

K1 - Jewish Identity



Aims

1. To **explore** if Judaism is a race or a religion.
2. To **understand** some of the factors that play a role in our Jewish identity.
3. To **consider** the interplay between our Jewish identity and the world in which we live.

Judaism - race or religion?

In 2009, the UK Supreme Court reached a verdict that JFS was guilty of illegal discrimination in refusing entry to



pupils whose mothers were not recognised as Jewish by the Office of the Chief Rabbi. The new entry requirement introduced by the school was that a prospective pupil must attend shul a certain number of times.

So, is Judaism a race or a religion? The race definition is adopted by Israel's Law of Return, which states that a Jew is someone with a Jewish parent or grandparent. Nevertheless, a person can convert to Judaism, which implies that it is a religion. Al pi halacha, the primary interpretation of who is a Jew is defined by the status of the mother - a religious interpretation that defines Judaism as a race! Clearly, there is not a simple either/or answer to this question.

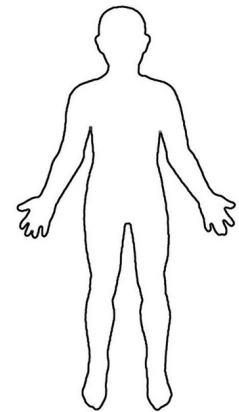


Who was the first Jew?

To address this topic, we must answer a question which leads us into an elementary understanding of Jewish identity - who was the first Jew?

On the one hand, Avraham would seem to be the founder of our people and was known as the Ivri ("the Hebrew"). However, Rashi states **five** times in the Gemara that Avraham was simply a Noachide who did the other mitzvot because he wanted to! In which case, the first Jews would have to be those who accepted the Torah at Har Sinai nearly 500 years later!

In truth, we tend to accept that Avraham was the first Jew in terms of the "label", however, it wasn't until Matan Torah that we received the Torah and thus became full Jews. We have thus highlighted two major aspects of Judaism, the **ancestral** and the **covenantal**.



Hadracha Hot Tip - who is a Jew?

Draw a body (like the one to the right) and get your chanichim to "fill it up" with what it means to be a Jew? For example: born to a Jew, Israeli, Zionist, hated, servant of Hashem, to have a mission, to be chosen...

Where does our Jewish identity come from?

A more potent question than 'who is a Jew?' is 'what does it mean to be Jewish?' We're going to explore some ideas about where our identity comes from. While reading the following section, consider to what extent these factors play a part in your personal Jewish identity and how you feel they may affect the identity of the wider Jewish community.



1. Antisemitism

According to French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre:

"The sole tie that binds them (the Jewish people) is the hostility and the disdain of the societies which surround them. Thus, the authentic Jew is the one who asserts his claim in the face of the disdain shown toward him." (Anti-Semite and Jew)

In other words, facing up to hatred is the element that unites all Jews.

The force of antisemitism faced by the Jews was noticed by Mark Twain:
*"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race...Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of...The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendour, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone...The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. **All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?** (Mark Twain, September 1897)*



What of the Jew has stayed the same throughout these thousands of years? What is it that we have preserved? Who in our community does the best job of preserving Judaism?

2. Tradition

Whilst antisemitism may play a role in our identity to some extent, it is an external influence, imposed upon us by others. Is this really the be all and end all of who we are? An alternative possibility is that our Jewish identity is rooted in tradition. Pre-enlightenment, most Jews lived in isolated communities, observing practices that changed little throughout generations.



"...tradition is, first and foremost, belonging. Those who question tradition, who are compelled to justify, defend, or preserve it, no longer belong to it, for it is, by definition, a function of self-identity rather than reflexivity...a lifestyle of halachic commitment bereft of the rootedness of traditionalism is soulless - and the soul, as we know, is the essence." (Rav Shagar, Religious Life in the Modern Age, essay in Faith Shattered and Restored: Judaism in the Postmodern Age)



What are the implications of this opinion for a Judaism of the post-enlightenment era? Can breaking with tradition weaken our Jewish identity?

3. Divine responsibility

“Earlier generations saw their Jewishness in the light of their universal ethical-monotheistic mission to bring God-consciousness into the world. It was a great privilege and an honour to be a Jew, and to live by the commandments of the Torah and its oral Tradition. But when the mission was removed from the heart of being Jewish, Judaism turned into a burden without a rational raison d’etre... Gone was the mission and the awareness that one lived by a divine covenant of high responsibility and dignity. And since there is no alternative definition of Jewishness, because Jewishness is just about our special relationship with the Creator of the Universe, Judaism for the uninitiated became a negative burden.” (Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, “Jean Paul Sartre, Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity”)



Rav Cardozo has homed in on a fundamental message. To be Jewish is to have a mission, *to be aware that one lives by a divine covenant of higher responsibility and dignity.* This awareness must come out of feeling the privilege of being a Jew and the importance of the task that we have been given.

What might the higher purpose be that Rav Cardozo is talking about?

Our Jewish identity should be embraced from a positive perspective. We shouldn’t allow our Judaism to merely be something we cling to as a vestige of the past, or to deny Hitler a posthumous victory. Everything we do as Bnei Akiva is for this purpose. We create a Machane mini-society to show our chanichim a paradigm of a religious ideal and that they can have a great time within a Bnei Akiva religious environment, that being Jewish doesn’t mean being hated, or having to do something because our parents want to do it, but rather doing it because **we** want to, because **we** are proud of who we are.



Do you agree with the above interpretations of the source of Jewish identity? Is there anything else you feel may contribute to someone ‘feeling Jewish’?

Adam Yisraeli or Ish Yehudi?

At the beginning of this Kvutza, we discussed the racial and the religious aspects of being Jewish. We can take this a step further and look at our Jewish identities through both a national and a personal lens.

