

## **Jewish State and Jewish Land**

Program written in Jerusalem by Yonatan Glaser, UAHC Shaliach, 2003

### **Rationale**

We live in a time where taking an interest in Israel is not taken for granted and where supporting Israel, certainly in parts of our public life like on campus, may be done at a price. Even in the best of times, it is important to be conceptually clear why we Jews want our own country. What can and should it mean to us, how might it enrich and sustain us – those of us who live in it and those of us who do not? What might contributing to its well-being entail? If that is at the best of times, then this – one of the most difficult times in recent memory – is an excellent time to re-visit the basic ideas and issues connected to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state in the ancient Land of Israel. With this in mind, this program takes us on a ‘back to basics’ tour of Israel as a Jewish country in the Jewish Land.

### **Objectives**

1. To explore the idea of Jewish political independence.
2. To explore the meaning of Jewish historical connection to Eretz Yisrael
3. To learn about the Uganda Plan in order to recognize that issues connected to independence and living in *Eretz Yisrael* have been alive and relevant for at least the last 100 years.

### **Time**

1 hour and fifteen minutes

### **Materials**

1. Copies of the four options (Attachment #1)
2. White Board or poster Board.
3. Description of the Uganda plan from [www.wzo.org.il/home/politic/uganda.htm](http://www.wzo.org.il/home/politic/uganda.htm) (Attachment #2)
4. A big map or picture of Israel
5. Holy Places exercise sheet (Attachment #3)

### **Detailed Procedure:**

#### **Warm-up**

**5 minutes**

Ask participants how many of them have great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents who were born or lived in what is now Russia (or some other part of the Former Soviet Union).

Ask of those who raise their hands to establish this as part of the history of (part of) the group (if no-one does, skip this part. It will strengthen the program but is not critical). For example:

- What do they know of the life there at the time their family members lived there?
- Did Jews flourish there? Why or why not?
- Do they still have family there? Why did at least part of the family leave there?

### **Opening Exercise**

**5 minutes**

Ask participants to imagine that they are transported back in time; it is 100 years ago, 1903. They should imagine that they are Jews living in Russia ('alongside the relatives of ....., if someone identified themselves before). They are poor, not accepted in the surrounding society and subject to violent attacks by non-Jews (called pogroms). They are not in control of their fates. They know nothing of the Holocaust, which will only start in another 30 or so years, and nothing of the State of Israel, which will only come into being in 45 years.

They and all the Jewish townfolk are called together for a meeting because some new possibilities are opening up for the Jews. They will be asked then whether they would like to stay where they are or if they would like to move, along with their friends and families, to one of the four new living options being offered to Jews. Each option has the full and total agreement of the authorities and peoples concerned and they are promised there will be no current or future problems or opposition to the move. The possibilities are:

1. To set up a Jewish country in part of Uganda
2. To set up a Jewish country in part of California
3. To set up a Jewish country in Eretz Israel, the biblical Land of Israel,
4. To have a 'concentration of Jews'; not quite a country, but lots of self rule, where they (you) are in Russia. This would be with self-government and taxes, your own language and culture, but no army to defend yourselves. The status of the arrangement is not written into a charter and could be reversed one day.

### **Small Group work**

**15 minutes**

Split the group into four or more small groups (ideally 3-6 participants per group), each led by a group leader, and give each of them the four possibilities written out (Attachment #1). They are to:

1. Discuss and write down the pros and cons of each option
2. Rank the four options in order of their group preference
3. To decide which language they would speak there:
  - a. Their current language (such as Russian)
  - b. The world's most popular language (whatever it was at the time)
  - c. The (yet to be invented) universal language *Esperanto* (intended for people in every country), or
  - d. Hebrew (which will need to be revived and reinvented as a modern, spoken language)

### **Debriefing in the large group**

**15 minutes**

1. List (or ask a representative of each group to write up) what they each chose on a white Board or poster Board.
2. Note similarities and differences between the groups. What were the popular choices? Ask for the main reasons for these.
3. Which of the options were real? Teach participants about the Uganda plan (see Attachment #2 to prepare your explanation. Prepare small parts for reading out loud).
4. Ask them if other places in the world were also discussed or looked at (explain about Israel Zangwill and Texas, Canada, Australia and even some Arab countries).

- Note that at that time, some did not necessarily want a state, but were willing to make do with "conditions which will enable members to observe their national customs." Others (the political Zionists) certainly did want and demand a state – they thought that this was the only real way to protect Jews, Jewish interests and to allow us to ‘observe national customs’ like our language, our yearly cycle of holidays and to implement a modern version of prophetic social justice.

