

# JERUSALEM IF I FORGET YOU... ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA

## BACKGROUND TEXT 1: OPTION A

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is a bipartisan organization of US citizens committed solely to strengthening, protecting, and promoting economic and security cooperation between the United States and the State of Israel. AIPAC holds an annual conference in Washington, DC, bringing together thousands of people from all walks of life. Speeches are usually delivered by political leaders of both countries, among others.

Koolulam (קולולם) is an Israeli social-musical initiative aimed at strengthening the fabric of society. In the main, it brings together masses of people, often from disparate backgrounds, to join in song. Occasionally, the songs performed are original compositions. Participants enter as individuals, but usually leave feeling part of a greater whole. The name of the initiative is a contraction of two words – קולולו (*kululu*), a Hebrew slang word for the act of “ululation,” the production of a long, wavering, high-pitched vocal sound using the tongue and the uvula, and כָּלֶם (*kulam*), “everybody.”

In 2019, Koolulam organized such an event by virtually bringing together the 18,000 participants of the AIPAC conference that year with another 1,000 people standing at the Tower of David in the Old City of Jerusalem to join in singing an original musical piece composed for the occasion. The intent was to send a message – linking the communities of these two countries is “an unbreakable bond.”



### TEXT 1 : OPTION A

VIDEO: KOOLULAM, [ISRAEL AND THE USA IN A DUET \(AIPAC & THE TOWER OF DAVID\), 2019](#)

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

## BACKGROUND TEXT 1: OPTION B

On May 24, 2018, 2,000 young Jews from around the world arrived at Ben Gurion Airport as part of Birthright Israel's 18th year. Marking 85 years of activity, the Jewish Academy of Music and Dance decided to celebrate Israel's 70th anniversary and surprise them with a warm welcome. Birthright's mission is "to provide all young Jewish adults with opportunities for transformative and immersive shared experiences in Israel and a foundation for ongoing Jewish connection."



### TEXT 1 : OPTION B

VIDEO: [FLASHMOB AT BEN GURION AIRPORT](#)

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)



### TEXT 2

GENESIS (*BERESHIT*) 12: 1-9

**1** GOD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

**2** I will make of you a great nation,

And I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

And you shall be a blessing.

**3** I will bless those who bless you

And curse him that curses you;

And all the families of the earth

Shall bless themselves by you."

**4** Abram went forth as GOD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. **5** Abram took his wife Sarai and

his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons

that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, **6** Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

**7** GOD appeared to Abram and said, “I will assign this land to your offspring.” And he built an altar there to GOD who had appeared to him. **8** From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to GOD and invoked GOD by name. **9** Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.

בְּרֵאשִׁית יב, א-ט

א וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה. ב וַאֲעֲשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְּרִכָּה. ג וְאֶבְרַכְךָ מִבְּרִכְיָה וּמִמְקוֹלָה אֲדָר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה. ד וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן חָמֶשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחֶרֶן. ה וַיָּקָם אַבְרָם אֶת שְׂרֵי אֲשֶׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת הַנַּפֶּשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחֶרֶן וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן. ו וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שָׂכָם עַד אֵלּוֹן מוֹרָה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲזַ בְּאֶרֶץ. ז וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזֶרְעֶךָ אֲתָן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיְכֵן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו. ח וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הַהֵרָה מִקְדָּם לְבֵית אֵל וַיֵּט אֹהֶלָה בֵּית אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעִי מִקְדָּם וַיְכֵן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה'. ט וַיִּסַּע אַבְרָם הָלוֹךְ וְנִסּוּעַ הַנִּגְבָּה.



### TEXT 3

### DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 30:1-5

**1** When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you – and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the ETERNAL your God has banished you, **2** and you return to the ETERNAL your God, and you and your children heed God’s command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, **3** then the ETERNAL your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. You will be brought together again from all the peoples where the ETERNAL your God has scattered you. **4** Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there the ETERNAL your God will gather you, from there you will be fetched. **5** And the ETERNAL your God will bring you to the land that your ancestors possessed, and you shall possess it; and you will be made more prosperous and more numerous than your ancestors.

