in a world dominated by the genius of his father. He did the only thing left for him to do: He carried on. And the task of the "successor" has always been one of the most unrewarding of all the tasks in history. It has often been said that "*all beginnings are difficult*," but continuation can be even more difficult. The capacity to persist is no less important than the power to begin. In all the significant revolutions of history it is evident that the first generation – the "founding fathers" – usually have to struggle against formidable objective forces. But the verdict of history ... whether it was a glorious victory or merely a passing episode, lies with their successors – the generation who have to fix and stabilise the revolution.

...One does not ascribe to the second generation the same glorious qualities that capture the imagination. The sons' task is to hold steady and not to create. Or as the Bible story puts it, they have to dig again the wells that the fathers dug before them and that have become blocked up.

... Isaac's task therefore, even if lacking in splendour or legendary exploits, is of utmost value and significance ... *"These are the generations of Isaac ... Abraham begat Isaac"* ... Isaac not only justifying Abraham, but establishing him forever... Paradoxically, were the events of his life dramatic and momentous like those of his father, he would have lost this distinction of being a true successor. In order to fulfil his role successfully, he had to repress any urge for assertion or self-expression. He was not allowed to be anything else, either different or something new. His destiny was to be the one who carried on.

... Isaac is the symbol not of the power that breaks through limitations and creates, but of the power that conserves and maintains things in their place."

Rabbi Steinsaltz gives a framework in which to understand Yitzchak's inaction. And yet, despite the power and heroism engendered by this image, I still find myself searching for more. We have an impression whereby our Avot are men of action, of achievement. Did Yitzchak simply follow Abraham's lead and copy him? Did he not innovate a thing? Nothing? Even if Yitzchak is destined to follow Avraham's path and to take it into posterity, did he not expand Avraham's vision at all?

Yitzchak takes a new path a path untrodden by Avraham. Yitzchak is a farmer, and a very successful farmer too! What does this mean? What is the significance of this?

Avraham was a shepherd. He wandered from place to place, a nomad, with no permanent dwelling place. Avraham is transient. He never settles in a single location and when his wife dies he has no real-estate to call his own. Yitzchak is a man of the land. He farms the land, and grips the land, argues over land. And a farmer is fixed in place. The wells don't move, the fields do not move.

Let us dwell upon Yitzchak's connection to land. Chazal have already suggested that Yitzchak's special quality relates to agriculture; *"the field."* It is in the fields that he is to be found when Rivka arrives, and many mefarshim see him as engaged in farming and not prayer. Here in Ch.26 Yitzchak demonstrates his flair for the agricultural life. Indeed might we suggest, precisely upon the lines suggested by Rav Steinsaltz, that Yitzchak is the patriarch who most prominently expresses Eretz Yisrael. Avraham makes the journey to Eretz Yisrael, but Yitzchak lives there, and lives there all his life. It is one thing to come to a country, but a country is only a viable place to live if a person can live there all his life, from the moment he is born, until his death. It is here in chapter 26 that God restricts Yitzchak from leaving the Land of Israel, and it is in the Perek that Yitzchak demonstrates his deep connection with the land.

Regarding Eretz Yisrael, we can suggest that each of the Avot represent an archetype as regards their involvement with the Land of Israel:

Avraham is the "Oleh" – the immigrant. He begins in Mesopotamia and comes to Eretz Yisrael. Yitzchak stays his whole life in the land.

Yaakov leaves the land, and returns to it, and then leaves again, returning again posthumously. These are three classic models for the Jewish people. Avraham represents the initial desire to emigrate to the land. Yaakov illustrates the notion that though Jews are thrust into Galut, exile, they will eventually find their way back home, they will return, in life, or even in death.

Yitzchak however is integrally connected to Eretz Yisrael. He never leaves. For a land to be considered a homeland, one must be able to spend every day of one's life, from birth to death, in the land. Yitzchak represents this type of association. In this manner, he is certainly deepening and establishing a firm foothold in the land, solidifying Avraham's mission, giving Avraham's journey to Canaan a broad foundation and a firm base, giving it roots and stability.

But we should realise that by focusing on the land itself, Yitzchak isn't simply copying his father. He is taking his father's legacy and building it in a fresh way. He is creating a new reality. Hazal see Isaac as particularly holy – "*Olah Temimah*." This is shaped by his role as a sacrifice in the Akeida, but possibly it relates to his exclusive residence in the land of Israel, giving form to his father's vision, his way.

The Wells and the Peace Treaty

The story of the wells gives us clear insight into Yitzchak's character. Having been banished from Gerar due to his material success – apparently he was accused of monopolising the economy, talking resources from the dominant population, the Philistines, Yitzchak relocates to the unsettled sand-dunes of Gerar to begin again. Each time he finds water there is conflict. The names of the wells give us the mood of the moment: Controversy, Enmity. But Yitzchak does not give up. Yitzchak demonstrates a phenomenal tenacity, patience, endurance. He digs again and again. And it is upon his third attempt that the arguments cease: Rechovot – Expanse.

Why did the arguments cease? It would seem that the local inhabitants of Gerar realised that Yitzchak was here to stay. They could push him aside, but he would always come back. And each time, he was more successful. They could not overpower him. And so, they had to come to terms with him. They realised that Yitzchak saw himself as having a right to the land just like they did. After all, he took unworkable territory and "made the desert bloom."

After his third success even Avimelech comes in a surprise visit, offering him a peace treaty, a pact of mutual recognition and friendship. Avimelech saw Yitzchak's power and influence. He saw his superior economic power and calculated that it would be better to ally himself with this new tribe in the region. He witnessed his moral superiority, he saw his stubbornness and unrelenting determination and he realised that rather than have Yitzchak as an adversary, he should make a covenant, a treaty. Peace only comes as a result of Yitzchak's unyielding stand, his bold resolve, his constant effort and toil.

Yitzchak establishes himself as a fixture in the land, but it is an uphill struggle, a battle at every step. In the end, however, he emerges victorious.

With this in mind, we emerge with a view of Isaac that is removed from a passive, feeble and pallid character. He isn't merely the second generation, the individual who is forced to replicate his father's mission. He isn't a personality in stasis, frozen in a form determined by his father's image. Yitzchak takes on his father's achievements with an impressive energy, and a powerful determination, but this is just the platform from which he starts. He sets his task to work tirelessly for the causes to which he has been educated and to which he is dedicated and he adds his own verse. In particular as relates to Eretz Yisrael, his contribution is unique and unparalleled. (SEE 26:23-4.)

When thinking about Yitzchak in a contemporary mind set, I cannot help but see certain messages here for our time. Sometimes we have the feeling that we are living in an era in which the State of Israel has already been founded; the exciting formative period of the pioneer generation has been and gone. We now face challenges, ongoing denial of our rights to our land, aggression. Yitzchak's personality has relevance and pertinence specifically in our times. We need the same defiant spirit of determination and tenacity, the same resolve to build and rebuild the land and the dream.

"The Lord appeared to him and said: Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land... reside in this land and I will be with you and bless you." (26:2-3)

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Vayetzei

BY RABBI GIDEON D. SYLVESTER

Israel and Her Enemies

"Ultimately, Jacob defends himself against Esau and Laban. He makes treaties with each of them, they learn to live side by side and they go their separate ways."

By the time that you read this, calm has been restored. Meanwhile, at the time of writing, Israel is once again at war, making it an appropriate time to reflect on the Torah's attitude to enemies and conflict.

On Seder night, we interrupt our narrative of the exodus from Egypt to tell the story of a villain who was worse than Pharaoh.

Come and learn what Laban the Aramean tried to do to our father Jacob. While Pharaoh only made his decrees against the males, Laban tried to uproot us all. For so it is written *"A Syrian sought to destroy my father and he went down to Egypt and dwelled there, few in number. There he became a nation, great, mighty and numerous."* (PASSOVER HAGGADAH)

This idea is based on a verse in this week's sedra. Jacob has been repeatedly cheated by his Uncle Laban. Now he and his family pack up their belongings and leave. Laban gives chase, accuses Jacob of stealing the idols and leaving without a proper farewell for Laban and his daughters. Then, he says;

It is within the power of my hand to do you harm, but the God of your fathers said to me last night as follows:

"Take heed that you do not speak either good or bad to Jacob". (GENESIS 31: 29)

According to the rabbis, Laban was threatening genocide.

The Haggada retells these events because like the exodus, it matches in miniature the God's prophecy to Abraham at the Covenant of the Pieces,

"Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a strange land and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great wealth. (GENESIS 15: 13-14)

Jacob, a single, penniless refugee flees to Laban's house where he is tricked and persecuted, but eventually escapes with his large family and great wealth.

The Mahari Beyrav argues that there is another connection. He blames Laban for our eventual slavery and suffering in Egypt. Had Laban not switched Rachel for Leah underneath Jacob's wedding canopy, Joseph would have been the first-born, the brothers would have respected his position, there would have been a calm and happiness in Jacob's home, Joseph would not have been sold to Potiphar and the Jewish people would not have been enslaved in Egypt.

Sometimes, the smallest sin can have enormous consequences, leading to terrible suffering. Others focus less on what Laban did and more on his motives. We have no idea why Laban hated Jacob so much. This is what makes him such a dastardly enemy. We can understand why Esau resented Jacob taking his blessing and the enmity that caused and we can understand the Egyptian desire to have slaves, but Laban had no reason to hate Jacob, to continually cheat him and to attempt to take his life when we face implacable enemies, peace seems very far off. (RASHBATZ)

"As Jacob left his family home, he dreamt a beautiful, spiritual dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder from the heavens"

Finally, we recall Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's explanation that as Jacob left his family home, he dreamt a beautiful, spiritual dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder from the heavens. But after years of living with the greedy, materialistic Laban, his idealism was waning; by the time the angel commands Jacob to make his way back home, he is dreaming of speckled sheep and profit margins.

Ultimately, Jacob defends himself against Esau and Laban. He makes treaties with each of them, they learn to live side by side and they go their separate ways.

Most important of all, as Rabbi Riskin points out, Jacob also recovers his sense of mission. For whilst defending the citizens of Israel is a non-negotiable, we must always be vigilant to guard our stunning Jewish vision of a world at peace where

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."
(ISAIAH 2: 4)

Vayetzei offers an eternal lesson for the Jewish people. The dreams of the Land of Israel are noble dreams, exalted dreams, and dreams which ultimately connect us to Heaven. The dreams of our national youth, the visions of our Biblical heroes, and of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, can only be achieved in the Land of Israel. Indeed, the dreams of Israel ideally connect all of the Earth's inhabitants to their Father in Heaven. RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB

We can revisit the dreams of our youth. We can go home again. The Land of Israel is the land of our dreams and it is our eternal home.

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Vayishlach

BY YAKOV ZVI MEYER

The patriarch Jacob receives his name because of his brother Esau's heel: In Hebrew, the name Yaakov is derived from the word akev, "heel." And indeed Jacob was born grasping that part of his older twin's body.

Throughout the weekly Torah reading of Parashat Toldot, two Sabbaths ago, which recounts the early phases of his life, Jacob demonstrates loyalty and a connection to his name: His personality is molded as part of an ongoing response to life with his brother, and he receives their father Isaac's blessing while figuratively holding on to Esau's heel (Jacob disguises himself as his older brother, and even identifies himself as Esau when he comes to Isaac for that blessing).

In keeping with his identification with Esau, Jacob sets off on the journey to the home of Rebecca's brother, Laban, as described in last week's Torah reading, Parashat Vayetze. In the opening of this Sabbath's Parashat Vayishlach (GENESIS 32:4-36:43), Jacob is described as being on his way back to Canaan and is on the verge of meeting Esau.

Moments before he once again encounters the brother who essentially gave him his name, Jacob finds himself at the center of an additional drama connected with names. Jacob prepares his camp for the meeting with Esau, transferring his family members to the other bank of the stream, dividing them into two camps in advance of the future encounter – and then he retreats: *"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed*

not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him. And he said: 'Let me go, for the day breaketh.'

And he said: 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.' And he said unto him: 'What is thy name?' And he said: 'Jacob.' And he said: 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed.' And Jacob asked him, and said: 'Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.' And he said: 'Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?' And he blessed him there (GEN. 32:25-30).

Jacob overcomes this man, who then blesses him and grants him a new name: Israel. However, the struggle is not yet over. Jacob asks the man to identify himself and, although the man does not expressly refuse to answer him, he responds with a rhetorical question: *"Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?"* – meaning, *"You have no reason to ask for my name."*

The man's name remains a mystery and the reader does not know whether the struggle is real or imagined, external or internal. In the following midrash, the sages shed new light on the refusal of this figure – in their view, he is an angel – to reveal his name. Adhering to a literal reading of the rhetorical question that's posed, the sages describe the refusal as stemming from an inability to provide an answer, and consider this to be an inherent characteristic of angels.

"And Jacob asked him, and said: 'Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.' Rabi stated, quoting Abba Yossi, son of Dessai: One biblical verse reads 'He counteth the number of the stars; he giveth them all their names' (PSALMS 147:4), while another biblical verse reads, 'He that bringeth out their host by number, he calleth them all by name' (ISAIAH 40:26).

How can these two contradictory verses be reconciled? It can only be concluded that the angel has no fixed name. The name he has now is not going to be the name he will have at some subsequent time, as it is written, *'And the angel of the Lord said unto him: 'Wherefore askest thou after my name, seeing it is hidden?' (JUDGES 13:18) – that is, I do not know what my new name will be (GENESIS RABBAH 78:4).*

The midrash presents two contradictory biblical verses. In the BOOK OF PSALMS, God gives the stars “names,” while, in the BOOK OF ISAIAH, God grants them a single name only. Do all the stars – which, in the midrash, are interpreted as constituting a reference to the angels – have their own names or just one appellation? How can two such verses be juxtaposed without contradicting one another? *“It can only be concluded,”* notes the midrash, *“that no angel has a fixed name.”*

This conclusion is congruent with the view that angels have no one, set name and that their names are constantly changed. They are given a new one on each occasion – or perhaps in advance of every new mission. God may have a single name that applies to all the angels; however, from time to time, it changes. So it is that the Almighty gives the angels many names. The midrash presents as evidence the verse in the Book of Judges where an angel refuses to reveal his name to Manoah, and simply replies, *“Wherefore askest thou after my name, seeing it is hidden?”* In this case, argues the homilist, the angel does not know what his name will be from one moment to the next, and thus has nothing to reveal to Manoah.

The above verse in which the “man” refuses to reveal his name to Jacob is not specifically referred to in the body of the midrash, but is rather only indirectly mentioned in its heading. However, after studying the midrash, one can understand the meaning of the man’s response: He does not refuse to reveal his name to Jacob; he simply is incapable of doing so because it will be changed in another instant. The man’s reply is thus given a double meaning because, just moments before, he changes Jacob’s name to Israel.

Prior to this point, the name Jacob shapes the story of the life of the patriarch. He is called Jacob when he and Esau are born and he takes hold of his twin’s heel. Up until the events described in this week’s reading – that is, prior to his reunion with Esau – Jacob has virtually been holding on to his brother’s heel: He defines himself vis-à-vis Esau and determines his deeds as a response to Esau’s moves. The confrontational name Jacob serves to *“clip his wings,”* and the man with whom he wrestles appears in order to free Jacob from this restraint, moments before he is due to reunite with his brother.

Jacob’s fear of his brother is linked to the sort of personalities they embodied in the descriptions of them in the Torah portions read two weeks ago. With the words *“Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?”* the man teaches Jacob that, just as the names of the angels change from one moment to the next, similarly, people change from one moment to the next – that is, Jacob who takes hold of his brother’s heel can also be Israel who has *“striven with God and with men, and ... [hath] prevailed.”*

The name of the man with whom Jacob struggles is not at all important because the next moment that name will change, in any case. Jacob seems fearful of a repetition of what he sees as the self-evident dynamics of his narrative; however, as the man teaches him, there is no continuity – every encounter is open to unique developments. Because of this, Jacob need not fear meeting his brother once again. In effect, then, it is not really Jacob who will meet Esau and, conversely, it will not be Esau whom Jacob will meet.

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Balfour and Beyond

The Balfour Declaration was issued November 2, 1917.

We rarely take the time to consider the importance of this declaration as a step towards Statehood or how international recognition facilitates the legitimacy of the Jewish State but these are not things that came easily and should not be taken for granted!

The anniversary dates relating to the declaration are an opportune time to reflect on the impact this declaration has had on the history of our people:

- July 14 -17 - first draft of the letter that would become the Declaration
- July 22 - League of Nations reaffirmed the Balfour Declaration as a part of international law.
- November 2 - the Balfour Declaration
- November 29 - UN Vote on the creation of the Jewish homeland in British Mandate Palestine

This Shabbat, as you gather with family and friends over challah and cholent/hamin, consider discussing the importance of Balfour for the Jewish people and our ancestral homeland!

Let's Talk!

1. If you were a Jew in 1917 reading the Balfour Declaration for the first time how would you react to the document?
2. The Balfour declaration specifically calls for the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine. Why Palestine and not some other region?
3. The declaration uses the word home rather than state in reference to the Jewish presence in the land. Do you think this distinction is an important one to make?
4. Do you think the Balfour Declaration is a strong enough message to the world regarding the establishment of a Jewish state? If not what would you change in the document to strengthen it?
5. It's been 101 years since the initial draft of the Balfour declaration. Why do you think the declaration is still important now?
6. Can you think of any other declarations that formally changed or influenced international acceptance of Jewish rights in Israel or Jerusalem?
7. What would happen if a government declared their recognition of a Palestinian homeland in the Land of Israel? How should Jews react to that?

Exploring the Aliyah Bet: Discussion Questions

Aliyah has different causes: Aliyah of need, i.e. those escaping persecution in their home country; and Aliyah by choice, those choosing to migrate for religious, ideological or nationalistic reasons. Why is Aliyah Bet a unique model for the Jewish immigration movement? Imagine the encounter between a Jew in Europe trying to escape the

persecutions with a member of the Jewish Brigade – the survivors' first contact with the yishuv (the organized Jewish community in Palestine). What do you think was their reaction?

The sight of a soldier with a Star of David insignia on his sleeve must have been intensely moving for the survivors; it instills a sense of national pride and identification

How was the connection to the Land of Israel different for Jews of this time period than it is today?

Nearly 250 American volunteers assisted in the Aliyah Bet. Do you think is a large or small number? Do you think more Jews wanted to volunteer? What challenges do you think these individuals faced in joining the ha'apala effort?

Many of the people interviewed said that their families and friends thought they were "crazy" for going there. Why do you think they were considered "crazy"?

Can you imagine believing in a cause so deeply that you would drop everything and leave your home to help?

Why do you think the survivors of the Holocaust opted to take on the challenges of the journey to Palestine instead of returning to their home countries?

Saving Jewish lives was a major reason that the volunteers' were motivated to engage in this cause. Do you feel that this is still an issue today in which Jews worldwide should be involved? Why or why not?

The Jews at the time had strong feelings of desire to find refuge in the Land of Israel. What can future generations of young Jews learn from this deep connection?

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Lech Lecha

BY RABBI ELIE MISCHEL

A Gift of Love

And Hashem said to Avram: *"Go out from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you."* At the very beginning of our story, generations before our people received the Torah at Har Sinai, Hashem promises that He will give this land to Avraham's children.

But at first glance, the way that Hashem gives the land to Avraham appears strange. Normally, when people give gifts to others, they say *"I've brought you a gift,"* and then present the gift to their loved one. We don't generally show the gift to a loved one, and then say *"by the way, it's a gift from me to you."* But this is precisely the way that

Hashem gives the land to Avraham! First He tells Avraham to “go to the land which I will show you.” And it's only later, after Avraham had already reached the land, that Hashem tells Avraham “to your children I will give this land.” The order is strange!

Rav Shlomo Carlebach explains Hashem's approach with a parable:

Imagine that there is a certain place in the world that I love dearly; for me, it's the most special place in the world, the place which touches the deepest secrets of my heart. And because this place means so much to me, I want to give it as a gift to my wife, the person I love the most.

But because I love this place so much, I want my wife to truly understand the significance of this gift. I want her to appreciate this place as much as I do! And so before I give this place to her as a gift, I bring her to this special place to experience it with me, to connect to its depth and its beauty. For once she understands how special this place is to me, she'll appreciate how special she is to me!

When you give a gift to someone out of a sense of obligation or formality, you simply tell the person you are giving him a gift, and then hand him the package. But when you are giving your heart, your soul, your most beloved place in the world, you want the recipient to see it first, to deeply appreciate what you are giving.

This is why Hashem showed the land to Avraham before formally giving it to him and his descendants. For the land of Israel is Hashem's most precious, beloved place. Hashem needed Avraham to experience and appreciate the land, so that Avraham would understand that this gift, the gift of Hashem's “special place”, was an expression of God's awesome love for Avraham and his future descendants, the Jewish people.

Perhaps this is why, to this very day, it is so essential for diaspora Jews to visit and experience the land of Israel. The goal of outreach organizations reaching out to unaffiliated Jews can be summed up with one phrase: “*get them to Israel! – and good things will follow!*” For only by seeing the land of Israel for ourselves, by walking its streets and tasting its fruit, can we truly appreciate the gift of love that our Father in Heaven promised us, at the very beginning of our history.

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Vayera

BY RABBI M. MITCHELL SERELS

Abraham's Eshel: Existential Hospitality

Nestled almost insignificantly in the various historical stories of Avraham, there is one sentence that, by its solitary uniqueness draws our attention. Hidden between the story

of the peace treaty with Abimelech, and the profound tale of the Akedah we are told of a mundane activity of Avraham:

וישב אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם

Onkelos gives us the definition used by most that the **אשל** is in fact **אילנא** and hence the common translation as a tamarisk tree. The Gemara in **סוטה י** there is a dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemia as whether this **אשל** is an orchard or an inn. Resh Lakesh presents that Abraham planted an orchard and provided all types of delicacies.

Rashi comments, based on the gemara in **כתובות ח**, that the **אשל** is in fact an acrostic **אכילה, שתיה, לינה** for eating, drinking, and lodging. Hence there are those who interpret the word to signify an inn. That Abraham opened a hostel for caravaneers.

Consequently, according to Ramban's explanation of Rambam, Abraham taught his wayfarers to make blessings before eating and drinking as well as to pray before retiring at night and when they first arise in the morn.

The Gaon of Vilna understood Abraham's action as an existential attempt to overcome the previous sins of man, through acts of hospitality. Employing the same acrostic the Gaon of Vilna adds that the sin of Adam was performed through the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, hence the **א**. The sin relating to Noah was through the acting of drinking, hence the **ש**. The sin of the people of Sodom was their action relating to lodgers as reported in the Midrash, hence the **ל**.

Abraham had taken upon himself the task of **תקונה של עולם במלכות שדי**. This is a wonderful concept and an inspiration to all believers. However, this explanation does not answer the question of the positioning of the sentence between these events. A possible suggestion would have us understand that once there is peace in the land, the prime example of the believing Jew, Abraham, came to fulfill his task to plant and to develop this spot. To establish a beacon for all to come and to participate. To reach out as an example of faith and brotherhood to all passerby.

The story of the Akedah with which we begin our daily prayers and draws out focus during the High Holy Days, that demonstrates for us our ultimate need for belief in Hashem and that divine promises will be kept. Though there will be struggles and challenges ultimate the promise to Abraham that his seed will inherit the land will be kept. Abraham understood this faith to be true and therefore does not argue with Hashem. Abraham had begun the process by planting his **אשל** and Abraham knew in his heart that his heirs would continue the process for perfecting the land and perfecting the world. Peace was a necessary component and belief, the existential catalyst - peace, the land, and the people.

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Chayei Sarah

BY RABBI MOSHE D. LICHTMAN

The G-d of the Land

Avraham said to his servant... *"I will make you swear by the Lord, God of heaven and God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. Rather, you shall go to my land and to my birthplace and take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak."* The servant said to him, *"Perhaps the woman will not want to follow me to this Land; shall I bring your son back to the land from which you left?"* Avraham said to him: *"Beware lest you bring my son back there. The Lord, God of heaven, Who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and Who spoke regarding me and Who swore to me saying, 'To your seed will I give this Land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there"* (24:3-7).

Many commentators ask why Avraham insisted on taking a wife for Yitzchak from his own birthplace and not from the Land of Canaan. After all, the inhabitants of both places were idolaters. The Ran and others answer that although Avraham's relatives worshipped idols, they possessed basically good character traits. The Canaanites, on the other hand, were corrupt, immoral, and cruel. Idolatry is a malady of the mind, which is not passed down from parent to child and is relatively easy to cure. Evil traits, however, are passed down from generation to generation and are very difficult to uproot.

There are other answers to this question (see, for example, the Kli Yakar), but no matter how we answer it, one thing is very clear: the Canaanites were extremely evil and corrupt. If so, why did God command Avraham, in Parashat Lech Lecha, to leave his birthplace and go to this Land? And why did Avraham warn Eliezer not to take Yitzchak out of the Land?

The answer is that Eretz Yisrael's holiness and special qualities are independent of any outside factor. The Land is inherently unique and has been that way ever since the beginning of time. Yes, even though the Land of Canaan was inhabited by immoral idolaters, God told Avraham to go there, because He knew that this was the only place where he and his descendants could truly flourish.

The Ramban explains what makes Eretz Yisrael so special: The first time Avraham mentioned HaShem's name to Eliezer, he described Him as *"God of heaven and God of earth"* (v. 3). Four verses later, however, he referred to Him as merely *"the God of heaven"* (v. 7). Why this discrepancy? (SEE RASHI'S ANSWER.) The Ramban explains that in verse 3 Avraham was speaking about the present, when he already dwelled in Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, he called HaShem, *"God of heaven and God of earth [lit, 'the land']"*, because HaShem is known as the God of the Land of Israel (SEE II MELACHIM 17:26).

In verse 7, however, Avraham was referring to when he still lived in Charan: *The Lord, God of heaven, Who took me from my father's house...*

Outside the Land of Israel, HaShem is considered only the God of heaven, because He chooses not to let His Shechinah rest in foreign lands. This, adds the Ramban, is the meaning of Chazal's statement "*He who dwells in Chutz LaAretz is like one who has no God*" (KETUVOT 110B). Thus, Eretz Yisrael is eternally holy and special because it is the Palace of the King; and no outside force can change that fact.