Our most fundamental texts are those that make up the Tanach, the story of becoming a nation. The tale from God’s promise to Avraham through to

deliverance from slavery, receiving the Torah and settling the land of Israel is all targeted towards a life lived together, with a shared identity.

Since the beginning of the second exile, Judaism has been very much a religion of the individual. Jews followed the Halacha as dictated by the code of law, the Shulchan Aruch. Hundreds of books were written on Jewish practice: this period focused on Jews as individuals, perhaps because in exile nationhood wasn't a possibility.

Before receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, Hashem says to Moshe:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ. אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

“And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation’, these are the words which you shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Shemot 19:6)

The specific laws of the Torah are given to us to observe as individuals. It is up to each of us to study and observe these laws in order to become better ovdei Hashem. Our personal Jewish identities are individualized and down to our own choices. But there is another level to our identities, and that is the fact that we are part of a nation. Upon receiving the Torah, we became Am Yisrael.

Looking back at the factors that shape our Jewish identity mentioned earlier, which of them relate to our personal Jewish identities and which relate to our national identity? When Rav Cardozo mentioned our higher purpose as Jews, was he referring to an individual or a national responsibility?



Hadracha Hot Tip - How do the chanichim view their Jewish identity?

On the back of the body drawn earlier, get the chanichim to write down what they feel contributes to their identity. This could include their interests, their values, the way they would define themselves to others - essentially what makes them, *them*. Compare the two sides of the paper - what elements of their individual identities correspond with how they view what it means to be

The World and Me

What situations might we encounter in the wider world that call into question our Jewish identity?

As Modern Orthodox Jews, we encounter situations that may call into question our fundamental beliefs about who we are (more to follow on this next kvutzah). It is important to understand our own Jewish identity to consider how we want it to impact on the way we interact with society.

When we answer the question above, we may initially only consider it in terms of our personal religious identity. There are many social norms that clearly contradict elements of halacha, e.g. by observing the laws of Kashrut, we are not able to eat in restaurants with non-Jewish or non-observant individuals. However, when we introduce the concept of a national identity, we encounter a new set of questions. For example:

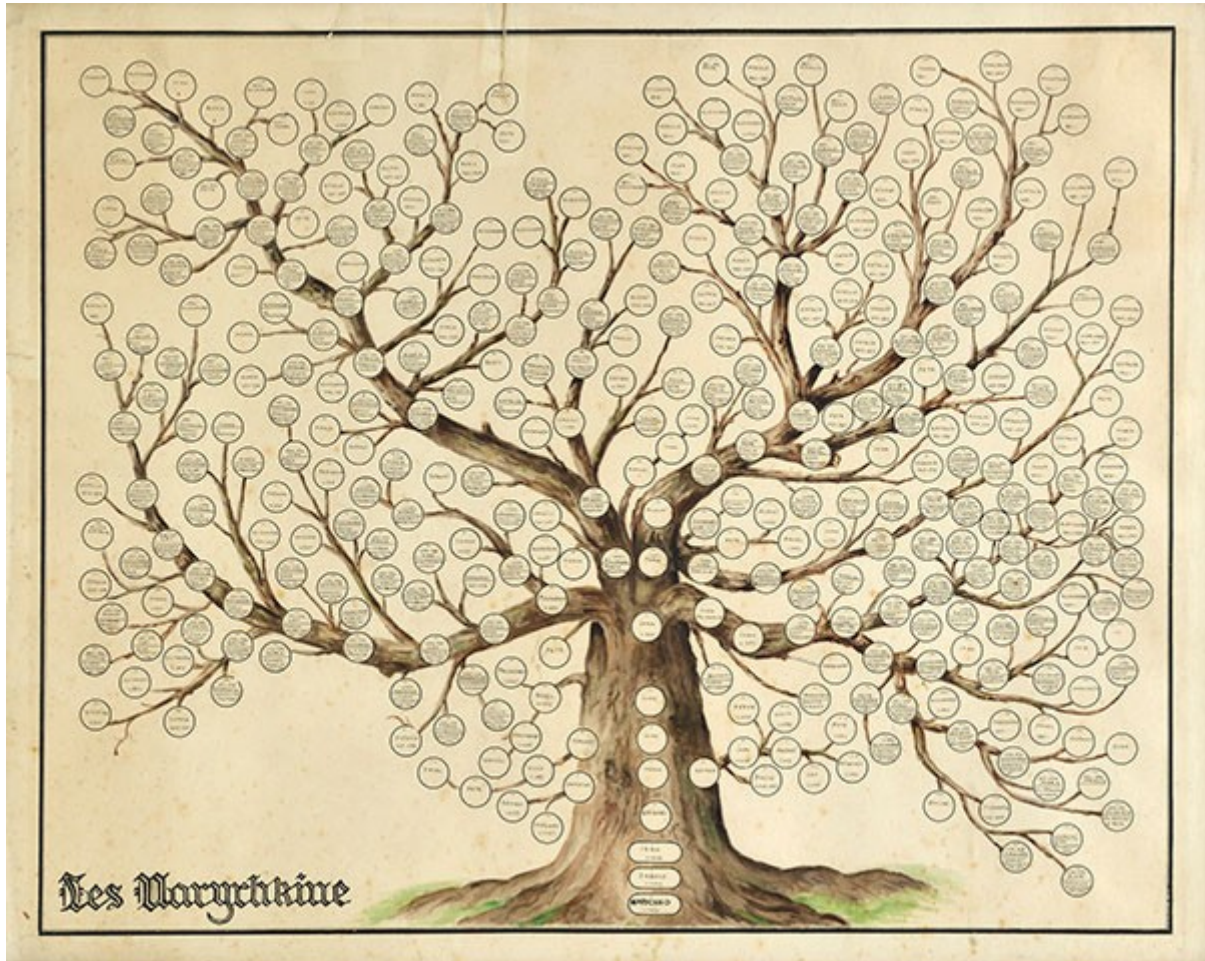
- What does it mean to be a part of Am Yisrael while living in the Diaspora?
- How should we relate to the rest of Am Yisrael when not everyone holds the same view of what it means to be a part of a nation?
- What obligations do we as a nation have towards non-Jews? Who is responsible for ensuring that these obligations are fulfilled?
- How can we resolve our Jewish obligations towards non-Jews with the modern belief in personal choice and autonomy?
- What responsibilities do we have in the way that we represent Judaism to the rest of the world?

