



The
Lookstein
Center
Bar-Ilan University

THE GOODNESS OF HUMANITY

Beta Israel's Perspective on Humankind

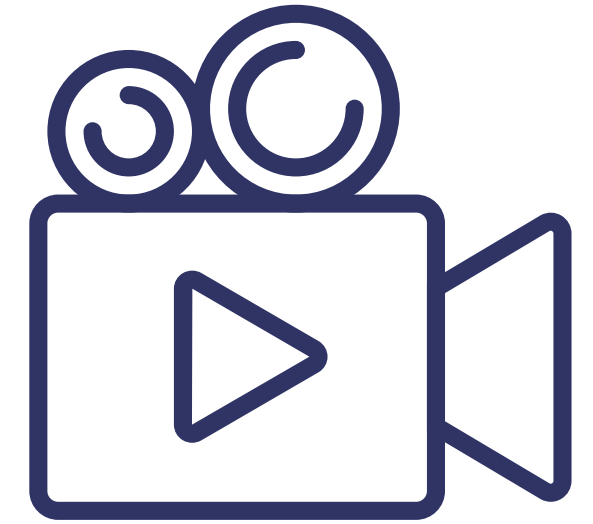


LET'S DISCUSS!

- Who should we help in the world?
- Who deserves the benefit of the doubt?
- Are people inherently good?
- Does belief help us avoid challenges?
- Who should we trust in the world?
- Is everyone deserving of respect?



VIDEO



<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/sotj14.socst.world.betaisrael/the-beta-israel/?student=true>





UNPACKING THE VIDEO

Who is the Beta Israel community and why did they come to Israel?

What sacrifices did the Beta Israel community make in order to come to Israel?

Who brought the members of the Beta Israel community to Israel, and how?





"The period between] 1270–1632 [was one of]...anti-Semitic persecution. Heavy pressure [was] placed on “those behaving like Jews” for them to convert or be killed. In response, the Jews adopt ascetic practices of their neighbors. In addition, the rights of Jewish landowners are annulled. The Jews who are expelled from their lands are forced to change their trades, and they become builders, ironworkers, carpenters, and weavers. Following the expulsion, they are given the derogatory name Falasha, meaning 'intruders' or 'foreigners.'"

-Rabbi Dr. Sharon Shalom From Sinai To Ethiopia p. 63

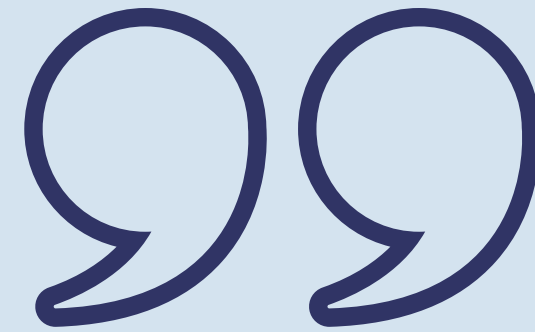




'[Between 1632-1769] the political center of the kingdom begins to migrate to the Gondar region. The Jews who were expelled from their lands are forced to participate in the construction of fortifications and churches in the new capital of Gondar. In recognition of the women of Beta Israel, who are known for their talents in preparing dyes and decorative items, the Jews are again granted land, and their general status improves.'

- My Family: The Beta Israel (p.64)





‘[Between 1755-1855], after the murder of Emperor Iyo’as in 1769, an extended period of unstable rule begins, and the power of local military leaders grows. Beta Israel loses all the economic, social, and religious advantages they had achieved during the Gondar period. This period is a difficult one in the religious life of Beta Israel, and according to tradition, they are unable to practice religious rituals for forty years’²². During the period [between 1888-1892] called Kifu Qen (the Terrible Days), about half of Beta Israel perished in a severe famine’

- My Family: The Beta Israel (p.64)





WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Following all of these these challenges, how might the Beta Israel feel about...

- ▶▶ ...religion?
- ▶▶ ...their community?
- ▶▶ ...the outsider?





If one reflected on the history and experiences of the Beta Israel, which included persecution and famine, one might imagine that a certain level of distrust and cynicism may have developed among members of the Beta Israel. Yet this is most certainly not the case. Instead, rather than the attitude - prevalent in other faiths and other Jewish communities- that humanity is untrustworthy and unreliable, and that it is appropriate to maintain a level of suspicion towards other human beings given the high likelihood that they will act improperly, members of the Beta Israel are of the view that is that while people sin, they are broadly good, trustworthy, and reliable.

As Rabbi Dr. Sharon Shalom explains: 'I have a tradition from my grandfather...that at the foundation of the theological conception of the Beta Israel is the idea that "a person's heart is good by its nature."' This is because, 'the sages of the community believe that it is not possible that person's nature is evil at its core, for humanity was created in the image of God, and God is good. How could a wholly good God create a man who is evil at his core?'

-My Family: The Beta Israel, (p.84)



JEWISH TEXTS



Bereshit 1:27

God created man in His image -
in God's image he was created

בראשית א:כז

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם
אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ:

Mishna Avot 1:6

"Rabbi Yehuda ben Perachya says
"You should judge everyone favorably"

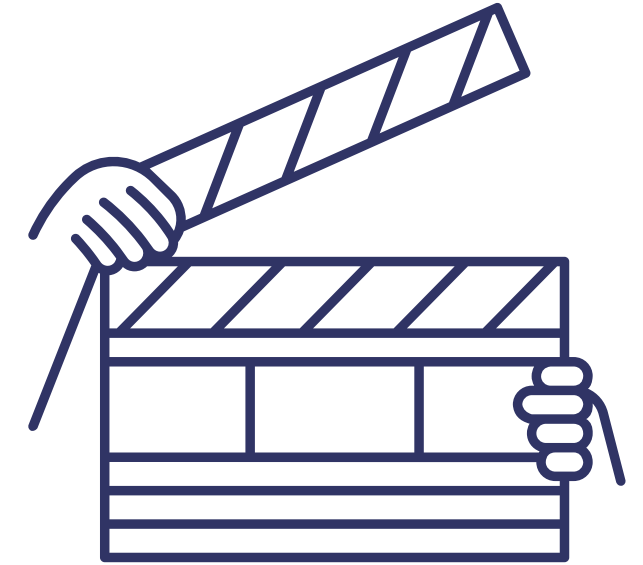
אבות א:ו

יְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אוֹמֵר... וְהוֹי דָּן אֶת כָּל
הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת:





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SCENARIO ACTIVITY