One question remains, however. The halachah states that one is permitted to leave Eretz Yisrael – temporarily – in order to find a mate (SEE RAMBAM, MELACHIM 5:9). Why, then, was Avraham so opposed to the idea of letting Yitzchak leave the Land to find a wife? Most commentators explain that Yitzchak was an exception to the rule, since he was considered an olah temimah – a "*perfect burnt-offering*." The Rashbam provides us with a more instructive answer:

The Lord, God of Heaven, Who brought me [Avraham] here and gave this Land to my descendants: I know that He does not want my descendants to distance themselves from here. For if so, why did God bring me here? Therefore, I know that He will send His angel to grant you [Eliezer] success on your journey, in order to fulfill His promise to me.

Avraham used simple logic. It can't be – he reasoned – that God wants me to send my son outside the Land, for if so why did He bring me here in the first place? If He promised me the Land and actually brought me here, He cannot possibly want my children to leave it.

I believe that this Rashbam teaches us an important lesson. Throughout the long and bitter exile, it was extremely difficult for Jews to come and live in Eretz Yisrael. Recently, however, HaShem fulfilled His promise to Avraham and returned the Land to the Jewish people, allowing them to dwell there in relative comfort. Is this not a clear sign that God does not want us, Avraham's descendants, to distance ourselves from the Land? For if so, why did He bring us here to begin with?

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Toldot

BY RABBI YAAKOV LERNER

The Real Disagreement between Yaakov and Rivka

Parshat Toldot opens with the tumultuous pregnancy of Rivka, followed by the birth of the twins, Esav and Yaacov. From birth they appeared vastly different from one another. This striking physical contrast proved to be a harbinger of bigger and far more significant differences to come. Yaacov was pure, innocent, wholesome in his ways and he spent much time absorbing the beliefs and values of his revered father Yitzchak. Esav, on the other hand, became "*a man of the fields*," a hunter, who according to Chazal trapped

not only animals but also women whom he molested and men whom he robbed and murdered.

Despite this sharp contrast, Yitzchak still wanted to bestow wealth and power upon Esav and not Yaacov. In a desperate attempt to block this from happening, probably after having tried to convince Yitzchak of his grave mistake and having failed, Rivka forced Yaacov to disguise himself as Esav and "steal" the blessings away from his brother by deceiving his father. The famous question is how could Yitzchak have been so wrong? Clearly he knew that the twins were opposites, that Yaacov was far and away the more spiritual of the two. He was the "*ish tam yoshev ohalim*," the son who was wholesome and sat in the tents, studying the religious beliefs of monotheism with his father, while Esav was away engaging in horrific behavior.

Yes, this is true answered my revered Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ztl. Yet, Yitzchak had a conception of Judaism that foresaw a world divided into two, the physical domain and the spiritual domain. He envisioned his two sons dividing up these two worlds with Esav conquering and controlling the physical one while Yaacov reigned supreme in the spiritual world of Torah Judaism. How wrong he was! The very goal of Halacha, said the Rav, is to teach us not how to escape from the physical world in which we live, but rather, to conquer and elevate it by infusing kedusha into this very world. When we recite a bracha over food we elevate the act of eating into something holy. When we bring halacha into the marriage relationship by observing taharat hamishpocha, we elevate the intimate relationship between husband and wife. Mind you, no other mitzvah in the Torah goes by the name "kiddushin," holiness, as does marriage. This is our job as religious Jews, to teach the world how to endow the physical with the holiness and beauty of spirituality as well. In a world that is drowning in promiscuity and obscenity, there is no more important lesson that we can offer them than the one taught to us by Rivka Imainu.

Shabbat shalom!

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Veyeitzei

BY RABBI MOSHE D. LICHTMAN

How To Make It Back Home

This week's parashah covers the twenty-year period in which Ya'akov Avinu lived in Padan Aram with his father-in-law Lavan. In the end, Ya'akov returned to Eretz Yisrael, making him the first Jew (since Avraham received the commandment of Lech Lecha) to dwell in Chutz LaAretz for an extended period of time and return to the Land. It therefore behooves us, Ya'akov's descendants, to study this parashah well and try to find out how he did it: how he managed to keep his dream of aliyah alive and actually make it back to the Holy Land, after such a long absence.

Our Rabbis teach that מעשה אבות סימן לבנים – the deeds of the Patriarchs are signs for their descendants. So, here are some lessons we can learn from Ya'akov:

(1) Realize that Chutz LaAretz is not where you belong: Commenting on Ya'akov's vow, the Midrash states:

Ya'akov said [to God]: "My father, Yitzchak, wanted to leave the Land, but You did not let him, because he was a burnt-offering... I am not leaving the Land for my own good, but because my brother [wants] to kill me. I received permission from You and my father. Do not leave me! (QUOTED IN PARPERA'OT LATORAH, VOL. 1, P. 138)

Ya'akov never lost sight of where he truly belonged and why he was not there. We, too, must constantly remember that Eretz Yisrael is our only true Homeland and that exile is a punishment (no matter how nice it feels).

(2) Pray for Divine assistance and vow to return: When he was about to leave the Land, Ya'akov took a vow, saying: *If God will be with me, and guard me on this way that I am going, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear; and I will return in peace to my father's home, and the Lord will be my God... (28:20-21)*. Some commentators interpret the words in bold as part of the condition. That is, Ya'akov asked God to help him return to Eretz Yisrael. Others maintain that these words are part of Ya'akov's vow, as if to say, *"If God protects and sustains me, I will return to the Land."*

Either way we look at it, this verse teaches us an important lesson. One cannot expect to make it to the Holy Land without God's help. And one of the best ways to get that help is through prayer. It is also helpful to show God how badly we want to be in His Land, by vowing to do everything in our power to achieve that goal.

(3) Don't be content with (or fooled by) the level of spirituality in Chutz LaAretz: The Tosefta (AVODAH ZARAH 5:2) and the Zohar (1:150B) interpret the end of Ya'akov's vow as follows: *I will return in peace to my father's home, for I know that only there the Lord will be my God*. Before even setting foot in Chutz LaAretz, Ya'akov ingrained in his head the notion that a Jew can reach spiritual perfection only in God's Chosen Land. And we can assume that he maintained this attitude throughout his exile, never becoming complacent with Jewish life in Charan and always looking forward to the day when he could return home and serve God to the fullest.

(4) Never take your mind off of Eretz Yisrael: The Sages of the Mesorah point out that Parashat VaYeitzei has no section breaks, no "opened" or "closed" parshiot. Rather, it is one, undivided unit. The Sefat Emet (the second Rebbe of Gur) says that this alludes to the fact that Ya'akov Avinu never took his mind off of Eretz Yisrael. From the moment he left Be'er Sheva until he arrived at Machanayim twenty years later, he never forgot where he really belonged. He constantly longed to return home and never came to terms with living on foreign soil. This, says the Sefat Emet, is the meaning of Rivkah's request to Ya'akov: Flee to my brother Lavan, to Charan, and stay with him a few days (ימים אחדים 27:43-44). That is, she assured him that no matter how long he stayed in Chutz LaAretz, it would seem like a short time, if he constantly remained connected (באחדות ובדבקות) to his father's home in Eretz Yisrael.

(5) Leave as soon as possible and put your trust in God: We mentioned above that the only reason Ya'akov left Eretz Yisrael was to escape Eisav's clutches. The moment this reason no longer applied, he began his journey home: It came to pass, when Rachel gave birth to Yosef, Ya'akov said to Lavan, *"Send me away, that I may go to my place and to my Land"* (30:25). Rashi comments:

WHEN RACHEL GAVE BIRTH TO YOSEF [means] when Eisav's adversary was born, as it says, *The house of Ya'akov will be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav [will be] as straw* (OVADYAH 1:18). Fire without a flame has no effect at a distance. Once Yosef was born, Ya'akov trusted in the Holy One Blessed be He and wanted to return.

In the next verse, Ya'akov says, *Give me my wives and my children... and I will go.* Notice that he did not ask for any money. He did not say, *"Let me stay another year or two so that I can save enough money to buy a bigger tent or a fancier camel."* He did not say to his wives, *"Let's wait until the kids are finished with high school."* Rather, he seized the first opportunity, put his trust in God, and got ready to leave. The only reason he tarried was because Lavan insisted on paying him his wages (SEE 30:27-28).

(6) If all else fails, leave the exile when things start getting bad: After Ya'akov "appropriated" a large portion of Lavan's flock, it says: *[Ya'akov] heard the words of Lavan's sons, saying, "Ya'akov took all that belonged to our father..." And Ya'akov saw Lavan's face, and behold, it was not towards him as before. And the Lord said to Ya'akov, "Return to your fathers' Land, and to your birthplace, and I will be with you"* (31:1-3). The Chafetz Chayim derives a very timely lesson from these verses:

When the nations speak evil of the Jewish people, libeling and encroaching upon us – in the sense of [Ya'akov] heard the words of Lavan's sons – we remain silent... But when we see that their faces are not towards us as before – in the sense of Ya'akov saw Lavan's face – [that is], when the heads of state give us angry looks, then we must find ourselves a place of shelter. And the safest shelter is in the Land of our fathers – Return to your fathers' Land. (CHAFETZ CHAYIM AL HATORAH; SEE ALSO OZNAYIM LATORAH V. 3)

If we don't return to the Land on our own volition, God will cause the nations to turn against us and banish us from their lands. The Chafetz Chayim warns us to pay close attention to the early signs of animosity, so that we can find shelter in the Holy Land before it is too late. A word to the wise is sufficient! (I hope.)

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Vayishlach

BY RABBI DR. JEROLD ISENBERG

In Parashat Vayishlach, Yaakov Avenu, after struggling with the Malach of HaShem, is told by the Malach that his name would be changed to Yisrael: **וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאמָר עוֹד שְׁמִי כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׁרִית עִם־אֱלֹקִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וְתוֹכֵל**

He (the Malach) said, "Your name shall no longer be Ya'akov, but Yisrael, for you have struggled with both divine and human beings, and you prevailed."

This occasion, in actuality, was not the "inauguration" of the new name. Ya'akov was being told that at some point in the near future, HaShem would change his name, and this is the reason why. And indeed, three perakim later we read: **וַיֹּאמְרוּ־לּוֹ אֱלֹקִים שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב לֹא־ יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהִיָּה שְׁמֶךָ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל**

HaShem said to him, "You, whose name is Ya'akov, you shall be called Ya'akov no more, but Yisrael shall be your name." Thus, He named him Yisrael.

This logical chronology of first revealing the reason behind the name change followed by its implementation, has, however, one difficulty. Between these two events, we find the appearance of the new name BEFORE it is officially assigned. Ya'akov, having lived through the deceit of Lavan and the hostility of Esav, returns to his homeland. He reaches the city of Shechem, when we are told: **וַיַּחַן אֶת־פְּנֵי הָעִיר** and *he encamped before the city*.

In the next pasuk, we read what he did there: **וַיִּקֶּן אֶת־חֶלְקֶת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר נָטָה־שָׁם אֹהֶלוֹ מִיַּד בְּנֵי־חָמוֹר אֲבִי שָׁכֵם בַּמָּאָה קִשְׁיָטָה**

He purchased the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Chamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred kesitah.

Finally in the last pasuk in PEREK 33 we read: **וַיִּצְבֹּֽשֶׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא־לּוֹ קֵל אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** *He set up an altar there, and called it E-I El-ohe Yisrael.*

Three questions come to mind.

First, why does Ya'akov pitch his tent at "P'nei Ha'ir" before the city?

Second, why does the Torah indicate that he purchased a "parcel" of land? It could have simply said, he purchased the land upon which he had pitched his tent. What is the significance of the word chelka (parcel)?

Finally, how is that Ya'akov made use of his new name, Yisrael, BEFORE, it was given to him by HaShem?

The answers pose an insight into the importance of where Ya'akov was and what he did there.

As we know, there are three places in Tanach where the legal purchase of a portion of Eretz Yisrael is cited with seller, buyer and purchase price explicitly. First, Avraham bought Ma'arat HaMachpela from Efron for 400 commercial shekalim. Second, in this parasha

with Ya'akov. And third, at the end of Sefer Shmuel when David HaMelech purchases the site of the Bet HaMikdash – Har HaBayit, from Aravna for 50 silver shekalim.

These three purchases correspond to the three phases of life. Avraham Avenu buys a burial ground. Without the lessons of the past, our moral compass spins every which way. Only by reflecting on what our Mesorah - a tradition that has been handed down to us, parent to child, teacher to student, from the time of our Avos - teaches, can we be assured of a lasting foundation for the future.

David HaMelech's purchase represents that future. The Bet HaMikdash, twice built, twice lost, yet ever the epicenter of Jewish sovereignty and aspirations. May the Third Bet HaMikdash be built speedily with the arrival of Mashiach.

And Ya'akov Avenu's purchase represents the present. What Ya'akov significantly realized is reflected in the word "p'nei" The Ramban states that the word "pnei" here is related to "pnima" - internal. Ya'akov did not want to remain a traveler, one just passing through the area. Rather, the Ramban explains, he immediately wanted to attain resident status, to be a citizen of Eretz Yisrael, and so he bought land and built his house. Furthermore, The Ibn Ezra notes that the word chelka (parcel) indicates the remarkable importance of owning land in Eretz Yisrael: *Owning a chelek of land in Eretz Yisrael- is considered as if one owns a chelek - a portion – in Olam Haba!*

And finally, I would suggest, that given that Ya'akov was planning to set up his permanent residence in the land promised to his progeny in perpetuity, and given the role to be played by that very land in the future of his children, the only name fitting for a mizbe'ach to HaShem on that land had to include the eternal name of that chosen people, Yisrael, even if the name was not yet formally launched!

May we take these lessons to heart as we work on behalf of ארץ ישראל לעם ישראל על פי תורת ישראל.

Rabbi Dr. Jerold Isenberg is the Executive Director of Mizrachi – Religious Zionists of Chicago, Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Theological College and serves as a Vice President of Mizrachi RZA.

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Zionism – Reclaiming an Inspiring Word

BY RABBI ALAN SILVERSTEIN

Words do matter. Groups either can preserve sacred terminology or allow their heritage to be demeaned.

In the mid-1960s, the word "Black" [Black People] had come to be derided by detractors. The "Black is Beautiful" Movement reclaimed: Black" in the process of elevating African-American self-esteem.

Throughout most of the 19th century, the words "Jew" or "Jewish" had negative connotations. The first national organization of synagogues had to be called the Union of American HEBREW Congregations (1873), including its HEBREW Union College (1875). A "Jewish is Beautiful" movement took hold, preparing the groundwork for naming the JEWISH Theological Seminary (1886), the American JEWISH Committee (1906) and so forth.

As we prepare to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the first World Zionist Congress, the 70th year since the UN Partition Plan, the fifth decade of Jewish return to the Kotel and the Jewish Quarter, it is the time to reclaim today's all-too-often denigrated term, "ZIONISM."

Israel's detractors cunningly have redefined ZIONISM into a narrow space of assenting to hawkish views about the Peace Process. They claim that if someone disagrees with the Netanyahu government, they are no longer Zionists. Following this ill-intended line of thinking, such a "non-Zionist" no longer supports Israel or its right to exist.

This is false reasoning based upon a false premise! We know that citizens can and do disapprove of policies of a particular Prime Minister or a President and still remain proud of their land and its sovereignty, be they Americans, Frenchmen, British or Israelis! Pro-Israel folks [Zionists] within World Jewry's spectrum encompass Left, Center and Right whether in Israel's Knesset or in Diaspora groups such as the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Collectively, irrespective of our views regarding the peace process, as Zionists we affirm Israel's right to exist.

Furthermore, the term "Zionism" is much richer to Jewry than the politics of "The Conflict" alone! Journalist Yossi Klein HaLevi has commented that *"The assault on Zionism is an assault upon our story, our Jewish historical narrative. And going forward there is no Jewish people, no Judaism, without the Jewish story."* We need to reclaim the word "Zionism" from its detractors, enumerating ways in which Zionism is beautiful. The following are but a few examples.

Zionism is a religious aspiration. It offers spiritual fulfillment by connecting with Medinat Yisrael. Israel is the venue in which the sacred events of the Hebrew Bible took place, and in which great rabbinic Sages taught Torah. It is the source of the global Jewish calendar, the direction in which we pray, plus provides a dominant theme within our liturgy. When Abraham Joshua. Heschel for the 1st time arrived at the liberated Kotel in June 1967, he reflected,

I did not enter on my own the city of Jerusalem/Zion. streams
of endless craving, clinging, dreaming, flowing night and
day, midnights, years, decades, centuries, millennia, streams

of tears, pledging, waiting – from all over the world, from all corners of the earth – carried us of this generation to the Wall...

Zionism helps us to move our focus from a natural inclination toward self-centeredness into becoming part of something larger, of Jewish peoplehood. Early Zionist luminary and social justice activist Moses Hess observed [1862] that: *“Modern life [eroding traditional shtetlach and kehillot] is being blighted by... the dust of atomism... [an extreme focus upon the self]”*. As a remedy, Zionism restored the glue that binds Jewish people together. For example, in the Soviet prison, Natan Sharansky *“discovered that only by embracing who I am – by going back to the shtetl, by connecting [via Zionism] to my own people, – could I stand with other [victims of human rights abuses too].”* Zionism brings together Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Secular Jews as well as Right, Center and Left in a manner not otherwise possible.

Zionism affirms the remarkable power of the human spirit. Zionism's “1st commandment” is the Herzl motto: *“if you will it, it is no dream.”* The Jewish State embodies being “A Start-Up Nation” with a “Can Do” spirit. The Zionism dream has prevailed against all odds. With pride, Knesset Member Michael Oren observed that *“Zionism revived the [ancient] Hebrew language, which is now spoken by more widely than Danish and Finnish and will soon surpass Swedish. Zionist organizations have planted hundreds of forests, enabling the land of Israel uniquely to enter into the 21st century with more trees than it had at the end of the 19th.”* Zionism effectively has absorbed immigrants from more than 100 countries as the Jewish destination for inspiration and/or for refuge.

Zionism means that Jews have re-entered the stage of history, reclaiming the right to determine our own destiny. Israel is the only place on earth where we have formed a majority. The Jewish State is a society uniquely measured by Jewish concerns. In Israel alone, does a Jewish army [the IDF] defend Jews in peril? Only in Israel, does a Jew speak the Jewish language, see a Jewish landscape, and continue the story our ancestors began. Only in Israel can a State embody Jewish values, launching emergency rescue missions throughout the world, providing advanced technology to underdeveloped nations, and imparting medical/pharmaceutical and psycho-social therapies to the ailing and bereaved.

Zionism means Jewish culture is being reborn. Israeli craft items dominate the inventory of Jewish gift shops. Synagogue Hebrew is now spoken with Sephardic intonation rather than Ashkenazic style. The style of our tallitot and kippot reflect Israeli cultural norms. Israeli songs and dances are ever-present in our festivals and our life cycle celebrations. Israeli films, novels, and poems abound. Israeli on-line news predominates Jewish communal life. Biographies of Israeli heroes, accounts of Israeli societal exploits fill our book shelves. A new generation of Torah scholarship is rapidly appearing. Israeli art yields prized possessions.

As we celebrate Israel's 69th Independence Day, let us rejoice in the multi-fold blessings of "Zionism." It is a word which we must reclaim. It must embrace all of us who support Israel's continued existence. As Zionists, we cannot surrender the inspiring meanings of "Zionism" to assaults by Israel's opponents. The State of Israel is real and by definition imperfect like all states. Yet it also is a miracle. It has enabled Jewry to re-envision our spirituality, our identity, our culture, our sovereignty, and our values via concrete action.

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(Post) Modern Alienation and Hope: Zionism as a Longing for Meaning [taken from FACULTY FORUM VOLUME 7, NUMBER 2]

BY RABBI DR. EINAT RAMON

Jews throughout the world who became ardent Zionists during the 19th and 20th centuries relate the same personal testimony heard time and again in different voices: Zionism was, for them, first and foremost, a personal, existential redemption, a one-time opportunity to endow their lives with meaning. In leaving their homes in the country of their birth, they were not making a sacrifice, but rather reclaiming their souls from assimilation, emptiness, decadence and alienation; the alienation modern culture has insinuated between a person and her/his body, family, religion, nation, and between individuals.

This is why, in our post-modern era, which constantly undermines every norm and thus forces alienation on every individual, it is relevant to reflect on those moments that preceded Zionism and explore the complex personal stories to understand how Zionism redeemed the personal lives of Jews from the chaos surrounding them, of which Anti-Semitism was but one facet. This internal dissonance is experienced by every individual who seeks cultural continuity in family and contemporary culture, while confronted with a cultural imperative that demands radical, uncompromising change. The Jewish people, however, whose identity is essentially dependent on such continuity, experience the breach more deeply.

Then as Now, Existential Sterility and Zionism: Herzl's Life as Parable

Amos Elon, Herzl's biographer, aptly conveys the emotional-spiritual mood of Western European youth, several generations after the advent of the "enlightenment":

What, therefore, was the meaning of being Jewish during those crucial years in which the seeds of the future Holocaust were sown, unconsciously, in people's hearts? [...] could the new Anti-Semitism be the fault of the Jews themselves? There were quite a few sensitive Jewish youths who convinced themselves to believe that was the case. Some destroyed themselves in this process. (AMOS ELON, HERZL, P. 80 – 84).

Yet, from within this void Herzl found the insight that led to his Zionist enlightenment that: *"the Jewish dilemma is not nationalistic, nor religious, but rather social."* (*IBID*, P. 137) and has its origins perhaps, in *"a social structure for which wealthy Jews should also be held responsible"* (*IBID*, P. 126). This recognition, which glimmered in the darkness of European Jewish bourgeois decadence in late 19th century Vienna, was the foundation for an unbelievable burst of political creativity whose source was one tormented man, who transformed his anguish into a catalyst for an orderly, organized enterprise of returning the Jewish people to their homeland, their roots and themselves.

Five years after Herzl's death, during a cold and rainy winter after the tragic death of his wife, Aharon David Gordon, the "grand old man" of the second Aliyah who emigrated from the East European Podolia region, wrote the following passage from his home in Petah Tikvah. His description of modern alienation as a severe human problem which afflicts Jewish youth is the prolegomena to his marvelous philosophical essay, *Man and Nature*:

Love of all creatures, love of family, love between friends, the measure of compassion decreases as man "progresses", especially as social life becomes more centered in large cities...[...]even when these feelings are found, you see that for the most part, they do not come from the heart, but are influenced by the brain. [...] and even the more essential feeling, which one would think would flow more naturally – love between man and woman – is decreasing (in enlightened society as a whole, and not just among Jews). [...] there is no love without ulterior motives, no faith, no ideals, no justice, no truth; but there is an insatiable "I", there is an appetite, there is lust and self delusion. [...] it is little wonder, therefore, that such a lack of strength and vigor, such spiritual distortion leads the man of our times to exchange his ideals (or to "break idols" in the epic phrase of our day) at the speed of an electron, and lately – to complete heresy, devastating emptiness, and utter despair. They say: the rationality of science has enlightened our vision and done away with the shadows of fantasy and mystery of the old world, but this statement does not provide any explanation. For the power of science is restricted to that which may be perceived and those opinions belonging to the realm of contemplation and observation, but not the realm of feelings and those opinions which stem from

feelings. ("MAN AND NATURE", YEAR, **THE WRITINGS OF A. D. GORDON**, 1911, VOLUME I, P. 45 – 48).

The return to nature, which Gordon advocated both in his writing and way of life, was more than a return to manual labor, agriculture and the conservation of the ancient landscape of the land of Israel; more than a return to life in the physical sphere of the land. It was essentially about the natural emotional connection of the individual to circles of affiliation from which modern Jews of his children's generation had been severed, by the decrees of Marxism and the Enlightenment. The return of that generation to the homeland and their integration in the Zionist national enterprise, is imbued with the possibility of rejuvenation and return to those feelings that were eliminated by the decree of modern times and skepticism: the feeling of belonging to the Jewish nation and the feeling of continuity of one's personal and extended family, even though this entailed a painful separation from family in Europe for them all.

Redemption of the Individual through the Redemption of the People

These voices, calling for finding personal, existential meaning in the Zionist enterprise, were heard from the members of the first generation of Zionism, despite the hardships and personal sacrifice that Zionism claimed from each and every one. Many felt that they had redeemed their souls from emptiness through immigrating to the land of Israel, joining in the task of building and protecting the land and helping others do the same. Sara Malchin, one of Degania Aleph's pioneers wrote of the moment she was requested to join the search for a plot of land for Jewish settlement to be purchased by Hakeren Hakayemet in the Jordan Valley:

It was a day filled with dreams and happiness. Here, between the mountains and the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), on the curving banks of the Jordan River whose waters flow with a pleasant murmur. In this place, replete with historical memories, where we were about to embark on a new life of freedom – here, on that very day, we forgot all the agony and hardships we had endured in exile and in our own land. Here we were healthy, strong and free. Oh! That we would have had a thousand Jews with us on that day! (SARA MALCHIN, **FIRST OF THE PIONEERS IN THE FIELDS OF ISRAEL**, P. 72 – 73).

David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel and the man who was courageous enough to declare its independence, explained as follows, his decision to make his home in Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev:

I never went to Sde Boker to become a symbol or role model for Israeli youth. I came here because I loved the place, I

loved the fellows who dared to build a settlement in the heart of the desert and I loved working the land and wanted, as long as my strength endured – to return to the task of working the land and making the desert bloom, which I view as the ultimate human calling. I did it for myself, for my own pleasure and with love. (EXCERPT FROM A LETTER TO YORAM PORAT, SDE BOKER, 13.01.1954)

Zionism and Alienation in Our Time

With the passage of time, living the Zionist dream became more difficult existentially and spiritually than in the days of creating the dream. Why is that? Some might say it is easier to preach than to practice what you preach. The cloak of Zionism, just as the cloak of the Torah, provided shelter for villains as well as righteous individuals, men and women who betrayed the public's trust and embezzled public funds while the common folk were risking their lives for the sake of their people and country. Mistakes were made, whether intentionally or not. Gathering in Jews from the four corners of the earth initially resulted, whether consciously or not, in undermining the worth and cultural heritage of immigrants from Muslim countries and remaining oblivious to the overwhelming pain of the Holocaust survivors. The desire to create "a new Jew" left women – half the Jewish people and equal partners in the Zionist enterprise – at the fringes of national memory and consciousness. A never-ending war, replete with difficult moral dilemmas, exists between us and the Palestinian people destined to share with us the land of Israel, and no end is in sight to this complex struggle. Zionism has become for many a cliché, an object of ridicule and in consequence, a source of cynicism and alienation. The personal experience, in which personal redemption is intertwined with national redemption, has eluded our grasp.