Each of these questions is crucially important and can be explored in depth, and we will attempt to answer some of them over the next few Kvutzot. But before we can begin asking them, we must take steps to try and define our own identities. While exploring these complicated topics, it's easy to get lost in the specifics of exactly what it means to be Jewish. It's important not to lose sight of the fundamental message, the reason why these questions are important: we are Jews, and we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Summary of K1

1. There are two different aspects to Judaism - ancestral and covenantal.
2. Our Jewish identity is shaped by numerous factors, some external and some internal.
3. There is a distinction and an interplay between our national identity and our personal identity.
4. It is vital to develop our understanding of our own identities in order to consider our relationship with our fellow Jews and non-Jews alike.

K*- Shevet Dorot



Aims

1. To **explore** why the name Dorot was chosen
2. To **question** the Jewish view of family
3. To **understand** that we are a link in the chain of Am Yisrael

The Grand Announcement

"Tnuat Bnei Akiva's Shabbat Hairgun ends this evening following a month of intensive and principled activities.

This evening, snifim across Israel are holding flag parades, fire writings and performances by chanichim. This year, the 90th anniversary of the founding of the tnuva, Chodesh Irgun was marked with "90 Years of Family", an initiative with a vision to strengthen the connection between everyone and their family and to strengthen family values.

Initiatives and various projects were carried out in the snifim, led by the Kommunariot and members of Chevraya Bet with an aim to strengthen the family in Israeli society. Among other things, there were experiential parents' evenings, a weekly telephone initiative for grandparents, disconnecting from mobile phones at a fixed hour of the day in order to talk with family members, and more.

Yair Shachal, Mazkal of Bnei Akiva in Israel, said, "We are currently seeking to strengthen the holy alliance of the family, the connection of every person to their glorious roots, to their parents, to their grandparents, and to accept the instruction to continue on the path and destination. We wish to tell each and every chanich and chanicha that they are not alone, that they are part of a large family. Each and every one of us is committed to our family - it is our identity and our destiny. Each of us is a person of past, present and future. "



In addition, chanichim of Shevet Haroeh were informed that their new name would be "Dorot." The decision was made at the beginning of last week, at the end of a vote, by the plenum of the National Hanhalla of the movement led by Rabbi Chaim Druckman.

From the plenum, on the choice of the new shevet name: "Today, with Bnei Akiva in its 90th year, we wish to strengthen the alliance to the movement. We have established a world of Torah, we have established a world of Avodah, we have set up generations (Dorot) dedicated to their Torah, their Am and their Eretz. Now, Shevet Haroeh, it is your task to continue the chain of the Dorot of Tnuat Bnei Akiva.

In light of these things your name was chosen: **And you, Shevet Haroeh - you will be called "Dorot"**

Chavrei Shevet Dorot - you were honoured to be named in the movement's 90th year. A new generation in our glorious movement, led through the path of Torah and Avodah, expand the tnuva, pave new paths

out of honour for the generations that preceded you, and be another link in the golden chain of the tnuva of our Am".

(From an article in Arutz Sheva, a translated from Hebrew - ט' כסלו 17/11/18 - תשע"ט)



Why has Bnei Akiva chosen this theme to conduct its 90-year celebrations?

The Jewish family

Family values are at the heart of Judaism. The importance attached to family and the halachot and stories relating to family that we find in textual sources are there to teach us lessons.

The commandment to honour our parents came directly to us at Sinai, as one of the ten commandments singled out to appear on the luchot. According to Norman Linzer in *The Jewish Family: Authority and Tradition in Modern Perspective*, parents symbolise the most fundamental authority systems of Jewish life and are equated with God in terms of the honor and reverence due them. Respect for parents is ideally designed to serve as the relationship model of respect for God.

Parents not only represent God to their children, but Jewish tradition and history as well. Hirsch interpreted the fifth commandment in this spirit:

"The knowledge and acknowledgement of historical facts depends solely on tradition, and tradition depends solely on the faithful transmission by parents to children, and on the willing acceptance by children from the hands of their parents. The continuance of God's whole great institution of Judaism rests entirely on the theoretical and practical obedience of children to parents, and kibbud av v'em is the basic condition for the eternal existence of the Jewish nation."

Parents are the means for bringing God and Jewish tradition into the life of the family. Therefore, obedience to parents will enable the child to accept the tradition.



Does the comparison between our relationship with our parents and our relationship with God apply in areas other than respect? Where does this metaphor start to break down?

Family is different

The mention of family in the Torah extends much further than our parents. The story all the way from creation through to Matan Torah, when we became Am Yisrael, is told through a family lens.

When Avraham looks to find a wife for his son, he sends his servant to his hometown to find a bride from among his brethren. Likewise, when Rivka sends Yaakov away to escape Esav and eventually find a wife, she directs him to her brother Lavan. This seems a little strange: their families were idol worshippers, and no more righteous than any local Canaanites!

