

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

1. Who was originator of the term, "Zionism"?
2. Describe his contribution to the Agudath Israel organization.
3. Describe the various ideological movements within Jewry at the time of the founding of Agudath Israel.
4. Which organization laid the groundwork and was most responsible for the creation of Agudath Israel?
5. Which Lithuanian Torah giant was most responsible in bringing together the leaders of Western and Eastern European Orthodoxy to create Agudath Israel?

This and much more will be addressed in the sixth lecture of this series:

**"The Struggle to Preserve Traditional Orthodoxy:
The Creation of Agudath Israel**

To derive maximum benefit from this lecture, keep these questions in mind as you listen to the lecture and read through the outline. Go back to these questions once again at the end of the lecture and see how well you answer them.

PLEASE NOTE: This outline and source book were designed as a powerful tool to help you appreciate and understand the basis of Jewish History. Although the lectures can be listened to without the use of the outline, we advise you to read the outline to enhance your comprehension. Use it, as well, as a handy reference guide and for quick review.

This lecture is dedicated to the honor and merit of the Brin Family.

THE EPIC OF THE ETERNAL PEOPLE

Presented by Rabbi Shmuel Irons

Series XXIII Lecture #6

THE STRUGGLE TO PRESERVE TRADITIONAL ORTHODOXY:
THE CREATION OF AGUDATH ISRAEL

I. Dr. Nathan Birnbaum and His Spiritual Ascent

A. We were like men in a well-protected port, looking out upon a storm-swept sea. With astonished eyes we watched the battle raging abroad, but in no small part because of our Jewish faith we remained in our safe haven, alone with our holy, eternal mysteries. G-d had chosen us, and we Him. . . . Our enemy sensed that there was a pagan germ within the Jewish heart, too, and he tried to use it for his purposes. This shrewd plot was called ‘the emancipation of the Jews’ Jews no longer felt that there was an Eternal G-d guiding our world; they threw away the ancient heritage with which G-d Himself had endowed them; and they became the most fanatic heralds and agents of the pagan rebellion. . . . They have . . . made this Golem the terrible taskmaster of modern man: they make people believe that the meaning of life—and true progress—is found in the throbbing of machines, the humming of wires, the frenzied hurry of the subways, the impertinence of skyscrapers, the noise of the stock exchange, the skyrocketing of statistics, and the chatter of newspapers. Thus the inner life of man, all its endeavors, have been paralyzed—the very heart of man has been turned into a machine. . . . [The Jews had] exchanged belief for the teachings of the pagan revels. . . . There are a few who dive into the whirlpool of chauvinistic excitement; and others who are the most superficial talkers, the most misled fools, the noisiest barkers at the world carnival of political ideas. . . . They have done their best to turn the prophets’ ideal of the brotherhood of the nations into a dry heathen cosmopolitanism; and of socialism, the outflow of the Jewish teachings of justice, they have helped make the most powerful war engine of militant paganism. . . . The discipline of the Law (Torah) turned the potentialities of the Jew into active virtues that put his vices into the shadow. . . . The young heathens in modern Jewry, in surrendering to the pagan revolt, have squandered the superior wisdom, the life-pervading love, the well-founded beauty of their inheritance, in exchange for the emptiness, the illusions, the fashionableness of those whom they ape. . . . I respect the great Hebrew and Yiddish writers But . . . the nationalists of the eastern European brand are even more dangerous than their more assimilated western friends, because of their closer contact and greater influence upon the Yiddish-speaking religious masses. . . . I notice the same unhappy aberrations spreading among them which I spoke of before—all the more crude and repulsive because their Eastern European devotees are quite new to them. **Nathan Birnbaum, G-d’s People (Confessions)**

B. Their ancient and firm faith in G-d, their spiritual naturalness, their harmonious and disciplined way of life, their unique and unshakeable peacefulness can best the tyranny of the machine, with its propaganda slogans, and the mood of egotist aggression that has spread throughout the modern world. . . . If judgment were rendered against us by [our own] transgressions . . . by the sad state of disrespect, the social and economic weakness into which we have fallen . . . [or] by the entire sad drama of continuous desertion from our colors, the immensity of our guilt, the guilt of the *pious* Jews, would thus be revealed. It would seem as though G-d had never commanded us to be a “saintly people,” or as if He had withdrawn that mission at some point. . . . We have, to be sure, stayed within our own sphere of life, the “four cubits of Law,” but we have not risen in it. . . . Instead, we let ourselves sink lower and lower. . . .

[We must] climb higher and higher, by virtue of our divine inheritance. It is not the will of G-d that we should be satisfied with a splendid isolation dedicated to the observance of the Law... [but that] our isolation, safeguarded by the Law, be used by us for G-d's purposes. . . . The blessing of salvation will not come unmerited, it must be gained by human endeavor. But it is through hard labor against the pain of sin, the struggle with it, and the longing to overcome it that the towering heights of virtue are slowly climbed. **Nathan Birnbaum, G-d's People (Confessions)**

C. There has been one people capable of marching at the head of the nations in this hard struggle. Its selection does not mean the rejection of other peoples. They can enter into the mercy of G-d by serving Him in other forms, with other symbols: the granting of the divine Law to the Jews is only the means of pointing out, to them all, the royal road that leads to the messianic goal. . . . [Until now, the Orthodox] have become blind to Israel's splendid destiny: to advance observance of the Law, [and] through it the spread of holiness and the coming of the Messiah. . . . The strength of the Jewish spirit among the Eastern Jewish masses holds out the hope that Jewry may even now, just now, embark upon its greatest spiritual moment. **Nathan Birnbaum, G-d's People (Confessions)**

II. Reuniting the Scattered of Israel

A.

