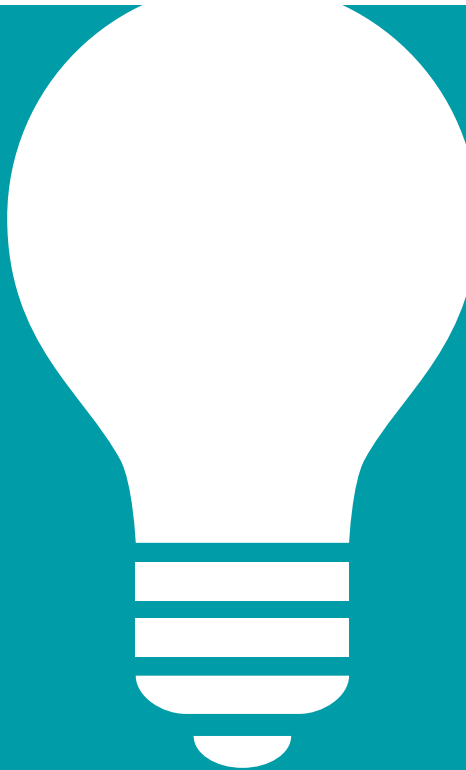


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WESTERN WALL

הַכּוֹתֵל הַמַּעֲרָבִי



The Western Wall, known as the Kotel, is revered as the holiest site for the Jewish people. A part of the outer retaining wall of the Second Temple that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, it is the place closest to the ancient Holy of Holies, where only the Kohanim—כֹּהֲנִים—Jewish priests were allowed access. When Israel gained independence in 1948, Jordan controlled the Western Wall and all of the Old City of Jerusalem; the city was reunified in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Western Wall is considered an Orthodox synagogue by Israeli authorities, with separate prayer spaces for men and women. A mixed egalitarian prayer area operates along a nearby section of the Temple's retaining wall, raising to the forefront contemporary ideas of religious expression—a prime example of how Israel navigates between past and present.



Every Israeli city has an open-air market, or shuk, where vendors sell everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to clothing, appliances, and souvenirs. There's no other place that feels more authentically Israeli than a shuk on Friday afternoon, as seemingly everyone shops for Shabbat. Drawn by the freshness and variety of produce, Israelis and tourists alike flock to the shuk, turning it into a microcosm of the country. Shuks in smaller cities and towns operate just one day per week, while larger markets often play a key role in the city's cultural life. At night, after the vendors go home, Machaneh Yehuda—מַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה—Jerusalem's shuk, turns into the city's nightlife hub. Artists have painted the shutters of shops with portraits of heroes of Israel and the Jewish people, turning the alleyways into an outdoor after-hours museum.



SECURITY BARRIER

גִּזְרֵי הַבְּטָחוֹן



In 2002, in response to terror attacks from the West Bank, Israel built a barrier separating Israeli and Palestinian populations, dramatically decreasing the number of attacks. About 95% of the barrier is barbed-wire fencing with a dirt path on each side; in highly populated areas, the barrier is a solid concrete wall. Many Palestinians say the barrier causes great hardship, cutting people off from school, work, or family. In response to multiple petitions, Israel's High Court ordered the government to alter the route of the barrier in many locations to ease the burden on the Palestinians. The Security Barrier encapsulates one of the ever-present tensions that exist in Israel.



MOUNT HERZL

הַר הַרְצֵל



Mount Herzl provides a moving example of how a young country creates national monuments. Established in 1951, Mt. Herzl is Israel's national cemetery and the final resting place of many of the country's leaders, heroes, and fallen soldiers. Here you'll find the graves of Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and others including Theodor Herzl, the father of Modern Zionism. Other monuments and memorials pay tribute to victims of terror, and to all who gave their lives for the State. Also known as Har HaZikaron—הַר הַזִּיקָרוֹן—Mount of Memory, Mt. Herzl is adjacent to Yad Vashem, the National Holocaust Memorial, at the western edge of Jerusalem, and a footpath connects the two sites. Mt. Herzl is one of many military cemeteries that exist throughout the country, reflecting a reality unique to Israel and an integral part of the Israeli experience.



YAD VASHEM

יָד וָשֵׁם



Yad Vashem, Israel's National Holocaust Memorial, derives its name from the Book of Isaiah, that vows not to forget the dead. Renowned for its research and ongoing effort to compile the names of victims of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem tells an unabashedly Jewish story of the collective tragedy that befell the Jewish people. Established in 1953 and rebuilt in 2005, the museum overlooks the Jerusalem Hills, which play a central role in preserving Jewish memory. Yad Vashem places an emphasis on sharing the stories of aging survivors and provides a narrative that is filled with hope for the future, signifying the will of the Jews to survive and thrive.



INDEPENDENCE HALL

בֵּית הָעֵצָמָאוֹת



Originally the home of Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, this building served as Tel Aviv's art museum when the government-in-the-making needed a place for the declaration of statehood. Four hundred invited dignitaries crammed into the central hall to listen to David Ben-Gurion read the declaration and the Palestine Orchestra play Hatikvah. Though this event, which took place on May 14th, 1948, hours before the British Mandate ended, was kept "secret," Rothschild Blvd. was packed with thousands of people who had heard rumors and wanted to witness history in the making. Today, visitors can hear a recording of Ben-Gurion reading the Declaration of Independence, which sets forth the aspirational goals upon which the Jewish State was founded.



MASADA

מצדה



Masada offers a compelling place to consider notions of Jewish sovereignty, self determination, and the sanctity of human life. A large fortress overlooking the Dead Sea in Southern Israel, Masada was built by King Herod in the 30s BCE. Approximately 100 years later, Jewish zealots fled to Masada after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. They lived there until the Roman siege in 73 CE, when, according to the account of Josephus Flavius, their lives ended in a mass suicide. Today, Masada is the third most visited site in Israel, and it has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You can hike up the Snake Path or the Roman Path, or ride a cable car to the top to watch the sunrise and view the remains of the ancient fortress, complete with a bathhouse—remarkable when you consider its location atop a mountain in the middle of the desert!



KNESSET

כנסת



Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has 120 members and is located in Jerusalem. Modeled on the ancient governing body, HaKnesset HaGedolah, the modern Knesset operates as a parliamentary democracy similar to those found in many European countries. Knesset debates tackle the issues and ideas that matter most to the public, often reflecting the tension involved in finding the balance between being a Jewish and a democratic state. Knesset members are chosen through democratic elections open to all citizens of Israel over the age of 18. Any party that passes a minimum threshold of votes gains representation in the Knesset. No party has ever won a majority 61 seats out of 120, so multiple parties must form a coalition to create a majority government. This system gives disproportionate power to small parties.



THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

הָעִיר הָעֶתִיקָה



Measuring just a third of a square mile, the area inside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem is divided into four quarters: Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian. The Old City is also home to some of the most sacred sites in the world for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, including the Western Wall, the Temple Mount/Haram el Sharif, Al Aksa Mosque, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Stations of the Cross, and more. The majority of the nearly 40,000 people who live in the Old City are Muslims, followed by about 7,000 Christians, 4,500 Jews, and less than 1,000 Armenians. Living in—and often beyond—their quarters, replete with so much history on constant display, the intertwined lives of the residents seem to embody the layers of history on which today's neighborhoods are built.



NEVE TZEDEK

נְוֵה צְדֵק



Today it's a trendy neighborhood in the southern part of Tel Aviv, but Neve Tzedek has a storied past. In 1887, a few Jewish families of Middle Eastern and North African descent established this community after leaving the overcrowded conditions in nearby Jaffa. Early on, Neve Tzedek was home to artists and writers, including S.Y. Agnon and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. In 1909, after Tel Aviv was established to the north, those who could afford to relocate to the “big city” did so, and Neve Tzedek fell into a state of urban decay. Faced with the choice of demolishing or renovating in the 1960s, the Tel Aviv municipality opted to rehabilitate the area. Today, a mix of charming old restored buildings and ultra-modern high-rises make it one of the most sought after neighborhoods in the city, and residents include international financiers like Roman Abramovich and film star Gal Gadot.



RABIN SQUARE

פְּנַר רַבִּין



The central plaza outside of Tel Aviv City Hall is named in honor of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated after a peace rally that took place there on November 4th, 1995. Formerly known as פְּנַר מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל—Kikar Malchei Yisrael—Kings of Israel Square, many gatherings, events, concerts, and rallies take place there throughout the year, notably a main exhibit of Israel’s National Hebrew Book Week. In recent years, the facade of City Hall, prominently visible from nearly anywhere in the square, has turned into a screen for large projected images that show solidarity with other countries in times of need, or highlight whimsical themes like giant Tetris games. The large, stark stone plaza embodies Israel’s commitment to democracy and free speech, as well as the ongoing challenge a young nation faces in balancing these core values.



ROTHSCHILD BOULEVARD

שְׂדֵרוֹת רוֹטְשְׁוִילְד



Originally named רְחוֹב הָעָם—Rehov Ha'am (Street of the People), Rothschild Boulevard is one of the oldest streets in Tel Aviv, dating back to the city's founding in 1909. The tree-lined center of the wide boulevard has walking and bike paths, as well as kiosks that sell some of the best coffee around. The street, renamed in honor of Baron Edmond James de Rothschild, has some of the city's most beautiful Bauhaus-style architecture, and has been the scene of seminal moments in Israel's history, from the establishment of the State at Independence Hall to the growth of Israel's financial and high-tech sectors, both of which are represented in preserved old buildings and modern skyscrapers. At the heart of the social protest movement, when Israelis pitched tents along the street and demanded lower housing prices, Rothschild Blvd. continues to bear witness to monumental moments in Israel's journey.



ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL

שְׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל



The Israel National Trail, which winds 600 miles from Kibbutz Dan in the north to the southernmost city of Eilat, offers a challenging and refreshing way to encounter Biblical sites, modern scenes, and nature in all its glory. The trail traverses mountains, plains, and multiple climatic zones, and many Israelis set out to hike its entirety over a period of weeks, months, or even years. From the earliest days of building the State, Israelis have loved the land and strived to engage with it in tangible ways. The chalutzim—חֲלוּצִים—pioneers stressed the importance of farming the land, and today, hundreds of thousands of people take advantage of holidays and long weekends to hike and sightsee in nature.



THE MANY FACES OF ISRAEL

פְּנִיִּים רַבּוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

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ETHIOPIAN ISRAELIS

ישראלים מאתיופיה



Most of the 125,000+ Israelis who trace their origins to Ethiopia either made aliyah since the mid-1980s or were born in Israel to immigrant parents. Ethiopians can be found across Israeli society—from Members of Knesset and army officers to doctors, teachers, and activists. The annual Sigd festival, marking the day they believe God revealed Himself to Moses at Mt. Sinai, takes place 50 days after Yom Kippur and has been added to Israel's official calendar. A memorial at Mt. Herzl commemorates those who died on the harrowing journey from Ethiopia to Israel; their memory is marked on Yom Yerushalayim in honor of the central place Jerusalem held in Ethiopian Jews' lives for centuries. Their traditional delicacies are featured in restaurants around the country, where airy injera bread is used to scoop meat, beans, and vegetables from communal plates.



ISRAELIS FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

יִשְׂרָאֵלִים מִבְּרִית הַמוֹעָצוֹת לְשֶׁעֶבֶר



Some one million Israelis trace their origins to the mass immigration from the Former Soviet Union in the 1990s, joining those who made aliyah in the 1970s, making them the largest ethnic community among Israeli Jews. Many are not considered Jewish according to Israel's Interior Ministry; they were granted citizenship under the Law of Return due to their Jewish heritage. Broadly referred to as "Russians," they can be found in every part of society, including politics, law, media, academia, and more. Many continue to embrace their language and culture: the Gesher Theater highlights Russian culture, restaurants feature their cuisine, and prominent politicians champion a secular, super-patriotic form of Israeli-Jewish identity. Indeed, no other immigrant community in Israel's history has challenged the status quo on issues of religion and state as much as they have.



MOROCCAN ISRAELIS

יִשְׂרָאֵלִים יוֹצְאֵי מְרוֹקוֹ



As hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated to Israel in the early years after independence, the largest number came from Morocco. Jews had lived in this North African country for centuries, and many had close relations with their Muslim neighbors. However, in the aftermath of 1948, fearing for their safety and drawn by the promise of a better future as part of the Zionist enterprise, Moroccans settled in Israel. Moroccan Jews are integrated throughout Israeli life; some of the earliest Israeli films focused on Moroccan immigrants, and Omri Casspi, the first Israeli to play in the NBA, is Moroccan. Today, one million Israelis trace their origins to Morocco, making them the second-largest ethnic community among Israeli Jews. The traditional Moroccan Jewish holiday of Mimouna, celebrated with festive open houses the day after Passover, features rich honey-drenched pancakes called mufletta.



DRUSE
דְּרוּזִים



About 10% of the world's one million Druze live in Israel, while most of the rest reside in Syria and Lebanon. The Druze are a breakaway from Islam, but they are not considered Muslim. In Israel, they are recognized as an Arabic-speaking separate ethnic group. The Druze faith is closed to the outside world; they do not accept converts, and even most adherents never learn the details of their belief system. Reincarnation is central to the Druze faith: the body and the soul are eternal, and one cannot survive without the other, so reincarnation is said to occur immediately after death. The Druze believe in loyalty to the sovereign nation of wherever they live, a reason they broke with the Arabs of the region upon Israel's establishment. Druze men serve in the IDF, and the community willingly accepts the existence of the state.



BEDOUIN

בְּדוּיִים



The Bedouin are a traditionally nomadic Muslim group in the Arab world. Approximately 250,000 Bedouin are citizens of Israel, where they live in all parts of the country, with the largest concentration in the Negev. Since 1967, when the government established Tel Sheva, the first permanent town for Israeli Bedouin, the community has been transitioning from their traditional way of life and embracing Western lifestyle. While today most live in permanent cities and towns, the government continues to navigate the tensions over unofficial communities and disputes over where Bedouin-owned livestock can graze. Many serve in the IDF, where their nomadic roots make them excellent trackers. Some receive support from organizations to help them adapt to 21st century life while preserving their traditions, including the rich culture of tent life, embroidery, and more.



ARAB CITIZENS OF ISRAEL

עֲרָבִים אֲזְרָחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל



Arabs comprise more than one-fifth of the citizens of Israel. While the Declaration of Independence guarantees all citizens equal rights regardless of ethnicity or religion, many Arab citizens struggle to see these values actualized in their lives. While the official term used most often to refer to this population group is Arab Israelis, many prefer to call themselves 1948 Arabs or Palestinian Israelis. They have full voting rights, and in the 2015 elections, the Joint Arab List became the third-largest party in the Knesset. Arabs attend all of the country's colleges and universities and work in every profession and sector of society. Many have relatives in the West Bank or Gaza—home to approximately four million Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel.



JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

יְהוּדִים, נְצִרִים, וְאַסְלָם



Israel is home to many of the holy sites of the three major monotheistic faiths. The country is committed to ensuring that all citizens are free to practice their religion. In accordance with the precedent set during the 400-year rule of the Ottoman Empire that ended in 1917, matters of personal status such as weddings and burials are handled only by the religious authorities of each recognized religion. Today, approximately 75% of the population is Jewish and about 20% is Muslim. Christians comprise a small minority of the total population. Nowhere do these three religious groups intersect more than in the Old City of Jerusalem, one of many sites in Israel with Biblical significance and filled with meaning for followers of all three faiths.



LANGUAGES

שפות



When Eliezer Ben-Yehuda set out to revive the Hebrew language, he had a dream of turning what had long been thought of as a “dead language” into a modern, spoken tongue. Today, of course, Hebrew is the No. 1 official language of Israel, and it’s estimated that nine million people around the world speak the language. Hebrew and Arabic are Israel’s official languages, though English and Russian also get used a lot; most street signs throughout the country use Hebrew, Arabic, and English. In all, 35 languages are spoken on a regular basis in Israel—including Yiddish, Amharic, Romanian, German, French, Ladino, Spanish, and Israeli Sign Language.



ACCESSIBILITY

נגישות



With nearly one in five Israelis having a disability, the country prioritizes its efforts to become a global leader in ensuring accessibility and opportunities for all. Hotels and tourist attractions lead the way in making Israel open to people with disabilities; even Masada is wheelchair-accessible! Everything from wheelchair lifts on public buses to a wide range of technological innovations, special training programs, and legislation make it possible for people with disabilities to enjoy productive lives. Israel's strong showing at the Paralympics and laws mandating web access for people with disabilities are just a couple of examples of how the country leads the way. Nevertheless, there is still more room for growth in ensuring access, as the hilly terrain in much of the country poses challenges, as do the ancient streets and infrastructures in many cities.