Ultimately, there is something about family that lets us cut them a little slack when they do things wrong. In most cases, we love our family and care for them more than we would a stranger, despite their flaws. *(Disclaimer: there are obviously exceptional cases where this does not apply, and we must be sensitive to the fact that our chanichim come from a range of family backgrounds and that we must prioritise their safety and wellbeing.)*



How has our attitude to family changed in modern time?

Connection to the Dorot

Adam and Noach's stories are entirely separate from each other and are linked only via a passage listing the ten generations from Adam to Noach. The same is true for Noach and Avraham. What does this add to the story? What extra value can we take from knowing that Adam and Noach were related and the names of the people who came between them?

The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



With Esau returning from the fields so very hungry, Jacob heads to the kitchen to whip up some grub for the upcoming... BIRTHRIGHT NEGOTIATIONS. **Ge 25:25-34**

The Torah is sending us the message that the concept of family extends beyond those people who you know personally. It extends backwards along the generations, and forwards to your descendants, establishing a bond with those whose lifetimes do not cross your own at all.

This theory also explains why we find such detailed description of the families of significant players in the Tanach (such as the Avot, Yishmael, and Esav). We are given a list of names of people we know nothing about beyond their familial connections. And yet, that tells us something important...they are a part of Am Yisrael!

Everlasting covenant

This family connection across generations is also recognised by God. When God makes promises in the Torah, He doesn't just do so in the moment. His oaths are binding for all of time. Following the flood, God created a rainbow as a sign that He will not destroy the earth again - not

just for Noach but for all the generations of the world. Today we rely on that same promise. Likewise, our covenant with God stems from the promises made to Avraham when a covenant was created to be passed down the generations.

This ties in nicely with an idea we discussed in our kvutzah on Jewish identity. Our obligations as part of our covenant with Hashem are not merely personal. We are responsible for taking our place in Am Yisrael as a whole. We have communal obligations that stem from our communal identity.

Part of the story

**וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים חַיֵּי שָׂרָה
 (בראשית כג:א)**

"And the life of Sara was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sara." (Bereshit 23:1)

This pasuk announces Sara's death by describing the years of her life. This directs the reader to consider the importance of her life: It's an official statement marking a significant end to a significant life. The format of this pasuk is identical to the formats of the pesukim announcing the deaths of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Yishmael. So why is it that Sara is unique among the Imahot in the way her death is described?



A further question is raised when examining the death announcements mentioned above in further detail. Each of them is followed by the phrase - ויאסף אל עמיו - and he was gathered to his nation. This refers to a symbolic joining to one's nation. It can be understood as the Torah's report of someone having secured their place

within a nation's continued existence; a closure of one's life having served as a link within the national chain. The report of the death of each of the Avot refers not only to a significant life lived, but also a significant part played in the continuation of Am Yisrael.

With this understanding, we can view Sara's life in the context of this continuation. Later in the parsha we learn that Avraham remarried and had many children. This implies that he had no difficulty fathering children, and the miracle of Yitzchak's birth was Sara's miracle. She was therefore not only a link in the chain of Am Yisrael, but was responsible for creating that chain. This explains why she is the first character in the Torah to have her death announced in the aforementioned format.

We can also now understand why the phrase - ויאסף אל עמיו - is lacking in Sara's case. She was the first member of Am Yisrael to die. There was not yet a nation for her to be gathered to. By the time Avraham died this

had changed, and all thanks to Sara. This is why she merited to have her death officially recorded.

A link in the chain

There is something incredibly special about being a part of a people. It gives you a sense of belonging and a deep connection to those who came before you and to those who will come after. It is an astonishing concept that we are a part of that same chain that Sara began, that the stories written in the Torah have a real connection to who we are today. We too can play a role in the story that began with Adam Harishon.



The metaphor of a chain has a deeper significance. If a link in the chain breaks, any links below it cease to be a part of the chain. If we fail to take our place in Am Yisrael, we are not only making a choice on our own behalf, but on the behalf of any potential descendants. By connecting to the past, we help to build the future.

Summary of K*

1. Shevet Dorot was named in Bnei Akiva's 90th year to recall the importance of family.
2. Judaism values family as it forms the nucleus from which we learn about the world, our relationship with Hashem, and our traditions.
3. Regarding all Jews as family provides a connection to and a care for every member of Am Yisrael, whether from past, present or future generations.

K3 - Our relationship with Israel

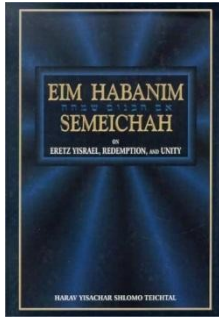


Aims

1. To **explore** the development of Religious Zionist ideology.
2. To **understand** the complexity of Religious Zionism today.
3. To **consider** the Great Aliyah Debate

The need for a national home

The Zionist movement came about as a reaction to antisemitism in Europe. It was perceived that only in a state of their own could Jews be free from persecution. The early Zionist movement was not a religious one and existed for purely practical reasons.



Rav Teichtal was a well-respected virulently anti-Zionist Rabbi who lived during the Holocaust. Amidst the destruction of the Holocaust, Rav Teichtal realised the need for a national identity in addition to a religious one, and that a Jewish homeland was the way to accomplish this. So, he changed his views, arguing that we must act together, rebuilding the nation in our own land. In the context of the Holocaust, he realised that we must become a nation that cares for itself, not be an individual who cares

for himself. It is by creating a Jewish society in the Land of Israel that we are fulfilled as a people.

Note that while Rav Teichtal, like the secular Zionists, was motivated to support the Zionist cause as a result of antisemitism, he did not view the state of Israel as a place of safety. Rather, he believed that refuge would be found in unity and that the Jewish people coming together to build a state would lead to the final redemption.

