

**Relevance of the Maimonides Source
in Relation to the Noahide Declaration:**

Dismantling criticism of the Kibbul outside the Land of Israel

Yaacov Amar Rothstein

More information on the [website](http://www.filosofiajudia.com)

www.filosofiajudia.com

Elul 5783

Abstract

The Noahide Declaration (Kibbul) is a vital component of Jewish tradition that often faces criticism from those who maintain that its application is only valid in the Land of Israel. Such confusion is based on a superficial interpretation of various Jewish sources; such as that written by Maimonides in Hilchot Melachim 8:10. A careful examination demonstrates that the Kibbul stated by Maimonides refers to all of humanity, and not exclusively to individuals living in Israel. In this essay we have relied on rabbinic sources that demonstrate how the Kibbul can be performed by mankind, regardless of where one lives. Now that Israel is experiencing a national renaissance, these monotheistic ideals of the Torah have never been more relevant; their influence and blessing extend more than ever to every Noahide who participates in their noble process.

Keywords: Bnei Noah; Noahide Declaration; Filosofía Judía; Kibbul; Maimonides.

Index

1. Dismantling criticism of the Kibbul outside the Land of Israel.....	1
2. Understanding the context of the chapter.....	2
2.1. Kibbul in the context of Maimonides.....	2
2.2. Maimonides and the Universality of the Mitzvot	2
3. The Concept of Kibbul according to Maimonides.....	3
3.1. The text in Hilchot Melachim.....	3
4. Meaning of the term באי העולם in Maimonides.....	4
4.1. The term באי העולם in rabbinic sources.....	6
4.1. Universal scope of the expression באי העולם.....	6
4.2. The judgment of all mankind on Rosh Hashanah	7
4.3. Midrash on the inability of human beings to create life.....	8
4.4. The expression באי העולם in other texts of Maimonides.....	9
4.4.1.Hashem revealed to mankind through the plagues	9
4.4.2.Universal judgment to all mankind	10
5. Conclusions	11
5.1. Maimonides' Perspective on the Kibbul.....	11
5.1.1.Universality of the terminology.....	11
5.1.2.Geographical location.....	12
5.1.3.Use by Maimonides	12
5.2. Relevance of Kibbul and its practice	13
5.2.1.National rebirth of the Jewish People	13
5.2.2.Application of monotheistic ideals.....	14
5.2.3.Bnei Noah and the World to Come.....	14

Relevance of the Maimonides Source with Respect to the Noahide Declaration:

Dismantling criticism of the Kibbul outside the Land of Israel.

In recent decades, we have witnessed the expansion of the Noahide Movement around the world. Many individuals around the globe are becoming interested in adhering to the Noahide Laws without undergoing conversion to Judaism and choosing instead to maintain their Noahide identity, marking a remarkable transformation among contemporary Judaism. In this context, the Jerusalem-based Noahide World Center (Brit Olam) has become increasingly important among emerging Noahide groups around the world. Supported by leading rabbis in Israel¹, Brit Olam has spearheaded efforts to unite sages in Israel and form rabbinical courts to give Noahides the opportunity to perform Kibbul².

Kibbul, being a practice advocated by the leading rabbis of Israel, has not only become a formal part, but has its foundation in various Jewish sources. However, it has also sparked debate on social media about its interpretation and application, leading to discussions about the relevance of Kibbul. Some argue that the Kibbul is only valid in the Land of Israel and not in the Diaspora, so it would not make sense for Noahide outside Israel to make the declaration in a Beit Din³.

¹ Among them, the Chief Rabbis of Israel, Chief Rabbi David B. Lau and the Rishon LeZion Yitzhak Yosef. [Watch video](#).

² Kibbul, in Hebrew קיבול. In English it is known as "Noahide Declaration". The term is due to the fact that the Noahide declares to receive (לקבל) the Noahide Laws in front of a Rabbinical Court.

³ Beit Din is a Rabbinical Court, in this case, composed of three Sages of Israel.

In this article, we will review the arguments that dispute the Halacha mentioned by Maimonides in his work Mishneh Torah concerning the Kibbul¹. Our goal in this article is to bring clarity and perspective to the ongoing debate, illuminating both its role in the practice of Kibbul and its relevance to the modern practice of Kibbul and the processes of formalizing the Noahide who dwells outside the Land of Israel.