וְאַתְּכֶם אֲזַרָה בְּגוֹיִם . . . וַיִּקְרָא כוֹלֵג (1)

And I will scatter you among the nations, . . . **Leviticus 26:33**

וְהִפִּיצְךָ ד' בְּכָל־הָעַמִּים מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ וְעַד־קְצֵה הָאָרֶץ . . . דְּבָרִים כַּח־סֵד (2)

And the L-rd shall scatter you among all people, from one end of the earth to the other . . . **Deuteronomy 28:64**

יִשְׁנוּ עִם־אֶחָד מִפְּזָר וּמִפְּרֹד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מְלְכוּתְךָ . . . אִסְתֵּר גִּיח (3)

There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom . . . **Esther 3:8**

B.

. . . ואחר בית דין של רב אשי שחבר הגמרא וגמרו בימי בנו נתפזרו ישראל בכל הארצות פיזור יתר והגיעו לקצוות ואיים הרחוקים ורבתה קטטה בעולם ונשתבשו הדרכים בגייסות ונתמעט תלמוד תורה ולא נכנסו ישראל ללמוד בישיבותיהם אלפים ורבבות כמו שהיו מקודם אלא מתקבצים יחידים השרידים אשר ד' קורא בכל עיר ועיר ובכל מדינה ומדינה ועוסקין בתורה . . . הקדמה ליד החזקה לרמב"ם

. . . After the [lifetime of the] Bais Din (Rabbinic Court) of Rav Ashi who compiled the Talmud, which was finished during the lifetime of his son [Mar bar Rav Ashi], Israel became even more dispersed, as Jews settled in the far ends of the earth and in the distant islands. [During this time,] belligerency increased, travel was impaired because of the warring parties and the study of Torah diminished. The thousands and tens of thousands who used to come and study in the yeshivas was a thing of the past. Only a remnant of Jewry, those who heard the voice of Hashem calling out to them, gathered together in each city and state to study Torah. **Preface of the Rambam to the Mishneh Torah**

C.

אמר רבא: האי קרא מרישיה לסיפיה מדריש, מסיפיה לרישיה מדריש. מרישיה לסיפיה מדריש: עת לעשות לד' מאי טעם - משום הפרו תורתך. מסיפיה לרישיה מדריש: הפרו תורתך מאי טעמא - משום עת לעשות לד'. ברכות סג.

Rava said: The first clause of this verse can be taken as explaining the second, and the second can be taken as explaining the first. 'The first clause may be taken as explaining the second', thus: "It is time to work for the L-rd." (Psalms 119:126) Why? Because they have made void Thy law. 'The second clause may be taken as explaining the first', thus: They have made void Thy law. Why? Because it is time to work for the L-rd. **Berachos 63a**

D. About two years before his death [Rav Hirsch] created the "Freie Vereinigung fuer die Interessen des Orthodoxen Judentums" (Free Association for the Interests of Orthodox Judaism), in founding which he linked up his work with a wider movement which was steadily gaining ground at the end of the 19th century: an organised union with a view to finding a solution for the spiritual and material problems of the time. It was his intention to strengthen the slender structure of Orthodoxy in Germany and so enable it to rise to prominence in Jewish and non-Jewish circles. **The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany, p. 89, Hermann Schwab**

E.

(1) תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב: ויהי בישורון מלך בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי ישראל: דברים לג-ה

Moses commanded us a Torah, the inheritance of the community of Jacob. And He (it) became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together. **Deuteronomy 33:4-5**

(2) ויהי בישורון מלך (דברים פרק לג פסוק ה): התורה היתה בישורון למלך. היא לבדה שלטת, מצוה ומושלל בישראל, שהרי אפילו המלך של התקופה המאוחרת היה משועבד לה והוא נועד להיות רק נתינה הראשון המקיים את דבריה למופת. בזכות שלטון התורה יהיה ישראל ל"ישורון": מתאים לאידיאל של ייעודו המוסרי, ולפיכך נאמר כאן "בישורון". נושאו של "ויהי" הוא "תורה"; אף על פי כן "ויהי" הוא לשון זכר בהשפעת הנשוא "מלך". רש"ר הירש דברים פרק לג פסוק ה

And [it became] king in Jeshurun (Deuteronomy 33:4-5): The Torah became a king in Jeshurun. It is the sole power, commander and ruler over Israel, for even the king [who ruled] in a later period of history was subservient to it and was appointed merely to be the primary example to fulfill its words. Through the dominion of Torah, Israel became "Jeshurun", focused upon its spiritual and ethical destiny. For that reason "Jeshurun" is stated here. The subject of "and it became" is referring to the Torah. Even though ויהי is in the masculine form [and Torah is in the feminine], it is because ויהי is modifying "king" [which is masculine]. **Commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch to Deuteronomy 33:5**