Am Yisrael B'Eretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael

In our first Kvutzah, we spoke about the concept of our national and individual Jewish identities. We concluded that the ideal is to live as individuals who are a part of Am Yisrael but mentioned that in exile this national identity is hard to achieve.

B'kitzur, the Jewish People have nationhood on a communal level, as well as 'religious' laws on an individual level, and it is by creating a Jewish society in the Land of Israel, that we are fulfilled as a people. This message is at the heart of our Bnei Akiva motto: Am Yisrael B'Eretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael - The people of Israel in the land of Israel according to the law of Israel.

The Ramban in his commentary on Vayikra 18:25 quotes the following Sifrei on Devarim:

"Even though I am about to exile you from the Land (of Israel) to a foreign land, you must continue to be marked there by the commandments, so that when you return they will not be new to you. A parable: A king of flesh and blood grew angry with his wife and sent her back to her father's house, saying to her, "Be sure to continue wearing your jewellery, so that whenever you return, it will not be new to you." Thus also the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, "My children, you must continue to be marked by the commandments, so that when you return, they will not be

new to you.” and takes it very seriously. However, a Gemara in Kiddushin 36b that says that “Any commandment that is not dependent on the Land (of Israel) must be performed outside of the Land, and any of them that is dependent on the Land is not performed except for in the Land.”

This essentially states that mitzvot done in the Diaspora don't really count, they're only for practice!

Whilst this importance of Eretz Yisrael is one that no religious Jew would debate, the question arises as to whether the modern state of Israel can really fulfil the ideals of Eretz Yisrael. How can the existence of a secular country with deeply secular roots truly signify the coming of the Mashiach? This is the source of much of the backlash against Israel found in sections of the Charedi community.

Religious Zionism

One can certainly make a valid point in saying that secular Jews were responsible for the widespread adoption of early Zionism. However, Religious Zionists were building a case for a return to the Jewish homeland long before Herzl came on the scene. Rav Yehudah Alkalai famously said in 1843: “We, as a people, are properly called Israel only in the land of Israel.” He called for the Jewish people to return on an individual and a communal level, by doing teshuva and migrating to the land of Israel.

The Religious Zionist ideal views the establishment of a national homeland as intertwined with a halachic and hashkafic obligation to settle in the land of Israel. It rejects the notion that one can believe in the need for a Jewish homeland without acknowledging the fulfilment of a Divine promise and presumes that no religious and halachic lifestyle can be truly complete without both living in and working towards the goal of a Jewish-led country in the land of Israel.



The relationship between religious Zionists and their contemporaries varied. Some were actively involved with Herzl's Zionist Congress, while others chose to keep their distance and engage in a parallel conversation. Rav Reines, founder of the Mizrachi movement (the parent body of Bnei Akiva), opposed religious anti-Zionists and anti-religious Zionists.

“The Zionists say that every Jew who is not a Zionist is not a Jew. I say that every Zionist who is not a Jew is not a Zionist.”

Whilst Rav Reines did criticise the non-religious Zionists, he believed that by helping the entire Jewish nation they were engaging in a great mitzvah. Rav Kook took this idea further and in doing so helped to build bridges

between the secular Zionist revolutionaries and the Religious Zionist community. He believed that every Jew has a Jewish soul and that secular Zionism is the expression of the souls of secular Jews.

“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 for the land that are dormant within our people.” (The Land of Israel, 1910-30)



How can we utilise Rav Kook’s approach when we look at the state of Israel today? What would he have said if he could see the modern state of Israel?

Reishit Semichat Geulateinu

The early Religious Zionists saw the development of the Zionist movement as the early signs of Geulah. Many of them did not live to see the founding of a Jewish state but truly believed that Messianic times were right around the corner and that it was their role to hasten the coming of the Mashiach. The establishment of the state and the near-miraculous defeat of the attacking Arab armies confirmed for many that the redemption was nearly upon us.



What steps (if any) do we have a responsibility to take to hasten the coming of Mashiach? How can we look at this in terms of our discussion of change versus tradition from last Kvutza?

When we look at Israel today, it can be difficult to sense the immediacy of Geulah in the same way as it was felt 70 years ago. We have a Jewish state, but it is fraught with tension between the religious and secular communities. More than half of the world’s Jewish population live in Israel, but millions of Jews from across the spectrum are happily settled in the Diaspora. Religious life in Jerusalem is at a peak, but the building of the Bet Hamikdash does not look like a reality we are likely to see in the near future.

Added to this, we as modern Jews face contradictions in our own ideologies. We believe passionately in the importance of halacha but also respect the rights of others to practice their faith as they choose. We celebrate the existence of a Jewish homeland but empathise with the ordinary Palestinians who suffered to make that happen. We are left with the challenge of negotiating our own complex relationships with a country that can be hard to understand.

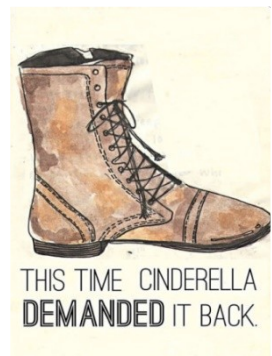
4 Hadracha Hot Tip - The Gavison-Medan Covenant

In 2003, lawyer Ruth Gavison and Rav Yaakov Medan proposed a document that could act as a constitution for Israel: “Foundations for a New Covenant among Jews in Matters of Religion and State in Israel.” The introduction to the document is included as an appendix to this kvutzah. Split the chanichim into groups and give each group one proposal of the covenant. Get them to

Our relationship with Israel

If you ask the chanichim what Israel means to them, you're likely to get a variety of responses. For some, Israel may be a place they go on holiday, a place of safety, somewhere they have family or a place they see as home. Others may speak of pride at the country's many achievements, discomfort with the politics, or anger at media representation.

