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Abstract
The Jewish people have a long history that documents that rise and fall of the Hebrew language. Without an understanding of the basic history of the Hebrew language and Jewish people, it is virtually impossible to comprehend the importance of the language and its revival to the Jewish people. In the 14th century B.C.E., the language was spoken. However, as the result of multiple expulsions and mass exiles, the Hebrew language ceased to exist in spoken form and solely remained in prayer, written works such as the Hebrew Bible and Mishna as well as in academic literature. Centuries later in the early nineteenth century, the pressures of rising global anti-Semitism resulted in mass Jewish immigration and the majority immigrated to their ancestral homeland in the ancient Land of Israel. Upon arriving, the Jewish immigrants were faced with cultural divisions in the absence of a common tongue and the subsequent inability to communicate, associate or exchange ideas as a collective community. The social pressures of incongruence initiated the revival of the ancestral Jewish language, Hebrew, into a modern spoken language. It was the revival of Hebrew in the late nineteenth-century and immersion of the language into political and education systems of the emerging state, that predominantly ensured not only the survival of the modern Jewish state but also the collective unity of the Jewish people.

Hebrew and the Unification of the Jewish People: A Historical Approach

Unification within a community is dependent on the commonalities shared between the

people within that community. In the case of the Jewish people, the absence of a unifying trait

shared by all members following the Diaspora caused incongruence and the revival of the ancient

Hebrew language served as the tool to unite Jews from around the world. The revival of Hebrew

consolidated the Jewish people in the late nineteenth century and into the beginning of the

twentieth century. As a result, it ultimately became the common language, which is unique to

Jews, used to establish the Jewish state. Historians debate the significance of Hebrew in the

unification of the worldwide Jewish community. However, by reviewing a general history of the language and the Jewish people, it's clear that the revival of the Hebrew language was a predominant factor that facilitated transnational Jewish unification and ensured the legacy of the establishment of the modern Jewish state.

History of the Hebrew Language

Due to the historical significance of Hebrew, it is important to understand the historical context and connection between the language and the Jewish people to fully comprehend its evolution over time and the impact of its revival amongst the Jewish community. The Hebrew language has existed for over three thousand years. However, for most of its three thousand year 'existence,' it was only used in prayer and academic settings, such as literature and studying of the Hebrew Bible. Before its revival in the nineteenth century, Jews all over the world were familiar with Hebrew in written form for prayer and studying the Hebrew Bible. However, Biblical Hebrew remained unspoken in daily life following its disappearance in around 600 B.C.E. [1]

Figure 1: This is a visual representation of the Birkat KoHanim, the priestly benediction, in three different historical stages of Hebrew.

Ancient variations of Hebrew existed primarily in epigraphic inscriptions and literary texts around the second millennium B.C.E. However, spoken Hebrew wasn't seen until the 14th-13th centuries B.C.E. when Israelite tribes in Canaan "used Hebrew as a spoken and a

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[1] Benner, Jeff. "The Aaronic Blessing from a Hebraic Perspective." *The Aaronic Blessing from a Hebraic Perspective*, www.ancient-hebrew.orglanguage_aaronic.html.

literary language until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E." (Saenz-Badillos). Before its disappearance, Biblical Hebrew was "a literary language, which until the Babylonian exile existed alongside living, spoken, dialects" (Saenz-Badillos). The language survived in some Israelite communities until about the year 200 A. D. when a Jewish revolt occurred against Roman powers in Jerusalem and Hebrew "died as a spoken language" (Fellman 250). Although the spoken language disappeared, literary elements survived through prayer, biblical texts such as the Bible and Mishna, the Dead Sea Scrolls and even specialized medieval literature.

In order to understand why the language is so intertwined with the history of the Jewish people, we must recall the events that lead to the disappearance of spoken Hebrew and how that coincided with events that affected the Jewish people. After the Roman Expulsion from the ancient Land of Israel, Jews were forced to disperse around the globe in an event known as the Diaspora. While Jewish communities continued to use Biblical Hebrew for special occasions or religious sermons, "nowhere in this period was Hebrew used as the normal medium for everyday discourse. Rather, the language of everyday use was usually the local language (or dialect) of the country in which the Jews were living"(Fellman 251). Usually, Jews who spoke the 'local language' of their residential country would speak with marked pronunciations or accents that incorporated Hebrew accents that would differentiate them from their non-Jewish neighbors. From these pronunciations sprouted Jewish dialects, each unique to different geographic regions. These Jewish dialects would go on to fuel tensions within the Jewish community in the years leading up to the establishment of Israel, stemming from conflicting ethnic backgrounds and predominantly, the absence of a universal language.

