

Origins of Zionism *Dream of Return* Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

How did Jews preserve ties to their homeland after their dispersion?

Materials:

- Dream of Return PowerPoint
- *Dream of Return* Video
- Copies of Documents A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H.

Plan of Instruction:

The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.

1. Pass out documents A-H.

Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:

- Slide: Post-Bar Kochba: *A period of repression follows Roman Emperor Hadrian's crushing of the Bar-Kochba revolt. Jewish holy places are desecrated and severe punishments imposed on those who perform circumcisions or attempt to keep the Sabbath. The situation improves with the rise to power of his adopted son Antoninus Pius who ends the persecutions of the Jews so that 60 years after the Bar-Kochba revolt, the Jews of Eretz Israel are again a large, well-organized community. Important disciples of Rabbi Akiba return from exile in Babylon and the Sanhedrin is reestablished in Judah.*
- Slide: Christian Rome: *In the fourth century, Rome becomes Christian under Emperor Constantine, who grows increasingly hostile to Judaism. Historian Heinrich Graetz writes: "Judaism was stigmatized as a noxious, profligate, godless sect (feralis, nefaria secta) which ought to be exterminated from the face of the earth wherever possible." Church leaders place severe restrictions on Jewish religious teaching and practice.*

The Jews get a respite from persecution with the rise of the anti-Christian emperor Julian in 361 A.D. Known as the Apostate, he allows Jews to return to Jerusalem and announces his intention to rebuild the Temple following his return from a campaign against the Persians. But he never returns. Julian is assassinated. The Jews suffer payback with intensifying

anti-Jewish measures. According to historian Cecil Roth, Christian writers declare the disappointment of Jewish hopes as “final proof that the Divine favour had departed from them.” One Hebrew poet writes: “Our land is not ours, what is ours is not ours, strangers possess our strength, and aliens take the fruit of our labors.”

- Slide: Persian Revolt: *In 614, the Jews rise in revolt, inspired by the Persians unimpeded march across the Levant all the way to Egypt. They join the Persians in their war against Byzantium, serving in the tens of thousands in special battalions. These Jewish Legions, established by the Jews in Palestine, would prove to be the last organized Jewish armed force for the next 1,300 years.*

For three years, the administration of Jerusalem is in Jewish hands. Jews living in the Land of Israel are convinced that the days of the Messiah have arrived. But the Persians suddenly abandon their Jewish allies. With the return of Byzantium to the Holy Land the Jews are again persecuted. Historian Salo Baron writes: “Thus ended the last attempt of Palestinian Jewry to secure political independence or at least autonomy under Persian suzerainty, and perhaps also to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. The ensuing disillusionment led to the conversion of many Jews...”

- Slide: Muslim Invasion: *Soon after the brief Persian period, the Arabs invade the Land of Israel, part of a campaign of world conquest undertaken by Mohammed’s successor Caliph Umar I. He conquers Jerusalem in 637-638 AD from the Byzantine Empire. The Arabs will rule Eretz Israel for over 450 years, not seriously threatened until the First Crusades in the 11th Century. Unlike the Persians, the Arab-Muslim invaders do not withdraw, but make the Jews into dhimmis, second-class citizens. Jews are forbidden to enter the Temple Mount, on which a great mosque is built. Synagogue construction is banned and Jews are required to wear special dress.*

Historian Ben-Zion Dinur writes that while the destruction of Jewish sovereignty was a long historical process, “the decisive event in this long struggle was the Arab conquest of Palestine, with the resulting expropriation of Jewish lands by the conquerors and the emergence of a new national majority in the country.”

- Slide: Crusaders: *The Muslims are overthrown in 1099 by the Crusaders. This time the Jews place no hope in the invaders, whose reputation for murder and plunder precede them. They join in the fight against the Crusaders. Jerusalem resists for five weeks. A contemporary Crusader account relates: “Jew, Turk, and Arab fight for their lives with sling stones,*

with catapults, with fire and venom ... and though there was terror on all sides, none put down his sword: the Turk, the Arab, and the Jew were among the fallen. The Jew was the first to fight and is the last to fall."