דְּבָרִים ל, א-ה

א וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וְהַשְׁבַּת אֶל לִבְכָּךָ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדִּיחָךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה. ב וְשַׁבְתָּ עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשִׁמְעֶתָ בְּקוֹלוֹ כָּכָל אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם אַתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְכָּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ. ג וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצָךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְצִיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה. ד אִם יִהְיֶה נִדְחָךָ בְּקִצָּה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצָךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחָךָ. ה וְהִבִּיאָךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִרְשׁוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וִירִשְׁתָּהּ וְהִיטְבָּךָ וְהִרְבָּךָ מְאֹד.



## TEXT 4

### PSALMS (TEHILLIM) 137:1-6

- 1** By the rivers of Babylon,  
there we sat,  
sat and wept,  
as we thought of Zion.
- 2** There on the poplars  
we hung up our lyres,
- 3** for our captors asked us there for songs,  
our tormentors, for amusement,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”
- 4** How can we sing a song of God on alien soil?
- 5** If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither;
- 6** let my tongue stick to my palate  
if I cease to think of you,  
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory  
even at my happiest hour.

תְּהִלִּים קלז, א-ו

א עַל נְהָרוֹת כָּכָל שֵׁם לְשַׁבְּנוּ גַם בְּכִינוּ בְּזִכְרֵנוּ אֶת צִיּוֹן. ב עַל עֲרֵבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ תָּלִינוּ כְּנֹרִיתֵינוּ. ג כִּי שֵׁם שְׁאַלְנוּ שׁוֹבֵינוּ דְּבָרֵי שִׁיר וְתוֹלְלֵינוּ שְׁמִיחָה שִׁירוּ לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן. ד אִיךָ נִשִּׁיר אֶת שִׁיר ה' עַל אֲדָמַת נֶכֶר. ה אִם אֲשַׁכְּחֶךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי. ו תִּדְבֹּק לְשׁוֹנִי לְחִכִּי אִם לֹא אֲזַכְּרֶכִּי אִם לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׁמִיחָתִי.



## TEXT 5

### SIFREI, DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 12:29

*Midrash Halakhah* to the books of Numbers (*BeMidbar*) and Deuteronomy (*Devarim*); compilation of teachings of *tanna'im*; edited in 4th–5th century in the Land of Israel.

It is recounted regarding Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteirah, Rabbi Matya ben Charash, Rabbi Chananyah the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Yonatan that were leaving the Land of Israel and when they reached Platana [in Syria], and recalled the Land of Israel, they raised their eyes and shed tears, they rent their clothing, and  
5 recited this verse, “And you shall possess it and dwell in it, and you shall observe to do all the statutes...” [Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 11:31–32]. They declared, “Dwelling in the Land of Israel is weighted against all the rest of the commandments in the Torah.”

ספרי, דברים יב, כט

מעשה ברבי יהודה בן בתירה ורבי מתאי בן חרש ורבי חנניה בן אחי רבי יהושע ורבי יונתן שהיו יוצאים חוצה לארץ והגיעו לפלטים וזכרו את ארץ ישראל קפז עיניהם וגלגו דמעוניהם וקרעו בגדיהם וקראו את המקרא הזה וירשתם אתה וישבתם בה ושמרתם לעשות את כל החקים ... אמרו לשיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל המצוות שבתורה.



## TEXT 6

### RABBI YEHUDAH HALEVI, *O SCENIC BEAUTY! JOY OF THE WORLD!* (YEFEI NOF, MESOS TEVEL)

(1075–1141) Poet and philosopher in Muslim Spain; author of an important work of medieval Jewish philosophy, the *Kuzari*.

O scenic beauty! Joy of the world! City of the Exalted King!

For you, from [earth's] far western end, my spirit yearns.

Compassion stirs in me when I remember the days of yore,

Your glory that has been exiled, and your splendor which has been destroyed.

5 Would that on an eagle's wings I could fly,

To soak your parched clay with my tears, and it will be sweet!

I seek you out, and although you have no king, and where once

Grew your balm of Gilead, snakes and scorpions [scuttle],

Would I not caress and kiss your stones,

10 And would not your clods of earth taste better than honey in my mouth?

רב יהודה הלוי, יפה נוף משוש תבל

יפה נוף משוש תבל קריה למלך רב.

לך נכספה נפשי מפאתי מערב!

המוז רחמי נכמר כי אזכרה קדם,

כבודך אשר גלה ונוף אשר חרב.

