

Hadracha **Choveret**



תנועת בני עקיבא
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Rabbi Akiva



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Dear Roshim, Sganim and Madrichim,

Another week, another Choveret! Wooohhhh! The great elders (we're not that old, but you get the idea) are constantly engaged in discussions regarding Chinuch in our Tnua. One of these questions is what areas of Chinuch we should focus on in Sviva, and how this differs from that of Machane.

One of the great things about Sviva, and there are indeed many, is the ability to educate about something that we don't get the opportunity to talk about on Machane.

Additionally, a Chanich can go on Machane year in, year out, but still not fully get the Bnei Akiva picture. With that in mind, I present to you a Choveret on Rabbi Akiva. This is an absolute pillar of our movement; after all we are named after him. And you're about to find out why. Enjoy!!

Bhatzlacha!

Bevirkat Chaverim l'Torah v'Avodah

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Aims:

- To learn and teach about Rabbi Akiva
- To recognise his greatness in History
- To appreciate why we are called Bnei Akiva



Of all the great Jewish leaders, patriarchs, rabbis, prophets and sages, why are we called Bnei AKIVA? What did he stand for that makes us want to follow in his footsteps?

Top 10 Alternative Movement Names

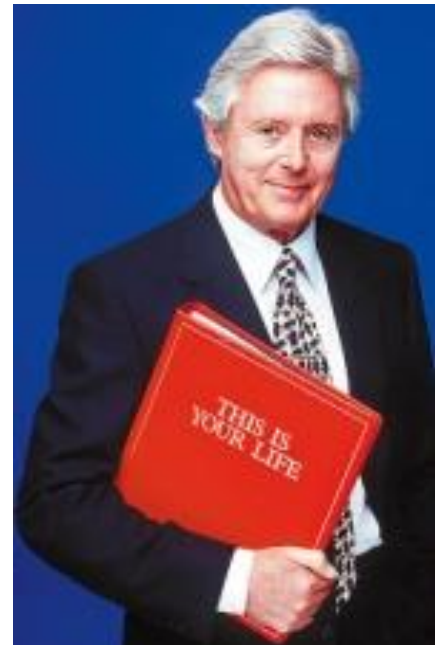
- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 10. Bnei Noach | 5. Benny Akiba |
| 9. Bnei Beitcha Bekarov | 4. Bnei Tzelofchad |
| 8. Bnei Yisrael | 3. Bnei Brith |
| 7. Bnei Sakhnin | 2. Bnei Rosemary |
| 6. Bnei Sacks | 1. Bnei Gurion |

The thing that makes Rabbi Akiva unique is that he just had it all! Not that he was perfect or that he never made a mistake – no-one can say that – but rather that he had the correct outlook in life, as we shall discover...

RABBI AKIVA:

This is your life!

Akiva ben Yosef was born around the year 50 CE, in the midst of Roman rule in the Land of Israel. He lived through the tragic events of the destruction of the Second Temple and Jerusalem around the year 70. He saw many Jews leaving in chains for Rome and the senseless hatred that destroyed Jewish unity.



He was one of the key Rabbis of the Mishnaic period and his statements are frequent in the Mishna. He is even referred to as ‘Rosh LaChachamim’ – Head of the Sages. Let’s look at some of the main events of his life:

- He was born as a non-observant Jew; the Talmud tells that he hated Talmidei Chachamim.
- He worked for Kalba Savua, one of the richest men in Israel, as a shepherd.
- He fell in love with Kalba Savua’s daughter Rachel, who agreed to marry him on condition that he went to learn Torah in Yeshiva.
- He went to learn for 24 years in total in Lod and Yavneh.
- He became a well-known and respected Rabbi and amassed tens of thousands of students.
- After the deaths of his students during the Bar Kochba Revolt (which we remember during the Omer) he found five new students and taught them. They were: Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Nehemiah, Rabbi Yose ben Chalafta and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.
- He played a huge role in codifying and systemising the Oral Torah as it was starting to be written down. It is said that all Mishna, Tosefta and Midrash were based in some way on his teachings.
- He supported the Bar Kochba Revolt, which ultimately failed, and claimed that Bar Kochba was the Mashiach.
- He was tortured and killed by the Romans in the persecutions at the time of Emperor Hadrian and the Revolt.
- His last words were the Shema.



OK so he had a quality life – famous, clever and well-liked! But why do we name our movement after him? Below is a number of suggested reasons – some of which you may connect to more than others – for our quest to find out why we are called Bnei Akiva?

