



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
World Zionist Organization
המחלקה לפעילות בתפוצות
Department for Diaspora Activities

Beit Ha'am

Z-Talks

בית העם

שיג ושיח ציוני

Leadership Near and Far
The Right to Doubt



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**“From the place where
we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.”
Yehuda Amichai**

The *Beit Ha'am* program was developed by the Department for Diaspora Activities in the World Zionist Organization to encourage discussion on the subject of Zionist identity and attitudes to the State of Israel.

The program includes diverse traditional and modern texts on a range of subjects. Through encounter with these texts, we hope to encourage lively discussion of Zionist identity among Diaspora Jews in general, and the younger generation, in particular.

The discussion will address what binds the Jewish people, wherever they may be, as well as what divides and separates us.

We will consider the meaning of Jewish political independence of the people dwelling in Zion and the reciprocal relationships between Jews living in Israel and those who live in the Diaspora.

This represents an opportunity for everyone, irrespective of prior knowledge, to get to know and enhance their knowledge about the significance of Zionism in the 21st century, to engage in discussion, reflect on its substance and the extent of its relevance to our lives.

The *Beit Ha'am* program is currently available in Hebrew and English, and will be translated into other languages according to demand.

If you are interested in using the *Beit Ha'am* program, or would like to hear more about training counselors to work with the program, please contact the Department for Diaspora Activities at maromnoa@wzo.org.il



Leadership Near and Far: The Right to Doubt

The verse “take your shoes off your feet” was uttered to Moses just before the Redemption from Egypt

Exodus 3:1-5

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.’ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’ “Do not come any closer,’ God said. “Take your shoes off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

The same saying appears just before Joshua conquers the Land of Israel

Joshua 10:13-15

*“Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, ‘Are you for us or for our enemies?’ ‘Neither,’ he replied, ‘but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, ‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’ The commander of the Lord’s army replied, ‘**Take your shoes off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.**’ And Joshua did so.*

“In Every Place” – Rabbi Moshe of Kubrin

The Holy One, blessed be He, says the same thing to every person that He said to Moses – “take your shoes off your feet” – “remove the lock from your habits.” Recognize that the place where you are standing is holy ground. You must always know and recall, wherever and whenever, God’s holiness.

As Bible says– **“take your shoes off your feet.”** By changing the Hebrew words for “shoes” and “feet” just a little, we can change this sentence to read **“remove the lock from your habits”** -

We learn from this that when one is about to save or be saved, or about to go to war, one must take care not to think in fixed patterns, but to think outside the box. Remove the lock from your habits.



**“Take your shoes
off your feet.”**

Leadership

A. Anecdote:

David Ben Gurion and Berl Katzenelson were walking in the desert when a tiger suddenly appeared in their way. Berl launched into a long description of the danger the tiger posed, knowledgeably expounding details of its strength. Ben Gurion responded: “It’s basically one of the cat family! Let’s keep going!”

Why did David Ben Gurion reach positions of national importance, while Berl Katzenelson, the intellectual, never became a leader?



B. What was the difference between Dr. Nachum Goldman (President of the World Zionist Organization) and David Ben Gurion?

Nachum Goldman is purported to have said: “Ben Gurion lives in the State of Israel, in the Land. He sees before him Jews and Arabs; Muslims, Christians, and Jews; ultra-Orthodox Jews and secular Jews – layer upon layer of tensions. Whereas I, Nachum Goldman, spend most of my days in airplanes, suspended between heaven and earth. From an altitude of 12,000 feet, everything appears level and all problems seem to have solutions. I can therefore take in the whole picture from my perspective!”

C. Tractate Temurah in the Babylonian Talmud describes the Joshua’s replacement of Moses: Babylonian Talmud – Temurah 16a

“R. Judah said in the name of Rav: When Moses our teacher was about to depart for the Garden of Eden, he said to Joshua: Ask me about any matters of law about which you are in doubt. Joshua replied: My master, have I ever left you, even for as little as one hour, and gone elsewhere? Have you not in fact written of me, ‘His servant Joshua the son of Nun departed not out of the Tabernacle’ (Exodus 33:11) [where I studied Torah constantly]? At that, Joshua’s mental strength grew so weak that he forgot three hundred laws and found himself in doubt concerning seven hundred other matters of law. All the people of Israel [frustrated by Joshua’s confusion] were ready to slay him.

So the Holy One said to him: It is impossible to teach you right now, but go and distract the people with warfare. Hence, ‘And it came to pass after the death of Moses... Joshua commanded:... Prepare your victuals, for within three days you... go in to possess the Land.’” (Joshua 1:1 and 1:10-11).