ומי יתנני על כנפי נשרים, עד

ארוה בדמעותי עפרה ויתערב!

דרשתיה, ואם מלכה אין בך ואם במקום

צרי גלעד - נחש שרף וגם עקרב.

הלא את אבניה אחוזה ואשקם

וטעם רגביך לפי מדבש יערב!



## TEXT 7

### DR. MALKA ZEIGER SIMKOVICH, *JEWISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LAND OF ISRAEL DURING THE TIME OF THE SECOND TEMPLE* (2015)

Director and Editor-in-Chief of The Jewish Publication Society.

Most observant Jews today assume that the desire to return to Israel and live in it was a dominant feeling among virtually all pious Jews from the time of the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.). Many of us have been taught that from this point forward, all Jews have “cried by the rivers of Babylon” (see Psalm 137), longing to  
5 return to Zion. While there is no doubt that many Jews did wish to return to Judah, and even took the opportunity when it presented itself some 50 years later, most Jews of the Second Temple period did not return to the land of Israel and adjusted to diasporan life remarkably well.

- 10 By the last two centuries of the Second Temple Period, Jews were living in cities all over the world. Some of these cities were major cosmopolitan centers, such as Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Rome in Italy. In these communities, Jews preserved their religious identities while simultaneously embracing many of the cultural and social aspects that surrounded them. Their attitudes towards the  
15 land of Israel and the Jerusalem Temple were complex, varied, and sometimes contradictory. . . .

- In short, there appears to have been three main attitudes towards the land of Israel, and the Jerusalem Temple in particular, among Second Temple period diasporan  
20 Jews. The first consists of great devotion to the land of Israel coupled with a total rejection of the Hellenist world. The second is an attempt to balance devotion for the land of Israel with loyalty to one’s host country. While Jews who adopted this attitude expressed a profound connection to the land of Israel by regularly sending donations to support the Jerusalem Temple, there is no evidence that they intended  
25 to move there, or felt guilty for not doing so. The third attitude was that the Temple in Jerusalem could be replaced by other, newer temples (in Egypt).

The first and third attitudes represent opposite extremes of one spectrum; it is the second attitude that was the most dominant during this period. It is these Jews who felt a powerful connection to the Jerusalem Temple and the land of Israel, but did not move there.

. . . [In] the very centuries that the Jewish religion was concretized, the majority of Jews were living in the diaspora and were faithfully practicing their traditions outside of the land of Israel. Most of these Jews were content to live with the tension of ideological commitment and love for the land of Israel with their choice to remain rooted in the diaspora.

Available online at [thetorah.com](http://thetorah.com). Viewed July 2020.



## TEXT 8

### THEODOR HERZL, *THE JEWISH STATE* (1896)

(1860–1904) The founder of modern political Zionism.

**We are a people—one people.**

We have honestly endeavored everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities and to preserve the faith of our fathers. We are not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty in some places running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers, and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already had experience of suffering....It is useless, therefore, for us to be loyal patriots....If we could only be left in peace....

But I think we shall not be left in peace. . . .

Because I have drawn this conclusion with complete indifference to everything but the quest of truth, I shall probably be contradicted and opposed by Jews who are in easy circumstances. . . .

... if all or any of the French Jews protest against this scheme on account of their own “assimilation,” my answer is simple: The whole thing does not concern them at all. They are Jewish Frenchmen, well and good! This is a private affair for the Jews alone.

Herzl, T. 1988. *The Jewish State*. New York: Dover Publications, 76–80. Available online at [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org). Viewed July 2020.



## TEXT 9

### ***EMET VE-EMUNAH, STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM (1988)***

A joint statement from The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly United Synagogue of America, The Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, and the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs.

#### **Various Centers of Jewish Life**

We view it as both a misinterpretation of Jewish history and a threat to Jewish survival to negate the complementary roles of *Eretz Yisrael* [the Land of Israel] and the Diaspora. Currently there are various important centers of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Diaspora Jewry furnishes vital economic, political, and moral support to Israel; Israel imbues Diaspora Jewry with a sense of pride and self-esteem. Some see the role of *Medinat Yisrael* [the State of Israel] as the cultural and religious center of world Jewry. Others insist that since the days of the Prophets, various foci or centers of Jewish life and civilization, in both Israel and the Diaspora, have sustained the creative survival of *Am Yisrael* [the Jewish people] and *Torat Yisrael* [the Jewish tradition]. *Eretz Yisrael* produced most of the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud of *Eretz Yisrael*, the major Midrashim, liturgy, and other great works, while the Diaspora gave us the Babylonian Talmud, Hebrew poetry, philosophical writings, commentaries, law codes, and other lasting creations. The various communities interacted in a continual symbiotic process of mutual enrichment.