1. The Ability to Grow & Change

Many Kvutzot and Peulot through the years come with Madrichim who claim that Rabbi Akiva is the man for us because he became religious at the age of 40. Although not the only reason, this is a key point.



Rabbi Akiva shows that it's never too late to start learning or growing and that anyone can change at any age. Older people often say 'I won't change now' and refuse to do anything different even if it would be better for them. As a youth movement and as individuals, we should always be prepared to change for the better, improve and start learning Torah whenever and wherever. And this is a very inspiring message to be teaching chanichim.

2. Massive Talmid Chacham

There is a famous Midrash that Moshe Rabbeinu himself paid a visit to Rabbi Akiva's classroom and found himself not understanding what was going on! Without going into that story, suffice it to say that Rabbi Akiva was one of the greatest talmidei chachamim ever – not just in the fact that he was clever and knew so much, but that he made it his life's work.



Rabbi Akiva derived laws from every tiny detail in the Torah, seeking to demonstrate how the Written Law contained the oral tradition. This approach was a matter of controversy with another great scholar, Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, who insisted that the Torah speaks in human language and should be understood through its plain meaning and not through the fanciful, homiletic approach expounded by Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva was also one of the pioneers of Jewish mysticism who - in the guarded words of the Rabbis - ‘entered the heavenly garden (Pardes) and emerged unscathed’.

One major part to being a Bnei Akiva madrich is setting aside regular time for Torah study – like at Limmud – and we get this from our man, who was described as the Head Sage and was the inspiration behind the Mishna, Rabbi Akiva. There is that great story that Rabbi Akiva loved nature. One day he was getting a breath of fresh air to clear his head and saw a strangely shaped rock. Wondering how it became such a shape he took a closer look and noticed water dripping onto the rock. The Torah is compared to water. If water can penetrate a rock, so too the Torah can penetrate ones heart, which is surely not as hard as stone. And with this Rabbi Akiva went to begin his Jewish education!



3. The Greatest Teacher

He had so many students! There are different opinions as to how many – the most commonly taught is 24,000. Either way – he was clearly a great educator who inspired many people. He moulded the next generation of Sages. An example for us to follow as Madrichim...

4. Kiddush Hashem

The ultimate Kiddush Hashem is to die with the Shema on one's lips – and that was what he did. He lived and dies by his ideals, that of perfect devotion to Hashem and sanctifying His name.

How devoted are you to your ideals??

5. Active Rebel

After the destruction of the Temple, it would be easy to give up on Judaism. No Temple, no state, no nation – what is there left? A mere 60 years later and Rabbi Akiva was actively supporting a revolution by Bar Kochba to regain control of Israel. We know that he ensured his students took part (therefore meaning they led lives as part-yeshiva student and part-soldier) and gave him support.



This could not be more relevant to today, when Am Yisrael took a decision to take our destiny into our hands and re-establish a Jewish State. For religious people, the balance between fighting in an army and learning Torah, between agriculture and religion, between the wishes of one's own religious community and those of a society which



encompasses many opinions – are all challenging. But Rabbi Akiva took upon himself those challenges, and so should we.



Rabbi Akiva believed in the idea of actively bringing the geula, as opposed to passively waiting for it to happen. This is the essence of Bnei Akiva's view of Religious Zionism. He valued Eretz Yisrael and knew that it was the only place where Jews should be. We emulate his early striving to create the first post-biblical Jewish State.

6. Ahavat Yisrael

Remember the song 'Amar Rabbi Akiva'? I know... now it's in your head for the rest of day...and the Mazkirut have been singing it for about a week! Anyway it tells of the quote from the Gemarrah that Rabbi Akiva says that 'Veahavta Lereiacha Camocha' is the greatest rule in the Torah – loving your neighbour as yourself.



This true Ahavat Yisrael, love for each and every Jew, is a key part of why we follow Rabbi Akiva, for all the Torah learning and ideals we may have are all worthless if we do not respect one another.