(3) בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי ישראל (שם): כאשר התאספו ראשי העם אל התורה, כבר התאחדו על ידי כך שבטי ישראל. התורה מהווה את הקשר היחיד המאחד את שבטי ישראל. כאשר כל מנהיגי העם מצטרפים לתורה ומשתעבדים לה, הרי איחוד העם עם התורה הוא גם הקשר המאחד את בני העם; וכשכולם נוטלים חלק בנכס הלאומי העליון, כל אחד מהם זוכה גם למעמד שווה באומה. רש"ר הירש דברים פרק לג פסוק ה

. . . when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel are gathered together. **(Deuteronomy 33:4-5):** When the heads of the people gather together [to dedicate themselves] to the Torah, this brings about unity amongst the tribes of Israel. The Torah is the only bond that unites the tribes of Israel. When all of the leaders of the people become connected to the Torah and become subservient to it, the unification of the people with the Torah also becomes the bond that unites the members of the people together. When they all take possession of the eminent national heritage, each one of them merits an equal standing within the nation. **Commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch to Deuteronomy 33:5**

F. Every Jewish community represents Israel within a limited geographical territory, and within this limited territory each Jewish community must discharge all the great tasks that have been set for Israel as a whole. For this purpose, but for this purpose only, the Jewish community is vested with the authority over the individual. **Collected Writings VI p. 40**

G. . . . Nevertheless, it is only through communal life that Judaism can attain the highest level of perfection. It is within the Jewish community as a collective unit that the Al-mighty wishes to be hallowed, וּנְקַדְשֵׁי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, and every Jewish child learns, in his very first profession of faith, that he has received the Torah from יַעֲקֹב, the community of Jacob. **Collected Writings VI p. 13**

H. . . . concerning the divinely revealed and continuing, binding character of the written and oral law, no difference of opinion arises between the various directions within Torah-loyal (*gesetztreuen*) Judaism. Over and against this indubitable, principled basis of organized cooperation, the remaining differences are controversies of second rank, perhaps only tactical matters of no significant weight. **Moreinu Yaakov Rosenheim, Ohale Jacob: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Ansprachen, Volume 2, p. 19**

III. HaRav HaGaon R. Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi

A.
הלוי היה גאון תלמודי, חריף ובקי בכל מקצועות התורה ויחד עם זה גם מבקר עמקן שלא נמצא כמוהו בכל חוקרי תולדות ישראל וספרותו. הוא השאיר אחריו ברכה: כתבים רבים בברור ההלכה וסוגיות התלמוד, אבל הימים שהוא היה חי בהם היו ימי הרת עולם, ימים שבהם נודעזע העולם העתיק, העולם של אמתיות מוסמכות ומקובלות; שנוי ערכין בא לעולם ומבול של מחקרי דברי הימים שטף והציף את העולם הגדול, ובתוכו גם את עולמנו אנו. ורבי יצחק אייזיק הלוי היה כמעט היחידי שהרגיש את הצורך לצאת מארבע אמותיו של הלכה ולהכנס לתוך מלחמתה של תורה, להלחם בתוקף ובחריפות נגד כל אלו ההשערות המזויפות והבדויות שמלאו את חללו של עולם הספרות ושעשו את מסורת אבות פלסתר. בהופעתו זאת של הלוי על שמי הספרות ההסתורית אנו רואים ומרגישים את כחה של היהדות המסורתית ואת יד ההשגחה העליונה הנטויה עליה לטובה. הרב יהודה ליב פישמן, הקדמה לס' תקופת המקרא מהרה"ג ר' יצחק אייזיק הלוי

HaLevi was a Talmudic genius (gaon) with an incisive mind and an expertise in all areas of the Torah. In addition, he was a profound critical thinker, head and shoulders above any of the other scholars who have ever written about and researched Jewish history and literature. He left behind a rich treasure trove of halachic and Talmudic insights [which he never published. It was due to the fact that] the period in which he lived was that of radical change, as the received truths of antiquity were being seriously challenged, with a new hierarchy of values replacing the old and a flood of critical historical works inundated the greater world, including our own. Rabbi Yitzchak

Isaac HaLevi was almost the only one [of his peers] who felt the need to leave his four cubits of halacha and enter the battle zone on behalf of the Torah, to fight vigorously and incisively against all of the distorted and invented theories that filled the literary world which pictured the traditional conceptions of our forefathers as being false. With the appearance of HaLevi on the firmament of historical literature, we behold and feel the power of traditional Judaism and the Providential and beneficial [protective] hand which has been extended above it. **R. Yehudah Leib Fishman, Introduction to Tekufas HaMikra (the Biblical Period) by HaRav HaGaon R. Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi**

B.

. . . הגדתי לו מה שכתב המנוח נ. סוקולוב באחד ממאמריו: אמנם כן, הלוי החוקר, פטיש החזק עומד ונוצח את גרץ ואת ווייס וכו', אבל הכל הוא רק בתקופת המשגה, התלמוד והגאונים. שם הוא עומד ברשות שלו, ושם כחו רב לעומתם. אך ינסה נא לעבור לתקופת המקרא ויראה את כחו שם. רגז תחתיו הארז הגדול וקרא: גם אלה מבקרי המקרא יהיו לאפס עפר ואפר אשימם אך לא אטפל כי אם בגדוליהם ובמיוחדים שבהם. כך אמר וכך עשה: הפסיק באמצע פרקו של ימי הבית השני ונגש לבקרת המקרא של וולהויזן וסיעתו. שתי מהדורות מהכרך הזה נשארו מכ"י של המחבר ז"ל. דרכו היה לחבר מהדורה אחר מהדורה ולהדפיס רק הרביעית או החמישית. ובכל זאת ימצא הקורא את המהדורה השנייה של הכרך שלפנינו מרוכזת יותר משאר כרכי הספר. וכח וגבורה יתירה עד להפליא הראה המחבר ז"ל בכרך זה במלחמתו כנגד מבקרי המקרא ודרכם. הקדמה לס' תקופת המקרא מד"ר ב. מ. לוי

