

SUMMER MACHANE 5781

Machane Ari

Am Yisrael b'Eretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael
עם ישראל בארץ ישראל על פי תורת ישראל

K1: Am Yisrael

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Aims:

1. **Explore** the concept of the Jewish People.
2. **Discover** the importance of social justice.
3. **Recognise** the centrality of Am Yisrael caring for each other.

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One Big Family

Am Yisrael literally means 'The people of Yisrael', the people who are descended from Yaakov Avinu (who was named Yisrael by an angel). Ultimately, being Am Yisrael means that we are all one family, with everything that entails: the fights and bickering, but also a great love, and the knowledge that ultimately we are still committed to and responsible for each other.

Based on this, our Sages teach us that **כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה** - "All of Israel is responsible for one another" (Sanhedrin 27b).

What does this mutual responsibility actually entail though?

What is clear from the Torah and throughout the prophecies in Sifrei Neviim, is that one of the fundamental requirements of Am Yisrael as a nation is that we care for and support the most vulnerable. At the time the nation received the Torah, this was usually defined as people who didn't have a Jewish bread-winner to look after them - "**גר יתום ואלמנה**", the non-Jew, the orphan and the widow. Today, our society functions differently, but there are still vulnerable and poor people who require additional care and attention.

**DISCUSSION POINTS: Which categories of people are vulnerable in modern society?
How good are we as a Jewish community at supporting them?**

Jewish Taxation

One of the ways modern governments redistribute wealth and help the poor is through taxing those who are better off and using it to create a safety net to support others. In the Torah, G-d commands us similarly that those who have land and crops to harvest (i.e. wealth and income), must put some of it aside to give to the poor. Let's look at two examples of these laws, Maaser and Peah.



When you have set aside in full the tenth part (Maaser) of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, you shall declare before Hashem, your G-d: "I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the

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fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments: I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed Hashem, my G-d; I have done just as You commanded me. Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers." (Devarim 26:12-15)

One who reaps his field should not reap the whole field entirely but rather he should leave a little bit of standing grain for the poor at the edge of the field, as it is written, (Lev. 23:22) You shall not reap all the way to the edges of the field. It is the same whether one is reaping [with a tool] or plucking [by hand], and that which is left is what Scripture refers to as peah [the "edge"]. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matanot Ani'im 1:1)

DISCUSSION POINTS: What differences are there between Maaser and Peah?

Why were we instructed to give both kinds of 'tax'?

Which do you think would be more effective?

Why does the person doing Maaser have to make a declaration?

Shared Responsibility

Sharing a responsibility for everyone in Am Yisrael is not just about the basics like making sure everybody has food to eat. The Torah also makes it clear that when we celebrate our festivals, we must be inclusive of all of Am Yisrael:

"You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities." (Devarim 16:14)



Celebrating and rejoicing aren't individual activities in Judaism. The Torah wants us to rejoice with those around us and include them in our celebrations. That means not just our families, but also those who have no family themselves.

There are many other examples of Mitzvot that command us to help the most vulnerable members of society. For more, try reading through Devarim chapter 24.

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Building a Just Society

We've seen that, as a people, we have duties to one another. It's not enough however just to give individual responsibility, the Torah insists on us creating a society which treats people justly and fairly.

We have a number of mitzvot which instruct us to create the institutions of a just and equal society. For example, there is a mitzvah to appoint judges and ensure that every person is treated equally before the law, regardless of their position in society. This might sound obvious to us, but it is something that the Jewish people failed at repeatedly. The prophet Amos told the leaders of the people:

"Therefore, since you trample upon the poor, and take from him exactions of wheat: you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine of them. For I know your many transgressions and your mighty sins: you that afflict the just, that take a bribe, and turn aside the poor at the gate." (Amos, 5:10-11)



Amos cites the primary sin of the corrupt elites at the time that they were 'trampling upon the poor', taking bribes from the rich and denying justice to those who were in the right.

It seems clear that without a functioning and fair system of justice, society itself is incapable of functioning.

In summary, this Kvutza is focused on Am Yisrael, and our obligation to build a just society in the Jewish State of Israel.

DISCUSSION POINTS: Think about how these themes are still relevant today. Do we as Torah observant Jews do enough to call out corruption, oppression and injustice?

How much of a problem are allegations of corruption against politicians in the State of Israel?

Which cases of injustice are there in the world today? Can we, and should we, support all of them? Should we prioritise discrimination against Am Yisrael, or broader issues?

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How does this relate to us?

So, as an Am, we have a responsibility to each other, to share our wealth and care for the poor and vulnerable. It is clear though that we can only achieve this fully through the building of religious communities and a Jewish state. In order to fulfil our duties to the Jewish people, we as Am Yisrael need to set up a state in Eretz Yisrael, based on the ideals of Torat Yisrael. Sound familiar?

This is the fundamental ideology of Bnei Akiva. We believe that, using the Torah as our guide, we can build a better, more ethical and just society, by building that society in the Land of Israel.



The early Chalutzim of Bnei Akiva believed that the ideal way to fulfil this ideology was to build kibbutzim - a small society where everybody is equal and as a collective they worked to develop the Land of Israel. Later, Bogrim also started moving to towns and cities, and developing Israeli Society as a whole.

