



# **Project Ben-Yehuda: Current Challenges & Legal Issues**

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**Part 1 –  
About Project Ben-Yehuda**

[www.benyehuda.org](http://www.benyehuda.org)

# What is Project Ben-Yehuda?

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- ◎ **Creating and maintaining a free for use, volunteer-based, online library of Hebrew literature**
  - **Diverse Genres:** prose, poetry, drama, articles, essays, letters, translations, etc.
  - **Free:** for any use, including commercial use; mostly public domain, not copyrighted.
  - **Volunteer-Based:** all texts are produced and edited by volunteers.
- ◎ **Founded in 1999, inspired by the English “Project Gutenberg”**

# Why is the Project Necessary?

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- ◎ Books –
  - Physical and perishable
  - Bound by supply and demand rules
  - Lack of financial incentive – prevents public access to the full corpus of Hebrew writings
- ◎ Libraries –
  - Withdraw books from their collections
  - Libraries abroad - limited inventory
  - Disadvantaged social groups - limited access to resources
- ◎ Preservation institutions / government –
  - Unable [and /or uninterested] to do the work needed
- ◎ Advanced research –
  - dependent on digital availability

# The Solution:

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**A free digital library of Hebrew literature!**

- ◉ Unlimited, free access
- ◉ Unlimited space, minimal storage costs
- ◉ Backup and content preservation
- ◉ Available for digital or mechanized processing
- ◉ Gradual expansion of the database, no timetable
- ◉ On-line management of volunteers and logistics

# How, Exactly..?

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- ◉ Bibliographic research
- ◉ Scanning
- ◉ Typing
- ◉ Proofreading
- ◉ Layout & web upload
  
- ◉ Collaborations
- ◉ Lecturing
- ◉ Fundraising

**All done by volunteers!**

# What do we work on first?

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- ◉ Public domain texts
- ◉ Copyrighted texts - about to expire in the next 3 years
- ◉ Copyrighted texts - with special permission to use
- ◉ Requests from the public
- ◉ Public preferences
- ◉ Positive Discrimination - emphasis on women writers

# November 2012 Snapshot

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- ◎ Over 8000 works by over 250 authors
- ◎ About 200 \*active\* volunteers
- ◎ Over 1000 volunteers since 1999
- ◎ 3 chief editors
- ◎ And -- 500,000 hits per month!
  
- ◎ Our volunteers come from all age groups and vocations
  - More women than men
  - More text-intensive professions (librarians, translators, editors, typists, etc)



# Our Youngest Volunteer in Action!

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# Who Benefits from the project?

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- ◉ Teachers, lecturers and students; cited as a source in both syllabi and academic papers
- ◉ Musicians and artists - choose texts to compose, perform or simply for inspiration
- ◉ Editors and translators
- ◉ Language lab
- ◉ But most importantly - simply people, the public at large, not only in Israel but around the world

# Project Ben-Yehuda: A Success Story

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- ◉ Main Goals achieved - preservation, accessibility and exposure
- ◉ Unique achievements - compiling or publishing texts for the first time
- ◉ Strong presence in the Hebrew internet community and academic world - collaborations with NLI, Wikipedia, scholars and researchers
- ◉ Enabling new research in Hebrew
- ◉ New volunteers on a weekly basis without PR
- ◉ Generating good will and inspiration

And it's only 13 years old.. 😊



**Part 2 –  
With Success Comes  
Responsibility:  
Current Challenges and  
Legal Issues**

# Conceptual Challenges

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- ◉ Unintentional creation of a new Hebrew literary canon
- ◉ Non religious texts
- ◉ Non academic project

## Solutions:

- Better definition of the project and its scope
- Growing collaborations with the academic community – lectures, women writers project

# Operational Challenges

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- ◎ Technology enhancements –
  - Tasks management system – volunteers & editors
  - Project Ben-Yehuda main site – all users
  - Semantic, rich database
- ◎ Texts Accessibility & Exposure -
  - More volunteers - more texts
  - Exposure via lectures and collaborations
  - Exposure via social media – blog, FB, YouTube
- ◎ Fundraising –
  - technological solutions
  - Compilation projects
  - Exposure projects

# Our YouTube Channel



אסף ברטוב על הפרויקט וכינוס ...  
68 צפיות | לפני חודש



ד"ר אבשלום אליצור על פרויקט ב...  
94 צפיות | לפני חודש



פרופ' נורית גוברין על פרויקט בן-י...  
37 צפיות | לפני חודש



11/11 - מתנדבים מספרים על פר...  
63 צפיות | לפני חודש



10/11 - מתנדבים מספרים על פר...  
51 צפיות | לפני חודש



שמואל אבנרי - "ביאליק של נתינ...  
177 צפיות | לפני חודש

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ProjectBenYehuda>

# Legal Challenges

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Israeli Copyrights law +  
Libraries "weeding out" collections +  
No financial incentive

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**A huge portion of the Hebrew Corpus is  
unavailable, simply non-existent.**

## Solutions –

- ◉ Getting special permissions to publish copyrighted texts from copyright holders
- ◉ Efforts to publish texts that haven't been published yet
- ◉ Copyright status can be ambiguous; an intractable status of some authors' corpora copyright; pseudonyms → working to change the Israeli law



# Final Words from our National Poet...

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What Bialik inferred in 1921 is still relevant today –

“All this important work – that of Education and Literature – depended on the volunteer work of individuals.”

”כל העבודה החשובה הזו – עבודת החינוך והספרות –  
היתה תלויה בהתנדבותם של יחידים.”  
(חנ”ב, ”על התרבות העברית”, תרפ”א)

<http://benyehuda.org/bialik/dvarim06.html>

**Thank You for Listening!**

**Shani Evenstein**

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