Understanding the context of the chapter

Kibbul in the context of Maimonides

In the position that questions the Kibbul, they suggest that Maimonides in this chapter is talking about certain steps that a person must take if he wishes to convert to Judaism; however, neither the chapter nor the Halacha therein specifically addresses the processes of conversion. It is pertinent to clarify the chapter in question in order to understand the idea regarding Kibbul.

Understanding Maimonides' conceptual framework and the role of Kibbul in interactions between Jews and non-Jews requires making these distinctions; otherwise, incorrect analysis will cause a partial understanding and misperception about the concept of Kibbul in Judaism.

Maimonides and the Universality of the Mitzvot

In this chapter, Maimonides begins by discussing wartime actions and provides the context for discussing female prisoners of war², as well as answers on how best to deal with converts in war. Although Maimonides

¹ Hiljot Melajim Umiljamotem 8:10.

² Cf. Babli Kidushin 21b.

touches tangentially on conversions here, his procedures and details do not constitute his main topic since another section of his work deals in depth with this subject¹.

Maimonides stresses² that those who seek conversion must fulfill the Mitzvot just as those who have no intention of converting. That is, Torah law applies equally to both the natural Jew and the convert. This universalistic approach underscores the obligations shared equally between Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, Maimonides goes further by insisting that non-Jews should not be forced to abide by the laws of Israel, emphasizing that they have some degree of religious autonomy.

The Concept of Kibbul according to Maimonides

The text in Hilchot Melachim

As part of this article, we will conduct an in-depth examination of Maimonides' source on Kibbul. Our exploration will aim to understand Maimonides' intentions in mentioning the Halacha on Kibbul; therefore, in order to gain a complete understanding, it is imperative that we place ourselves within his conceptual framework to understand his thinking regarding Kibbul. Maimonides' text reads as follows:

וכן צוה משה רבנו מפי הגבורה לכך את כל באי העולם לקבל מצות שנצטוו
בני נח. וכל מי שלא יקבל יהרג. והמקבל אותם הוא הנקרא גר תושב בכל
מקום. וצריך לקבל עליו בפני שלשה חברים³.

¹ Themes concerning proselytes are dealt with at length in Isurei Bia.

² Ibid.

³ Three *Chaverim*, שלשה חברים, are three Sages of Israel. Vid. Maimonides in Mishnah Demai 2:3.

Translation¹:

By the same regard, Moses was commanded by the Almighty to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept the commandments given to Noah's descendants. If one does not accept these commands, he should be executed. A person who formally accepts these commands is called a resident alien. This applies in any place². This acceptance must be made in the presence of three Torah scholars.

In this translation it is understood that Kibbul is to be performed by all the inhabitants of the world. Still, with this text in hand and in order to ascertain whether Maimonides was referring specifically to Noahides living in the Land of Israel, we propose to undertake a detailed examination of the term בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם (*Baei HaOlam*). This analysis should not be taken lightly, as a particular term can have far-reaching ramifications for our understanding of Maimonides' works within their contemporary context. At its core lies a fundamental question that we must address: whether "בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם" refers to humanity in general regardless of place of residence; or rather whether its meaning can only apply to individuals living in Israel, a striking distinction with potential implications for Halachic application.

Meaning of the term בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם in Maimonides.

The position of those who believe that Maimonides' reference to Kibbul being performed only within the boundaries of the Land of Israel can be understood from a superficial interpretation of the term בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם

¹ Translation by Rabbi Touger, E. (2007). *Mishneh Torah*. Moznaim, Jerusalem.

² Brauner in his translation of *Hilchot Melachim* (2012) notes that the intention here is that a "Resident Convert" is allowed to live anywhere in the Land of Israel.

in Hebrew; which literally translated could mean "those who come from the world." This suggests geographic mobility of non-Jews to Israel.

In linguistic terms¹ it could be explained in the following way:

They come = באים

The world = העולם

By taking both nouns, we get the construct state²:

Those who come from the world = באי העולם

The critics of Kibbul propose that Maimonides' use of the expression "באי העולם" was intended to refer to non-Jews from all parts of the world who have decided to migrate from their countries of origin to settle in the Land Israel, that it refers to "those who come from the world" to settle in Israel. According to this scenario, Kibbul then becomes an act reserved exclusively for those non-Jews who wish to make the Land of Israel their home³.