### **Focus on Israel – lead in**

**5 minutes**

- Put up a big map or picture of Israel (to signify the focus of the next part of the program)
- Note that, in the end, we have our country in *Eretz Yisrael*, even if it was touch and go and it may not have ended up that way. Tell them that today you are not going to look at the history of this – the politics, the military aspects and the wars – but rather try to understand why this might have been so significant. After all, this was the view that in the end won the hearts and minds of Jews everywhere. What was it about the Land of Israel that was so meaningful, so powerful, that even at great risk they pursued this option above all others?

### **Focus on Israel – exercise in threes**

**20 minutes**

- To help them understand this, you need to split them into threes and give them some work to do. Do so by giving each group the “Holy Places” exercise sheet (Attachment #3)
- What places were either specially important or considered Holy before Israel was established?  
  
(Some possibilities include: the Kotel, Jericho, the Tombs of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the place where the Mishna was written, David’s city (the original place where King David established Jerusalem), Lake Kinneret, Yaffo – the list goes on (see <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH00uh0>).
- Ask if anyone has been to any of these places and ask them to describe what it was like to be near them.
- Of the following options, which is the relationship you’d like the Jewish people to have with these places? (List them and relate to them one by one):
  - To control, or be considered the owner, of these places
  - To have the right to access these places, even if they actually are under someone else’s control
  - To live amongst the places so that they are part of your life and special consciousness.
  - Other.

Use examples from the list they considered in groups of three to explore these different kinds of relationships. For example,

- Would it matter if France purchased the White House and let the American President continue to live and work there? Why and why not?
- What if Mt. Rushmore was helicopter lifted to London but all American citizens were given free access to visit it?

- What if the entire natural landscape that informed Walt Whitman’s poetry, or Graceland, was destroyed? In what ways might American life be impoverished for this?
5. Go back to the case of Israel and us Jewish people. What is the ideal relationship for us to have with our special – perhaps Holy – places:
    - a. To control, or be considered the owner, of these places
    - b. To have the right to access these places, even if they actually are under someone else’s control
    - c. To live amongst the places so that they are part of your life and special consciousness.

*[NOTE to Programmer: make sure this is discussed on a ‘all other things being equal’ basis. Clearly, if someone else is upset or their rights are affected by your having this relationship, that has an impact on what one wants to actually have (to realize in fact); but here we are trying to explore the relationship we would ideally have.]*

### **Closing comments**

**10 minutes**

Close with some concluding questions. These are different to regular discussion questions in that your purpose is to bring closure to the program and leave them with one or two final thoughts or challenges. The way to do this is to ask for and allow two or three responses only to each question rather than try to open the discussion up for broad participation as one might normally. In this way, you may wish to close with some or all of the following questions:

1. Can we expect to have a deep relationship with these places in Israel without learning about them?
2. How might actually visiting the places affect our relationship with them, the ways they enrich us and affect us?
3. What might we be missing out on if we don’t build our relationship with them?
4. How might Israelis have the same relationship to these places as we do?
5. How might Israelis have a different relationship to these places than we do?

*[NOTE to Programmer: You may wish to point out that today you have focused mainly on the historic connection to and meaning of Israel; less on the issue of political independence versus other forms of autonomy and not at all on other key parts of what makes Israel such a special place for many Jews today.]*

### **Optional Conclusion:**

Suggestion for finishing: read a personal testimonial of someone who finds great value in spending time in Israel in terms of the historic connection and inspiration. Interview your rabbi or someone else in your community, or use the narrative section on NFTY’s Website at Israel Central (e.g. ‘The time the Sun stood still’, by Rabbi Andrew Davids and others).

## **Attachment #1**

**To set up a Jewish country in part of Uganda**

**To set up a Jewish country in part of California**

**To set up a Jewish country in *Eretz Israel*, the biblical Land of Israel**

**To have a ‘concentration of Jews’; not quite a country, but lots of self-rule, where you are in Russia.**

\* This would be with self-government and taxes, your own language and culture, but no army to defend yourselves. The status of the arrangement is not written into a charter and could be reversed one day.

## Attachment #2

### Background to the Uganda Plan of 1903 and the Zionist Congresses

#### **First Congress - Basle [Basel], 1897 By David Mendelsson**

Source: [www.us-israel.org.jsource/Zionism.html](http://www.us-israel.org.jsource/Zionism.html)

The [first Zionist Congress](#) was to have taken place in Munich, Germany. However, due to considerable opposition by the local community leadership, both Orthodox and Reform, it was decided to transfer the proceedings to Basle, Switzerland.