- Slide: Messianic Anticipation: *The Crusades spark a messianic anticipation among the Jews. They interpret the persecutions and massacres as a prelude to the Messiah. This leads Jews to make Aliyah to the Land of Israel.*

Historian Ben-Zion Dinur says, "These two phenomena, messianic ferment and movements of immigration to the land of Israel, are among the basic phenomena of Jewish history through the generations..."

Caught up in this anticipation in Christian Spain, poet and philosopher Yehuda Halevi writes what is perhaps the most famous of all medieval poems: "My heart is in the East and I am at the ends of the West...it would be easy for me to leave behind all the good things of Spain; it would be glorious to see the dust of the ruined shrine." Halevi follows his heart and in 1140 travels to Palestine where it is believed he is killed shortly after his arrival. One legend has it that a Mohammedan horseman trampled over him.

- Slide: Crusader Collapse: *In 1187, Saladin conquers Jerusalem. Jews are permitted to settle in Jerusalem once more. Historian Heinrich Graetz writes: "His empire became a safe asylum to the oppressed Jews. Saladin was just to the Jews, as indeed towards everyone, even his bitterest enemies. Under him the Jews rose to great prosperity and distinction."*

The collapse of the crusader kingdom produces a wave of intense messianic ferment prompting Jews from many lands to move to Palestine, including a large number of religious scholars (though there is some debate among historians as to whether these scholars left for messianic motives or simply out of piety.) The first wave occurs in 1209 or 1210 from southern France, the second in 1211 from northern France. Historians call it the Aliyah of the 300 rabbis.

- Slide: Decline & Return: *Rapidly changing conditions in the Land of Israel – most of them hostile to Jewish survival – leads to decline followed by efforts at renewal. In the early 15th century, a large Aliyah to Jerusalem dissipates following a ruinous increase in taxation. In the early 16th century, following the conquest of Palestine by the Ottoman Empire, a major Aliyah of Jews settles in Safed in the Galilee, which becomes the focus of a major Jewish intellectual renaissance. Persecution brings an end to the community.*

- Slide: Jewish Religion: *Jewish religious practice keeps alive the idea of return. When Jews pray, they face toward Jerusalem. The seventh benediction of the ancient Shemonah Esreh, a prayer Jews repeat several times daily, reads: "Gather us from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You, Lord, who gather the dispersed people of your people Israel."*
- Slide: False Messiahs: *Persecution in the Diaspora leads Jews to yearn for the days of the messiah which will bring an end to their suffering. In 1524, an adventurer appears in Rome named David Reubeni. He claims to be the brother of Joseph, king of the tribe of Reuben and declares he will lead the Jews back to the Promised Land. He is eventually joined by Diego Pires. A Marrano who had been brought up as a Christian. He changes his name to Solomon Molcho and returns to Judaism. The two attempt to convince Charles V to help them defeat the Turks. Their efforts fail. Molcho is burned at the stake. It is likely that Reubeni met the same fate.*

In the 17th Century, attacks like the Chmelnitsky massacres of 1648 in Poland again leave the Jews vulnerable to the claims of false messiahs. The most famous of them is Shabtai Tzvi. Enthusiastic masses in eastern and central Europe abandon their property in preparation for an exodus to the Holy Land. In 1666, the Turkish sultan forces Shabtai Zvi to convert to Islam leading to widespread dismay among his followers, many of whom abandon Judaism.

- Slide: Waves of Immigration: *Nevertheless, Jews continue to believe in mystical dates that will inaugurate redemption and immigrate to Eretz Israel as those dates approach. Indeed, for six hundred years under a series of Muslim empires, bursts of immigration focused on specific dates when redemption is believed to be at hand. Historian Arie Morgenstern writes, "Starting with the year 5000 on the Jewish calendar (1240 C.E.), the beginning of each new century signaled for many the possibility of redemption, leading large groups of Jews to make the journey to Palestine as a necessary step in bringing it about."*

The largest Aliyah is in the years leading to 1840: 5600 on the Jewish calendar. An Israeli historian writes: "Tens of thousands of Jews arrived in Palestine, radically changing the demography of the Jewish community there. By the time the first of the Zionist immigrants began arriving towards the end of the nineteenth century, the land of Israel was already host to its largest and most vibrant Jewish community in many centuries."