Rav Kook's belief that a part of every Jewish soul longs for Israel resonates with many of us. It can be hard to articulate the sense of connection and belonging that we don't feel about any other country, often even the one we were born in! Our relationship with Israel is multifaceted and challenging. It is understandable that some may feel so challenged as to try to avoid thinking about it, but this is not the way to nurture that special feeling of connection. We want our chanichim to enjoy asking



themselves difficult questions, even if they can't find an answer.

Hadracha Hot Tip - six-word story

The Great Aliyah Debate
 Inspired by Hemingway's famous six-word tale, "For sale: ~~no more, however, the American Jew~~ *business to give*, he will never be able to justify the fact that he belongs to the generation that was given Jerusalem yet opts for New York or Los Angeles. To have waited 2000 years, to have suffered the agonies of exile, to have dreamt and hoped, to have been given the land only to reject it. How will the Jews in exile answer to future generations when they ask, 'Where were you?'"
 Challenge your chanichim to describe their relationship with Israel in six words. Get them to write down their answers and share them with the group. (Youtube: Six-Word Memiors, The Rebbezin Esther Jungreis, Zionism: A Challenge to Man's Faith, 1977) (Video Story)

In order to practice the Torah to the fullest extent, the best place to do it is as a nation in our own land. And, as the Torah, predicted, we as a nation have flourished there: Religious learning has exploded to the biggest size in the history of us as a nation. And once again, we can defend ourselves with our own army, music, cuisine, and literature. There is much to be gained from making Aliyah. We have the opportunity to lead a fulfilled life while taking our place in the Jewish story.

The question that arises is what should Aliyah look like today?

The early days of Bnei Akiva UK looked very different to the tnuva as we know it today. Hachshara involved a year spent on the Bnei Akiva farm at Thaxted, undergoing agricultural training in preparation for Aliyah to a kibbutz with your garin – the other people in your shevet who were making Aliyah with you. Many Kibbutzim, including Lavi and Beit Rimon, were founded by members of BAUK.

In 1979 there was a great controversy when two garinim made Aliyah – one to Kibbutz Bet Rimon, and the largest garin ever to Gilo, which was at the time seen as a development town. Those against the move felt that it abandoned Bnei Akiva's socialist roots and redefined who we were as a tnuva. Those in favour argued that the kibbutz movement was on its way out and Israel needed help in other areas. They believed that it was time to redefine the Avodah component of Bnei Akiva's ideology to incorporate what Israel needs most.

Today, Aliyah is still a celebrated component of our Bnei Akiva ideology, but we've lost the sense of idealism that we used to have. Most people who we know who have made Aliyah have done so to Anglo communities rather than kibbutzim or development towns. We celebrate our bogrim who make Aliyah, but the idea of one shevet making Aliyah together is a dream lost in time.



***Should we as Bnei Akiva be encouraging Aliyah for its own sake rather than to help the country?
How should we reinterpret the idea of Avodah to fit the needs of Israel today?***

Summary of K3

1. The existence of a Jewish state helps us maintain a communal identity.
2. Early religious Zionists had mixed reactions to their irreligious counterparts.
3. BAUK's attitude towards Aliyah has grown less ideological over time.

Appendix

The Spirit of the Covenant and a Summary of its Proposals

With the aim of promoting Jewish solidarity, a sense of unity and shared destiny among the various segments of the Jewish people and especially within the State of Israel, and dignity for each and every one of its sectors,

And out of a deep faith in two principles: that the State of Israel is the state of the Jewish people with all that this entails, and that the State of Israel upholds equality for all citizens and full respect for their human rights as individuals as its *raison d'être* -

we propose to agree upon the following guidelines:

The State of Israel is the place where the Jewish people is exercising its right to self-determination in part of its historical homeland. The state's existence, security and prosperity depend upon a sense of a shared destiny among the different sectors of the Jewish people and of mutual responsibility between them. Profound disagreements currently pose a threat to this partnership, to the point of generating baseless hatred among different groups. The covenant provides a consensual operating framework that enables the preservation of the lifestyles of the respective groups while emphasizing the common ground.

Israel is a Jewish and democratic state. Israel will continue to respect the equal rights of all its citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, along with freedom of religion and conscience, in the spirit of the Proclamation of Independence. In addition to this social covenant between sectors of the Jewish public in Israel (and in the Diaspora), it would be appropriate to seek out a common civil-political framework for all citizens of the state.

The best way of addressing fundamental disagreements is to establish a practical framework that is acceptable to all sectors of the Jewish public in Israel, through a process of dialogue. In this manner the dignity of all groups is upheld, with an attendant commitment to protect the beliefs and lifestyles of each, enabling all groups to act in a coordinated fashion to promote shared existential goals. The spirit of the covenant rejects the use of coercion against any group in order to persuade it to relinquish that which it holds as holy and dear. It permits and even mandates agreements concerning the shared public domain, which take into account the beliefs of every group. Given that division of the public domain completely among the various groups is neither possible nor desirable, its ordering requires coordination and balancing. The covenant also rejects the introduction of unilateral changes in agreements, and changes achieved through political or juridical decisions, while welcoming the institution of a consensual decision-making procedure.

We appeal to the leaders of the Jewish public in Israel to embrace the spirit of the covenant in all future discourse on matters of religion and state. This would be in the interest of maintaining peaceful conduct. It is also the call of the hour, in view of the disastrous consequences of exacerbating the social divide.

