



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
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המחלקה לפעילות בתפוצות
Department for Diaspora Activities

Beit Ha'am

Z-Talks

בית העם

שיג ושיח ציוני

**That which unites
and that which divides**
About the need to overcome
the things that divide us



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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 orlyb@wzo.org.il



That which unites and that which divides

About the need to overcome the things that divide us

This study kit includes three units:

A: Abraham and Lot – two brothers who decide to part company; the symbolic significance of the place where Lot chooses to live – Sodom; the meaning of the story of the Tower of Babel.

B: Mutual responsibility: the symbolism of the connection between different parts of the Jewish people, through study of the Minyan (prayer quorum) as a symbol of togetherness.

C: Study of the painting *The Dream and Its Rupture* by Avraham Ofek; the meaning of the painting regarding the future of Israel; a hindsight look at the painting, and a view toward the desired dream?!

Each of the units in this kit aims to emphasize the need to ask questions about current reality, and even more importantly – to understand how we would like things to be. We will do this through the study of traditional texts alongside modern sources, such as poetry and art.

The underlying goal is to encourage discourse between Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, and to use the study of sources to examine what we think about each other, even when we are not physically meeting together.

In order to create this discourse, we must establish a common foundation for our discussions when we meet. In the present stage, we are preparing a series of kits raising principled questions. We hope this will encourage real (not virtual) meetings between Jews living in Israel and Diaspora Jews and/or Israelis living outside Israel.

Lot's parting of ways with his brother for economic and/or psychological reasons is an example of a situation where Jews are unable to live alongside those of other faiths, and even alongside their fellow Jews.

The story of the "Generation of the Rift" – the building of the Tower of Babel – also symbolizes the desire for unity, as well as the reality of division. From here it is only a short step to assimilation – what is the price of dispersion?

Do those of us who live in the State of Israel accept responsibility for the Jews in the Diaspora? And conversely – do Diaspora Jews see their fellow Jews in Israel as part of their cultural identity?

What is our attitude to Jewish tradition and to religious Jews from the different streams and/or secular Jews? Does the idea of mutual responsibility really connect us?

Study of the origin of the Minyan (prayer quorum) – reflects tremendous sensitivity to the weaker sections of society, and raises the question of the tendency of the masses to silence minority views, even to the extent of harming Joseph, and the tendency to dictatorship / fascism – which explains the warnings in the various examples.

What are we doing today to encourage discussion that alerts people to these dangers, and what means are we using?

Lastly, we look at a painter who tries to express verbal questions in artistic form, using traditional images such as the Binding of Isaac and the Golden Calf, alongside works that draw on diverse images, including that of open heart surgery...

The study of art works and Israeli poems in each of the units seeks to enhance our understanding of the themes and our realization that there is more than one way to interpret reality.

Whether you use selected parts of one or more units or the whole kit, our hope is that the material presented here will encourage discourse and a search for.

That which Unites and that which Divides

Identifying a Nation

Unit A: “Let there be no strife between you and me... for we are brothers”

Sdom as a symbol

בראשית יג, ח'

ויאמר אברהם אל לוט אל נא תהי מריבה ביני וביניך ובין רעי ובין רעיך כי אנשים אחים אנחנו:

Genesis 13:8

And Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are brothers.”

Abraham and Lot are together in the Land of Canaan, but it is Abraham who took the initiative by bringing his family with him. However, when the quarrel begins, he/they understand that they need to part ways. Abraham's explicit request is that they should do so as brothers.

Today, can we live together with our extended family members? Or do we need to establish separate and homogenous communities?

Are we able to create one neighborhood or town that will integrate all the Jewish denominations?

What will I gain and what will I lose by coexisting with all of the denominations?

Are we capable of living with a minority among us or anyone else who we consider “different?”

What are the costs that we pay as a society and as individuals in order to integrate minorities within our population?

Can we maintain a society together with communities that consider and define themselves as having a uniquely different identity than ours?

What is your opinion regarding the current topic among Israeli society regarding its relationship toward the Arab minority living within its population?

What is your opinion regarding the current topic among Israeli society regarding its relationship with the Arab minority who lives within it?



