

**Zionism is a family name:
On Political Zionism and Reform Zionism**
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Rationale

In the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds, many people think of Zionism as Jewish nationalism. That is, they think that the Jewish People need political independence - our own country¹ - to help ensure the physical and cultural² wellbeing of the Jewish people. This focus reflects the success of Political Zionism, the stream of Zionism established by Theodore Hertzl.

While Reform Jews rightly accept these ideas as important, we in the Reform Movement draw on other understandings of Zionism, ones which offer us rich, perhaps deeper ways to understand the significance of the State of Israel. In fact, Zionism has always been a family name for a range of different ideas, not a single conception. These streams of Zionist thought, known variously as religious, cultural and spiritual Zionism are important for Reform Jews. They speak to our soul, to our aspirations for holiness and *Tikkun Olam*, not only to our aspirations for the survival of Jews and Judaism, important and legitimate as they are. As Union for Reform Judaism President Rabbi Eric Yoffie said in his Biennial sermon in 2003, "God forbid that Israel's current difficulties should blind us to the dream and the magic of the Zionist enterprise." (*see the attached extract of the full sermon*).

Ironically then, educators in the biggest Jewish religious movement in North America needs to carefully articulate and share this vision with young learners because if we fail to, they will understand and relate to Israel only in the dominant way it is framed – as the country of the Jews, and to Zionism as Jewish nationalism. These are partial and inadequate understandings and will rightly fall short if judged by our Movement's members.

In response to this need, the following program enables participants to learn and think about the dominant (political) and lesser known but critically important spiritual and religious idea of Zionism. By learning how Reform Judaism's understanding of Zionism goes beyond nationalism, we open the door to deeper engagement with Zionism and Israel.

Objectives

1. To learn the difference between political Zionism and spiritual/religious Zionism.
2. To learn about an aspect of Martin Buber's vision of Zionism, and explore how it can be meaningful for us as Reform Jews today.

¹ And that the natural and right place for this is in our ancient homeland - see the last eSource program

3. To learn about NFTY's decisions and resolutions (1) about Israel, and (2) NFTY programs in Israel, and to help participants think about going on such a program.
4. To learn about and consider becoming a sponsor of the "Ride4Reform" bike ride of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ).

Time

Preparation time: approximately 1-2 hours, or enough to:

- read and think about attached background materials (further reading is referenced for the ambitious!)
- adapt the program as needed for your group
- copy handouts

Program time:

Between 1:05 – 1:15

Materials

Attached:

- I. Definition of Nationalism (p. 5)
- II. Description of Political Zionism (p. 5)
- III. Extract of speech by Knesset Member Avraham Burg, then Chairman of the Zionist Executive, at the grave of Theodore Hertzl (p. 6)
- IV. NFTY's Affirmation of Commitment to Israel and Israel programs, (p. 7)
- V. "The Jerusalem Platform", the Zionist charter, adopted by NFTY, 1987 (p. 7)
- VI. Martin Buber: Text for discussion with participants (p. 8)
- VII. Martin Buber: background for the program leader (p. 8)
- VIII. Extract of sermon by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Minnesota Biennial, 2003. (p. 9 - 10)
- IX. Further Resources available on-line (p. 11)

Not Attached:

- White Board or poster paper
- Printed copies of I, V, VI and IX for each participant

Detailed Plan:

Warm-up

10 minutes

Introduce the topic through a relevant personal experience or asking some key questions in a rhetorical fashion – "Why are Reform Jews interested in Israel? What excites, troubles us or touches us about Israel? One of the words we hear thrown about in discussions about Israel is "Zionism". Let's see what this means to us ..."

Do a brainstorm on the topic "What are your associations with the word 'Zionism'?" Write down their responses on a whiteboard or poster sheet. Don't discuss, just pump them for more words or phrases!

Exploring Political Zionism through discussion, text study

25-30 minutes

1. Where do these associations (with the term “Zionism”) come from?

They might say things like: the press, synagogue, anti-Semitic stereotypes, Jewish texts, NFTY, Camp, other...?