- 15 We realize that Israel and the Diaspora enjoy different advantages while facing unique challenges. Only in Israel may a Jew lead an all-encompassing Jewish life. There, Shabbat, *Yom Tov*, and *kashrut* are officially observed in varied degrees by the civilian organs of state and by the military; there Hebrew is the nation's language, and the Bible is studied in every school. Paradoxically, the very ease
- 20 with which Jewish identity may be expressed in the Jewish state may give the false impression that religion is not needed in Israel for Jewish survival as it is in the Diaspora. We do not believe that Jewish identity can be replaced by Israeli identity or the ability to speak Hebrew. We are convinced that Jewish religion is essential as a source of ethical and moral values. . . .

25

Both the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry have roles to fill; each can and must aid and enrich the other in every possible way; each needs the other. It is our fervent hope that Zion will indeed be the center of Torah and Jerusalem a beacon lighting the way for the Jewish people and for humanity.

Dorff, E. N. 2018. *JPS Anthologies of Jewish Thought: Modern Conservative Judaism – Evolving Thought and Practice*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.



## TEXT 10

### ALAN WOLFE, *AT HOME IN EXILE: WHY DIASPORA IS GOOD FOR THE JEWS*

(b. 1942) Professor of political science and director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College.

- . . . the Diaspora remains the place where universalistic Judaism will thrive best. Its Judaism will become more complex and vibrant as its culture intermingles with other cultures. Its religion, far from dissolving into meaningless syncretism, will be enriched by its encounter with other faiths. Its ethnicity will no longer be defined
- 5 by the vulgarity of Jackie Mason, the claustrophobia of *Fiddler on the Roof*, or the determination to prevent Yiddish from breathing its last breath, but instead will be free to find new forms of expression in a world that values individual freedom more than group attachment. In one sense Jews are like everyone else: they must manage

to find ways to be true to their heritage in an ever-changing world. In another  
10 sense they are relatively unique: their character as a diasporic people gives them a  
powerful advantage for meeting that challenge, even if their current inclination is not  
to use it. . . .

. . . [Just] as Israel is a fact of life, and, in my opinion, has every right to exist, . . . the  
15 Diaspora also is here to stay, and with it the universalism that was so much part of  
its history. Now that the events of the 1930s and 1940s are beginning to lose their  
hold on the consciousness of younger generations, Jews in both Israel and the  
Diaspora need each other more than ever.

Wolfe, A. 2014. *At Home in Exile: Why Diaspora Is Good for the Jews*. Boston: Beacon Press, 8–9.

## BACKGROUND TEXT 11

The following text is the concluding section of Wertheimer’s article based on news articles, op-eds, reports, and blogposts that have appeared since October 7. In addition, he conducted over 55 interviews with professionals at 19 Jewish philanthropic federations and 15 national Jewish agencies during the summer of 2024 to learn how their organizations and supporters have responded to new challenges.

In the fuller text, Wertheimer addresses the following questions:

Why were most American Jews so unprepared for the surge of domestic anti-Israel and antisemitic activities? How did rank-and-file Jews and their communal organizations respond to the dual crises in Israel and the United States? What were some of the most and least successful responses? And are assumptions guiding communal strategies in need of rethinking?

After outlining how American Jewry mobilized both financially<sup>1</sup> and through activism and participation in Jewish life<sup>2</sup> in support of Israel, he concludes by looking at the concerning elements of anti-Zionism among the younger generation of American Jewry.



## TEXT 11

### PROFESSOR JACK WERTHEIMER, *WHAT AMERICAN JEWS GAVE AFTER OCTOBER 7, PART IV THE FAILINGS* (2024)

(b. 1948) Professor of American Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary and founding director of the Joseph and Miriam Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism from 1987 to 2008.

...

