
BE KILLED BUT DO NOT TRANSGRESS

(The “three cardinal sins” of Judaism, which usually sanctify human life, require a person to be ready to give up his life and not to transgress the three sins.)

The beginning of negotiations between Israel and West Germany was initiated by a claim filed with the great powers by the Israeli government on March 12, 1951, and ended with the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1965.¹ Relations were achieved despite the fact that Ben Gurion had not sought an agreement with Germany at the beginning of the negotiations. Ben Gurion’s purpose in filing the claim was to make Germany extend economic aid to Israel—which it desperately needed—without evoking a public dialogue about a possible agreement. The funds he sought were referred to as “reparations,” testimony of Israel’s desire for revenge and not for making amends. One of the interpretations of the word “reparations” is “revenge,” as it is written in Deuteronomy.² “We will not permit that our murderers will also be our inheritors,” Ben Gurion explained in his decision.³ When filing the claim against Germany, Begin estimated that it would be possible to receive reparations without direct negotiations and thus joined the claim’s supporters—including members of Mapam, Hapoel Hamizrachi, and Mapai—and even saw it as reclaiming “the nation’s dignity.”⁴

However, West Germany’s first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, set as his goal the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel in order to regain international legitimacy for his country. Ben Gurion, encouraged