Lookstein Virtual
Power up Jewish Learning

Bar-Ilan University
אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

The Lookstein Center for Jewish Education

Zionism and Aliyah

Lesson Plan

Introduction

In this lesson, students will learn classical sources related to Jews living in the Land of Israel and will debate the issue of making *Aliyah* today.

Learning Objectives

Students will understand the importance Judaism places on living in the Land of Israel as well as the complexities involved in doing so today

Materials

Tanach, attached source sheet and article.

Background

The land of Israel is a central aspect in the Torah, and thus plays a significant role in Judaism. Each of the five books of the Torah mentions the land countlessly – from the Patriarchs to whom God promises the land and who travel and settle it and insist on being buried there, to the forty-year journey of *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert to ultimately reach the land.

More than half of the commandments in the Torah are dependent on the Jewish people's dwelling in the land and the books of the prophets speak about their return to the land from exile. Throughout the diaspora, Jews longed and prayed to return to their homeland, every year saying "לשנה הבאה בירושלים" – next year in Jerusalem.

Various historical circumstances, however, prevented them from fulfilling this dream. The Jews of the Soviet Union are but one such group, who did everything they could to make it to Israel and never gave up the hope of achieving this goal. The modern State of Israel has allowed for this dream to become a reality, and has become a safe haven for Jews escaping persecution around the world. Yet, the majority of the world's Jews do not live in Israel. We will examine a number of historical sources related to this topic and will explore the factors contributing to the modern Jew's decision to make *Aliya (*move to Israel*)* or not.

Procedure

1. Divide the students into small groups and have them search for mentions of the Land of Israel in the Tanach. This can be done as a race to see how many mentions they can find in a certain amount of time, or can be played like the game Boggle, where when the time is up, each group announces their findings, and whichever group has the most, which were not already mentioned by another group, wins.

2. Ask the students why they think the Land of Israel is so central to the Torah. Do they think it is important for all the Jews to live in the same place? Why/why not?

3. Ask for a show of hands of how many students have been to Israel. What were their impressions?

4. Have the students learn the source sheet in pairs, or give each pair a source to learn and then present to the class.

5. Divide the students into two teams assigning one team the pro-*Aliyah* position and the other team the position against *Aliyah*, and have them debate the issue. The attached article may be of use.

6. Wrap up the session by going over the main points raised by each group and by highlighting the fact that although there are many challenges to moving to Israel today, this is the easiest it has ever been to make the move, and that Jews throughout history (including Moses!) only dreamt of having the opportunity that we have.

Read the following quote of Sylva Zalmonson in Operation Wedding: 4:27 - “I tried a few times to get out legally, officially, but I was refused. They used to tell us “You may rot here, but you’ll never get out, you’ll never see your Israel…27:03 – during the trial they told me to be the first one on the stand. They probably thought that a woman would be weaker. I thought I wouldn’t get out of there alive. So I said "לשנה הבאה בירושלים" and "אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני".

End with reading the following quote of Avital Sharansky and/or showing the following video (song) which describes the difficulties that the Ethiopian Jews faced on their journey to Israel.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKcRKzbSeJM Hamasa Le'eratz Israel by Shlomo Grunich

- Avital Sharansky speaks at Oz Vegaon: 46:11 –" In ulpan, from those righteous Hebrew teachers, we learned that for two thousand years – we didn't even know about the Holocaust – there were great, righteous people, who every year said "next year in Jerusalem", and didn't make it there. People who sang songs, like Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, "Zion will you not ask (after the welfare of your prisoners)", or "My heart is in the east and I am in the uttermost west", full of yearning and longing for the land of Israel, but didn't come. They didn't live here. And I? Who am I? A blank page in terms of my Judaism, and I'm here! And others like me in the ulpan from different countries. And I asked her "Why? Why am I here? Explain it to me". And then again, a full exploration of the books, I can tell you because it is engrained in me, it's in Deuteronomy chapter 30, and in Ezekiel – there is a precise plan of redemption for the nation of Israel. It goes like stairs, from level to level. Read it for yourselves - how God takes us, even the very last one from under the sky and brings him here. He sprinkles pure water on us. I didn't know what this pure water that He sprinkles on us is, but I felt wonderful. After all of the filth of the exile, pure water is good! I would have put ritual baths outside of the entrance of Israel and jump in them – so that everyone could pass by there and come to Israel. And afterwards He turns us into a nation. He relates to us as His children. And that is how slowly but surely, the redemption of Israel happens. And the basis of the redemption is the ingathering of the exiles. I said, "no, really? You mean that I am in God's plan?" She said "yes, you are in the plan". I asked "is my husband also in the plan?" "Yes, your husband also". "So he will come?" "Of course he will come!" "Are the American Jews also in the plan" – because then there were many Americans in the ulpan. "Of course! Everybody! This is the plan of God, not even the plan of the Prime Minister who today says one thing and tomorrow can say another. God's plan doesn't change and we are all a part of it. And we are all on the way to the redemption of the nation of Israel. We are all there."… We are in the plan and we aren't going back to exile. I saw it with my own eyes, I lived it, and I experienced it."