GEOGRAPHY

גאוגרפיה

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JERUSALEM

ירושלים



Tradition holds that King David declared Jerusalem his capital city 3,000 years ago. Today, at the city's entrance, there is a harp-shaped bridge, referencing his musical talents. In addition to being Judaism's holiest city, it also plays a central role in both Islam and Christianity. Built of golden Jerusalem stone, the city has both a modern and ancient feel. Jerusalem today has nearly 900,000 residents, including secular and Modern Orthodox Jews; ultra-Orthodox Jews; and Arabs. While media and political figures focus on the city as a symbol of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, residents are more concerned with daily quality of life issues. In recent years, a vibrant arts scene has flourished, and many exciting efforts to bridge religious-secular divides are underway.



TEL AVIV-JAFFA

תֵּל אָבִיב-יָפוֹ



Founded by 66 Jewish pioneers in 1909 as the first modern Jewish city, Tel Aviv was designed as an answer to overcrowding in the nearby ancient port city of Jaffa. As one of the oldest cities in Israel and once the main point of entry into pre-State Israel, Jaffa remains an important part of the combined city. It has become an entertainment hub, and the flea market is a wonderful place to scout out treasures from bygone eras. Today, Tel Aviv, which merged with Jaffa to form one municipality, is the country's cultural and financial center. Its vibrant economy, culinary scene, nightlife, and startup culture make it an exciting place to visit around the clock. The downside: the cost of living is among the highest in the world. The preserved Bauhaus buildings earned the city status as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



BE'ER SHEVA

בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע



The capital of the Negev desert, Be'er Sheva is Israel's seventh most populous city, with more than 200,000 residents. The city is host to Ben-Gurion University, named for Israel's first Prime Minister who believed that settling the desert was the key to Israel's success. In recent years, the economic base of Be'er Sheva has grown in large part due to the technology boom that is impacting all of Israel, as well as plans by the IDF to relocate many large military bases to the outskirts of the city. Like many places in Israel, Be'er Sheva is the scene of multiple stories from the Bible: it is written in the Book of Genesis that Abraham dug a בְּאֵר—be'er—well here, and Jacob had his famous dream about a ladder rising up to heaven after he left Be'er Sheva. Today, Be'er Sheva is undergoing a building boom, with young families and students helping to revitalize the city.



Built on Mt. Carmel in the north of the country, this port city is known for peaceful co-existence between its Jewish and Arab residents. The Baha'i Gardens and World Center create a beautiful landscape in the city center, but locals have been working hard to draw attention to the city's other attractions. The downtown area has become a hipster magnet and the nightlife scene is booming. Haifa is the country's third-largest city, but its fans love that it maintains a small-town feel. Thousands of visitors arrive via cruise ships that dock in Haifa's port, making Haifa their first impression of Israel. Home to two of the country's major universities, Haifa University and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, the early 21st century saw a major technology hub develop in the city and its surroundings.



Mentioned in the Bible as a port city during King Solomon's time, Eilat is a tropical city at Israel's southern tip. Today, it is a popular vacation spot for Israelis and tourists alike, known for its resorts, beaches, diving, hiking trails, and Red Sea coral reef. Eilat is adjacent to Egypt and Jordan, the two neighbors with which Israel has peace treaties, so one can cross into them via overland border crossings just outside the city. Eilat is also within view of Saudi Arabia. Recognizing that the port here would play an important role in connecting Israel to the world, providing access to the Far East and Africa, Israel's first PM David Ben-Gurion was adamant that the city be included in the state. In 1949, late in the War of Independence, the IDF waged the Uvda Campaign, ultimately linking the small, backwater fishing town of Eilat to the rest of the country and laying the groundwork for its growth.



Tzfat is known as the city of קַבָּלָה—Kabbalah—Jewish mysticism, and as a center of art. An ancient, spiritual city in the north of Israel, it is nestled high in the Upper Galilee hills. At nearly 3,000 feet above sea level, it's the highest city in Israel. Tzfat is considered one of four cities in Israel that are holy to Jews. The tradition of Kabbalat Shabbat began here in the 16th century, and an annual klezmer festival is a summer highlight. Visitors love to wander in the winding alleyways of the old part of town, browsing in art galleries and synagogues, and admiring the beautiful views of the Galilee. A bit off the typical beaten track pursued by tourists—but no less important—are the newer sections of town that serve as a regional center for kibbutzim and smaller communities in the surrounding area.



TIBERIAS

טבריה
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Located on the western shore of Lake Kinneret—making it hot and humid in the summer—Tiberias was established around the year 20 CE and named in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius. Archaeological excavations in and around the modern city have uncovered many relics from ancient times, including a Roman amphitheater. Its location on Lake Kinneret, and proximity to many sites that are holy to Christianity, makes Tiberias a popular tourism destination; Christians often use it as a base for pilgrimages, and everybody loves the water sports, beaches, and nighttime party cruises. The Jerusalem Talmud was codified here, making Tiberias one of the four holy cities in Judaism. While the Tiberias Marathon isn't the biggest one in Israel, it does have one specific distinction: the city is located 660 feet below sea level, making the local marathon the lowest one on earth.



HEBRON

חברון



Located 20 miles south of Jerusalem, in the heart of the West Bank, the modern-day city of Hebron is a flashpoint of tension between Israelis and Palestinians. The patriarch Abraham, who is holy to all three monotheistic faiths, is believed to have sojourned in this area. Hebron is one of the four holy cities for Jews, and also holds special significance for Muslims. It's the site of the Cave of the Patriarchs, which the Book of Genesis tells us Abraham purchased as a burial site for the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs. Israel captured the city, along with the rest of the West Bank, from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War. Today, Hebron is home to 250,000 Palestinians and about 700 Israeli Jews. Extensive security arrangements seek to keep the area calm.



GALILEE

הַגָּלִיל



A mountainous region in Northern Israel, the Galilee is home to Jews, Arabs, Druze, and other diverse populations. In many parts of the Galilee, the Arab population is greater than the Jewish one, the only part of the country where this is the case. The Galilee boasts many nature preserves, hiking trails, Christian religious sites, and ancient synagogues. It borders with Lebanon to the north and Syria to the east, and is home to many small villages that have been established in recent years, reflecting the Israeli public's passion for pioneering even long after the country gained independence. On weekends and holidays, huge crowds travel from the center of the country to "get away from it all" in the Galilee.



NEGEV

הַנֶּגֶב



Israel's southern desert, the Negev, covers more than half the country's land but is home to less than 10% of its population. The word "Negev" refers to the Hebrew word for "dry," while in the Bible, Negev means "south." Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was a passionate advocate for settling the Negev and making the desert bloom. Inspired by young people he met in the 1950s who were building a new community in the area, he decided to follow suit, and moved to Sde Boker. The Negev includes the city of Be'er Sheva, military bases, Bedouin villages and towns, and many kibbutzim. With the development of the national railway in recent years, Be'er Sheva and the Negev are a short, comfortable ride from the center of the country and its employment opportunities—perhaps explaining why housing prices here have been rising even faster than in other parts of the country.



GOLAN HEIGHTS

רמת הגולן



This mountainous region in Northern Israel supplies one-third of Israel's water. Located on the border of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, Israel captured the territory from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it in 1981. Neither Syria nor the rest of the world recognizes Israel's sovereignty, and indirect negotiations have been held over the years in an effort to resolve the region's status. In light of the devastating Syrian civil war and other recent developments, the military has been on high alert in the Golan, though civilian life continues normally. The Golan includes Israel's highest peak, הר החרמון—Mt. Hermon. At over 7,000 ft, it turns into a ski resort during the winter months.



Also known by the Biblical names of Yehudah VeShomron, Judea and Samaria, this disputed territory was captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War but never annexed. Named for its location west of the Jordan River, the West Bank is home to more than two million Palestinians and close to 400,000 Israeli Jews. The 1993 Oslo Accord sought to separate Israeli and Palestinian populations to reduce tensions. It established three zones that afforded the Palestinian Authority varying levels of self-rule while negotiations for a final-status deal were held. In the absence of an agreement, the status quo remains. The area's rich Biblical history makes it holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, complicating prospects for a negotiated settlement.



GAZA

עזה



Gaza is a densely populated 141-square-mile enclave on the Mediterranean coast, just north of Egypt. Israel captured the territory from Egypt in the 1967 Six-Day War, and handed autonomous control to the Palestinian Authority (PA) following the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993. In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, removing all Israeli civilian and military presence. The PA assumed full control of the area, although Israel and Egypt continue to control land, air, and sea crossing points. In 2007, Hamas, which Israel, the US, and the EU recognize as a terror organization, seized control of Gaza and has ruled ever since. Gaza is home to almost two million Palestinian Arabs, nearly all of whom are Muslims, and has an annual population growth rate of about 2.9%, one of the highest in the world. Tensions between Israel and Gaza remain high, especially in light of Hamas' stated goal of eliminating Israel.



RED SEA

יָם סוּף



The Red Sea—in Hebrew, יָם סוּף—Yam Suf—Sea of Reeds—lies at the southern tip of Israel and provides important shipping routes from the southern port city of Eilat. The Bible says that the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea after the waters parted for them as they fled from slavery in Egypt. In 1967, Egypt closed the waterway to Israeli shipping, one major factor leading to the Six-Day War. Today, the Red Sea offers extensive diving, snorkeling, and other water sports, and a lively beach scene that caters to Israelis and tourists. The Israeli section of the Red Sea coastline is met on the west by the Egyptian coastline and on the east by the Jordanian resort town of Aqaba. The three countries coordinate in managing the tremendous natural resource that they share.



DEAD SEA

ים המלח



The lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea is 1,300 feet below sea level. Also known as the Sea of Salt, the salt content is so high that no living thing can survive in it, allowing people to float while enjoying the natural minerals that form in the mud. The minerals of the Dead Sea are in high demand around the world as beauty aids. Due to the precarious water situation in Israel, the Dead Sea, which historically was filled by the Jordan River, has been shrinking dramatically, raising questions about what the future holds for this natural resource and the medical tourism industry that has developed around it.



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

הַיָּם הַתִּיכוֹן



Israel lies at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, at the nexus of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It shares the eastern coastline with Gaza and Egypt to the south, and Lebanon and Syria to the north. The countries that border the Mediterranean Sea share a certain informality shaped by the centrality of the shoreline. Israel's relationship to the Mediterranean has been changing dramatically in recent years: while the fourth Prime Minister, Golda Meir, joked that Moses led the Children of Israel to the only place in the Middle East without oil, recent exploratory efforts have revealed huge natural gas reserves off the Israeli coast, and the country is beginning to exploit this resource. In response to the shortage of freshwater in Israel, giant desalination plants have been built along the coast, allowing salty seawater to be turned into sweetwater that alleviates the shortage.



JORDAN RIVER

נהר הירדן



Traditionally, the Jordan River has been an important source of freshwater for Israel and its neighbors. It flows on the eastern side of Israel and the western border of Jordan and connects Lake Kinneret with the Dead Sea. Despite what many people may think, the Jordan River has never been “deep and wide.” Compared to the great rivers of North America and Europe, it’s barely a stream. As growing populations put stress on Israel’s sources of freshwater, the flow in the river has slowed to a trickle. Nonetheless, it remains a popular tourist attraction, both for the Christian baptismal sites on its shores, and for rafting and tubing recreational activities.



KINNERET

ים כנרת



Lake Kinneret is the country's largest body of freshwater and traditionally, it has been Israel's main source of drinking water. Also known as the Sea of Galilee, it is located in Northern Israel. Legend has it that Jesus walked on water here, making Lake Kinneret a popular destination for Christian pilgrims. The first קיבוצים—kibbutzim were founded around Lake Kinneret decades before Israel gained independence. The Kinneret Cemetery, on the shores of the lake, is the final resting place for many of the luminaries of the Zionist movement, as well as Rachel the Poet and Naomi Shemer.



SPORTS AND LEISURE

ספורט ופנאי

theicenter.org



BEACH AND WATER SPORTS

חופים וספורט ימי



The Mediterranean coastline and its beaches play a major role in shaping Israeli life and culture. From Nahariya in the north to Ashkelon in the south, cities that have developed along the coast highlight their connection to the shore, and the salty air seems to seep into every aspect of local life. Many cities boast beautiful beachfront boardwalks that draw crowds of walkers, runners, and bikers all year long. On the action-packed Tel Aviv beaches, sun worshippers and surfers share the sandy expanses with kids building sand castles and people of all ages playing מתכות—matkot, a local version of paddleball. Roving vendors hawk ארטיקים—artikim—popsicles, and cafes and restaurants offer close-up views of the sea. Further north or south, the scene is a bit more subdued, leaving room for surfers, windsurfers, small boats, and other water-sports enthusiasts.



BASKETBALL

707:73



Israeli kids play basketball on indoor and outdoor courts all over the country, and fans flock to stadiums to watch professional league play. Maccabi Tel Aviv is the acknowledged king of Israeli basketball, winning most of the national championships since the league's founding in 1954, and no one player has been more closely associated with the team than Tal Brody. Brody is an American-born Israeli who walked away from the number 12 draft pick in the NBA in order to compete in Israel. He led Maccabi Tel Aviv to its stunning 1977 victory over the Soviet Red Army team, CSKA Moscow, on the way to winning the EuroLeague championship for the first time. After beating the Soviets, Brody exclaimed, "We are on the map! Not just in sports, but in everything!" That phrase has been popular in Israel ever since, and is the inspiration for the title of the film, *On the Map*, about Maccabi's amazing win.



While most North Americans call it “soccer,” Israelis join the rest of the world in calling this global favorite football. Official competitive play predates the founding of the state—the league was established in 1931, disrupted by the Arab Revolt, and then resumed in 1949. Israeli clubs have competed in European championships since 1991, with two teams making it to the quarter-finals—Maccabi Haifa in 1998-99, and Hapoel Tel Aviv in 2001-02. Two films have been made about the בְּנֵי סַחְנִין—Bnei Sakhnin Football Club, the most successful team fielded by an Arab community in Israel. The team, which—like many teams in Israel—has Arab and Jewish players, seeks to be a “cultural rainbow,” and many of its matches take on deeper symbolism, as they demonstrate that Jews and Arabs can live—and play—together in peace.



Krav Maga—literally Combat-Contact—combines aspects of karate, aikido, boxing, judo, wrestling, and realistic fight training. While Krav Maga trainers will tell you that the best way to win a fight is to avoid fighting in the first place, if you must fight, Krav Maga focuses on making every move efficient, designed to incapacitate your opponent. Hungarian-born Imi Lichtenfeld developed Krav Maga based on his experiences as a street fighter defending the Jewish Quarter of Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in the 1930s. After moving to Israel, he shared his expertise with the IDF and Israeli security services, which embraced its focus on an aggressive mix of offensive and defensive moves. Its popularity has spread to the civilian sector in Israel and around the world, thanks, in part, to a long list of celebrities who train in it, including Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Angelina Jolie, and Jennifer Lopez.



When small forward Omri Casspi was signed by the Sacramento Kings in 2009, he became the first Israeli to be drafted into the NBA in the first round. While he had been popular in Israel before that—his long career started in the youth leagues and culminated in impressive stints with Maccabi Tel Aviv and Hapoel Galil Elyon—becoming the first Israeli to play in the vaunted NBA made him an instant Israeli folk hero. His career has included playing for the Golden State Warriors, the Houston Rockets, and other NBA teams. While basketball legend Tal Brody may have boasted that Israel was “on the map” in 1977, as of 2009, Casspi can now say that Israel was in the NBA. Through his foundation, Casspi has brought delegations of American basketball players and celebrities to Israel, where he encourages them to explore the country for themselves, making personal connections to the land and people.



AMAR'E STOUDEMIRE

אַמאַרֶה סְטוּדֵמַיִר



After a 15-year career in the NBA, primarily playing for the Phoenix Suns, six-time All-Star Amar'e Stoudemire signed in 2016 to play with the Israeli basketball team הפועל ירושלים—Hapoel Yerushalayim. Having recently purchased a partial ownership share in the team, he moved his wife and four kids to the Israeli capital. His first visit to the country was in 2010 as part of a quest to explore what he called his “Hebrew roots.” Stoudemire says that all African Americans have such roots, and he professes a strong connection to Israel. Since settling in to his new life in Israel, Stoudemire has been quick to volunteer in a variety of public-service roles; he’s helped to raise money for emergency medical services, fired the starting shot at the Jerusalem Marathon, and encouraged his team to do more outreach to fans.



THE WINGATE INSTITUTE

מכון וינגייט



Located just south of Netanya, the Wingate Institute is Israel's primary sports training center. In addition to training sports educators, Wingate is home to many Olympic teams and athletes, as well as teams that represent Israel at international sporting events in swimming, judo, volleyball, tennis, and others. Sports rehabilitation is a major focus at Wingate, which also houses the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame and the Israel Sports Hall of Fame. The institute is named in honor of British army officer Orde Wingate, an ardent supporter of the Zionist cause who helped train pre-State fighters. He died in a plane crash while on duty in India in 1944, thirteen years before the founding of the institute. Wingate Institute was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize in 1989, in recognition of extraordinary achievement in education, sports medicine, and research.