- Among the disheartening developments since October 7, one of the more painful has been the very public activities of Jews who join forces with haters of Israel. This is not the place to trace the long, sordid history of Jewish anti-Zionism, a history going back to the very beginnings of the Zionist enterprise at the end of the 19th century. What sets current anti-Zionists apart is their unbridled activism during a military campaign defined by Israel as an existential war against Iranian proxies attempting to assault Israelis from multiple directions. Demonstrating in public and often joining pro-Hamas encampments and marchers, anti-Israel Jews proudly claim they are acting in accordance with the highest values of Judaism. Organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace, If Not Now, and assorted other groups proudly denounce Israel. Their adherents malign Israel “as Jews.”
- It’s hard to know what proportion of the American Jewish population identifies as anti-Zionist, but some surveys offer preliminary figures. The political scientist Eitan Hersh has been surveying college students in recent years and concluded in 2022: “the percentage of Jewish students who believe there should not be a Jewish state in Israel-Palestine [is] fairly constant, at around 10-15 percent.” A survey he conducted after October 7 showed no change in those numbers, though some of the undecided students had become more supportive of Israel. Significantly, nearly 25 percent of Jewish students were uncertain “whether Israel as a Jewish state should continue to exist.” This means that roughly one-third of Jewish college students cannot bring themselves to say they support the only state Jews have. As for the adult population, a survey conducted by JFNA found that 90 percent supported Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, while 17 percent identified as non-Zionists, 5 percent as anti-Zionists, and 36 percent claimed they did not know.

What are we to make of the large gap between Jewish college students and the adult population? And why do so many Jews fail to identify as Zionists, that is, as supporters of the right of Jews to sovereignty in their own state? It's possible that many of the latter may not know what Zionism means. The same JFNA survey found high percentages of Jews eager to learn more about Zionism and Israel because they had never been educated about either. Some have attributed the gap between college students and older adults to their different stages of life, claiming that as the former mature, they will come around to valuing the Jewish state.

No single explanation can capture why some Jews have turned on Israel. Surely how Jews are educated and socialized by the American Jewish community is a contributing factor. For decades, educators, rabbis and communal leaders have provided a dumbed-down version of Judaism as fundamentally about being a good person. . . .

After October 7, American Jews can no longer afford the skewed priorities of the past decades. Daniel Kane, a Reform rabbi, bluntly assessed what is broken in American Jewish life that now must be fixed: "In many ways, we failed our young people in teaching them too much about the conscience of the prophets and too little about the passion of the priesthood. We rooted the majority of their Jewish identities in the universal call of social justice and put less emphasis on balancing it with a particular pride in and obligation toward Jewish peoplehood."

One might add too that Jewish education in many sectors of the community failed to teach about the commandments of Judaism that are specific to the Jewish people or to impart that observance of mitzvot guides Jews to moral behavior, spiritual connection to God, and a love for the Jewish people. Instead, as Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, the leading advocate for Israel and the needs of the Jewish people in the Reform movement, has put it: "We thought we were sensitizing young Jews to the Jewish obligation of social repair. We thought we were conveying the principles of Jewish universalism. We thought we were teaching g'milut hasadim – acts of lovingkindness. . . . We did not expect the Jewish spirit to dribble away while we thought we were passing it on."

Compare the American Jewish mantra of tikkun olam to what Israeli society imparts to its youths. From a young age, Israeli Jews are socialized to value service to

their people. When they join the military, men and some women risk (and tragically too often lose) life and limb while protecting their people, their state, their Jewish way of life. It's not that Israelis care only about fellow Jews: Israel too has a strong environmental movement, sends volunteers with alacrity to far-flung lands when catastrophe strikes, and has a vibrant movement to build bridges with Arab communities in Israel and the West Bank. It is taken for granted that the Israeli healthcare system will treat terrorists wounded while they tried to murder Israeli citizens. Israeli Jews combine their primary commitment to their own people with secondary efforts to help others around the world in need. Many younger American Jews, by contrast, rarely if ever learn about their special responsibility to care for their own – and what that might mean in practice.

That failing has many deleterious consequences for the lives of American Jews. Jewish youth especially pay a price in that they are deprived of a greater purpose. As Dan Senor and Saul Singer write in their recent book *The Genius of Israel*, “the act of bringing people together, . . . defending the country against a common threat gives a feeling of being needed and creates resilience.” Put differently, Israelis find meaning in their lives by furthering a great Jewish cause, the building of a sovereign Jewish state. In the absence of a compelling Jewish cause, recent generations of younger Jews in the United States have played at being “social-justice warriors.”