However, it is not only due to the difficulties involved in rebuilding an exiled nation upon its own ruins that we have lost the path to personal-national redemption. We have also witnessed the return of the demon of modern alienation in post-modern guise –gleaming, computerized, and virtual. Zionist education, which emphasized personal and national initiative, creativity, relinquishing comfort, mutually recognizing and attending to the unique qualities and needs of different Jewish groups, seeking compromises between different world views from a sense of community and aspiration towards unity – even among those who are not unified in their beliefs – has disappeared. Instead, the Marxist "discourse of rights" has returned, this time in its post-modern incarnation, saturated with grudges and "legitimate" hatred towards the oppressors. The "sons of light" are once again fighting the "sons of darkness", the enlightened against the fundamentalists, the Jews against the assimilators.

In the post-modern world, where everyone competes over carrying the banner of the oppressed, the Holocaust, rather than the resurrection of the Jewish people, became the cornerstone of Jewish existence in Zion. The scholars Isaiah Leibowitz z"l and Hanna Javlonka have critiqued the danger in an educational agenda which focuses on "that

which has been done to us" rather than on the manner by which we have earned and are still earning our independence, by taking responsibility for our own fate, before, in the midst of, and after the Holocaust. Conversely, in the argumentative discourse over the superiority of one's wretchedness there are no winners. That is why the spiritual philosophical strengths of Herzl, A. D. Gordon, Bialik, Ben Gurion, Henrietta Szold, Sara Malchin, Matilda Gez and many others are no longer extolled.

Why should we wonder that the youth of today hide behind television and computer screens, finding comfort in alcohol and drugs, seeking virtual love that is perfect and unattainable in a world whose values are fluid and fluctuating? In a world of amalgamation (globalization) there is no room for uniqueness. No room for the singularity of the complex relationship between man and woman, for the closeness between different generations within the family, or any singularity of vision in either the national or religious spheres. However, there is no identity without uniqueness.

With time, the claim of enlightenment has become, once more, hostile to the privilege and duty to assume responsibility for a unique, Jewish identity. From day to day, the position that advocates Jewish singularity becomes more defensive, threatened, and distanced from anyone who is unwilling to yield to its absolute authority. Simplistic arguments on the left reflect simplistic arguments on the right and in the absence of dialogue between divergent Jewish sectors which represent diverse world views, the grudge is intensified. Thus in terms of the internal consciousness of the Jewish people we are regressing to the time preceding the birth of Zionism: alienation from our Jewish culture and as a result, alienation from ourselves as a people and as sons and daughters of the Jewish nation.

How shall we instill in ourselves once more the idea that we are part of a large family, sharing a "*covenant of faith*", a term coined by Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik? How shall we resurrect the familial feeling whose loss was mourned by A. D. Gordon? Or the feeling of Shabbat that Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel sought to revive? Perhaps the first Mishna in the Peah Tractate indicates the way to shift our view from the television and computer screen, the shapers of consciousness and breeders of illusions and disperse the post-modern illusion of unlimited freedom:

These are the things that have no measure: the peah of the field, the first fruits, the appearance [at the Temple in Jerusalem on Pilgrimage Festivals], acts of kindness, and the study of the Torah.

These are things the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world,
while the principle remains for him in the World to Come:

Honoring father and mother, acts of kindness, and bringing peace between a man and his fellow.

But the study of Torah is equal to them all.

(PEAH 1:1)

Why have Hazal (Sages of blessed memory) determined the commandments enumerated in this Mishna as being without measure, i.e. as commandments which are considered fulfilled even if one abides by them to the smallest degree. And yet one should practice them to the greatest extent possible? This was first of all determined by the Halachic hermeneutic system of interpreting the Bible.

Nevertheless, I wish to suggest an additional interpretation: that the aforementioned commandments, those that “*have no measure*” and those which benefit a person in this world, may serve as a foundation for a national Jewish existence. The commandments that depend on the land: the peah (corner edge of the field), bringing the first fruits of the harvest and the appearance connect the people to the land of their birth, the land of Israel. The commandment of peah commits us to allot a permanent share of the revenues of our harvest to the poor.

But the lives of Jews in Israel depend on additional fundamental values that extend beyond this commandment. They are: respect for one's father and mother as the primary religious social core (in which is embedded the assumption of a society that instructs the parents to respect one another as well). Charity, which means assisting others with our body and not only our money; making peace between one person and another; and the study of Torah above all. When we transfer these commandments to Jewish life in the land of Israel in our time, it becomes apparent that they apply to all. The political and ideological barriers between us hold no power over them. It is possible to construct a Jewish society in Israel founded on these commandments imbued with mutual responsibility within the family and in society as a whole.

We should therefore strive to create neighborhood or regional societies which would combine Torah learning with Modern Hebrew culture and the stories of Jewish inner, spiritual strength, both recent and historical. These societies, in accordance with their study, would cultivate and encourage a sense of responsibility for others and for the environment, which is charity; and act to diminish the sense of alienation within family and neighborhood circles, which is making peace. From within these societies would arise an affinity between the diverse sectors of the Jewish people, without diminishing their unique qualities. And if you will it, it is no dream.

Park Avenue Synagogue

[HTTPS://PASYN.ORG/PRINT/RESOURCES/SERMONS/NEW-LIGHT-ZION](https://pasyn.org/print/resources/sermons/new-light-zion)

A New Light on Zion (October 2016, Rosh HaShana)

BY RABBI ELLIOT J. COSGROVE

In retrospect, I don't think any of us would have faulted him for keeping quiet. The year was 1916 and Louis Brandeis was nominated to be the first Jew on the Supreme Court. It would be a long and bruising confirmation battle. Was the country ready for this progressive and potentially polarizing figure, a Jew no less, to take a seat on the highest court in the land? Brandeis had not arrived at his Judaism until his fifties; in his own words: *"Throughout long years which represent my own life, I have been to a great extent separated from the Jews."* Perhaps it was a 1910 mediation with striking garment workers that prompted Brandeis to identify with his brethren of Eastern European origin for the first time. It could have been a chance meeting between Brandeis and the journalist Jacob de Haas, who regaled Brandeis with tales of his late Uncle Lewis Dembitz's Zionism. Maybe, some say, it was the influence of Aaron Aaronsohn, head of the Jewish Agricultural Experiment in Palestine, who planted the seeds of Palestine's promise in our rural-born Kentucky justice. The truth is, nobody, perhaps not even Brandeis, knew why he became a Zionist later in life. What we do know is that in August 1914, as the efforts of European Zionists were shut down due to the outbreak of World War I, and world Jewry turned to America for leadership, it was Louis Brandeis who was elected chair of the World Zionist Organization.

So when he was nominated and subsequently appointed to the Supreme Court in 1916, had Brandeis decided to focus solely on his judicial obligations and let his newfound parochial ties slacken, we would, I suppose, understand. What happened, we know, was just the opposite. Precisely one hundred years ago this coming year, owing to Brandeis's intervention, the Balfour Declaration came into being. In a story told most recently in a fabulous new book by Jeffrey Rosen, it was Brandeis who, by way of his influence on President Wilson and Lord Balfour himself, was able to secure the long-awaited dream of international sanction of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. *"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,"* the political cornerstone for what would become the modern State of Israel. **(LOUIS D. BRANDEIS: AMERICAN PROPHET, P. 165; PHILLIPA STRUM, LOUIS D. BRANDEIS: JUSTICE FOR THE PEOPLE, P. 273; L. STEIN, THE BALFOUR DECLARATION, PP. 427-8)**

Critical as Brandeis was to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, instrumental as his leadership was in rallying the men, money, and discipline to grow a national movement, it is Brandeis's ideological legacy to which American Zionism is forever indebted. Remember, to declare oneself a Zionist in those days was to be subject to the charge of dual loyalty. As Rosen explains, populist sentiment was suspicious of foreigners, and legislators sought to limit immigration, as a spirit of anti-hyphenated-identity pervaded our country. To the non-Jewish community, but more importantly, to the Jewish community, Brandeis articulated a vision whereby one could be both an American and Zionist. *"Let no American,"* he declared in 1915, *"imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with patriotism. . . . Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will*

ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so." The most important thing about these words is that they were spoken to a room of American rabbis. Brandeis was the Sandy Koufax of his day – no Jew or non-Jew could touch his stature – and here he was telling American Jewish leaders not only that they could, but that they must, support the nascent State of Israel. Brandeis is the father of American Zionism not because of the Balfour declaration and not because of his fundraising skills. Brandeis is the father of American Zionism, because one hundred years ago he championed the revolutionary and countercultural idea that every American Jew become a Zionist without necessarily making *aliyah*, emigrating to Israel. Brandeis sought to facilitate a rapprochement between competing sectors of American Jewry, the young and the old, the established American Jewish leadership and the Eastern European immigrants. He understood the loyalties that stood in conflict, he understood the tension embedded in American Jewry, and he articulated a compelling vision whereby one's Zionism and patriotism were not only not mutually exclusive, but were interdependent one upon the other. *"To be good Americans,"* Brandeis insisted, *"we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists."* The force of Brandeis's persona, the force of his ideas, the competing loyalties he bridged, all led to the birth of the movement we call American Zionism.

This Rosh Hashanah it is 100 years later, not just the birthday of the world, but the centennial of American Zionism. On the one hand, we could say, the more things change, the more they stay the same. A contentious presidential election, a protracted battle over a Jewish Supreme Court nominee, a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, and a bubbling cauldron of world conflict with concomitant debates on US military intervention. We would not be wrong to reflect on a peculiar feeling of *déjà vu*. And yet, we know that for American Jewry, for Israel, and for the all-important relationship between the two, we live in an era that our predecessors could not have imagined possible. The establishment of the Jewish State, the affluence, ease and assimilation of American Jewry, be it measured in Jewish Supreme Court justices, Nobel laureates or tech titans - American Jewry punches way above its weight. Just last week, both presidential candidates met with the Israeli Prime Minister, meetings that were as unremarkable to us as they would have been inconceivable to Brandeis. And while the scar of the Shoah is a wound from which our people will never recover, nor ever forget – we are, without question, living in an era of unprecedented blessing. The playing field is very different that it was 100 years ago. So as we gather for our annual check-in, as we come together on Rosh Hashanah, on this, the 100th anniversary of American Zionism, let's ask the questions of the hour. Where are we? How did we get here? And most importantly: where shall we go from here?

The challenge that Brandeis faced and was able to reconcile – that patriotism was entirely compatible with Zionism – was a challenge of a bygone era. By the time Brandeis passed away in 1941, American Jewry faced a new question, how to support American war efforts while finding refuge for a persecuted European Jewry. A few years later, with the establishment of Israel in 1948, American Jewry was, on the one hand, jubilant in the return of Jewish sovereignty and self-determination, but also disoriented in the realization

that they had, by making the choice not to emigrate, somehow sidestepped the arc of Jewish history. It is worth noting that the campus bearing Brandeis's name was established in that same year – 1948 – as if to assert that American Jewry was here, and here to stay. The golden age, if you will, for American Zionism came in the sixties and seventies. Whether it was the Six-Day or the Yom Kippur War, Entebbe or Munich, triumph or terror, the combination of fear and pride prompted American Jewry to respond with unprecedented support – political, philanthropic, and in terms of emigration to Israel, personal.

Students of American Jewry differ as to when the turning point occurred. When exactly did the Golden Age end, ambivalence creep in, and occasional criticism replace unequivocal support? Some say, it was the Lebanon War, others the first intifada a few years later, and some suggest it was even earlier, in the wake of the Six-Day War, when Israel chose not to heed the advice of Ben-Gurion, who, upon hearing of the IDF's capture of Hebron, reportedly said, *"Well done, now give it back to them."* Some, to be sure, say it wasn't Israel that changed, but American Jewry, that as we began to assimilate, it was a weakened and wavering American Jewry that began to criticize the Jewish state. Regardless of the start date and who started it, what is clear is that at some point we entered a new chapter in our relationship. Long gone were the days when Israel could claim the role of powerless victim, the David to the Arab world's Goliath. No longer was Israel the young, scrappy, and hungry place of milk, honey, and moral purity depicted in Leon Uris's **EXODUS**. Yet again, American Zionism would face a test of competing loyalties. Not those of Brandeis's day: patriotism vs. Zionism; not those of 1948: emigration or not; but a new conflict – a conflict inconceivable to our predecessors – that if not named, discussed openly, and, most of all, addressed, will imperil the critical bond between the two vital centers of world Jewry today.

So what is the conflict facing American Jewry today? The late, great Leonard Fein once wrote:

There are two kinds of Jews in the world. There is the kind of Jew who detests war and violence, who believes that fighting is not *'the Jewish way,'* who willingly accepts that Jews have their own and higher standards of behavior. And not just that we have them, but that those standards are our lifeblood, are what we are about. And there is the kind of Jew who thinks we have been passive long enough, who is convinced that it is time for us to strike back at our enemies, to reject once and for all the role of victim, who willingly accepts that Jews cannot afford to depend on favors, that we must be tough and strong.

"And the trouble is," Fein concludes, *"most of us are both kinds of Jew."* (MOMENT, SEPT. 1982)

Fein wrote these words in 1982 with the backdrop of the first Lebanon War just prior to the horrific bloodshed of the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, an incident that would eventually prompt the resignation of then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Fein's reflection draws out what was, and I believe remains, the fundamental tension American Jewry faces regarding Israel, and that is the competing loyalty between our particularism and universalism, or as the sociologist Steven M. Cohen writes, our protective and prophetic impulses. Our tension is not that of dual loyalty, nor, for most American Jews, the question of emigration. Rather it is the simple but inexorable fact that as American Jews, each one of us is two kinds of Jew, heirs to two laudable and sometimes conflicting traditions of particularism and universalism.

First, our particularism. To be a Jew means to be a member of a distinct family, a *mishpachah*, and as such our first concern is necessarily directed toward the well-being of that *mishpachah*, protecting the Jewish past, present and future – from generation to generation, which in the case of Zionism means the safety and security of our brothers and sisters living in Israel. In the temporal shadow of the Shoah, in the actual shadow of Iran, in the face of suicide bombs, indiscriminate knife attacks, Palestinian intransigence, corruption and celebration of terror, in a world of anti-Semitism, anti-normalization, ISIS, Holocaust denial, BDS, and de-legitimization of Israel in the Middle East, Europe, UN and college campuses, is it at all curious that the Jewish people should be "shields up" and put Israel first? In a world where the resolutions attacking Israel as "racist" or "apartheid" emanate from those people and places who stand guilty of their own colossal abuses of human rights, why would we pay heed to such hypocrisy? Would any other sovereign nation, we rhetorically and rightfully ask, respond with Israel's restraint and military code of ethics, when its own citizenry is subjected to indiscriminate attacks? In such a world, what kind of Jew would do anything other than put our particular concerns for Israel as our pre-eminent if not sole loyalty?

But to be a Jew also means a commitment to a prophetic tradition and a series of universal values, namely, putting the welfare of humanity at the forefront of our concerns. American Jewry has a historic commitment to civil rights and civil liberties, *tikkun olam*, and a host of progressive causes. How exactly do we square the circle of the dream of Israel as a liberal democracy while bearing witness to the growth of settlements and asphyxiation of the two-state solution? Those of us excited to celebrate the centennial of the Balfour declaration are surely aware of its second clause, the one stating that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," a promise affirmed in Israel's founding declaration. To see the checkpoints, the disparity of resources, the communal and familial dislocations wrought by the security barrier is to witness a breach in the very universal values we are taught as Americans, as Jews, and as American Jews. With every piece of legislation in which Israel declares itself hostile to religious pluralism, hostile to the Judaism we practice

here in the States and here in this synagogue, is it at all curious that American Jews should find themselves increasingly alienated from the Jewish state?

I am trying, mind you, not to pick sides. What I am trying to do is explain where we are and how we got here. Far too many people far too often brush the struggle aside, claiming it is just a generational gap - whether you were born before or after 1967, AIPAC or J Street, **NEW YORK TIMES** or **WALL STREET JOURNAL**, or – my favorite – a willfully blind devotee of Israel or a willfully ignorant self-hating Jew. Such divisions, however, are not only intellectually false, but they diminish the complexity of our moment and misrepresent our tradition. We are heirs to two authentic traditions, protective and prophetic. As Hillel taught: *“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, then what am I?”* Yes, we are here for the Jewish New Year, but it is the creation of universal humanity that we are celebrating. Of course we read of the birth of our patriarch Isaac, but we also read of God's care for the other, Hagar, whose name literally means “the stranger.” The universal and the particular: both are of our deepest concern. Both sides have a point, both rooted in Jewish sources. I am reminded of the story of the married couple who came to the rabbi to resolve their differences. The rabbi listened to the husband and said, *“My son, you are right.”* He then listened to the wife, and said, *“My daughter, you are right.”* Overhearing the conversation, the rabbi's wife questioned, *“How can they both be right?”* To which the rabbi replied, *“My dear, you are also right!”* This is not about who is right and who is wrong, we are both kinds of Jew, both of us are right – in Hebrew, *sh'neinu tzodkim* – and that is precisely the point and the problem. American Jews are blessed and burdened with two identities and Israel is the Rorschach test that brings it all to the fore.

I think of the ADL, the Anti-Defamation League, the senior statesman of American Jewry, committed both to civil rights, and to combating anti-Semitism and the de-legitimization of Israel. Just a few weeks ago, over the course of twenty-four hours, the ADL issued three different statements. The first applauded the US-Israel aid package. The second denounced BDS. The third, significantly, chastised the Israeli Prime Minister for equating Palestinian aspirations for sovereignty with ethnic cleansing. This is the ADL, the big boy of American Jewry, all tangled up in the question of whether its focus should be on the defense of Israel or its critique.

I think of a committee on which I serve at the AJC, the American Jewish Committee, which, like the ADL, is a premier Jewish advocacy organization. The committee is called the Jewish Religious Equality Commission (JREC), and it seeks to break the stranglehold of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate on matters of personal status. With one sermon to give each week, I wonder, shall I use those precious minutes to defend Israel against its enemies or to decry Israel's scorn of that which is most dear to me – my Judaism and the Jewish community I serve?

I think of our college kids. Taught from birth to treat the stranger with kindness because we too were once strangers in a strange land. Taught to love Israel and defend her, and hopefully by way of a Birthright trip to Israel get even more engaged. Then, we send them

off to campus where Israel is subjected to such a barrage of criticism that they are effectively told that their love for Israel is in conflict with every other progressive value they and their contemporaries hold dear.

I think of my own children who have been to Israel more times than they can count, have family there, and one day want to live there. This summer my eleven-year-old son asked me without any prompting:

"Hey Dad, you know the Israeli national anthem – Hatikvah – that line about the two-thousand-year hope to be a free nation in our land?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Well," Jed continued, *"how do Israeli-Arabs feel when they sing it?"*

It was a terrifying and gorgeous moment. My kid was doing exactly what I always hoped for: loving and defending Israel, but thinking of the other, the stranger in our midst. And because my child was doing everything right, a conflict of values was set into motion.

I could give a million examples, but they all point to the same conundrum: an American Jewry caught between the switches, caught between its universalism and particularism. Which is why, today, on this Rosh Hashanah, I want to challenge you. Left or right, young or old, AIPAC or J Street, I want to challenge you. We came to synagogue not to hear how the world is, but how it ought to be. So let us leave the safe space behind and enter into the brave space where we define the conversation we want to have. One hundred years after Brandeis and Balfour, fifty years after the Six-Day War, twenty-five years after the Madrid Peace Conference, let's draft the next chapter of American Jewry's relationship with Israel. Today, on this Rosh Hashanah, let's call for the birth of a New American Zionism.

First and foremost, we need an American Zionism that begins with love for the Jewish people, a Zionism that teaches our children and grandchildren the story of our exile, the pitfalls of powerlessness, the dreams of every wave and every stage of our national longings and our right to the land. American Jewry has become woefully ahistorical, and we need a Marshall Plan to rebuild our deficit of memory, because you can't love a country that you know only by way of CNN. By my count, Park Avenue Synagogue already has two trips to Israel this year, and in the hours to come we will announce a third trip next spring on the occasion of fifty years since the Six-Day War. As long as I am rabbi, we will go at least once a year. We need formal, informal, and most importantly, experiential curriculum; our children should be in dialogue with Israeli children, by way of technology, exchange programs, sister congregations, any means available. Every Bar and Bat Mitzvah should be given a trip to Israel, underwritten if need be. We need a full time *shaliach*, an Israel educator, on staff, a Yom HaAtzma'ut celebration that is the talk of the town, and a redoubling of our efforts on Hebrew language, because that is our bridge to each other, to our past and to our future. We need to do more, we need to do it better, and we need to be all in.

Next, we need an American Zionism with a dose of humility. The Middle East is not the Upper East Side, and the democratically elected government of Israel has every right to make decisions in the best interest of Israel even when they run contrary to our sensibilities. Israel lives in a very rough neighborhood, and the community of nations holds Israel to a nasty double standard that is often, but not always, laced with explicit or implicit anti-Semitism. Lest we forget, Abraham was called *Ha-Ivri*, meaning "the other," because he stood alone when the rest of the world stood on the other side. There is nothing wrong, in fact there is everything right, with standing at Israel's side, even when, and sometimes especially when, it makes decisions we ourselves would not make. We dare not be the proverbial football player who takes a knee because we object to this or that policy. Given the choice of defending a sovereign and imperfect Israel or enjoying the moral purity of exiled victimhood, I would choose the former over the latter any day, and so should you. In school, on campus, on Capitol Hill, the coming generation of American Zionists must be given the tools to be resilient, self-confident, and adroit defenders of the real, not imagined, Jewish state.

But for the coming chapter of American Zionism to ring authentic and stand the test of time, we must also be willing and able to integrate the other, universal and prophetic dimension of American Jewry. If the project of Zionism, as Martin Buber once reflected, is the Jewish use of power as tempered by morality, then it is a project that sometimes Israel gets right and sometimes Israel gets wrong. If the dream of Israel is to serve as a homeland for all Jews and all forms of Jewish expression, then we must confront the bitter truth that that very dream is threatened by the government of the Jewish state. If on this year's coming anniversary of the Six-Day War, Israel's challenge remains how to remain a liberal democracy without sacrificing its security concerns, then we dare not stand idly by as that dream slips away. There is nothing wrong with helping, chiding, or goading Israel towards these goals as long as that nudging comes from a place of abiding concern for Israel's safety and security. We dare not let the ideological, philanthropic, and social media extremes define the field of play and terms of the debate. If you don't live in Israel but want to effectuate change there, then do it systemically. Support religious pluralism, support the Conservative/Masorti movement, support efforts aimed at Arab-Jewish co-existence and dialogue, and support those efforts aimed at creating a two-state solution. Those of us in this room, we who live between the forty-yard lines, have a unique role to play in shaping of the coming chapter of American Zionism. With the stakes as high as they are, the sane center must speak with passion and with volume, we must protect each other from the ideologues on the extremes, we must rally the men, women, money, and discipline for a cause that is just and above all else, we must let the Jewish world know that we are all in this together.

Finally, the coming chapter of American Zionism needs to understand that American Zionism is not a substitute for American Judaism. The problem with the golden age of American Zionism was that for far too many Jews, support for Israel became a vicarious faith, a civil religion masking the inadequacies of our actual religion. The only way Israel will learn from, listen to, or care about American Jews is if American Jews show themselves to be living energetic Jewish lives. We dare not pin our angst over Jewish continuity on

the politics of Israel. A robust American Jewish identity can weather policy differences with this or that Israeli government and withstand the slings and arrows of campus culture – something a paper-thin Jewish identity cannot do. One hundred years ago, Brandeis asserted that to be better Jews, we must become Zionists. Today, we know that to be good Zionists, we must be better Jews. If you are interested, really interested, in the future of American Jewry's relationship with Israel, then make sure in the year ahead you do that one thing truly in your power to do: live a vibrant Jewish life. Build up your own Jewish identity and that of your children and grandchildren, and do everything in your power to support those individuals and institutions committed to nurturing and sustaining the American Jewish community.

With the passing of Shimon Peres last week, the Jewish people lost a great leader. In his eulogy, Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke of the differences between them, reflecting on one late night conversation in particular:

"From Israel's perspective," Netanyahu asked Peres, "What is paramount: bitahon, security, or shalom, peace?"

Shimon replied *"Bibi, peace is the true security. If there will be peace, there will be security."*

Bibi responded, *"Shimon, in the Middle East, security is essential for achieving peace and for maintaining it."*

The debate intensified, the two men argued, one from the left, the other from the right, one the prophet of peace and the other the protector of Israel, until like two worn-out prize fighters, they put down their gloves. So who was right? With the passage of time, Netanyahu reflected on their exchange, concluding *sh'neinu tzodkim*, *"we are both right."* Though their politics differed, Netanyahu explained, no one camp has a monopoly on truth, and their views stemmed from a shared and principled commitment to Israel's future. In Netanyahu's words: *"...The goal is to ensure our national existence and co-existence. To promote progress, prosperity and peace – for us, for the nations of the region, and for our Palestinian neighbors."*

Friends, our politics as American Jews, no different than in Israel, may indeed differ. And no differently than Israelis themselves, let us acknowledge that conflicted as our souls may be – universal and particular, prophetic and protective – deep down, *sh'neinu tzodkim*, we are both right: we are both kinds of Jew. This is no concession; it is actually our strength. It is the starting point for drafting the next chapter of American Zionism, and it is the seed that bears the promise of our future.