. . . I told [Rav Isaac HaLevi] what the now deceased Nachum Sokolov wrote in one of his essays: "It is true that the critical scholar, HaLevi, is like a mighty hammer conquering the likes of [Heinrich] Graetz and [Isaac Hirsch] Weiss and others. But all of this is strictly limited to the period of the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Gaonim where he is in his element and has the superior strength to contend with them. Let's see him try, however, to go through the Biblical period and show his power there." The great cedar (HaLevi) responded angrily and cried out, "These Bible critics will also be made into nothing. I will turn them into dust and ashes! I will involve myself, however, only with the [writings of the] greatest and most prestigious of them." This is what he said and this is what he did. He interrupted his work on the period of the second Temple and became involved in the Biblical criticism of Wellhausen and his colleagues. Two versions of this volume, written by the author (HaLevi), of blessed memory, remained [unpublished and] in manuscript form. His custom was to write one version after another and only to print the fourth or fifth version. Nevertheless, the reader of the second version of this present volume will find it to be better arranged [and more accesible] than the other volumes of this work. The author, of blessed memory, displayed unusual strength and vigor in this volume in his battle against the Bible critics and their [entire] approach. **Dr. B. M. Levin, Introduction to Tekufas HaMikra (the Biblical Period) by HaRav HaGaon R. Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi**

C. The Conference of Bad Homburg

(1) אליעזר ראבינאוויץ החופ"ק מינסק בעזה"י יום עש"ק כ"ט סיון תרס"ט מינסק. אשיב ברכה ושלוי' לכבוד ידיד ד' וידידי הרב הגאון המפורסם לשבח ולתהילה רב מהללים כש"ת מו"ה יצחק אייזיק הלוי נ"י רב בהמבורג יע"א. יבורך טעמו, ויהי' ד' עמו. אחדשה"ט

נכבדתי ביקרת מכתבו יום כ"ב דנא, ושמחתי מאוד בו, בראותי כי רחש לב יראי ד' בחו"ל דבר טוב, להתאגד ולהתאחד ויקויים בנו מאה"כ אז נדברו יראי ד' כו' להתייעץ כדת מה לעשות בנוגע לחיזוק דת תוה"ק, אשר אנחנו כשאנו לעצמנו אין די כח בנו מסיבות שאין תלויות בנו, ידועות ושאין ידועות, ועי"כ נרפים אנו אין רוח אומץ בלבנו באפס מעשה, והננו כנואשים יושבים ומחכים

לתשועת ד' מבלי התעוררות מצדנו, אשר אם כי יודעים הננו אשר לא זו היא הדרך, שהלכו בה קדמונינו ז"ל אך מה נעשה אם ידנו כאסורות, ורגלינו כנחושתיים הוגשו, כי מצבינו החמרי והמוסרי מצבנו במדינה, שלש אלה לא יתנונו להיות עומדים על פסגת משמרתנו וע"ז לבנו עלינו דוי. ובכך הנני שש ושמה כי ת"ל נתעוררו יראי ד' בחו"ל לדאוג לטובת אחיהם בחו"ל, בנוגע לחיזוק הדת בפרט באר"י, יהי' נועם ד' על כולנו, לכונן מעשינו אמן. הנני מוכן אי"ה להיות חבר ליראי ד' לאשר ידרושנו, וד' יופיע על עצתנו.

מובן הדבר כי באם יוחלט דבר כי אז ההכרח להודיענו מזה לא יאוחר משלש שבועות מקודם זמן הנסיעה, כי הלא על הנוסע לחו"ל ליקח פאס גירנאטירסקי ולזה צריך זמן קצוב, גם על איש כמוני להכין עצמי לעשות סדר בנוגע לצורך פעולתי פה. מאוד הייתי חפץ לדעת מקדם את פרטי ההצעות שישנם בזה, אשר ידובר בם, בכדי שהפתרונים יהיו בישוב הדעת ובמתינות, גם אבקש להודיעני מי ומי ההולכים מרוסיא כי אז יוכל היות שהייתי בא בדברים אתם. הנני ידידו הדו"ש והמכבדו מאוד, *אליעזר ראבינאוויץ*

1) [HaRav HaGaon R.] Eliezer Rabinowitz, who dwells in the city of Minsk, with G-d's help, *Erev Shabbos Kodesh* (Friday), the 29th of Sivan, 5669 (June 18, 1909)

Greeting of blessing and peace to the honor of Hashem's beloved and my friend, the famed and greatly praised Rav and Gaon, *Moreinu V'Rabainu* (our master and teacher), Yitzchak Isaac, HaLevi, may his lamp shine brightly, the Rav of Hamburg. May his acuity be blessed and may Hashem be with him.