- The point here is to peak interest

2. Which of the following is who first coined the term:

- Moses, as he looked over into the Land of Israel from Jordan, before he died and the Jewish people crossed over?
- The founders of the early Kibbutzim in the 1920's?
- Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, in 1890, then a 26-year-old philosopher and author?
- Moses Montefiore, the famous philanthropist who helped Jewish settlement in what is now Israel?

3. What does Zionism mean – can anyone sum it up or define it?

- Work with them, yet draw out contradictions or aspects that they don't include. Doing your preparation will help you do this.
- Write up their suggestions, even if fragmentary. This will be more focused and clearly worded than the brainstorm, yet draw on that.
- Accept any attempts here as valuable, but tentative.

4. Is Zionism nationalism?

- According to their definitions, is Zionism nationalism? Let them struggle with this. Get several answers; probe to see if they can defend their answers; that is, 'Problem-atise' their answers!
- Give out the attached **definition of nationalism** (you are so good and kind...). Read it together (I assume here that the definition is adequate; certainly there are others, but this is a simple one for the sake of the program). According to this definition, is nationalism good or bad, perhaps neither or both? What aspects are good, promising, bad or problematic?
- Compare with the brainstormed associations and definitions from earlier.
- Ask again – does Zionism appear to be nationalism?
- Give them out the **Jerusalem Program** and review it with them. Clarify any unclear phrases. Explain carefully that NFTY signed on to this and that Reform Jews around the world are signed on to it. Based on this, is Zionism Nationalism? Is it “enough” for us?

Comment – the jury is out on this one. One could claim that the Jerusalem Platform is Jewish nationalism, though an enlightened and responsible version of that nationalism rather than a narrow, purely self-interested version. One could say that – because of the emphasis on 'prophetic vision of Justice and peace', it is interested in more than Israel. Personally (this is Yonatan speaking), I think that everything is framed in terms of the Jewish people and even point (3) is in order to strengthen the Jewish State rather than to do good! The Jerusalem Platform is wonderful and important, it should not be dismissed, it should be taught and explored; but it is not enough as the basis of our beliefs about Israel and Zionism.

Learning about Reform Zionism: Martin Buber's religious vision 25-30 minutes

Explain to the participants that whatever we think of the Jerusalem Platform, the Reform Movement has many times gone past what is stated there when it sets out what it sees as

the importance and potential of the State of Israel. Refer to other materials you have read as appropriate (by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, CCAR, NFTY, as referenced in this program). The platform, after all, was not written by Reform Jews so it is not surprising that we say other things as well when thinking about Israel.

Explain that one of the important thinkers who have shaped the Reform movement's views on Zionism is Martin Buber. Tell them a little about Buber (see background attached).

Break them into small groups – ideally in small groups (of three or five; even numbers usually work less well) – give them out the text by Buber to study and discuss. Give them 10-15 minutes for this.

When they come back together, review their answers. Hopefully they will come up with something like:

1. What are the main ideas in each passage? How are these connected?
 - In the first passage, Buber distinguishes between love and justice. He says that a national independence is needed (note; not only for Jews, for all nations) “for the sake of its own salvation and the salvation of humanity” – that is, for *Tikkun Olam*
 - In the second passage, he says that Zionism should have as its concern all humanity, not just the Jewish people.
 - The connection is that Zionism needs to be based on more than Jewish self-interest. That is what gives it religious purpose and a moral foundation.
2. What does Buber think the ultimate aim of Zionism should be?
 - The same as any other “worthy” (that is, “moral” national movement), to “move towards the holy” for itself and all humanity.
3. What do you think should be the goals of Zionism, and therefore of Israel?
 - Please let me know... Hopefully their ideas will be informed by the ideas you have just explored with them.

Conclusion:

5 minutes

You may wish to

- Ask whether their “associations” with the word Zionism have changed today.
- Close by quoting the sermon of Rabbi Eric Yoffie at the Minnesota Biennial in November, 2003 in Minneapolis:

“Judaism rests on three sacred pillars: God, Torah, and Israel . And the time has come, I believe, to make Israel , land and people, more central to our Movement's concerns.

