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ZIONISM: LAND, PEOPLE, AND COVENANT is a set of lessons on the stories, behaviors, promises, and values that identify us as a unique people. Zionist education is our birthright and our entryway to Jewish community. Each lesson can be read and enjoyed by a Hadassah member studying alone; each lesson is also a program—including study questions and instructions for facilitators—that can be the basis for group discussion.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE? HOW CAN THESE FOUR QUOTATIONS *POSSIBLY* COME FROM THE SAME TRADITION?

"In the towns of the peoples,...which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, *you shall not let a soul remain alive*" —Deuteronomy 20:16

"The Lord said to Moses... *'I will utterly blot the name of Amalek from under heaven!'* ... The Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."— Exodus 17:14, 16

"The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'The work of my hands is being drowned in the sea, and *shall you chant hymns?*'"
—BT Megillah 10b

"The battalion CO got on the field telephone....and said, '*Don't touch the civilians...don't fire until you're fired at and don't touch the civilians.... Their blood be on your heads.*'"
—Israeli soldier talking about The Six-Day War

This is the third of nine units that shows us how the story of the Jewish People connects us to the land of the Jewish People.

Why Jerusalem?

What Is The "Covenant"?

How Does a Nation Act "In the Image of God"?

Zionism Land, People, and Covenant

What woke you this morning? The alarm? The baby? That inner clock some people are blessed with? At any rate, you're up. No doubt within the next ten minutes you will do something that you'll repeat countless times before the day is over: You will look in the mirror.

What do you see? You surely *don't* think, "I see the image of God." And yet, that is precisely what you *do* see. The Torah teaches us that everyone, every human being, is created "*b'tselem Elohim*," in the image of God.

Genesis 1:26-27

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." ... And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.¹

What does it mean to be created "in the image of God"? Obviously God doesn't have physical attributes, so we must look at what God does. The verbs in Genesis 1:1-29 tell us that God "creates," "speaks," "sees," "separates," "commands," and "blesses." Each action expresses God's power and righteousness.

"God's image" is reflected in God's actions. To be created in the image of God, then, is to have the capacity to act as God acts—to have power and to use it for righteousness. Maimonides gives us specifics:

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book of Judges, Treatise Four: Mourning, 14:1

The following positive commands were ordained by the Rabbis: visiting the sick; comforting the mourners; serving in a funeral procession; providing a dowry for a bride; escorting departing guests; taking an active part in burying the dead (carrying the coffin to the cemetery, walking before it, delivering a eulogy, digging the grave, burying the body); causing the bride and the bridegroom to rejoice; providing them with all their needs (for the wedding). These are deeds of loving kindness... These commands are on rabbinical authority [that is, they are not commanded in the Torah, but] they are implied in the precept: "And thou shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), that is: what you would have others do unto you, do unto him who is your brother.²

Each human being, created in the image of God, should be able to say: *God is unique, and so am I. God's value is infinite, and so is mine. We are all equal, so we must treat all people with respect.*³

All people are created "*b'tselem Elohim*," but it is in the Book of Isaiah that God gives the Jews the responsibility, and the privilege, of being "*or lagoyim*," an example of righteousness that will be a "light to the nations."⁴

Book of Isaiah 42: 6-7; 60:3

I the Lord, in My grace, have ... created you, and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations. Opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon who sit in darkness.... And nations shall walk by your light; kings, by your shining radiance.

The prophet Isaiah saw that the peoples of the earth lived in spiritual darkness, and he the Jewish people to be a moral and religious guide, to make God's name great throughout the world as a "light of nations."

This is an enormous responsibility, and it's incumbent upon us not only as individuals, but as a people, and as a nation. *How does a nation act "in the image of God"?* We might say that a nation that acts in a God-like way is a peaceful nation, an ethical nation, a nation that tries to solve conflicts with an olive branch first, and only with swords when absolutely necessary. We must use power responsibly – even when provoked, even when attacked.