בראשית פרק יג'

- (א) ויעל אברם ממצרים הוא ואשתו וכל אשר לו ולוט עמו הנגבה: (ב) ואברם כבד מאד במקנה בכסף ובזהב: (ג) וילך למסעי ומנגב ועד בית אל עד המקום אשר היה שם אהלה בתחלה בין בית אל ובין העי: (ד) אל מקום המזבח אשר עשה שם בראשנה ויקרא שם אברם בשם ה': (ה) וגם ללוט ההלך את אברם היה צאן וקור ואהלים: (ו) ולא נשא אתם הארץ לשבת יחדו כי היה רכושם רב ולא יכלו לשבת יחדו: (ז) ויהי ריב בין רעי מקנה אברם ובין רעי מקנה לוט והכנעני והפריזי אז ישב בארץ: (ח) ויאמר אברם אל לוט אל נא תהי מריבה ביני וביניך ובין רעי ובין רעיך כי אנשים אחים אנחנו: (ט) הלא כל הארץ לפניך הפרד נא מעלי אם השמאל ואימנה ואם הימין ואשמאילה: (י) וישא לוט את עיניו וירא את כל כפר הירדן כי כלה משקה לפני שחת ה' את סדם ואת עמרה כגן ה' בארץ מצרים באכה צער: (יא) ויבחר לו לוט את כל כפר הירדן ויסע לוט מקדם ויפרדו איש מעל אחיו: (יב) אברם ישב בארץ כנען ולוט ישב בערי הכפר ויאהל עד סדם: (יג) ואנשי סדם רעים וחטאים לה' מאד: (יד) וה' אמר אל אברם אחרי הפרד לוט מעמו שא נא עיניך וראה מן המקום אשר אתה שם צפנה ונגבה וקדמה וימה: (טו) כי את כל הארץ אשר אתה ראה לך אתננה ולזרעך עד עולם: (טז) ושמת את זרעך כעפר הארץ אשר אם יוכל איש למנות את עפר הארץ גם זרעך ימנה: (יז) קום התהלך בארץ לארפה ולרחבה כי לך אתננה: (יח) ויאהל אברם ויבא וישב באילני ממרא אשר בחברון ויבן שם מזבח לה':

Genesis 13:1-18

1 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South. 2 And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he went on his journeys from the South even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai; 4 and where he had first built an altar; and Abram called there on the name of the L-rd. 5 And Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6 And the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. 8 So Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Please separate yourself from me; let us part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left. 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the L-rd destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the L-rd, like the land of Egypt, as you go unto Zoar. 11 So Lot chose him all the plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves from one another. 12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the L-rd. 14 And the L-rd said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him: "Lift up now your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your offspring forever. 16 And I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your descendants also be numbered. 17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for unto you will I give it." 18 And Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelled by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the L-rd.



Sdom as a symbol

Is Sodom a metaphor for a harmful location, as the prophet Isaiah states? Or is modern-day Sodom the Dead Sea Works that is a source of livelihood or a place that harms the quality of life in nature?

Where in the world is Sodom for you and why? When is a place called “Sodom?”

ישעיהו פרק א'

(י) שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר ה' קְצִינֵי סְדֹם הָאֲזִינוּ תוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִם עֲמֹרָה:

(יא) לָמָּה לִי רֵב זְבָחֵיכֶם יֹאמֶר ה' שְׁבַעֲתֵי עֹלוֹת אֵילִים וְחֶלֶב מְרִיאִים וְדָם פְּרִים וְכִבְשִׁים וְעֲתוּדִים לֹא חִפְצָתִי: (יב) כִּי תָבֹאוּ לָרְאוֹת פְּנֵי מִי בְקֹשׁ זֹאת מִיַּדְכֶם רִמַּס חֲצָרָי:

Isaiah 1:10-12

Hear the word of the L-rd, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah:

10 “What are all your sacrifices to Me?” asks the L-rd. 11 “I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I have no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats. 12 When you come to appear before Me, who requires this from you, to trample My courts?”

The danger of stereotyping people and acting in a way that is influenced from this stereotype

Why does the prophet choose to refer to the leadership of Israel as “rulers of Sodom” or “people of Gomorrah”? Does this transform the phrase “Sodom and Gomorrah” into a warning to those leaders – be careful, because you have become like Sodom and Gomorrah?

Is Lot’s choice of Sodom as a place to live evidence of his character or his faith?

How would we respond if someone suggested that some aspects of our society are similar to what Sodom symbolizes?

Can we really maintain multifaceted dialog between those who live in Israel and those who live in the Diaspora in accordance with Abraham’s request to Lot: “Let there be no strife... for we are brothers!”

Referring to a society as “Sodom” is like a disguise – an actual mask or just a metaphor. Nevertheless, we recommend doing an exercise, or at least imagining – what am I willing to show and what will I not show at all costs?