God forbid that Israel 's current difficulties should blind us to the dream and the magic of the Zionist enterprise.”
- Also, if you wish to show that these ideas are alive and well, not just in the Reform Movement but in important parts of Israeli society, you may wish to quote from the speech of Avraham Burg. (*He is part of the modern orthodox community in Israel*)

Good luck!

I: Definition of Nationalism

*Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition
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1. Devotion to the interests or culture of one's nation.
2. The belief that nations will benefit from acting independently rather than collectively, emphasizing national rather than international goals.
3. Aspirations for national independence in a country under foreign domination.

II. Description of Political Zionism

Modern Zionism is a movement whose goal is the return of Jews to Eretz Yisrael, or Zion, the Jewish synonym for Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. It began in the 1880s in Eastern Europe, especially Russia, as an ideal of building a home for the Jewish people and bringing about national and spiritual renewal. It became a political movement through the work of essayists and the campaigners of Eastern and Western Europe, spearheaded by the untiring efforts of Theodore Herzl.

The term was originally coined in 1890 by Dr. Nathan Birnbaum (1864-1937), philosopher, author and Yiddish-ist.

Zionism developed in different directions, and - since Israel's statehood in 1948 - it has been debated as the means to an end, rather than the goal itself. In this respect, it addresses the significance of everyday life in Israel and in the Jewish Diaspora.

Note: Things are not as simple as they seem. Political Zionism was never “soul-less” or uninterested in other peoples. Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, expressed in his 1902 book *Altneuland*, many years before the black-rights movement and before the likes of Rabbi J. Heschel became so closely aligned with the struggle for Black rights in North America

“There is still one problem of racial misfortune unsolved. The depths of that problem only a Jew can comprehend. I refer to the problem of the Blacks. Just call to mind all those terrible episodes of the slave trade, of human beings who merely because they were black were stolen like cattle, taken prisoners, captured and sold. Their children grew up in strange lands, the objects of contempt and hostility because their complexions were different. I am not ashamed to say, though I may expose myself to ridicule for saying so, that once I have witnessed the redemption of Israel, my people, I wish to assist the redemption of the Black people.”

Source: <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/faq/ShowCategory.asp?categoryid=10>

III. Extract of speech by Knesset Member Avraham Burg, then Chairman of the Zionist Executive, at the grave of Theodore Hertzl

Address by Avraham Burg,

*(then) Chairman of the Zionist Executive, and the Jewish Agency for Israel
(later to be the Speaker of the Knesset, Israel's parliament)*

Mt. Herzl, Ceremonial Opening of the Zionist General Council, in the presence of the President of the State of Israel, Monday 17th June 1996 - Rosh Hodesh 1 Tammuz 5756

“..... The supreme challenge for the tomorrow of a Zionism for rescuing distressed Jews was defined by the Zionist visionary himself; here, by his tomb, let us remember his words:

"I believe that even when we will have achieved a land of our own, Zionism will not cease to be an ideal. For in Zionism, as I perceive it, incorporates not only the aspiration to a secured plot of land for our wretched people, but also the desire for moral and spiritual fulfillment." (Theodore Herzl)

The people is no longer wretched, but the aspiration to spiritual and ethical integrity has not yet been realized. The Zionist dream appears to us in serial form:

- ❖ The first chapter was the vision.
- ❖ Next came fulfillment - the translation of the vision into a reality of strength and prosperity.
- ❖ The third chapter will hold the value-related substance of our lives - building a community, the struggle for the status of the Jewish woman, social tolerance, religious pluralism, sensitivity to the stranger and the citizen in our land. So many tasks, so many challenges, so much hope.”
- ❖ See full text at <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/100/act/21zion.html>