I was honored by receiving your letter dated the 22nd. I was overjoyed seeing that hearts of the G-d fearing of the Diaspora have been moved to gather together in unity, thereby fulfilling the words of Scripture (Malachi 3:16), "Then those who feared the L-rd spoke to one another etc," in order to deliberate over the proper course of action to strengthen our commitment to our holy Torah. We, on our own, due to various circumstances beyond our control, some of which is common knowledge, don't have the power [to effect change]. Consequently, we have become weakened and don't have the strength of spirit and sit idly by. We have become like those who are despaired who simply wait for Hashem's salvation, without enacting anything on our behalves. Even though we know that this is not the path that our forefathers, of blessed memory, took, but what can we do if our hands and feet are figuratively tied and in shackles. This is because our material, spiritual and political situation prevents us to fully fulfill our appointed mission and for this our hearts are distressed. Consequently, we are joyous and confident for there are, thank G-d, G-d fearing people in the Diaspora who are deeply concerned regarding the spiritual welfare of their brethren in the Diaspora and especially in Eretz Yisrael. May the pleasantness of Hashem be with all of us to support our actions. Amen. I am prepared, with Hashem's help, to become a colleague with the other G-d fearing people and will fulfill that which is asked of me. May Hashem's presence be felt in our deliberations.

It goes without saying that when the plans are finalized that we should be informed no less than three weeks ahead of time, for it takes a specific time to get the necessary passport to cross the border. In addition, a person in my position needs time to properly arrange his affairs. I would also like to know, beforehand the particular proposals that are being planned and the order of business so that the solutions should be arrived at with forethought and deliberation. I would also like to know who is traveling from Russia so that I would be able to discuss the matters with them. Sincerely yours, your friend who seeks your welfare and respects you greatly.

Eliezer Rabinowitz

(2) יום א' ח' תמוז ס"ט.

כבוד ידידי הרב הגאון המפורסם חכם הכולל סיוע"ה מו"ה יצחק אייזיק הלוי שליט"א אדשה"ט
 זה כשבעה ימים אשר קבלתי מכתב הדר"ג היקר לשאלתו אם אבוא אי"ה לכינוס הצדיקים בהומבורג
 לאחר תשעה באב, וטרם שהחלטתי את הדבר לא רציתי לכתוב אליו, ועתה שהחלטתי לנסוע לחו"ל,
 הנני לכתוב אל כתר"ה כי אתכבד לבוא אל האסיפה אי"ה, ומאוד ארצה לידע מי הם הקרואים עוד
 מרוסלאנד, למען אוכל להזכירו אם חסר איזה מהם כמו הר"ר יעקב ליפשיץ נ"י מקאוונא אם כי
 וודאי קרא אותו הדר"ג. אמנם מפני גודל נחיצת הדבר שיהי' ר' יעקב הנ"ל על האסיפה אמרתי
 להזכירו אך על ספק ספיקא ובזה הנני ידידו המכבדו כערכו הנכבד ומברכו בכל טוב.

אליעזר גארדון חוב"ט

Sunday, the 8th of Tamuz, 5669 (June 27, 1909)

To my respected friend, the famed Rav HaGaon, the comprehensive scholar, *Sinai V'Okair Harim* (i.e. one who possesses an encyclopedic knowledge together with being an incisive analyst) *Moreinu V'Rabainu* (our master and teacher) Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi, Shlita.

A week has already passed since I received your eminence's distinguished letter asking if I would come, with Hashem's help, to a conference of *tzaddikim* in [Bad] Homburg which will be held after Tisha B'Av. Before I finally decided the matter, I didn't want to write back to you. Now that I have made the decision to travel abroad, I am now writing to his eminence of Torah that I would be honored to come to the conference, with Hashem's help. I would really want to know who else from Russia is coming, in order to inform you if anyone else, such as Rav Yaakov Lipshutz, of Kovno, may his lamp shine brightly, [should be invited]. I am sure, however, that your distinguished eminence has already invited him. However, because of the great urgency that R. Yaakov should attend the conference, I mentioned him, even though in all probability he has already been invited. I remain, your friend who honors you in a manner befitting your distinguished stature and blesses you with all that is good,

Eliezer Gordon, who resides in Telz

(3) ב"ה א' דברים תרס"ט ק"ב.

כבוד אהו' הרה"ג המפורסם לשם ולתהילה כש"ת מ' רי"א הלוי שליט"א.

יקרתו הגיעני, וגם מביתי נשלח לי כתב הזמנה מהרב דפד"מ בטובו דרוש שלומו עבורי
 ולהודיעהו כי קבלתי המכתב, ועוד אדרוש מכמ"ע להודיעני מי המה הרבנים מאשכנז ואוסטריא
 שישבו בישיבה הזאת, וכמו כן הפראגראמע מה יהיה לדבר, למען אוכל להתיישב מקודם, אשאר
 בזה אוהבו דוש"ת

אברהם מרדכי אלטר מק' גור

אם אי"ה אקח חבל האספה הזאת אדמה שיסע עמי כבוד גיסי הרצ' חנוך שליט"א אשר הוא כעת בפה
 וגם מפה יסע לויסבאדען.

3) With the help of Hashem, Sunday, Parshas Devorim, 5669, Carlesbad (?)

To my respected friend, the famed and renowned Rav HaGaon, Moreinu (our master) Rav Yitzchak Isaac, Shlita.