Acting in the spirit of the covenant as we understand it, we have drafted proposals for consensual arrangements concerning several issues

currently steeped in controversy – relations between Torah and state and relations between different communities within the Jewish population. We believe that the adoption of these proposals will significantly advance the basic objectives of the covenant.

We therefore call upon the Israeli Jewish public to study the spirit of the covenant, its fundamental tenets and the proposals it comprises, and to work towards the adoption of such a document.

Following are the proposals in concise format:

Principle of Return: Every “member of the Jewish people” will be eligible to immigrate to Israel, including the child of a Jewish father and a person who has converted through a recognized procedure. Even someone who converted in a manner that diverges from the tradition of the “Shulhan Arukh” will be entitled to register himself as a Jew in the population registry.

Personal Status: The right to establish a family will be recognized. The law of the state will permit weddings conducted according to any ceremony the couple chooses, and the marriage will be recorded in the population registry. No individual in Israel will be allowed to marry who is not single both according to state law and according to a strict interpretation of the laws of his religion.

The Sabbath: Saturday is the official day of rest in Israel. Persons will not be employed and will not be required to work in manufacturing, trade or services on the Sabbath. Cultural events, entertainment and a reduced schedule of public transportation will be permitted to meet demand.

Principle of Non-Coercion: The elimination of any monopoly exercised by a particular group on overall arrangements; at the same time, the right of every group to preserve its own lifestyle according to its own conception and interpretation will be respected. The same will hold true in matters of burial, dietary laws, the Sabbath, religious services and prayer arrangements at the Western Wall.

Legal Implementation: The covenant will be anchored in law such that it will be difficult to introduce partial and unilateral changes into its mechanisms. It is in the spirit of the covenant as a whole to give preference to mechanisms for negotiation and compromise over legislative and judicial decision-making. The courts, therefore, will not be granted the authority to invalidate laws concerning the covenant. The interpretation of the covenant, insofar as there is no court case involved, will be entrusted to an accepted representative public body, in order to encourage consensual interpretation without the need for recourse through the courts.

K5 - Our Relationship With Non-Jews



Aims

1. To **explore** what it means to be a chosen people
2. To **understand** our responsibilities to the wider world
3. To **learn** how we can be an Or Lagoyim

The Chosen People

`You may have heard the phrase “the Chosen People” used to refer to Am Yisrael. Where does the concept of the Jews as a chosen people come from? The passage from Sefer Shemot below is often quoted as a source for this idea.



וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֵגֻלָּה מְכֻל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ. (שמות יט:ה)

“Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples.” (Exodus 19:5)



What is the link between being a ‘treasured possession’ and a ‘chosen people’? What do these terms even mean?

Are we racist?

The notion of being ‘chosen’ seems to imply some form of superiority over other nations. In the modern era, this may sit uncomfortably with us, but it’s important to remember that throughout most of history this was a normal and acceptable attitude to have. Events of the 20th century left us with a new and negative perspective on philosophies such as nationalism and imperialism. What once was labelled pride is now seen as ego.



How can we maintain a sense of Jewish pride if we regard nationalism and imperialism in this way?



As mentioned above, the notion of ‘Am Segula’ does not automatically connect to the idea of being ‘chosen’. The source of the widespread use of the phrase ‘Chosen People’ originates in the Kuzari, a 12th century philosophy work by Yehudah Halevi. The essential message of the book celebrates the superiority of Judaism to any other religion and the special qualities of Am Yisrael. Halevi in fact goes further, extending his disparagement of non-Jews to converts, who he claims do not attain equal status to that of Jews who were born into the faith.

Historical context

The Kuzari is a crucial Jewish text and we can’t simply ignore its seemingly racist undertones. However, we may find justification for Halevi’s attitude when we examine the historical context.

“there were special historical circumstances for Halevi’s desire to restore the pride of the Jewish people in their spiritual heritage; Kuzari was addressed to his own people to redress their despair at being an

oppressed nation as well as a despised faith...Halevi's unequal treatment of converts as compared to born Jews in terms of their ability to achieve prophecy was in a historical context in which conversions were not designed to recognize the spiritual equality of the converts but, rather, the spiritual inferiority of their prior religious status" (Lippman Bodoff, "Was Yehudah Halevi Racist?")

Yehudah Halevi lived in Spain under Muslim rule. While non-Muslims enjoyed many freedoms that would not have been awarded to them in other religious autocracies, including freedom to practice their religion, they were regarded as second-class citizens and had to pay a tax. Halevi was concerned that the Jews were beginning to regard *themselves* as second-class. He wanted to give them a morale boost and a sense of pride in their Judaism. This, coupled with the general attitudes of the time, puts Halevi's arguments in a much more favourable light.

We can also understand why the concept of being a chosen people has resonated throughout history. It is a beacon of hope to an oppressed nation, a reminder that no matter how hard others are trying to make us forget it, we have worth.

Am Segula

Rashi does not proscribe to the concept of the Jewish people being superior to other nations. He comments on our opening pasuk with a warning: "do not say that you alone belong to Me and that I have no other peoples [besides] you...this is not so".

Rashi's view is important, but many commentators disagree, claiming that Am Yisrael is indeed unique in being an 'Am Segula'. This leaves us with a statement that appears to discriminate against non-Jews.

One approach is to understand segula to refer not an inherent special quality, but rather to a specific role that is bestowed upon us. Rav Hirsch subscribes to this definition:

"The Bible terms Israel segula, "a peculiar treasure," but this designation does not imply, as some have falsely interpreted, that Israel has a monopoly of the Divine love and favor, but, on the contrary, that God has the sole and exclusive claim to Israel's devotions and service; that Israel may not render Divine homage to any other being." (Nineteen Letters 15:13)

We are chosen not because we are better than any other nation, but because we have a unique role. God gave us the Torah not because we are superior to other people, but because our mission is to use it to serve Hashem, and to be a mouthpiece for God in the world. This fits with the

pshat of our pasuk: we are an Am Segula, but *only* “if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant”.