IV. NFTY's Affirmation of Commitment to Israel and Israel programs, February 2001

<http://nfty.org/resources/religiouscultural/israel/resolutiononisrael.html>

NFTY's Affirmation of Commitment to Israel and Israel programs

Adopted by the NFTY General Board, February 2001

WHEREAS, NFTY is a youth movement committed to Jewish education, and,

WHEREAS, in the Preamble to the NFTY Constitution, it states: "We, the members of the North American Federation of Temple Youth, the Reform Jewish youth movement of North America, in order to secure the experience and perpetuation of a strong and meaningful Reform Jewish youth experience based on the (principle) of: The centrality of the State of Israel to the strength, and survival of the Jewish people." and,

WHEREAS, Israel is the international center for Judaism, providing unification among the sects, and,

WHEREAS, Reform Zionists of recent history have set a precedent that we are committed to follow, including Abba Hillel Silver, who advocated the establishment of an active relationship between Reform Jewry and the State of Israel, and Richard G. Hirsch, who in 1967 called for the development of "the relationship of Reform Judaism to Israel . . . to [reach] its full potential," and,

WHEREAS, Reform settlements in Israel, such as Kibbutz Yahel, Kibbutz Lotan, and Har Halutz, could not exist without support from American Jewry, and,

WHEREAS, the Reform movement is committed to the ensuring of Israel 's security and opportunity, and,

WHEREAS, many Jewish youth of today are confused or unsure of their stance regarding the advancement of Israel , and,

WHEREAS, NFTY encourages participation in Israel programs,

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that NFTY regions encourage all youth to participate in Israel programs, and,

LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that each NFTY region accompany Israel programming by incorporating updates regarding the current political situation in Israel as a part of each event and/or meeting, or a comparable cultural/political activity, and,

LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that each NFTY region is encouraged to provide programming on the topic of modern Israel throughout the year, and,

LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the Temple Youth Groups of are both reminded and encouraged to adopt this or a similar resolution for themselves.

Respectfully Submitted, 2000-2001 NFTY Southern California Regional Board, February, 2001

V. "The Jerusalem Platform", the Zionist charter, adopted by NFTY, 1987 (Note: the below five points are the Jerusalem Platform)

NFTY Boards, 1987: F - THE JERUSALEM PLATFORM

Resolved: That NFTY adopts the Jerusalem Platform, affirming that the aims of Zionism are:

1. The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life
2. The in-gathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Yisrael, through aliyah from all countries.
3. The strengthening of the State of Israel which is based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace.
4. The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish

- and Hebraic education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values.
5. The protection of Jewish rights everywhere.

VI. Martin Buber: Text for discussion with participants:

Martin Buber's "Hebrew Humanism" - on Zionism and nationalism

'...(While) love can be embodied only in the life of individuals, justice cannot be embodied except in the life of a nation and in the lives of nations ... It is only a nation which is able to establish justice both amongst its various parts – individuals and groups – and in its relations with other nations, for the sake of its own salvation and the salvation of humanity in the making. For this purpose, a nation requires independence and self-determination'.

I am setting up Hebrew Humanism in opposition to that Jewish nationalism which ... recognizes no task for Israel save that of preserving and asserting itself. ...just as an individual who wishes merely to preserve and assert himself leads an unjustified and meaningless existence, so a nation with no other aim deserves to pass away. The Zionist movement must decide either for national egoism or national humanism. ...If it decides in favor of Hebrew Humanism ... it will have something to say and to bring to mankind."

Martin Buber, "Hebrew Humanism", in Israel and the World, 1948, p. 248

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the main ideas in each passage? How are these connected?
2. What does Buber think the ultimate aim of Zionism should be?
3. What do you think should be the goals of Zionism, and therefore of Israel?