Joshua 1:1-2, 10-11:

“Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying, Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.”

[...]

“Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.’”

Did Moses do everything he could to help Joshua take over as his successor? Why did he only invite his protégé, Joshua, to ask questions on his last day? Did Joshua act and learn as he should have?



The Place Where We Are Right, Yehuda Amichai

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, in a plow.

And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

What is the price one pays for trampling (remaining) on one spot?

Why is it important for us to be right?

What price does one pay for being right?

What are the advantages?

What kind of dialogue is needed?

Trampled – the earth is impacted and no plants will grow there.

There is a similar custom at the end of the Amidah prayer – the Shemonah Essreh – while reciting, “May He who makes peace in His heaven...” we take three steps back and then forward.

One way to interpret the symbolism is that when we want to make peace, one needs to step out of one's position, although one should return to it later. Negotiation requires one to move from one's spot!



The Wall, Janina Brzostowska

Since the morning
I have been putting up a wall
That divides me
From you.

Yet even so, I love.
I remove from the wall
Stone after stone
But already there come towards me
The builders
Of strangers' fates.

They mend the gaps
And the wall becomes so firm
That I almost forget.

In the evening, I realize once more
That despite everything
I love you.
And constantly I remove
The stones
From my wall
So that they will not conceal you from me.

And only you know
How to look
As if the wall
Did not exist.

**The symbolism of the wall:
Who sees the whole picture?
Someone standing on a wall can see both sides.
When do we need to build a wall?
What walls do we build within ourselves, and in
relation to our identity?
What walls do we build between ourselves and
people living in Israel and what walls do we build
between ourselves and those living in the Diaspora
- and vice versa?
What purpose does this wall serve? At what price?**

From: **Szczęścia szukamy** (Thoughts of Happiness), 1974. English: Shaul Vardi



Ezekiel 33:2-3

“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, ‘If I bring the sword upon a land, let the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land, he will blow the trumpet and warn the people.’”

Excerpt from: “On the Marionette Theatre”, Heinrich Von Kleist

The original article was written in German in 1810. The English translation is by Idris Parry, a well-known translator of classical German works. Perry’s clear, straightforward translation can be found at:

<http://www.southerncrossreview.org/9/kleist.htm>

The site also provides a brief biographical note about Kleist and a concise commentary on the article. The English translation is taken from: **Parry, Idris. (1981) Hand to mouth and other essays. Carcanet Press.**

“I inquired about the mechanism of these figures. I wanted to know how it is possible, without having a maze of strings attached to one’s fingers, to move the separate limbs and extremities in the rhythm of the dance. His answer was that I must not imagine each limb as being individually positioned and moved by the operator in the various phases of the dance. Each movement, he told me, has its centre of gravity; it is enough to control this within the puppet. The limbs, which are only pendulums, then follow mechanically of their own accord, without further help. He added that this movement is very simple.

When the centre of gravity is moved in a straight line, the limbs describe curves.



Everything Changes, Bertholt Brecht

Everything changes. You can make
A fresh start with your latest breath.
But what has happened has happened. And the water
You once poured into the wine cannot be
Drained off again.

What has happened has happened. The water
You once poured into the wine cannot be
Drained off again, but
Everything changes. You can make
A fresh start with your latest breath.

From: **Essential Brecht Poems**, Methuen Publishing Ltd., 1995

Marks, Dalia Yairi ?!

If only exclamation mark would bend over a little
Lowering their heads to the ground
Hesitating slightly, letting go of their arrogant rigid stance
Seeking to get down –
If not to the bottom of the matter, then at least to the matter
itself.
Perhaps some things properly belong
Within parentheses or inverted commas
Perhaps three suggestive periods should be added –
“That’s not the whole story”...

If only exclamation points would curve around, and become
Hunchbacked question marks
Stooping under the burden of bubbling
Worrying, searching, piercing doubts
Shaking the organs of denial until
Their contents are doomed to memory.
And if not – at least casting doubt
On that which they sought to obliterate. Or to hide
In lines ending in an exclamation mark.

*** To what extent should one try to read each mark differently – to round out, to bend the exclamation mark that stands upright!**
*** In relation to our own leadership, when do we need to insert exclamation marks and when do we need to add question marks? What is the price for each of these marks? Is it permissible to place question marks in relation to Israel's leadership from outside its borders? What should be the exclamation mark in relation to criticism of Israel and/or its policies? What is the leader's role in placing those marks?**

May 2006