- Slide: Centuries of Misrule: *Still Jews congregate in only a few places in the land, mainly Jerusalem and Hebron. Most of the Land of Israel remains in poor condition. The situation is vividly portrayed by famous visitors, among them American writers Herman Melville and Mark Twain. Melville writes of a visit in the 1850s: “Judea is one accumulation of stones – stony mountains & stony plains; stony torrents & stony roads; stony walls & stony fields...” A decade later, Mark Twain writes, “Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies.”*
- Slide: Never Palestine: *At no time in the 460 years of Muslim rule is there a separate country called Palestine. The land is divided into districts and provinces of the successive empires. These included Byzantine, Arab, Crusader, Mameluk, and Ottoman.*
- Slide: Zionism’s Rise: *Beginning in the 19th century, a modern movement to return emerges. Zionism sprouts spontaneously, first in eastern Europe and Russia, and then in the West. It will succeed where earlier efforts have failed: To once again make the Jews a free nation in their own land.*

2. Play video: Dream of Return

Introduce inquiry question: How did Jews preserve ties to their homeland after their dispersion?

3. Whole class discussion:

- What do you think kept Jews going through the centuries despite the hardships and misfortunes?
- Historian Ben-Zion Dinur thinks the Diaspora should be dated from the Arab conquest. Do you agree or disagree?
- If you had to list three motives to explain why the Jews continued to come to their homeland through the centuries, what would they be?
- Why is it that only the Jews treated the Land of Israel as a separate geographic entity?

4. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

**Document A: “History of the Jews”, Heinrich Graetz
(1893)**

The Emperor Constantine, who had aggrandized the Church, and laid the dominion of the earth at her feet, had at the same time given her the doubtful blessing, “By the sword thou shalt live.” He had originally placed Judaism, as a religion, on an equal footing with the other forms of worship existing in the Roman Empire. ...

The more Christianity asserted its influence over him, the more did he affect the intolerance of that religion which, forgetful of its origin, entertained as passionate a hatred of Judaism and its adherents as of heathenism. Sylvester, Bishop of Rome, Paul, afterwards Bishop of Constantinople, the new capital, and Eusebius of Caesarea, the first historian of the Church, did not fail to incite the inhabitants of the empire against the Jews. Judaism was stigmatized as a noxious, profligate, godless sect (*feralis, nefaria sect*) which ought to be exterminated from the face of the earth wherever possible.

Source: “History of the Jews Vol. II”, Heinrich Graetz, *The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1893 p. 562.*

Document B: “A Social and Religious History of the Jews”, Salo Baron (1952)

Hearing of the irresistible march of Persian troops, the Palestinian Jews were perfectly convinced that these were signs of the approaching Messiah. Already in the reign of Maurice a dream of the head of the academy in Tiberias about the Messiah’s birth within eight years had found widespread credence. ...

At any rate it appears that the Jewish communities around Tiberias, led by the wealthy and learned Benjamin, opened the road for the Persian conquest of the administrative capital of Caesarea. When the Persians finally turned toward Jerusalem, the Jews seem to have obtained from them a formal promise that the city would be handed over to Jewish rule. After a twenty-day siege the Holy City surrendered (614). ...

