Dear members of the ‘Eretz Hemdah’ family,

May we all flourish spiritually and materially.

We wish the entire Jewish people and our country to continue to plant the values of love of one’s fellow and love of our Land, wherever we may walk.

Pesach 5777 Newsletter

Dear ‘Eretz Hemdah’ family,

The time of freedom has arrived!

Freedom from shibud malchuyot (subjugation to the nations), freedom from enslavement to our physical needs = the war for material survival.

Freedom from the evil inclination!

The joy of freedom can now be tasted on a daily basis, even by laymen, by dedicating significant time to Torah study. Our bid midrash is a place for them, too. We invite the public to participate in our ‘Moreinu’ program, which involves deep study of Halacha in a format suitable for the general public – laymen from all over the world.

Rav Yitzhak Steinberg, the Rosh Kollel of the ‘Eretz Hemdah–Ohel Ari’ Beit Midrash in Ra’anana, and Rav Bezalel Daniel, both of them alumni of ‘Eretz Hemdah,’ under the supervision of ‘Eretz Hemdah’s directors, Rav Moshe Ehrenreich and Rav Yosef Carmel, prepare the textual sources to be studied. The class in Hebrew meets once a week in the ‘Ohel Ari’ beit midrash in Ra’anana and is taught by Rav Steinberg. The class in English, taught by Rav Daniel, will soon get under way in the Jerusalem area. The ‘Moreinu’ beit midrash program is a new addition to the vast amount of Torah material that ‘Eretz Hemdah’ makes accessible to the public, including the Friday beit midrash, the responsa to questions in Hebrew and foreign languages, classes that can be viewed on the website, the weekly ‘Hemdat Yamim’ bulletin in Hebrew and English, and more.

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The full responsum will be published in the following responsum (here abridged) about the possibility of determining a person’s Jewish identity on the basis of a genetic test - and proposes a solution, based on deep Torah scholarship that also involves first-rate scientific research, to a halachic and social problem that has a negative impact on Israeli citizens. The full responsum will be published in ‘Bemareh HaBazak’ IX.

Those who would like to read the full responsum are invited to contact the Institute’s offices by phone or by email.

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Determining Jewish Identity on the Basis of Genetic Testing (Munich, Germany; Tishrei 5773)

**QUESTION**

A woman discovered that she is apparently Jewish, but her grandmother (a Holocaust survivor) refuses to help her and has concealed all evidence that they are Jewish. The granddaughter wants to join the community and observe the Torah, at least as she deems fit, but she is married to a non-Jew who is not interested in converting, making it impossible to convert her. Left helpless, she did a blood test of her mitochondrial DNA, which made it clear that she belongs to a Jewish family on her mother’s side. She even received information so she could try to contact relatives. However, there is no one who can testify to her Jewishness, because all of the relatives linking the families were killed in the Holocaust or passed away a long time ago. Is it possible to rely on this genetic test as evidence so that she may join the Jewish community, as per her request and desire?

**ANSWER**

We begin by noting that in this responsum we will deal in brief with the Halachic status of DNA testing in general and mitochondrial DNA testing in particular.

1. For the purpose of determining Jewishness, a probabilistic majority is acceptable. Some claim that the Sages limited this to a "majority that is not present before us" or to a "majority that is present before us" when there are two "majority" variables; some hold that we can accept a "majority that is present before us" even when there is only one "majority" variable. All opinions hold that a "siman muvhak" (unmistakable sign) is acceptable evidence.

2. The DNA tests employed today can be of very high reliability and so fall into the category of a "siman muvhak" (unmistakable sign) and can serve as acceptable proof of Jewishness. Therefore, if according to this test, performed in an accredited institution, it is clear that a person was born to a Jewish woman, he or she is considered to be Jewish for all intents and purposes.

3. All sequences of mitochondrial DNA are passed down exclusively from the mother to her children. Fathers have no influence on mitochondrial DNA. There is a "majority" that halachically determines whether each person who is Jewish (even if they are insufficient in and of themselves). The presence of a specific sequence in a mitochondrial DNA test as evidence so that she may join the Jewish community, as per her request and desire.

4. Based on the state of current research, it is not possible to consider mitochondrial DNA testing as a "siman muvhak" (unmistakable sign) and can serve as acceptable proof of Jewishness. Therefore, if according to this test, performed in an accredited institution, it is clear that a person was born to a Jewish woman, he or she is considered to be Jewish for all intents and purposes.