Or hadash al tziyon ta-ir, v'nizkeh kulano m'heirah l'oro. "Cause a new light to shine on Zion, and may we all soon share a portion of its radiance." May this year and the years ahead be radiant ones, for us, for Israel, and the shared bond between us.

[HTTPS://PASYN.ORG/RESOURCES/SERMONS/WHAT-WE-TALK-ABOUT-WHEN-WE-TALK-ABOUT-ISRAEL](https://pasyn.org/resources/sermons/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-israel)

What We Talk about When We Talk about Israel (May 2019)

BY RABBI ELLIOT J. COSGROVE

Sometimes, the things we talk about are not really what we are talking about. It could be mundane: a spouse, let's say, neglects to unload the dishwasher. The ensuing argument is not just about the dishes, but about the division of household responsibilities, or about assumptions regarding gender, or maybe even about one spouse's unspoken struggle with professional direction. The point is not that the dishwasher argument doesn't exist – the dishes are not imagined. The point, as taught in Pastoral Counseling 101, is that our hypothetical couple would do well to also address the unspoken issues lurking beneath the surface.

And what is true for our households is also true for much bigger conversations. Political debates regarding tax policy are not just about balancing budgets; they are about wealth distribution, fighting poverty, or racial justice. The Reagan-era debates over military funding were not just about defense spending; they were about whether our country had learned the lessons of Vietnam. Arguments about our president are not just about one individual; they are about the values, mission, and direction of our country.

The same thesis holds for the Jewish community. The story of the half-Israelite blasphemer thrown out of the Israelite camp at the end of our Torah reading is not just about heterodox views; it is about whether the Israelites were willing to countenance individuals of heterogenous origins. You may recall Nathan Englander's short story "WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT ANNE FRANK" – where the main characters speculate who among their non-Jewish friends would hide them in the event of a second Holocaust – a short story bringing into relief a host of unspoken Jewish insecurities about living in a non-Jewish world.

My favorite example is the subject about which I wrote my doctoral thesis. The great Jewish debates of the 1950s and '60s revolved around the subject of revelation – the question of *Torah mi-sinai* – whether the Torah is or isn't divine. Magazine articles were written, books published, movements formed, rabbis hired and fired – all questioning whether God did or didn't write the Torah. Given that the substance of these debates – biblical criticism, Darwin, etc. – had been around for centuries, it is fair to ask why Jews were litigating the issue yet again. My answer was that the issue of revelation was code for other transformations: a generation of Jews entering universities, Jewish engagement with Protestant biblical theology, the rise of Evangelicism, and so much more. But most of all, the debates reflected a shell-shocked post-Holocaust Jewry grappling with that which, in Will Herberg's words, "*brought man to the brink of the abyss.*" These Jews weren't just arguing over whether God did or didn't write the Torah. These Jews were arguing over "*Where was God in Auschwitz?*" and can we still believe in that God? No different than any other person or people, Jews spend much time talking about one thing when they are really talking about different and sometimes deeper things.

These days, Jews are no longer debating "*Who wrote the Bible?*" or whether the Exodus did or did not happen. Nor, for that matter, are we discussing whether we should or

shouldn't drive to synagogue on Shabbat or other such debates of yesteryear. Today, our conversations and arguments revolve around one subject, one place, one word: Israel. Israel is what brings us together and tears us apart. We advocate to keep Israel and our relationship with Israel strong, we are anxiety-ridden at signs of the relationship withering. We fear for our children's experience with BDS on campus, and we hope that they sign up for Birthright. The labels that define our tribes are no longer about belief or Jewish observance: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist. They are about our views on Israel: AIPAC, JStreet, and the rest of the alphabet soup of the Jewish world.

Across the spectrum, who you are as a Jew is measured by way of your perceived proximity to Israel, often with unseemly results. A Jew openly critical of Israel is labeled a self-hating Jew; a Jew who is supportive of the Israeli government is labeled a colonialist oppressor. We call for vigilance against those on the left trafficking in anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic tropes, as well as against populist nationalists on the right oddly aligned with a strong Israel. I could go on, but the point is one and the same. We talk a whole lot about Israel – a strange state of affairs given that we do not live there, vote there, pay taxes, or serve in Israel's military. We are not Israeli citizens. And yet Israel has become the organizing principle, the civil religion, and sometimes, the actual religion of American Jewry. Years from now, when some industrious doctoral student writes a thesis on the present-day North American Jewish community, it will be the debates over Israel, more than any other topic, that will be shown to be the dominant issue of our era.

Let's put my theory to a test. If, when we talk about Israel, we are actually talking about something else, what is that something else we are talking about? In other words, if Israel is the Rorschach test for contemporary American Jewry – revealing our hopes, fears, foibles, and fissures – what are those conversations that we are not having, that we need to have, that sit beneath the surface.

First and foremost, to live in the presence of the State of Israel, but not in Israel, reminds us of the choice we in this room have made not only of where we live, but of how to define our Jewish lives. When we talk about Israel, we are not just talking about Israel; we are talking about a Jewish community that defines its existence in a manner fundamentally different than we do. Israeli Jews are defined by physical borders and national identity. American Jewry is defined by religious borders: the communities we join, the practices we observe, and who we marry. Their border incursions come from Lebanon and Gaza, ours from intermarriage. At eighteen, our children go off to campus to engage in liberal arts and universal values. At eighteen, their children go off to serve in the army and defend a nation. American Jewish identity is a matter of choice and volition; Israeli identity is a matter of necessity and self-preservation. As Golda Meir explained to Joe Biden in the nervous hours before the Yom Kippur war: *"Don't worry, we have a secret weapon against the Arabs: We have no place to go."* Israelis don't have a place to go; American Jews do – they can assimilate. I am not judging here, simply noting the emergence of two different Jewish communities, animated by different concerns, contexts, and senses of mission. For American Jews to talk about Israel (or, for that matter, Israeli Jews to talk about American Jewry – a sermon for another day)

is to put up a lens or more precisely, a mirror, to our own Jewish identities, bringing our strengths, weaknesses, and reality to the fore.

Second, I think our arguments over Israel are not about Israel but about Jewish power. For two thousand years, the Jewish story has been one of exile and second-class citizenship, thus explaining our people's historic alliance with progressive politics and the plight of the needy and oppressed. And now, lo and behold, there is a Jewish state in possession of great power. Jewish sovereignty is cause for celebration; we have certainly paid the price for its historic absence. And yet, American Jews squirm when we see that power used in ways that we think contradicts the liberal Torah upon which we have been raised. There may have been a time when the idealized Ari Ben Canaan/kibbutznik image of Israel sat comfortably alongside the liberal politics of American Jewry, but that time has long passed. Politically, religiously, and militarily, Israel has shifted right, understandably prioritizing its own self-preservation, even as North American Jewry continues its liberal universalist lean. Like two siblings born of the same household who meet years later to find they have very little to say to each other, so too North American and Israeli Jewry. Again, my aim is not to point fingers; this is not about right or wrong. It is simply to point out that when American Jewry calls foul over the chief rabbinate or the squandering of the two-state solution or the chipping away of Israel as a democracy, it is about those things, but it is not *just* about those things. It is about our effort to sort out what it means to have a relationship with a Jewish state that is perceived to be increasingly at odds with the very values at the core of our own Jewish self-understanding. It is a state of affairs made more awkward by the current bromance between a populist-leaning Israeli prime minister and a pro-Israel American president, concurrent to the co-opting of the Palestinian cause by the American left. There is less and less breathing room for the would-be progressive Jews and Zionists. Discussions on Israel have become proxy for the question of whether a Jew can be concerned with our self-preservation and shared humanity, particularism, and universalism all at the same time.

Third, I think we American Jews talk about Israel because doing so displaces the real elephant in the room, the thing we should be talking about but are not, and that is our Judaism. At some point, for far too many Jews, support for Israel became a substitute for Judaism. It is easier to write a check than it is to keep yourself and your children home on Friday night to light Shabbat candles. We are more willing to take a day off work for an AIPAC conference than we would for Shavuot. We are more at home discussing the relative merits of the Iran deal and what grades of plutonium can be weaponized than we are opening a siddur. And if it were just the case that our Israel engagement was some sort of compensatory act for a paper-thin American Jewish identity, that would be wake-up call enough. But it is far worse. The name calling, the self-destructive take-down politics of American Jewry – from the right and the left – reflects the fact it is easier to call someone out on their position on Israel than it is to come face to face with the at-risk Jewish identity of your children and grandchildren. Nine times out of ten, the people who write me nasty emails on the subject of Israel (from both sides) are not the ones in shul, on committees, and supportive of the synagogue. Were those individuals to spend less

time picking people off and more time building Jewish identity; less of their resources supporting the extremes of the Israel debate and more making Jewish day school, camp, and synagogue life affordable; less time forwarding emails and more time forwarding Torah; not only would American Jewry be in better shape, but our relationship with Israel would be as well. Why do American Jews talk about Israel so much? Because we would rather do that than turn the lens on the endangered condition of our own Judaism.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me be clear about what I am and am not saying. I am not suggesting for a second that American Jewry should not be engaged with Israel. As I have said from this pulpit many times: to be an American Jew and not be engaged with Israel is to abdicate the present-day demands of Jewish identity. We all need to support the work of Israel advocacy to the degree we are able. I am also not saying that the problems facing our relationship with Israel are imagined. The dishwasher still needs to be unloaded. I remain deeply concerned with matters of religious pluralism in Israel, with the future of Israeli democracy, the fate of the two-state solution, all the more so with the soon-to-be-released American peace plan. These are real conversations and arguments, not imagined. My point is simply to give voice to the fact that these conversations are not *just* about Israel. They are about us, and we do ourselves, Israel, and our relationship a disservice to brush that fact under the rug. Like any relationship in need of continuing care, we need to pause and consider the relationship in its fullness, to see the forest apart from the trees, and separate the symptoms from the underlying condition.

Seventy-one years ago this month the State of Israel was founded. It is the most public manifestation of Jewish identity in our time, representing our collective hopes and dreams even as it is just doing its level best to figure itself out. We share a history and peoplehood, even as we choose not to exercise the option to live there. Our souls and destiny are bound together, even as we realize we are not them and they are not us. There is a lot of there there, and a lot still left to unpack. Maybe that is the best gift we can give our relationship with Israel this year: less name-calling and more dialogue, more effort to understand and be understood. In other words, to talk about what we really need to talk about. It's not everything, but it is something, and frankly, the relationship is just too important to have it any other way.

Zionist Organization of America

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[HTTPS://WWW.AMEINU.NET/BLOG/PERSONAL-STORIES-OF-ZIONISM-ISRAEL-AND-PROGRESSIVE-IDENTITY/AN-IMPENETRABLE-WALL-BETWEEN-PROGRESSIVISM-AND-ZIONISM/](https://www.ameinu.net/blog/personal-stories-of-zionism-israel-and-progressive-identity/an-impenetrable-wall-between-progressivism-and-zionism/)

An Impenetrable Wall between Progressivism and Zionism? (Aug. 2017)

BY CHERYL GORDON

I am an American Jew, a New Yorker, and a student at the University of Michigan. As a Jew, I feel a connection to the land where the Jewish people trace their roots; to

ancestors who lived in the land we now call Israel as far back as the Bible records Jewish history. Unfortunately, I find that my peers at school are quick to forget Israel's history as a small state constantly threatened by hostile neighbors. They are quick to forget that our people were refugees too, and were exiled from our land twice (586 BCE, returned, exiled again in 70 CE, returned again). For me, Zionism is about love for Israel. It is about acknowledging and respecting the Jewish people's history, looking ahead to our future, and taking the Zionist movement with us, encouraging it to evolve as the world changes and confronts new challenges.

Contrary to the complex and nuanced definition I find so dear, when the term "Zionism" is mentioned in conversation with my peers, it is a controversial word often invoked with ignorance and hate. What solely comes to their minds is the Occupation, the violence perpetrated against Palestinian civilians, including children, and examples of the unlawful taking of Palestinian land, which have been promoted or sanctioned by various establishment groups and Israeli governments for years.

I feel that the message I receive from my community on campus is that *if you're a liberal, you have to put your liberal values in a box, or on hold, if you're a Zionist*, because Israelis are being unfair and most certainly violating basic human rights of Palestinians. The way that young, social justice oriented leftists talk about Zionism creates in my mind an impenetrable wall between progressives and Zionists. However, I believe that I don't need to give up any of my liberal views to be considered a legitimate supporter of Israel. I also don't have to give up Zionism to be committed to liberal causes and justice.

I spent the last semester studying abroad in southern France. I was there for the election of Emmanuel Macron, who emerged as France's newest president after a nail-biting election, in which immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment were prominent themes.

Macron recently issued a statement where he said: *"Anti-Zionism is the new Anti-Semitism."*

I feel proud that the French people elected a candidate like Macron: Someone who does more than acknowledge France's role in the Holocaust, more than apologize, but shows real concern for what is going on today.

As someone who is both compassionate and committed to learning, the mistreatment of Palestinians by Israelis motivates me to match the example Macron set. In Macron's speech he was not oversimplifying Zionism, but was at the same time standing up for vulnerable peoples. I encourage everyone to look to that as an ideal of someone who *seeks knowledge, is concerned, and open-minded*.

Living and learning on a liberal campus like Michigan, full of bright, social justice-oriented students, is stimulating and inspiring. Nevertheless, I have heard and read many statements by UM students and others that reveal the validity of Macron's take on anti-Zionism being the new anti-Semitism.

In 2015, following a terror attack by an armed Palestinian man that killed three Israelis, I was disturbed to walk past a Palestinian student group demonstration in the Diag on the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus, where many student groups raise awareness for their causes. This group set up a large mock border checkpoint. This wall was adorned with glorified images of Palestinian violence, and slogans calling for the destruction of Israel. I became even more disturbed while I watched concerned students approach the demonstration only to learn at surface level about a complex history from a one-sided perspective.

Another upsetting scandal occurred this year at the Chicago Dyke March, where participants with a Jewish gay pride flag were kicked out. So much for intersectionality.

I connect these two scandals at the Chicago Dyke March and the display on Michigan's campus as just two examples of presenting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in grossly oversimplified terms, black and white, victim and perpetrator. Where is the solidarity here? The dialogue? The importance here is to learn about difficult subjects and be open to others. If you wall yourself off from ugly realities that "your side" or your people are doing, you are ultimately engaging in the same kind of ignorance that your opponents are doing. *Zionists need to confront reality in Palestine. By and large, we're not.*

I have spent my summer interning for Ameinu, which means "Our People" in Hebrew. At Ameinu, we are liberal Zionists supporting a progressive Israel, an Israel where Palestinians and Jews can co-exist in peace and respect each other's rights.

Ameinu fundraises for and publicizes many great causes that are much more effective than BDS. I endorse a two state solution. Instead of hurting the Palestinian economy I believe in building up a stable Palestinian state. The BDS movement boycotts various cultural events and academic exchanges, which is contrary to principles of freedom of expression, free exchanges of ideas, and discourages engaging with one another.

Take issue with Zionism as you will. But first, as with any issue, learn. Follow Macron's example of thoughtfulness and empathy in speech. Read about Zionism. Speak about Zionism. Engage with Zionists. We at Ameinu are citizens of the world. We are citizens working for peace and justice. We live by Jewish values and try every day to make our world a more peaceful and just place.

[HTTPS://WWW.AMEINU.NET/BLOG/LETTERS-FROM-LEADERSHIP/DEFENDING-THE-Z-WORD-PEACE-AS-ZIONISMS-ULTIMATE-VICTORY/](https://www.ameinu.net/blog/letters-from-leadership/defending-the-z-word-peace-as-zionisms-ultimate-victory/)

Defending the 'Z' Word: Peace as Zionism's Ultimate Victory (Sept. 2015)

BY RALPH SELIGER

We have recoiled in horror and disgust over recent events in Israel and the occupied territories, in which Jewish terrorists caused the deaths from burns of a Palestinian infant and his father, and an ultra-religious fanatic took the life of a young Jewish girl at a Gay Pride parade. Sadly, these crimes, with the backdrop of decades of human rights abuses

and wrongdoing in the name of Israel and Zionism, have caused many to earnestly question the meaning and validity of Zionism.

In 1997, one of several times I participated in a World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem (probably three, but I've lost count), I had halfheartedly hoped that the World Zionist Organization would emulate the putative suggestion of an old United States Senator George Aiken (R-Vermont) regarding Vietnam, that "victory" be declared and that we "go home" — that the WZO finally declare its purpose done, on the centennial of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, and close up shop. So I have some "post-Zionist" sympathies, but from the perspective of Zionism as a positive historical force for the Jewish people.

In fact, I have long seen Israel's peace camp as struggling for the ultimate Zionist goal, to "normalize" Israel's circumstances by finalizing its acceptance in the Middle East as a legitimate neighbor, and thereby helping to normalize and stabilize the status of Jews around the world. The rocky and violent road that has tragically not achieved this end (due to a complex of misdeeds and errors of judgment on both sides) has led to a renewal of assaults on Israeli/ Zionist legitimacy. Yet the Z word covers too broad a sweep of virtues and sins to dismiss or extol as one undifferentiated phenomenon.

I recall being at a meeting of the World Union of Meretz, ten or more years ago, where we were addressed by the writer A.B. Yehoshua. He defined Zionism as a "common platform" rather than a single ideology.

By way of contrast, anti-Zionists like to define the pre-state bi-national strains within the Zionist movement (as represented by the likes of Buber, Einstein, Arendt, Magnes, Hashomer Hatzair) as other than Zionist. For example, Fred Jerome (a former leader of the neo-Stalinist Progressive Labor Party) even wrote a preposterous book a few years ago, claiming that Einstein was not a Zionist — maybe a "cultural Zionist," but not a "real" Zionist.

Even Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the father of Revisionist or right-wing Zionism, had a liberal side, which we hear today in the voice of Israel's current president Reuven Rivlin. We don't know how Jabotinsky would have impacted Israel and its right-wing factions if he had lived beyond 1940; in 1995, I reviewed **THE LAND BEYOND PROMISE: ISRAEL, LIKUD AND THE ZIONIST DREAM** (revised in 2002) by British scholar Colin Shindler, in which he indicated that Jabotinsky regarded Menachem Begin as a hothead. And I know that Hillel Kook (aka Peter Bergson of the Bergson Group), along with his colleague, Jabotinsky's son Eri Jabotinsky, both left Begin's Herut party as sitting Members of Knesset, because they felt that it was not promoting Jabotinsky's belief in equal rights for Israel's Arab citizens.

When Herzl wrote his pamphlet, **THE JEWISH STATE**, in 1896, he was addressing the crowned heads and elected leaders of the imperial powers of Europe at that time, desperately attempting to win support for the Jewish colonization of Palestine. And so he wrote in terms we'd never use today, of Jewish Palestine as "*an outpost of civilization against barbarism.*" Anti-Zionists have pounced on this and other selected quotes from Herzl and other Zionist leaders to "prove" their "racist," "colonialist," "imperialist" or otherwise odious intentions.

Herzl's true agenda, however, was humanitarian rather than hateful: a mass escape of Jews from what he prophetically knew would become a cauldron of Jew-hatred. He was a Central European 19th century liberal with socialist leanings, who wrote in terms that were common to that time and place, and not with phrases that we would consider acceptable today; to sharply condemn him for being a product of his time is to commit the analytic fallacy known as "presentism." We also do Herzl a disservice in forgetting the storyline of his futuristic utopian novel, **OLD-NEW LAND**, in which an anti-Arab nationalist political party is defeated in an election by genuine liberals advocating equal Arab and Jewish rights of citizenship.

Hence, I only entertain "post-Zionist" ideas that do not repudiate Israel's Zionist past; rather I wish to see some reforms to secure Israel's place among the nations as a beacon of democratic values — safeguarding the rights of its non-Jewish citizens, while still being recognized as the ancient Jewish homeland, with a hallowed link to Jews around the world. It's hard to see how this will happen currently, given the present political constellation, but Israel still has much more of a liberal and democratic base to build upon than any of its Arab neighbors, who have made such a tragic hash of the Arab Spring. I know that one doesn't relate directly to the other, nor excuse wrongdoing in Israel, but one wishes that Israel's most vehement critics and foes would temper their barbs with regional comparisons.

Finally, I feel a moral obligation to defend the fact that my kin, who have been Israeli for four generations, have the right to live there in peace and security as Jews and Israelis. They owe their very lives to the success of Zionism. If we retire the Z word, let's do so because it's fulfilled this noble purpose of rescue, not because our political foes on the right and the left have infused this term with meanings and purposes we deplore.

[HTTPS://WWW.AMEINU.NET/BLOG/JEWISH-IDENTITY/WHAT-IS-ZIONISM-A-PROGRESSIVE-VISION-ABRIDGED/](https://www.ameinu.net/blog/jewish-identity/what-is-zionism-a-progressive-vision-abridged/)

What Is Zionism? A Progressive Vision (Abridged) (May 2012)

"You shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with justice." [ISAIAH I: 26-27](#)

Zionism involves the belief that Israel has a right to exist as a democratic Jewish state. It is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. Zionism, like any form of nationalism, has found expression on the left, right and center of the political spectrum. All Zionists share the common denominator of commitment to the existence and flourishing of a democratic Jewish state called Israel.

Progressive Zionism is best expressed by three whose life and work reflect the balance of universal and particular, the love of Israel and the Jewish people, and the love of peace and justice, common to the Biblical prophets, representing authentic Jewish values: Theodor Herzl, Ahad Ha'am, and Israel's former Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak. Each embodies dimensions of progressive Zionism. To be sure, each expresses progressive Zionism in different degrees and imperfectly.

Contemporary progressive Zionism draws on the enlightened outlook of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism. It was Herzl who urged in **OLD-NEW LAND** (1902), *"Hold fast to the things that have made us great: to liberality, tolerance, love of mankind. Only then is Zion truly Zion."* Herzl foresaw a Jewish state in which Jews and Arabs enjoyed full equality as citizens. Progressive Zionism entails both a love for the Jewish people, a passion for its well-being, and a commitment to justice, equality, human rights—cosmopolitan values with deep sources in Jewish tradition—and for their embodiment in a liberal democracy. *"For Herzl the fortunes of Zionism and those of European liberalism were intertwined,"* wrote Jacques Kornberg in the introduction to the English translation of Herzl's novelistic vision of Jewish nationalism realized. **"OLD-NEW LAND was a... blue-print for a liberal New Society in Palestine."**

Progressive Zionists fight for Arab-Israeli peace and a more equalitarian society in Israel out of a recognition that a just and well-crafted political solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the larger Arab-Israeli dispute, will enhance Israel's security, fortifying it economically, politically and socially. And we struggle to realize these ideals because they are at the core of our moral vision as Zionists. In our Zionism there is no contradiction between our belief in the justice of a state which embodies Jewish culture and symbols in its public life, reflecting the heritage and needs of the Jewish people, and our embrace of universal moral values.

Ahad Ha'am and the Zionism of Justice

Ahad Ha'am (which means "one of the people"), the pen name of Asher Ginsburg, founded what is known as Cultural Zionism, the idea that Jews should come together in the historic Land of Israel so that they can cooperatively build what will become the common cultural center of the Jewish people throughout the world, forming a collective space that is Jewish. Herzl and Ahad Ha'am represented two contrasting approaches to Zionism in their day, the one focusing on state-building, the other on creating a Jewish cultural and spiritual center in the Land of Israel for all Jews everywhere, reviving Hebrew and the moral core of Judaism. But their ideas can be united, particularly now that political Zionism has achieved its primary goal of establishing a Jewish state. Ahad Ha'am sought to establish not only *"a state of the Jews,"* which he saw as Herzl's goal, but a "Jewish state" animated by Jewish spiritual and moral values.

For Ahad Ha'am, Jewish national aspirations can only be realized *"while maintaining respect for the feelings and rights of the region's Arabs."* Jews, cautioned Ahad Ha'am, *"should not forget that for the Arabs too, Palestine was a national home."* Indeed, in a famous essay titled *"Truth from the Land of Israel,"* written from Jerusalem in 1891, *"he was the first Zionist...to raise the question of the Arabs"* of Palestine. He made the *"call for a decent treatment of Palestine's Arabs"* essential not only to the resurrection of Zion and the Zionist enterprise, but to the future of Judaism itself, which was to become *"the civic religion of a future Israel,"* notes Jewish historian Stephen J. Zipperstein.

Ahad Ha'am stresses that following the universal principle of love and respect for the other does not commit the Jew to self-abnegation—or what might be called today, self-hatred or self-denial. On the contrary, because it commands the Jew to love himself, and to love others no less, it obligates him to fulfill his individual and national identity to the fullest extent that is consistent with the demands of justice. The same idea is expressed in Rabbi Hillel's maxim, from PIRKE AVOT, *"If I am not for myself, what am I for; but if I am only for myself, what am I?"*

Ahad Ha'am also maintained that the most fundamental principle of Jewish ethics—*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (LEVITICUS 19:18)—does not teach us to love our neighbor *more* than ourselves, but as much:

The true meaning of the verse is: 'Self-love must not be allowed to incline the scale on the side of your own advantage; love your neighbor as yourself, and then justice will necessarily decide, and you will do nothing to your neighbor that you would consider a wrong if it were done to yourself'... Judaism cannot accept the altruistic principle; it cannot put 'other' in the center of the circle, because that place belongs to justice, which knows no distinction between 'self' and 'other.'"

It was Ahad Ha'am who spoke of the relationship between Jewish nationalism and Jewish ethics, both of which comprise our Zionism, in an essay called "THE CHARACTER OF JUDAISM":

The Jewish law of justice is not confined within the narrow sphere of individual relations. In its Jewish sense the precept *'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'* can be carried out by a whole nation in its dealings with other nations. For this precept does not oblige a nation to sacrifice its life or its position for the benefit of other nations. It is, on the contrary, the duty of every nation, as of every individual human being, to live and to develop to the utmost limit of its powers; but at the same time it must recognize the right of other nations to fulfill the like duty without let or hindrance. Patriotism—that is, national egoism—must not induce it to disregard justice, and to seek self-fulfillment through the destruction of other nations.

