

UNITY

A RESOURCE FOR CHANUKAH

Reflection upon learning
with a partner

בְּרִזָּל בְּבְרִזָּל יִחַד
וְאִישׁ יִחַד פְּנִי-רֵיעָהוּ
משלי כז:ז

As iron sharpens iron,
so too one person sharpens
the wits of their friend

Proverbs 27:17

An invitation to question

For the whole of 2018, the Limmud Chavruta Project has been producing educational resources to help us reflect on Israel as it reaches 70 years of independence. It's fitting that, as the days shorten and the year draws to a close, we should finish this journey by considering the theme of unity. Simple to invoke but immensely complicated to understand, unity is a Jewish value of the highest importance and one that our textual tradition has much to say to challenge our thinking.

We hope that this year of five resources has inspired you to find a partner, grab some texts and get learning, and we are grateful to Ambassador Regev for his kind endorsement of this resource. As you light the Chanukah candles, take time to think about what unifies and what divides our Jewish world and our Jewish state.

Chanukah Sameach!

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UNITY FOR SURVIVAL

1 Maccabees 2:19-23

¹⁹But Mattithias answered, and said in a loud voice, ²⁰“Even if all the nations in the king’s kingdom obey him, so that each one forsakes the religion of his fathers and consents to his instructions, ²¹yet I and my sons and my brothers will walk in the covenant of our fathers. ²²Far be it from us to forsake the law and the ordinances. ²³We will not obey the accounts of the king by departing from our religion to the right hand or to the left.”

Translation: biblicalaudio.com

וַיֹּשֶׁא מַתִּיתִיָּהוּ אֶת קוֹלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר. ²⁰אִם אִמְנָם יִסְרוּ כָל עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ גּוֹי מֵאֻלֹּהָיו וַיִּשְׁמַעוּן לְקוֹלוֹ לְהַמִּיר אֶת חֻקֹּת אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם. ²¹לֹא כֵן אֲנִכִי וּמִשְׁפַּחְתִּי, כִּי לֹא נִסּוּר יִמִּין וּשְׂמָאל מֵאַחֲרֵי חֻקֹּת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. ²²חֲלִילָה לָנוּ לָשׁוּב מִמִּצְוֹת ה' אֱלוֹהֵינוּ וּלְהַפְרִיר בְּרִיתוֹ אֲתָנוּ. ²³לִכְן אֶת דְּתֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא נַעֲשֶׂה, וְאֵת חֻקֹּתֵינוּ לֹא נִמִּיר בְּחֻקֹּת הַמֶּלֶךְ.

ספר מקבים א ב:יט-כג

Judges 21:5

The Israelites asked, “Is there anyone from all the tribes of Israel who failed to come up to the assembly before the Lord?” For a solemn oath had been taken concerning anyone who did not go up to the Lord at Mizpah: “He shall be put to death.”

Translation: NJPS

וַיֹּאמְרוּ, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָלָה בְּקֶהֱל מִכָּל-שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶל-ה': כִּי הִשְׁבוּעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת, לֵאמֹר לֹא-עָלָה אֶל-ה' הַמִּצְפָּה לְאָמַר מוֹת יוֹמָת.

שופטים כא:ה

Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel on Judges 21:5

...all good that comes to the Jewish People depends on the unity of the people.

אברבנאל שופטים פרק כא

...שכל טוב ישראל והשארותם
נתלה בהתאחדם יחד.

Points to consider

If unity is threatened, how much coercion, if any, is justified to bring people back into the fold?

Do you agree that “all good that comes to the Jewish People depends on the unity of the people”? Why or why not?

WHAT MAKES UNITY? – MEMORY

Living with Memory

Being a Jew meant living with memory ... it was only necessary to continue the tradition, to reproduce the gestures and sounds transmitted across generations whose final product was me. On the morning of Shavuot there I was, with Moses receiving the law, on the eve of Tisha B'Av, sitting on the floor, my head covered with ashes, crying, next to Rabbi [Yochanan ben] Zakkai, because of the destruction of the city which we had thought was indestructible. Over the week of Hanukkah, I ran to help the Maccabeans; and during Purim I laughed, and how I laughed, with Mordechai celebrating his victory over Haman. And week after week, while we blessed the Shabbat wine, I accompanied the Jews who left Egypt – yes, I was always leaving Egypt, liberating myself from slavery. Being a Jew meant creating bonds, a network of continuity.

Elie Wiesel, *A Jew Today* (1978)

Connecting to the Jewish Past

The distant past is closer than the recent past of two thousand years.

David Ben-Gurion, Letter to Nathan Rottenstreich (1957), translated by Chaya Galai

Points to consider

Which Jewish past(s) do you connect to? How does memory create personal identity? Collective identity? National identity?

Does memory have to be factually accurate to be true? What if one Jew's understanding of collective memory is different to another's?

Did the establishment of the State of Israel lessen the importance of two thousand years of Diaspora Jewish life?

WHAT MAKES UNITY? – LANGUAGE

Genesis 11:1, 6-7

¹Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words.

⁶And the Lord said, "If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. ⁷Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech."

Translation: NJPS

בראשית י"א, ו-ז

¹וַיְהִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ, שְׂפָה אֶחָת, וּדְבָרִים, אֶחָדִים.
⁶וַיֹּאמֶר ה', הֲזֶה עַם אֶחָד וְשָׂפָה אֶחָת לְכָל־ם, וְזֶה, הַחֲלֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת; וְעַתָּה
 לֹא־יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם, כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת. ⁷הִבֵּה, נִרְדָּה, וְנִבְלָה שָׂם, שְׂפָתָם
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ, אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ.