Your precious [invitation] reached me and I also received an invitation from the Rav of Frankfurt

am Main (Rav Shlomo Breur). Please send him my regards and tell him that I received his letter. I would also request from his eminence to let me know the names of the rabbonim from Germany and Austria who will be attending this conference, as well as the planned program, in order that I will be able to give it some thought beforehand.

I remain, your friend,

Avraham Mordechai Alter of the community of Gur

If, with Hashem's help, I will be taking part in this conference, I plan to take along my brother-in-law, HaRav Tzvi (Hirsch) Chanoch (Henach) Shlita (the Rav of Bendin, Poland), who now is with me here and is planning to travel from here to Weisbaden.

D. Creating the Framework for Agudas Yisrael

(1) ב"ה יום ו' עש"ק ז' מר"ח תע"ר

שי' Herrn Jacob Rosenheim

ברכה ושלום חיים עד העולם

כבר הבטחתי לכתוב למעלת כבודו בשבוע זו דעתי בנוגע להתקנות מאגודת ישראל . . .
יצחק אייזיק הלוי

I

שם החברה ומקומה

פזורי ישראל בכל מקום שהם יתאחדו יחד תחת חבורה אשר תוסד לזה בשם "אגודת ישראל" לחיזוק הדת אשר מושבה יהי' בפראנקפורט על נהר מיין.

II

מטרת האגודה

(א) להשתדל כי יתאחדו במעשיהם יחד כל שומרי תורה ומצוה בכל תפוצת הגולה וארץ ישראל, בכל הנוגע לקיום התורה והמצות בישראל, ובכל מקום אשר יהי' נדרש לדבר בשם התורה ושמירת קיומה יהיו הם יכולים להשמיע קולם בשם האומה בכללה.

(ב) לחזק את כל בתי ספר לתורה הנמצאים וליסוד בתים חדשים לתורה בכל רוח התורה ודבר כל קדשי בני ישראל, בכל מקום אשר יחסר זה וביחוד בערי ארץ ישראל ובכל המושבות החדשות שמה ובאמעריקא ואפריקא.

(ג) להשתדל להיטב את דרכי החיים של בני ישראל ויחד עם זה גם לרומם את רוחם בכל ארחות החיים של היהדות.

(ד) להשתדל להפיץ את ידיעת הספרות בין טובי העם וכי יהיו נושאי דגל הספרות אנשים אשר ישאבו לכל לראש ממקור ישראל, אנשים אשר לא ימכרו את חכמת ישראל ממכרת עבד לכל פושק שפתים מעם נכר, ויעמדו בראש ספרות ישראל להרחיבה באמת ובמשפט, מתוך חקירת חכמה ודעת, ולהוציא מכתבי עתים אשר יהיו שם כל הידיעות הנדרשות למרבית בני העם, ויחד עם זה רוח כביר ונאור לטובת האומה ושמירת רוח חיים אשר לד' ולנצור את כל סגולות האומה וכל מחמדיה. אגרות רבי יצחק אייזיק הלוי, הרב דר. אשר רייכל, ע' 175

With the help of Hashem

Friday, the eve of the holy Shabbos, the 7th of Marcheshvan, 5670 (October 22, 1909)

Herrn Jacob Rosenheim, may he live: Blessing, peace, and eternal life

Previously, this week, I promised to write to his eminence about the [proposed] constitution of the Agudas Yisrael . . .

Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi

I

The Name of the Association and its Place

The dispersed of Israel, wherever they are, shall unite to strengthen Judaism and be part of this association created for that expressed purpose. It is to be named "Agudas Yisrael" and its headquarters shall be in Frankfurt am Main.

II

The Goals of the Association

- 1) To endeavor to bring together all of those who are committed to the observance of Torah and Mitzvos, wherever they live within the entire Diaspora and Eretz Yisrael, to deal with all of the issues that pertain to the preservation within Jewry of Torah and Mitzvos. And whenever a spokesman is needed to defend the observance of Torah and Mitzvos, the association will make their voice heard in the name of the entire Jewish people.
- 2) To strengthen all of the extant Torah schools and to found new ones imbued with the spirit of the Torah and sanctity of the people of Israel in any area where it is missing, especially in the cities within Eretz Yisrael, in the newly established colonies, in America, and in Africa.
- 3) To endeavor to improve the [material] life of the Jewish people as well as to enhance their spiritual well being.
- 4) To endeavor to spread the knowledge of [professional] literary writing amongst the talented of our people. These exceptional writers should draw, as their primary source, from the true wisdom of Israel (*Chochmas Yisrael*), untainted by the theories of the assimilated historians. These writers should become the vanguard of Jewish literary activity through their Torah based analysis and publish periodicals which will contain all the information required by the general populace. They should combine the traditional spirit with an awareness of the Enlightenment to preserve Jewry's G-dly spirit and their unique cultural treasure trove.

(2) ברכה מרובה למע"כ ידידי הרב הגאון הגדול המפורסם פאר הדור וכו' מ' ר' יצחק אייזיק הלוי נ"י ראבינאוויץ וכ"ג (ט) הרמה שליט"א.