Now that American Jewish life is challenged more severely than at any time since the Second World War, multiple Jewish needs beg for their attention. Perhaps after this year of travail, American Jews of all ages will focus more energy on rebuilding domestic Jewish life by attending to Jewish human-service needs, Jewish victims of anti-Semitism, and Jews who lack a proper Jewish education, along with their efforts on behalf of Israel. If that shift in priorities occurs, October 7, indeed, will have been an inflection point of great significance for American Jewish life.

Available at [mosaicmagazine.com](https://mosaicmagazine.com). Viewed February 2025.



## TEXT 12

### LINDA MIRELS, *REIMAGINING PHILANTHROPY FOR THE START-UP NATION* (2024)

Philanthropist and business leader, President of UJA-Federation of New York since July 1, 2023.

...

[T]he events of and since October 7 have made clear that Israel cannot go it alone. Though the Israeli people have demonstrated extraordinary heroism and resilience,  
5 we can no longer take for granted that Israel by itself can repel the many threats arrayed against it. Its military efforts to subdue and defeat Hamas have come with enormous human and economic costs for Israel . . .

This much is clear: Israel's security and the safety of Jews in the Diaspora are  
10 intertwined. When Israel is on the defensive, so are we; when Israel is wounded, so are we. And vice versa: Never have more Israelis understood the connections between their fate and that of global Jewry; never have I heard more offers of support or more of a sense that our fates are shared . . .

15 Our new understanding of reality must lead to new approaches to meet our collective challenges. Diaspora Jewry and major donors, as well as Israeli government officials and nongovernment leaders, must act with new urgency and creativity. It's time to reinvent the model of philanthropic partnership between Israel and the Diaspora in a way that is equal to the moment.

20 Let's begin our work by acknowledging the obvious.

First, continued philanthropy is essential to Israel's long-term existence. Disengagement is simply not practical or possible if we want to ensure Israel's  
25 survival.

And second, the welfare and prosperity of Israel are directly linked to the well-being of global Jewry, and vice versa. Israel is the largest Jewish community in the world.

It is the center of Jewish culture, Jewish learning, and Jewish life, not to mention a source of remarkable innovation in a broad range of industries. The Diaspora draws strength from Israel. Our destiny and Israel's are closely linked . . .

In short, Israel doesn't need donors – it needs investors and partners. This goes far beyond the financial. We should offer advice from our experience in other societies, including over matters that affect the long-term character of the nation, such as its democratic systems and its religious institutions and policies. We should have a voice on how Israel tells its own story to the world and share with Israel what we know about those global audiences. We are important stakeholders with a shared destiny. We share the core Zionist mission to not only return Jews to their ancestral land but also to revivify Jewish communities worldwide.

. . .

Through this kind of partnership and the relationships it will engender, Diaspora Jews will learn new things about Israel – and about themselves. In the days following October 7, a generation of young Israeli men and women raised in relative prosperity and security reacted with courage and heroism. More reservists responded after the attacks than had been called up; even those who had aged out of service or were ineligible for a variety of reasons wanted to fight for their homeland. Creative and tireless civilian volunteers also stepped up, ready and willing to meet the needs of the moment.

There is a lesson here for Diaspora Jews who feel besieged on their campuses and in their communities by antisemitic attacks and vitriol. The example set by Israelis should embolden us. Their willingness to sacrifice and fight when it matters most is an inspiration and a reminder of the stakes involved.

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks once wrote:

To be a Jew is to be part of the most remarkable story ever lived, by any people, covering more countries, more adverse circumstances, more triumph and tragedies than any other story. Every one of us has a chapter to write in that story and hand the book on. That is what it is to be a Jew.

The surge in antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment following October 7 has made it clearer than ever that the fates of Israel and global Jewry are intertwined. We

65 all need to participate in what happens next. We all have a role to play: donating, volunteering, investing, learning Hebrew, becoming activists, and living proud and vibrant Jewish lives, wherever we live.

70 This is an extraordinary time in Jewish history, when Israel exists as a sovereign nation. Israel needs our support and partnership as much as it ever has – and we need Israel just as much.