Early Hebrew Dialects

As a result of Diaspora, Jewish dialects were born that divided Jews based on geographic regions. The separation of Jews across the globe and emerging Jewish dialects would eventually be a source of tension in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries because they perpetuated sub-ethnicities within the Jewish community, which prevented collectiveness since there wasn't a common thread to bind them together. Jewish dialects were later termed as Hebrew 'half-languages' and were based on the Jewish communities in different geographic regions such as: "Yiddish in Central and Eastern Europe originating from the German Rhineland area, with Ladino in the Balkans and Near East originating from Spain"(Fellman 251) in addition to Judeo-Arabic languages emerging in North Africa and the Middle East. 'Half-languages' used Hebrew lettering as the writing system while sounding like a mixture of the local language and sparse Hebrew phonetics.

The combination of Hebrew writing and the phonetics of modern languages, such as German, Spanish or Arabic, allowed Jews to retain a distant, but ever present, familiarity with Hebrew in a written form. However, these dialect 'half languages' created an ethnic and cultural divide between Jewish communities that were immigrating back to the ancient Land of Israel because of conflicting forms of communication and the absence of a common tongue. These divisions within the Jewish community, diversity of languages amounting to language barriers and miscommunication, would eventually motivate a man named Eliezer Ben-Yehuda to revive Hebrew as a modern spoken language. The revival of the inherently Jewish language aimed to unite Jewish communities around the world by speaking a familiar, common language, Hebrew. Since Jews were immigrating from all over the world, they spoke a variety of languages and

therefore couldn't communicate efficiently, until a man named Eliezer Ben-Yehuda decided to revive the language using ancient texts and scriptures in the late nineteenth century in an attempt to bridge the divide.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: The Revival Process

In 1881, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda immigrated to Jerusalem and formally initiated the revival process of Hebrew. While Hebrew hadn't been spoken popularly for close to two thousand years, he was determined to "transform Hebrew, which for centuries had been used only in study, into a modern spoken language"(Saiger) as a way to empower Jews to embrace their culture and create a collective community in their ancestral homeland. The variety of cultures and languages required a unifying language because "the Sephardic Jews who spoke Ladino or Arabic and the Ashkenazi Jews who spoke Yiddish needed a common language for commercial purposes, and the most obvious choice was Hebrew" (Bensadoun). A common language would allow for the exchange of ideas and the formation of a localized economy to sustain a developing Jewish nation.

With the diverse backgrounds of the new melting pot of Jewish immigrants, the single thread connecting Jews together was, in fact, their connection to Hebrew as the Jewish language of prayer. From there, the goal was to convert Hebrew "from the language of prayer and sacred texts into the language of Hebrew culture, and beyond that into the language of the street and home" (Shapira 57). The Diaspora culture, following the Roman Expulsion, tormented the Jewish people because they saw it as a defeat that forced them out of their ancestral homeland and deteriorated the Jewish identity. The 'half languages' spoken in different geographic regions were a constant reminder of the catastrophe of the Diaspora and the resulting dis incongruous

Jewish community. And so the need to redefine the Jewish identity evolved into "a secular Jewish identity, a shift towards Hebrew as the spoken language, and a demand for independence from Diaspora cultures"(Shapira 54), which manifested in the dissociation of 'half-languages' that were born as a result of the Diaspora.

The driving factor of Hebrewism came from the desire to separate the "Diasporic Jew", who knew only persecution and victimhood, from the "New Jew", Jews in the late nineteenth century that were the first generation born in the ancestral Land of Israel from immigrant, Diasporic parents. "Diasporic Jews" were depicted as "religiously observant, uneducated, and had no leadership" (Shapira 32). The hope was to forget their past existences and redefine the Jewish identity upon returning to their ancestral homeland, which was rooted in the implementation of Hebrew as the universal Jewish language. The modern and redefined "new Jew", was "characterized by speaking Hebrew [...] and a self-definition diametrically opposed to that of Diaspora Jews" (Shapira 56). While the need for Hebrew was initially intended to allow for successful communication, it began to manifest as the foundation of new, developing culture that nourished the unification of Jewish communities.

Hebrew unequivocally became the diagnostic feature that connected Jews together across transnational communities and created a base for Jewish unification through nationalism that fuelled the emergence of the Jewish state. In an interview with Dr. Rafi Grosglik, visiting assistant professor and Israel Institute teaching fellow, affiliated with University of California, Davis's department of sociology and Jewish studies program, Grosglik explains that "the objective was to bring the use of Hebrew from prayer to the mundane, it is connected to the notion of politics, as part of building a nation, it was a political mission, that we needed to build

the 'new Jew'". He goes on to say that "it's a combination of ethnicity and social status and it is all connected to the hierarchical and political status of language in Israel. It was globalization and the opening of a new culture and nation-state, but the demise of the melting pot". Effectively, the demise of 'half-languages' and the rise of Hebrew as the common language was imperative in bringing Jews together because until that happened, they were not a 'new Jew', they were perpetuating the narrative that Jews will always be the eternal incohesive outcasts of Europe that they had been before immigrating to Israel.