OLYMPIC ACHIEVEMENTS

הַשָּׂגִים אֹלִימְפִים



In 1992, Yael Arad became the first Israeli to bring home an Olympic medal, a silver in judo. A few days later, Oren Smadja claimed Israel's first bronze medal, also in judo. Twelve years later, in 2004, Gal Fridman became the first—and to date only—Israeli gold medalist. His medal in windsurfing is fitting since his first name is גַּל—Gal, which means “wave.” Through the 2016 Summer Games, Israeli athletes have brought home nine medals, but have yet to win one at the Winter Games, as it's not always easy to practice these sports. For instance, there's just one ice rink in all of Israel, forcing athletes to practice abroad. By contrast, Israeli athletes have dominated the Paralympics for decades; for many wounded soldiers, paralympic sports play a huge role in rehabilitation. In total, Israeli paralympic athletes have racked up 375 medals since 1960, 123 of them gold.



The Maccabiah, often called “the Jewish Olympics,” began as the far-fetched fantasy of a young man in pre-State Israel. Inspired by the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, 15-year-old Joseph Yekutieli dreamed about a global sporting competition for Jews. He lobbied leaders, arguing that bringing Jewish athletes together to compete would yield great benefits for the Zionist movement. Twenty years later, the first Maccabiah took place. A massive undertaking held in Israel every four years, athletes compete in all 28 Summer Olympic sports, as well as a few more including chess and bridge. A separate set of competitions highlights paralympic sports including wheelchair tennis and wheelchair basketball. Named in honor of Judah Maccabee, the hero of the Chanukkah story, the opening ceremony of each Maccabiah takes place in Modi’in, where the Maccabees lived.



ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL

שְׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל



The Israel National Trail, which winds 600 miles from Kibbutz Dan in the north to the southernmost city of Eilat, offers a challenging, refreshing way to encounter Biblical sites, modern scenes, and nature in all its glory. The trail traverses mountains, plains, and multiple climatic zones, and many Israelis set out to hike its entire length over a period of weeks, months, or even years. From the earliest days of building the State, Israelis have loved the land and strived to engage with it in tangible ways. The halutzim—חֲלוּצִים—pioneers stressed the importance of farming the land, and today, hundreds of thousands of people take advantage of holidays and long weekends to hike and sightsee in nature.



LEADERSHIP

מְנֵהִיגוּת

theicenter.org



MENACHEM BEGIN

מְנַחֵם בֶּגִין



Born in 1913 in Belarus, Menachem Begin was an aide to Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of Revisionist Zionism. Arriving in pre-State Israel, he led the Etzel underground military organization, working in opposition to the more mainstream Haganah. After 1948, he was elected to the Knesset and led the parliamentary opposition until he became Prime Minister in 1977. Begin was a fiery orator who opposed accepting financial reparations from Germany. He believed in the right of the Jewish People to all of the Land of Israel. He surprised many by negotiating a peace treaty with Egypt, Israel's largest and most powerful neighbor. His first official act as PM was to welcome 77 Vietnamese refugees, saying that Israel would never forget when the world refused to help Jews in need during the Holocaust. Heartbroken after the death of his wife, Aliza, in 1982, Begin resigned from office in 1983 and died in 1992.



DAVID BEN-GURION

דָּוִד בֶּן-גּוּרִיּוֹן



“In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles.” David Ben-Gurion declared independence for the Jewish State and became Israel’s first Prime Minister in 1948. One of his early achievements as PM was to create the Israel Defense Forces by merging several pre-State fighting forces into one unified army. He immigrated from Poland in 1906, and later met his future wife, Paula, in New York. He believed that all Jews should participate in building and strengthening the new country, and worked with World Jewry to forge understandings about different kinds of support. While Ben-Gurion was not a religious man, his reverence for Jewish sources and tradition led him to establish Israel’s annual Bible Quiz. He urged Israelis to settle the Negev and make the desert bloom. After retiring from public life, he lived at Kibbutz Sde Boker, where he and his wife are buried.



SHIMON PERES

שמעון פרס



Shimon Peres, originally from Poland, began his career in public service as an aide to Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion. Although he never served in the army, he was the first person in charge of Israel's military industry and oversaw the nuclear development program. He served as Prime Minister from 1984-1986 and 2005-2006, and as President from 2007-2014. For much of his career, Peres was viewed as a divisive figure in Israeli society, though his optimism and vision for a bright future never wavered. In his later years as President, Peres was widely respected and came to be viewed as a national grandfather figure. In 1994, he received the Nobel Peace Prize with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat for his efforts to bring Israeli-Palestinian peace. When he died in 2016, he chose to donate his corneas to science—so that someone would get his sight and, hopefully, his vision.



GOLDA MEIR

גולדה מאיר



Born in 1898, Golda Meir's family fled from anti-Semitism in the Ukraine and settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She moved to pre-State Israel in 1921, becoming one of two women to sign the Declaration of Independence, and to date the only woman to serve as Prime Minister of Israel. In early 1948, she was sent to the US to raise funds for the nascent State, returning home with \$50 million, making it possible to achieve statehood. She addressed audiences with her ever-present cigarette in hand—but no notes—and urged American Jews to open their wallets and “not be too late.” She served as ambassador to the Soviet Union and Foreign Minister before becoming PM during a period that included the 1972 Munich Olympic Massacre and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. She died in 1978 and is remembered for how she gathered advisors and ministers around her green formica kitchen table, which came to be known as Golda's Kitchen Cabinet.



YITZHAK RABIN

יצחק רבין



Born in Jerusalem in 1922, Yitzhak Rabin was the first sabra, or native-born, Israeli Prime Minister. As a child, he dreamt of becoming a farmer and studied at the Kadourie Agricultural School, but he answered the call of duty and served in the pre-State military effort. As chief of staff of the IDF during the 1967 Six-Day War, he spoke eloquently about the need to balance the joy of victory with the reality of the heavy human toll of the war. He served as PM twice, from 1974-1977 and from 1992-1995, earning a Nobel Peace Prize together with Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat for the Oslo process. Rabin, who called himself a “soldier for peace,” was assassinated in 1995 by a Jewish Israeli law student at a peace rally in Tel Aviv. The Rabin Center, in Ramat Aviv, documents his life and carries on his legacy.



BENJAMIN (BIBI) NETANYAHU

בִּנְיָמִין נֶתַנְיָהוּ



Born in Tel Aviv in 1949, Benjamin Netanyahu spent many years as a child and young man living in the United States. His late father was a respected historian, and his older brother, Yoni, was killed during Operation Entebbe in 1976. During his stint as Israel's ambassador to the UN in the 1980s, Netanyahu gained prominence as an eloquent, effective spokesman for Israel. He later joined the Likud party and rose to the role of Prime Minister. In 2019, he became Israel's longest-serving premier, filling the role from 1996-1999 and again since 2009. Netanyahu continues to be a strong voice opposing accommodation with Iran and insists on accountability from the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.



RUTH CALDERON

רִית קַלְדֶרוֹן



Ruth Calderon was born in 1961 in Tel Aviv and gained national prominence in 2013, when her first speech as a Member of Knesset went viral on social media. Calderon holds a doctorate in Talmud and has worked for decades to bridge religious-secular gaps in Israeli society. In the speech, she wove personal anecdotes about her upbringing into a plea for mutual respect and cooperation across all parts of Israeli society. She lost her Knesset seat in the 2015 elections, when her Yesh Atid party won just 11 seats. Her work establishing BINA, the first Secular Yeshiva in Tel Aviv, has made religious study accessible to both men and women in Israel, and continues to draw growing numbers of enthusiasts.



ANAT HOFFMAN

עַנַּת הוֹפְמָן



Anat Hoffman is best known as the leader of Women of the Wall, a group that has advocated for the rights of women to pray, wear טליתות—tallitot, and read Torah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem for the past several decades. An outspoken advocate for women's rights, religious freedom, and peace, she was a member of the Jerusalem City Council for 14 years and has served as director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center since 2002. Born on a kibbutz near Jerusalem in 1954, she was an outstanding swimmer who competed in the Maccabiah Games.



STAV SHAFIR

סטיוו שפיר



Stav Shafir is the youngest woman ever to serve in Israel's parliament, first elected to the Knesset in 2013 at the age of 27. A longtime social activist, she catapulted to national prominence as a leader of the 2011 social protest movement, in which hundreds of thousands of Israelis demanded lower housing prices. Appearances on national television drew the attention of the Labor Party, which approached her about joining their ranks ahead of the 2013 Knesset elections. As a parliamentarian, the charismatic Shafir has focused on demands for financial transparency and social issues, ranging from the cost of living to LGBTQ rights, advocating for religious freedom, asylum-seekers' rights, and other causes.



SALIM JOUBRAN

סלים ג'ובראן



Born in Haifa in pre-State Israel to a Christian-Arab family, Salim Joubran studied law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and became a judge after 12 years in private practice. In 2003, he was appointed to a temporary position on the Israeli Supreme Court, becoming permanent the following year. While not the first Arab Israeli to serve on the highest court, he was the first to hold a permanent appointment. He was the first Arab Israeli to chair Israel's Central Elections Committee, and earned respect for his legal mind. In 2012, he was criticized for not singing the national anthem Hatikvah. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended his right not to sing, noting that he had stood respectfully for the anthem. He retired in 2017 upon reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70, and his seat was filled by another Arab Israeli, George Kara.



THEODORE HERZL

תֵּיאוֹדוֹר הֶרְצֵל



Born to an assimilated Jewish family in Budapest in 1860, Theodor Herzl went on to become the father of the Modern Zionist movement that later led to the establishment of the State of Israel. As a reporter in Paris, he witnessed the Dreyfus Affair—in which a French Jewish army officer was wrongly convicted of treason—and concluded that the Jews needed a national home so that an event like this would never happen again. In 1897, after convening a Zionist Congress, he wrote in his journal that a Jewish state would be founded within 50 years—and exactly 50 years later, the UN voted to establish a Jewish state. He died at the age of 44 and never saw his greatest dream come to fruition, but his contributions played a crucial role in the effort. He was reburied in Jerusalem, atop Mt. Herzl, which was named in his honor.



RABBI ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK

הַרְבֵּי קוֹק



Born in Latvia in 1865, Abraham Isaac Kook became the first Chief Rabbi of pre-State Israel, serving in that post from 1921 until his death in 1935. He immigrated to Jaffa in 1904 and became the area rabbi, where his responsibilities included serving the mostly secular farmers of the surrounding agricultural communities. He became convinced that the pioneering efforts of religious and secular alike were playing a key role in heralding messianic times—a view that put him at odds with some other Orthodox figures. His openness to a wide range of ideas did not change the fact that he was a strict adherent to Jewish law. Around the same time that he became Chief Rabbi, he established Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which remains a respected center of Jewish learning to this day.



NATAN SHARANSKY

נָתָן שְׂרָנְסְקִי



As a young man in the Soviet Union, Natan Sharansky's only crime was that he wanted to live a Jewish life. When he requested permission to emigrate to Israel in 1973, the authorities refused; four years later, he was accused of spying for the CIA and sentenced to 13 years in prison. His wife, Avital, who had been allowed to emigrate, drew attention to his case, and Sharansky became the face of the refusenik movement as Jews and other activists around the world demanded that they be allowed to emigrate. Released in 1986 as part of a prisoner exchange, he immediately moved to Israel, where he became a voice for other Soviet immigrants and later, a fierce advocate for strong ties binding Israel and world Jewry. After working as a Member of Knesset and a government minister, he served as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel from 2009-2018.



AYELET SHAKED

אילת שקד



Born in Tel Aviv in 1976, Ayelet Shaked began to embrace right-of-center political views, after watching a televised debate as a child—but it wasn't until her army service that she became politically active. After a career in the technology sector and a stint working for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, she was elected to the Knesset in 2013 as the only secular Jew representing the religious Jewish Home party and has served as Justice Minister since 2015. She supports bans on public transportation on Shabbat and Jewish holidays, mandatory IDF service for Haredi Jews, and has said that there may need to be some compromises on the rights of non-Jews in the interest of preserving Israel's Jewish character. Haaretz newspaper has said she is “poised to be Israel's most successful female politician since Golda Meir.”



ILAN RAMON

אילן רמון



All of Israel watched in excitement as Ilan Ramon trained with his NASA colleagues after he was selected to be the first Israeli astronaut in space. When the Space Shuttle Columbia went into orbit in 2003, Israeli media followed Ramon's journey. Ramon, whose Air Force career included participating in the 1981 bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, was the first astronaut ever to request kosher food in space, and brought on the Space Shuttle a mezuzah and a Torah that had been rescued from the Holocaust. His regular communications with Israeli media raised awareness and national pride. Looking down on earth from the Space Shuttle, Ramon and another astronaut said they saw no borders and that the view reminded them of John Lennon's song, *Imagine*. He died, along with the other six members of the Columbia crew, when the Space Shuttle crashed upon re-entry.



HANNAH SENESH

חַנָּה סֵנֶשׁ



Hannah Senesh is revered in Israel as a hero. Born in Budapest in 1921, she moved to pre-State Israel at 17 to pursue her dream of building the Jewish State. She studied agriculture, joining the Haganah and Kibbutz Sdot Yam before enlisting in the British Jewish Brigade to fight in World War II. In 1944, she parachuted into Yugoslavia to help rescue Hungarian Jews who were being deported to Auschwitz. She was captured by the Germans, tortured, tried, and put to death by firing squad. Her diary was published in Hebrew in 1946 and her poetry continues to be read and sung to this day. One of her most inspirational songs is הַלִּיכָה לְקִיסְרִיָּה—Halicha L'Caesarea—*A Walk to Caesarea*, commonly known as אֵלִי, אֵלִי—*Eli, Eli—Oh Lord, My God*. Her remains were reburied on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem in 1950.



ELIEZER BEN YEHUDA

אליעזר בן-יהודה



As a young man growing up in Lithuania and Paris in the second half of the 19th century, there was little reason to believe that Eliezer Ben-Yehuda would become the person most responsible for reviving Hebrew as a modern language. Early on, he became convinced that the Jewish people needed a spoken language of their own in order to thrive. Soon after immigrating to pre-State Israel, he and his wife raised the first child to hear and speak only Hebrew in modern times. He founded a Hebrew language institute and authored the first modern Hebrew dictionary. His success can be seen all over Israel, where Hebrew is the primary language used, and around the world, where learning Hebrew is an important part of connecting to Jewish culture everywhere. Cities and towns all over Israel have streets named in his honor, including the popular pedestrian mall in downtown Jerusalem.



ARIEL SHARON

אַרְיֵאל שָׂרׁוֹן



Born in a small farming community in pre-State Israel, Ariel Sharon had a long military career before entering Israeli politics. After becoming Defense Minister in 1981 and resigning two years later, he was elected Prime Minister in 2001, serving until 2006. As PM, he focused on restoring personal security and quelling terror attacks against Israeli civilians. He led Israel's 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and formed Kadima, a pragmatic, centrist political party that drew support from the left and right. He was known for pushing his ideas and agendas relentlessly in all of his military and civilian leadership roles. He suffered a stroke in 2006 that left him in a coma until his death in 2014. His legacy lives on at Park Ariel Sharon, an environmentally sustainable public space that was once a landfill on its way to becoming an ecological disaster.



MOSHE DAYAN

מֹשֶׁה דַּיָּן



Identifiable by the iconic black eye patch that he wore after a bullet pierced his left eye during World War II, Moshe Dayan was born in Kibbutz Degania Aleph in 1915. As one of the first children born in the new kibbutz, he was treated as a communal baby. His family eventually moved to Nahalal, the first established moshav, or farming cooperative. His long military career began when he served in the Haganah before the establishment of the State, where one of his heroes was pro-Zionist, British army officer, Orde Wingate, who helped train pre-State fighters. He was appointed Defense Minister on the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War, helping to calm the nervous Israeli public when war seemed inevitable and the people feared the military was not prepared. He helped negotiate Israel's 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, which was signed two years before his death.



ALICE SHALVI

אַלִּיס שְׁלֵבִי



Alice Shalvi was one of the founders of the Israel Women's Network, one of the earliest advocates for women's equality in Israel, long before such efforts were commonplace anywhere in the world. Born in Germany in 1926, her family came to London in 1934, where she gained her education in Jewish and general studies. Moving to Israel in 1949, she began a long career training teachers to teach English as a foreign language. During the 15 years that she headed Pelech, a prestigious, innovative school for religious girls in Jerusalem, she had the opportunity to put her beliefs into action. Enrollment in the school, whose motto was, "no area of knowledge should be closed to women solely on grounds of their sex," grew fourfold during her tenure. She received the prestigious Israel Prize in 2007.



ADA YONATH

עֲדָה יוֹנָת



When Ada Yonath received the Nobel Prize in 2009 for her research in the field of ribosomal crystallography, she became the first Israeli woman to win a Nobel—and the first woman to win in chemistry in 45 years. Despite the wall of awards that adorns her office at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, she told a reporter that her most honored award is the handmade “Grandmother of the Year” award that her 12-year-old granddaughter gave her a few years ago. Yonath was born in Jerusalem in 1939 to a family that she says was so poor that they couldn’t even afford to buy books, but her parents found the means to send her to good schools to encourage her love of science. She withstood years of criticism from colleagues who said her work had little value. All one needs to do is look at the wall of awards to see that her perseverance paid off.