In conclusion, we as a people have a clear responsibility to create a society based on the Torah principles of charity and justice. The only way we can create that society is through building a State of Israel based on those principles. For 92 years Bnei Akiva has been part of that effort, and today we continue to fight for an Israel that is **ערבים זה לזה**.

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K2: Eretz Yisrael

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Aims:

1. **Look** at why Eretz Yisrael is significant.
2. **Learn** about the Mitzvot Teluyot b'Aretz.
3. **Discuss** how we can appreciate the Land through hiking.

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K2: Eretz Yisrael

Why Israel?

From the very beginning of our history as a people, when Avraham Avinu travelled to the place that G-d showed him, to the Exodus from Egypt, when the Bnei Yisrael crossed the desert to conquer the Land of Milk and Honey, and in every generation since, Eretz Yisrael has been at the very centre of our Jewish identity.

We have seen how vital it is for the Jewish people to have a home of their own, a State for the Jewish people, that is run on Torah values.

But why Israel? What makes this Land so special for us?

One reason is that it was promised to us by G-d multiple times. In Bereishit, we see G-d make a covenant with Avraham, promising the Land to his descendants (that's us!):

*On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."
(Bereishit 15:18)*

This covenant was repeated later with Yitzchak and Yaakov and forms a central narrative throughout Tanach.

Our Sages also teach us that there is an intrinsic holiness to the Land of Israel:

עֶשֶׂר קְדוּשׁוֹת הוּן, אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקַדְּשֶׁת מְכַל הָאֲרָצוֹת. (משנה כלים 1:6)
"There are ten levels of holiness: The land of Israel is holier than all other lands."

Mitzvot Teluyot b'Aretz

In practical terms too, many mitzvot that we were given in the Torah are specifically related to the Land of Israel, and cannot be practiced outside of it.

"All mitzvot may be categorized into two types. Some mitzvot that are "Teluyot baAretz" - they can only be fulfilled in the Land of Israel. Other mitzvot are incumbent even outside of Israel."

Rav Kook: Introduction to Etz Hadar



These are all the agricultural laws. Things like Shmitta, where we take one year every seven years off from farming and let the land have a rest, and Terumot and Maasrot, the different portions of the crops which we would give to the Kohanim, Leviim and the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. Of all our pursuits, agriculture can be one of the most

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rewarding, and this is why the promises we are given are tied up so closely with the land.

The Land is also a central theme in the promises G-d makes us of our future redemption:

"I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them". (Amos 9:14-15)

We in Bnei Akiva believe it is our duty not just to wait for the redemption to come, but to bring it ourselves. A vital part of that is to "rebuild the cities", "plant vineyards" and "make gardens" so that we bring about the vision Amos described to make Eretz Yisrael alive once more.

DISCUSSION POINTS: To what extent have we already realised this vision of redemption? What more is there to do?

Hiking – a real Mitzvah?

Rav Yirmiya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Anyone who walks four amot (cubits) in the Land of Israel is ensured of a place in the World to Come.

(Ketubot 111a)

Israelis love hiking. The entire country is covered in trails and most children will go on class hikes with their school. One reason is probably that there is so much amazing beauty packed into such a small country! In roughly the same distance as going from London to Manchester, you can experience desert, coastal plains, forests and a snow-capped mountain.



As we are told in the Torah:

"For Hashem, your G-d brings you into a good land, and land of brooks and water, of fountains and depths springing out of the valleys and hills. A land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees and honey." (Devarim 8:7-8)

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There is also something amazing about walking up the same mountains and along the same streams that our ancestors did in the time of the Tanakh. By hiking in the Land, we understand its beauty, we connect to our history, and we are inspired to build for the future.

In conclusion, Eretz Yisrael is holier than any other country and, as the 'Promised Land', is central to us as the Jewish people. It is not just any Land though, it is beautiful and fruitful and pleasant to live. We believe in building the State of Israel as a place that appreciates and utilises, but also cares for and protects the Land of Israel.

Activity Ideas

- 📄 How much do the Chanichim know about the geography of Israel? Build a map; get them to identify landmarks like the Arava Valley, the Yehuda Desert, the 'Finger of the Galil'.
 - Chanichim pin down on the map places in Israel they have been
 - Ask questions - have to run to place on the Map that is the answer
 - Piece together map as puzzle. Get them to add to it
- 📄 Head-Up with Mitzvot Teluyot b'Aretz
- 📄 Pictures - Israel or not
- 📄 Acting out skits from Bereishit
- 📄 Dress up as Farmers, cultivate the Land!
- 📄 Plant watercress
- 📄 North South East West with places in Israel
- 📄 Go on a 'Tiyul', pretend you're visiting famous sites around Israel
- 📄 Make cards of the Seven Species, play Snap!

K3: Torat Yisrael



Aims:

1. **Understand** the difference between the Oral and Written Torah.
2. **Discover** how the Jewish people developed the Oral Torah to deal with the changes that Galut brought, and why the Oral Torah needed to be written down.
3. **Explore** how Jewish life developed after the Churban.