[Theodore Herzl](#) acted as chairperson of the Congress which was attended by some 200 participants. The major achievements of the Congress were its formulation of the Zionist platform, known as the Basle program and the foundation of the World Zionist Organization.

The program stated,

*"Zionism seeks for the Jewish people a publicly recognized legally secured homeland in Palestine."*

This gave clear expression to Herzl's political Zionism in contrast with the settlement orientated activities of the more loosely organized [Hibbat Zion](#). [Herzl](#) was elected President of the Zionist organization and an Inner Actions Committee and a Greater Actions Committee were elected to run the affairs of the movement between Congresses.

In his diary [Herzl](#) wrote,

“Were I to sum up the Basle Congress in a word - which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly - it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State.”

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#### **Second Congress - Basle, 1898**

In the face of a more active opposition to Zionism from amongst various Jewish leaders, [Herzl](#) called on the Congress to “conquer the communities.” In essence, this was a demand that the Zionist movement focus its attention not only on political activity for Palestine but also on work within the Jewish communities. At this Congress, the foundations were laid for the establishment of the Jewish Colonial Trust, a financial body aimed at the development of Palestine. It was also at this Congress that a group of Socialists first appeared demanding representation within the Zionist leadership.

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#### **Third Congress - Basle, 1899**

[Herzl](#) opened the Third Congress with a report on his meetings with Kaiser William II in Constantinople and Jerusalem. Despite the fact that these meetings produced no practical results, the fact that they took place was of considerable symbolic value.

The Congress spent a good deal of its time discussing the political dimensions of Zionism although opposition to this orientation was voiced by those who thought that the more practical efforts of settlement should be encouraged. In a debate on the Jewish Colonial Trust, Congress decided that its funds could only be spent in Palestine or Syria.

Whilst delegates were increasingly concerned with what was called the question of culture - the Zionist attempt at a national/ethnic identity for the Jews - [Herzl](#) was preoccupied with the political matters at hand. Some historians argue that [Herzl](#) was not so much disinterested in these cultural matters as he was frightened of their potential to split the infant movement.

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### **Fourth Congress - London, 1900**

The Congress was held in London in order to affect public opinion in that country in sympathy with the Zionist idea. The Congress met in an atmosphere of growing concern over the situation facing Rumanian Jewry where many thousands had been forced to leave and the remainder was subject to persecution. Although this appeared to provide further evidence of the need for a "Charter," [Herzl](#) had nothing substantial to offer that might bring succor to these Jews.

On the cultural question, the [religious Zionists](#) led by [Rabbi Yitzhak Ya'akov Reines](#) demanded that the Zionist movement restrict itself solely to political matters. The Congress also discussed the problems of the Jewish workers in Palestine and the question of a national Jewish sports movement.

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### **Fifth Congress - Basle, 1901**

[Herzl](#) reported to the Congress of his meeting with Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey and of the progress of the Jewish Colonial Trust. These achievements did not satisfy all the delegates, in particular those associated with the recently formed Democratic Faction.

The group led by [Leo Motzkin](#), [Martin Buber](#) and [Chaim Weizmann](#) called on the Zionist movement to adopt a program of Hebrew culture and a greater degree of democracy within the organization. The more concrete achievement of the Congress was the establishment of the [Jewish National Fund \(JNF\)](#) which was to raise funds for land purchase in Palestine.

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### **Sixth Congress - Basle, 1903**

At the Fifth Zionist Congress, a resolution was adopted determining that the next Congress would take place every alternate year and not —as had been the practice—annually.

In his opening speech, [Herzl](#) detailed the efforts to secure a Charter on behalf of the movement, but these attempts were increasingly desperate as the situation of the Jews, particularly following the Kishinev pogrom, deteriorated. This gave rise to various temporary solutions such as the "El Arish" project, which was negotiated with the British statesmen, Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Landsdowne.

After the collapse of this scheme, the British then offered [Herzl](#) the possibility of an autonomous Jewish settlement in East Africa (commonly known as the [Uganda project](#)). [Herzl](#) called on the Congress to give serious consideration to the plan, even though he appreciated that it could not replace Palestine as the Jewish Homeland. In the lively debate that followed, [Max Nordau](#), [Herzl's](#) major confidante, argued that “Uganda” would be a night refuge. Despite considerable opposition and a demonstrative walk-out by the Russian Zionists, the delegates agreed by 295 in favor, 178 against and 98 abstentions that a committee should be dispatched to examine the possibility of Jewish settlement in East Africa.

