

*Rega Shel Ivrit - רגע של עברית - By Ori Nir*  
*Hitkansut - התכנסות - Convergence*

To underscore the unilateral nature of their withdrawal plans, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and incoming Prime Minister Ehud Olmert have chosen reflexive Hebrew verbs, verbs that denote an action one performs upon oneself. The verb-form “hitpa’el” **התפּעל** often has a reflexive meaning.

Sharon’s plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip was tokhnit ha-hitnatkut **תּכּנית ההתנתקות**, (loosely translated into English as the “disengagement plan”), derived from the root n.t.k. **נ.ת.ק.**, (to sever or to cut oneself off something).

Olmert chose hitkansut **התכנסות**, loosely translated into English as “convergence.” A more accurate English translation would be “ingathering” or “coalescing.” I am now told that some Israeli officials prefer an altogether different English term: “realignment.”

No English translation could convey the layers of historic, cultural and religious connotations of the Hebrew root k.n.s. **כ.נ.ס.**

In biblical Hebrew, the root was mainly used to denote entering into somewhere or something (kanas **כּנס**), bringing something or someone in, or gathering many individuals (kines **כּנס**). Only later, was this root conjugated in other “binyanim,” and produced an abundance of nouns.

The most recognizable noun worldwide, even among non-Hebrew speakers, is of course the Knesset **כּנסת**, Israel’s parliament, named after Knesset ha-Gdolah **כּנסת הגדולה**, the “large assembly,” which was the supreme governing body of halachic legislators (around 500 BC). Beit kneset **בית כּנסת** is of course a synagogue. In medieval Hebrew, there was no distinction between beit kneset and knessiya **כּניסה**. Both were used for synagogue. Today, knessiya denotes only a Christian church.

When the Jewish yishuv in pre-Israel Palestine started to organize in the early 1920s, its chief governing bodies were called Knesset Yisrael **כּנסת ישראל**.

K.n.s **כ.נ.ס.** has become very well rooted in modern Hebrew. Lehakhnis **להכניס** is to put in or push in or insert. Knissah **כּניסה** is entrance (ein knissah **אין כּניסה** is no entrance), Hakhnasah **הכּנסה** is income, and mas hakhnasah **מס הכּנסה**, accordingly, is the income tax which Israelis despise. Israelis believe that they pay a higher proportion of income tax than any other nation. The verb hikhnis **הכּניס** is ubiquitous in Hebrew slang. It can mean sending someone to prison, beating up someone (lehakhnis makot) and it is also has a

crude sexual meaning. In Ruvik Rosental's new dictionary of Israeli slang, I counted 18 expressions involving lehakhnis.

So what does hitkansut **הִתְכַּנְּסוּת** mean? Originally, in medieval Hebrew, hitkansut was an assembly, a gathering, a usage that is still valid today. When Israelis gather today for a rally or a meeting, the speaker will open by saying: "hitkanasnu po hayom..." (we have gathered here today...). But in modern Hebrew, hitkansut can also mean to withdraw into oneself, it carries a certain flavor of isolationism – whether individual or collective – a porcupine-like withdrawal in defiance.

In choosing that term, Olmert articulated a contemporary, current national state of mind. He connected with strong sentiments among Israeli voters, and won the election. He did so by using a root that is – well - deeply-rooted in Jewish tradition. By doing that, he subtly laid a foundation of traditional acceptance for his revolutionary plan to unilaterally withdraw from most of the West Bank. But how Israeli politicians are considered to be statesmen by voters? Regrettably, not even a select handful among the chosen ones.