BENJAMIN (BENNY) GANTZ

בֶּנְיָמִין (בֶּנִי) גַּנְזֵץ



Born in Moshav Kfar Ahim in 1960, Benny Gantz drafted into the IDF as a paratrooper in 1977. Soon thereafter, he served as part of the security detail assigned to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat during his historic visit to Israel. Rising through the ranks of the military, he was appointed Chief of Staff in 2011 until his discharge in 2015. After a brief stint in the business world, Gantz entered politics in 2018, forming the Israel Resilience Party, which joined with Yesh Atid to form Blue and White political party, ahead of the April 2019 elections. Gantz has positioned the party at the center of the political spectrum, attempting to appeal to a wide cross-section of Israeli voters. The party's message has struck a chord with voters, who quickly made it one of the country's largest political parties.



RACHELLE FRAENKEL

רחלי פֿרַנְקֶל



When Naftali Fraenkel, Eyal Yifrach, and Gilad Shaar were kidnapped in the West Bank by Hamas terrorists in June 2014, people around the world followed news reports about efforts to rescue the three high school boys. Naftali's mother, Rachelle, a respected Jewish educator working out of the public eye, became a public figure overnight as people were drawn to her calls for unity, love, and hope. When it was revealed that the boys had been murdered, the entire country shared in the families' grief. Fraenkel's response to her personal tragedy was to establish, together with the families of the other two boys, the Jerusalem Unity Prize—a joint initiative with the Mayor of Jerusalem dedicated to fostering unity among the Jewish people. Hundreds of thousands of people in Israel and around the world participate in the annual Unity Day, and each year the prize is awarded in recognition of these efforts.



YONI NETANYAHU

יוֹנִי נֶתַנְיָהוּ



As the leader of the 1976 IDF mission to rescue 102 Jewish passengers being held hostage in Uganda after terrorists hijacked their Air France plane, Yonatan “Yoni” Netanyahu became an iconic Israeli figure. During that historic rescue mission in which he was the only casualty, Netanyahu embraced the IDF ideal of אָחַרַי—Acharai—Follow Me, in which officers lead their troops into battle. Born in New York in 1946 to an ardently Zionist family, Netanyahu’s father, Ben-Zion, was a renowned Biblical scholar and his brother, Benjamin, went on to serve as Israel’s Prime Minister. After his death, the name of the mission was changed from Operation Entebbe to Operation Yonatan in his honor. An eloquent writer, his many letters written throughout his short life to family and friends were published as a book that continues to inspire readers today. His story has been the subject of multiple films and books over the years.



MIRI REGEV

מִרִי רֶגֶב



Miri Regev earned a reputation for her outspoken brand of advocacy, with a military career that culminated in her post as IDF Spokeswoman. Since joining the Likud party, she became Minister of Culture and Sport in 2015, openly taking aim at those who criticize Israel. Acknowledging that filmmakers enjoy freedom of speech, she has said that the government also has “freedom of funding,” and should not underwrite films that are critical of the country. She decries what she calls the Ashkenazi-centric cultural elites in Israel, and supports Mizrahi artists. She has been a vocal advocate of fighting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, an outspoken critic of African asylum seekers, and supports the rights of the LGBTQ community in Israel. She has been one of PM Benjamin Netanyahu’s most loyal supporters, and some believe she sees herself as his eventual successor.



ZE'EV JABOTINSKY

זֵאֵב ז'בוֹטִינְסְקִי



Ze'ev Jabotinsky founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and several organizations in pre-State Israel, including the Betar youth movement and the Irgun fighting force. Following the 1903 Kishinev Pogrom, he established the Jewish Self Defense Organization in Odessa and became the leader of right-wing Zionism. Making aliyah to pre-State Israel, he frequently traveled abroad, and died of a heart attack in 1940 while visiting a Betar camp in New York. In his will, he expressed the wish to be buried in Israel, but only if an invitation was issued by the leaders of Israel to be re-interred. The invitation came in 1964 from Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, and Jabotinsky's grave can be found on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem. His fierce Jewish nationalism, coupled with firm commitment to the rights of minorities, served as guiding principles of the Herut party and later, the original Likud party.



JOSEPH TRUMPELDOR

יוסף טרומפלדור



Known for his famous last words, “טוב למות בקֶּד אֶרְצֵנוּ”—it is good to die for our country,” Joseph Trumpeldor lost his arm in battle fighting in the Russian-Japanese War. Born in Russia in 1880, after moving to pre-State Israel, he made his home in Kibbutz Degania. The Ottoman authorities expelled him for his refusal to accept Ottoman citizenship. He returned in 1918 and founded Hechalutz, which helped young people plan to move to pre-State Israel. In 1920, he was part of a team defending Tel Hai in the Upper Galilee, and he was killed in battle. He and the others who fell at Tel Hai are buried in a communal grave in Kibbutz Kfar Giladi, where a statue of a lion guards over them.



AHAD HA'AM

אֶחָד הָעָם



Ahad Ha'am was born in 1856 in the Russian Empire and given the name Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg. He is the father of Cultural Zionism, a movement that argued passionately that Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, should be a spiritual and cultural center for the Jewish People. He believed Jews around the world should look to the Land as a place for hope and inspiration, but—unlike many other early Zionist thinkers—he did not believe it was crucial to have a sovereign Jewish state. Ginsberg wrote under the pen name Ahad Ha'Am, which literally means, “one of the people,” and his work gained followers—and detractors—throughout the Jewish world. He argued passionately against Herzl's Political Zionism, and urged people to focus on building a society in Eretz Yisrael that would be truly, palpably Jewish in its nature and its values. He visited pre-State Israel multiple times, and lived in Tel Aviv for the last five years of his life until his death in 1927.



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SHAKSHUKA

שֶׁקְשֻׁקָה



This rich, savory dish combines the sharp flavors of tomatoes, red peppers, and garlic with the smooth, creamy consistency of eggs. Nobody can say for sure exactly who invented shakshuka. Its origins may lie in Turkey from the days of the Ottoman Empire, but Moroccans, Tunisians, Libyans, and others insist it was their ancestors who came up with this spicy, thick, satisfying meal in a skillet. Regardless of who was first, when hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated to Israel from all over the Middle East in the 1950s, many of them brought with them their family recipes, and shakshuka quickly became a staple in Israeli cuisine.



When Iraqi Jews immigrated to Israel soon after the establishment of the State, they brought a traditional recipe for a breakfast sandwich called sabich. More than 50 years later, sabich burst onto the Israeli culinary scene as the hottest alternative to falafel. It's not clear where the name comes from; writing in Tablet Magazine, Adeena Sussman explains that it's related to the Arabic word for "morning," which makes sense when you realize that Iraqi Jews traditionally enjoy sabich on Shabbat morning. She adds that others insist it's a purely Israeli name coming from the Hebrew for its contents סַלַט, בֵּיצָה, חֲצִילִים—salat, beitzah, hatzilim—salad, egg, eggplant.



OLIVE OIL

שֶׁמֶן זַיִת



Olives are one of the seven species referenced in the Bible, and olive trees have thrived in Israel since Biblical times. Many olive presses, used to extract oil from the fruit, have been found at archaeological sites around the country. Olive oil was used in the Holy Temple to light the menorah and papyrus receipts have been found that record the sale of olive oil to Egyptian markets. Today, olive trees grow all over the country and new industries have developed that promote olive-based oils and creams for medicinal uses, as cosmetic products, and more. Look for elegant galleries all over Israel where you can taste a variety of olive oils and choose your favorite.



An Israeli chef in New York once tried to set a record for the world's largest falafel ball by frying a 24-pound lump of the chopped chickpea mix, only to find that falafel is meant to be fried in smaller balls that are crispy and brown on the outside and light and airy on the inside. Israelis often call falafel their national food, while many in the Middle East—Egyptians, Lebanese, Palestinians, and others—contend that it's their national dish. Regardless of who gets bragging rights, falafel is hands-down the most common Israeli street food. Israelis line up at popular falafel stands all over the country for a quick lunchtime meal-in-a-pita that combines fresh falafel balls with Israeli salad, tahini sauce, pickles, and a wide range of other toppings of your choice. The key to delicious falafel is to eat it when it's fresh.



Like many other staples of Israeli cuisine, shawarma is enjoyed throughout much of the Middle East. For centuries, Turks roasted meat on a horizontal spit over a fire, but in the 19th century, they realized that a vertical spit would allow the fat and juices of the meat to stay inside, rather than dripping onto the fire below. Today, standing spits are seen in fast-food joints all over the country. Traditional shawarma is made from roasted lamb seasoned with a mixture of cumin, cardamom, paprika, cinnamon, and turmeric, but many use turkey meat instead, adding lamb fat as a special seasoning. Once it's cooked, slices of the meat go into a pita along with tahini sauce, Israeli salad, and any other additions you desire. Shawarma can also be enjoyed as a sit-down meal, served on a plate with a selection of salads and side dishes.



HUMMUS

חֻמְמִס



Many call hummus—a thick paste made of mashed chickpeas and tahini sauce seasoned with lemon juice and garlic—the national food of Israel. The country is filled with restaurants whose menus feature nothing but plates of hummus with a variety of extras. It can be an appetizer, a side dish, or a meal depending on how hungry you are! Arab cuisine also features hummus, and Israel and neighboring Arab countries have long tussled over who makes the best hummus. Lebanon even asked the European Union to recognize hummus as a Lebanese dish. That hasn't stopped Israeli chefs from competing to win the Guinness Book of World Records' recognition as the makers of the largest platter of hummus. In 2010, 50 Israeli chefs—Jews and Arabs—worked together to win the title with 9,000 pounds; a few months later, a group of Lebanese chefs regained the title with 23,000 pounds of it.



BUREKAS

בֻּרֵקָה



Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz compares burekas in Israel to bagels and cream cheese in North America: they're served everywhere and everybody loves them! These flaky pastries were popular throughout the Ottoman Empire, and Jews who came to Israel from Turkey and Bulgaria introduced them to the Israeli palate. Connoisseurs can tell what burekas are filled with by the shape of the pastry: triangles with cheese; rectangles with potato; crescents are made of a different kind of dough and filled with a blend of cheeses. Israelis eat burekas at any time of day. They're a popular breakfast staple, a favorite on-the-run snack, and they can even be "dressed-up" as an appetizer at weddings and other celebrations. Feel free to experiment: add olives and tomato paste and they taste like pizza; a bit of spinach, and you'll be convinced they're healthy.



The pocket in pita makes the bread uniquely suited for sandwich making, and Israelis use it as a holder for just about anything. You can fill it with falafel or hummus, or stuff it with grilled meats, a variety of salads, and even French fries! Restaurants that serve a mezze—huge array of tiny plates with salads, spreads, dips, and vegetable delicacies—generally offer bottomless baskets of hot fresh pita, which diners use to scoop up the appetizers. Baking pita is an adventure, highlighted by watching the round mounds of dough rise up like balloons in the oven. Less complicated pita can be baked on a campfire using a traditional saj, a sort of upside-down wok placed over the campfire: flatten a piece of dough and toss it on the saj for a couple of minutes until it starts to brown. Dip it in olive oil, sprinkle with za'atar or sumac, and eat it while it's hot!

ISRAELI SPICE RACK

מִזְרָף תְּבֻלִינִים יִשְׂרָאֵלִי



Israeli cuisine uses lots of fresh ingredients and draws on countless influences from East and West, so it should come as no surprise that Israeli chefs use a wide range of spices in their kitchens. Fragrant mountains of colorful spices are a highlight of any visit to the shuk. You can buy dark green za'atar; deep purple sumac; bright orange turmeric; dark paprika; whole, crushed, preserved, or powdered garlic; and more. In the shuk, spices are sold by weight, but people who prefer to buy them in small jars may opt for the supermarket spice aisle. Of course, we can't talk about Israeli spices without mentioning the fresh mint, lemongrass, and sage that Israelis like to add to their tea. For an especially refreshing hot beverage, try steeping one or more of these herbs in a glass of boiling water—no tea bag necessary!



WINERIES AND BREWERIES

יִקְבֵּים וּמְבַשְּׁלוֹת



In pre-State Israel, Baron de Rothschild purchased land and helped new immigrants establish vineyards and wineries in Zichron Ya'akov in the north and Rishon LeZion in the center of the country. Few wineries in those days produced anything other than sweet wine for Shabbat. Today, the country is filled with boutique wineries producing a vast range of award-winning wines. It's really no surprise that the Israeli wine industry is thriving; grapes are one of the seven species of the Land of Israel described in the Bible, and archaeologists have discovered the remains of multiple wineries all over. Alongside the thriving wine industry, craft breweries produce a wild array of beers that have found welcome markets among young and old, locals and visitors alike.



ISRAELI SALAD

סלט ישראלי



In Israel, this fresh delicacy is most often called simply “salad” or “chopped salad.” It’s a close relative of many other traditional salads served throughout the Middle East. When Jews immigrated to Israel, many brought their own versions from Turkey, Iran, and other places. The secret is to chop fresh tomatoes and cucumbers as finely as possible. In kibbutzim, a salad comprised of tiny pieces is the sign of an accomplished chef, though some prefer larger chunks. Everybody loves it with a splash of olive oil and a dash of lemon juice. Israelis eat this salad at any time of day: at breakfast, it may be accompanied by a yogurt sauce, while later in the day, many serve it with tahini sauce. A dash of sumac brings out the vegetables’ natural flavors, and this salad is a key ingredient in a wide range of pita-based sandwiches such as falafel, sabich, and shawarma.



Israel boasts an awesome array of snack foods. Kids grow up eating Bamba, cheese puffs that taste like peanut butter; Bissli, crunchy wheat-based morsels that come in flavors like falafel, pizza, and onion; Krembo, a chocolate-coated marshmallow that sits atop a cookie base; and Milki, individual chocolate pudding cups topped with whipped cream, to name a few. And to wash it all down: Shoko Basakit, chocolate milk in individual-serving-sized bags. As they grow up, Israelis broaden the array of snacks they enjoy to include Garinim—sunflower seeds, sweet seedless watermelon served with salty Bulgarian cheese, and more. In addition to being delicious, snack foods can be good for you too: doctors believe the reason Israelis have fewer peanut allergies than kids in other countries is because of all the Bamba they eat as infants.



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YEHUDA AMICHAH

יְהוּדָה עֲמִיחַי



Yehuda Amichai has been called the greatest Hebrew poet since King David. Born in Germany in 1924, Amichai immigrated to pre-State Israel with his family and grew up speaking and writing in Hebrew. During his lifetime, he published more than a dozen volumes of poetry, many of which have been translated into 40 languages around the world. Some of his best-known poems include *Memorial Day for the War Dead*, *Tourists*, and *Ecology of Jerusalem*. He was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize in 1982, as well as many other Israeli and international awards. His poems address every aspect of life; though he said that all of them were in some way political: “real poems deal with a human response to reality...and politics is part of reality, history in the making.” Amichai died in 2000.



RACHEL THE POET

רַחֵל הַמְּשׁוֹרֶרֶת



Rachel the Poet's Hebrew works are legendary in Israel, and they reflect her deep love of the country and the Zionist ideal. Born Rachel Bluwstein in 1890 in Russia, she and her sister planned to study painting in Italy but decided to visit pre-State Israel on the way. Moved by what they saw in the land, they decided to stay. Rachel learned Hebrew by listening to small children speak and dreamed of becoming a teacher. During a visit to Europe, she contracted tuberculosis, for which no cure existed. Unable to work with children any longer, she spent the rest of her life living in Tel Aviv, writing about the landscapes of her beloved land. She died in 1931 and is buried in the Kinneret Cemetery near many of the early leaders of the Zionist movement. When the Bank of Israel introduced new banknotes depicting poets, Rachel's likeness was selected for the 20 shekel note.



AMOS OZ
רִיבּוֹן



Amos Oz was considered Israel's best-known living writer until his death in 2018. His long list of novels includes *My Michael*, *Black Box*, and *Judas*, all bestsellers in Israel and translated into many languages around the world. His nonfiction work, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, chronicling his troubled childhood, was the first Hebrew book translated into Chinese to become part of the official school curriculum in China. Born in 1939 in Jerusalem, he moved to Kibbutz Hulda as a teenager. There, he was allotted one day per week to write, but after *My Michael* became a bestseller and brought significant revenue to the kibbutz, he was granted three days per week to write. Oz, who was an outspoken advocate for Israeli-Palestinian peace, received the prestigious Israel Prize in 1998.