. . . ע"ד אגודת ישראל עוד לא הגיעני מכתב כ"ג הרמה שליטא ומאוד חפצי לדעת, אחרית דבר, אם הסכימו היראים שבאשכנז על הנעשה בהמבורג בתנאיו ובפרטיו, או שרוצים לשנות איזה דברים, בטח יגיעני מכ"ג הרמה שליטא דברים בארוכה בביאור הכל, תמול הגיעני מכתב מהרה"ג ר"י ראזינהיים, בו יודעני כי ענין התקנות מאגודת יראים הם תח"כ"ג הרמה שליט"א, ואודיע לכ"ג הרמה שליטא שלו' הר' מרדכי אליעזר נ"י כי טוב הוא בכל הפרטים, וברכה וכ"ט לכ"ג הרמה שליט"א נזכה להתבשר זמ"ז אך טוב וברכה כ"ה כדברי מוקירו וידידו חיים הלוי סאלאווייציק ב' כ"ג כסליו העת"ר.

Abundant blessings to his eminence, my friend, the great and renowned HaRav HaGaon, the pride of the generation etc. Moreinu (our teacher) R. Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Rabinovitz, may his lamp shine brightly, his most revered eminence, Shlita.

With regards to Agudas Yisrael, I haven't as yet received a letter from the distinguished and exalted personage, Shlita. I want to know the final outcome. Have the G-d fearing Jews of Germany agreed to that which was decided on in [Bad] Homburg, i.e. [all of] the conditions and particulars or do they want to make some changes. I am confident that I will [soon] receive a detailed report from his eminence. Yesterday I received a letter from HaRav HaGaon R. Yaakov Rosenheim. He informed in that letter that the by laws of the *Agudas Yereim* (Vereinigung) are in the possession his eminence Shlita. I want to let his eminence, Shlita, to know that [his son] Rav Mordechai Eliezer [HaLevi Rabinovitz], may his lamp shine brightly, is doing well in all areas. Blessings and all the best to his eminence, Shlita. May we only hear good news from each other, blessings and all the best. These are the words of his admirer and friend,

Chaim HaLevi Soloveitchik

Monday, the 23rd of Kislev, 5670 (December 6, 1909)

(3) ב"ה ג' סיון תער"ב ווילנא

הוד כבוד ידידי הגאון הגדול איש האשכולות כו' כש"ת מוהרי"א הלוי הי"ו.
אחד"ש הדר"ג שי', כרגע הגיעני מכתבו מעש"ק, הליפשיצים בעברם דרך עירנו התיעצו עמי על דבר נסיעתם ואמרתי כי ישובו הביתה וליתר בטחון הגדתי להם שישאלו את הדר"ג ע"י ט"ג. כאשר שמעתי כי הגר"ח שי' הוטבו ויסעו בודאי אי"ה, גם אני מצדי אקוה להתאמץ בעזה"י ולנסוע, אם כי לע"ע אסכול מהשיעול וקשה עלי הדבור, לגיסי הרב שי' כתבתי להכין א"ע להנסיעה. כאשר כתבתי בהרשימה את הרה"ג חפץ חיים שי' כתבתי בדרך ספק, רק חשבתי כי יהי' לתועלת שמו הטוב ההולך לפני מרן וצדקתו, אולם בשבוע החולף הי' פה איזה ימים, והגיד לי כי אחרי המחלה שעברה עליו בימי החורף זהיר הוא מנסיעה, ואין ביכלתו להשתתף בהועדה ובהפעולות הנמשכות, ואפשר להשמיטו, ובכלל הרשימה הוא של קאנדידאטען והשערתי דלא כדבר מוחלט, ויתברך ידידי וביתו וכל הנלוים אליו לאהבה אותו בברכת החג הבעל"ט כנפשו היקרה וכנפש ידידו מוקירו ומכבדו הדושת

חיים עוזר גרודזענסקי

With the help of Hashem, the 3rd of Sivan 5672 (May 19, 1912), Vilna

[To] His Eminence, the great Gaon, the comprehensive scholar, the crown of Torah, Moreinu V'Rabbainu (our master and teacher) R. Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi, may Hashem grant him life and preserve him. After the proper greetings to His Eminence, may he live:

I just received your letter of Erev Shabbos. The Lipshutzes, while they were passing through our city, sought advice regarding their [upcoming] journey. I told them to return home and for greater assurances they should ask His Eminence via telegram. When I heard that Rav Chaim [Soloveitchik], may he live, is satisfied and will definitely travel [to the conference,] I, too, hope to make the effort and travel there as well, even though I am presently suffering from a bad cough and it is hard for me to speak. I also wrote to my brother-in-law that he should make preparations to travel. When I wrote the Chofetz Chaim's name on the list it was only meant to be tentative. I thought, though, that his good name [being connected with this project] and his famed righteousness would be of benefit. However, this past week he was here for a few days

and he told me that after the sickness that he endured this past winter, he is careful to refrain from traveling. Consequently, since he won't be able to take part in the assembly or in the work that will follow, it is now possible to remove his name from the list. Included in the [published] list should [also] be a list of candidates for office. I assume that no final decision was yet made regarding this matter. May [you,] my friend, and his family and his greater circle of friends be blessed with the blessings of the upcoming holiday . . .

Chaim Ozer Grodzinski

IV. Compromise and Conflict

A. Any Jew, who recognizes the binding nature of the Torah for himself and for the Jewish people can become a member of Agudat Israel. The right belongs to the *Landesorganisation* to set limiting conditions for the acceptance of members for a certain time with the approval of the rabbinical council of the country.