Acting in accordance with a previous agreement, the Persian general, Romizanes, surnamed Shahrabaz (the Shah’s wild boar), entrusted the Jews with the administration of the Holy City. An unnamed leader quickly assumed the name of Nehemiah; he seems even to have attempted the restoration of Jewish sacrificial worship. Many Jews undoubtedly saw in these events a repetition of the reestablishment of a Jewish commonwealth by Cyrus and Darius, and behaved as rulers of city and country. After three years the Persians realized, however, that the Jews expected from them more than they were willing to concede. On second thought they also must have felt that the aid extended to them by the small Jewish minority could not in the long run compensate them for the animosity of the Christian majority, sectarian as well as orthodox, whose loyalty toward Byzantium could otherwise be easily undermined. We do not know of the actual incident which led to the breach between the allies, but about 617 the Persians suddenly suppressed the Jewish regime in Jerusalem, forbade Jews to settle within a three-mile radius from the city, and deported a number of obstreperous leaders.

Even more severe were the measures taken by the returning Byzantines in 629-630. Heraclius, to be sure, was statesmanlike enough to wish to pacify the restless Asiatic provinces, rather than to exacerbate the existing sectarian conflicts. ... After his entry into Jerusalem, however, he yielded to the entreaties of the ecclesiastical leaders, whom he was seeking to placate also by retrieving the True Cross from the Persians. The Church proclaimed a special “fast of Heraclius” (celebrated for centuries thereafter in Coptic churches) to secure for the emperor expiation for the breach of his oath. This reversal opened the gate to formal prosecutions of individual Jews implicated in the previous attacks on Christians, as well as to mass lynchings.

Thus ended the last attempt by Palestinian Jewry to secure political independence, or at least autonomy under Persian suzerainty, and perhaps also to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. The ensuing disillusionment led to the conversion of many Jews...

Source: “A Social and Religious History of the Jews Vol. III”, Salo Baron, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1957 [First Published 1952], p. 19-23.

**Document C: “Israel and the Diaspora”, Ben-Zion
Dinur (1969)**

Even the destruction of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine was not a single event, nor yet a series of events, but a long, fluctuating historical development, beginning with Pompey's conquest of the country and its partition by Gabinius, and only ending with the abolition of the Patriarchate in the reign of Theodosius II. This was a political and administrative process, in which the main factors were the Roman conquests in the Near East, the spread of Roman rule, and the consequent development of the Roman system of provincial government throughout the empire and particularly in the countries of the Near East. The territorial dispossession of the Jewish nation, on the other hand, was a social and colonizing process (though set, of course, in a certain political framework) in which the principal factors were, first, the continuous penetration of nomad desert tribes into Palestine and their amalgamation with the non-Jewish (Syro-Aramean) elements of the population; and, secondly, the domination of the country's agriculture by the new conquerors and the expropriation of Jewish lands for their benefit.

This was a long process. Its earliest beginnings go back to the reign of Hadrian, when the Roman government, in pursuance of its aim of obliterating all record of the Jewish state (the name "Judah" was now changed to "Palestine"), started a systematic harassment of the Jews, while strengthening and increasing the numbers of the non-Jewish settlements; and it finally ended with the ruthless slaughter of the remaining Jewish population of the country by the warriors of the Crusades, "the vanguard of western civilization," who vented the stored-up Christian hatred of generations on "the enemies of God," and whose crusading fervor was as much the result of their hunger for land and their desire to conquer Palestine and make it as of their religious faith.

However, the decisive event in this long struggle was the Arab conquest of Palestine, with the resulting expropriation of Jewish lands by the conquerors and the emergence of a new national majority in

the country. This, therefore, is the right moment to choose as the starting-point of the era of "Israel in the Diaspora."

Source: "Israel and the Diaspora", Ben Zion Dinur, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1969, p. 4-7.

Document D: “*Dispersion and the Longing for Zion, 1240-1840*”, Arie Morgenstern (2002)

Indeed, from the time of the Crusades until the nineteenth century Jewish life was infused with a sense of messianic anticipation, which found expression, among other things, in *aliya*. This messianic anticipation was focused on specific dates, which were endowed with mystical significance. Starting with the year 5000 on the Jewish calendar (1240 C.E.), the beginning of each new century signaled for many the possibility of redemption, leading large groups of Jews to make the journey to Palestine as a necessary step in bringing it about. ...