However, while this interpretation may seem compelling at first glance, its validity falters when examined through the lens of rabbinic literature. When examined in its broadest and deepest context, the expression "באי העולם" does not strictly refer to those who "*come from the world*". Instead, its scope encompasses more than geography or

¹ Azar, M. (1985). Classification of constructions in juxtaposition. R. Nir (Ed.), *Academic teaching of contemporary Hebrew*, Proceedings of workshop 1 (pp. 1-6). Jerusalem.

² In Hebrew this grammatical structure is known as "Semichut" and consists of two words, usually nouns, placed next to each other to form a unit. The first word is the nucleus and the second one acts as an adjunct.

³ This mere interpretation of Maimonides' writing is clearly erroneous since, throughout his work, Maimonides emphasizes the counterproductive implication of non-Jews migrating to the Land of Israel to settle there. See explanation of the Magid Mishneh and Minchat Chinuch on Hilchot Avodah Zarah 10.

displacement alone. Therefore, our analysis will now focus on understanding this nuance for an accurate understanding of the words Maimonides used in the law of Kibbul.

The term באי העולם in rabbinic sources.

Universal scope of the expression באי העולם

In this section, we will conduct an in-depth examination of different rabbinic sources that employ the term "באי העולם". Our aim will be to illustrate and show how such an expression transcends simple geographical migration to Israel. In exploring this corpus of textual material, we will find that the expression באי העולם has a broader usage and denotes referring often to humanity in general.

This analysis is intended to refute a narrow interpretation that suggests that Kibbul refers only to non-Jews who leave their homeland to settle in the Land of Israel. Rabbinic sources will show us a more universalized perspective of the term in question. In concluding this analysis, our goal is for readers to be able to recognize, based on textual evidence, that באי העולם has been consistently employed to describe all of humanity without restricting itself only to a particular group or migration to Israel. This essential nuance not only clarifies Maimonides' words, but also illuminates an intricate legislative tradition within rabbinic thought regarding the Kibbul.

The judgment of all mankind on Rosh Hashanah

As part of our analysis, we will begin by delving into the Mishnah Rosh Hashanah¹. This Mishnah is particularly noteworthy, as its central theme revolves around Hashem exercising judgment on all aspects of creation during Rosh Hashanah. In this quotation it is mentioned that "On four occasions the world is judged", four different types of divine judgment are mentioned, one of which is related to agriculture, while others refer directly to mankind.

The Mishnah says:

בְּרֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן

On Rosh Hashanah, all creatures pass before Him like sheep

This analogy suggests that we are speaking here of all human beings collectively and globally; not only of geographical limitations or specific groups, but of all of humanity as a complete entity.

To further emphasize this point, it is important to mention that, on this same statement of the Mishnah, the Talmud² engages in a deeper dialogue on this issue and refers to a judgment that encompasses all of humanity without distinction or prejudice. Thus, through the interaction between the Mishnah and the Talmud, it becomes evident that their reference signifies an inclusive perspective that embraces all human beings equally and not only those who dwell in the Land of Israel.

¹ Chapter 1, Mishnah 2.

² Babli Rosh Hashanah 16.

Midrash on the inability of human beings to create life

Among other sources, we find a particularly insightful midrash on creation and life itself. Rabbi Elazar bar Zimra proposes the following thought experiment based on the quote from "*And the souls they made in Haran*"¹ saying:

אם מתכנסין כל באי העולם לברא אפלו יתוש אחד אינן יכולין לזרק בו נשמה
ואת אמר ואת הנפש אשר עשו

If all the inhabitants of the world were to gather to create even a single gnat, they would not be able to infuse a soul into it. Yet it says, '*And the souls they made*'

Rabbi Elazar bar Zimra affirms that not even all the inhabitants of the world gathered together could bestow upon a single gnat the vital spark that defines its existence. The passage "*And the souls they made*" reminds us of Hashem's vastness and the mystery surrounding His creation, thus highlighting His greatness and omnipotence.

In this context, the expression באי העולם ("all the inhabitants of the world") powerfully underscores that no human endeavor could match Hashem's miraculous work in creating life while highlighting the universality of humanity, making it clear that this midrash refers to all human beings, regardless of their origin or location.

Moreover, the historical geography further underscores this point². The city of Haran was not part of Israel, so when Abraham is mentioned outside of Israel it indicates that Abraham is reflecting on creation and life

¹ Genesis 12:5.

