



HILLEL'S JOSEPH MEYERHOFF  
CENTER FOR JEWISH LEARNING

## HATIKVA

Kol od balevav penima  
nefesh yehudi homia,  
oulfa'atey mizrakh kadima  
ayn leTzion tzofia.  
Od lo avda tikvatenou,  
hatikva bat shnot alpayim,  
lihiot am khofshi be'artzenu  
eretz Tzion viy'rushalayim.

### History of the poem

The Israeli national anthem, Hatikva, has been attributed to Naftali Herz Imber, but the Hatikva that is sung today has little resemblance to the original poem written in 1878 and published in 1886.

The poem was first published under the title of "Tikvatenu (Our Hope)" in Imber's journal *Barkai*.

The inspiration of the poem is said to have been the founding of the city of Petach Tikvah (Gateway of Hope) in Israel. The themes of the poem were possibly influenced by Polish patriot songs. The Polish song, "Poland is not yet lost, while we still live," became the Polish national anthem with the birth of the republic between the two world wars.

In 1882, Imber went to Rishon L'Zion where Tikvatenu was received with enthusiasm. Samuel Cohen, who was living in Rishon L'Zion at the time, put the poem to music based on an old Moldavian-Romanian folk song, "Carul cu Boi (Cart and Oxen)." The Moldavian born Cohen did not receive credit due to lack of a copyright on the melody.

The pattern of the tune for Hatikva can be recognized in many tunes that were famous in Europe at the time. Bedrich Smetana used the tune as the basis for the classical "Moldau" (composed in 1874).

The wording went through a number of changes over the years, reflecting changes in nationalistic ideas and customs. The words "Where David once lived" were exchanged for "Zion and Jerusalem" in the choruses. The poem was cut to two verses and the chorus. Another important change that was made was the call to be "a free nation in our own land," and not just to "live in the land of our fathers." The accent was switched to the Sephardic pronunciation. The melody was also changed to fit the cadence and syllable stress of the new version. These changes can be traced through the various printed editions of the work such as the 1909 version from the Hebrew Publishing Company.

The first competition for the national anthem was announced in Die Welt, a German newspaper, in 1898. Another competition was called for by the Fourth Zionist Congress in the year 1900, but no song was officially chosen. In 1901, one of the sessions of the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, ended with the singing of Hatikva (still called Tikvatenu).

It wasn't until 1905 that the entire Hatikva was sung by all the delegates present at the Seventh Zionist Congress. It can be said that Hatikva was then unofficially adopted as the Zionist anthem.

*One of the other considerations for the Zionist National Anthem was Shir Ha-Ma'alot (The Song of Ascents) as sung by the famous cantor Yossele Rosenblatt. Shir Ha-Ma'alot is sung as a prelude to the Grace After Meals on Sabbaths and holidays and the tune often used is the one composed by Yossle Rosenblatt.*

In 1979, when Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed a peace treaty with Egypt on the White House lawn, he read aloud the complete *Shir Ha-Maalot* in

Hebrew.

Imber died in 1909 in New York and his remains were re-interred at the Mt. Herzl cemetery in Jerusalem in 1953.

## The original nine verse poem "Tikvatenu"

O while within a Jewish breast,  
Beats true a Jewish heart.  
And Jewish glances turning East,  
To Zion fondly dart,

Chorus

O then our Hope - it is not dead  
Our ancient Hope and true  
Again the sacred soil to tread  
Where David's banner flew.

O While the tears flow down apace,  
And fall like bounteous rain,  
And to the fathers' resting place,  
Sweeps on the mournful train,

Chorus...

And while upon our eager eye,  
Flashes the City's wall.  
And for the wasted Sanctuary,  
The teardrops trembling fall,

Chorus...

O while the Jordan's pent-up tide,  
Leaps downward rapidly,  
And while its gleaming waters glide,  
Through Galilee's blue sea,

Chorus...

And while upon the Highway there  
Lowers the stricken Gate,  
And from the ruins of Zion's prayer  
Upriseth passionate,

Chorus...

O while the pure floods of her eyes  
Flow for her People's plight,  
And Zion's Daughter doth arise  
And weep the long, long night,

Chorus...

O while through vein in ceaseless  
stream  
The bright blood pulses yet,  
And on our fathers' tomb doth gleam  
The dew when sun is set,

Chorus...

Hear Brothers, mine, where e're ye  
be,  
This Truth by Prophet won:  
"Tis then our Hope shall cease to be  
With Israel's last son!"

Chorus...

### **YOUR PSALM 126 AND HATIKVA NAVIGATOR**

Read through Psalm 126 and Hatikva.

- 1) What are prominent ways in which Psalm 126 and Hatikva are similar? Do these texts share common themes, emotions, or images?
- 2) Can you find significant ways in which Psalm 126 and Hatikva differ? Are any elements present in one text but absent in the other?
- 3) If you had the choice of either Psalm 126 or Hatikva for your national anthem, which would you select and why?

### **YOUR PSALM 126 COMMENTARY NAVIGATOR**

Read the Talmudic story around the margins of Psalm 126. This is a story about Honi Hama'agel, a man who had difficulty with the first verse of Psalm 126. Honi could not comprehend that a person might have to dream for seventy years, or an entire lifetime, in order to see the return to Zion become a reality.

- 1) How has the ability to dream played a role in the Jewish desire to return to Israel? What happens to dreams once they are fulfilled? Have you ever had a situation where a dream has been realized? Explain what happened.
- 2) Focus on the story of the carob tree, in which a man gathers fruit from a tree planted by his grandfather. How can you connect this story with the portrayal of sowing and harvesting in Psalm 126? In Psalm 126 are the ones who sow the same people who bring in the harvest?

### **YOUR HATIKVA COMMENTARY NAVIGATOR**

The poem on the left margin by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevy has been the standard bearer for all Jews who have felt the burden of exile. It reflects not only the yearning to return, but the burden of being oppressed and dispossessed.

- 1) How does its tone differ from the tone of Hatikva?

2) Does Yehuda HaLevy feel he will ever make it back to "the east" or is this only a poem of despair?

3) What does this poem say to you?

The poem by Yehuda Amichai on the right margin describes a road trip to Ein Yahav through the Arava desert. Amichai talks about hope.

1) How is his hope different than the hope expressed in Hatikva?

2) What is hope for Amichai?

3) How does Hatikva define hope? How does Amichai define hope? Why the difference? How do you define hope?

The poem on the bottom of the page talks about Jerusalem in the snow. Anat Bental was a young poet who was tragically killed in a car accident when she was in her early twenties in 1975. She, a Haifa resident, writes of Jerusalem in the snow.

1) How does she see Jerusalem?

2) How does she use the snow as a metaphor?

3) Does this coincide with your vision or experience of Jerusalem?

**Did any or all of these poems make you see Hatikva differently? If so, how?**