Only those members are eligible for election to the organs of Agudat Israel whose convictions and manner of life correspond recognizably to the Torah. Members of organizations which are in principled opposition to Agudat Israel are not eligible for election to the central administrative organs. In controversial cases, the entire rabbinical council will decide concerning a member who belongs to an opposing world organization; the rabbinical council of a country will decide concerning a member who belongs to an opposing organization that relates only to a specific country. **Rules of Membership in the General Organization and Executive Bodies of the Agudas Yisrael as Approved in the Second Knessia Gedolah in Vienna, 1929**

B. “to bring forth, in an elevated sense, that Jewish unity based on Torah, which yet existed in the middle of the eighteenth century, before the time of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. To this extent, the organization as such is a goal in itself.” **Speech by Moreinu Yaakov Rosenheim on October of 1911 to the Provisional Committee for the Creation of Agudas Yisrael**

C. Agudas Israel is the first historical attempt, after the fall of the Jewish State, to regenerate the Jewish People— despite its diaspora in all lands—in the form of a living organism so that its anarchic masses can be ordered and assembled around G-d's Law as a unified and will-determining center. **Moreinu Yaakov Rosenheim, Agudistische Schriften, 1929**

D. It is not a society (*Verein*) alongside other societies that we wish to found; not a merely pragmatic association (*Zweckveiband*), whose meaning exhausts itself in the realization of some practical, individual purposes. What presents itself to us as our highest goal is rather the reanimation of an archetypal Jewish possession: the traditional concept of *Klal Yisrael*—the entirety of Israel's body, filled and borne by its Torah, its organizing soul— which we will realize through our Agudat Israel in the midst of the world of culture, through those technical means which culture now makes available to us. **Moreinu Yaakov Rosenheim, at the Plenary Address at the Founding Kattowitz Conference, 1912**

V. Nathan Birnbaum and the Program of the Agudah

A. The Peace Conference is at the gate! The program of the new order includes the [freedom of] self-determination of nations. The Zionists call out in the name of the Jewish people of Palestine. [But] non-Zionist Torah Jewry also belongs to the Jewish people! If we wish to avoid being pushed aside, we must come together . . . united with a common purpose to claim the

leadership of the Jewish people before the world forum. **Nathan Birnbaum, Open Letter to the Agudath Yisrael Youth, November 20, 1918**

B. I have been asked to speak on behalf of the Agudas Israel which . . . is a world union of Orthodox Jewry comprising the majority of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, having branches in 18 different countries. The draft of the Mandate, calls upon the whole Jewish people to cooperate in the upbuilding of Palestine at the same time it recognizes the Z.O. [Zionist Organization] as the Jewish Agency[,] the authoritative body representing Jewry in all Palestine work. . . . This is obviously done on the assumption that the Z.O. enjoys the full confidence of all sections of the Jewish People and is therefore most likely to [effect] the participation in all Palestine efforts of the whole Jewish people. . . . [However,] the bulk of Jewry live in Eastern Europe. They are intensely conscious of the historical past. The Jewish people to them is the people of the Jewish religion, the people of the Bible. Palestine is the land in which they hope to realize the ideals of life as taught [in] the Jewish religion. On the soil of the Holy Land they desire to work out their own salvation in a quiet life of peaceful work living up to the Traditions of their fathers. Because they know that the spiritual basis of Zionism is a nationalism religiously indifferent and therefore incompatible with Jewish Tradition, these Jewish masses have not joined the Zionist movement. Nor have [they] joined the [Mizrahi] (the conservative [faction] of the Z.O.) because by so doing they will allow that the Jewish Religion which to them is the paramount issue in all Jewish [affairs] be reduced to a mere party matter depending on the changing majorities of Jews united within the folds of this religiously indifferent nationalism. . . . We are of course very happy at the possibility of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, but what the Agudah and the millions of Orthodox Jews behind it yearn for is not flag waving, not a political triumph, but the opportunity of living in accordance with the law of our G-d in the spirit of the Torah. The only thing that stands between the religious masses and their energetic cooperation in Palestinian efforts is the fact that their religious scruples do not allow them to participate in Palestine work as long as the safeguarding of the Jewish religion is not clearly, consistently and practically assured. **Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung in the name of the Agudah delegation to Sir John Eveylyn Shuckburgh, the Undersecretary of State for the colonies, at the end of 1919**

C. Our youth must make their will known. . . . Our wish remains first and foremost to maintain Torah studies in their old, pure form. We wish [however] to [also] pursue more practical work on behalf of Palestine . . . [to] direct the youth to undertake the great work of its settlement. . . . We wish, more than before, to learn the Hebrew language, to study Jewish history and literature, so as to instill in our youth a love and understanding for our people. . . . In Germany, we call for cultural autonomy and the establishment of an education system for our aims. . . . If we stand aside, we lose the Land of Israel, and with it the majority of the Jewish people. . . . Zionism would become the sole representative of Jewish interests [and thus the] sole arbitrator of Jewish rights. We would lose the eastern Jews, who will have only one political choice shoved before their faces, which speaks against their interest and tramples over their Jewish sensibilities. . . . Precisely *because* we are Torah Jews, *because* it is in the Land of Israel that we will see the fulfillment of our Torah ideals, *because* [there] we will come to our own, we must state it clearly and frankly. Precisely *because we will fight nonreligious nationalism with all our power, we must create a real religious nationalism in the land.* Palestine must not be given to the Zionist organization; it must be given to the Jewish people. **Nathan Birnbaum, Open Letter to the Agudath Israel Youth, November 20, 1918**