Yet how do we make sense of our responsibility to *conquer, inhabit, and safeguard* the Land of Israel? We are given this responsibility when God initiates the covenant with Abram (Genesis 17:8). It is reinforced many times in the Bible, for example in Leviticus 20:22-24: "You shall faithfully observe all My laws and all My regulations, lest the land to which I bring you to settle in spew you out. You shall not follow the practices of the [Canaanite] nation that I am driving out before you. For it is because they did all these things that I abhorred them and said to you: '*You shall possess their land, for I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.*'"

How we can reconcile our responsibility toward other human beings and our responsibility to our land? The laws of warfare, detailed in Deuteronomy, distinguish between wars waged against nations outside Israel and wars waged against the Canaanite nations within Israel's borders.

Deuteronomy 20:10-18

When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you at forced labor. If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it, and when the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town—all its spoil—and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the Lord your God gives you. Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout.

In the towns of the peoples, however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. No, you must proscribe them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites [and the Girgashites, a seventh nation, which is mentioned in a similar list in Deuteronomy 7:1]—as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they lead you into

doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God.

Exodus 17:8-9, 13-16

Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek." ... Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: **I will utterly blot the memory of Amalek from under heaven!**" And Moses built an altar and named it *Adonai-nissi*. He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the Lord!' The Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."

Maimonides, in Mishneh Torah, The Book of Judges, 5:1-2, 6:1, 4

The primary war which the king wages is a mandatory war [*milhemet mitzvah*, "commanded war"]... against the seven nations, against Amalek, and a war to deliver the Jews from the enemy attacking them. Thereafter he may engage in an optional war [*milhemet hareshut*], that is, a war against neighboring nations to extend the borders of Israel and to enhance his greatness and prestige... No war is declared against any nation before peace offers are made to it. This obtains both in an optional war and a mandatory war...

Deuteronomy describes two types of wars. The first type of war is an "optional" war, *milhemet hareshut*. When Israel attacks a city (to expand its borders or enhance its greatness), it must offer its citizens the opportunity to surrender without harm. If they insist on battling Israel and are defeated, Israel may kill their men. Women, children, and property are spared and taken captive. The second type of war, a "commanded war," *milhemet mitzvah*, is against cities in the land of Israel. Israel is commanded to utterly destroy the seven Canaanite nations—men, women, and children—to eliminate any trace of their pagan influence on the people of Israel.

This policy also applied to Amalek, the nomadic tribe that attacked the people of Israel as they journeyed through the desert and continued to attack them in Canaan. In fact, in the first Book of Samuel, King Saul has the opportunity to murder King Agag of Amalek, yet spares his life and as a result, is punished by losing his kingship to David.

I Samuel 15: 11, 28

The word of the Lord then came to Samuel: "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from Me and has not carried out My commands." ... Samuel said to [Saul], "The Lord has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you."

The prophet Samuel never again came to see Saul, and God regretted ever having made Saul king over Israel. Saul later was plagued with mental illness and God looked favorably on David, the young warrior who was to become the next king.

Despite this, our Sages still recognized our enemies as human beings. A stunning *midrash* reflects their mindset. When the people of Israel fled Egypt and the Egyptians who followed them drowned in the Red Sea, did we gloat at their catastrophe? On the contrary: We softened our praise to God for saving us.

Babylonian Talmud Megillah 10b

The ministering angels wanted to chant their hymns [when God closed the Red Sea on the Egyptians, causing them to drown], but **the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "The work of my hands is being drowned in the sea, and shall you chant hymns?"**

We find more evidence that we must regard our enemies with compassion in a *midrash* about Moses waging war under God's commandment.

Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:13

God commanded Moses to make war on Sihon, as it is said, "Engage him in battle" (Deuteronomy 2:24), but he did not do so. Instead he sent messengers...to Sihon...with an offer of peace (Deut. 2:26). God said to him: "I commanded you to make war with him, but instead you began with peace; by your life, I shall confirm your decision. Every war upon which Israel enters shall begin with an offer of peace."

