

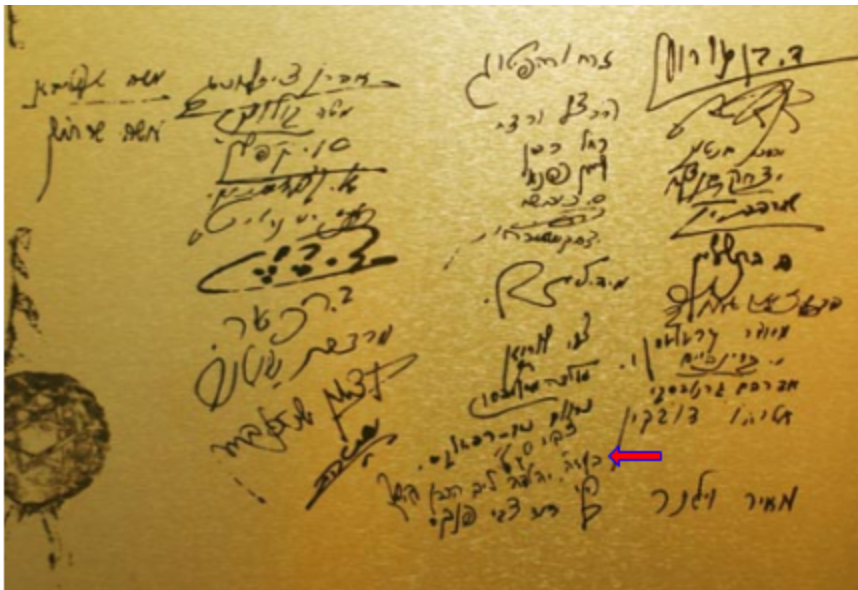
Ki Tisa - March 18, 2017

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה: לֶךְ-רֵד--כִּי שָׁחַת עַמֶּךָ, אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

Exodus 32:7 And Adonai spoke to Moses: 'Go, get down; for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly...'

וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה, אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו; וַיֹּאמֶר, לָמָּה יְהוָה יַחַרָּה אַפְּךָ בְּעַמֶּךָ

Exodus 32:11 And Moses implored Adonai his God, and said: 'Adonai, let not your anger blaze forth to Your people, whom you delivered out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.'



Like parents who want to distance themselves from disobedient children, God speaks to Moses referring to the people as “your people” in this week’s portion. In response Moses points out to God, this is “Your people.” The biblical exchange represents an ongoing tension. Do the Israelites represent a “Divine creation” or are they a community of people based on geographic location and cultural norms? Furthermore, how has the Jewish people evolved with this

dichotomous identity? And, finally how has the establishment and the evolution of the State of Israel continued to shape that question?

After the UN voted to partition Mandatory Palestine in November of 1947, thereby sanctioning the creation of a Jewish State, David Ben-Gurion hurriedly convened a small group tasked with drafting the Declaration of Independence. Disagreements regarding content and wording ensued. How much should the document contain ancient scriptural references? What would be in the official declaration and what could be included in the preamble? The religious Zionists wanted the Declaration to cite G-d’s name. Those aligned with the socialist movements, representing the majority of Zionists, wanted no mention of G-d, instead advocating for wording that balanced contemporary and traditional ideals. These leaders

wrote into the Declaration of Independence that Israel was to be a country “...based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel”... “it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

The final document reflects the aspirations of religious Zionists, but not their complete wishes. The phrases “[Israel is] the birthplace of the Jewish people; our spiritual religious and political identity was shaped here....” are included in the preamble. And the conclusion reads “with trust in the Rock of Israel.”

This was a partial victory for the religious segment of Israel’s initial leadership. They insisted on including the name of G-d while secularists insisted that G-d’s name not be included. Ben Gurion attempted a democratic process take place. He selected four individuals to negotiate the wording. They determined that the phrase: “With faith in the Rock of Israel,” as ambiguous enough to connote a biblical reference or a modern one. The religious men in the group stated that “Rock of Israel” was not enough. They wanted the Declaration to read: “With faith in the Rock of Israel and its Redeemer.” While it didn’t cite G-d’s name, the reference would be clearly understood.

The arguments ensued into the final hours before Ben Gurion planned to declare the state before shabbat on May 14, 1948, a few hours prior to the British Mandate expiration that evening at midnight. The committee came to consensus, agreeing to the Hebrew word “v’goal” corresponding to the English phrase “and its Redeemer.” However, the word does not appear in Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Somehow, as Ben Gurion claimed, the word got lost in the final draft.

While Israel’s founding leaders realized a way to satisfy both the religious and the secular - creating Israel as a Nation State emerging out of and embracing Jewish principles the struggle for the wording in the Declaration of Independence points to an ongoing struggle between those who wish for Israel to be a Jewish State rather than a State that is comprised of Jewish people.

Discussion Questions:

1. What role should religion take in Israeli society and how do Israel’s decisions on religion impact Jewish people living in the diaspora? Reflect on how religious tensions in the government influence “who is a Jew” for the purposes of making aliyah and resettlement.

Additional References:

One particular ongoing struggle concerns the sounding of the shofar at the Kotel. The powerful 10 minute film “[Echoes of a Shofar](#)” gives background and context to the years of struggle for the right to blow shofar at the Kotel.

Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon (nee Fishman) was determined to insert God’s name in the Declaration. Unable to do so in the content, he found a way to do so in his signature! See the arrow on the image above which points to his signature that includes: *B’ezrat HaShem* (with the help of G-d)

For over 20 years, liberal women and men have been attempting to exert their right to perform rituals and pray in the public sphere through the organized efforts of **Women of the Wall**.

<http://www.womenofthewall.org.il/who-we-are/> (retrieved and accessed March 2, 2017)