

The Meaning of the Semel

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The semel is comprised of four components, each of which is doubled. 1) First and foremost, in the center there are the Luchot Habrit (Two Tablets); 2) on the Luchot are engraved two letters- Tuf and Ayin; 3) in the background we see two agricultural implements – the scythe and the pitchfork; 4) also two agricultural products can be seen – on the left a sheave of barley and on the right an olive branch. The banner of Bnei Akiva symbolically ties the four components together.

The semel or symbol is important because of the ideals that it represents. It gives aesthetic and visual expression to the ideals of our movement. It is also a means of identification – for chaverim to identify with our ideals, and for others to identify us for who we are and what we stand for.

The Colors of the Semel

There is also significance even in the colors of our semel. It is predominately blue and white, but also includes green, brown, red, and gold. Medinat Yisrael chose blue and white as our national colors, and these colors are on our flag. Why were these specific colors chosen? The Techaylet, or blue strand, was added to the white Tzitzit, whose purpose was to remind us whom we are and what we are supposed to do. The deep blue Techaylet also served as a symbol of the Divine all – encompassing entity, by reminding us of the deep blue sea, and the infinite blue sky.

Other nationalistic movements have in their semel only blue and white; while other movements with socialist ideals have a predominantly red semel; on the other hand, our multi – colored semel includes nationalistic ideals along with social values. Our semel also contains the green color, which today is popularly associated with the environmentalist movement. Already years ago the love of nature was a part of our ideology.

Our multi – colored emblem signifies a number of different ideals, each important in its own right. Each has its place in our semel that adorns our banner. It is worn with pride on

our chultzot (shirts) and is found on our letterhead and on every publication of Bnei Akiva. The semel represents today over 70,000 chaverim (members) of Bnei Akiva, worldwide.

Components of the Semel

The **LUCHOT HABRIT** – the tablets, which are found in the center of the semel, are at the heart of our movement. We believe that many things were given to Moshe on Har Sinai that are included in the Torah sheba'al peh, as well as the Torah she'bichtav. Our Rabbis teach that every insight that a student will have, has already been mentioned to Moshe at Sinai. We recall the story of Moshe seeing G-D crowning certain letters of the Torah, before handing it over. His explanation was that there would one day arise a Torah scholar who will learn laws even from the crowns of these letters. His name is Akiva Ben Yoseph. Then Moshe saw Rabbi Akiva's beit medrash, and heard him say "this law was brought to us by Moshe from Sinai." (Menachot 29)

The Luchot symbolize the centrality of G-D's Torah to our movement, written and oral law alike.

The letters **TAF** and **AYIN**, on the Luchot, stand for the words **TORAH VA'AVODAH** – our motto. This symbolizes the deep roots of our ideology in the Torah, and therefore they are inscribed on the Luchot.

Behind the Luchot, which have the letters TAF and AYIN inscribed on them, we see two species – **A SHEAF OF BARLEY AND AN OLIVE BRANCH**.

Wheat and barley are the basic sources of human sustenance and therefore are the first of the seven species mentioned where the Torah praises the land of Israel as a land of plenty (Devarim 8,8). Food products (such as bread – "hamotzie" or cakes – "mezonot") made from grain are recognized as the main staple of our diet and therefore are to be blessed and eaten first, before anything else.

Also, G-D's Providence is expressed when He blesses the harvest of "Dagan, tirosh, veyitzhar" (grains, wine and oil – Devarim 7,13)

The olive branch, and especially olive oil, is very symbolic. Since the time when the dove returned to Noah with an olive branch in her beak (Berashit 8,11), the olive branch has symbolized a measure of pacification between G-d and His world.

Pure olive oil was used in Beit Hamikdash (Temple), especially to light the Menorah.

The olive branch, alongside the Menorah, is found in the prophecy of Zacharia (4,2-3) in his vision of redemption. This vision is the source for the national symbol of the Modern State of Israel. It is also fitting to be present in our movement's semel.

In addition to the Luchot, the two letters, and the produce, we find in our semel two agricultural implements – **A SCYTHE AND A PITCHFORK**. Contrary to other movements (communist) that draw on their flag the hammer and sickle, which represents agricultural and industrial development, we emphasize only agricultural implements. This is because our ideal society is an agrarian one, where every family in Am Yisrael was allotted a plot of land of their own, forever. And from this land everyone was guaranteed at least a minimal existence. We see in the development of industry a giant step forward for society, which of course potentially enhances the quality of life. Yet we also see the gaps formed in such a society, that is the seed of social strife. Factory owners becoming wealthy and powerful at the expense of the working class; greed on one side and jealousy on the other side, etc. Some how there is a parallel between technological development and advanced weapon systems. Against all this our prophets saw in the end of days “they will turn their swords into plowshares...for no nation will rise up against another nation.”(Isaiah 2,4) Industrial and technological advances must become the sustenance of life, like agriculture.

In an agrarian existence where everyone knows the borders and boundaries of their existence, there is the possibility for internal peace and brotherhood.

We've put on our flag lofty ideals for our chanichim to strive for and to achieve. Our difficult path passes between heaven and earth; the physical world of labor and productivity and the spiritual world of Torah study. National pride and universal social justice are held together in our ethos. Basic simplicity is required in our private lives, alongside our leadership in the rebirth of our nation in a modern, sophisticated society. Our path includes a number of different ideals which counter-balance one another, and rather than creating conflict, should complement one another, in creating a full, complete, ideal, society.