



## Chapter 1

# It's a Home for People from All Over the World

**H**ave you ever been to a place where most of the people were Jewish? Your religious school or maybe a Hanukkah party? It probably doesn't happen to you that often, because in most places in the world, Jews are in the minority.

In Israel it's different. Israel is the only country in the world where a majority of the citizens are Jewish. Israel is also often called a "melting pot" of cultures—like the United States—because people come there from all over the world. When they move to Israel, they bring their traditions and languages along with them.



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## What Do You See?

With a partner, look at the pictures of different Israelis on these pages and discuss the following questions:

- What do you notice about the people in the pictures?
- What would you guess about the people in the photos based on what they are wearing?
- Clothing gives us clues about people but can't tell us what they like or dislike, or what's important to them. If you had a chance to interview people shown in the photos on this page, what would you ask them about their lives?

Write your interview questions here:

## The Many Flavors of Your Community

Just like Israeli society is diverse, so is your own Jewish community. Stand in a circle with a group of friends. Imagine you are surrounding a giant salad bowl. One at a time, step into the bowl and sit down. As you do so, share what unique "flavor" you add to the community. You can share a unique tradition your family observes, or a special skill or talent you have.



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*A home in Israel can be anything from an ancient stone house in Jerusalem to a high-rise apartment in Tel Aviv.*

# The Jewish Homeland

Where do you feel most at home?  
Is it your room? Maybe your yard or the  
playground? What about that space makes  
you feel at home?

Many Jews think of Israel as home, whether  
they live there or not. One reason is because  
of the Law of Return. It grants every Jew  
the right to move to Israel and become a  
citizen. If you are Jewish, no matter  
your age, or wealth, or your  
country of origin, you  
are always welcome.



07150

## By the Numbers:

A whopping 3.3 million  
Jewish people from over 100  
countries have made *aliyah*—the  
Hebrew term for moving to Israel—  
since the founding of the state  
in 1948.

## Coming Home

### Step 1:

Imagine you are writing a scene  
for a movie in which a character  
returns home after being away  
for a long time. Write the dia-  
logue for that scene in the space below.  
What does the character see, feel,  
and hear? When you are done, trade  
scripts with a partner and review them.  
Then discuss the following questions:

- What did the scripts you and your partner wrote have in common? What was different?
- What emotions did the characters in both scripts feel?

### My Script:

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*The Maccabeats*

### Step 2:

Watch the video of the Maccabeats singing “Home” at [bhlink.me/israel1](http://bhlink.me/israel1).

- What do you think the Maccabeats are feeling when they are in Israel? Why do you think they feel that way?
- What emotions do the Maccabeats share with the character in your script?
- Now that you’ve thought more about what home means, what does the idea of a Jewish homeland mean to you?

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## What If You’re Not Jewish?

The Law of Return applies only if you’re Jewish or have a Jewish family member, such as a grandparent or spouse. Others can apply to become a permanent resident or citizen of Israel.

### Debate It!

Because Israel was founded as a Jewish state, it allows Jewish people, or those with a Jewish family member, to receive automatic citizenship. What do you think about Israel giving priority to Jews who wish to immigrate? Pick a side, and have a partner take the other side. Debate the issue. List the main points that you each made in the spaces below.

**YES:** It’s a thoughtful policy.

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**NO:** It’s an unfair policy.

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Which points made above do you agree with? Disagree with?

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# The People Who Come

Jewish people from all around the world are drawn to Israel, and many have traveled far and overcome great obstacles to move there.



*American's making aliyah*



## Meet Karen

Karen is fifteen years old. She was born in Chicago, Illinois, and moved to Israel just last month with her family.

“My family believes that even though we loved our life in the United States, Israel is our homeland, and it’s where we want to live.”

Karen has lots of friends on her block who speak English, but at school, her classes are in Hebrew. “It is a bit embarrassing; I try to pay attention to what is being said, but everything is in Hebrew!” says Karen. “But I’m learning. I think by the end of the year I’ll be able to understand Hebrew as if I grew up here.”



## 0749 By the Numbers:

In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, over 1,000,000 Russians moved to Israel.



## Meet Roman

Roman, fourteen, was born in Israel. His parents and grandparents were all born in the Soviet Union, and the family moved to Israel in 1985.

At that time, the Soviet Union required anyone who wanted to leave to get government permission. Many who applied were refused; they were called “refuseniks” and considered traitors for wanting to move to Israel.

“My grandparents lost their jobs after they applied to leave. They wanted to live in Israel and be safe. Fortunately, many American Jews worked on their and other refuseniks’ behalf. They marched and demonstrated. Finally, those efforts paid off. My grandparents got permission and were able to come here,” says Roman.

“Even though I was born here in Israel, I speak Russian at home and Hebrew with friends. I am proud to be Russian, Jewish, and Israeli.”