We are forbidden to make “molten gods” but I think it is vital for us to clarify what these are – the inner and outer masks, how much I’m willing to show/hide, and why?



Art exercise

Making and painting face masks; inside and/or outside – what do I reveal and what do I hide?

Petroleum jelly
Gauze strips
Small bowl of water

Spread petroleum jelly on the places where you plan to put the gauze strips (face, hands...). Wet the gauze strips and put them on carefully (if you're putting them on your face, make sure you leave room to breathe).

how should one read the story
and why do you think it is one
of the stories that the Torah
begins with?



The tower of Babel

The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel is a powerful account of the transition from a world of unity, or even uniformity, to a broken society verging on assimilation – like the confusion of languages is the story of the Tower of Babel.

When is it appropriate to describe a place as a Tower of Babel? Is this a purely negative label, or could it refer to multiculturalism, and actually praise a country or city that welcomes people from throughout the world?

בראשית פרק יא

(א) וַיְהִי כָל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אַחַת וּדְבָרִים אַחָדִים: (ב) וַיְהִי בְנֹסְעִם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְקֵעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שֹׁנֵנִר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: (ג) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה וַתְּהִי לָהֶם הַלְּבָנָה לְאֲבָן וְהַחֲמֵר הָיָה לָהֶם לְחֵמֶר: (ד) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה לְנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה לְנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נִפּוּץ עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ: (ה) וַיֵּרֶד ה' לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הֵן עִם אֶחָד וְשָׂפָה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחֲלֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא יִבְצָר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: (ז) הִבֵּה נִרְדֶּה וְנִבְלֶה שֵׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ: (ח) וַיִּפֹּץ ה' אֶתְּם מִשָּׁם עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לִבְנֵת הָעִיר: (ט) עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׂמֶהּ בָּבֶל כִּי שָׁם בָּלַל ה' שְׂפַת כָּל הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם הִפְיָצָם ה' עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ: פ (י) אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת שֵׁם שָׁם בֶּן מֵאֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת אַרְפַּכְשָׁד שְׁנַתַּיִם אַחֵר הַמַּבּוּל:

Genesis 11:1-10

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the L-rd came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The L-rd said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 8 So the L-rd scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel – because there the L-rd confused the language of the whole world. From there the L-rd scattered them over the face of the whole earth. 10 This is the account of Shem's family line. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arpachshad.

What can we learn from the actual story (the story of Babel) as an analogy to a multicultural society and to the role of the Diaspora communities toward Israel?

Does Babel represent the acceptance of a form of assimilation? Does a negative connotation originate from here toward the same society that we view as assimilated?

In what way does the meeting between Israel and the Diaspora enrich the worldview of the other?

What is the difference between Sodom as a societal problem and the Tower of Babel as presenting theological questions?

how should one read the story and why do you think it is one of the stories that the Torah begins with?



The Tower of Babel – The Generation of the Rift

Genesis 11:1-10

The order of the verses has been mixed up! Arrange them according to your understanding (There are ten verses. Each person or pair takes a verse and explains it by pasting the verse on folio-size paper and explaining the hidden idea of the verse using colored strips of paper. Afterwards, the group will arrange the order of the verses).

This is the account of Shem's family line. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arpachshad.

They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.

The L-rd said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

That is why it was called Babel – because there the L-rd confused the language of the whole world. From there the L-rd scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

But the L-rd came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

So the L-rd scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.

As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

The Torah appears to be written sparsely. In other words, there are many gaps in which the reader has to fill them in. As a result when putting together the puzzle, there is more than one possibility and from here is the difference in organizing the verses. After thus comparison, look at the next page. Follow the explanations to learn about the ten verses and to understand what the order of the verses implies. To what extent could the story of the Tower of Babel – the Generation of the Flood serve as a warning signal – to not be compared to Babel?

Regarding the Scriptural verses, is your arrangement different or the same? Can you explain the source of the difference?



The Tower of Babel –The Generation of the Flood

Give a title or name to the idea:

There, in heaven, there, there, from there, its name, there and from there, name.

Compare the order of the verses that the group arranged with the order of the verses in the Torah. Explain the selection.

Genesis, chapter 11

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

The Hebrew “vayehi” is used only to indicate something sad.