Zionism comes in many flavors. One approach stresses Jewish national self-aggrandizement at the expense of the Jewish commitment to equality, justice and liberal values. The other Zionism balances our duties to ourselves and our own nation with our universal commitments, in the belief that one can love and give preference in special ways to one's own people while also promoting equality, justice and respect for all, Jew and non-Jew alike, in Israel. One such preference is for Israel's Jewish public culture, expressing the historical memory and national identity of its Jewish majority; another is the Law of Return which allows any Jew the right to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen. Our pursuit of peace and justice arises not only from our embrace of biblically-inspired moral imperatives, but from our own self-interest as a Jewish nation and people: our well-

being and security mandates that we strive to live with our Arab neighbors in peace and justice, helping Israel and our fellow Jews there to work towards just and peaceful relations with them.

While Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, our liberation is impossible without the concomitant flourishing of Palestinian political and cultural life in a state living at peace next to Israel, whose people should be treated with full respect and equality when they are citizens of Israel.

Israel as a Democratic Jewish State: Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak

Israel's **DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**, "*anticipated and boldly confronted the possible tension between the Law of Return and the principle of equality,*" between Israel's pursuit of the Jewish national project and its commitment to equal citizenship for Jews and Arabs alike, embracing both in the same paragraph:

The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

"In other words, the nation's founders saw no inherent contradiction between the exigencies of creating a Jewish state, the values of the prophets, and international principles of human rights," the **JERUSALEM POST** reminded its readers.

Former Israel Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak explains that Israel's

declaration of independence called to '*the children of the Arab nation living in the Land of Israel to keep the peace and take part in the building of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship.*' Zionism was not based on discrimination against non-Jews, but on their integration into the Jewish national home. Zionism was born as a response against discrimination and racism. Certainly the values of the State of Israel as a democratic state stand opposed to discrimination and demand equality. Indeed, the democratic state is obliged to honor the basic rights of every individual in the state to equality, and to protect them. But equality is a complex

right. Treating individuals in a different manner does not always imply treating them in a discriminatory manner, and nor does treating individuals in an identical manner automatically imply treating them in an equal manner.

"The claim is heard," continues Barak,

that this application of the principle of equality between Jews and Arabs spells the end of Zionism, or that it embodies a post-Zionist attitude. Nothing could be further from the truth. Zionism is not based on discrimination between Jews and Arabs. That is not how the declaration of independence saw it when it called on 'the children of the Arab nation who live in the State of Israel to keep the peace and assume their share in the building of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship'; that is not how the founding fathers, Theodor Herzl, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, David Ben-Gurion and others, saw it when they repeatedly emphasized that the Jewish state was a state in which full equality between Jews and Arabs would prevail; that is not how the Supreme Court saw it from its earliest days, when it repeatedly emphasized equality between citizens of the state on the basis of religion, race and gender. Of course, the principle of equality itself, by its essence, permits — in cases where circumstances require it — differing but non-discriminatory treatment among equals, such that it is permissible to infringe on equality under certain defined conditions.

"The values of Judaism and democracy have broad jurisprudential importance in Israel," Barak writes.

They have constitutional status, influencing both the determination of the extent of human rights and the protection accorded them in Israeli jurisprudence. The phrase '*the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state*' entered into Israeli law in 1992 with the enactment of two Basic Laws governing,

respectively, freedom of occupation and human dignity and freedom. The Basic Laws, 11 in total, serve as the *de facto* constitution of Israel. Israel's Jewish and democratic values are accorded suprallegal-constitutional status and serve as a legal yardstick by which to measure the applicability of the Basic Laws.

"Only a national home built on foundations of equality and respect for the individual can endure over time," concludes Israel's former Chief Justice. *"Only a state that relates in an equal manner to all its children can win acceptance in the society of freedom-loving nations. Only a society based on principles of equality can live in peace with itself."*

"There is no contradiction between striving to grant the Arabs equality as required by law and decency and the fulfillment of Zionism," remarked Israel's Attorney General (and now Supreme Court Justice) Elyakim Rubinstein, an Orthodox Jew. *"Whoever wants to preserve Israel as a democratic and Jewish state must strive to grant equality to the Arabs."* *"Israel is the state of the Jewish people,"* notes former Israeli Justice Minister Dan Meridor, *"but because it is a Jewish state, it must not practice against its non-Jewish citizens the kind of discrimination to which Jews were subjected in the diaspora."* Our Israel is both a Jewish and a liberal democratic state, and liberal democracy requires equality among all citizens, Jewish or Palestinian, in the domestic public sphere where the government acts, when it provides education, allocates budget and land, regulates employment, assesses taxes, and imposes the duty on citizens to serve the state through national service.

For progressive Zionism, realizing equality for all Israel's citizens by no means compromises Israel's unique character as a Jewish nation-state. Israel can remain the guardian of the interests of the Jewish people and be a well-spring of its cultural and religious renewal, as Aharon Barak has continued to urge:

In a speech entitled *'THE STATE OF ISRAEL AS A JEWISH AND DEMOCRATIC STATE,'* Barak outlined the characteristics that make Israel a Jewish state. *'It is a state to which every Jew has a right to immigrate and in which the ingathering of exiles is a basic value,'* said Barak.

...a state whose history is intermixed and enmeshed with the history of the Jewish people, whose language is Hebrew, and whose holidays reflect the Jewish heritage. A Jewish state is a state where Jewish settlement in the countryside, cities and rural settlements is the prime concern...a state which preserves the memory of the Jews who were

slaughtered in the Holocaust...A Jewish state is a state which encourages Jewish culture and education and love for the Jewish people.

A Jewish state is the realization of the hope of generations for the redemption of Israel. A Jewish state is a state whose values are the freedom, justice, honesty and peace which are part of the Jewish heritage. A Jewish state is a state whose values include those which emanate from the religious tradition. The Bible is the most fundamental of its books, and the prophets are the foundation of its morality...a state in which Jewish law has an important function...where the values of the Bible, the values of Jewish heritage and the values of the Halacha make up part of the fundamental values.'

False Dilemmas: A Jewish Democratic State AND a State of All Citizens

Aharon Barak's is our Zionism. For progressive Zionism, there is no contradiction between Israel as a democratic Jewish state and Israel as a state of its citizens. Speaking of the Law of Return, Israel's ties with the Jewish Diaspora, and the maintenance of a Jewish majority, political scientist Alan Dowty has noted that *"None of these features is inherently inconsistent with liberal democracy, and none of them are in fact unique to Israel. There are at least two dozen ethnic democracies in the world (among several dozen ethnic states), and a large number of states grant citizenship on the basis of ethnic identity or descent."*

Adds Israeli constitutional law scholar Ruth Gavison:

The Jewishness of Israel is, first and foremost, the recognition of the fact that Israel is the state in which the Jewish people exercises its right to national self-determination. Many of the world's democracies, old and new, have a distinct culture analogous to Israel's Jewish culture. The constitutions of most European countries reveal that they are nation-states in this sense. These states celebrate their distinct histories, languages, identities, and emblems. Many of their citizens do not share this nationality. But so long as the rights of these citizens are not denied, and so long as they can participate fully in the political and civil life of their societies, we do not deny the democratic nature of the state.

There is no clash between Israel's remaining a haven for persecuted Jews, or inviting free Jewish immigration under the Law of Return, and its becoming fully a state of all its citizens. Critics on the ultra-nationalist right, like their radical post-Zionist antipodes—purists who rail against the very fact of Jewish power rather than its unjust application—would impale Israel on one or the other horn of a false dilemma.

Right-wing Zionists like Yoram Hazony, in his flawed volume **THE JEWISH STATE: THE STRUGGLE FOR ISRAEL'S SOUL**, seem tone deaf to the imperative of fulfilling the promise of equal citizenship for the Arabs of Israel, as codified in its **DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**. If Hazony is genuinely troubled by the Palestinization of Israel's Arab community, and the prospect that Palestinian national identity will translate into a secessionist movement, why does he consistently fail to champion large-scale efforts to remove the stain of social and material privation from its Arab population? Does he seriously expect a minority long discriminated against by the state in land allocation, housing, education, job opportunity, urban development, economic support, and basic social services will display undying fealty?

He who seeks the abiding loyalty of this community should praise the first steps at fuller inclusion which Israel has taken, including the elevation of an Arab judge to Israel's Supreme Court, the participation of Arab Knesset Members in the Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee, rising government budget allocations for Arab municipalities under Labor during some of the Oslo years, Supreme Court rulings affirming equality for Arabs in the allocation of land, and encourage other far more dramatic steps.

Because Hazony has failed to face this ineluctable problem, he cannot accomplish the task he has set himself: refurbishing the idea of the Jewish state. *"There is no way of resolving the ongoing debate on the relationship between 'Jewish' and 'Israeli' without first resolving the question of the relation between the Israeli Jew and the Israeli Arab, the question of 'who is an Israeli,'"* notes David Grossman sagely in **SLEEPING ON A WIRE: CONVERSATIONS WITH PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL**, a chronicle which remains required reading for anyone hoping to rededicate the Jewish state with lasting oil, without relying on miracles.

By dismissing the Oslo peace process as the child of post-Zionist flight from the image of a Jewish nation-state—as if most of its supporters were not in fact Zionists seeking to fulfill the Zionist dream—Hazony displays a tin ear for equal citizenship, equal respect for all, as the true source of the struggle for Israeli-Palestinian peace. If West Bank and Gaza Palestinians cannot enjoy such equal status as Israeli citizens, a result neither side wishes, they must be afforded the chance to secure it in their own polity in the territory where they reside.

Jews form the majority in Israel's national society, and so they represent the prevailing culture, just as in the peaceful Palestinian state which as Zionists we are committed to help realize, Palestinian Arabs will form the majority, and a Palestinian culture, infused by the Islamic values of the largely Muslim population, will reflect the dominant culture of Muslim Palestinians in that area. The draft constitution of the future state of Palestine defines it as a Muslim Arab state, while guaranteeing relative freedom of religion, and equal civil and political rights to all Palestinian citizens. And just as Israel gives preference to Jews wishing to emigrate to it, under the Law of Return, so the state of Palestine will have a Palestinian Law of Return, which gives preference to Palestinians, especially Palestinian refugees, to emigrate into the new state. Both states, Israel and Palestine, will ultimately contain minorities, and in both the minorities must be treated with full equality

before the law. The education systems and public cultures of both societies should promote equal respect in the public and private interaction of all people with one another.

Our Zionism strives to forge a common civic post-national culture which both Jews and Palestinian Arabs can share equally in the Jewish state of Israel, and in relations between Israel and the state of Palestine. With Herzl, Ahad Ha'am and Aharon Barak, it understands the moral limits of the national thread in Zionism, recognizing the imperative of a cooperative, common identity to complement—not replace—the national identity inherent in Zionism. And because, on our Zionism, both states should seek to develop such a common civic egalitarian public culture to complement the particularistic aspects of their national cultures, they will draw from their own cultures in the articulation of that common public culture to be shared by Jews and Arabs in Palestine-Israel. Our Zionism sees not only two states, living in peace side by side, it sees the Palestinian citizens of Israel enjoying full equality legally, economically and socially in a Jewish republic, as it does Jews, Christians and other minorities eventually living in full equality with Muslim Palestinians in a Palestinian Arab republic in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the Jewish republic, Israel, Palestinian citizens should have equal civic responsibilities and enjoy equal civic benefits. Equal civic duties means national service for all citizens, including eventually, when conditions permit, service for all Israeli citizens in the Israel Defense Forces, which will, with the full realization of our Zionism, no longer face a neighboring Arab army with which it is likely to be at war. A number of prominent Knesset members have proposed even now instituting national service for all citizens of Israel, Jewish and Arab, under which all citizens would perform work benefiting the public. Non-Jewish citizens of Israel who cannot serve in the Israel Defense Forces due to current security conditions would perform non-military civic service instead.

Progressive Zionism works assiduously to attenuate armed national conflict and to establish a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. Our struggle for peace will also help remove the main obstacle to equal civic duties and benefits for Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians—the ongoing national conflict. Indeed, we can and must work to reduce these obstacles to fuller equality between Jews and Arabs in Israeli society even now as part of our larger mission to seek peace and justice.

The iCenter

[HTTPS://WWW.THEICENTER.ORG/PRESS/RIGHT-TIME-ISRAEL](https://www.theicenter.org/press/right-time-israel)

The Right Time for Israel

BY DAN BROSGOL

Have you ever wondered or asked how old your kids should be when they go to Israel for the first time?

My answer? *“Are they alive? Then bring them.”* And while that might be a tad overstated, it's not dramatically so. If you are fortunate enough to be able to bring your children, do it. If you are able to send them on a trip with their peers, do it. If you can encourage them to do Birthright, do it. It is literally always the right time for your children to go.

When I am trying to convince parents to send their teens to Israel, one of the more colorful and persuasive arguments is that the trip will absolutely result in some kind of transformation. Perhaps they'll come back with an interest in learning Hebrew. Maybe they'll start following Israeli basketball or pay more attention to the news. There's a chance they'll want to be more religiously observant. At the very least, they'll return with a broader perspective on their Jewish selves, and at the other side of the spectrum it could very well impact the choices, both Jewish and not, that they make for the rest of their lives.

No matter how you slice it, there's a huge “there, there” about Israel, and that comes across in all of the data and research on the impact of Israel travel on U.S. Jews' Jewish identities. The long-term research on Birthright Israel shows that the short, intense duration of an Israel trip has far-ranging impact on Jewish identity even 10 or 15 years after the fact – data that has baffled researchers, since other travel experiences do not have a similar impact.

Why? There are many factors, but Abraham Joshua Heschel summed it up nicely in “ISRAEL: AN ECHO OF ETERNITY”:

“The land is different. Those who built it and those who worship in it inspire it. It is an inspired land. Just to be in the land is a religious experience. It is a land where time transcends space, where space is a dimension of time.”

While it's one thing to read and reflect on those words, it's another to think about them as they relate to my own children and our family.

Over the past several years, I was fortunate to be able to bring each of my sons to Israel on a trip I was leading. Those experiences were incredibly meaningful for them both. I remember the awe with which they beheld the Western Wall; the love they felt from my friends whom they met and whose children they played with; and the immediate claim they placed on Maccabi Haifa soccer fandom (not a wise choice in retrospect). They fell in love right away with the country and made annual demands to come back with me. It's hard to quantify exactly what clicked for them, but in the words of my now-11-but-then-8-year-old from 2014, *“This trip is so amazing, it's like a dream.”* What else is there to say?

A year-and-a-half ago, the stars aligned and we were able to bring all five of the children to Israel on a family trip, which featured the bar mitzvah of my first-born son. That trip, those 10 days over the course of our family's life, were without a doubt the most consequential days we have ever had together.

For my two boys, who had been twice before, it was a chance for them to share their passion for Israel with their sisters and their mother. They were proud to be experts in the sculpture garden at the Israel Museum; lead the way through the grottos at Rosh Hanikra; eager to return to the famed tables of Burgus Burgers Bar; and excited to go the Grand Kenyon in Haifa again.

For the girls, the magic was real. By the evening of our second day, they were buzzing around trying out Hebrew words. I had somehow transitioned from "Daddy" to "Aba"; that is still my default title, along with "Abi," some little girl approximation of aba sheli or avi that I am totally fine with. When we hit the camel ride on Day 3 and the Masada/Dead Sea twofer later that day, Israel had sealed the deal with all of them. Everything was magical, everything was shining, and you could see dots being connected between our family's Judaism at home and what we were doing in Israel.

Later on in the trip, the bar mitzvah and a lovely Shabbat in Zichron Yaakov iced the proto-Zionist cake, with a little help from blended iced limonana, chocolate croissants, breezy and lazy lunches on the Carmel, and the soft sands of Caesarea. Certainly none of us wanted to leave, and with even more certainty, all the kids make daily requests to return. With bar mitzvah Number 2 on tap in about one year, well, that might be the answer right there.

So no, don't wait. Go now, go again, go as soon as you can, and bring or send your kids to Israel at every opportunity. Sure, you can wait for Birthright, and there are compelling reasons to do so, but if you can swing it, bringing your family to Israel will be the best money you ever spend.

Trust me, it costs way less than your average bar mitzvah in the States.

[HTTPS://WWW.THEICENTER.ORG/VOICE/WHAT-ACTUALLY-HAPPENED-WHEN-ISRAELI-INDEPENDENCE-WAS-DECLARED](https://www.theicenter.org/voice/what-actually-happened-when-israeli-independence-was-declared)

What Actually Happened When Israeli Independence Was Declared?

THE LATE ARIEH HANDLER WAS THE ONLY BRITISH CITIZEN IN THE ROOM WHEN ISRAELI INDEPENDENCE WAS DECLARED. **THE JEWISH CHRONICLE**'S COLIN SCHNDLER SPOKE TO HIM IN 1998

You were a Pre-War Bnei Akiva founder in London. When did you go to israel?

After my wife discovered that her father had perished in Auschwitz, the family went from London to Palestine in May 1947. I was still engaged in Zionist work in London at that time as director of Bnei-Akiva-Bachad and youth Aliyah. I stayed behind because I was heavily engaged in getting people out of DP (displaced persons) camps and taking them — legally and illegally — to Palestine.

We felt a great responsibility to the people in the DP camps. We could not let them sit any longer in such difficult conditions after everything that they had been through. The survivors had to be given a chance to control their own lives.

There was such despondency. They waited for visas for Palestine or England or South America, but all the time they lived in the shadow of what had happened to their

parents, their relatives — and almost to themselves. They believed that nothing was going to happen.

So how was the decision made?

The council of the provisional government voted 6-4 in favour of declaring a state. Ben-Gurion and Sharett of Mapai, Aharon Tziling and Mordechai Bentov of Mapam, Moshe Shapira of Hapoel Hamizrahi and Peretz Bernstein of the General Zionists were in favour. Eliezer Kaplan and David Remez of Mapai, Pinhas Rozenblueth-Rozen of the Progressives and Behor Shitrit of the Sephardi party were against.

Ze'ev Sharef, the secretary of the political department of the Jewish Agency, was told to organise invitations for the declaration at the Tel Aviv museum, literally the day before. No one knew if it would actually take place.

What happened on the day of the declaration?

I received an invitation on that Friday morning, 14 May, by motorbike. It requested us not to divulge the contents and the locations. We were told to be in our seats by 3.30 that afternoon in "dark festive attire". It was signed "the Secretariat". Even the name of the state had not been decided. It could have been Judea, Ivriya — we just didn't know.

What about the text of the declaration?

The wording of the declaration had been fought over for some time before. Sharett redrafted the original document in a beautiful but highly detailed Hebrew. Ben-Gurion shortened and simplified Sharett's declaration.

The religious — and many others — wanted a reference to "Almighty God". Ideological secularists like Aharon Tziling from Ein Harod, a kibbutznik, did not want any mention of God. Then came this beautiful compromise which only Jews can put together. They decided to include the phrase tsur Yisrael — "the Rock of Israel". The religious understood tsur as 'God' while the secularists believed that it was simply that — a rock.

Was there uncertainty at this late stage?

Even a few hours before the actual signing, we still did not know whether it would take place. There was tremendous pressure from London on [US President Harry] Truman.

Even some in the council were unsure whether to proceed with the declaration — everyone wanted a state but it was a question of timing. Even Moshe Shapira, who was moderate in all things, asked if it really mattered if we waited another 24 or 48 hours.

Ben-Gurion gave three reasons for an immediate signing.

First, the British formally withdrew from Palestine at lunchtime on that Friday. This would leave a power vacuum. Who would have the final authority amongst the Jews?

Secondly, he argued that the British could easily change their mind and call another meeting of the United Nations, which would delay things perhaps for months. There could be all sorts of changes. How and where and who? He said that we could not wait for this.

Thirdly, he said that at present the Soviets, the Latin Americans and others were in agreement but tomorrow there might be a totally different political constellation. Where would we be then?

What happened at the actual ceremony?

I arrived at 3.30. By 3.45 we were all sitting down. In addition to the intended signatories, there were visitors, journalists and the Tel Aviv Philharmonic Orchestra. Then there was a few minutes of music. At four o'clock on the dot, without any kochmas, Ben-Gurion then stood up. We were all shaking. Without any introduction, no nice words, he read the declaration of independence. He asked the members of the council of the provisional government to come forth and sign it. No discussion, no dissent.

One by one, they stood up. Then Hatikvah. People got up and we were out of the museum at ten to five. For me, it was the greatest moment of my life. Although we were all moved, no one lived in a fool's paradise. No one knew what was going to happen. We had a little neshek (arms), but we knew that the situation was extremely dangerous.

What took place then?

I went with Rav Fishman and his friends to the Malon Talpiot, a small kosher hotel in Rehov Ahad Ha'am. We drank a little l'haim and then each one of us returned home. I went back to my family to get ready for shul, for kabbalat Shabbat. There was an atmosphere of both joy and fear at the same time.

When I returned from shul, the Egyptian planes were already over Tel Aviv and dropping their bombs. This strange experience continued throughout the entire evening, up to midnight. On the one hand, people were singing and dancing and the other, north Tel Aviv was being bombed.

And the opponents?

The Revisionists called us traitors. They believed that if we didn't get it all now, we would get nothing. Yitzhak Tabenkin of Ahdut Ha'avodah had a similar view — but from the left.

The Charedim were not supportive even after what had happened during the Shoah. Before the war they discouraged Jews from going on aliyah, [saying] better to remain in Lublin.

After the war, a majority of the Charedim did not respond to Ben-Gurion's call for a state — although a few were positive towards us. Even Lubavitch began to change a little from their former position of "anti-Zionism".

Many Charedim said that the time for the state would come with the arrival of the meshiah. Even so, Yitzhak Meir Levin, a Gerer hasid, signed the Declaration of Independence for the Agudah and became a member of the government.

If it had not been for the inner strength of Ben Gurion and supported by such people as Rav Fishman who were relatively moderate — he supported Ben-Gurion on the question of partition — there would have been no state. They said that if it was impossible to get everything then we should be satisfied with what we can get.

Keep Dreaming: Zionism. Think Again.

BY DAVID BREAKSTONE

"Stop referring to us as Diaspora Jews," a leading Israel educator living overseas admonished us. "That's not how we see ourselves.

We're Jews living in North America, like you are Jews living in Israel."

"It's not the same," replied an Israeli.

"Calling where you live 'the Diaspora' isn't a put-down; it's simply an expression of the special place that the Land of Israel has always held in Jewish tradition.

If Israel is our homeland then there has to be terminology that distinguishes between where I live and where you live that is different from the way in which we distinguish between Jewish life in Canada and Argentina. Otherwise we're denying the unique claim that the land of our forebears has on us.

Or the claim that we have on it. How can you explain to your students, never mind to the rest of the world, why we have any right whatsoever to this sliver of territory if you don't believe our relationship to it is unlike our relationship to any other country where Jews live?" The ancient debate between the Jews of the Land of Israel and those of Babylonia revived. Is Israel at the center of Jewish life or just another place where Jews live? Is *"Next year in Jerusalem"* a promise or a prayer? Does peoplehood, territory or Torah define what we are all about? A few of these questions were raised at a recent conference on Israel education in Chicago that brought together some 90 educators from Israel and North America, comprising both veteran practitioners and a younger generation of graduate students and educational entrepreneurs.

Organized by the World Zionist Organization and the iCenter (a hub of Israel education in North America) and sponsored by Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs and the Kelman Center for Jewish Education of Tel Aviv University, the purpose of the gathering was to initiate a far-reaching dialogue on the role of Israel in the development of Jewish identity. And to challenge one another to think anew about the relationship between us and between Israel and Jews around the world.

"I don't see Israel as the state of the Jewish people today," ventures one of the young Americans. "Israel doesn't want me. It won't let me practice the kind of Judaism I believe in," she explained, referring to a series of unpleasant experiences she had as a Reform Jew during an extended period of study in Jerusalem. Then a moment of hesitation. "It's not that I don't love Israel," she continues, "it's just that it's easier for me to love it from a distance."

"The ultimate love-hate relationship," interjects one of the next-generation Israelis. *"It's not simple for me either."*

Because I care so much, I'm really bothered by all the things that are wrong with the society. That's why I've gotten involved the way I have. And why I need you to be involved too. The genuine pluralism you have here, we need to figure out how to make it work back home."

"You guys are amazing," remarks one of the older participants, referring to the impressive array of initiatives undertaken by the accomplished delegation of Israeli 20- and 30-somethings. *"You're so involved. Do you represent your generation or are you the exception?"* The Israelis exchange glances for a moment, not sure what to say.

"Not everyone cares," one of them finally volunteers.

"Of course not," says another, *"but more and more of our peers are stepping out and saying this is not the society we want and finding ways to fix it."*

"It's called Zionism," says one of their peers, without hesitation. *"A commitment to building something special. It's not just about supporting a Jewish state or even about loving the country, but a dedication to really turning it into a light unto the nations."*

THE SAME idealism surfaced in another encounter. The young Israelis are asked what concerns they wake up with in the morning. Separately, the North Americans are asked what they think the Israelis will say. The Israelis talked about social and economic challenges.

The North Americans were surprised; they were sure their counterparts would say "security."

"I always think of Israel as a place that needs to be defended," explains one of them. *"It's hard for me to imagine you aren't preoccupied with the physical threats you are facing."*

"Sure, there's always the tension," explains one of the Israeli participants,

but it's kind of more like background noise. I'd love to be able to get rid of it, to think that my kids might actually grow up without it. In the meantime, though, I'm not going to let my enemies dictate my agenda. There are things I can do something about and things that I can't. And that's what we need to teach towards: engaging young Jews in shaping Israeli society.

Still, the question hovers in the air.