Although the number of Jews who succeeded in making the voyage and settling in Palestine never constituted more than a small portion of world Jewry, these messianic *aliyot* were of enduring significance, partly because of the renown of those who took part, partly because of their regular appearance over the centuries, and partly because of the variety of diaspora communities which participated. The messianic impulse which spawned these waves of immigration, and the belief in the centrality of the land of Israel upon which they depended, were in no way marginal to the Jewish tradition, but in fact became an axis of Jewish spiritual life. Indeed, the story of *aliya* from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries illustrates the depth and force of the Jewish people's connection to its ancestral homeland, a connection that was carried into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when modern Zionism found a new way of giving it voice.

Source: “Dispersion and the Longing for Zion, 1240-1840” Essay by Arie Morgenstern, Azure: Ideas for the Jewish Nation (quarterly journal published by Shalem Press) Issue #12 (Winter 2002), pp. 71-132

**Document E: “10th Prayer of Amidah Service”
(ca. First – Second Century A.D.)**

Sound the great shofar for our freedom and raise a banner to gather the exiles and unite us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are you, LORD, who regathers the scattered of his people Israel.

Source: Koren Sacks Siddur, Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009.

**Document F: “My Heart Is in The East”,
Judah Halevi, (c. 1141 A.D.)**

My heart is in the east, and I in the uttermost west —

How can I find savor in food? How shall it be sweet to me?

How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet

Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?

A light thing would it seem to me to leave all the good things of
Spain

Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the
desolate sanctuary.

Source: “Texts Concerning Zionism: My Heart is In the East”, Yehuda Halevi, c. 1141, Jewish Virtual Library, Link: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-my-heart-is-in-the-east-quot-yehuda-halevi>

**Document G: “*Shebet Yehudah*”,
*Solomon ibn Verga (1550)***

In the year 4971 (=1211 c.e.) God inspired the rabbis of France and England to go to Jerusalem. They numbered more than three hundred and were accorded great honor by the king. They built for themselves synagogues and houses of study. Our teacher the great kohen R. Jonathan Ha-kohen went there as well. A miracle occurred. They prayed for rain and were answered, and the name of heaven was sanctified because of them.

Source: “Shebet Yehudah,” [“The Scepter of Judah”] ed. Yitzhak Baer and Azriel Shochat, Jerusalem, 1946-47, (This section is part of an appendix composed by Solomon’s son Joseph), p. 105.

**Document H: “*Innocents Abroad*”,
Mark Twain (1867)**

Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies. Where Sodom and Gomorrah reared their domes and towers, that solemn sea now floods the plain, in whose bitter waters no living thing exists – over whose waveless surface the blistering air hangs motionless and dead – about whose borders nothing grows but weeds, and scattering tufts of cane, and that treacherous fruit that promises refreshment to parching lips, but turns to ashes at the touch.

Nazareth is forlorn; about that ford of Jordan where the hosts of Israel entered the Promised Land with songs of rejoicing, one finds only a squalid camp of fantastic Bedouins of the desert; Jericho the accursed, lies a moldering ruin, to-day, even as Joshua’s miracle left it more than three thousand years ago; Bethlehem and Bethany, in their poverty and their humiliation, have nothing about them now to remind one that they once knew the high honor of the Saviour’s presence; the hallowed spot where the shepherds watched their flocks by night, and where the angels sang Peace on earth, good will to men, is untenanted by any living creature, and unblessed by any feature that is pleasant to the eye. Renowned Jerusalem itself, the stateliest name in history, has lost all its ancient grandeur, and is become a pauper village; the riches of Solomon are no longer there to compel the admiration of visiting Oriental queens ...

Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land?

Palestine is no more of this work-day world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition – it is dream-land.

Source: “The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrim’s Progress Vol. II,” Mark Twain, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1922, p. 359.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

1. Why were the Jews ready to follow to false messiahs?

2. *Close Reading (Document D):*
What motivated the Jews to return every century from 1240-1840?

3. What does Mark Twain reveal about the Holy Land of the 1800s?

In the space below, use information from all four documents to answer the question:
How did Jews preserve ties to their homeland after their dispersion?