We can compare this to the different roles given to members of Bnei Yisrael. We don't regard Kohanim or Leviim as superior to the rest of Am Yisrael. Their uniquely holy roles in the Beit Hamikdash are no less significant than those of agricultural workers, teachers, or the rest of the nation. We don't believe that a Kohen or a Levi is inherently greater than a Yisrael – although we may expect a higher standard of behaviour from them.

What is our role?

We've established that being an Am Segula means that we have specific responsibilities. The pasuk describes Am Yisrael as *Am Segula Mikol Ha'amim*, implying that our 'treasured-ness' has something to do with other nations too. From this we understand that we have obligations towards non-Jews. We're going to explore some possibilities as to what these obligations may be.



If the Torah wanted to tell us about our obligations towards non-Jews, why didn't it just state what those obligations are instead of using vague terminology?

Seven Noahide Mitzvot

The Gemara in Masechet Sanhedrin discusses seven mitzvot that non-Jews are obligated in. These are known as the Mitzvot Bnei Noach, or the Noahide Laws, as they applied to all non-Jews from the time of Noach. The mitzvot are as follows:

1) Do not murder. **2)** Do not steal. **3)** Do not worship false gods. **4)** Do not be sexually immoral. **5)** Do not eat a limb removed from a live animal. **6)** Do not curse God. **7)** Set up courts and bring offenders to justice.

According to the Rambam, any person who faithfully observes these laws earns a place in heaven. Some believe that one of the prerequisites for Mashiach to come is that all non-Jews observe these mitzvot. If this is the case, it would seem that we may have an obligation to encourage non-Jews to keep these laws. The Lubavitcher Rebbe indeed held this view, and many Chabad chassidim offer classes for non-Jews interested in learning the laws.

Ger Toshav

The Torah discusses the concept of a Ger Toshav – a stranger who sojourns. Rashi interprets this to refer to a non-Jew who has accepted the Noahide Laws. There are several laws set out in the Torah and in the Gemara in Masechet Avodah Zara regarding the way we should treat these strangers which on the whole take a positive attitude towards them.

There is no mention of our obligation to persuade a non-Jew to become a Ger Toshav: it appears to be an entirely voluntary status.

Again, looking at historical context can help us understand the text on a deeper level. When Am Yisrael first settled in Eretz Yisrael, they were commanded to destroy the seven Canaanite tribes who already lived there (many poskim hold that this was a specific commandment for the generations who initially conquered the land). The Torah needed to distinguish between those tribes and individuals who would be happy to dwell amongst Jews and accept their laws. The message is one of tolerance, provided you were not dealing with individuals who posed a threat to the future of Am Yisrael in the land.



Why are these specific laws important for non-Jews to observe? Should we promote them to non-Jews?

Or Lagoyim

וַיֹּאמֶר נֶקֶל מְהִינְתָּךְ לִי עֶבֶד לְהַקִּים אֶת שְׁבִטֵי יַעֲקֹב וְנִצְוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהָשִׁיב וּנְתַתִּיב לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם לְהִיּוֹת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד קֵצָה הָאָרֶץ: (ישעיהו מט:ו)
*"He said, 'It is too light a thing for you to be My servant, to establish the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the scions of Israel, and I shall submit you as a **light unto the nations**, to be My salvation until the end of the earth."*

Matan Torah could easily be described as the most central event in Jewish history. Where does this revelatory, life changing experience happen? Not in the Promised Land of Eretz Yisrael, but in the wilderness of Sinai. God and His Revelation are for all, not restricted to the Jewish people, alone. Am Yisrael's role is to bring all people to God.



The common interpretation of how we are supposed to achieve this is something we are familiar with in Bnei Akiva: the idea of dugma. By publicly living a life of morality and observance we can create a Kiddush Hashem to show the essence of God's message to the world in a truly powerful way.



Which Jewish messages are most important to carry to the rest of the world?

Lighting up the World

Jews make up less than 0.2% of the world's population. Billions of people have never met a Jew in their lives. How are we supposed to influence these people and spread Hashem's message to them?

Rav Kook answers this by saying that the ideal form of Am Yisrael being a light unto the nations is when we are together in Eretz Yisrael. From there everyone will see how morally just and economically successful our state is and will attribute our success to our collective worship of Hashem. This will in turn encourage the rest of the world to recognise the importance of ethics and develop a relationship with Hashem.

Rav Kook's idealistic vision may seem like a far cry from the reality we see today. No country is criticized, vilified and scrutinised to the same degree as the state of Israel. The majority of the world have negative associations when they hear about Israel and it certainly isn't known for being a pillar of ethics and morality. The government of Israel is famous for its divisiveness and corruption.

We spoke in K3 about Israel as *Reishit Semichat Geulateinu* - the beginning of the flowering of the redemption. A perfect world comes slowly, one step at a time. Israel may not yet be spreading the messages we hope to share with the world. And yet we have a voice. With everyone's eyes trained on a tiny area of the Middle East, a people who make up less than 0.2% of the population are speaking to the entire world.



How can the state of Israel progress to become a true Or Lagoyim?

What responsibility do we have as individuals to fulfil the mitzvah of Or Lagoyim?

Summary of K5

1. Being a chosen people means that we have a specific task to fulfil.
2. Judaism values family as it forms the nucleus from which we learn about the world, our relationship with Hashem, and our traditions.
3. Through leading by example we can be an Or Lagoyim.