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K3: Torat Yisrael

What is Torah?

When we think about the Torah, the image that most probably pops into our heads is that of the Sefer Torah, the Five Books of Moshe that we read from each week in shul.

So what is the Torah all about? The word 'Torah' literally means 'instruction', and it is filled with laws and commandments - according to tradition, 613 of them! In one way, Torah is the set of rules which instructs us as Jews for how we live every detail of our lives. In the words of Tevye the Milkman "We have traditions for everything! How to eat, how to sleep, how to work, how to wear clothes..."



Is that it though? Just a collection of rules? In his first comment on the Torah, Rashi asks a pretty obvious question: If the Torah is just simply a rulebook, what's the point in all the other stuff? The story of Creation, the Flood, the exploits of our Avot and Imahot, Yosef and his dreams - how is that relevant to the Torah?

IN THE BEGINNING — Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah which is the Law book of Israel should have commenced with the verse (Exodus 12:2) "This month shall be unto you the first of the months" which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text (Psalms 111:6) "He declared to His people the strength of His works (i.e. He gave an account of the work of Creation), in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations." For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan", Israel may reply to them, "All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us" (Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 187)

Where does Torah 'end'?

Both elements of Torah we've discussed - the laws and the stories - carry on for a long time afterwards.

The rest of what we call "Tanach" follows the Jewish people as they conquer the Land of Israel, build a Temple, then kind of ruin it all and get kicked out of the Land, then do it all again!

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And as for the 'Book of Law' element of Torah, did that end at the end of Devarim? The first Mishnah in Pirkei Avot explains how the Torah wasn't just a written document, but an Oral tradition that was passed on from generation to generation:

"Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be patient in [the administration of] justice, raise many disciples and make a fence round the Torah."

Notice how this Mishnah not only tells us how the laws of the Torah were passed between generations, but how they added to and adapted those rules as well. We distinguish between the written Torah, Torah Shebichtav, which came directly from G-d and is unchanging, and the oral traditions of Jewish law, Torah Shebal Peh, which are constantly being updated as they pass down the generations.

DISCUSSION POINTS: What do you think the Mishnah means by "make a fence round the Torah"?
Can you think of an example of a law that was added or adapted by the Rabbis?

This passing of the Torah from generation to generation (and discussing and adding to and adapting its laws for new situations) is one of the most central parts of Jewish religious life. Rambam, who attempted to collect all of Halakhic law into one central work, the Mishneh Torah, wrote:

"Every man in Israel is obliged to study the Torah, whether he be poor or rich, whether he be physically healthy or ailing ..." (Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:8).

(Whilst Rambam didn't consider it an obligation for women to study Torah, this has to be seen in a context of his world, where most women were illiterate. Nowadays, this is a matter of more debate in the Orthodox world, but we in Bnei Akiva see learning Torah as equally central and valuable to the lives of Jewish women.)

We in Bnei Akiva believe that learning and teaching Torah is a central part of our lives. Learning Torah is something we do on Shabbatot in Sviva, every day on Machane, and to which we encourage our members to dedicate a year or more to after school.



What do we mean by Torat Yisrael?

A central part of our ideology as Bnei Akiva is that we also believe that Torah is something to be lived. And not just lived anywhere, but lived in the Land of Israel.

What does it mean to live Torah? For example, in the Torah it says that "Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of Hashem, your G-d: you shall not do any work".

We all know about keeping Shabbat, and not doing any of the prohibitions attached to it, but creating a society based around Torah means that on Shabbat, everything shuts down, where no schools, places of work or shops are open and public transport is not running.

Living Torah also means creating a society which is built on the basis of Torah rules, where by default Marriage and Divorce are conducted according to Halakha and public buildings have to serve kosher food.

As mentioned in a previous Kvutza, there are also mitzvot which are only kept in the Land of Israel. For example, every seven years is a Shemitta year, where farmers are forbidden from harvesting their crops. Torat Yisrael means Jewish law isn't just something we do individually, but something that determines how we function as a society, in order that we communally enact the will of G-d.



There are interesting discussions to be had around how much we should enforce Halakha in the modern State of Israel, where the majority of the population aren't religious or aren't Jewish. Nonetheless, the ideal of *Torat Yisrael* means that we strive to create a society where everybody lives by Torah rules. Torat Yisrael means creating a Torah that can be built into a society around us, and it means building a society that is based around Torah.



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Activity Ideas

- 📖 Pass on the Torah 'between generations':
 - Chinese Whispers
 - Pictionary
 - Charades
- 📖 The Story Game - can you tell stories from Tanach one word each?
- 📖 Get the Chanichim to think of mitzvot they do at home - how would they be different if everyone in the country was doing them too? What about if they were the only ones doing them?
- 📖 Build a ladder - say stories from the Torah. Trigger words for them to go on the ladder
- 📖 Freeze with Torah stories
- 📖 Chinese whisper-esque charades
- 📖 Pictionary round
- 📖 Mix of mitzvot done in Israel and out of it, Chanichim need to categorise them
- 📖 Charades of family tradition
- 📖 Pass down Torah stories in only a few words