Etgar Keret writes offbeat, quirky short stories in Hebrew that have enjoyed wide appeal around the world. Looking at the titles of some of his stories—*The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God*, *Missing Kissinger*, and *Crazy Glue*—you begin to get a sense of his intriguing world. Born in 1967, Keret cites as his inspirations Kurt Vonnegut, William Faulkner, and the Coen Brothers. His essays and social commentaries appear in the Israeli media and foreign outlets including the *New York Times*. He and his wife, Shira Geffen, have collaborated on films, and he also writes plays, graphic novels, and children's books. In the aftermath of the 2014 Gaza War, Keret and his friend, Arab-Israeli writer Sayed Kashua, wrote a series of anguished letters that appeared in the *New Yorker* and explored different perspectives on the stalemate between Arabs and Jews in the region.



Sayed Kashua, an Arab Citizen of Israel who currently lives in Illinois, has been called “the greatest living Hebrew writer” and holds a very special place in the Israeli literary landscape. Born in 1975 and raised in the Arab town of Tira, in the region of northern Israel called “the Triangle,” Kashua, a gifted student, was sent to an elite boarding school in Jerusalem. There he read novels for the first time, and soon afterwards began writing—naturally, in Hebrew. In his work, including bestselling novel *Dancing Arabs*, and award-winning television series *Avoda Aravit—Arab Labor*, Kashua explores the complex reality of the nearly two million Arab Citizens of Israel. In 2014, Kashua accepted a position at the University of Illinois and announced he was leaving Israel. He continues to write a weekly column for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* and remains a cultural icon in the country.



HAIM NACHMAN BIALIK

חַיִּים נַחֲמָן בִּיאֲלִיק

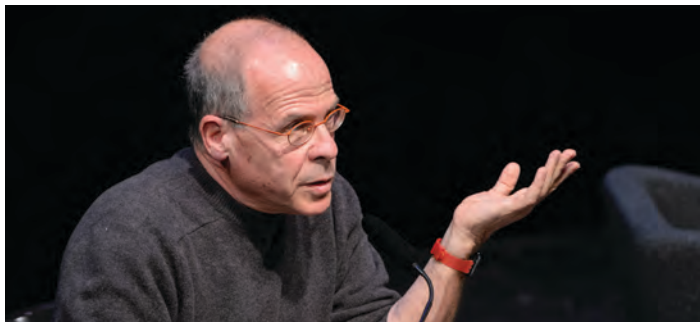


Known as the National Poet of Israel, Chaim Nachman Bialik was born in Russia in 1873 and lived most of his life in Europe. His early poetry was written in Yiddish, but as he became involved in the Zionist movement, he switched to Hebrew. After publishing his first book of poetry in 1901, he was hailed as the poet of the Zionist awakening. Perhaps his most haunting poem was written about the 1903 pogrom in Kishinev, called “In the City of Slaughter.” In it he decried the passivity of Jews in the face of anti-Semitic violence. The poem served as the inspiration behind the founding of the Haganah in pre-State Israel. He moved to Tel Aviv in 1924 where he was revered for his literary work. Many of his poems remain among the most popular children’s songs today, and his home is a museum and literary center.



MEIR SHALEV

מֵאִיר שָׁלֵב



A popular novelist and essayist, Meir Shalev was born in 1948 in Nahalal, a מוֹשָׁב—moshav—farming community, in Northern Israel. He fought in the 1967 Six-Day War and was injured soon thereafter in a friendly-fire incident. He became prominent among the Israeli public when his first novel, *The Blue Mountain*, became a bestseller in 1988; other works of fiction include *Esau* and *A Pigeon and a Boy*. His nonfiction works include personal interpretations of the Bible and a long-running weekly newspaper column. Also a writer of children's books, his works have been translated into 26 languages. After moving to the Jezreel Valley in the north and spending time in nature, Shalev wrote a nonfiction book, *My Wild Garden*. He is an outspoken supporter of a two-state solution, although he says that as long as radical Palestinians envision a Middle East with no Jews, there can't be progress toward peace.



LEAH GOLDBERG

לאה גולדברג



As a young child, Leah Goldberg kept a Hebrew diary and wrote Hebrew poems, even though she didn't know the language well. Growing up in Russia and Lithuania, she dreamed of being a Hebrew writer because “writing in any other language would be like not writing at all.” Settling in Tel Aviv in 1935, at the age of 24, she joined a group of other writers who were forging a Modern Hebrew style of poetry. Her mastery of many languages made her a skilled translator, and her biggest translation project was to produce a Hebrew version of Tolstoy's opus *War and Peace*. Many of her works—including *דירה להשכיר*—*Dirah L'haskir—A Flat for Rent*—remain popular children's stories in Israel today. When she died in 1970, her mother accepted the prestigious Israel Prize on her behalf, awarded posthumously. Goldberg's image is featured on the 100 shekel note.



Born into a large Israeli family of Yemenite origin, Ayelet Tzabari recalls that she loved to read as a child, but often wondered why the heroes she met in books seemed so different from the people she knew. In her highly acclaimed first book, a collection of short stories called *The Best Place on Earth*, Tzabari pursues her mission of telling Mizrahi stories. It won the prestigious Sami Rohr Prize for literature and gained her widespread attention in Israel and North America. The book was written in English—she has lived in Canada for the past two decades—and was recently translated into Hebrew for Israeli readers. Tzabari's first published work was in Hebrew when she was 10 years old, and she sometimes marvels that today she writes in English. Nonetheless, she says, seeing her work in Hebrew translation in Israeli bookstores was a dream come true.



DORIT RABINYAN

דֹרִית רַבִּינְיָאן



Novelist and writer Dorit Rabinyan was born in 1972 in Kfar Saba to parents who had immigrated to Israel from Iran. Her first novel, *סְמִטַּת הַשְּׂקֵדִיּוֹת בְּעוֹמְרִינ'אן*—*Persian Brides*, became an immediate bestseller in Israel and was translated into multiple languages around the world. Perhaps the most interesting translation of her work was done unofficially and anonymously: *Persian Brides* has long been a big seller in Iran, where the unsanctioned translation doesn't mention the fact that the author is Israeli. The initial reception to Rabinyan's 2014 novel, *Gader Haya—All the Rivers*, which tells the story of a romance between an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man in New York, was warm, and the book won the prestigious Bernstein Prize in 2015. Soon, however, the Israeli education ministry removed it from a list of approved books for high school classes, saying it encouraged intermarriage and assimilation.



EREZ BITON

אֵרֶז בִּיטוֹן



Now an acclaimed, award-winning Israeli poet, Erez Biton was born in Algeria in 1942 and came to Israel as a young boy soon after Israel's independence. Blinded in an accident at the age of 10, Biton studied at a school for the blind, where he was introduced to Western culture and began to write poetry. His poems focused on his experiences growing up in a school filled with blind children, and on the reality of living as a Sephardic Jew in a country dominated, at the time, by Ashkenazi culture. His work focuses on telling the stories of the Mizrahi Jewish experience which has earned him the title of the founding father of Sephardic poetry in Israel, Biton has received multiple awards, and in 2015 he became the first Mizrahi Jew to be awarded the prestigious Israel Prize for literature.



RONNY SOMECK

רוני סומק



Born in Iraq in 1951, Ronny Someck was brought to Israel with his family two years later, where he grew up in a transit camp for new immigrants. He published his first poem at age 17, and went on to study Hebrew literature, philosophy, and drawing. He has published more than a dozen books, including two children's books that he co-authored with his daughter, Shirly. Someck's poems address themes related to urban landscapes around Tel Aviv, as well as local and international pop culture figures. His 2017 collection of poetry, נקמת הילד הבגנבם—The Revenge of the Stuttering Child has been translated into many languages, as have many of his earlier works. Someck also exhibits his artwork, has recorded two discs of music, and has been active in a variety of political and social causes. A founding member of the Yesh Atid party in 2012, Someck serves on the board of the New Israel Fund.



Born to Holocaust survivors in Transylvania in 1947, Agi Mishol immigrated to Israel with her family at the age of four. Growing up in the town of Gedera, the family was so poor that Mishol slept in an armchair in their one-room apartment until she began her IDF service at age 18. That same year, she self-published a volume of poetry, but later she destroyed all of the copies. Since then, her career has taken a major turn, and she has published more than a dozen volumes of poetry. The author Amos Oz describes her poetry this way: “Agi Mishol’s poems know how to tell a tale, to sing a song and also dance—all at one and the same time. I love the splendid surprises in them, the subtle and exact sadness, and the mysterious manner by which she makes this sadness overflow with hidden joy.” Mishol has won many awards for her work, including the Prime Minister’s Prize and the Yehuda Amichai Prize.



Born in 1914 in Poland to a family that was part of the Chabad dynasty—her first cousin was Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the most recent Lubavitcher Rebbe—Zelda, who used just her first name, moved to pre-State Israel with her family in 1926. Her poetry, which is filled with references to religious texts and imaginary characters, continues to strike a chord among Israelis from all walks of life, crossing religious lines. Since her death in 1984, Zelda's poetry has grown in popularity, as translations into many languages make her work accessible worldwide. As a young teacher in Jerusalem, one of her students was Amos Oz, who would go on to become one of Israel's greatest authors. Her most famous poem, לְכֹל אִישׁ יֵשׁ שֵׁם—Lekol Ish Yesh Shem—Each Person Has a Name, is recited each year on Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel.



A.B. Yehoshua's novels have been translated into nearly 30 languages, but many North American Jews know him best for his outspoken criticism of Jewish life outside the Jewish state. "American Jews are just playing with their Judaism," he has said, adding that Jewish life in Israel—even for secular people—is much richer, fuller, and all-encompassing than outside of Israel. Jews who choose not to live in Israel are making "a neurotic choice," he says, much to the chagrin of many Jews who have made that choice. Yehoshua's comments often prompt interesting, impassioned discussions about identity and community, which are some of the themes his novels explore. His best-known books include *A Late Divorce*, *The Lover*, and *Mr. Mani*, and his films include *The Human Resources Manager*.



DAVID GROSSMAN

דָּוִד גְּרוֹסְמָן



One of Israel's most popular writers, David Grossman's novels, nonfiction works, and political essays have all garnered widespread attention. A longtime peace activist, his voice took on special resonance during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. His son Uri, who was fighting in the war, was killed in the final hours before the ceasefire took effect. His eulogy for Uri was a powerful ode to faith at the most difficult moment a parent can imagine. "In our crazy, cruel, and cynical world, it's not 'cool' to have values, or to be a humanist, or to be truly sensitive to the suffering of the other, even if that other is your enemy on the battlefield," he said. "However, I learned from Uri that it is both possible and necessary to be all that." He won the Man Booker Prize for his 2017 novel, *A Horse Walks Into a Bar*, and the prestigious Israel Prize in 2018.



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ARI FOLMAN

אַרִי פּוֹלְמָן



Ari Folman's experience as a soldier in the First Lebanon War—and the three traumatic days that he blocked from his memory—led to the biggest film success of his career to date, the 2008 animated full-length *Waltz with Bashir*. The film, which explored his search for answers about what he and others experienced in Lebanon, won a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film and was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Language Film category. He also wrote for a variety of Israeli TV shows, including *Be'Tipul*, which became the inspiration for the US series *In Treatment*. The child of Holocaust survivors who married in the Lodz ghetto the day before they were deported to Auschwitz, Folman has also sought to explore issues related to the Holocaust in his work.



Gal Gadot—now most widely known as Wonder Woman—was crowned Miss Israel in 2004 at the age of 18, and has been a popular model and actress ever since. She has had roles in the *Fast and the Furious* franchise, and she's been the spokeswoman for everything from fragrances and fashion to websites and cell phones. As her global career has advanced, her Israeli fan base has continued to grow, leading to headlines in both local and international media that highlight her as a role model to girls and women everywhere. She credits her two years of IDF service, where she trained combat soldiers, with preparing her for her role as Wonder Woman, and in interviews she regularly expresses pride in her country.



The Israeli series *Be'Tipul* was the first TV show to become a big hit in the US market, where it drew large audiences as *In Treatment*. It's been followed by a long string of others: the blockbuster TV series *Homeland*, based on the Israeli series *Prisoners of War*, and *Hostages*, based on *Bnei Aruba*, to name a few. While many Israeli exports revolve around adrenalin-driven national-security themes—including the short-lived series about US special forces *The Brave*—others include a variety of game shows, reality shows, and dramas. Most Israeli shows use small casts and modest sets, reflecting the reality of low-budget productions suited to a small home audience. If you want to see the originals, you can stream a wide range of Israeli shows—in Hebrew with English subtitles. A few suggestions: *Fauda*, *Mossad 101*, and *Srugim*.



GALEI TZAHAL

גַּלְי תְּצַה"ל



Galei Tzahal, Army Radio, was launched in 1950 as the heir to the pre-State Haganah radio broadcasts. Initially aimed at soldiers, the national broadcasts long ago broadened their appeal and Galatz, as it's called for short, draws a wide audience that spans all ages and walks of life. The lively mix of music, talk shows, and news hits the mark for the public. Since the 1990s, Galatz has operated a second station, called Galgalatz—a play on גַּלְגַּל—galgal—wheel and Galatz—that combines popular music with frequent traffic reports. Galatz was the first Israeli radio station to broadcast 24 hours a day, and its alumni include many prominent figures in the worlds of journalism, culture, and politics. Galatz and Galgalatz are among the most-listened to radio stations in a landscape that includes state-run and private stations.



LUCY AHARISH

לוֹסִי אַהַרִישׁ



Lucy Aharish is the first Arab Israeli to anchor a national television newscast in Hebrew, and a powerful voice for mutual respect among different sectors of Israeli society. Born in 1981 to two Muslim-Arab parents who lived in the predominantly Jewish city of Dimona in Southern Israel, she says she grew up feeling proud to be Israeli and very comfortable living with Israeli Jews. Chosen to be the only Arab among 14 citizens honored to light a torch on Independence Day in 2015, she said, in Arabic, “this is our country and there is no other.” Aharish has been criticized by right-wing Israeli Jews, as well as by other Arab citizens of Israel, but her message of coexistence has resonance among many people. “My national identity is that of an Arab-Israeli,” she says. “I identify with Palestinian suffering, but I am not part of it.”



TV SATIRE

סאטירה בטלוויזיה



From Zehu Zeh!—This Is It! in the 1970s, to Hartzufim—a made-up word that can be translated as Cheeky Faces—in the 1990s, and Gav HaUma—The Back of the Country and Eretz Nehederet—It’s a Wonderful Country today, Israeli TV features a lot of political and social satire. Think a combo of Saturday Night Live and The Daily Show with a really, really, really sharp bite. Gav HaUma and Eretz Nehederet are both highly rated weekly programs that skewer social trends, news headlines, and politics and politicians. While the hosts—each show is hosted by a group of A-list Israeli personalities—share broadly liberal political views, no politician or political position escapes the sharp tongues and side-splitting laughs from these shows. Literally nothing is off-limits!



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ARIK EINSTEIN

אַרִּיק אֵיִןשְׁטֵיִן



More than any other single musical artist, Arik Einstein chronicled decades of Israeli history through more than 500 songs and 34 albums. One of Israel's leading music critics, Yoav Kutner, said "Einstein is more than the greatest Israeli artist of all time. Einstein is the real Israel himself." Some of the most popular songs by the Tel Aviv-born Einstein, including *Ani VeAta*—אֲנִי וְאַתָּה and *Oof Gozal*—עוֹף גּוֹזַל, are still played and sung in Israel and around the world. He collaborated with countless other musicians and singers, and is universally regarded as the greatest Israeli musician of all time. It wasn't always clear that he would pursue a musical career; as a youth, he was Israel's high jump champion. When he died in 2013 in Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called his music "the soundtrack of the country."



NAOMI SHEMER

נעמי שמר



Naomi Shemer is best known for her song יְרוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁל זָהָב —*Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*—Jerusalem of Gold, which she wrote just before the 1967 Six-Day War. It became an unofficial anthem after the reunification of Jerusalem, and some proposed that it replace Hatikvah as Israel’s national anthem. Her works read like a history of the state. Born in 1930 in Kvutzat Kinneret in the Galilee, a kibbutz her parents helped found, she studied at the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem, performed in an IDF entertainment troupe, and launched a long, successful career, eventually winning the prestigious Israel Prize in 1983. When she died in 2004, she was buried in the Kinneret Cemetery, just a few meters away from the grave of Rachel the Poet, whose poetry Shemer featured in many of her songs.



DAVID BROZA

דָּוִד בְּרוּזָה



Best known for his 1977 hit song יִהְיֶה טוֹב—*Yihye Tov*, which contains a passionate plea for peace, David Broza has long been one of Israel's most popular singers and performers at home and abroad. The grandson of one of the founders of Neveh Shalom, a groundbreaking community of Israeli Jews and Arabs in the center of the country, Broza's music and activism have long focused on his belief in bringing people together. When he is not performing or recording, he is working to bring Israelis and Palestinians together. In 2015, he released an album called *East Jerusalem, West Jerusalem*, which features Israeli and Palestinian performers; a film by the same name documents the experience. "I don't make political statements but I'm a peace activist," he says. "I have been for the 40 years of my career and before that as a kid."