Available at [Sapirjournal.org](http://Sapirjournal.org). Viewed February 2025.

## CONCLUDING TEXT FOR THE COURSE



### TEXT 13 RABBI KERRY M. OLITZKY, *TEN ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION "WHY BE JEWISH?"*

(b. 1954) American Reform rabbi, educator, administrator, and author.

1. **As a Jew, the collective story of the Jewish people becomes my personal story.** My own life's story contributes to the collective memory of the Jewish people. The Jewish historical narrative of the Jewish people evolves as the Jewish people march forward in history and will eventually bring us into the messianic period.
2. **The doing of mitzvot brings me closer to the Divine.** In the refracted Divine light, I am able to see myself more clearly.
3. **The emphasis of deed over creed encourages the individual (irrespective of personal belief or doubts of faith) to help build a better world through acts of social justice (*tikkun olam*)** and provides the individual with a variety of opportunities to do so. The doing of these good deeds, which emerge from a foundation of positive Jewish values, brings me closer to others and to humanity.
4. **The affirmation of one God is the unity principle that is the foundation of Jewish faith.** Judaism encourages questioning and debate. Faith comes through struggle. The result of this struggle helps to define Jewish theology.
5. **The Jewish community provides support to the individual (and family) during life's liminal moments,** including those times in which we soar, as well as those that bring us into the deepest, darkest moments of our lives.
6. **Judaism transforms daily routine (the long haul of life) into sacred moments and sacred opportunities,** especially through the application of ritual, helping to moor us in what is sometimes an anchorless world.
7. **Judaism emphasizes lifelong educational growth of all kinds.** Jewish education helps us to morally navigate the world. (The Talmud requires parents to teach their children "how to swim.") Judaism also provides a framework for teaching children their moral responsibility to the world.
8. **Judaism has a variety of spiritual disciplines that elevate the soul,** including daily prayer, the study of sacred texts, dietary standards, and Shabbat (the Sabbath).

9. **The beauty of Judaism and the accomplishments of the Jewish people foster Jewish pride**, as well as a connection to fellow Jews that transcends any geographic border or time and space.
10. **Jews have a home in Israel.** Its capital, Jerusalem, is the center of the Jewish spiritual world, where according to rabbinic teaching, is the place where heaven and earth touch.

Available on-line at [ejewishphilanthropy.com](http://ejewishphilanthropy.com). Viewed July 2020.

# KEY TERMS

**Am Yisrael.** (עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל) The Jewish nation or people.

**Diaspora.** (Heb. תְּפוצוֹת, *tefutzot*) Greek word for “dispersion,” used to refer to areas of Jewish settlement outside of the Land of Israel.

**Eretz Yisrael.** (אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל) The Land of Israel. Name of the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants.

**Galut.** (גָּלוּת) Exile. Generally refers to the enforced dwelling of the Jews outside of the Land of Israel. It has connotations of alienation, degradation, and persecution.

**Ge'ulah.** (גְּאֻלָּה) Redemption. In the context of the Jews, it is a religious concept that refers primarily to the fulfillment of the prophetic vision regarding the reestablishment of the Jewish people in the Land promised to them by God. In the context of the entire world, it marks the arrival of the Messianic Era that ushers in a period of universal peace and knowledge of God.

**Medinat Yisrael.** (מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל) The modern State of Israel.

**Yishuv ha'aretz.** (יְשׁוּבַת הָאֶרֶץ) A reference to the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel. The question of when and under what conditions Jews are obligated in this mitzvah, as well as what one does to fulfill it, are ongoing issues of halakhic debate.

**Zion.** (Heb. צִיּוֹן, *Tziyyon*) One of the names for the city of Jerusalem (or a part of it). Later used to designate all of the Land of Israel.

**Zionism.** (Heb. צִיּוֹנוּת, *Tziyonut*) Political and ideological movement aimed at restoring Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel; later, refers to support of the State of Israel. The modern movement was founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897 at the first World Zionist Congress in Basel.