The Revival of Hebrew

I have decided that in order to have our own land and political life, it is also necessary that we have a language to hold us together. That language is Hebrew, but not the Hebrew of the rabbis and scholars. We must have a Hebrew language in which we can conduct the business of life.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (Letter to his wife Deborah, 1880). Translation: Robert St. John



A trilingual street sign in Jerusalem

Photo from michaelminn.net

Points to consider

Does the unity created by a single Jewish language foster harmony or hostility?

Could there have been, be or might there yet be Zionism without the revival of Hebrew?

What should be the place of Hebrew in Israel? How about Arabic? How about English?

WHAT MAKES UNITY? – COVENANT

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 6a

You have made Me a single entity in the world, as it is stated that Israel declares God's oneness by saying: "*Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One*" (Deuteronomy 6:4). And because of this, I will make you a single entity in the world, unique and elevated with the utterance: "*Who is like Your people, Israel, one nation in the land?*" (I Chronicles 17:21).

Translation: Steinsaltz (Koren Noé edition)

תלמוד בבלי, ברכות ו ע"א

אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם שנאמר "שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד" (דברים ו:ד) ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם שנאמר "ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ" (דברי הימים א יז:כא).

Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People

In recent weeks, members of the Druze community – which as a minority group in Israel serves in large numbers in the IDF, including in some of the most elite units – have said that the [recently-passed Nation-State Basic] law breaks the traditional "blood alliance" between Israel and the Druze. Following the passing of the law, dozens of former top IDF officials from units like Golani and Paratroopers signed a petition expressing support for the Druze community, saying "we stand with our brothers. This land has absorbed the blood of their sons that has spilled, and they have stood with us shoulder to shoulder...".

Anna Ahronheim, Jerusalem Post, 31 July 2018

Points to consider

Can the people of Israel be a single entity outside of the Land of Israel?

What is the role of the IDF as a source of unity within Israeli society? How might this apply to the Druze? Muslim Arabs? Christian Arabs? Haredim?

If covenants can be a source of unity, what might the content of an Israeli societal covenant be?

WHAT MAKES UNITY? – LAND

Mishnah Ketubot 13:11

Everyone may compel [their spouse] to go up to the Land of Israel, but none may compel [their spouse] to leave.

Everyone may compel [their spouse] to go up to Jerusalem, but none may compel [their spouse] to leave.

Translation: Joshua Kulp

משנה כתובות יג:יא

הכל מעלין לארץ ישראל, ואין הכל מוציאין. הכל מעלין לירושלים, ואין הכל מוציאין.

Yeridah

The Diaspora is a disease and we should have nothing to do with Israelis who join it.

Geula Cohen MK (1980)

Points to consider

Is aliyah obligatory? Why or why not?

Traditional Zionism saw *yeridah* (Jewish emigration from Israel) in very negative terms. If you live in Israel, how do you see those Israelis who now live abroad? If you live outside of Israel, how do you see those Israelis who now live in your community?

WHAT MAKES UNITY? – DIVERSITY

Pirkei Avot 5:17

Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to endure; one that is not for the sake of Heaven is not destined to endure. Which is a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven? The disputes between Hillel and Shammai.

Translation: adapted from emishnah.com

משנה אבות ה:יז

כָּל מַחְלָקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוֹפָהּ לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשֶׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, אֵין סוֹפָהּ לְהִתְקַיֵּם. אִיזוֹ הִיא מַחְלָקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלָקֶת הֵלֵל וְשַׁמַּי.

The Opportunity of Unity

...we must recognise that we are not condemned to be punished by the developing Israeli mosaic – but rather it offers a tremendous opportunity. It encompasses cultural richness, inspiration, humanity and sensitivity. We must not allow the ‘new Israeli order’ to cajole us into sectarianism and separation. We must not give up on the concept of ‘Israeliness’; we should rather open up its gates and expand its language.

Reuven Rivlin, President of the State of Israel, Herzliya Conference, 2015

Points to consider

How diverse can a people be whilst still being unified? Can diversity strengthen unity?

What in the Jewish world, if anything, commands widespread agreement?

How do you see the future of Israel? Is Israeli society coming together or tearing apart?

A Message from HE Mark Regev, Israeli Ambassador to the UK

I am grateful to Limmud for releasing this accessible, incisive and thoughtful educational resource to share and discuss Israel's 70 year long story.

As we reflect on seven decades of independence, we can celebrate our success in building a Jewish and democratic state, which ensures our people's security and national self-

determination, as well as the human rights of all Israelis: Jew and non-Jew alike. We can also rejoice over Israel's transformation into a powerhouse of innovation, which is producing the technologies and medicines that are transforming lives across the globe.

This latest chapter in our long history stands as testament to

the Zionist vision Theodor Herzl powerfully articulated, that: “whatever we attempt [in Israel] to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity”. Surely all our people can proudly unite behind those words.



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Find out for yourself and get involved at limmud.org

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Reflection upon concluding learning with a partner

טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן-הָאֶחָד
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלָהֶם
שָׂכָר טוֹב בְּעַמְלָם

קהלת ד:ט

Two are better than one,
because they have
a greater reward
for their toil

Ecclesiastes 4:9



To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, UJIA is proud to support Limmud Publications with its 2018 resources.

We hope you've enjoyed learning with Limmud this Chanukah. Limmud is a charity which relies on your support to continue its activities, including the costs of this resource. We would hugely appreciate it if you can [give us a donation](#) to help with the costs of this and all our learning activities.