ISRAEL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

הַתְּזְמוּרַת הַפִּילְהַרְמוֹנִית הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית



Founded in Tel Aviv in 1936 as the Palestine Orchestra, many of the IPO's original members were talented Jewish musicians who had been forced out of Europe by the rise of Nazism. The acclaimed conductor Arturo Toscanini led the Orchestra's first concert in 1936, and they performed before Allied troops around the world during World War II. That first concert featured the works of German composer Richard Wagner, despite him being a favorite of Adolf Hitler. After Kristallnacht in 1938, the IPO stopped playing Wagner's music; Wagner remains off-limits in most Israeli classical music circles to this day. In 1948, with the establishment of the State, the name was changed to the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. From its home in Tel Aviv, the IPO performs for tens of thousands of subscribers, and travels around Israel and the world. It was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize in 1958.



Yael Deckelbaum

יַעֲלֵ דֶקֶלְבָּאום



Growing up singing and making music with her father, Yael Deckelbaum burst on to the national scene as a member of the popular three-woman band הַבָּנוֹת הַנְּחָמָה—HaBanot Nechama—The Comfort Girls, whose debut album went platinum in 2004. The name references how the three performers met: they were all in a Tel Aviv clothing store when they began to complain about their careers. Recognizing the comfort they felt in each other's company, they found the name of their band. Deckelbaum has collaborated and toured with some of Israel's leading music acts, including Shlomo Artzi and the band Mashina. Since 2014, Deckelbaum has gained prominence as a social activist; she wrote the song *Prayer of the Mothers*, which has become the anthem of the Israeli-Palestinian women's movement Women Wage Peace.



YEHUDA POLIKER

יְהוּדָה פּוֹלִיקֵר



Yehuda Poliker exploded on the Israeli music scene in the 1980s as the lead singer of the band Benzene, and launched his solo career a few years - and two successful albums - later. The son of Holocaust survivors originally from northern Greece, Poliker's exploration of traditional Greek music has made a unique contribution to the Israeli culture scene. In 1988, Poliker and his parents, along with Poliker's longtime partner Yaakov Gilad and his mother, co-starred in a documentary film, **בְּגִלָּל הַמִּלְחָמָה הַהִיא**—Biglal Hamilhama Hahi—Because of That War, with Poliker's music as the soundtrack. In addition to winning a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of Authors, Composers, and Music Publishers in Israel in 2012, he received the Gold Cross of the Order of the Phoenix, one of Greece's highest awards for achievements in the arts, in 2014.



SARIT HADAD

שָׂרִית חַדָּד



Born in 1978 in the northern town of Afula, Sarit Hadad is the youngest of eight children in a musical family whose parents immigrated to Israel from the Caucasus region of the Former Soviet Union. Her early musical aptitude - she played a variety of instruments and performed in local youth bands - paved the way to a stellar career as Israel's best selling female vocalist. With more than 20 hit albums, Hadad has brought her brand of Mizrahi music into the local mainstream, garnering fans across the country and around the world. Hadad was a mentor in the early years of the Israeli version of The Voice, and has been named Female Vocalist of the Year multiple times. Galei Zahal, Israel's army radio, crowned her Female Vocalist of the 2000s, and her live performances continue to sell out across the country.



AVIV GEFFEN

אַבִּיב גֵפֶן



Born in 1973 to an Israeli version of cultural royalty—his father, Yehonatan, is an acclaimed writer, and his uncle was Prime Minister Moshe Dayan—Aviv Geffen began his performing career before his 10th birthday and quickly became an icon for young Israelis. While many popular performing artists got their start in a military performing troupe, Geffen received a medical exemption from military service, leading some of his critics to challenge his right to sing about the IDF and military/security issues. On November 4, 1995, he performed at a large Tel Aviv peace rally, singing לִבְכוֹת לְךָ—Livkot Lecha—Cry For You—a song he originally wrote for Arik Einstein to perform. In the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which took place at the end of that rally, the song became an anthem for the “candle children,” as the teens who lit memorial candles in the following days and weeks were called.



IDAN RAICHEL PROJECT

הַפְּרוֹיֶקְט שֶׁל עִידָן רַיִיֶּחֶל



Idan Raichel learned to play the accordion at age 9, which he calls “the uncoolest instrument ever.” By high school, he was playing jazz and experimenting with other genres. He spent his military service in an army band, entertaining troops all around the country. After the army, Raichel worked at a school for immigrant teens, where he befriended Ethiopian immigrants who introduced him to their traditional music. Intrigued, Raichel began to create music with them, eventually establishing the Idan Raichel Project. In 2003, the Project’s song בּוֹעֵי—*Bo’ee* became a hit in Israel and they soon found themselves in high demand. Raichel’s unique sound blends influences from around the world, and he has performed with many popular musicians on stage, including Dave Matthews and Alicia Keys. Through his work, Raichel has become an ambassador whose music brings hope to all.



ACHINOAM NINI (NOA) אַחִינוּעַם נִינִי (נוֹעָה)



Born in Israel in 1969, Achinoam Nini, who performs internationally under the name Noa, moved to New York with her family when she was two-years old. Returning to Israel at 17, she served in an IDF entertainment troupe, and studied at the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music. While there, she began to collaborate with one of her teachers, Gil Dor, whose strong background in jazz and rock continues to mesh with Noa's Yemenite influences to create a unique sound that has made her a bestselling performer. Noa credits Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, and Leonard Cohen with influencing her work, and has been a tireless voice for peace in Israel and around the world. "My light is my dedication to peace, humanism, and human rights," she told a reporter, "and to the most beautiful concept conveyed to me as a child: 'Love your brother as you love yourself.'"



RITA
רִיטָה



Born in 1962 in Teheran, Iran, Rita—whose last name is Jahan-Foruz—came to Israel with her family as a young child. After performing in an IDF entertainment troupe, she soon launched her career with a string of best-selling songs and albums that catapulted her to the top of the Israeli music charts. In the 2000s, she began to sing in her native Farsi and became wildly popular in Iran. While the Iranian government accused her of participating in Israel’s “soft war” against them, many Iranian fans reached out with messages of peace. Whenever she performs, she leaves an empty seat in the front row—just in case one of her Iranian fans manages to attend. In a popular TEDxTelAviv, she said, “I used to think I was cursed by all possible ways: Jewish, Iranian, Israeli...Now, I have learned that our weaknesses hold the potential of great strength and our curses carry a blessing inside them.”



KOBI OZ
קובי אוז



Born in 1969 in Sderot to parents who fled the World War II Vichy regime, Kobi Oz found himself in the thick of a robust music scene that developed in the 1980s and 1990s. While subject to an ongoing barrage of rockets from nearby Gaza, immigrants and children of immigrants from the underprivileged town passed the time spent in bomb shelters by making music. Oz is among the most famous products of Sderot: he co-founded TeaPacks, which produced multiple best selling albums that merge pop, rock, and Middle Eastern music. More recently Oz, who identifies as a secular Jew, has produced albums that explore the meeting of religious texts and Tel Aviv culture, with songs whose lyrics explore man's search for meaning. He is credited with helping to open up Israeli music to Middle Eastern influences.



THE BANAI FAMILY

משפחת בנאי



Everyone in Israel associates the family name Banai with performers. When the family came to Israel from Iran, they lived in Jerusalem's Nahlaot neighborhood until many of the siblings and cousins settled in other parts of the country. The Banai family music has broad appeal throughout Israel. It's hard to say who's the most famous, but here's a sampling: Gavriel was a member of the comedy trio הַגָּשָׁשׁ הַחַיִּיבֵר—Hagashash Hahiver—Pale Tracker, which set the standard for Israeli comedy routines and was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize in recognition of its contribution to Israeli society; his brother, Yossi, also received an Israel Prize for his acting; cousins Ehud, Yuval, and Eviatar all have enjoyed successful musical careers; and cousin Orna is one of the country's leading stand-up comics and a former member of the Tel Aviv City Council.



SHLOMO ARTZI

שְׁלֹמֹה אֶרְצִי



One of Israel's most popular male vocalists, Shlomo Artzi has sold more than 1.5 million albums in a career that spans six decades. Representing Israel in the 1975 Eurovision song contest—after his musical career was in high gear in the late 1960s and early 1970s—his song didn't garner good reviews and he contemplated giving up on music. In 1977, he decided to record “one last album,” נָפֵר הוֹלֵךְ לְאִיבֹד—Gever Holech Le'Ibud—A Man Gets Lost; in addition to being a bestseller, it put Artzi's career on a trajectory that continues until today. Music has turned into something of a family business; Artzi's son Ben performed in his father's music video for the hit song תַּחַת שְׁמַי יָם הַתִּיכוֹן—Tachat Shmei Yam HaTichon—Under the Mediterranean Sky—and today he is a popular singer and performer in his own right.



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BEZALEL ACADEMY OF ARTS AND DESIGN

בְּצַלְאֵל אַקָּדֶמְיָה לְאֻמְנוֹת וְעֵצָוִב



Founded in Jerusalem in 1908, Bezalel was the first institution of higher education established in pre-State Israel. The founder, Boris Schatz, had a vision for the school to guide the development of arts that would meld the ancient with the modern, a vision that has played out for more than a century. Named for the Biblical figure Bezalel, who Moses appointed to design the Tabernacle, Bezalel's early students shaped the course of Israeli design as they melded elements of European art nouveau with traditional Middle Eastern elements to depict Biblical and Zionist themes. Today, Bezalel graduates play an outsized role in shaping the Israeli art and architecture scene. Prominent alumni include sculptor David Gerstein, graphic designer David Tartakover, artist Yaacov Agam, architect Ron Arad, and installation artist Sigalit Landau.



BAUHAUS ARCHITECTURE

אַדְרִיכְלוֹת בְּאַוּהָאוּס



How did Tel Aviv come to boast the largest collection of buildings designed in the Bauhaus style, also known as the International Style? The German Bauhaus School, which advanced a minimalist style of architecture, closed after the Nazis came to power, and many German Jewish architects fled to pre-State Israel. Tel Aviv was a new city with a new master plan, and the early architects found plentiful work designing apartments and other buildings. They adapted the Bauhaus style to the hot, humid, Mediterranean climate, and the result can be seen to this day in some 4,000 white buildings with recessed windows and high walls—to keep out the glaring hot sun—and long porches that look down on the streets below. In 2003, UNESCO recognized Tel Aviv as a World Heritage Site, due to its huge collection of preserved Bauhaus buildings, earning it the nickname The White City.



NACHALAT BINYAMIN

נַחֲלַת בִּנְיָמִין



Located in central Tel Aviv not far from the Carmel Market, the Nachalat Binyamin Arts and Crafts Market is surrounded by preserved buildings in a variety of local and international styles. A popular attraction since the 1980s, this colorful street fair brings together dozens of artists and artisans who sell their wares. Tourists and locals alike wander among the vendors, buying trinkets and souvenirs, relaxing at area restaurants and cafes, and in general taking a break from the bustle of the city. Along with street performers, the arts and crafts market operates on Tuesdays and Fridays, all year long. Thousands of people visit each week, and at peak holiday times the crowd can swell to 100,000 people.



HABIMA

תֵּאֲטֵרוֹן הַבִּימָה



Habima, the National Theatre of Israel, traces its roots to Russia, where in 1917 a group of actors received permission from the mayor of Moscow to establish a troupe that would perform in Hebrew. Living and working in post-revolutionary Russia proved challenging, so when the actors embarked on a world tour a few years later, they did not return. After a brief stint in New York, they settled in Tel Aviv and formed a collective in which all members had a say in the company's management. By the 1940s, they had settled into a new building at the end of Rothschild Boulevard, and in 1958, upon receiving the prestigious Israel Prize, Habima was named the National Theatre of Israel. As a group of leading Israeli authors wrote in 2005, "Habima is not just a cultural institution. It is the foundation of the revival of the Hebrew language and cultural life in Israel."



FLORENTIN

פְּלוֹרֶנְטִין



This neighborhood in the southern part of Tel Aviv was established in the 1920s when a Greek Jew named David Florentin purchased the land and envisioned it as a working-class neighborhood with lots of small workshops and businesses. By the 1960s, the buildings were in disrepair, and it wasn't until a 1990s TV show called *Florentin*, about young, cool Israelis living and working in the neighborhood, that artists and other creative types discovered it. Today, many of the old workshops are artists' studios and the former shops are now trendy cafes and restaurants. Artists have turned the crumbling walls of the old buildings into their canvases, and thousands of visitors and locals flock to graffiti tours to learn about the messages behind the many forms of street art.



SHENKAR

מכללת שנקר



Ranked the ninth best fashion school in the world by Fashionista, the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design was founded in 1970 to support the country's growing textile industry. Today, Shenkar offers a wide range of academic degrees and is Israel's leading school for fashion and industrial design. Shenkar stresses the importance of embracing global culture without neglecting its uniquely Israeli mission—giving voice to Israeli culture through design. Tel Aviv's annual Fashion Week features designs produced with 3D imaging technology, newly designed materials, and other innovations pioneered by Shenkar students and graduates. Shenkar's alumni have achieved fame in global fashion circles for their innovative use of materials as well as their long lists of celebrity clients.

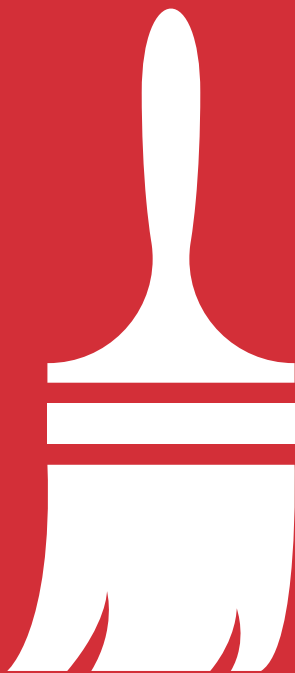


JERUSALEM STONE

אֶבֶן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם



The Talmud says, “Ten measures of beauty descended to the world, and nine were taken by Jerusalem.” One of the most striking aspects about the city is the use of light-colored limestone to face nearly all buildings. Israelis call it Jerusalem Stone, and it’s quarried in multiple locations around the country and in the West Bank. Used as a key building component since ancient times, in the early 1900s it became a legal requirement that all buildings be faced with Jerusalem Stone. British authorities decided it would beautify the city, and ignored the fact that using Jerusalem Stone adds significantly to the cost of construction projects. Today, most builders create stone facades from thin blocks of stone as a way to maintain the city’s unique look while keeping costs in check. One of the best things about this ubiquitous design element? There’s so much of it in the country that experts say they’ll never run out.



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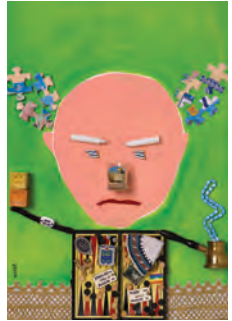
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HANOCH PIVEN

חֲנוּךְ פִּיבֵן



Born in Uruguay in 1963, Hanoch Piven made aliyah with his family as a child and always dreamed of being an artist. When he got to art school in New York, however, he had a crushing realization: he couldn't draw! Rather than give up, he refocused his energies and began to work with random objects to create images that tell stories. You can learn about Israeli leaders such as Theodor Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, and Golda Meir through the wildly creative portraits he has created. One of his books, *What Prime Ministers are Made Of*, features portraits and stories about Israel's Prime Ministers from 1948 to the present. Piven's workshops in Israel and around the world teaching people how to create portraits out of everyday objects. His work appears regularly in Israeli and international publications, including *TIME*, *Rolling Stone*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and others.



SIGALIT LANDAU

סיגלית לנדאו



Sigalit Landau is an Israeli artist whose sculpture, video, and installation works address a range of compelling current topics including homelessness, banishment, and the relationships between decay and growth. Born in Jerusalem in 1969, she spent part of her childhood in the US and Britain before studying dance at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. After completing her IDF service, she studied at the Bezalel Academy and launched her career in which she focuses on large, dramatic art installations. Over the years, her installations have been hosted in a diverse array of venues including the Tel Aviv Central Bus Station and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. For more than 15 years, many of her works have explored the Dead Sea and the salts and minerals that contribute to making the lowest place on earth a unique venue.



MOSHE SAFDIE

מֹשֶׁה סַפְדִּיָּה



Born in 1938 in Haifa, Moshe Safdie spent his childhood raising chickens and dreaming of becoming a farmer. When he was a teenager, his family relocated to Canada, where farming had less allure. He studied architecture at McGill University and went on to build a world-renowned architecture practice. After heading the urban design program at Harvard University, he left academia in order to focus his efforts on his own architecture. Significant works in Israel include Yad Vashem's main museum, the campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem, the master plan for the city of Modi'in, and Ben-Gurion International Airport. Safdie, who is a citizen of Israel, the US, and Canada, says he maintains "a trilogy of loyalties," and stays engaged in the cultural life of all three of his home countries.