Among other matters discussed at the Congress was a report by Franz Oppenheimer on the possibility of cooperative settlement on the land, a program that was to have influence on the creation of various settlements in Palestine a few years later. This was to be [Herzl's](#) last Congress: he died a year later.

An additional account of the 1903 Congress:

At the [Sixth Zionist Congress](#) at Basle on 26 August 1903, Herzl proposed the British Uganda Program as a temporary refuge for Jews in Russia in immediate danger. By a vote of 295-178 it was decided to send an expedition ("investigatory commission") to examine the territory proposed.

While Herzl made it clear that this program would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism, a Jewish entity in the Land of Israel, the proposal aroused a storm at the Congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO) was formed as a result of the unification of various groups who had supported Herzl's Uganda proposals during the period 1903-1905.

The Uganda Program was finally rejected by the Zionist movement at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, but [Nahum Syrkin](#) and [Israel Zangwill](#) called an alternative conference in order to continue the plan of the Uganda scheme.

## **Cultural Zionism**

The counterpoint to Herzl's political Zionism was provided by Asher Ginsberg, better known by his pen name Ahad HaAm (One of the People). Ahad HaAm, who was the son of a Hasidic rabbi, was typical of the Russian *maskalim*. In 1886, at the age of thirty, he moved to Odessa with the vague hope of modernizing Judaism. His views on Zionism were rooted in the changing nature of Jewish communal life in Eastern Europe. Ahad HaAm realized that a new meaning to Jewish life would have to be found for the younger generation of East European Jews who were revolting against traditional Jewish practice. Whereas Jews in the West could participate in and benefit from a secular culture, Jews in the East were oppressed. While Herzl focused on the plight of Jews alone, Ahad HaAm was also interested in the plight of Judaism, which could no longer be contained within the limits of traditional religion.

Ahad HaAm's solution was cultural Zionism: the establishment in Palestine of small settlements aimed at reviving the Jewish spirit and culture in the modern world. In the cultural Zionist vision, a small number of Jewish cadres well versed in Jewish culture and speaking Hebrew would settle in Palestine. Ahad HaAm believed that by settling in that ancient land, religious Jews would

replace their metaphysical attachment to the Holy Land with a new Hebrew cultural renaissance. Palestine and the Hebrew language were important not because of their religious significance but because they had been an integral part of the Jewish people's history and cultural heritage.

Inherent in the cultural Zionism espoused by Ahad HaAm was a deep mistrust of the gentile world. Ahad HaAm rejected Herzl's notion that the nations of the world would encourage Jews to move and establish a Jewish state. He believed that only through Jewish self-reliance and careful preparation would the Zionist enterprise succeed. Although Ahad HaAm's concept of a vanguard cultural elite establishing a foothold in Palestine was quixotic, his idea of piecemeal settlement in Palestine and the establishment of a Zionist infrastructure became an integral part of the Zionist movement.

The ascendancy of Ahad HaAm's cultural Zionism and its emphasis on practical settlement in Eretz Yisrael climaxed at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903. After an initial discussion of settlement in the Sinai Peninsula, which was opposed by Egypt, Herzl came to the congress apparently willing to consider, as a temporary shelter, a British proposal for an autonomous Jewish entity in East Africa. The Uganda Plan, as it was called, was vehemently rejected by East European Zionists who, as before, insisted on the ancient political identity with Palestine. Exhausted, Herzl died of pneumonia in 1904, and from that time on the mantle of Zionism was carried by the cultural Zionists led by Ahad HaAm and his close colleague, Chaim Weizmann. They took over the WZO, increased support for Hibbat Tziyyon, and sought Jewish settlement in Palestine as a prerequisite to international support for a Jewish state.

## Attachment #3

### The “Holy Places” exercise sheet

What are the most special and important places for Americans?

	Don't know what it is	Not important	Important	Incredibly important
Mt Rushmore				
Capitol Hill				
Tribal lands				
Statue of Liberty				
Graceland				
The Grand Canyon				
The Supreme Court				
Gettysburg				
The first Spacecraft				
The car Kennedy was riding in when shot				
Babe Ruth's Grave				
Other (be specific)				

Discuss amongst your small group each of the following questions:

1. Do you consider any of these places Holy? Do other Americans?
2. What does it mean to call a place ‘Holy’? How is that different from saying it is ‘very special’
3. How can you know that a place is Holy to someone or for a group of people?
4. How does a place become Holy for someone or for a group of people?