

Introduction

Welcome to the Jewish History curriculum! Please allow me a moment to outline the goals and expectations of this curriculum.

This curriculum attempts to do more than tell the story of the last few hundred years of Klal Yisroel. It tries to give students (and teachers!) a sense of who we are as Jews in the 21st century and the miracle of how we got here. It is our hope that students will gain a sense of pride in being part of the nation that bears the flag of Hashem's will in the world, and which merits His guiding hand throughout history.

With this perspective, we will study the challenges that previous generations faced with and how they dealt with them. We will contemplate how we ourselves may have behaved in those circumstances, and we will consider how we can apply lessons learned from history to our everyday lives.

We hope that students will recognize that it is our responsibility to live up to this sacred mission, and that they will be inspired to live better lives as proud Jews.

About the Curriculum

This curriculum was developed throughout the years that I taught eighth grade Jewish History in Yeshiva Ketana of Lakewood. Each class period was thirty-seven minutes long, and I broke the lessons into segments that can be taught in this time frame.

When I began teaching Jewish history, I imagined that I would simply tell the story while having the students take notes. At one point, however, I realized that expecting students in eighth grade to take notes while I lectured would be unrealistic. At the same time, I also believed that for the students to succeed, they needed to be actively involved in the lesson in some way.

After consulting with those more experienced than myself, I developed a system of worksheets that could provide a happy medium. With these worksheets, I could teach the lesson while the students would easily "take notes" by filling in the blanks in the worksheets. An added benefit was that these sheets piqued students' interest in the lesson as soon as they were given out, even before the lesson was taught.

Usually, I would give out the sheets towards the beginning of the class after introducing the lesson. As we made our way through the lesson I would put the

answers on the board and the students would fill them in. By the time the lesson was over, the students would have their own “notes” on the material. Of course, every teacher should use the sheets in the way that he or she feels that they will be the most effective in his or her classroom.

It is important to point out that this booklet, which was created from my worksheets, is meant to serve as “notes” for the students on the lesson that the teacher is giving. As such, the history is written in a concise and abridged form. This booklet is not meant to be the teacher’s notes; they should not be used as the sole basis for the teacher’s lessons. For this system to have optimal success, the teacher should use the notes as a starting point for research to prepare his/her lesson. It would be helpful if the teacher would read up about the time period and the events that each lesson focuses on. As with any lesson in any subject, the more familiar the teacher is with the material and the broader his/her understanding, the more powerful and effective the lesson will be.

To help guide the teacher in how to introduce and explain each lesson, I have included in the Teachers Edition introductions to each chapter and individual lesson. This will serve to give the teacher material to use in his/her explanation of each lesson, and make him/her more familiar with the subject matters.

One final note: When researching the curriculum, I used many books. One of the main ones was Rabbi Chaim Schloss’s *2,000 Years of Jewish History*. For the Holocaust era, I drew from *Witness to History* by Ruth Lichtenstien and *The Holocaust and Jewish Destiny* by Rabbi Gershon Weiss shlit”a, along with Michael Berenbaum’s *The World Must Know*, the official book of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Many other books were used to enhance the lessons. Each teacher should try to find his or her own additions to add a personal touch to the lessons.

May Hashem give you the *siyata dishmaya* to give over to the students a sense of pride in who we are, and a sense of responsibility to carry out our role in this world. May we continue to carry the torch with our heads held high, as we proudly declare ourselves to be the nation chosen to bring Hashem’s message to the whole world until the final redemption, speedily, in our days.

Hatzlacha!

Rabbi Gershon Septimus

Introduction to “Why Are We Learning Jewish History”

Right from the outset it is important to set forth the importance of learning Jewish History. It is crucial that the students be excited about what is about to be taught. It is also important for them to realize that they are about to learn something that promises to be interesting and exciting.

I would begin the first day by asking the class (by raise of hands!) the following question: “What do you think was the biggest miracle that ever happened to the Jewish people? If you had the opportunity to go back in time to any point in the history of the Jewish people, to the greatest event that happened to us, where would you choose to go?”

I would receive many answers. The Splitting of the Yam Suf, Matan Torah, the Ten Makos, etc. I would tell them that all of their answers are great. But I would like to show them something that is a greater miracle than all of those miracles that they mentioned combined! And I would emphasize that I’m not the one making this claim but, rather, this is the claim of Rav Yaakov Emden! And he even swears that it is so.

I would then draw their attention to the words of Rav Yaakov Emden.