ANNA TICHO

אַנָה טִיכּוֹ



Born in Moravia and trained as an artist in Vienna, Anna Ticho moved to Jerusalem to be with her fiancé, Albert, an ophthalmologist who had been asked to establish the Lema'an Zion Eye Hospital. She immediately began wandering the streets of the city, an underdeveloped outpost of the Ottoman Empire at the time, and painting scenes that struck her fancy. Over nearly seven decades, Ticho explored multiple styles of painting, but her subject was always the same: the fascinating, multi-faceted, ever-changing face of her adopted home, Jerusalem. When she died in 1980, her home—a beautiful stone building in the center of the city—was bequeathed to the city and today it operates as a branch of the Israel Museum. The outdoor cafe is a popular artists' gathering place, and the home hosts cultural events.



REUVEN RUBIN

רֵאָוֶן רוֹבִין

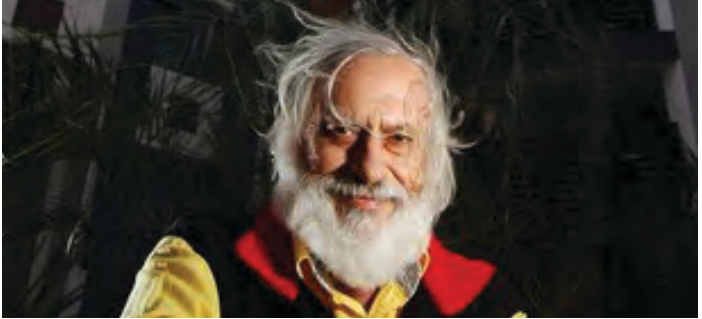


This Romanian-born painter originally emigrated to pre-State Israel in order to study at the acclaimed Bezalel Academy, only to continue his training in Paris. Upon returning to Palestine, he played a central role in creating the “Eretz Yisrael” style of art, depicting Biblical landscapes under the harsh Mideast sun’s glare, and portraits of Zionist laborers. Through much of his career, he signed his works with his first name in Hebrew and his last name in Latin letters, somehow symbolizing the merging of East and West. After a brief stint as Israel’s first ambassador to Romania in 1948, he resumed his work in Israel, creating the sets for the Habima Theater and continuing to depict scenes of the young state. He received the prestigious Israel Prize in 1973, and died the following year. Rubin bequeathed his home to the city of Tel Aviv, which turned it into a museum that is a popular place to visit.



YAACOV AGAM

יעקב אגם



Born in 1928 to a rabbi in pre-State Israel, Yaacov Agam trained at the Bezalel Academy of Art before heading to Europe to continue his art education. He is a pioneer of kinetic art, and his works often feature moving parts, lights, and music. Some of his best-known iconic works include the bright, colorful Fire and Water Fountain in Dizengoff Square in Tel Aviv, removed in 2016 when the square was renovated and reinstalled in 2018; the facade of the Dan Tel Aviv Hotel; and a Chanukkah Menorah on 5th Avenue at 59th Street in New York City that is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest Chanukkah Menorah in the world. His installations can be found in prestigious museums and prominent installations around the world. Agam's work is said to fetch the highest prices of all Israeli artists.



ADI NES

אדי נס



Adi Nes is a photographer that describes himself as an outsider in many ways: as the child of Sephardic immigrants growing up in the development town of Kiryat Gat, as a gay man in a macho-focused society, and as a photographer whose job is to observe from the outside. While he never felt like he fit in, he says he stays in Israel because Israeli society is the topic of his work, and he couldn't photograph it anywhere else. Nes's most famous work depicts a scene that echoes Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*; in Nes's version, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*, the characters at the table all are male IDF soldiers. "My staged photographs are oversized and often recall well-known scenes from Art History and Western Civilization," Nes says, adding that they are, "combined with personal experiences based on my life as a gay youth growing up in a small town on the periphery of Israeli society."



ASSAM ABU-SHAKRA

עֲאִסָּם אַבּוּ שְׁקֵרָה



Born in 1961 to a religious Muslim family in the northern city of Umm al-Fahm, Assam Abu-Shakra attended a Jewish high school in the nearby city of Afula, and at age 20 he moved to Tel Aviv to attend art school. For several years, he lived in a studio at the Kalisher Academy of Art, where he studied and later taught. While in Tel Aviv, he developed a body of work that included many self-portraits as well as paintings of sabra cactus plants, which he saw as symbolizing his Palestinian and personal identity. Like a cactus in a pot on a patio, he related that throughout his years in Tel Aviv, he felt as if he had been uprooted from his home in Umm al-Fahm: both he and the plants he painted had been separated from their typical settings and were living in unnatural surroundings. Abu-Shakra was diagnosed with cancer in 1987 and died in 1990. To this day both the Israeli and Palestinian art worlds claim him as an important figure.



For years, people have flocked to Tel Aviv's Florentin neighborhood to admire the street art. Tour guides lead groups along the streets and alleys, offering commentary about what a growing number of graffiti artists mean to tell the world through their art on the sides of buildings. You don't need to limit yourself to Florentin, and you don't need a guide, to see and enjoy Israeli street art—it's literally everywhere. Late at night, when the shops and stalls in Jerusalem's Machane Yehuda market are closed, feast your eyes on hundreds of larger-than-life portraits of famous people who run the gamut from rabbis and Zionist leaders to Bob Marley—all the work of local street artist Solomon Souza. Be sure to check out the giant wall murals that adorn buildings around Tel Aviv—and in the US, Argentina, China, and elsewhere—by Rami Meiri, who's earned the title of Godfather of Israeli Street Art since he began working in the 1990s.



MOMENTS IN MODERN ISRAELI HISTORY

רגעים משמעותיים בהיסטוריה של ישראל



ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

הַקְמַת הַמְדִינָה



On ה'ב'אָיָר תש"ח—May 14th, 1948 in Tel Aviv, before an audience of 400 people, David Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence announcing the establishment of the State of Israel. Thousands of people cheered and danced in the streets outside, and Jews around the world celebrated the first sovereign Jewish state in nearly 2,000 years. Fleeing horrific memories of the Holocaust and persecution in the Arab world, hundreds of thousands of Jews began to arrive in the country immediately. The declaration was met with sharp opposition by the Arabs of the region, and the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq attacked the new state in an effort to change the course of history. Palestinians refer to the events of 1948, in which 700,000 Arab residents of the land became refugees, as the Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe.



SIX-DAY WAR

מלחמת ששת הימים



As tensions rose between Israel and its neighbors in May 1967, Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser threatened to destroy Israel. The IDF went on high alert and called up all reserve soldiers. On June 5th, the Israel Air Force staged a preemptive strike, destroying the Egyptian Air Force. Over the next six days, Israel captured the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, reunifying Jerusalem and enabling Jews to visit the Western Wall for the first time in nearly 20 years. Many viewed the outcome of the war as nothing short of a miracle, replacing the vulnerability Israel felt before the way with a sense of confidence. At the same time, few thought about the longer term implications of controlling large populations of Palestinian Arabs, which today is at the forefront of Israel's geopolitical reality.



YOM KIPPUR WAR

מלחמת יום כיפור



On Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, Israel was taken by surprise in 1973 when Egyptian and Syrian armies attacked the thinly-manned Israeli front lines. As the IDF quickly mobilized hundreds of thousands of soldiers, the situation was so bleak that Defense Minister Moshe Dayan reportedly told Prime Minister Golda Meir that he was not certain Israel would survive the war. US President Nixon authorized sending military supplies to Israel, helping turn the tide of events as the IDF encircled the Egyptian army. By the time a ceasefire took effect, 2,688 Israeli soldiers had died, and more than 9,000 were wounded.



LEBANON WARS

מלחמות לבנון



In response to relentless attacks and infiltrations staged by Palestinian terrorists from bases in southern Lebanon in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Israel launched a military operation in June 1982. Called Operation Peace for Galilee, Israel's declared intention was to push Palestinian fighters 25 miles north of the border. The operation—meant to last only a few days—quickly turned into a protracted war effort that left many civilian casualties. Referred to as Israel's first "war of choice," the First Lebanon War, as it's commonly called, led to an 18-year IDF presence in parts of Lebanon. In 2006, after a few years of relative quiet, the IDF launched a second major military effort, following the kidnapping of IDF reservists from the Israeli side of the border. This time the stated intent was to destroy the Hezbollah militia, which controls the area. The military campaign ended when the bodies of the captured soldiers were returned. Hezbollah was not destroyed, and the security threat remained high.



INTIFADAS

אינתיפאדות



In December 1987, an Israeli truck driver crashed into a vehicle in Gaza that was carrying Palestinian workers, killing four and injuring others. Convinced that the crash was deliberate, Palestinians erupted in angry protests across the Gaza Strip, which soon spread to the West Bank. Termed “Intifada,” Arabic for “shaking off,” the protest was a spontaneous, violent outcry against Israeli rule over territories conquered in the 1967 Six-Day War. Many credit the First Intifada with prodding the sides toward negotiations that would begin in the early 1980s. After those talks collapsed in 2000, the Palestinian Authority then encouraged Palestinians to take their protests to the streets. The so-called Second Intifada differed from the first because it was coordinated by Palestinian officials and included suicide bombings that killed hundreds.



PEACE WITH EGYPT

הַסָּכֵם הַשְּׁלוֹם בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִצְרַיִם



Shocking the world, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat announced in Cairo in November 1977 that he was willing to travel to Israel to negotiate. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin responded with an official invitation; soon after, Sadat's entourage arrived in Israel to huge crowds of Israelis lining the streets waving Egyptian flags. In March 1979, the two former enemies signed a peace treaty; Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula, captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, and the two countries established full diplomatic ties. They also agreed on a plan for Palestinian autonomy, but the Palestinians, who had not been consulted, rejected the plan and it was never implemented. Angered by the deal, the Arab League expelled Egypt. In 1981, Sadat was assassinated by Egyptians who hoped to void the treaty. More than 40 years later, while relations are chilly, the peace treaty has endured.



RABIN ASSASSINATION

רצח רבין



Under the leadership of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli government pursued negotiations with the Palestinian Authority in the early 1990s. Tensions and discord rose among the Israeli public, with many supporting these efforts and others believing they would lead to disaster. On the night of November 4th, 1995, at the end of a giant peace rally in Tel Aviv, a Jewish Israeli law student shot and killed Rabin, hoping to derail the peace effort. The shock waves that rippled throughout the country—forever changing Israeli society—led to outpourings of grief, recrimination, and a realization that angry rhetoric can have disastrous results. The assassin hoped his action would end the peace process, but subsequent leaders continued to pursue negotiations aimed at achieving a final-status agreement with the Palestinians.



GAZA DISENGAGEMENT AND AFTERMATH

הַתְּנַתְּקוֹת מֵעֶזְרָה



In 2005, talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) came to a halt and the possibility of reaching an agreement seemed dim. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon oversaw the unilateral withdrawal of all Israelis from the Gaza Strip, giving the PA a chance to run affairs with no Israeli interference. In August, thousands of Israeli civilians and soldiers left the area, handing over control. Soon thereafter, Hamas wrestled control of Gaza and imposed an Islamic regime on the 1.6 million people there. In the years since, Israel and Egypt have placed strict controls on Gaza, while Hamas has used the territory as a launching ground for rocket and missile attacks, and has dug tunnels under the border fence in an effort to infiltrate Israel. The growing gulf between the PA and Hamas, and the disparity in standard of living between the West Bank and Gaza, make prospects for a negotiated settlement appear more distant.



SOCIAL PROTESTS

מחאה חברתית



In the summer of 2011, tens of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to protest the high cost of living. Many spent weeks sleeping in tents along Rothschild Blvd., a key artery in Tel Aviv's financial district, and in similar tent encampments across the country. Rallying around a chant of "the people demand social justice," protesters advocated for relief from the high cost of housing and inadequate education and social welfare systems. The government responded by promising to work on improving the situation. Subsequent efforts to revive the protests have failed, though several of the protest movement leaders have remained active in public life as they continue to try to bring about change within Israeli society.



RABIN-ARAFAT HANDSHAKE

לְחִיצַת יָד בֵּין רַבִּין לְעַרְפָּאֵת



In September 1993, US President Bill Clinton presided over a scene that few people believed they would ever see: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres shaking hands with the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat, as they signed an agreement aimed at bringing about a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Called the Oslo Accord—because talks began secretly in the Norwegian capital—the agreement laid out a plan designed to bring about a final-status agreement between the sides within five years. Under the terms of the agreement, the two sides recognized each other, the PLO rejected terrorism, and Israel agreed to grant autonomy to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Polls showed that a majority of Israelis were more optimistic than ever that peace was possible. In 1994, Rabin, Peres, and Arafat received the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts.



UN PARTITION PLAN

פ"ט בְּנוֹבֵמְבֵר



On November 29th, 1947, as the British Mandate for Palestine was drawing to a close, the United Nations voted to partition the territory of Palestine into two states: one for Jews and one for Arabs. While the Zionists had hoped for more of the territory, it was, as David Ben-Gurion noted, the best offer the Jews had received in nearly 2,000 years, and they accepted the plan. The Arabs, however, summarily rejected the plan, saying they would never accept a sovereign Jewish presence in the heart of the Arab Middle East. The day after the vote, all-out civil war erupted between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, beginning Israel's War of Independence. The plan had called for Jerusalem to be internationalized, but by the time the war ended in 1949, the western half was in Israeli hands and the eastern half was controlled by Jordan.



OPERATION ENTEBBE

מבצע אנטבה



In late June 1976, terrorists hijacked an Air France plane flying from Tel Aviv to Paris and diverted it to Entebbe, Uganda. There, they released the non-Jewish passengers, keeping all Jewish and Israeli passengers hostage while demanding the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. While Israel engaged in negotiations, it also planned a secret military operation. A week later, on July 4th, the IDF staged a daring rescue operation, sending 100 commandos to storm the airport and free the hostages. The commander of the mission, Col. Yonatan Netanyahu, was the only commando killed during the raid; the mission was subsequently renamed in his honor.



ESTABLISHMENT OF THE IDF

הַקְּמַת צֶה"ל



Although Israel declared independence on May 14th, 1948, and immediately faced invading Arab armies, it only established the Israel Defense Force—צְבָא הַהֲגָנָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל—on May 31st, more than two weeks later. During that time, the new government negotiated to incorporate fighters of each of the pre-State fighting forces into a unified chain of command: the Haganah and Palmach, which answered to the mainstream Zionist leadership, and the Etzel and Lehi, which pursued independent, more aggressive policies. The government insisted that, with the establishment of the State, there was no place for multiple forces. The four independent forces dissolved, and their fighters enlisted in the IDF, marking the establishment of the first official Jewish army in nearly 2,000 years.



WINNING EUROVISION

זְכִיחַ בְּאִירוֹוִיזִיּוֹן



Israel has competed in the annual Eurovision song competition since 1973, selecting catchy pop tunes designed to capture the imagination of voters across the European continent and beyond. In 1978, Izhar Cohen represented Israel with his playful song *A-Ba-Ni-Bi*—אֶבְי-בְּנִי-בִי, and brought home the top prize for the first time. Cohen's victory earned Israel the right to host Eurovision the following year, where Gali Atari sang *Hallelujah* and won first prize for the second year in a row. In 1998, the singer Dana International took first prize with her song *Diva*; the high-energy performance wowed audiences and intrigued people many years before LGBTQ issues had entered the mainstream. Pop sensation Netta Barzilai brought the country its fourth first-place finish in 2018 with her catchy tune *Toy*, a song that resonated with the global #MeToo movement.



RUSSIAN ALIYAH

עֲלִיָּה מִחֻבֵּר הָעַמִּים



Over the years, millions of Jews from around the world have availed themselves of Israel's Law of Return and made the country their home. Moments after the country gained independence in 1948, hundreds of thousands of people flocked to Israel from Europe and Middle Eastern countries, and multiple waves of immigrants—olim in Hebrew—continually invigorate and enrich Israeli society. The single largest group of immigrants hail from Russia and the countries of the Former Soviet Union. About one million people made aliyah in the decade following the 1989 fall of the Soviet Union, joining hundreds of thousands of former Soviet Jews who had come to the country in the 1970s. At the peak of Operation Exodus, as the wave in the 1990s was called, an average of 1,000 new olim arrived each day, and the country struggled to absorb them into society. The effort continues to pay off, as the “newcomers” have left their mark in every sphere.



WINNING NOBEL PRIZES

זוכי פרס נובל



In 1966, Hebrew writer S.Y. Agnon became the first Israeli to receive a Nobel Prize. He won it for literature, in recognition of his “profoundly characteristic narrative art with motifs from the life of the Jewish people.” It was a high point in a career that began when he wrote poems in his native Poland, and continued after he settled in Jaffa in 1908. Israelis take great pride in their Nobel laureates: when Agnon complained that the noise from traffic in Talpiot made it difficult for him to write, the city closed his street to cars. A sign went up that said: “No entry to vehicles. Writer at work!” By 2018, 11 other Israelis had followed in Agnon’s footsteps, receiving Nobel Prizes in Peace (past prime ministers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Peres), Chemistry, and Economics.



