



MOMENTS IN MODERN ISRAELI HISTORY

רגעים משמעותיים בהסטוריה של ישראל



ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

הקמת המדינה



On ה'בא"ר 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

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 בִּנְוֹבֶמֶר



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.



WINNING EUROVISION

זְכִיחָה 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.



RUSSIAN ALIYAH

עֲלִיָּה מִרוּסְיָה



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 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.



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

טבח מינכן



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."