"Is that Zionism or social activism? Is what you are doing in Israel any different than what I am doing here? Why get stuck on the terminology?" One answer comes in the form of a reflection on the conversation offered by an educator who just returned to Israel after an extended sojourn abroad. *"It was an interesting experience, starting to use the 'Z-word' again after many years of abstinence. I am a Zionist. Yes, I will use the word. Just like I am a feminist. Those words are important. They imply a commitment to some ideologically based values.*

And I believe in them. There is something about the term 'Zionism' rather than 'pro-Israel' that also implies an active, ongoing co-creation of the Jewish State, that I personally want to be involved with. But," she continued, *"that is the personal stuff. As an educator, I have to ask other questions, about whether the word 'Zionism' is helpful to us in reaching our broader educational goals. And that is where I am not sure. But at the very least I am certainly challenged, for the first time in years, to think again."*

Thinking again is always a good idea.

For those of us living in Israel, it is important that we ask "why" from time to time. If we can't understand it ourselves, we can't expect to be able to explain it to others. Is it because we believe Israel is central to Jewish life, or because it is comfortable here? If the latter, should it become uncomfortable, does that mean we get up and leave? Or are we here for some higher purpose? In which case we had better be able to explain that as well.

Or maybe it is because we believe Israel must exist, we feel the obligation to ensure that existence and consider being here the ultimate way of doing that.

Judaism, after all, has always been about fulfilling obligations. Then we'd best be able to explain why Israel needs to exist to those who are no longer so sure, and how fulfilling obligations can also be self-fulfilling in an age when self-fulfillment is generally about "me" and not about the collective.

For those living abroad, there are other questions. If Israel is not the center, why do I care any more about it than I do about any other Jewish community around the world? Why am I drawn to it? Why am I bothered by criticism of it? Why do I feel pride in every Israeli achievement and shame in each of its missteps? Is my love for Israel conditional? Will I count myself among its supporters only if I can abide its government and its policies? Or is there something deeper? Am I an outside observer, judging from afar, or an active stakeholder, somehow responsible for what transpires across the ocean? Is my connection to the land, the state or the people of Israel? For one of the young participants, the answers are less important than the conversation itself. *"I've been involved in bringing Israelis and American Jews together before, but I never could*

really articulate why,” she says at the end of the conference. “Now I know. This is the first time in my life I feel complete. This is my calling.”

I think what she's saying is that as long as we keep talking, we are one. In which case, the gathering will have served its purpose.

Center for Israel Education

[HTTPS://ISRAELED.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2015/03/LECHA.PDF](https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/lecha.pdf)

Lech Lecha

BY PROFESSOR KEN STEIN, RABBI ELLEN NEMHAUSER, AND CIE STAFF

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ צָרָה וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבְּיֶת אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר לְךָ: GENESIS 12:1 And Adonai said to Abram, go forth from your country, from your birthplace, and your father's home to the land that I will show you.

This week's portion, like most Torah portions, draws its name from the opening words. Lech Lecha, “go forth,” is the well-known phrase spoken by G-d to Abram, the founder of Judaism and first to dwell in the Land of Israel (then Canaan) in response to a Divine directive and promise.

Yet a careful reading of the text raises some questions. Abram is to leave his father's house. But, the text also says that Abram is to leave his birthplace, and, according to the previous chapter, Abram has already left his birthplace, that of Ur. His father, Terach, it is reported, has already set out for Canaan with Abram and his wife Sarai [later Sarah]. As it happens, they stop along the way, and settle in Haran. So, why was Terach, Abram's father, heading to Canaan? And, why are most Jewish people taught that Abram (later Abraham) was the first to be motivated to go to Canaan, rather than learning that this was originally the destination for Abram's father? Rabbinic interpretations attempt to reconcile the sequence of events and the departures by the two generations. Terach left for Canaan with his young family in order to pursue a better way of life than that available in Ur. Abraham left Haran because G-d called him to do so. The father was motivated by the hope of greater prosperity and his son by religious conviction and faith.

Much like our biblical ancestors, Jews who set out for the Land of Israel prior to and since the establishment of the modern state were motivated by many goals. Some respond to religious convictions; secular-oriented Jews seek to actualize their Zionist beliefs, others seek a physical connection to history and tradition, to live in their ancestral homeland, and be part of modern Zionism.

In the decades preceding 1948, the Zionist vision to create a Jewish homeland in Israel took center stage. Whether spurred by a desire to be a part of a new Jewish life that promised nationhood and self-determination or fleeing for their lives from hostile environments, thousands of Jews immigrated from all over the world. In July 1950, Israel granted any Jew who wished to immigrate to Israel the right to do so, as expressed in the

Law of Return, published in **SEFER HACHUKKIM (BOOK OF LAWS)** No. 51, P. 159. Since then, the Knesset has approved two amendments to the Law of Return. The first, added in 1954, detailed persons barred from immigration due to a proven criminal record. The second amendment, accepted in 1970, granted rights to the families and spouses of Jews who wished to immigrate.

What has motivated people to move to Israel in recent years? And, what is the status of aliyah today? Unlike previous generations, North Americans, Australians, and those residing in Western Europe do not live in environments that are overtly hostile to Jews, where they are denied basic rights or persecuted.

Immigration trends vary depending on global politics and Israel's domestic situation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union many Soviet Jews used their new freedom to make aliyah, resulting in a surge of immigration to Israel. In the decades of the first and second Palestinian uprisings (1987-1993 and 2000-2005), these numbers dipped somewhat. And now, perhaps in part due to the rise of anti-Semitic incidents in cities of Western Europe, aliyah numbers are once again on the rise. According to Israel's Jewish Agency chairman Natan Sharansky, *"2014 was a year of record-breaking aliyah...this trend is evidence of Israel's attractiveness as a place where it is good to live, as well as of the success of our joint efforts to promote aliyah and strengthen connections between Jews around the world and the State of Israel."* (OMRI EFRAIM, **YNET JEWISH WORLD**, DECEMBER 31, 2014) The Ministry of Immigration and Absorption reports that 29,500 new immigrants arrived during the Jewish year 5775 (September 2014 through September 2015), compared to 26,000 the previous year.

It is not easy to predict who will make the move to Israel. According to a JNS blog from April 20, 2015, it is becoming trendy and fashionable for young Americans to make aliyah, combining a sense of responsibility, a desire for adventure, and a dose of nostalgia for what previous generations might not have been able to do or could only achieve through great hardship. The blogger writes, *"I grew up learning how my grandfather trekked to [Mandatory] Palestine on a camel. Now, I just have to get on a plane and fly there. It's easy to get comfortable elsewhere. By moving to Israel, I am able to live a part of history and tradition in a way that people two, three, and more generations back didn't have the opportunity to do."* Furthermore, converts to Judaism are considering strengthening their Jewish ties by moving to Israel ([SEE THE JEWISHPRESS.COM ARTICLE PUBLISHED JULY 19, 2015](#)).

The fact that Terach and his departure for Canaan is preserved in our sacred text means that this detail is significant. Our tradition teaches us that whether it is through religious observance or not, anyone who signs on to move to Israel is an integral part of the journey of the Jewish nation. Despite Israel's location, surrounded by unsupportive or hostile governments and ideologies, immigrating to Israel still maintains its appeal.

Discussion Questions

Are there some motivations of those making aliyah more significant than others? If so, what are they?

Can a Jew in the Diaspora be a committed Zionist or does one need to live in the Land of Israel? What is a committed Zionist? Who defines the term?

What do you consider the role of family and friends if a loved one is considering making aliyah?

How might the shrinking Jewish Diaspora (76.8% of world Jewry live in only 17 metropolitan areas, of which only two are not in North America or Israel) continue to impact future aliyah policies and strategies of the State of Israel?

[HTTPS://ISRAELED.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2015/03/VAYERA-2017.PDF](https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/vayera-2017.pdf)

Vayera

BY PROFESSOR KEN STEIN, RABBI ELLEN NEMHAUSER, AND CIE STAFF

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְּרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בְּתֶחֱ-הָאֵהָל בְּקֶדֶם הַיּוֹם וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אָנָשׁים נֹצְרִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרָץ לֵקְרָאָתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה
near the trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

The opening verses of this week's portion say that Abraham was interacting with G-d when three men approach him. Abraham gets up, bows low to the ground in front of his three guests, and states, "My Lord, if now I find favor in your sight, do not pass over, I pray you, from your servant." It is understood by many commentators that Abraham is addressing the strangers, but Talmudic sages also propose that Abraham is in fact in the midst of a conversation G-d. When the strangers approach Abraham puts his conversation with G-d on hold to attend the three men. Therefore, these sages suggest, being of service to desert-weary guests actually takes precedence to communing with G-d. (BT:SHABBAT 127A)

In the latter interpretation of the text, Abraham establishes the precedent of attending to the needs of others even above spiritual communion with G-d. Today, this serves as an example for the way the Jewish people and the organizations in the State of Israel should respond to those in need, not just within the country itself, but globally.

The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid, IsraAid, is a well known (yet seldom mentioned in the secular press) organization that supports the efforts of local communities affected by war, natural disaster, acute poverty, and massive displacement. This NGO, founded in 2001, goes beyond disaster relief by assisting those in need in moving toward sustainable living. Maintaining a cohort of professional medics, search and rescue squads, post-trauma experts, and community mobilizers, IsraAid

dispatches teams of first responders. In the fourteen years since its inception, they have been on the front lines, responding to nearly every major humanitarian global crisis.

Empowering local populations to establish and maintain response centers for ongoing relief efforts is vital to IsraAid's mission. Additionally, they have been resolute in forming partnerships with other international relief organizations to maximize their efforts. Reporting on their own involvement, IsraAid states that they have responded to crises in twenty-nine countries, treating over one million individuals in places including Kenya, Sierra Leone, Philippines, and Syria. They have delivered over one thousand tons of medical supplies and food and trained over five thousand locals who can respond to future crises. From their own ranks, IsraAid has sent out over 150 medical workers and 600 volunteers.

Israel has numerous non-government organizations that are immediate responders to global crises. IsraAid is a particular one that has served on the front lines of the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe; numerous IsraAid workers have, for over two years, assisted those fleeing the bloody conflict in Syria. They have helped deliver people from rickety boats to safety on dry land in Serbia, Croatia, and Greece and then ensure access to medical treatment, food, and clothing. Their efforts extend to the political realm as well. One year ago, Yotam Polizer, IsraAid's Development Director, presented on the organization's holistic approach to providing psychosocial support and relief for Yazidi refugees in Greece and Germany. The event was hosted by the Israeli mission to the UN, featuring United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agency representatives.

In the aftermath of hurricane Matthew, Nippes, Haiti was left without access to clean water. A team from IsraAid was quick to respond - national and international professionals are working together with community leaders to restore pipelines and access to potable water. These pipelines will restore clean water to over 10,000 people. IsraAid will engage in ongoing efforts; their next goal is to restore water and electricity to hospitals and clinics so that the most vulnerable Haitian citizens can receive proper care.

Ultimately, Jewish tradition teaches that human need takes precedence over religious observance. In fact, it could be argued that the very point of one's relationship with G-d is to strengthen bonds with fellow human beings both within and outside our own communities.

Discussion Questions

Beyond the text of this week's portion, what additional Jewish values might have led to the creation of organizations like IsraAid?

How might the events that preceded the establishment of the State of Israel have affected the psyche of the Jewish population vis à vis international relief work? Why might they wish to be first responders to crises all over the world?

[HTTPS://ISRAELED.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2015/03/CHAYEI-SARAH-2017.PDF](https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CHAYEI-SARAH-2017.PDF)

Chayei Sarah

BY PROFESSOR KEN STEIN, RABBI ELLEN NEMHAUSER, AND CIE STAFF

גֵר־וְתוֹשֵׁב אֶנֶכִּי עִמָּכֶם תִּנּוּ לִי אֶחֱזֹת־קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי מִלְפָּנֶי
GENESIS 23:4 I am a foreign resident among you, sell me a burial site from your midst so I can remove my dead for burial.

The opening verses of the portion Chayei Sarah depict the first purchase of land for the earliest Israelites. Sarah has died and Abraham wishes to bury his wife in the hill country of Judah, identified in this portion as both Kiriath Arbah and Hebron. Abraham requests to purchase land from the resident people for Sarah's grave. Abraham negotiates openly in GENESIS 23:4. He asks for a particular site, the cave of Machpelah. Throughout the negotiations, the residents attempt to gift the land to Abraham, but the patriarch refuses, intent on purchasing the land at a fair price. In numerous instances, the text states that he negotiates in the presence of others (v.10, 12, 16, 18), underscoring the transparency of Abraham's dealings. He succeeds in purchasing the land (GEN. 23:17-20) and the property becomes his own, to include the burial cave and the trees. This same site of Sarah's grave later becomes the burial place of Abraham himself, as well as that of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah.

Discussions and studies of Zionism and modern Israel about land ownership and purchase are challenging. The data available for who owned which land in Palestine in the late 1800s is sketchy at best. During the late Ottoman period, the government in Istanbul asked residents to register their lands so that title deeds could be issued and revenue collected for the registration process. Taxes could then be estimated for land ownership. Not all land in Palestine, or for that matter in much of the Middle East that was under Ottoman control, was registered. Many peasants seeking to avoid taxes often let urban notables register their lands on the peasant's behalf. With agricultural incomes precariously inconsistent, peasants, who once used lands outright, often found themselves exchanging their rights to work certain lands for plough animals or seeds for the coming crop year. When the British took control of Palestine at the end of WWI, documenting ownership was made more difficult, since records had been destroyed in the war. Jews, upon immigrating to Palestine in the late 19th century, acquired small plots of land by purchasing it directly from Arab landowners residing nearby or from Arab landlords residing in distant cities such as Beirut, Damascus, Alexandria, and Cairo.

As part of the Zionist effort to build a national home and state, the World Zionist Organization created the Jewish National Fund in 1901 and, along with other institutions, aided in the purchase of land and settlement of new immigrants. Until 1939, fully two-thirds of the land that Jews purchased from Arabs was purchased by individual Jewish immigrants and not by the JNF or other organizations. This suggests an individual commitment by the early settlers or pioneers to invest their own savings in their new Zionist adventure. During the period of British rule in Palestine, 1918-1948, almost no lands were given to the Zionists. Rather the lands upon which Jews built kibbutzim and moshavim, as well as land acquired in urban areas, were purchased and registered in the British

administration's various land registry regional offices throughout Palestine. Without Jewish land purchase during the Mandate and before, the Jewish national home would not have had a geospatial nucleus for a state; which means that Arabs residing in Palestine and living elsewhere willingly cooperated with the Zionists in their effort to acquire lands for Jewish settlement and development.

After the state was established and Arabs abandoned lands, the Israeli government confiscated these areas and often made them available to newly arriving Jewish immigrants. Today more than 90 percent of the land in Israel is owned directly or indirectly by the state or church, with individuals and businesses leasing tracts on a long-term basis from the Israel Lands Authority (ILA). Certain areas, including the land on which the Knesset is built, is owned by the Greek Orthodox church. In the neighborhoods where the church owns the land (about 10% of the Israel) residents lease their property from them.

Complicated disputes regarding land ownership in Israel go back to the end of the 1800s. It is often taught that scores of Palestinian Arab agricultural workers in early pre-state days were displaced from their land. However, studies show that this process of displacement had begun in Ottoman times and was ongoing due to the impoverishment of the peasantry, with little of that early displacement having to do with Zionist intentions. Conclusive data for actual land deals and ownership are not readily available. Much like the torah depicts Abraham's purchase, pre-State ownership and leasing of the lands is a narrative. And, as is often the case, this narrative can be told in a way that supports any number of platforms. There was a growing sense that Palestinian farmers and peasants were being unfairly displaced, providing a political excuse for the Arab riots of 1929. British politicians attempted to understand and intervene, with deleterious results for the Zionist cause. As for the history of Zionism, the subject of land acquisition and rightful ownership is key to understanding context and deflecting anti-Zionist sentiment.

Whether debating the rights of Palestinians to receive restitution for lands from which they consider themselves to be displaced or whether standing up to the growing cries of BDS and SJP groups and their supporters, it is crucial that the lens through which history is told be as accurate as possible. That does not negate multiple significant narratives; nor is it to be unsympathetic to a group of people that is noticeably weaker in their economic and social well-being. Rather, honesty in the telling the history regarding the complexities of land acquisition and the context in which it occurred can only help as all sides move forward with diplomacy and empathy for "the other."

Discussion Questions

In what ways does it serve and harm the parties involved in land disputes to ignore historical evidence?

Why do you think little or nothing is taught about Israeli land acquisition and ownership in Jewish education settings? Who should be responsible for teaching the history and current events in this area? What would be the best approach to teaching these topics?

[HTTPS://ISRAELED.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2015/03/11-18-17-TOLDOT.PDF](https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/11-18-17-TOLDOT.PDF)

Toldot

BY PROFESSOR KEN STEIN, RABBI ELLEN NEMHAUSER, AND CIE STAFF

וַיֵּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנְשָׁבְעָה לִּי כַּיּוֹם וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּמָּכֶר אֶת־בְּכֹרְתּוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב: GENESIS 25:23 Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

This week's Torah portion introduces Esau and Jacob. Though the two men are twins, they are different in every way—in their physical appearance, strengths, and personalities.

The narrative voice of the biblical text portrays Jacob as the one predetermined by God to inherit his father's blessing and wealth over his older brother, Esau. Yet, many see Jacob, spurred on by his mother Rebecca, to be a schemer and trickster. And for centuries, the evident conflict between the twin brothers has been used to explain the ongoing conflict in Israel and the region.

Biblical history indicates that the father of Arab nations is Ishmael, Abraham's son by his Egyptian concubine Hagar. Biblical historians name Esau (also referred to as father of the Edomites in GENESIS 20), as a second progenitor to the Arab nations after Ishmael, who was born before Esau.

Rabbinic texts portray Esau as crass and uncaring, ready to dispense with his inherited rites for a bowl of red soup or lentils (VERSE 34). The same texts paint Jacob as one who “must” do what he can to obtain what he was predestined to receive, even if it means deceiving his blind father. And so, Jacob benefits from his older twin's ravenous hunger and receives the firstborn blessing intended for Esau. Turmoil ensues, and Esau is enraged. However, he does not immediately leave to chase his younger brother. Rather he pledges to remain housebound as his ailing father nears death. The text states that Esau says in his heart, “*afterward I will slay my brother Jacob.*”

In addition to biblical commentaries, some history books claim that the Arab states of today are all descendants of either Esau or Ishmael (each of whom hated their favored siblings who became Jewish patriarchs in line for God's blessing and the Land of Israel).

Can we, in the modern day, assume that this is the root of our current Middle Eastern conflict? Was the present-day situation initiated by maternal jealousy, family rivalry, expulsion, trickery, and murderous, angry threats? Or perhaps the biblical stories offer a way to explain an existing conflict in the region?

Accounts of hatred and mistrust in the region do not end with the early stories of Esau and Jacob. The narrative in Numbers states that, while in the wilderness, Moses and the people encounter ongoing enmity from the descendants of Esau as they ask permission to travel through their lands (NUMBERS 20:14-21).

Edom (Esau) says to him: “*You may not pass through me, or I shall come out with the sword against you.*” The children of Israel try to negotiate, suggesting that if they or

their cattle drink any water on Edomite lands, they will pay for it. Again, they are told, *"Do not pass through here!"* and are confronted by numerous men barring their way.

We read of the ongoing violent encounters of the Edomites and the Ishmaelites with the Israelites in Judges, Kings, and Psalms. Sadly, there are contemporary Arab leaders who continue to use these ancient texts, reciting with the exact wording, to justify their expressions of hatred and desire for the destruction of Israel.

As God promised in the text, the descendants of Abraham, including Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, and Esau, did prosper and grow to become numerous. However, due to political and social upheaval, the majority of the Jewish descendants were forced out or left the region for other, more hospitable lands. The entire region was populated by numerous Arab communities and tribes with loosely or non-existent legal borders between them.

Internationally recognized borders remained undefined at the end of Israel's War of Independence in 1949. Already at the end of the 19th century, during the last several decades of Ottoman rule, there were murmurings of Arab national feeling as Arab leaders began to object to the foreign rule of the Ottoman Turks. Arab nationalism then blossomed after World War I. Tribal communities, already in the region for many centuries, began to establish themselves as independent entities, each with their own local leadership, often supported by the British in their quest for regional supremacy.

Perhaps the most frustrating challenge for Jews is the Arab nations' wealth of territory and population in contrast to the comparatively tiny landmass of Israel and their small population. With brutally antagonistic political conflicts between and amongst Arab states and ethnic groups within those states, it feels increasingly less probable that the modern day descendants of ancient brothers, fathers to the Jews and Arabs, will reconcile and live side by side peacefully.

Discussion Questions

Prominent thinkers in the Arab world included Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammed Abduh (1849 - 1905); both activists, scholars, and politicians whose attempts to modernize Islamic pride and Arab nationalism continue to influence the development of Muslim thought today. What challenges might these liberal thinkers have confronted when faced with multiple Arab groups who do not necessarily see themselves as a single unified people?

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Vayetze

BY PROFESSOR KEN STEIN, RABBI ELLEN NEMHAUSER, AND CIE STAFF

*וַיָּבֹר אֶת-עֵקֶב וְגַם לְאַמִּיר אֱסֻדָּה יְאֳלִים עֲמָלִי וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ בְּצֶרֶף הַזֶּה אֶשֶׂר אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנִטְמוֹן לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וְיִבְגַּד לְלَبָשׁ וַיִּשְׁבְּתִי
 :: GENESIS 28:20-21 If G-d will be with me, and maintain me along the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothes to wear so that I come back whole to my father's house, then shall Adonai be my G-d*

It seems quite brazen for the biblical figure of Jacob to bargain with G-d immediately following G-d's reassurance that he will be protected and soon brought back to the land. Yet, Jacob itemizes the ways he should receive Divine favors in order to pledge his allegiance to G-d. Jacob thinks of practical necessities beyond spiritual connections. He asks G-d for protection on his journey, food to sustain him, and clothing to wear. Then, under these conditions, if and when he returns to his father's land, he will set aside a tithe for G-d. Jacob's insistence on practical necessities sends the message that tangible, life sustaining items must precede a transcendent covenant.

The establishment of the State of Israel could not have occurred without some very practical planning. The nucleus for Israel's bureaucratic organization evolved out of the early 20th century Zionist Congress and the creation of the Jewish National Fund and the Anglo-Palestine Bank, each of which assisted in early settlement of Palestine. After World War I, the Zionist Commission (then the Palestine Zionist Executive 1921-1929) followed by the Jewish Agency coordinated Jewish settlement with the British. Jewish Agency personnel had regular contact with British counterparts in drafting legislation and reacting to political events in Palestine. When the British imposed restrictions against Jewish immigration in the 1940s, the Jewish Agency, through its fledgling self-defense force, the Haganah, abetted illegal immigration. The British Navy responded by intercepting unauthorized ships off the coast of Palestine and forcing illegal immigrants into detention camps in Cyprus. In certain cases, like the Exodus in 1947, they forced the human cargo ships to return to points of departure. The Jewish underground in Palestine sabotaged British installations in protest. Faced with increased violence against their rule in Palestine and pressure from the Truman administration, in April 1947 the British government turned to the newly created United Nations to choose one of two options: either remove British presence entirely or confirm a renewed Mandate for Britain without any political restrictions.

After months of investigation, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) presented two proposals: a minority of the committee suggested a single federal state for both peoples, and the majority opinion suggested the partition of Palestine into two states with an economic union between the two and an international zone for Jerusalem. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly passed the resolution of the committee's majority suggestion for the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. It was clear that the Zionist dream was about to be realized. Yet, as Britain withdrew, leaving the hard-pressed Jews in Palestine at the mercy of the surrounding Arab nations, it was clear to some Americans that Israel could not succeed without much needed supplies, funds, and the tools to defend its communities and the people living there from ongoing incursions and attacks by men in neighboring Arab villages. Sheer will and determination could not protect the Jewish institutions and population.

Many people helped Israel seek and preserve its establishment. Among them was Al Schwimmer, an aviation engineer and pilot from Connecticut. At the end of World War II, Schwimmer was understandably horrified by reports of what had occurred to the

Jewish populace in Europe. He insisted, despite great personal risk, in the first days after the establishment of the State of Israel that he would do what he could to save the remnant of European Jews who had successfully made it to the shores of Israel, along with the lives of those already living there. In the early months of 1948, he responded to a request from Teddy Kollek, the Haganah's chief of weapons acquisition in the U.S., to help the Jewish community secure necessary equipment and supplies for its defense.

During Israel's War of Independence in 1948-1949, through a variety of creative maneuvers and some illegal contacts, Schwimmer arranged, purchased, repaired, and delivered fighter planes, arms, and ammunition that were surplus in the USA, Czechoslovakia, and South America in the aftermath of WWII. Even after the UN levied a strict embargo on supplying arms to those fighting in the Arab-Israeli war, Schwimmer successfully procured munitions for the newly established Israeli Air Force; he helped to identify possible engineers and pilots, many recruited from his circle of colleagues and friends from his years in the army. In the months after Israel's successes, Schwimmer helped to build the country's first military aircraft installation, and eventually Israel Aircraft Industries. It was, and continues to be, a government-owned enterprise responsible for the defense of Israel and the export of weapons.

Schwimmer died in Israel in 2011 at age 95. He is not universally known as one of the devoted early Zionists ready to risk life and limb to secure the Jewish State. And, he didn't seem to mind the lack of recognition, despite his close association with the early leaders of Israel, including David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, and Shimon Peres. Schwimmer could be held up as an exemplar of commitment and ingenuity for Israel's establishment. There were many others like Schwimmer who made important contributions to the state's establishment.

Like the patriarch Jacob and modern-day hero Al Schwimmer, people who support the success of a Jewish state must continually consider the practical and realistic means that will enable Israel to continue to grow and flourish today and in the future.

Discussion Questions

With more than six decades since the establishment of Israel, what remains for "practical needs?" Any discussions of people, leadership, means, organization, perseverance, sacrifice, innovation, adaptability, lobbying for the cause, and commitment are clearly appropriate.

[HTTPS://ISRAELED.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2015/03/VAYISHLACH-2017.PDF](https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/vayishlach-2017.pdf)

Vayishlach

BY PROFESSOR KEN STEIN, RABBI ELLEN NEMHAUSER, AND CIE STAFF

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עוֹד יִשְׁמְךָ כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-שָׁרִיתָ עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אֲנָשִׁים וַתִּגְדָּל
shall no longer be Jacob, rather it will be Israel, for you have striven with Divine
beings and humans, and have triumphed."