After reading the amazing statement of Rav Yaakov Emden it should be pointed out how he states that the longer the exile stretches the greater the miracle is...



WHY SHOULD WE LEARN JEWISH HISTORY?

The following is a quote from the סדור הקדמה of the סדור גלות: regarding the survival of כלל ישראל in our יעב"ץ:

...חַי וְנַפְשִׁי, כִּי בְּהִתְבוּנָנִי בְּנִפְלְאוֹת
אֱלֹהִים, גָּדְלוֹ אֲצִלִּי יוֹתֵר מִכָּל נִסִּים
וְנִפְלְאוֹת שְׁעָשָׂה הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ
לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וּבַמִּדְבָּר וּבְאֶרֶץ
יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְכָל מָה שְׁאַרְךָ הַגְּלוּת
יוֹתֵר נִתְאַמַּת הַנֵּס יוֹתֵר, וְנוֹדַע
מִעֲשֵׂה תִקְפוֹ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ...

Translation: ...I swear by my life, that when I think of these wonders, it's more to me than all the miracles that Hashem did to our fathers in Mitzrayim, in the midbar, and in Eretz Yisroel. **And as the golus gets longer, so is the miracle truer. And His ability and strength becomes known...**

Introduction to “And the Goyim notice us too”

One of the important themes that we want to stress throughout the year is the important role that the Jewish nation is destined to play by serving as an example to the world as we mentioned in the introduction.

These testimonies from Mark Twain and Leo Tolstoy bring the message home in a strong way. I like to point out that it is doubtful if Mark Twain ever saw a religious Jew. Nevertheless, the Jewish nation, by its very existence, carries this message.

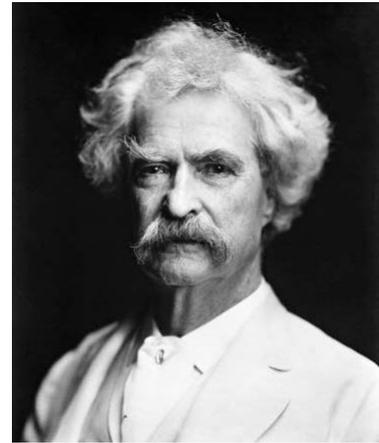
I added the testimony of Glen Beck who is a current, modern day thinker and the letter from William Aiken to illustrate how this message, and our mission, lives on in our times.

And the Goyim notice us too...

Mark Twain wrote an essay about the Jews. As a matter of fact, he called it-

"Concerning the Jews..."

*"The Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Persian, rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream stuff and passed away. The Greek and the Roman followed, made a vast noise and they are gone. Other peoples have sprung up, held their torch high for a time, but it burned out and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. **The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence¹, no infirmities² of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal, but the Jew. All other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality³?"***

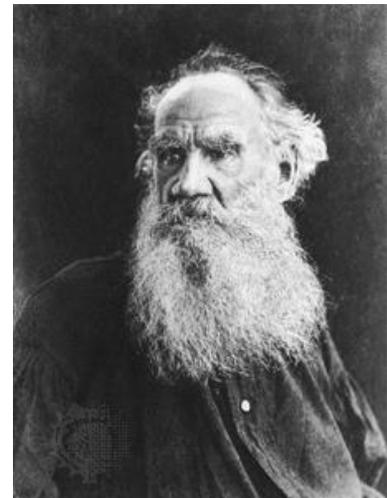


Mark Twain

Mark Twain ended his essay with a question. Leo Tolstoy provides an answer.

(Just a bit of background on Leo Tolstoy: Tolstoy is considered by many the greatest novelist of all times. He lived in Russia in the 1800's and was admired by the "modern" world as a writer and as a great thinker.) He wrote the following-

"The Jew is the emblem of eternity. He whom neither slaughter, nor torture of thousands of years could destroy, he whom neither fire, nor sword, nor inquisition was able to wipe off the face of the earth; he who was the first to produce the oracle⁴ of G-d, he who has been for so long the guardian of prophecy and who transmitted it to the rest of the world. Such a nation cannot be destroyed. The Jew is as everlasting as eternity itself."