5. The detection of one of the sequences mentioned above in §3 by a process that has been used as evidence for the purpose of determining Jewishness based on the "majority" rule when there are additional indications that the person is Jewish (even if they are insufficient in and of themselves).

6. During the horrible Holocaust, countless communities were destroyed. Then and later, the Iron Curtain isolated those in the Soviet Union and its satellites from their Father in Heaven and their Torah-observant brothers and sisters throughout the world. As a result, many European Jews lost the ability to prove their Jewishness because all of the relatives linking the families were killed in the Holocaust or passed away a long time ago. Is it possible to rely on this genetic test as evidence so that she may join the Jewish community, as per her request and desire?
8. Since most Jews do not carry these unique sequences in their mitochondrial DNA, those who undergo this test and do not receive a positive result will not be negatively affected.

We are grateful to Dr. Shai Tsur, Mr. Tzvach Aouizerat, and Dr. Shai Carmi for their extensive assistance in the preparation of the responsum. Special thanks to Prof. Karl (Kalman) Skoretski, director of Medical and Research Development at the Rambam Health Care Campus, formerly the head of the Rappaport Family Institute for Research in the Medical Sciences at the Technion, and one of the pioneers in the study of the Jewish people's unique genetics. Our blessings and gratitude go to the respected Rav Yisrael Birnbaum, head of the Moscow Beit Din, for his halachic cooperation and his enlightening halachic and scientific comments. Many of them are included in the responsum.

Dr. Carmi and Rav Prof. Nathan Keller prepared the mathematical-statistical appendix.

Approbation by our esteemed teacher

Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg

"It is my humble opinion that these appear to be true words and can be depended upon in practice."

Zalman Nechemia Goldberg

Jerusalem Day

At our annual event, we will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation and unification of Jerusalem, thirty years to the founding of ‘Eretz Hemdah,’ and the seventieth birthday of Rav Moshe Ehrenreich. Of his seventy years, he has spent fifty teaching Torah in general and thirty at ‘Eretz Hemdah’ specifically. The event will be held on Wednesday afternoon, Iyar 28th (May 24th), Reservations can be made through the ‘Eretz Hemdah’ office.

The ‘Eretz Hemdah’ Beit Midrash for Training Community Rabbis in Ra’anana

This is the second year of a unique program at the beit midrash that involves working with the teenage boys in the community. Each age group is assigned to one of the avrechim, who organizes an enjoyable program, every other week, which also has added Torah value. In this way, wonderful personal bonds develop between the avrechim and the teens, and joint Torah study groups are formed.

The cross-fertilization between the avrechim and the teens produced something special: these past weeks, the chavrutot have been working together to write Torah articles and were able to publish a small collection of their efforts, "Hemdat Yisrael" (the seventh in the series), with thanks to Hashem (and may there be many more).

This year we began running a similar program for the teenage girls in the community, with the wives of the avrechim.

Eretz Hemdah's Work on Behalf of the Jewish People in the Diaspora

1. We are now in our second year of cooperation with the Montefiore Endowment to enhance the rabbinical training program in London. The alumni of the first class will receive their ordination certificates towards the end of the academic year.

2. A five-year program to train dayanim for service in the Diaspora opened this year, in cooperation with the Montefiore Endowment and the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA). The curriculum will include the laws of marriage, laws of divorce and laws of conversion. A special concentrated five-day seminar will be held this summer in Los Angeles.

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Jerusalem day

This year, as in the past, we will celebrate the unification of Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish Nation. Mark the date on your calendar: Wednesday, Iyar 28th (May 24th)

Have a Happy & Kosher Pesach!

 shlom ha’olam
 yerushalayim

Rabbi Moshe Ehrenreich
Heads of the Institute

Rabbi Yosef Carmel
Chairman of the Board

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IN SWITZERLAND
Verein der Freunde von Eretz Hemdah
Mr. D. Guggenheim
Hesligenstrasse 24, CH-8700 Kusnacht, SWITZERLAND

IN ISRAEL
Donations to ‘Eretz Hemdah’ are tax deductible under Section 46 of Income Tax Ordinance.
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IN SOUTH AFRICA
South African Friends of Eretz Hemdah
Mr. Clive Ginsberg
88 Peglyn Rd., Glenhazel, Johannesburg 2192
SOUTH AFRICA

IN CANADA
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