Biblical names often refer to the character of a person, indicate their origins, or foreshadow destiny. In the case of Jacob, his name tells how he *“held onto”* the ankle of his brother Esau. True to his name, Jacob continues to *“hold onto”* his brother in attempts to surpass and supplant Esau's firstborn status. In this week's portion, Jacob is growing up. He has fled his parents' home. He married, fathered children, and has himself been deceived and taken advantage of by a family member. On his path to full adulthood, Jacob receives a new name - Israel. The biblical passage explains that the name derived from *“ki sarita”* or *“because you struggled.”* Jacob struggled with his immediate family, his extended family, and, in this episode, with some unidentified being which commentators state has divine origins. Jacob's name change marks a significant transitional point in his journey. So, too, is the name itself - for its meaning. In scholarly circles, the name “Israel” first appears in extra biblical works in a song of King Merneptah of Egypt dating back to 1200 BCE and again in an inscription of King Mesha of Moab in 830 BCE.

Naming the modern Jewish state Israel, as it came into existence, was neither clear nor simple. Zionist leaders met as late as May 1948, only weeks before the state was established, to discuss the possibilities. Would the new State's name provide a clear historical link to Eretz Yisrael? Or a religious link to Zion or Judea? Each of these considerations were rejected in favor of Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel.

Next the question of naming the new Jewish nation in Arabic arose. The original document (declassified in Spring 2013 and available in Hebrew on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website under State Archive Documents), demonstrates attitudes toward the population, both Jewish and Arab. Again, committee members considered three options: Palestine or Filastin; Zion or Sayoun; and Israel or Esra'il. The three Zionist officials—consisting of D. Remez, B. Shetritt, and M. Assaf—worked under two primary assumptions: first, that an Arab state would be established alongside the Jewish one (in keeping with the UN's partition resolution the year before); and second, that the new Jewish state would include a significant Arab minority whose political feelings needed to be considered.

The Zionist officials rejected the name Palestine, because they thought that would be the name of the new Arab state to be established in the near future. They rejected the name Zion, or Sayoun, seemingly because the words “Zion” and “Zionist” already had a pejorative overtone in the Arab world. The committee referenced conflicting ideologies between Jews and Arab Muslims about attachment to the region; calling the country Zion *“would cause real difficulty for the Arab citizen in the Jewish state,”* the document states. In the end, they opted for Esra'il, or Israel.

Subject: Translating the State's Name to Arabic

A special committee that convened on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel, has decided that the translation of the State's name to Arabic should be that of “Israel” and rejected other proposals such as “Zion” and “Palestine”

The National Executive

Considerations and Conclusion

The Committee members M. Assaf, D. Remez and B. Shetrit convened for the purpose of considering the translation of the State's name – Israel – to Arabic as the name of the Jewish State. We have reached the conclusion that it has to be the literal translation of the name "Israel" and not "Palestine". The considerations were as follows:

- A. There should not be a special/discriminatory translation to Arabic; it has to be translated in the same way that it is being translated to other foreign languages.*
- B. This is a natural/accepted name and it is rooted in the Arabic tradition. Therefore, it will be understood and recognized.*
- C. The name "Palestine" which connotes a geographical entity may raise concerns and problems that are associated with the name: "Eretz Israel".*
- D. It is possible that the name of an Arab state in Eretz Israel may be "Palestine" and it might cause confusion.*

It should be noted that using any other name may stir identity difficulties for the Jews living in Arab speaking countries. Hence, using the name "Israel" bears some political consideration as well. The Committee considered the translation of "Zion" into Arabic but concluded that it might be burdensome for the Arab citizens in a Jewish State.

Signed: D. Remez, B. Shetrit, M. Assaf

The naming of people and places holds great significance in the historical narrative of the Jewish people. Jacob's name change to Israel resulted in his offspring receiving the name b'nai Yisrael, "children of Israel," and the ensuing generations the name "Israelites." The Torah tells us that names have power; and in this portion we can see Jacob/Israel's legacy in the rebirth of the modern Jewish State. Whether in Hebrew, English, or Arabic, the name of the new Jewish State would remain Israel. It evokes the significance of the historical connection to the land, suggests the continuity of the journey of the Jewish people from early biblical times to the present, and finally, foreshadows the inevitable struggle that would ensue as Jews established for themselves a new State.

Discussion Questions

The name of a country is identity, common experience, symbolism, culture, a literature, a language, something historically distinct. What other component elements constitute a national identity?

What was distinctive about Jews who immigrated to live under British control in Palestine?

Did immigrating Jews to Palestine have a notion that they were creating a nation? That they were transforming themselves from living in separate communities in the diaspora to becoming a common collective?

What might have been the motivation for the discussion of the name Israel in Arabic? Why was there an apparent Zionist sensitivity for non-Jews living in the Jewish state?

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Herzl and Zionism

Theodor (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, was born in Budapest in 1860. He was educated in the spirit of the German-Jewish Enlightenment of the period, learning to appreciate secular culture. In 1878 the family moved to Vienna, and in 1884 Herzl was awarded a doctorate of law from the University of Vienna. He became a writer, a playwright and a journalist. Herzl became the Paris correspondent of the influential liberal Vienna newspaper **NEUE FREIE PRESSE**.

Herzl first encountered the antisemitism that would shape his life and the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century while studying at the University of Vienna (1882). Later, during his stay in Paris as a journalist, he was brought face-to-face with the problem. At the time, he regarded the Jewish problem as a social issue and wrote a drama, *The Ghetto* (1894), in which assimilation and conversion are rejected as solutions. He hoped that *The Ghetto* would lead to debate and ultimately to a solution, based on mutual tolerance and respect between Christians and Jews.

In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was unjustly accused of treason, mainly because of the prevailing antisemitic atmosphere. Herzl witnessed mobs shouting "*Death to the Jews*". He resolved that there was only one solution to this antisemitic assault: the mass immigration of Jews to a land that they could call their own. Thus the Dreyfus case became one of the determinants in the genesis of political Zionism.

Herzl concluded that antisemitism was a stable and immutable factor in human society, which assimilation did not solve. He mulled over the idea of Jewish sovereignty, and, despite ridicule from Jewish leaders, published **DER JUDENSTAAT (THE JEWISH STATE)** in 1896.

Herzl argued that the essence of the Jewish problem was not individual, but national. He declared that the Jews could gain acceptance in the world only if they ceased being a national anomaly. The Jews are one people, he said, and their plight could be transformed into a positive force by the establishment of a Jewish state with the consent

of the great powers. He saw the Jewish question as an international political question to be dealt with in the arena of international politics.

Herzl proposed a practical program for collecting funds from Jews around the world by an organization which would work towards the practical realization of this goal (this organization, when it was eventually formed, was called the Zionist Organization.) He saw the future state as a model social state, basing his ideas on the European model of the time of a modern enlightened society. It would be neutral and peace-seeking, and secular in nature.

Herzl's ideas were met with enthusiasm by the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe, although Jewish leaders were less ardent. Still, Herzl convened and chaired the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, on August 29-31, 1897 - the first interterritorial gathering of Jews on a national and secular basis. Here the delegates adopted the Basle Program, the program of the Zionist movement, and declared "*Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.*" At the Congress the Zionist Organization was established as the political arm of the Jewish people, and Herzl was elected its first president. In the same year, Herzl founded the Zionist weekly **DIE WELT** and began activities to obtain a charter for Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael).

After the First Zionist Congress, the movement convened annually at an international Zionist Congress. In 1936 the center of the Zionist movement was transferred to Jerusalem.

In 1902, Herzl wrote the Zionist novel, **ALTNEULAND (OLD NEW LAND)**, in which he depicted the future Jewish state as a social utopia. He envisioned a new society that was to rise in the Land of Israel on a cooperative basis utilizing science and technology in the development of the Land. He included detailed ideas about how he saw the future state's political structure, immigration, fund-raising, diplomatic relations, social laws and relations between religion and the state. In **ALTNEULAND**, the Jewish state was foreseen as a pluralist, advanced society, a "*light unto the nations.*" This book had a great impact on the Jews of the time and became a symbol of the Zionist vision in the Land of Israel.

Herzl saw the need for encouragement by the great powers of the national aims of the Jewish people. Thus, he traveled to the Land of Israel and Istanbul in 1898 to meet with Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. When these efforts proved fruitless, he turned to Great Britain, and met with Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary, and others. The only concrete offer he received from the British was the proposal of a Jewish autonomous region in east Africa, in Uganda.

The 1903 Kishinev pogrom and the difficult state of Russian Jewry, witnessed firsthand by Herzl during a visit to Russia, had a profound effect on him. He proposed the British Uganda Program to the Sixth Zionist Congress (1903) as a temporary refuge for Russian Jewry in immediate danger. While Herzl made it clear that this program would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism, a Jewish entity in the Land of Israel, the proposal aroused a storm at the Congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Uganda

Program was finally rejected by the Zionist movement at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905.

Herzl died in 1904 of pneumonia and a weak heart overworked by his incessant efforts on behalf of Zionism. But by then the movement had found its place on the world political map. In 1949, Herzl's remains were brought to Israel and reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Herzl coined the phrase "*If you will, it is no fairytale*," which became the motto of the Zionist movement. Although at the time no one could have imagined it, the Zionist movement, just fifty years after the First Zionist Congress, brought about the establishment of the independent State of Israel.

Zionism

Zionism is the national movement that espouses repatriation of Jews to their homeland - the Land of Israel - and the resumption of sovereign Jewish life there.

Yearning for Zion and Jewish immigration continued throughout the long period of exile, following the Roman conquest and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. This yearning took on a new form in the nineteenth century, when modern nationalism, liberalism and emancipation caused the Jews to contend with new questions, which the Zionist movement tried to answer. The Hibbat Zion movement began to coalesce in the second half of the nineteenth century, advocated revival of Jewish life in the Land of Israel, and began establishing agricultural settlements there. But later, Herzl energized and consolidated Zionism into a political movement, convening the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Herzl was the first to bring the Jewish problem to world attention, and make the Jewish people a player in the world political arena. The Zionist movement which developed from his initiative also created organizational, political and economic tools to implement its vision and ideology.

The Zionist movement enunciated its goals - a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel - in the Basle Program. Apart from the movements that rejected the idea of national revival, Zionism included diverse groups, from Religious Zionism to Socialist Zionism. All of them worked towards the aim of the Jewish National Home, an enterprise that culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

A Modern Rendition of an Ancient Motif

The origin of the word "Zionism" is the biblical word "Zion," often used as a synonym for Jerusalem and the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael). Zionism is an ideology which expresses the yearning of Jews the world over for their historical homeland - Zion, the Land of Israel.

The hope of returning to their homeland was first held by Jews exiled to Babylon some 2,500 years ago - a hope which subsequently became a reality. (*"By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion."* PSALMS 137:1). Thus political Zionism, which coalesced in the 19th century, invented neither the concept nor the practice of return. Rather, it appropriated an ancient idea and an ongoing active movement, and adapted them to meet the needs and spirit of the times.

The core of the Zionist idea appears in the **DECLARATION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL** (May 14, 1948), which states, inter alia, that:

"The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom."

The idea of Zionism is based on the long connection between the Jewish people and its land, a link which began almost 4,000 years ago when Abraham settled in Canaan, later known as the Land of Israel.

Central to Zionist thought is the concept of the Land of Israel as the historical birthplace of the Jewish people and the belief that Jewish life elsewhere is a life of exile. Moses Hess, in his book *Rome and Jerusalem* (1844), expresses this idea:

"Two periods of time shaped the development of Jewish civilization: the first, after the liberation from Egypt, and the second, the return from Babylon. The third shall come with the redemption from the third exile."

Over centuries in the Diaspora, the Jews maintained a strong and unique relationship with their historical homeland, and manifested their yearning for Zion through rituals and literature.

Antisemitism as a Factor in Shaping Zionism

While Zionism expresses the historical link binding the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, modern Zionism might not have arisen as an active national movement in the 19th century without contemporary antisemitism preceded by centuries of persecution.

Over the centuries, Jews were expelled from almost every European country - Germany and France, Portugal and Spain, England and Wales - a cumulative experience which had a profound impact, especially in the 19th century when Jews had abandoned hope of fundamental change in their lives. Out of this milieu came Jewish leaders who turned to Zionism as a result of the virulent antisemitism in the societies surrounding them. Thus Moses Hess, shaken by the blood libel of Damascus (1844), became the father of Zionist socialism; Leon Pinsker, shocked by the pogroms (1881-1882) which followed the assassination of Czar Alexander II, assumed leadership in the Hibbat Zion movement; and Theodor Herzl, who as a journalist in Paris experienced the venomous antisemitic campaign of the Dreyfus case (1896), organized Zionism into a political movement.

The Zionist movement aimed to solve the "Jewish problem," the problem of a perennial minority, a people subjected to repeated pogroms and persecution, a homeless community whose alienness was underscored by discrimination wherever Jews settled.

Zionism aspired to deal with this situation by effecting a return to the historical homeland of the Jews - the Land of Israel.

In fact, most of the waves of Aliya (mass immigration to the Land of Israel) in the modern age were in direct response to acts of murder and discrimination against Jews. The First Aliya followed pogroms in Russia in the 1880s. The Second Aliya was spurred by the Kishinev pogrom and a string of massacres in the Ukraine and Belorussia at the turn of the century. The Third Aliya occurred after the slaughter of Jews in the Russian civil war. The Fourth Aliya originated in Poland in the 1920s after the Grawski legislation infringed on Jewish economic activity. The Fifth Aliya was composed of German and Austrian Jews fleeing Nazism.

After the State of Israel was established in 1948, mass immigrations were still linked to and oppression. Holocaust survivors from Europe, refugees from Arab countries escaping the persecution which followed the establishment of Israel, the remnants of Polish Jewry who fled the country when antisemitism reignited at the time of Gomulka and Muzcar, and the Jews of Russia and other former Soviet republics who feared a new spasm of antisemitism with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The history of the waves of Aliya provides strong proof for the Zionist argument that a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, with a Jewish majority, is the only solution to the "Jewish problem."

Rise of Political Zionism

Political Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, emerged in the 19th century within the context of the liberal nationalism then sweeping through Europe.

Zionism synthesized the two goals of liberal nationalism - liberation and unity - by aiming to free the Jews from hostile and oppressive alien rule and to reestablish Jewish unity by gathering Jewish exiles from the four corners of the world to the Jewish homeland.

The rise of Zionism as a political movement was also a response to the failure of the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment) to solve the "Jewish problem." According to Zionist doctrine, the reason for this failure was that personal emancipation and equality were impossible without national emancipation and equality, since national problems require national solutions. The Zionist national solution was the establishment of a Jewish national state with a Jewish majority in the historical homeland, thus realizing the Jewish people's right to self-determination. Zionism did not consider the "normalization" of the Jewish condition contrary to universal aims and values. It advocated the right of every people on earth to its own home, and argued that only a sovereign people could become an equal member of the family of nations.

Zionism: A Pluralistic Movement

Although Zionism was basically a political movement aspiring to a return to the Jewish homeland with freedom, independence, statehood and security for the Jewish people,

it also promoted a reassertion of Jewish culture. An important element in this reawakening was the revival of Hebrew, long restricted to liturgy and literature, as a living national language, for use in government and the military, education and science, the market and the street.

Like any other nationalism, Zionism interrelated with other ideologies, resulting in the formation of Zionist currents and subcurrents.

The combination of nationalism and liberalism gave birth to liberal Zionism; the integration of socialism gave rise to socialist Zionism; the blending of Zionism with deep religious faith resulted in religious Zionism; and the influence of European nationalism inspired a rightist-nationalist faction. In this respect, Zionism has been no different from other nationalisms which also espouse various liberal, traditional, socialist (leftist) and conservative (rightist) leanings.

Zionism and Arab Nationalism

Most of the founders of Zionism knew that Palestine (the Land of Israel) had an Arab population (though some spoke naively of "*a land without a people for a people without a land*"). Still, only few regarded the Arab presence as a real obstacle to the fulfillment of Zionism. At that time in the late 19th century, Arab nationalism did not yet exist in any form, and the Arab population of Palestine was sparse and apolitical. Many Zionist leaders believed that since the local community was relatively small, friction between it and the returning Jews could be avoided; they were also convinced that the subsequent development of the country would benefit both peoples, thus earning Arab endorsement and cooperation. However, these hopes were not fulfilled.

Contrary to the declared positions and expectations of the Zionist ideologists who had aspired to achieve their aims by peaceful means and cooperation, the renewed Jewish presence in the Land met with militant Arab opposition. For some time many Zionists found it hard to understand and accept the depth and intensity of the dispute, which became in fact a clash between two peoples both regarding the country as their own - the Jews by virtue of their historical and spiritual connection, and the Arabs because of their centuries-long presence in the country.

During the years 1936-1947, the struggle over the Land of Israel grew more intense. Arab opposition became more extreme with the increased growth and development of the Jewish community. At the same time, the Zionist movement felt it necessary to increase immigration and develop the country's economic infrastructure, in order to save as many Jews as possible from the Nazi inferno in Europe.

The unavoidable clash between the Jews and the Arabs brought the UN to recommend, on November 29, 1947, the establishment of two states in the area west of the Jordan River - one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the resolution; the Arabs rejected it.

On May 14, 1948, in accordance with the UN resolution of November 1947, the State of Israel was established.

The State of Israel: From Dream to Realization

Into the 21st Century

The establishment of the State of Israel marked the realization of the Zionist goal of attaining an internationally recognized, legally secured home for the Jewish people in its historic homeland, where Jews would be free from persecution and able to develop their own lives and identity.

Since 1948, Zionism has seen its task as continuing to encourage the "*ingathering of the exiles*," which at times has called for extraordinary efforts to rescue endangered (physically and spiritually) Jewish communities. It also strives to preserve the unity and continuity of the Jewish people as well as to focus on the centrality of Israel in Jewish life everywhere.

Down through the centuries, the desire for the restoration of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel has been a thread binding the Jewish people together. Jews around the world accept Zionism as a fundamental tenet of Judaism, support the State of Israel as the basic realization of Zionism and are enriched culturally, socially and spiritually by the fact of Israel - a member of the family of nations and a vibrant, creative accomplishment of the Jewish spirit.

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Zionist Leaders – Ze'ev Jabotinsky

Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky - Zionist leader, writer, orator, journalist and soldier - and the Zionist Revisionist movement he founded have been steeped in controversy, but have left their own distinct mark on the course of Zionist history, despite years of anti-establishment status.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky was born in Odessa in 1880. When he was only six years old, his father died, a tragedy that plunged the family into economic distress. An uncle advised his widowed mother to have the children learn a trade. But she wanted them educated, despite her difficulties.

Odessa was at its height as a center of Jewish and Zionist activity; still Jabotinsky grew up steeped in Russian, more than Jewish culture. At age 18 he left Odessa for Switzerland and later went to Italy to study law.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky's promise as both a leader and a critic had already surfaced at the age of 14 - in a critique of the grading system, which he published in a local paper. In Bern, he began a lifelong writing career, serving as foreign correspondent for two Odessa newspapers (writing under the pen name "Altalena"). He joined a Russian student group and became interested in both socialist and Zionist ideas.

Jabotinsky's articles were so popular that in 1891, his paper recalled him to Odessa to join the editorial staff. Under the impact of the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev, he soon became immersed in Jewish self-defense as well as Zionist activities. Elected as a delegate to the

Sixth Zionist Congress, Jabotinsky was deeply impressed by Herzl. Envious of the fluent Hebrew he heard spoken at the Congress, Jabotinsky - who already spoke Russian, French, English, German and various Slavic languages - set about gaining mastery of Hebrew, becoming an accomplished orator and translator. His writings include both original works - poems, plays and novels as well as polemic and philosophical tracts - and translations of classics, including an unparalleled rendition of Edgar Allen Poe's poem "THE RAVEN" into Hebrew, and the works of Hebrew national poet Chaim Nachman Bialik into Russian.

Jabotinsky rose to prominence as a professional journalist and provocative publicist - but first and foremost as a gifted and passionate orator. As a speaker his tone and message introduced a sense of urgency, not always shared by mainstream Jewish leaders, to Zionist deliberations and aspirations.

He traveled widely all over Russia and Europe - lobbying for the Zionist cause in Constantinople following the Young Turk revolution - advocating unrelenting international political activity along with ongoing Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Jabotinsky stressed the importance of learning Hebrew, which he perceived as a central element in nation-building - even serving for a brief stint as elocution teacher for the founding actors of the Habimah Theater, the first Hebrew-language theater troupe, destined to become Israel's national theater.

While socialist Zionists encouraged Jews to fight for their civil rights as Jews within the countries of their origin, Jabotinsky was skeptical of this avenue of emancipation, proclaiming that salvation for Jews - both on a personal level and as a national entity - lay only in the Land of Israel.

Jewish self-defense was at the epicenter of Jabotinsky's socio-political philosophy, both as a physical imperative and as a wellspring of pride and self-confidence, capable of "ennobling" the Jewish spirit.

With the outbreak of the World War I in 1914, Jabotinsky found himself in disagreement over strategy with prevailing opinion within the Zionist camp. Unconvinced that the Turks or the Arabs would accommodate the aims of Zionism, he advocated bolder tactics. As he was convinced of an ultimate Allied victory, Jabotinsky, together with Joseph Trumpeldor, called for the establishment of a Jewish fighting force to join the Allies in liberating Palestine from Ottoman rule. Thus they could earn a place at the peace table, with the right to demand establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine.

While both the Allied powers and mainstream Zionists were at first reluctant, the Zion Mule Corps was formed in 1915. The corps fought in Gallipoli, but was later disbanded. Despite objections by the official Zionist leadership, which favored neutrality in order not to jeopardize the Jews of Palestine, Jabotinsky convinced the British government to permit the formation of three Jewish battalions. A man of action as well as words, Jabotinsky became an officer in the 38th Royal Fusiliers, which fought with General Allenby in 1917, and was decorated for heading the first company to cross the River Jordan into Palestine.

After the war, Jabotinsky wanted to maintain a Jewish unit as defense against growing Arab hostility to Zionism, but the unit was disbanded by the British.

Settling with his wife and two children in Palestine, Jabotinsky became editor of the Hebrew newspaper, **HADOAR**. During the Arab riots in Jerusalem in 1920, he organized Jewish defense. Subsequently, Jabotinsky was arrested and sentenced by a British military court to 15 years in jail, for illegal possession of arms. He was released several months later.

In the same year, he again became active within the Zionist establishment. However, since WWI, during which he had championed alignment with England, he had become disenchanted when Great Britain severed almost 80% of Mandate Palestine originally designated for a Jewish Homeland to create Transjordan (1922). Disillusioned with Britain and angry at Zionist acquiescence to British reversals, Jabotinsky resigned in 1923 from the Zionist Organization.

He set about establishing a separate Zionist federation based on "revision" of the relationship between the Zionist movement and Great Britain. This federation would actively challenge British policy and openly demand self-determination - Jewish statehood. The goals of the Revisionist movement he founded included restoration of a Jewish Brigade to protect the Jewish community and mass immigration to Palestine - of up to 40,000 Jews a year.

In 1925, the establishment of the World Union of Zionist Revisionists was announced, with Paris as headquarters for the movement. Jabotinsky spent the next years actively lecturing and collaborating on dozens of publications to further the cause worldwide. He lived in Jerusalem between 1927 and 1929. In 1930, while on a speaking engagement abroad, the British administration barred his return to Palestine by canceling his return visa. Unable to return home, from that point until his death a decade later, Jabotinsky fought for the Zionist cause around the world. In 1931 Jabotinsky demanded that the Seventeenth Zionist Congress make a clear announcement of Zionist aims - a Jewish state - but the delegates refused to do so.

Seriously alarmed by Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Jabotinsky pressed in 1933 for a worldwide Jewish boycott of Germany, hoping to crush Germany economically, but Jewish and Zionist leaders declined to cooperate. In 1934, an agreement was signed between Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion, then Labor Zionist leader, general secretary of the powerful Federation of Labor and undisputed spokesman for mainstream Zionism in Palestine. The agreement was aimed at easing the growing conflicts between the groups; cooperation, however, was stymied when the Federation of Labor failed to ratify the agreement. Revisionists and Laborites were to remain bitter political adversaries for decades to come.

In 1935, the Revisionists withdrew from the Zionist Organization in protest over the organization's refusal to state clearly and unequivocally its final goal of statehood. Revisionists also claimed that the Zionist establishment was too passive, failing to challenge British restrictions on the pace of development of the Jewish National Home

and thwarting attempts by Jews to flee Europe to the safety of Palestine. Jabotinsky focused his efforts on assisting Jews to reach Palestine by all means - legal or illegal. Sensing that Jews of Eastern Europe were in great danger, he called, in 1936, for an "evacuation" of Eastern European Jews to Palestine to solve the Jewish problem.

Outspoken and candid, Jabotinsky appeared before the Palestine Royal Commission in 1937 declaring that the "*demand for a Jewish majority is not our maximum - it is our minimum.*" Stressing there would soon be 3-4 million European Jews seeking a safe haven in Palestine, he compared "*Arab claims to Jewish demands*" as akin to "*the claims of appetite versus the claims of starvation.*" He and his followers argued that all territory in the original 1920 British Mandate over Palestine - encompassing all of the Land of Israel on both banks of the Jordan River - should be part of the Jewish homeland.

When the Peel Commission recommended the partition of the remainder of Mandated Palestine into two states, Jabotinsky opposed the plan. While Zionist leadership reluctantly accepted it, feeling that a truncated state was better than no state, the Arabs rejected it.

As conditions in Europe worsened, Jabotinsky began to support underground armed resistance against the British in Palestine, and, in 1937, officially became the supreme commander of the Etzel - the Revisionist underground military organization. He continued to focus on the rescue of Jews from Europe by all means available - including some of the first attempts to circumvent immigration restrictions by the clandestine landing of immigrants who arrived by sea. His plans for the future included a Jewish army to be formed after World War II.