Leo Tolstoy

¹ **Decadence:** decline or decay

² **Infirmities:** lack of strength

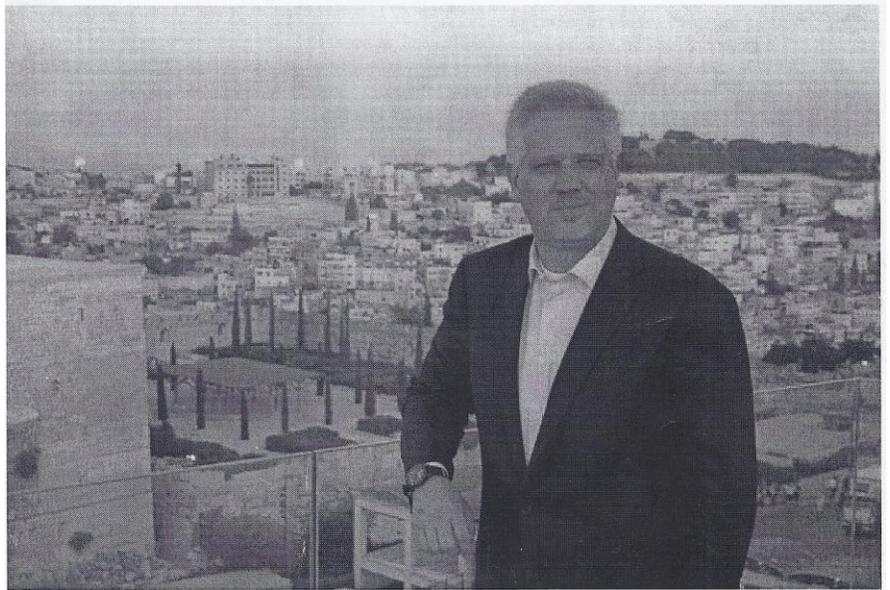
³ **Immortality:** eternal life

⁴ **Oracle:** source of wisdom

Conservative pundit⁵ Glenn Beck during his keynote address titled "Restoring Courage" near the Kosel in Yerushalayim, August 24, 2011:

In Israel, there is more courage in one square mile than in all of Europe.

In Israel, there is more courage in one soldier than in the combined and cold hearts of every bureaucrat⁶ at the United Nations. No country is perfect. But it tries, and it is courageous. Today, the world needs courage more than ever.



Glenn Beck

Everything we know about human rights and real

civilization came from this place, this land. Whether you live by 613 commandments, 10 commandments, or one sweet Golden Rule, it all started here. It all started here - the throne of G-d.

When the world turns its back on Israel and the Jewish people, the world turns its back on human rights. **Without the Jewish people, humanity would never know that every single individual life has dignity, that every single life is sacred. That G-d names every star and knows every soul.** That was G-d's message to Abraham. That was G-d's message to Moses. That is the message of the Jewish people to the world **and by their very existence they teach it to us, every single day.**

**Look at the last sentence again.
What does this say
about who we are?!**

⁵ **Pundit:** political commentator

⁶ **Bureaucrat:** government official

The following is a letter that was written in 1973 during the oil embargo in response to a bumper sticker that said: "JEWS GO HOME! WE DON'T WANT JEWS- WE WANT OIL!" This letter was printed in a small newspaper in Colorado and within a few days it was printed in 250 newspapers across the United States.

"JEWS GO HOME"

"Well, this is nothing new. Never in the past have you ever taken this gentle suggestion to move on.

But, Heaven forbid, suppose just this once you thought that this expression of a few sick people, actually expressed the conviction of all the people in this wonderful land of ours and all of you started to pack your bags and leave for parts unknown.

However, just before you go, would you do me a favor?

Would you leave your formula for the Salk and the Sabin Vaccine with me before you depart? You wouldn't be so heartless as to let my children contract polio?

And, would you please leave your knack⁷ for government and politics, science and technology, and literature, and good food, and fun and love, good films, and plays, music, dance, and all those things so useful and enjoyable, and would you please leave with me the secret of your drive to succeed? Please?

And please, have pity on us, show us the secret of how to develop more such geniuses as Einstein, Freud, Nostradamus, Steinmetz, Spinoza and oh so many others who have helped us all. After all, we owe you for the Atomic Bomb, most of our rocket research and perhaps the fact that we are alive today, instead of looking up from our chains and from our graves to see an ageing, happy Hitler drive by slowly in one of our Cadillacs.

On your way out, Jews, will you do me just one more favor?

Will you please drive by my house and pick me up also? I'm just not sure I could live too well in a land where you were not around to give us as much as you have given us. If you ever have to leave, love goes with you, democracy goes with you, everything my buddies and I fought for in World War II goes with you. **G-d goes with you too.**

Just pull up in front of my house, slow down and honk, because, so help me, I'm going with you too.

Yours sincerely,

William Aiken

⁷ **Knack:** ability or skill