All wars, even those against the Canaanites, must be preceded with an invitation to peace. And even if peace is rejected by the enemy, we must consider the humanity of noncombatant civilians of the enemy nation and do all we can to protect them.

It's clear from the sources that while we must conquer, inhabit, and safeguard the Land of Israel, we must act "in the image of God." Our tradition gives us guidelines that speak with great relevance, if not urgency, today.

Account of an Israeli unit entering Nablus during the Six Day War

The battalion CO got on the field telephone to my company and said, "Don't touch the civilians... don't fire until you're fired at and don't touch the civilians. Look, you've been warned. Their blood be on your heads." ... The boys in the company kept talking about it afterwards, I heard it from every one of them, right down to the drivers. They kept repeating the words... "Their blood be on your heads."⁵

Reuven Kimelman, a contemporary Judaic scholar, notes that concerns about the humanity of the enemy inform the doctrine called "purity of arms" (*taharat haneshek*).

Reuven Kimelman

There is a consistent thread weaving its way through Jewish ethical thought from biblical ordinance to modern practice as noted by ancient as well as medieval and modern

observers. Just because an army is legitimately repelling an aggressor does not allow it to violate civilian life. A just war does not justify unjust acts.

The warrior is the enemy, not the noncombatant civilian. If peace is the goal, the reality of war must be conditioned by the vision of the reconciliation between the warring populations.

Many of these considerations for the moral stature of the soldier and the humanity of the enemy received their initial stimulus from the biblical passages on war...

In today's world, with terrorism and ever-growing antisemitism and anti-Zionism, how should we—as creatures created in God's image and as models to the world's nations—respond? Must we always consider the humanity of the enemy, or could that consideration hurt us? In a recent responsum (halakhic answer to a question) on the permissability of preventive war, the Reform Movement put the issue of national defense into perspective.

Responsum of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR—Reform), January 2003

Many of these [Biblical and Rabbinic] laws and teachings do not apply to our day and time. The seven Canaanite nations no longer exist, and Amalek is a homiletical device, a symbol of irrational hatred and evil rather than the name of an actual people. Yet...threats against our national existence continue to plague us [and we are commanded to protect ourselves. This commandment] also teaches us that our tradition rejects pacifism as a policy of national defense. The Torah does not expect us to submit to armed aggression, to stand silently and passively when others seek to conquer and dominate us. The people of Israel have the right to defend themselves from attack. Indeed, we are commanded to do so...

We see that the Torah and Rabbis offer a contradictory and complex mandate. At the end of the day, the Israeli army, while instructed to defend itself, has also been exhorted to minimize civilian deaths. The Israeli army is guided by the Jewish view that killing an individual is similar to killing an entire universe—a dictum derived from the understanding that we are all created *b'tselem Elohim*—in God's image.⁶

If we are all *created* in God's image, we share fundamental qualities of Godliness. If we are to act in God's image, we must treat each other as we would wish to be treated—with respect and compassion.

Things to Think About...

1. Is there anything you think is missing from Maimonides' list of positive commands? Create your own list of the most important acts human beings can do to help others, and through those acts to share in God's holiness.
2. How do you feel about the concept of "*or lagoyim*"? Do you try to be a role model to anyone (aside from family members) in your daily life? Why (or why not)?
3. Being Jewish brings great responsibility. Discuss.
4. Did Saul deserve his punishment? Why?
5. How does the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) display concern for the humanity of Palestinian civilians?
6. The CCAR responsum dismisses the notion that Amalek exists today as a flesh-and-blood people. What purpose is served by using Amalek as a metaphor for evil? Can any nation, past or present, be likened to Amalek?
7. If all humans are created in the image of God, why are we not precisely alike?