# KEY NAMES

**Abraham (Avraham).** Born Abram (Avram) in the city of Ur in Babylonia, he was the son of Terach, and the husband of Sarah. He is credited with (re)introducing monotheism into the world. According to the biblical text, after demonstrating his loyalty and devotion to God, God contracted a covenant with him and with his descendants following him – they would keep God’s law and God would be their God and allot them a territory of their own. Through his son Isaac (Yitzchak) the Israelites came to be according to all Abrahamic faiths, and through his son Ishmael (Yishmael), the Arab peoples came to be according to Muslim and Jewish traditions.

**HaLevi, Rabbi Judah (Yehudah).** (c. 1075–1141) A great medieval Jewish theologian and Hebrew poet. Born in Spain, he migrated to the Land of Israel shortly before his death. His most famous work is the *Kuzari*. Written in the form of a dialogue, it is a long defense of Judaism against Christianity, Islam, and Greek philosophy.

**Herzl, Theodor.** (1860–1904) Founder of modern political Zionism. Originally a journalist, he was stirred by the Dreyfus affair and began to formulate his Zionist ideology. In 1897, he convened the First Zionist Congress, which called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in the Land of Israel.

**Kaplan, Rabbi Mordecai M.** (1881–1983) Essayist and Jewish educator, he became the ideologue of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement. Born in Russia, in 1889, he immigrated with his mother and sisters to the United States to join his father in New York. From 1893 to 1902 he studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and began his career as an Orthodox rabbi. From 1934 until 1970 he wrote a series of books in which he expressed his Reconstructionist ideology, centered around the “concept of Judaism as a civilization.” He was a prolific writer, keeping a journal throughout most of his life.

**Mirels, Linda.** Philanthropist and business leader, President of UJA-Federation of New York since July 1, 2023. She chairs a diversified global investment company with holdings in food distribution and real estate. She has been actively involved with UJA-Federation since 1999, previously serving as Chair of the Board, and she is an honorary lifetime member. Additionally, she serves on the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee and the Metropolitan Opera of New York.

**Simkovich, Dr. Malka Z.** Director and Editor-in-Chief of The Jewish Publication Society. She is the author of several books, including, *Letters From Home: The Creation of Diaspora in Jewish Antiquity* (2024). She held the Crown-Ryan Chair of Jewish Studies and served as the Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She is also a Leon Charney Fellow at the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies and a Kogod Research Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. She frequently lectures across North America and beyond on topics related to the Hebrew Bible, Jewish history, and contemporary Jewish-Christian relations.

**Wertheimer, Professor Jack.** (b. 1948) Professor of American Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). His focus is on trends in American Jewish religious, educational, and organizational life since World War II. He has authored or edited over a dozen volumes. Notably, his book *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* won the National Jewish Book Award in 1994 for the best study on contemporary Jewish life. In addition to his scholarly work, Wertheimer served as provost of JTS from 1997 to 2007 and was the founding director of the Joseph and Miriam Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism from 1987 to 2008.

**Wolfe, Prof. Alan.** (b. 1942) American political scientist and sociologist renowned for his extensive contributions to the study of religion, politics, and American society. He held academic positions at various institutions, including Boston College, where he served as a professor of political science and directed the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life. In addition to his scholarly publications, Wolfe has contributed to various prominent magazines and newspapers, including *The New Republic*, *The Wilson Quarterly*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has also served as an advisor to political figures, notably assisting President Bill Clinton in preparing for the 1995 State of the Union Address.

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# ENDNOTES

**1** Within weeks, over \$300 million dollars were raised, a figure that eventually rose to \$833 million collected by the federation system alone in the first six months after October 7.

**2** Based on a survey it conducted in February and March 2024, the Jewish Federations of North America reported “an explosion in Jewish belonging and communal participation that is nothing short of historic. Jews are feeling more invested in their identity and community and looking for ways to connect, creating an opportunity for a sector-wide focus on driving engagement and membership.” This “surge,” as it was named, was especially noticeable among the previously least engaged segments of the American Jewish population. “Of the 83 percent of Jews who were ‘only somewhat,’ ‘not very,’ or ‘not at all engaged’ prior to October 7, a whopping 40 percent are now showing up in larger numbers in Jewish life,” the report continued. “This group [is] equal to 30 percent of all Jewish adults and nearly double the proportion of Jews who identify as ‘deeply engaged.’” It’s particularly noteworthy that Jews between the ages of 18 and 34 and between 55 and 74 years old – meaning adults least likely to get involved primarily for the sake of their children – were the most eager to increase their participation.