VII. Martin Buber: background for the program leader

Buber, Martin (1878-1965): Philosopher and theologian, Zionist thinker and leader

The grandson of the noted Talmud and Midrash scholar, Solomon Buber, Martin Buber was deeply stirred by the religious message of Hasidism and considered it his duty to convey that message to the world. He wrote several books on Hasidism including collections of Hasidic tales. He was very concerned about Jewish education in Germany and, together with Franz Rosenzweig he translated the Bible into German. During the early Nazi period (1933--38) Buber traveled throughout Germany lecturing, teaching and encouraging his fellow Jews, and thus organized something of a spiritual resistance to the oppressions which were beginning. In 1938 he settled in Eretz Yisrael (then called by the British 'Palestine') and was appointed professor of social philosophy at the Hebrew University, where he taught until his retirement in 1951.

In his later years Buber remained very active in public affairs and in Jewish cultural endeavors. He was one of the founders of the College for Adult Education Teachers, established to train teachers from among the new immigrants who came to Israel. He was the first president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. After World War II Buber lectured extensively outside Israel and became known worldwide as one of the spiritual leaders of his generation.

The starting point of Buber's philosophy is the relation between the individual and the world. He identified two basic forms of relation, the I-Thou and I-It, into which all people's relations, both

with other people and things in the world, can be divided. The I-Thou relation is characterized by openness and directness among other qualities; the I-It by the absence of these qualities. The I-Thou relation is one in which the parties speak to one another as equals; the I-It relation is characterized by the fact that one partner uses the other to achieve some end. I-Thou relations among people leads to the notion of God as the Eternal Thou and to the description of the relation between the individual and God as I-Thou. For Buber the essence of the religious life is not the holding of religious beliefs, but the way in which one lives them by meeting the challenge of everyday life.

VIII. Extract of sermon by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Minnesota Biennial, 2003

Lech L'cha: Go Forth and Discover

Union for Reform Judaism, 67th General Assembly

November 8, 2003 - Minneapolis, MN

(This is a selection; see full text: <http://www.uahc.org/yoffie/biennialsermon03.shtml>)

Judaism rests on three sacred pillars: God, Torah, and Israel . And the time has come, I believe, to make Israel , land and people, more central to our Movement's concerns.

... Abraham, the Jew has always related personhood to peoplehood. He can know himself deeply only as part of a people; for Jews, participation in sacred community is the path to ultimate meaning.

But we have a problem. American Jews - and I am intentionally excluding Canadians - have less and less feeling for peoplehood. Every study that we have indicates that our ties to the Jewish state and to Jews throughout the world are weakening. This is particularly true of the young, who do not see any reason why they should care about Jews in Minsk , Paris , or Tel Aviv.

Do they have a warm spot in their hearts for Israel ? Yes. Are they appalled by Palestinian terror? Of course. And a certain residual tribalism retains its hold. Yet rarely does it go beyond a kind of nostalgia or a shared feeling of vulnerability. And what happens to Jews in Israel and elsewhere around the world does not seem to be in any way central to their lives.

How do we account for this? Some of this might simply be the parochial quality of American Jewish life. American Jews, after all, are Americans, and we are prone to the self-sufficiency and even arrogance to which all Americans fall prey ... Another factor is that we live at a time when individual religious experience is emerging as a primary value. This is positive in many ways. But for some, this privatization of Judaism has come to mean a turning away from collective commitment and communal attachments.

But the real problem is that we no longer understand what Jewish peoplehood means. Peoplehood is a difficult concept in all cases and is especially difficult when applied to the Jews, who defy all conventional classifications.

Most scholars would tell us that a people is defined by race and common origin; by a common language; by a common culture; and by the existence of a national state and a common territory. The problem is that these criteria apply very imperfectly to the Jewish people.

Jews have biological ties, to be sure, but for millennia we have welcomed converts from all racial groups. So Jews are clearly not a race.

Jews have a language, Hebrew, which is the language of our prayer book and sacred texts. But Hebrew is not the language of the Jewish people in the same way that French is the language of the French people. For most of Jewish history, Jews did not speak Hebrew, and even today the majority of the Jewish people speaks neither Hebrew nor Yiddish nor any other Jewish language.

Jews have an ethnic culture that is identified with certain foods, folk songs, and styles of humor and artistic expression. But this culture is diffuse and almost entirely borrowed from our neighbors; in most cases, it is difficult to say what precisely is Jewish about it.