And so, Ben-Yehuda was determined to destroy the persona of the former Jew and set out to create a "new Jew" which first required the formal and intensive revival of Hebrew. To formally initiate his process, "Ben-Yehuda began collecting material for the creation of a Modern Hebrew dictionary when he arrived in Israel, and never ceased expanding the language" (Saiger). He consulted the present Jewish communities that remained in the region after the expulsion knowing that even as far back as "fifty years preceding the start of the revival process, a version of spoken Hebrew already existed in the markets of Jerusalem" (Bensadoun). Ben-Yehuda gained the support of teachers and educators. Schools began teaching the Hebrew language as part of the curriculum and Hebrew was the language of instruction, which was a "practical solution to the problem of immigrants from different countries speaking a variety of languages" (Saiger). It was only logical that the Jewish people be united over the common thread holding them together, which was the ever-present connection to Hebrew, which is still used as the language of prayer until today. Ben-Yehuda's vision manifested into a legislative agenda, the government formally endorsed Hebrew as the national language of the Jews and called for the complete immersion of Hebrew into the education system of the developing Jewish state.

After Ben-Yehuda: A State in the Making

The education system played a critical role in carrying out the immersion of Hebrew into everyday Israeli society. Teachers and educators were crucial in the success of Hebrew's revival because they "formulated a Hebrew vernacular and teaching language, revived terminology they needed in their work, wrote textbooks and adopted poems and songs that they disseminated among their students"(Shapira 58). Ben-Yehuda meant to ensure his legacy would withstand the pressures of time by co-founding the Language Council which turned into the Academy of Hebrew Language, tasked with continuing Ben-Yehuda's life's work after his death. To this day, the Academy of Hebrew Language "approves new Hebrew words to meet the ever-evolving needs of contemporary Israeli society" (Saiger). The objective beyond simply revival was to ensure that the process was dynamic and sustainable, to make sure it could evolve with the times to meet the needs of the community over time, and it couldn't have been more successful.

Immigration to the new state, once again, brought a wide variety of cultures and languages, resulting in tensions within the community and the need for a common language was apparent and unavoidable. While there had been only a small Jewish community in the region pre-1948, the establishment of the state caused an exponential increase in Jewish immigration to the region and in just a decade, "a million destitute Jewish refugees would arrive from Europe and Arab lands, well outnumbering the existing Jewish population"(Glinert). Despite sharing a common Jewish ancestry, there were no other common features to unite the different sub-communities once they immigrated to Israel. Zionist leaders knew that a newly-formed country comprised of disjointed immigrants would not survive. Because Jews had assimilated into the culture of their previous residences to resist anti-Semitism, "few were functionally

literate in Hebrew and even fewer could speak it, but the new state was determined that all should. Hebrew language and culture were to be the beating heart of this newborn society of Jews" (Glinert). The revival process initiated by Ben-Yehuda needed to be applied to the new state, it needed to be incorporated and integrated into the new nation through political influence and legislature.

In order to preserve Ben-Yehuda's legacy, Hebrew had to be implemented by the political leaders of the new state. Predating the establishment of modern Israel in 1948, there had been no formal implementation of Hebrew as the national language. However, after the state was established, the first prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion was determined to continue Ben-Yehuda's work in reviving the Hebrew language and use it as the foundation to build a uniform Jewish society. Following WWII, it was imperative that Israel put forth a strong, unified front. However, 'half languages' and regional culture differences between Jews posed a threat. The fragmentary nation needed its inhabitants "to be bonded into loyal citizens of a new nation, and Hebrew was a key ingredient in the process" (Glinert). More practically, a common language was needed for people to communicate and interact and transform Jewish immigrants into a uniform society. Less than a decade after Israel's establishment, "an entire younger generation of immigrants emerged from Israel's schools, its youth movements, and the IDF with a fully functional Hebrew, equipped to conduct their daily lives in it" (Glinert). The new generations of those born in Israel from immigrant parents, known as the 'Sabra', were the product and culmination of Ben-Yehuda's dream. They were united through a shared culture that was cultivated by the common language of their faith and forefathers.

Without historical context of the history of the language and the Jewish people, it would be impossible to fully comprehend the significance of Hebrew's revival. The tumultuous history of the Jewish people saw the rise and fall of Hebrew as a spoken language, but it never fully disappeared from the Jewish culture because it is an integral part of prayer and academic study. Upon arriving in their ancestral homeland, instead of finding comfort in commonality, they were divided by different cultures, rooted in the absence of a common tongue. By reviving Hebrew from a language of prayer to a spoken language, Jews were united over a familiar language that had been retained since their inception thousands of years prior. It was the revival of Hebrew, initiated by Ben-Yehuda and later advanced by Zionist political leaders, that laid the foundation for a unified Jewish nation, no longer divided by language barriers, but united through a common tongue. It was the reinstatement of Hebrew that solidified the legacy of Israel and ensured that the Jewish nation would not crumble because of social incongruence associated with language barriers. Hebrewism single-handedly allowed for the amalgamation of Jews by allowing for easy communication and the exchange of ideas using a language that is unique to the Jewish people, Hebrew.

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