2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

The term “settled” has connotations of transgressions – Joseph’s brothers “settled down to eat” after throwing their brother into the pit; the Children of Israel “settled down to eat bread” after they made the golden calf and waited for the festivities that were due to take place the next day!

3 They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.”

They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Are they successful in their plan?

4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

What is wrong with this?

5 But the L-rd came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.

What does the phrase “people” (bnei adam) mean here? Read verse 8.

6 The L-rd said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

7 “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

How is this manifested in practical terms?



8 So the L-rd scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.
What about the Tower? Was G-d's action a punishment or a reward?

9 That is why it was called Babel – because there the L-rd confused the language of the whole world. From there the L-rd scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

10 This is the account of Shem's family line. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arpachshad.

Suggestive questions:

Note the many different verb forms used in this section—what is the significance of this (33 verbs in just nine verses!) and it was; when they journeyed; and they found; and they dwelled; and they said; come, let us make bricks, and bake them, and it was, it was, and they said, come, let's build, that we make, we will be scattered, came down, to see, built, began, to do , to fortify, to plan, to do, come, let us go down, and confuse, understand, smashed, and they stopped, building, called, confused, scattered them.

Are you for or against the actions of
“the whole earth?”
Can you find anything positive
about their actions/behavior?



The City Coat of Arms: Franz Kafka

At first all the arrangements for building the Tower of Babel were characterized by fairly good order; indeed the order was perhaps too perfect, too much thought was taken for guides, interpreters, accommodation for the workmen, and roads of communication, as if there were centuries before one to do the work in.

In fact the general opinion at that time was that one simply could not build too slowly; a very little insistence on this would have sufficed to make one hesitate to lay the foundations at all.

People argued in this way: The essential thing in the whole business is the idea of building a tower that will reach to heaven. In comparison with that idea everything else is secondary.

The idea, once seized in its magnitude, can never vanish again; so long as there are men on the earth there will be also the irresistible desire to complete the building. That being so, however, one need have no anxiety about the future; on the contrary, human knowledge is increasing, the art of building has made progress and will make further progress, a piece of work which takes us a year may perhaps be done in half the time in another hundred years, and better done, too, more enduringly. So why exert oneself to the extreme limit of one's present powers? There would be some sense in doing that only if it were likely that the tower could be completed in one generation. But that is beyond all hope. It is far more likely that the next generation with their perfected knowledge will find the work of their predecessors bad, and tear down what has been built so as to begin anew.

Such thoughts paralyzed people's powers, and so they troubled less about the tower than the construction of a city for the workmen. Every nationality wanted the finest quarters for itself, and this gave rise to disputes, which developed into bloody conflicts. These conflicts never came to an end; to the leaders they were a new proof that, in the absence of the necessary unity, the building of the tower must be done very slowly, or indeed preferably postponed until universal peace was declared.

But the time was spent not only in conflict; the town was embellished in the intervals, and this unfortunately enough evoked fresh envy and fresh conflict.

In this fashion the age of the first generation went past, but none of the succeeding ones showed any difference; except that technical skill increased and with it occasion for conflict. To this must be added that the second or third generation had already recognized the senselessness of building a heaven-reaching tower; but by that time everybody was too deeply involved to leave the city.

All the legends and songs that came to birth in that city are filled with longing for a prophesied day when the city would be destroyed by five successive blows from a gigantic fist. It is for that reason too that the city has a closed fist on its coat of arms.

From where did he derive his interpretation?

How did he explain what was written?

Which Biblical account was omitted from his description?

Where did Franz Kafka learn the interpretation used in his story?



The Tower of Babel from an artistic vantage point

Piere Bruegel the Eldar



Piere Bruegel the Eldar 1563



Manual script from the 15th century



David Sharir



Sign – Yaakov Orland

From: Selected Writings, The Cry of the Fire

וַיֵּרֶד ה' לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם: (בראשית פרק י"א, ה')

But the L-rd came down to see the city and the tower the people were building (Genesis 11:5)

A sign that He is afraid.

If He comes near,

If He descends and walks through the camp

To see whether it is really so –

A sign that He is afraid

The fortress of perfection they have built

From the magnet that constantly draws to it

From our sense of persecution.

He is afraid.

He expels from the Garden of Eden.

Destroys with the flood.

Delays the Tower of Babel

Demolishes Nineveh.

A sign that He is afraid.

He is drawn to the scene of the crime.

This is the best time finally to catch Him,

And know what He is.

Do we expect that Israel will be complete? Do we judge Israel by different standards than the rest of the world? In which aspect? Why?