² Halévy, J. (1874). *Mélanges d'Epigraphie et d'Archéologie Sémitiques* (pp. 72-85). Paris.

outside of its geographical boundaries and touching on all of humanity as a whole. It thus provides tangible proof that the expression in question applies globally, and does not refer only to the inhabitants of the Land of Israel.

The expression באי העולם in other texts of Maimonides.

Hashem revealed to mankind through the plagues

In exploring Maimonides' extensive work, we find an intriguing use of "באי העולם" in his monumental compendium of laws. Maimonides discusses the issue of Pharaoh's hardened heart, providing us with a discussion that offers insight into the analysis of language. He writes¹:

"ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתיד". כדי להודיע לבאי העולם שבזמן שמונע הקדוש ברוך הוא התשובה לחוטא אינו יכול לשוב אלא ימות ברשעו שעשה בתחלה ברצונו.

"For this alone, I have preserved you"² to make known to all the inhabitants of the world that when the Holy One, blessed be He, withholds repentance from a sinner, he cannot repent, but he will die in the wickedness that he initially committed willfully.

That is, Maimonides pointed to this verse in Exodus as proof of Hashem's reasoning for keeping Pharaoh by His side even after all his transgressions. It was used to demonstrate this fact and the hardening of

¹ Hilchot Teshuva 6:3.

² Exodus 9:16, "For this alone, I have preserved you, so that My name will be spoken about throughout the earth". We see that this verse also alludes to the whole land and not just the geographical boundaries of Israel.

Pharaoh's heart had an educational purpose¹: to show all the inhabitants of the land, mankind itself, an important lesson about repentance and Divine justice. If Hashem were to deny someone the attempt to repent despite efforts, that person would ultimately die within his sinful behavior.

Recall that Maimonides insisted in this same fragment that this event occurred in Egypt -not Israel-² and used באי העולם (which clearly means humanity) to describe a lesson intended for all human beings and not just the residents of Israel. This supports the idea that this term refers more generally to mankind and not just to residents of Israel.

Universal judgment to all mankind

Maimonides also leads us to consider again the term באי העולם in another text in the laws of repentance. This section³ deals with divine judgment, both at the time of death, and annually on Rosh Hashanah:

וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁשׁוֹקֵלִין זְכוֹת אָדָם וְעוֹנוֹתָיו בְּשַׁעַת מִיתָתוֹ כִּד בְּכֹל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה שׁוֹקֵלִין
עוֹנוֹת כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מִבְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עִם זְכוֹתָיו בְּיוֹם טוֹב שֶׁל רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה

Just as a person's merits and sins are weighed at the time of his death, so, too, the sins of every inhabitant of the world together with his merits are weighed on the festival of Rosh Hashanah.

Maimonides states in that text that just as an individual's merits and sins are evaluated at the time of his death, so too are his sins evaluated with

¹ Polonsky, P. (2020). The Seventh Plague: Hail. in *Bible Dynamics: Evolving Personalities and Ideas*. Vol. 2 Exodus (p. 175). Orot Yerushalaim.

² There Maimonides writes "לישראל הגרים בארצו", "to Israel living in their [Pharaoh's] land". In this sense, it is clear that the expression באי העולם would not apply to those who dwell in the Land of Israel since the events narrated are taking place in the land of Egypt.

³ Ibid. 3:3.

his merits on Rosh Hashanah. It is noteworthy how Maimonides adheres to the lexicon of Jewish tradition by employing the expression באי העולם to refer to "every inhabitant of the world" broadly and globally.

This quote fits perfectly with what has been discussed above about the Rosh Hashanah Mishnah readings¹. Maimonides stays loyal to the traditional language of the Sages of Israel when speaking of the Mishnah of Rosh Hashanah readings, aligned with tradition, he indicates that באי העולם refers to all of humanity without distinction geographically or otherwise. This is further confirmation from Maimonides, like most of the rabbinic tradition, where the term "באי העולם" is used globally confirming our understanding that all of humanity will face universal judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

Conclusions

Maimonides' Perspective on the Kibbul

We have gone through a wide range of texts that explore Maimonides' use of the term באי העולם and can make some important observations about its meaning and use in rabbinic literature.

Universality of the terminology

The term באי העולם (the inhabitants of the world) has come to be understood on multiple occasions to mean "all the people of the world"². This expression has its roots in Jewish tradition, but it is not limited only to

¹ See page 7.