Endnotes

- ¹ Biblical excerpts are from *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1985). Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.
- ² The Torah itself, in its opening chapters, includes the act of clothing the naked (Adam and Eve sew fig leaves to cover themselves—Genesis 3:7) and closes with the *mitzvah* of burying the dead (God buries Moses—Deuteronomy 34:5-7).
- ³ This is a paraphrasing of the words of Rabbi Irving Greenberg, president of the Jewish Life Network. "*Or lagoyim*" is Hebrew for "light to the nations."
- ⁴ "*Or lagoyim*" is Hebrew for "light to the nations."
- ⁵ *The Seventh Day: Soldiers' Talk About the Six-Day War*. Recorded and edited by a group of young kibbutz members. London: Andre Deutsch, 1970, p. 132. (Reprinted in 1971 by Penguin UK.) Cited in Reuven Kimelman, "The Limits of Monarchy and Government, Part III: War and Its Limits," *Perspectives* (publication of CLAL), Vol. 1 No. 6 (June 1986), p. 5.
- ⁶ *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:5 presents a paradox: Each human being is created in the image of God—suggesting that we are all, fundamentally, alike—and yet each of us remains unique:

Capital cases are not like monetary cases. In civil suits, one can make monetary restitutions and thereby make atonement, but in capital cases [the accused] is held responsible for his [the murdered person's] blood and the blood of his [potential] descendants until the end of time. ...

For this reason was man created alone, to teach you that whosoever destroys a single soul of Israel, Scripture considers him as though he had destroyed a complete world. And whoever preserves a single soul of Israel, Scripture ascribes merit to him as though he had preserved a complete world. Furthermore, he was created alone for the sake of peace among men, that one might not say to his fellow, "My father was greater than yours," and that the Gnostics might not say, "There are many ruling powers in heaven," again, to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He. For if a man strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, fashioned every man in the stamp of the first man, and yet not one of them resembles his fellow. Therefore every single person is obliged to say, "The world was created for my sake."

For the Facilitator...

The questions above, should you choose to share them, can lead to a general discussion (or even a controlled argument!) among friends, families, or Hadassah colleagues. They can also be used as a more formal, facilitated "lesson."

The purpose of this unit is to explore the idea that being created in the "image of God" carries serious responsibilities. It is incumbent upon all of us—as human beings, members of the Jewish people, and Zionists—to behave in a dignified, divine manner at all times. However, the ability to behave in Godly ways can be compromised during times of war. In today's world, all Jews must grapple with the ethics of military behavior. This lesson draws from Jewish texts—ancient, medieval, and modern—to demonstrate that while there is no easy or "right" way to conduct oneself during wartime, we must always remember that we fight not only for ourselves and for our people but as God's representative.

A good trigger for this lesson is a mirror. Bring small hand-mirrors or compacts—one for each participant. Ask everyone to look at herself and to ponder the questions: *Does she see the image of God? How does she act like God?* Facilitate a discussion about God-like behaviors.

Next, display a map of Israel. Ask: Does Israel look like God? How does Israel act like God? What does Israel see when it looks at itself in the mirror?

Finally, turn off the light in the room and shine a flashlight through the darkness. How is Israel a "light to the nations"?

Most participants will be familiar with the mandate to be an "*or lagoyim*," light to the nations, but others might be surprised and even offended. Does this concept imply Jewish superiority over other nations? If yes, is this a troubling concept?

Participants might also be surprised by the Bible's harsh policy regarding the treatment of enemy peoples. Ask them why—do they think of Judaism as a peaceful religion? How does their attitude color their perception of the State of Israel's militaristic actions? Would their approach be any different if they and their family lived in Israel?

Continue the lesson by asking participants to read each selection aloud, and elicit comments, opinions, and reactions after each reading. Use the "Things to Think About" to enhance dialogue and to lead the group toward an understanding of the importance of having been created in the "image of God."