

About this partnership:

Both the Jewish People and the United States of America are rooted in a quest for greater freedom and human dignity. Inspired by this parallelism, the National Museum of American Jewish History is collaborating with Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and its Rabbis Without Borders program to launch a new initiative, **Sacred Stories: A Living Commentary on the Hebrew Bible and American Jewish History**.

Sacred Stories weaves together Judaism's foundational sacred text, the Torah, with one of the most successful expressions of freedom in human history, the story of Jewish life in America. **Sacred Stories** explores our shared values by linking these two vital and compelling stories through contemporary commentary and 21st century media.

The **Torah** is a central feature of Jewish tradition. Used to refer generally to Jewish wisdom, it also refers specifically to the 5 Books of Moses which makes up the Hebrew Bible. A portion of the Torah text, a **Parsha**, is read on **Shabbat** (Sabbath). The whole Torah is read sequentially over the course of the year. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest and begins on Friday evenings and ends Saturday night. Many Jews observe Shabbat to emulate God's resting on the seventh day of Creation. The fourth commandment is to keep Shabbat holy which Jews do with festive meals, resting, and learning.



The National Museum of American Jewish History, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, presents educational programs and experiences that preserve, explore and celebrate the history of Jews in America. Its purpose is to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire in people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans aspire.



Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is a think tank, leadership training institute, and resource center. Bringing Jewish insights to a wide American audience, Clal makes Jewish wisdom an accessible public resource. A leader in religious pluralism, Clal builds bridges across communities to encourage diversity and openness. Linking Jewish texts and tradition with innovative scholarship, Clal promotes Jewish participation in American civic and spiritual life, reinvigorating communities and enhancing leadership development.

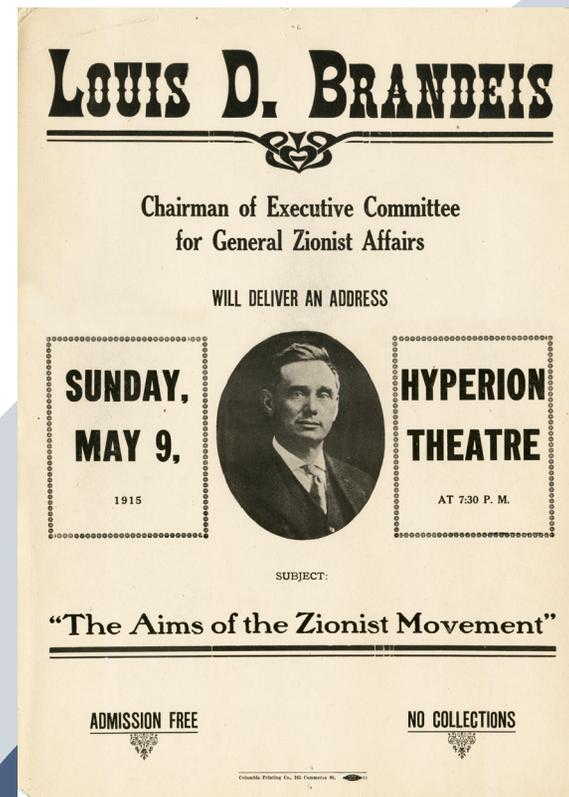
Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

SHOFTIM AUGUST 10, 2013

When American and Jewish Are One

By Rabbi Brad Hirschfield



Artifact:
Poster, The Aims of the Zionist Movement, Boston, 1915
National Museum of American Jewish History
Dedicated in honor of Maya Rosenberg's recovery by Lyn and George Ross

Located in the Politics section of our **Competing Visions** gallery on the third floor

When American and Jewish Are One

Sacred Stories **SHOFTIM**

What does it mean to build a great society? While that phrase may be most closely associated (in recent years at least) with the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, it has been the animating focus of many great American leaders, and one of the central issues for the Jewish people from the start.

At first glance, nothing about Louis Brandeis' early life seems indicative of his future role as one of the most important Jewish American Zionist activists of his age. Brandeis was born in Louisville, Kentucky and raised by parents who emphasized universal humanist values over religious Jewish observances. We have to wonder, how did this child from a secular family become such a passionate advocate for the future State of Israel?

“The highest Jewish ideals are essentially American in a very important particular.”

In fact, his upbringing had everything to do with it, and reminds us all that the values we learn as children can express themselves in many different ways over the course of our lifetimes. A useful thing for both parents and children to remember.

Brandeis came to see Zionism as a natural and necessary expression of his parents' lessons about human dignity, as well as a powerful application of America's political and societal values. He came to see the establishment of the Jewish State as yet another way in which people could build a model version of a great society.

In the speech advertised by the poster before which you stand, the future Supreme Court Justice declared the following:

“The highest Jewish ideals are essentially American in a very important particular. It is Democracy that Zionism represents. It is Social Justice which Zionism represents, and every bit of that is the American ideal of the twentieth century.”

Like the words found in Deuteronomy 16:18, “You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes...and they shall govern the people with due justice,” both America and Israel were meant to embody the oldest Jewish ideals of a great society—a society marked by equal justice for all and assured by the presence of great jurists and trusted officials. Louis Brandeis committed his life to that goal, wherever it could be achieved. For him, and for so many other Jewish Americans to this very day, nothing could be more American or more Jewish.

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, President of CLAL, has been ranked several years in a row in Newsweek as one of America's “50 Most Influential Rabbis,” and recognized as one of our nation's top “Preachers & Teachers,” by Beliefnet.com.

ARTIFACT:

Poster, *The Aims of the Zionist Movement*, Boston, 1915
National Museum of American Jewish History
Dedicated in honor of Maya Rosenberg's recovery by Lyn and George Ross

You can learn more about Justice Louis D. Brandeis in our *Only in America*® Gallery/Hall of Fame.



Scan here to see past stories and to subscribe to the weekly essays.