² It is worth mentioning the German translation by L. Mandelstamm (1851), corrected and edited by I. Itkin, where he translates באי העולם literally as *alle Menschen*.

those living in Israel, but refers to humanity in general, regardless of geography.

Geographical location

It is crucial to realize that the common Jewish sources that use the expression באי העולם do not focus solely on Israel; rather, their texts cover various settings outside of Israel and include stories and lessons that occurred elsewhere¹. As we saw, Haran and Egypt are examples where this expression was applied beyond Israel's borders.

Use by Maimonides

Maimonides expands on his thinking about the universality of the Torah elsewhere in his work Mishneh Torah. As a legislator and philosopher, he was known to use his terminology consistently and accurately throughout his volumes of Halacha. On several occasions in his text, he used the term באי העולם, always in reference to mankind²:

Trial: Maimonides reinforces this idea regarding Rosh Hashanah and emphasizing the fact that all the inhabitants of the world will be judged during this holy day.

¹ Many other sources use this expression to refer to mankind in general, e.g. Yerushalmi Shabbat 14 where it says that all of mankind (באי עולם) is compared to a mole, in Netzach Israel 38 brings a midrash where it says that at three times mankind (באי עולם) argued with Hashem (at the tower of Babel etc), in Midrash Tanchuma Vaetchanan 4 it speaks of Moses teaching באי עולם and being that Moses did not enter the land of Israel etc. among several other quotations that we do not mention in this article, the idea is clear.

² He also uses the term באי העולם in Hilchot Shmita VeYovel 13 explaining that every human being can dedicate himself to serve Hashem. This Halacha is also quoted by Rabbi Oury Cherki in Brit Shalom 11:17, concerning service to Hashem by a Noahide.

Empowerment: Emphasizes the inherent capacity of each individual, regardless of age or background, to dedicate himself and seek a closer connection with Hashem.

Lesson: Maimonides' discussion of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart serves not simply to recall biblical accounts, but to convey an important lesson that transcends nations, generations, and geography.

Maimonides' terminology and its context within the rabbinic tradition allow us to get a clear and complete picture. The expression used, באי העולם (all humanity), captures not just a part of humanity¹, but all aspects of humanity, reflecting both Torah teachings and rabbinic perspectives on the inherent relationship between God and all human beings.

Relevance of Kibbul and its practice

Kibbul is of vital importance to today's generation for several fundamental reasons that reflect both contemporary dynamics and traditional approaches to Judaism. At a time when the Jewish national renaissance is manifest, understanding Kibbul and its scope is more essential than ever; here is an outline of its relevance.

National rebirth of the Jewish People

Since the rebirth of the State of Israel, we have witnessed a resurgence of the ideals of the Jewish People on a universal level. This resurgence has strengthened the bonds between Jews around the world,

¹ The idea that the Kibbul mentioned by Maimonides refers to non-Jews migrating to Israel has no representation in the Jewish tradition. The claim that "a non-Jew who goes to settle in Israel" is not mentioned, neither in the text itself, nor in any of the main commentators of Rambam: neither Kesef Mishneh, nor HaRadbaz, nor Lechem Mishneh, nor Migdal Oz, nor Hagahot Maimoniot, etc.

while giving them a renewed sense of identity and purpose. Therefore, understanding the Kibbul becomes essential.

Application of monotheistic ideals

With spirituality and authenticity regaining popularity in contemporary society, the monotheistic ideals of the Torah offer guidance and enlightenment. These ideals not only speak to belief in one God, but also embrace ethics, justice and fairness in human interactions, making integrating them even more vital than before in today's challenging environment of conflict and moral turbulence.

Bnei Noah and the World to Come

According to Jewish tradition, Noahides play a crucial role in the integrative vision of Judaism. The Noahide Laws extend the divine connection to all who follow the ways that were passed down through the oral tradition of the Jewish People for millennia, which is especially poignant in our globalized world where cultures and beliefs increasingly collide.

By joining this process, every Noahide can strengthen his or her personal bond with Hashem, while contributing to building a world of justice and morality. Active participation in this monotheistic path is not only rewarding for Noahides, but for all of humanity.

The broad tradition and principles of Kibbul make it an indispensable component, not only of Judaism, but also for all of humanity. It proves to be a guide for all those who seek purpose and meaning in life. Even in our modern age, its relevance cannot be denied, as it provides a vision of a world centered on ethics, justice and divine connection, ideals that underpin its foundational value for future generations.