Finally, while we thank God for the State of Israel, for most of our history the Jewish people has not been concentrated in a single territory and no independent political framework has existed.

So, what is it then that defines the Jewish people? The answer is simply this: Judaism defines the Jewish people. Judaism unites us. Judaism gives us our unique character. Judaism makes us a people.

And what is Judaism? It is not only a religion. It is a complex, many-splendored thing wherein peoplehood, faith, and ethics interact. But Torah is its central pillar. Without Torah, the whole structure collapses.

We are not Jewish because we like bagels or borscht belt humor. It is Jewish learning and religious practice that make us Jews. To be sure, ethnicity and culture, gastronomy and nostalgia, language and biology—these are all aspects of our Jewish identity. But they are the superstructure, while the foundation that drives it all is Torah, covenant, and faith.

More than a thousand years ago, Saadyah Gaon said it plainly, Israel is a people only by virtue of its Torah.

The relationship between peoplehood and religious tradition suggested in this week's portion was confirmed at Sinai. There we learned that our greatest challenge is not to ascend from earth to heaven through the journey of the soul but to bring the Divine Presence from heaven to earth and share it with others. But this is a collective task. No individual—and no group—is capable of doing it on their own, which is why the covenant at Sinai was made not with individuals or tribes but with the entire Jewish people.

Since that day, every religious Jew has understood that she cannot fully observe Torah and reclaim the holy moment at Sinai unless she does so as part of K'lal Yisrael .

We turn our attention in particular to the State of Israel, which has a special hold on our soul. Israel is the very essence of our being. The Torah that spells out for us a way of life and a religious destiny also binds us to a Land, and Jewish life cannot be sustained without Israel at its core . . . God forbid that Israel 's current difficulties should blind us to the dream and the magic of the Zionist enterprise.

Located in a bad neighborhood, Israel is concerned right now with the safety of But the day will come when Israel will not only save Jews but save Judaism. The day will come when the State of Israel will become the classroom of the Diaspora, teaching us lessons in Jewish identity and practice. And Israel must begin to prepare for that day now. Because threats to security need religious responses as well as military ones. In a

period of prolonged unrest, those who face ongoing terror eventually ask: “Why do I risk my life here?” And ultimately, the only answer to that question is a religious one that talks of the holy community that our tradition requires us to create there and of the eternal ties that bind all Jews to that place.

I am proud to say that our Movement is playing its part in bringing this holy community into being. We offer Israel a Judaism that is egalitarian and accessible, a Judaism that speaks the language of both ritual and justice, of both modernity and tradition.

IX. Further resources available on-line:

The Reform Movement’s most recent extensive statement about the meaning and place of Israel and Zionism is "The Miami Platform", adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in 1997. See [Reform Judaism & Zionism: A Centenary Platform](http://www.ccarnet.org/platforms/miami.html) at <http://www.ccarnet.org/platforms/miami.html>

To see the changes over time in Reform’s position on Israel and Zionism, see: <http://nfty.org/resources/religiouscultural/israel/reformzionistplatforms.html>

For great hands-on resources from a Reform perspective (e.g. Websites, special interviews), see NFTY’s [Israel Central](http://www.nfty.org/israelcentral/index.html): <http://www.nfty.org/israelcentral/index.html>

For great answers to the following questions

See: <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/faq/ShowCategory.asp?categoryid=10>

- Where does the term, "Zionism" come from and who first used it ?
- What are the major streams of early Zionism?
- Has Zionism changed since the early days before the State of Israel was created?
- Where can I find online resources about the development of Zionism, Israeli History and the Peace Process?
- What are the best kinds of books to read from libraries?
- What books are available for online purchase?

For excellent guidelines about the teaching of Israel from a Reform perspective, see National Association of Temple Educators (NATE) “Guidelines for Israel Education” http://rj.org/nate/edu_resources/NATE%20Brochure%204-9-01Full%20Justified.pdf