FIRST PRIDE PARADE

מִצֵּד הַנְּאֻה הָרִאשׁוֹן



Israel's LGBTQ community organized the first Pride Parade in Tel Aviv in 1993, and it has grown into an annual weeklong series of events that draw more than 200,000 people. In addition to being the largest Pride event in the Middle East, the parade ranks among the biggest in the world, and draws thousands of tourists each year. Smaller parades take place in other Israeli cities—including Jerusalem, where it brings to the forefront the tension between religion and state. Members of the LGBTQ community serve openly in the IDF and have served in the Knesset and in local government. Israel has been a world leader in striving to protect the rights of members of the LGBTQ community, recognizing civil unions that enjoy the same benefits afforded to married couples. Israel's acceptance of the LGBTQ community has made the country a beacon in the region.



US-ISRAEL RELATIONS

יְחֻסֵי אֶרְצוֹת הַבְּרִית-יִשְׂרָאֵל



The United States was the first country to recognize the newly established State of Israel, foreshadowing the pivotal alliance that would emerge between the two countries in the years to come. Since President Nixon authorized a massive military airlift to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the US has been Israel's primary military supplier. Sometimes the personal relationship between the President and the Prime Minister can color relations, as seen by the close ties between Bill Clinton and Yitzhak Rabin, or between George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon, or the obvious tension between Barack Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu. While the nature of relations has fluctuated over the decades, the alliance has grown deep and strong, often attributed to the underlying shared values of freedom and democracy.

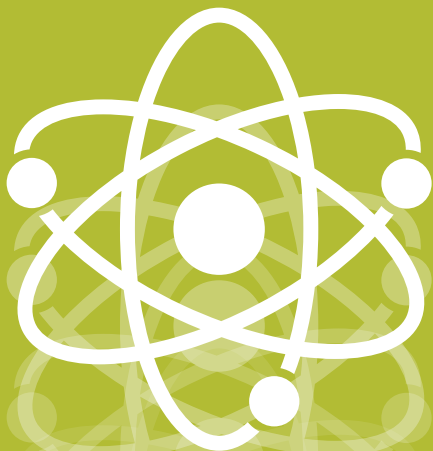


MUNICH OLYMPIC MASSACRE

טִבַּח מִינְיֵן



During the 1972 Munich Olympics, Palestinian terrorists held 11 Israeli athletes hostage in the Olympic Village, demanding the release of hundreds of security prisoners held in Israeli and West German jails. The West German police officers' ill-fated rescue attempt resulted in the massacre of all 11 Israeli athletes, and the death of 5 of the 8 terrorists. Israel's secret service agency, the Mossad, later assassinated the remaining terrorists in a covert operation that became the subject of Steven Spielberg's 2005 film "Munich." After calls for an official Olympic commemoration of the massacre were rebuffed for decades, a memorial ceremony was held in a special place of mourning at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Said Ilana Romano, widow of one of the slain athletes, "this is an extremely emotional moment for us, one we have been waiting for since 1972."



INNOVATION

חדשנות

theicenter.org



IsraAID, established in 2001, brings together 35 Israeli and Jewish humanitarian aid groups to send relief missions to every corner of the earth. From setting up field hospitals in Haiti and Nepal after earthquakes, to tornado relief in Oklahoma City, IsraAID is quick to respond to any natural and humanitarian disaster around the world. IsraAID has dispatched Arabic- and English-speaking social workers to Germany where they provide support to many of the more than one million asylum seekers who have sought refuge in recent years, and continues to provide aid to refugees from the Syrian civil war. Whenever IsraAID sends aid workers to a community, they work closely with local groups and authorities to ensure a smooth transition after the aid workers conclude their mission.



DESALINATION

התפלה



Like all countries in the Middle East, Israel has a severe shortage of freshwater. Many believe that future wars are likely to be fought over how to divide water resources. Since the early 21st century, Israel has turned its water deficit into a surplus by harnessing desalination technology to turn hundreds of millions of cubic meters of Mediterranean Sea saltwater into clean drinkable water. This allows the country's natural freshwater reservoirs to start a long process of replenishment. By 2018, five gigantic desalination plants dotted the Mediterranean coastline south of Tel Aviv, pumping their product into the National Water Carrier and meeting two-thirds of Israel's freshwater needs. Plans to build more plants will position the country to provide even more freshwater to its neighbors, a commodity that many hope will help with future peace negotiations.



DRIP IRRIGATION

תִּירוּשָׁה



Working the land has always been a key part of the Zionist ideal, but farmers in the early years of the state faced a huge problem: the country's desert-like climate meant there wasn't enough water to irrigate fields effectively. Enter an early example of Israeli ingenuity—drip irrigation. Rather than spraying fields with large amounts of water, most of which won't reach the roots, drip irrigation allows farmers to direct a few drops of water to the exact places they're needed. The net result is that farmers harvest plentiful crops, using less water. The technology, which was revolutionary in the 1950s, has become popular around the world for everything from large-scale commercial farms to backyard vegetable gardens. This Israeli innovation also answers the needs of drought-prone regions around the world.



IRON DOME

נוֹפֵת בַּרְזֵל



Faced with thousands of rockets and mortars being launched from Lebanon in the north and Gaza in the south since 2006, leaving Israeli citizens vulnerable, Israel set about developing a solution to this life-threatening challenge that no existing missile interception technology could tackle. This state-of-the-art missile defense system can intercept incoming projectiles at a very short range. While the first phases were funded by the Israeli government, the US stepped in to provide major funding to build additional anti-missile batteries and to continue developing the technology. Since becoming operational in 2011, Iron Dome has intercepted the vast majority of missile threats likely to hit populated areas, and the system has played a key role in restoring a sense of normalcy to the lives of millions of Israelis.



KIBBUTZIM

קיבוצים



Some say the kibbutz is the original Israeli innovation. The first of this uniquely Israeli experiment in collective living was established in 1909 and called Degania. Its founders immigrated from Eastern Europe filled with dreams of working the land, becoming farmers, and sharing in all the work and the rewards. Other kibbutzim were established in rapid succession, until there were hundreds, all living by the motto, “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” Kibbutz members, or “kibbutznikim,” were viewed as the cream of Israeli society due to their deep pioneering spirit. Today’s kibbutzim are less communal than they once were, and less focused solely on farming, but they continue to thrive throughout the country. There have even been experiments in “urban kibbutzim,” that seek to bring the unified sense of mission to city locations.



Israel's banknotes offer an opportunity to explore the history of the Jewish State. The name of Israel's currency, shekel, honors the currency used in biblical times. The story of Israeli banknotes is not just a story of wear and inflation. Like street names, stamps, or coins, banknotes have symbolic, political, and commemorative significance—a reminder of our history every time we open our wallets. They include some of the boldest anti-counterfeit features of any bills in the world, embed special security threads in them to discourage copying, and have braille to ensure easy access for the blind. Today, Israeli bills are adorned with the likenesses of leading poets whose work is intertwined with the history of the state. The 20 shekel note features the poet Rachel; the 50 shekel note features Shaul Tchernichovsky; the 100 shekel note features Leah Goldberg; and the 200 shekel note features Natan Alterman.



When Google announced a monetary prize to anyone that could land an unmanned spacecraft on the moon in 2007, a team of young Israeli scientists jumped at the opportunity to draw attention to STEM education. What started as a fun challenge quickly turned into a serious bid to win the prize; as teams from all over the world dropped out, Team SpaceIL kept progressing toward their goal. At the same time, they promoted the study of science among children of all ages in all sectors of Israeli society, garnering tremendous support worldwide. Despite Google ending the contest without a winner, Team SpaceIL launched in 2019. The spacecraft—named *Beresheet*—is designed to measure the moon’s magnetic field using technology developed specifically for this mission.



In 2006, Israeli programmer Ehud Shabtai had an idea: wouldn't it be nice to crowdsource a map of Israel that anybody could update traffic in real time? It was a natural outgrowth of the burgeoning "sharing economy," where people collaborate and interact electronically, even if they never meet. Shabtai called the project FreeMap Israel, and it got popular very fast. In 2008, the company changed its name to Waze; in a crowded market for real-time traffic information, Waze stood out because it encouraged users to become active participants by sharing what they experienced on the roads. Waze quickly became the most popular driving aid in Israel, and global companies took note. In 2013, Google beat out Facebook and other suitors by paying \$1.3 billion to acquire Waze. The crowd-sourcing aspect of Waze continues to be popular among drivers around the world.



KOOLULAM

קוללולם



What happens when you bring thousands of people from all walks of life together to sing a song? The founders of the social initiative Koolulam say it's an incredibly fun way to help people build relationships with people they might not otherwise meet. Koolulam organizes mass events that draw as many as 12,000 people at a time— young and old, men and women, religious and secular, right-wing and left-wing, etc.—where everyone learns the words and melody of a popular song and sing it together. It's a uniquely Israeli spin on social activism: Israelis love to get together with friends to sing—it's called שירה בצבור—Shira BeTzibur—and Koolulam has succeeded in broadening the groups of people who share in the joy of song. The name Koolulam is a play on a few words: “cool”; קולם—kulam—everyone; קול—kol—voice; and the kululu exclamation of joy sung by many Mizrahi Jews.



IDF UNIT 8200

8200 היחידה



Until recently, the very existence of IDF Intelligence Corps Unit 8200, which collects signal intelligence and handles code decryption, was very hush-hush. The IDF scours new recruits to find those with high-level coding and computer skills who also show signs of the ability to rapidly adjust to changing circumstances and new technologies. The unit, whose soldiers wage war with keyboards, not guns, is credited with being among the world's best intelligence-gathering operations, and veterans often transition into the frontlines of Israel's startup scene. One veteran told Forbes Magazine that he knows of 100 startups launched by people who served with him in the fabled unit; he even spoke of a "magic room," where 10 soldiers had worked. What made it magic? Each of them has started companies worth an average of half a billion dollars.



KREMBO WINGS

כַּנְפֵי קְרֵמְבוֹ
שֶׁל קְרֵמְבוֹ



Krembo Wings was born out of the friendship between its founder, then 16-year-old Adi Altschuler, and Kfir Koby, a young boy with cerebral palsy whom she was tutoring. Its vision is to “enable every child living with any type of motor, cognitive, or sensory disability to take part in enjoyable social interactions and become part of community life in Israel.” Since 2002, Krembo wings has developed a national network of more than 60 branches that cater to thousands of young Israelis of all backgrounds. Named for the delicate chocolate-coated marshmallow treat that Israeli kids love, Krembo, and the total freedom that wings represent, this youth group stands apart from all others in that it brings together children and teens with and without disabilities, instilling a culture of inclusiveness, support, and understanding.



MEDICAL CLOWNING

ליצנות רפואית



Although it was pioneered decades ago in the US, Israel has taken medical clowning to new heights by integrating medical clowns into the medical team rather than sending in the clowns before or after the doctors make their rounds. Dozens of hospitals around the country employ specially trained medical clowns to help replace tears and fears with laughter and calm. In some Israeli medical centers, one in five pediatric surgery patients enjoy the care of a medical clown as an integral part of the team of doctors, nurses, and other professionals. Studies carried out in Israeli hospitals find that the presence of a clown reduces the need for sedatives and can even improve the chances of success in a variety of procedures. It seems increasingly believable that laughter really can be the best medicine, and Israel has assumed its place as a leader in the field.



CORE TEXTS

מְסָמְכִים עִיקָרִים

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

מְגִילַת הָעֵצְמָאוֹת



Written in the weeks leading up to the declaration of the State of Israel on May 14th, 1948, the final text of the Declaration of Independence was approved just hours before the ceremony. It recounts the long history of the Jewish people and their connection to the Land of Israel. Delineating aspirational goals for the new country, it appeals to the Arabs of Israel, neighboring countries, world Jewry, and the entire world for cooperation and acceptance. It pledges open immigration for all Jews, “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex,” and “freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture.” It was signed by 35 men and two women from across the political and religious spectrum of the Jewish community; three of them went on to the post of Prime Minister, and one became President. The founders expected that a constitution would be adopted; in its absence, the Declaration of Independence has remained a foundational constitutional document of Israel.



IDF CODE OF ETHICS

רוח צה"ל



The IDF Code of Ethics draws from four main sources: the traditions of the Israel Defense Forces, the traditions of the State of Israel, the traditions of the Jewish People, and on universal moral values related to the dignity of human life. It calls for the defense of the state, its citizens, and its residents; love of the homeland and loyalty to the country that serves as a democratic home for all its residents; and the protection of human dignity for all, regardless of origin, religion, nationality, gender, status, or position. It addresses “purity of arms,” saying, “the soldier shall make use of his weaponry and power only for the fulfillment of the mission and solely to the extent required; he will maintain his humanity even in combat.” All soldiers—from new recruits to the highest-ranking officers—carry a physical copy of the Code of Ethics with them and are expected to abide by its values at all times.



BASIC LAWS

חוקי יסוד



Though the Declaration of Independence called for adoption of a constitution no later than October 1st, 1948, that deadline proved unrealistic, as the country was embroiled in the War of Independence. By 1950, it became clear that writing a constitution would not be simple due to many factors, including the relationship between Jewish and civil law and the status of non-Jewish citizens of a Jewish state. The Knesset voted to enact a series of Basic Laws in a piecemeal approach which, when complete, would be made into a constitution. To date, Israel has enacted 12 Basic Laws that define the role of each branch of government, codify the status of Jerusalem, and address a wide range of human rights issues. The Basic Laws enjoy constitutional status, and despite multiple efforts to advocate for adopting a full constitution, it seems unlikely that such a document will be adopted anytime soon.



HATIKVAH

הַתִּקְוָה



Israel's national anthem, Hatikvah—The Hope is adapted from a poem titled *Tikvatenu*—Our Hope, written in 1877 by Naftali Herz Imber, a Polish Jew. Hatikvah recounts the Jews' undying connection to Zion and dreams of return. After reciting the poem for Zionist pioneers in pre-State Israel, it was embraced as an unofficial anthem for the movement, becoming official at the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Concerns from religious Jews that the anthem lacked overtly religious themes have been raised from time to time, but bigger concerns focus on non-Jewish Israelis, who feel little connection to an anthem that celebrates Jewish hopes and dreams. Non-Jewish state officials have sometimes declined to sing the anthem, though discussions about altering the words, or choosing a different anthem, have not gained traction.



LAW OF RETURN

חוק השבות



In 1950, the Knesset enacted the Law of Return, codifying the Israeli policy of granting citizenship to any Jew who immigrates to the country. The boundaries of the law are tested regularly, and over the years, the law has undergone modifications aimed at clarifying who is of Jewish ancestry and determining the status of non-Jewish family members of Jews. Religious figures often call for a tightening of the requirements to ensure that only people who are considered Jewish in accordance with Orthodox Jewish law receive citizenship. Others maintain that giving Jews preferential treatment in the path to citizenship is discriminatory. Recently, the Ministry of Interior began granting citizenship to same-sex non-Jewish spouses of Jews.



TANACH

תנ"ך

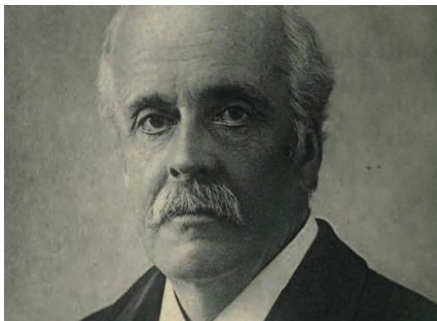
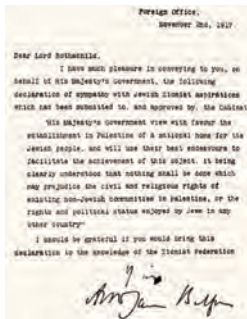


The Jewish Bible is referred to by an acronym of the first letter of each of its three sections: Torah (the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ktuvim (Writings, including the Book of Psalms and more). From the moment the State was established in 1948, when the Tanach was referenced in the Declaration of Independence, it was clear that Jewish law and tradition would shape life in the new-old country. Unlike other Western democracies, which stress separation of religion and state, Israel celebrates the Tanakh as a foundational part of the country and its laws. All Israeli school children—religious and secular, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian—study the Tanach, which often is referenced as a history book and a guide for exploring the country. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, established the International Bible Quiz as a way of stressing the continuing relevance of this core text to Israelis and Jews around the world.



BALFOUR DECLARATION

הַצְהָרַת בַּלְפֹּוּר



In November 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, affirming the British government's support for the establishment of a "Jewish national home in Palestine." This was a major diplomatic achievement for the Zionist movement, as Britain was a global power and seemed poised to achieve greater influence in the region. Recognizing that there were many Arab residents of the area, as well as many Jews living elsewhere who would not want to leave their homes, the declaration also stressed that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." The Balfour Declaration was perceived as a key measure of support for the Zionist enterprise.



YOUR CATEGORY HERE

YOUR TITLE HERE

YOUR STORY HERE