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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—מחנה יהודה—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

גִּזְר 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 הַזִּכְרוֹן—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.



MASADA

מצדה
מַצְדָּה



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 הָעתיקה



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.



ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL

שביל ישראל



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—חלוצים—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.



NEVE TZEDEK

נְיֵה צֶדֶק



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.



THE MANY FACES OF ISRAEL

פְּנִיִּים רַבּוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

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ETHIOPIAN ISRAELIS

יִשְׂרָאֵלִים מֵאֶתְיוֹפִיָּה



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

ישראלים מברית המועצות לשעבר



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 Druse live in Israel, while most of the rest reside in Syria and Lebanon. The Druse are a breakaway from Islam, but they are not considered Muslim. In Israel, they are recognized as an Arabic-speaking separate ethnic group. The Druse 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 Druse 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 Druse 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. Druse men serve in the IDF, and the community willingly accepts the existence of the state.



BEDOUIN
בְּדוּאִים



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 אֲזֵרָחֵי 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

יְהוּדִיּוּת, נִצְרוּת, וְאִסְלָם



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.



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 be'er—בְּאֵר—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.



HAIFA
חיפה



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
צפת



Tzfat is known as the city of Kabbalah—קבלה—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.



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.



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.



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.



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

רִמַּת הַגּוֹלָן



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, הַר הָהָרִים—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 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.



LEADERSHIP

מנהיגות

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MENACHEM BEGIN מֵנַחֵם 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 קַלְדֶּרוֹן



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 is best known as the leader of Women of the Wall, a group that has advocated for the rights of women to pray, wear tallitot—טליתות, 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 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.



BENJAMIN (BENNY) GANTZ

בֶּנְיָמִין (בֶּנִי) גַּנְץ



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.



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

הרב קוק



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 שָׂרָנְסְקִי

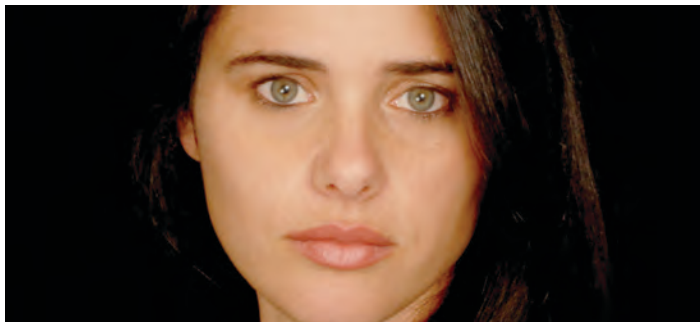


As a young man in the Soviet Union, Natan Sharansky's only crime was that he wanted to live a Jewish life. When he requested permission to emigrate to Israel in 1973, the authorities refused; four years later, he was accused of spying for the CIA and sentenced to 13 years in prison. His wife, Avital, 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 סֶנֶשׁ



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 *Halicha L'Caesarea*—הֶלִיכָה לְקִיסְרֵיָה—*A Walk to Caesarea*, commonly known as *Eli, Eli*—אֵלִי, אֵלִי—*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.



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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 salat, beitz, hatzilim—סלט, ביצה, חצילים—salad, egg, eggplant.



Olive oil is 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.



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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'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 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

אתגר קרת



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

סײד קשׁוּא



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.



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ARIK EINSTEIN

אַרִיק אֵיִנְשְׁטַיִן



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*—עוף גוזל, 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 *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*—ירושלים של זהב—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 *Yihye Tov*—יִהְיֶה טוֹב, 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."



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.



MOMENTS IN MODERN ISRAELI HISTORY

רגעים משמעותיים בהיסטוריה של ישראל



ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

הקמת המדינה



On May 14th, 1948—ה' תש"ח 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

התנתקות מעזה



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 לְעַרְפָּאט



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 בִּנְוּבְמֶנֶר



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

הַקָּמַת צְה"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.



FIRST PRIDE PARADE

מַצֵּד הַנָּאֹה 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.



WINNING EUROVISION

זְכִיָּה 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*—אָבא-ני-בי, 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.

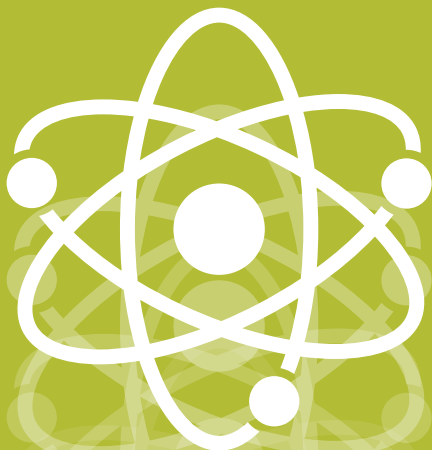


WINNING NOBEL PRIZES

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.



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חדשנות

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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.



DESALINIZATION

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 תִּירוּגוּ



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.



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.



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.



CORE TEXTS

מִסְמָכִים עִיקָרִיִּים

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

מְגִילַת הָעֲצֻמָּאוֹת



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.

[T] 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.

[T] BASIC LAWS

חוקי היסוד



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.

[T] HATIKVAH התקווה



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 הַשְּׁבוּת

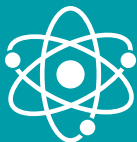


In 1950, the Knesset enacted the Law of Return, codifying the Israeli policy of granting citizenship to any Jew who immigrates to the country. The boundaries of the law are tested regularly, and over the years, the law has undergone modifications aimed at clarifying who is of Jewish ancestry and determining 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.

「T」 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.



YOUR CATEGORY HERE

YOUR TITLE HERE

YOUR STORY HERE