



CORE TEXTS

מְסַמְכִים עִיקָרִים

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

מְגִילַת הָעֲצֻמָּאוֹת



Written in the weeks leading up to the declaration of the State of Israel on May 14th, 1948, the final text of the Declaration of Independence was approved just hours before the ceremony. It recounts the long history of the Jewish people and their connection to the Land of Israel. Delineating aspirational goals for the new country, it appeals to the Arabs of Israel, neighboring countries, world Jewry, and the entire world for cooperation and acceptance. It pledges open immigration for all Jews, “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex,” and “freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture.” It was signed by 35 men and two women from across the political and religious spectrum of the Jewish community; three of them went on to the post of Prime Minister, and one became President. The founders expected that a constitution would be adopted; in its absence, the Declaration of Independence has remained a foundational constitutional document of Israel.



IDF CODE OF ETHICS

רוח צה"ל



The IDF Code of Ethics draws from four main sources: the traditions of the Israel Defense Forces, the traditions of the State of Israel, the traditions of the Jewish People, and on universal moral values related to the dignity of human life. It calls for the defense of the state, its citizens, and its residents; love of the homeland and loyalty to the country that serves as a democratic home for all its residents; and the protection of human dignity for all, regardless of origin, religion, nationality, gender, status, or position. It addresses “purity of arms,” saying, “the soldier shall make use of his weaponry and power only for the fulfillment of the mission and solely to the extent required; he will maintain his humanity even in combat.” All soldiers—from new recruits to the highest-ranking officers—carry a physical copy of the Code of Ethics with them and are expected to abide by its values at all times.



BASIC LAWS

חוקי יסוד



Though the Declaration of Independence called for adoption of a constitution no later than October 1st, 1948, that deadline proved unrealistic, as the country was embroiled in the War of Independence. By 1950, it became clear that writing a constitution would not be simple due to many factors, including the relationship between Jewish and civil law and the status of non-Jewish citizens of a Jewish state. The Knesset voted to enact a series of Basic Laws in a piecemeal approach which, when complete, would be made into a constitution. To date, Israel has enacted 12 Basic Laws that define the role of each branch of government, codify the status of Jerusalem, and address a wide range of human rights issues. The Basic Laws enjoy constitutional status, and despite multiple efforts to advocate for adopting a full constitution, it seems unlikely that such a document will be adopted anytime soon.



HATIKVAH

הַתִּקְוָה



Israel's national anthem, Hatikvah—The Hope is adapted from a poem titled *Tikvatenu*—Our Hope, written in 1877 by Naftali Herz Imber, a Polish Jew. Hatikvah recounts the Jews' undying connection to Zion and dreams of return. After reciting the poem for Zionist pioneers in pre-State Israel, it was embraced as an unofficial anthem for the movement, becoming official at the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Concerns from religious Jews that the anthem lacked overtly religious themes have been raised from time to time, but bigger concerns focus on non-Jewish Israelis, who feel little connection to an anthem that celebrates Jewish hopes and dreams. Non-Jewish state officials have sometimes declined to sing the anthem, though discussions about altering the words, or choosing a different anthem, have not gained traction.



LAW OF RETURN

חוק השבות



In 1950, the Knesset enacted the Law of Return, codifying the Israeli policy of granting citizenship to any Jew who immigrates to the country. The boundaries of the law are tested regularly, and over the years, the law has undergone modifications aimed at clarifying who is of Jewish ancestry and determining the status of non-Jewish family members of Jews. Religious figures often call for a tightening of the requirements to ensure that only people who are considered Jewish in accordance with Orthodox Jewish law receive citizenship. Others maintain that giving Jews preferential treatment in the path to citizenship is discriminatory. Recently, the Ministry of Interior began granting citizenship to same-sex non-Jewish spouses of Jews.



TANACH

תנ"ך

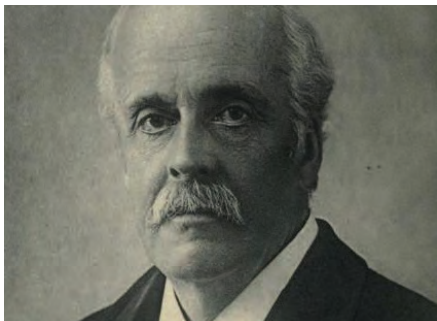
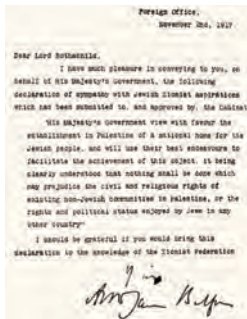


The Jewish Bible is referred to by an acronym of the first letter of each of its three sections: Torah (the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ktuvim (Writings, including the Book of Psalms and more). From the moment the State was established in 1948, when the Tanach was referenced in the Declaration of Independence, it was clear that Jewish law and tradition would shape life in the new-old country. Unlike other Western democracies, which stress separation of religion and state, Israel celebrates the Tanakh as a foundational part of the country and its laws. All Israeli school children—religious and secular, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian—study the Tanach, which often is referenced as a history book and a guide for exploring the country. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, established the International Bible Quiz as a way of stressing the continuing relevance of this core text to Israelis and Jews around the world.



BALFOUR DECLARATION

הַצְהָרַת בַּלְפֹּוּר



In November 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, affirming the British government's support for the establishment of a "Jewish national home in Palestine." This was a major diplomatic achievement for the Zionist movement, as Britain was a global power and seemed poised to achieve greater influence in the region. Recognizing that there were many Arab residents of the area, as well as many Jews living elsewhere who would not want to leave their homes, the declaration also stressed that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." The Balfour Declaration was perceived as a key measure of support for the Zionist enterprise.