From what are we afraid and project onto someone else?

When do we claim that something is scary or dangerous and therefore needs to be avoided as an expression of fear?



Translated from Hebrew

The Ayalon Vision - Agi Mishol *

In my dream, I saw Azrieli Tower leaning to the right
As if about to fall
And the L-rd spoke to me on La Guardia, Adar, five thousand
seven hundred fifty nine, as I traveled from the east to the north.

While walking it was revealed to me again, more strongly to the right
Gleaming in the sun in my side mirror
Like a tree swaying in the wind
Like a mountain leaning over the city and over the silent dreamers
Around it, o wanderers in the mall, stuffed from Yotvata
Sated from the shop windows.

A third time my dream took me to Hecharash Street
The street of bricks and clay, from where I saw it again, closer up
Rising up in its glory, it can only be that G-d has descended to see
The windows that mimic His heavens.

And the wind whips through the tower, tearing it, its appearance
Like the "tower" card in a pack of tarot cards,
The clouds dark on its peak as it falls onto Kibbutz Galuyot
I am carried to its roof, with its migrant laborers there
Fear and anxiety seize me, Oh darn; we cling on to the scaffolds
For our language has already been confused and scattered in every direction, oh it is my fear
Dumb and dream struck in the Shalom Towers
Praises be it.

*The poem uses names of streets near the Azrieli Towers in Tel Aviv
as an expression of the Tower of Babel – The Shalom Towers.

Translated from Hebrew

I live in the Diaspora and I imagine seeing
Israel leaning to the side and G-d forbid
collapsing like a deck of cards. Can I
imagine the Jewish world without Israel?
Or how can one deal with the metaphor of
the state of Israel like the Tower of Babel?



Yehudah Amichai

When and why are we considered as tourists? When and why do we lie? What defines us as Jews?

A Song of Lies on Sabbath Eve

On a Sabbath eve, at dusk on a summer day
When the odors of food and prayer drifted up from all the houses.
And the sound of the wings of the Sabbath angels rustled in the air
I began to lie to my father:
“I went to another synagogue.”

I don't know if he believed me or not.
But the lie was very sweet in my mouth.
And in all the houses at night
Sabbath songs and lies drifted up together,
“Savor delights,”
And in all the houses at night
Deceptive angels died in the light fixture,
who love His Name from one mouth to the other
And they
embellished each other until they hovered above,
Or until they exploded.

Since then, the lie was very good and sweet in my mouth.
Since then, I always go to another synagogue.
And my father responded to me with a lie when he died:
“I have gone to another life.”

When do I lie regarding my identity?
Which prominence does Israel have in
defining my identity?
What is an acceptable lie today between
the parents' generation and the children's
generation regarding identity?

From: Great Tranquility: Questions and Answers, Schocken, 1980
Translated from Hebrew



Tourists

Visits of condolence are all we get from them.
They squat at Yad Vashem they put on grave faces at the Western Wall
And they laugh behind heavy curtains in their hotels.

They have their pictures taken together with our famous dead at Rachel's Tomb
And Herzl's Tomb and on Ammunition Hill,
They weep over our sweet boys
And lust after our tough girls
And hang up their underwear
To dry quickly
In a cool, blue bathroom.

Once I sat on the steps by the gate of the Tower of David
Two heavy baskets I placed by me.
I group of tourists stood around the guide and I was used as a reference point.
"Do you see that man with the baskets? A bit to the right of his head is the arch
from the Roman period, a bit to the right of his head."
"But he moves, he moves!" I thought to myself. The Redemption will come if
they'll be told: Do you see over there the arch from the Roman period? It's not im-
portant: But next to it, a bit to the left and down below it sits a man who bought
fruits and vegetables for his household.

Translated from Hebrew



The Diameter of the Bomb

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimeters and the diameter of its effective range about seven meters, with four dead and eleven wounded.

And around these, in a larger circle of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered and one graveyard. But the young woman who was buried in the city she came from, at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers, enlarges the circle considerably, and the solitary man mourning her death at the distant shores of a country far across the sea includes the entire world in the circle.

And I won't even mention the howl of orphans that reaches up to the throne of G-d and beyond, making a circle with no end and no G-d.

The Diameter of the Bomb – What is the force of a positive explosion; what influences can this circle of learning have; and how can we expand and deepen its influence!

Isn't Amichai interested in justice? Does justice require us to ask questions?



Translated from Hebrew