7. Hope & Optimism

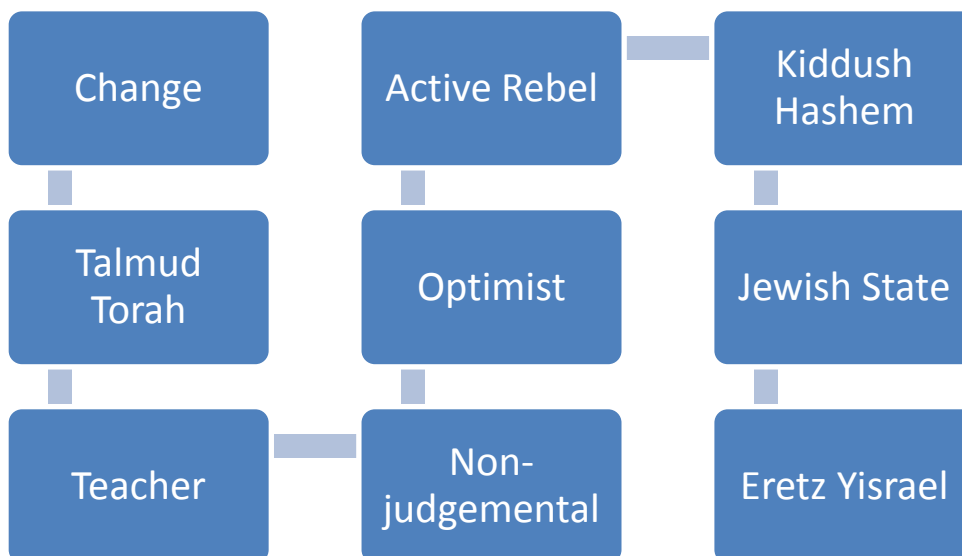
There is a must-learn story at the end of Gemarrah Makkot, 24b:

שוב פעם אחת היו עולין לירושלים כיון שהגיעו להר הצופים קרעו בגדיהם כיון שהגיעו להר הבית ראו שועל שיצא מבית קדשי הקדשים התחילו הן בוכין ור"ע מצחק אמרו לו מפני מה אתה מצחק אמר להם מפני מה אתם בוכים אמרו לו מקום שכתוב בו [\(במדבר א\)](#) והזר הקרב יומת ועכשיו שועלים הלכו בו ולא נבכה אמר להן לכך אני מצחק ... אמרו לו עקיבא ניחמתנו עקיבא ניחמתנו: (מכות כד עמוד ב)

Rabbi Akiva and the other Sages see a fox trample over the Temple ruins. They all cry – but Rabbi Akiva laughs. When they ask him why, he replies that now that the Temple has been destroyed he could see certain prophecies coming true and was comforted that one day the Jews will return and rebuild the Temple.

He saw in the year 70 what we have seen in the last few decades. Some people today look at the State with disgust – but Rabbi Akiva would have viewed it with joy and comfort 2,000 years ago! He taught us to be eternal optimists – and how would the Jewish nation have got through centuries of challenges without that lesson. It is up to us to see the positive in every person, every situation, the Jewish State and the world!

Summary (A brief overview of the reasons!)



Whichever view you liked, the truth is that the real reason why we are called Bnei Akiva is a combination of them all! All of the above are key points, but individually we could learn each of them from other figures in our history as well. However, when we put them all together, we get a unique and inspirational leader of Am Yisrael, after whom we are proud to be named...

Why are we not called Bnei RABBI Akiva?

Either way, our belief in the ideology of *Torah Va'Avodah*, which means ensuring that *Am Yisrael* are *b'Eretz Yisrael* living *al pi Torat Yisrael*, would be difficult to uphold without a precedent. We need someone to look to for inspiration who has done it before – someone who embodies these ideals and who is a respected leader in Jewish history. And that someone is Rabbi Akiva... he was so BA!

Key Ideas:

- **Rabbi Akiva led a very interesting life and only flipped out at the age of 40!**
- **There are many reasons why we are proud to be named after him**
- **Perhaps one of the main ones is how Dati Leumi he was – being a big Rabbi, whilst also being involved in the Bar Kochba revolt!**



Peula Ideas

- This Is Your Life – quite obvious really! Madrichim make a red book and start it off, maybe get chanichim to act out the rest of Rabbi Akiva's life.
- Have a debate as to why we are called Rabbi Akiva using the opinions listed above.
- The Ultimate BA-nik. Each group has to make an advert for their ideal BA-nik in different styles (e.g. World War 2 TV era style, Blue Peter, X Factor, Match of the Day etc).
- Discuss if there was a movement after you what values it would hold.



Hadracha Tip of the week.....

When you give Chanichim food at Sviva, whether it's biscuits or sour sticks, make sure you all say the Bracha (before and after!)

-KVUTSAH PLANNING SHEET-

THEME		
<u>Aim 1:</u>	<u>Aim 2:</u>	<u>Aim 3:</u>
<u>Related Activities</u>	<u>Related Activities</u>	<u>Related Activities</u>
<div>Points to discuss:</div>	<div>Points to discuss:</div>	<div>Points to discuss:</div>
<div>Conclusion:</div>		
<div>Tziud needed:</div>		