Jabotinsky died suddenly of a heart attack on 4 August 1940, while visiting a summer camp operated in New York by the Revisionist youth movement - Betar.

Jabotinsky left an intellectual legacy of thousands of papers and documents - correspondence, speeches, published articles, pamphlets and books - including an unfinished rhyming dictionary in Hebrew, but the only personal effects on his person at the time of his death were \$4 and a tobacco pipe.

Throughout his life, Ze'ev Jabotinsky was convinced that Jewish statehood was an historic necessity that must and would come to pass. In his writings he recalled how, at the age of six, he had asked his mother whether the Jews would ever have a state of their own." His mother had retorted: "*Of course, foolish boy.*" Jabotinsky, who devoted a lifetime to the realization of a Jewish state, never questioned the validity of her reply. In 1935, five years prior to his death, Jabotinsky composed his will, stating that should he die, he could be buried anywhere, but requested that his remains be transferred to Israel "*only at the instructions of a Jewish government ki takum - 'that shall be established.'*" No "ifs".

In 1965, Ze'ev Jabotinsky's remains were brought to rest on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

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Jewish Settlement in the Land of Israel

The Jewish people's presence in the Land of Israel has been maintained unbroken since biblical times. This physical presence existed throughout the centuries of dispersion, and in each generation Jews came - in larger or smaller groups - to settle in their ancient homeland.

During the 400 years of Ottoman rule, the Land of Israel was divided into four districts, attached to the province of Damascus and ruled from Istanbul. By the end of the 18th century, the country had suffered from widespread neglect, taxation was crippling, the great forests of the Galilee and the Carmel mountains were denuded of trees and the country was sparsely populated, mainly by impoverished tenant farmers. The 19th century saw the first signs of progress, when Britain, France, Russia, Austria and the US opened consulates in Jerusalem, postal and telegraphic connections were installed and the first road connecting Jaffa and Jerusalem was built.

The situation of the country's Jews slowly improved, and their numbers increased substantially. By the middle of the 19th century Jews had built the first neighborhood outside the city walls of Jerusalem, land for farming was purchased throughout the country and the Hebrew language was revived as a spoken tongue.

The agricultural school Mikve Israel, east of Jaffa, was founded in 1870 by the Alliance Israelite Universelle, to train Jewish pioneers, from urban environments in Europe, in agricultural work. In 1878 the first moshava, Petah Tikva, was established.

The pogroms in Russia and Romania in 1882 led to the First Aliya (wave of immigration) and the foundation of agricultural villages: Rishon Lezion, Ekron, Zichron Ya'akov and Rosh Pinah.

Members of the Bilu movement also began to arrive in 1882. The first organized group of pioneers, they preceded the Zionist movement by fifteen years. Some settled in Mikve Israel and Rishon Lezion, others founded Gadera in the coastal plain, which became known as the Bilu settlement.

Some of the newcomers joined the old *yishuv*, while the majority, in both towns and rural settlements, contributed to a modern and dynamic way of life, that of the New *yishuv*. This new *yishuv* established the first industrial enterprises and introduced cultural activities and the use of Hebrew as the language of daily life. The foundations of the State of Israel, many years in the future, were thus laid.

As early as 1898, at the Second Zionist Congress in Basle, Zionists recognized the importance of settling the Land for national revival. In time they founded the Jewish National Fund to purchase land for the Jewish people and to set up villages.

The Jewish National Fund - *Keren Kayemet L'Israel* - the land purchase and development fund of the Zionist Organization, was founded at the Fifth Zionist Congress in December 1901. It was resolved that *"The JNF shall be the eternal possession of the Jewish people. Its funds shall not be used except for the purchase of lands..."* In the early

years, the JNF acquired tracts of lands with funds raised from Jews abroad, in the Galilee, in Judea and near Lake Kinneret. The first large area acquired in 1921, in the Jezreel Valley, increased the JNF's holdings to nearly 15,000 acres (60,000 dunams). Jewish-owned land and settlements rapidly increased, despite legal restrictions imposed by the British administration. JNF leasehold contracts run for 49 years and can be prolonged by the lessee or his heirs for as long as they serve the purpose specified.

With the founding of the State of Israel (1948), the emphasis of JNF activity shifted from land purchase to land improvement and development as well as afforestation. Swamps were drained, hills were readied for agriculture and settlement by stone-clearing and terracing, and new areas for farming were won in the Negev. By the 1990s, the JNF had planted over 200 million trees in forests and woods covering some 300,000 acres (120,000 hectares). It had developed parks and recreation sites, prepared infrastructure for new settlements, carried out water-conservation projects and taken part in environmental efforts.

In 1909, Degania, the first *kibbutz*, was founded on the shores of Lake Kinneret, followed by many more *kibbutzim*. Nahalal, the first *moshav*, was established in 1921, in the Jezreel Valley.

Other newcomers settled in the towns and cities. In 1909, the first houses of Tel Aviv, the first modern all-Jewish city, were built. Named after the Hebrew translation of Theodor Herzl's book "**OLD-NEW LAND**", which envisioned a new Jewish community in the Land, it began as a suburb of Jaffa and rapidly became the commercial, financial and cultural center of Jewish life.

The Arab riots of 1936-39 - in addition to restrictions on purchase of land, imposed by the British administration - inspired the "Stockade and Watchtower" method of establishing new settlements. Convoys of hundreds of volunteers, prefabricated huts and fortifications would arrive at the designated site at daybreak. By nightfall the settlement was complete, surrounded by a protective fence and dominated by a watchtower from which to scan the surrounding area for signs of hostility. Between 1936 and 1947, over one hundred settlements were established in this manner.

Other settlements were established during and after World War II throughout the country and especially in the northern Negev. They were based on diversified farming: fruit orchards, field crops, livestock and citrus groves. Industries were established, at first to process agricultural products; roads and electric power plants were built; the mineral potential of the Dead Sea was tapped. In the cities, a Hebrew press and Hebrew radio programs functioned and literature, art, music and dance - with a flavor unique to the Jewish community in the Land - developed.

At the beginning of the century, Jewish villages numbered 22; at independence (1948) 277 Jewish villages, *moshavot*, *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* dotted the countryside. The Jewish community - 650,000-strong - was a well-organized community with representative national institutions - the foundation upon which Jewish statehood was renewed in the Land of Israel.

A unique product of Jewish national revival are the *kvutza* and *kibbutz*, forms of voluntary, mainly agricultural, collective communities. Here equal value is placed on all types of work and the community is responsible for the needs of its members. Inspired by the idea of social justice as an integral part of the effort to resettle their homeland, young pioneers established the first *kvutza*, Degania. At first *kvutza* denoted a smaller group and *kibbutz* a larger community; in time the distinction disappeared and these settlements became known as *kibbutzim*. The *kibbutzim*, whose number grew to 11 by 1914 and 29 by 1918, played an important part in the expansion of the map of Jewish settlement in the years before the establishment of the State. Perhaps more importantly, their role in safeguarding the growing Jewish community was vital.

Since its inception, the *kibbutz* movement has contributed far more to the development of the country than its size warrants. Today, their part in the country's production - 33 percent of farm produce and 7.6 percent of manufactured goods - is proportionately much greater than their share of the population - some 2.2 percent living in 267 *kibbutzim*.

The *moshav* is a rural village combining some of the features of both cooperative and private farming. *Moshavim* came into being with the aim of providing more scope for individual initiative and independent management than the *kibbutz*. In the *moshav*, each family maintains its own farm and household, while purchasing and marketing are cooperatively operated. A commitment is made by *moshav* members to provide mutual aid within the community. In the 1950s former merchants and shopkeepers from the urban ghettos of Eastern Europe and Arab countries, who arrived in the country en masse, found themselves suited to the family structure of the *moshavim*. They formed many *moshavim*, with the aid of veteran *moshav* members.

Some *moshavim* are organized on a more collective basis, with work and allowances distributed on a collective basis, while the family still functions as the basic unit. These settlements are called *moshavim shitufi'im*.

In the mid-1950s, regional planning envisioned a tri-level model of settlement: agricultural settlements surrounding a central settlement where schools, clinics and cultural and service facilities are located; these centers, in turn, surround a development town - where shopping facilities, banks, emergency hospitals and much more are located. This model was first implemented in the Lachish region, and has been duplicated, with some alterations, elsewhere in the country.

After the 1967 Six-Day War, the areas of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, as well as the Sinai peninsula, came under Israeli control. In the 1970s, a group called Gush Emunim dedicated itself to the establishment of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, the heartland of the biblical Land of Israel and the places where events recounted in the Bible took place. After a protracted struggle, the government finally permitted settlement in these areas, until then populated solely by Arabs, and by the mid-1990s some 150,000 Jews lived in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

Today the vast majority of the country's population (91%) live in urban areas, including a dozen cities with over 100,000 inhabitants. Israel's main cities are Jerusalem, the capital

and the largest city (pop. 591,000), Tel Aviv, the industrial, commercial, financial and cultural center (pop. 356,000), Haifa, the industrial center of the north (pop. 252,000) and Be'er Sheva, the largest population center in the south (pop. 153,000).

The central coastal region has become a densely populated zone, where over the 40% of population live and much of the country's commerce and industry is located. Here and elsewhere in Israel, people have begun to move to suburban areas, farther from the cities' centers. A proposed new railway system and improved highways are expected to promote this trend.

High-tech industrial zones have sprung up around the country, some connected to the universities. Most of these industrial zones are close to urban centers, but outside the cities themselves. One example is the Tefen industrial park in the Galilee, where a number of high-tech enterprises are based. A 'village' for the entrepreneurs, built near the industrial park, may be the harbinger of a new type of settlement.

Rural inhabitants live in villages (3.7%), kibbutzim (2.2%), and moshavim (3.1%). The rural population of the land, with its distinctive forms of settlement, has a uniquely Israeli atmosphere.

As the State of Israel enters the twenty-first century, the various settlements adapt themselves to modern life: kibbutzim and moshavim become less centralized, emphasizing the family and the individual; villages invest more resources in industry and in agriculture; and the cities exhibit a trend towards suburbanization and the movement of industry to outlying areas.

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Lech Lecha

A Student of Abraham (October 2017)

And may they be blessed in you

(GENESIS 12:3)

(בראשית ג:יב) וְנִכְרְתוּ בְךָ

Reuven Shmerling loved people—all people. An Israeli resident of the settlement of Elkana, Shmerling owned a small factory in the neighboring Israeli-Arab town of Kfar Kasm and enjoyed strong, warm relationships not only within his own community, but in Kfar Kasm as well. Israeli educator Rabbi Chaim Navon wrote in a Facebook post that when Shmerling would see Arabs walking on the side of the road, he would stop and offer them a ride. When a family member convinced him that this practice was too dangerous to continue, he adopted another custom: every day he would take a bottle of frozen water from the freezer before he left for work, which he would give to the Arabs waiting to travel to work at the side of the road. This way, at least they would not be thirsty during the summer heat.

In his love for everyone, Shmerling followed in the path of our forefather Abraham, who saw the good and the positive potential in everyone. Rabbi Rafi Feurman writes that, *“Abraham was full of love... He loved people, hundreds and thousands, and they followed him with great devotion.”* Abraham also loved serving others, which is why he ran to greet his guests and serve them a meal in the hot desert sun. More than anything, it was this love that drew so many to Abraham and brought them closer to monotheism. THE MISHNAH IN AVOT (5:19) describes three attributes which define the *“students of Abraham,”* the first being a *“good eye,”* meaning the ability to see the positive in everyone and everything.

These values guided Reuven Shmerling in his daily life. These were the values that his family—his children and grandchildren—had gathered to celebrate over the Sukkot holiday as they marked his seventieth birthday. Sadly, they are also the values that they mourned and honored as they sat shiva after Reuven was brutally murdered in his factory in Kfar Kasm in a terrorist attack on the day before Sukkot.

Shmerling's love for all people was universally recognized both inside his community and in the Arab town where he worked. It was due to his good nature and his strong relationships that dozens of Arab businessmen joined an IsraeliArab delegation organized by MK Issawi Frej of the Meretz party together with MK Nissim Slomiansky of the Jewish Home party, which traveled the short distance to Elkana to pay to a shiva call to the grieving family. During the visit, Shmerling's wife Hannah told the delegation, *“Reuven would have been happy to see you here...He believed with all his might in true coexistence between fellow human beings.”* Shmerling's daughter Yonit, added that,

Abba always educated us that people are people, from both sides of the [Israeli-Arab] dispute, and this is how we must relate to them, despite our fear. We could have taken this episode to a place of hatred and anger, but today we choose together with you to take it to a place where it is possible to believe that [coexistence] is still possible.

Frej noted, *“Despite the ideological distance, geographic proximity is more important than all, and creates a shared life. For that, we are here. [Reuven] worked in Kafr Kasm, he did not talk about coexistence—he lived it.”*

In the commandment to leave his homeland, God promises Abraham that, *“in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”* (12:3) What is the meaning of this blessing? Rashi (on VERSE 3) explains that the simple meaning of this verse is that, *“A man will say to his son, May you be like Abraham.”* Tragically, we only learn about Reuven Shmerling because he was killed. Only in his death has the world learned just how much he followed in our forefather Abraham's footsteps, as a student of Abraham whose

“good eye” brought him to love all people, and to work towards positive coexistence in the state of Israel.

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Chayei Sarah

The Importance of Diplomacy (November 2017)

And he spoke to the children of Heth

(GENESIS 23:3)

חת בני אל וידבר בראשית ג:כג

Exactly one hundred years ago this week on November 9th 1917, the British government publicized a written communication that would dramatically alter the fate of the Jewish people. In the famous Balfour Declaration, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour declared that the English government “*views with favour [sic] the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours [sic] to facilitate the achievement of this object...*” This declaration represented the first expression of public support for Zionism by a major political power, and played a critical role in generating support for what would eventually become the Jewish State.

While we should rightly celebrate this critical milestone in modern Jewish history, we cannot allow ourselves to forget that the British government did not simply issue this declaration on its own. Undoubtedly, Prime Minister David Lloyd George genuinely believed in the righteousness of Zionism. Nevertheless, he had more practical considerations to consider as well. The British government, mired in the terrible depths of the First World War, also hoped that a public embrace of the Zionist vision would help gain Jewish support for the Allied War effort. The declaration was the result of months of high-level negotiations between the British government and the Zionist leadership, which led to Balfour's request that Lord Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, and Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann submit a draft of a public declaration. Looked at from this perspective, the document that set the stage for the eventual creation of the state of Israel was the result of geopolitical reality, idealism, need, and high-level negotiations—thus following the precise model established by our forefather Abraham in Parashat Chayei Sarah.

Following the death of Sarah, Abraham finds himself in need of a final resting place for his beloved wife. He also recognizes the significance of this purchase. As a nomad who had never permanently settled in any one place throughout his life, the purchase of an ancestral burial ground not only for his wife, but for himself and ostensibly for his heirs, would finally establish for Abraham a permanent presence in the Promised Land. For this reason, the biblical text records the negotiations between Abraham and the people of Heth in such great detail. While the story in the bible focuses primarily on Abraham's

discussion with Efron, the Midrash (PIRKEI D'RABBI ELIEZER) records an extensive discussion with the residents of Heth the preceded the final negotiations.

He spoke to the Jebusites to purchase from them the Cave of the Machpela...but were they Jebusites? Were they not people of Heth? Rather, [he originally spoke to the people of Jebus (Jerusalem) who were called Jebusites, and they did not accept him. He began to bow to them, as it is written, 'and [Abraham] bowed down to the people of the land.' (VERSE 7) They said to him: We know that in the future the Holy One will give you and your descendants all of these lands. Establish with us a covenant that Israel will not inherit the city of Jebus without their permission, and then you can purchase the machpela...

According to the Midrash, before Abraham could even approach Efron about purchasing a burial plot, he first needed to negotiate with and reach agreement with the local citizenry. Through diplomacy, respect and negotiation, Abraham is able to reach the critical political agreement necessary to achieve his long-term goal.

Today, we follow this very same model in our own political activity on behalf of Israel. Like Lord Balfour in his time, Abraham in his time, and in every Jewish community throughout history, our greatest national achievements have come through relationships and negotiations with governments and political leaders who both support Israel ideologically and appreciate the value of the support of the pro-Israel community. This is precisely why we work so hard to build solid relationships with our elected officials. Diplomacy and a strong relationship set the stage for the purchase of the oldest, most revered burial ground in the Jewish faith. Thousands of years later, similar efforts brought about the founding political document of the Zionist enterprise. Today, we follow in the footsteps of history, using these very same tools to strengthen and protect the Jewish State.

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Toldot

Stability in an Unstable Region (November, 2017)

We often say that Israelis live in a “*dangerous neighborhood*.” Recent events remind us that this neighborhood—the Middle East—is not only dangerous; it's also inherently unstable. Last week, the **WASHINGTON POST** reported that Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri

stunned Lebanon and its leaders...when he announced his resignation in a televised statement recorded in Saudi

Arabia, citing Iranian and Hezbollah meddling in Arab affairs...Hariri's abrupt resignation has set off anxious chatter about Lebanon's unstable political configuration and put it at the center of a spiraling regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

After the resignation, the **NEW YORK TIMES** reported that, "*fears for Lebanon's stability were running high,*" as the move represented a Saudi effort to "*curb Iran's growing dominance in the region.*" According to the **JERUSALEM POST**, "*With Saad Hariri's shocking resignation as prime minister of Lebanon on Saturday evening, Israel's northern border has become even more unstable...*"

Without stability, when turmoil inevitably arises we lose our equilibrium, balance and sense of self-identity. As Parashat Toldot unfolds, the life of Isaac as described in the Torah teaches us the critical value of stability fundamental to the foundation of a great nation. After reading three parashiot about the various trials and tribulations that Abraham endured as he spread the message of monotheism across the region, we would expect our parashah, which relates to the life of Isaac, to offer new stories that diverge from Abraham's path. Yet, we find precisely the opposite beginning in the very first verse: "*And these are the generations (or stories) of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begot Isaac.*" (25:19) The most fundamental element of Isaac's personality is his lineage—"Abraham begot Isaac." Moreover, most of the events related in Toldot about Isaac seem to repeat portions of Abraham's life: Just as Abraham fled famine in a foreign land, so did Isaac. Abraham argued over the digging of wells and Isaac followed suit. Abraham claimed that his wife is his sister and Isaac did exactly the same thing. Where is Isaac's innovation? What does he add to the story? Why is he considered a "forefather"—a critical progenitor of the Jewish people?

Rabbi Dov Linzer explains that Isaac's critical contribution to Jewish history is the element of stability.

There is little that is new or innovative in Isaac's life. He chose not to set out on his own but to continue in the way of Abraham. It is easy to dismiss such a life as mundane and meaningless, but in fact, without Isaac we would not have survived. Isaac took all of Abraham's creativity, all of Abraham's innovations and vision, and ensured its continuity. Abraham was the creator, the founder, the charismatic leader; Isaac was the one who took that charisma and creativity and institutionalized it...If another Abraham had followed the first there would have been no progress. All the amazing ideas, visions, and goals of

Abraham would have been forgotten in the excitement and passion of his successor. Redigging the wells, doing the hard day-to-day work necessary to sustain the vision one has inherited and bring it into the next generation, can often be unexciting and thankless. Such was Isaac's task. But had it not been for him, all of Abraham's contributions would have been lost.

In 1917, the year the Balfour Declaration was presented, the entirety of the Middle East was also being negotiated and borders were being re-drawn by Western powers. Of all the countries created in the years after World War I, today, Israel is the only country in the Middle East that is democratic and stable. This stability isn't just important for the Jewish people. It's critically important for the United States as well. In an increasingly uncertain Middle East, Israel is the one stable democratic ally upon which America can consistently depend. When we work to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in intelligence, homeland security, missile defense and counterterrorism, we're not only helping Israel. By ensuring Israel's stability, we are also helping the United States meet its security challenges.

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Vayeitzei

The Ladder of History

וְהִנֵּה אֱלֹקִים מֵלֶאֱנִי *GENESIS 28:12 And behold the angels of God*

"It was a rejoicing that started with silence, and grew as the meeting neared its end. In the public lobby there were kisses and tears and excited laughter. In the delegates' lounge a rabbi cried, 'This is the day the Lord hath made! Let us rejoice in it and be glad!'" So wrote Walter S. Sullivan in the **NEW YORK TIMES** on November 30th, 1947 on the reaction to the historic United Nations vote to partition Palestine into two nations: one Jewish and one Arab. The Times of Israel describes how in Jerusalem, the staff of a local winery rolled a barrel into the middle of a downtown street and gave out free drinks. The Zionist leader Golda Meyerson—later to become Prime Minister Golda Meir—addressed the crowds from the balcony of the Jewish Agency building. *"For two thousand years we have waited for our deliverance. Now that it is here it is so great and wonderful that it surpasses human words. Jews,"* she cried, *"Mazel tov!"* Zionist delegate David Horowitz in his account of the events on that day wrote that, *"a feeling that grips a man but once in his lifetime came over us. High above us we seemed to hear the beating of the wings of history."*

As Jacob journeys from Beersheba to Haran, he camps for the night at a “place” defined by the Sages as none other than Mount Moriah, the future epicenter of the Jewish faith. There he dreams of, *“a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”* (28:12) Scholars have for centuries offered different interpretations of Jacob’s dream and the symbolism of the angels climbing and descending the ladder. According to Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni (PESIKTA D’RAV KAHANA 23:2), Jacob’s ladder represents a vision of the unfolding of Jewish history.

This [story] teaches us that the Holy One showed our forefather Jacob that the [celestial] Minister of Babylonia rose seventy rungs and descend; [the Minister] of Media fifty two [rungs], and Greece one-hundred and twenty. The [Minister of Edom] rose and rose an unknown amount. At that moment Jacob feared a great fear and said, *‘Perhaps this one will not descend?’* [The Holy One] said to him: *‘Fear not O Israel...’* (JEREMIAH 30)

Professor Shalom Rosenberg explains that according to the Midrash, Jacob witnessed the rise of each of the nations that would dominate the world. *“The ascension of the rungs of the ladder represents the period of growth and expansion of each nation, until it transformed into a superpower or empire. At some point, the process reverses.”* When Jacob expresses his fear that Israel would never rise on the ladder, he is promised that his descendants would indeed one-day rise to great heights. Jacob dreamed the future of world history, but his dream did not reveal the ultimate end of the story and the rise of Israel on the ladder of history.

Jacob’s dream reminds us that story of VAYEITZEI serves as the blueprint for the formation of the Jewish nation. At every step, Jacob and his descendants must leave the Holy Land to grow, develop and expand, thus paving the way for return. Jacob leaves his home alone and emptyhanded, but returns as the leader of a large and important family ready to take his inheritance. Jacob’s family descends to Egypt only to return many years later as a great nation of twelve tribes. Even today, after the terrible centuries of anti-Semitism and persecution, Jacob’s descendants have returned, with the help of the nations of the world, to build a Jewish homeland that has grown into a source of inspiration not only for the Jewish people, but for the entire international community.

The 1947 New York Times article on the reaction to the passage of the Partition Plan also reported that, the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Dr. Isaac Herzog, almost overcome with joy said: *“After a darkness of 2,000 years, the dawn of redemption has broken. This is an outstanding epoch not only in Jewish history but in world history.”* We have no doubt that Jacob, who feared this day might never come, would agree.

Vayishlach

Facing Problems Head-On

לְבַדּוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּתֵּר GENESIS 32: 25 *Jacob was left alone*

On November 19 we marked the 40th anniversary of the first official visit to Israel by an Arab head of state. This unprecedented visit by the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat laid the groundwork for the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, which remains indispensable to Israel's security and serves as an important foundation for regional stability and peace. Sadat's 1977 visit was viewed by Israelis and the world as an earthshaking shift in the region. Over the previous two decades, Egypt—the largest, most populous and most powerful Arab country—had led multiple Arab efforts to destroy the Jewish state. But in a gesture of hope and goodwill, both Egypt and Israel were reaching out to each other in peace and acceptance.

In contrast to this spirit of benevolence, PARASHAT VAYISHLACH opens with Jacob expressing great fear about meeting his brother. Upon learning that Esau approached Jacob with 400 of his men, “*Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed...*” (GENESIS 32:8) Jacob sent gifts, split his camp and prayed for salvation. We read how on the night before the fateful meeting, after accompanying his family over the ford of Jabbok, the final natural barrier between himself and Esau, “*Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*” (32:25)

What was Jacob doing alone on the other side of the wadi? Why after traversing the ford with his family did Jacob return to the other side? Rashbam (on VERSE 25) suggests: “*He wanted to pass after them [his family], for he intended to find a different path to run away, so that he would not meet with Esau.*” According to Rashbam, rather than face a difficult and frightening confrontation with his brother, Jacob attempted to flee. It was for this reason that immediately, “*there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day...*” (32:25) The Sages describe this “man” as a celestial angel. Rashbam explains that the angel struggled with Jacob on that night to convey to Jacob, “*that he cannot run away.*” Rather, he must confront Esau and reach an agreement to end the decades-long feud with his brother.

Running away and avoiding direct interaction doesn't solve problems, but instead exacerbates it. This is the lesson of Sadat's visit to Israel. As Sadat stated while addressing the Israeli Knesset, “*I come to you today on solid ground to shape a new life and to establish peace...But to be absolutely frank with you, I took this decision after long thought, knowing that it constitutes a great risk.*” Each side paid a price for the first peace agreement between the State of Israel and one of its Arab neighbors. Israel took what it saw as a major security risk by returning all of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, which it had won during the defensive 1967 Six-Day War. And Egypt was expelled from

the Arab League for making peace with Israel. But this demonstration of courage and wisdom led the Nobel committee to award President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize. Unfortunately, the “*great risk*” Sadat warned of was all too real. On Oct. 6, 1981, members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad assassinated President Sadat.

Jacob “*got the message*” from the angel, and his meeting with Esau led to peace and reconciliation. Through direct negotiations and goodwill, Israel and Egypt understood that same message. Let us pray that in the near future direct negotiations—the only path that can lead to a permanent peace agreement—will see peace spread between Israel and her neighbors.