*An Israeli store that caters to Russian-speaking customers*



*Israeli and Russian passports*



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*An Ethiopian synagogue in Israel*



## Meet Esther

Esther's family came to Israel from Ethiopia.

"My grandparents say they can trace their Jewish family back hundreds of years," says Esther, fourteen.

In the 1980s, Israel rescued the Ethiopian Jewish community from the famine and persecution there by bringing them to Israel.

"My grandparents had a difficult journey. They had to walk with hundreds of others through a desert to a meeting place where airplanes took them to Israel. Not everyone survived—about four thousand people died on the journey," she says. "In Ethiopia, there wasn't much modern technology, and when my grandparents arrived here, they had a big shock. They had to learn how to use a refrigerator and other machines that they didn't have back in Ethiopia," says Esther.

"To me, being Israeli means sharing my Ethiopian culture with my friends."



*Ethiopian immigrants arriving in Israel*



## By the Numbers:

Between 1984 and 2006, about 74,000 Ethiopians immigrated to Israel.





## Meet Marc

Marc moved to Israel from France six months ago.

“My family and I loved our life in France,” explains Marc, “but my parents were worried about the recent rise in anti-Semitism there. They wanted their children to be proud of their Jewish heritage and not have to hide their Judaism. I am happy that we came here,” says Marc, fifteen.

At home, Marc’s family speaks French. At school, Marc speaks Hebrew with his friends and teachers.

Marc’s dad had a hard time finding work in Israel. He splits his time between France and Israel.

“My dad found it very difficult to learn Hebrew.

So, he kept his job in France, and now he commutes back and forth. He tries to be in Israel every weekend with our family before he returns to work in Paris on Monday,” says Marc.

“There are many people who work half-time in Europe and half-time in Israel. I sometimes wish my dad could find work in Israel and just stay here all the time. He loves his job and loves that we live in Israel,” says Marc.



*Vintage French and Israeli postage stamps*







*Greeting new arrivals to Israel at the airport*

## Welcoming the New Arrivals

Israel has many programs that help immigrants become comfortable with their new country. For example, often the government gives new immigrants free services their first few years in Israel, including a free one-way flight to Israel, financial assistance, free health insurance, and free Hebrew classes called *ulpan*. People in Israel also create welcome packages for new immigrants, to help them feel at home.

## Welcome Packages

Pick one of the people that you met on pages 14 through 17, and create a list of what you would include in a care package to welcome them and their family to Israel. Then, draw pictures or make a collage of those items below.



Why did you choose each of the items?

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How do you imagine each item would help the family you selected feel welcome?

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# It's Complicated

## Who Is a Jew?

Can you imagine if someone asked you to prove who you are? That's the question that Jewish immigrants are asked when they move to Israel: Are you Jewish? And: Can you prove it?

Since the Law of Return only applies to Jews, you must be Jewish—and able to prove that you are Jewish—in order to take advantage of the law.

## But what makes Someone Jewish?

This is where things get very, very complicated. Judaism is a thousands-year-old religion. Over the centuries, the worldwide Jewish community has developed a wide variety of religious perspectives. For example, some of the movements within North American Judaism—Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative and Orthodox—all share core Jewish values but disagree on lots of things, even on what makes someone Jewish. The Reform definition is that anyone born to a Jewish father or Jewish mother and raised Jewish is a Jew. In contrast, the Orthodox definition is that only someone born to a Jewish mother is Jewish. Both traditions accept Jews by choice—people who convert to Judaism. However, some movements do not accept those who convert under differing traditions.

## What does the Jewish State do?

For immigration policy, the Law of Return accepts anyone who has a Jewish parent, grandparent, or spouse.

But: You still have to legally prove that your spouse or any of your parents or grandparents is Jewish if you want to make *aliyah* and become a citizen. This leads to complications.

For example, when Jews from Ethiopia immigrated to Israel, they had no way to prove their Jewish roots. Without proof, the Israeli government would not accept them as Jews and insisted that they convert.

While to the government this might have seemed like a practical solution, to many immigrants it was hurtful. Back in their country of origin they had to fight for their Jewish identity or were even persecuted for it. Now in Israel, where they thought they would be accepted as family—their word wasn't trusted!

In small groups, discuss:

- Do you think it makes sense for the Israeli government to have rules about proving Jewishness?
- Why or why not?

## Proving Jewishness

Split up into small groups and role-play. Choose one person to play a government official in Israel, and have the rest of the group play a family of immigrants hoping to make aliyah and become Israeli citizens under the Law of Return. The family members should decide which country they are from, how they are related to each other, and what their Jewish connections are. The government official should use the questions below as a guide to interview the family. The official can also ask any additional questions that he or she thinks could help prove Jewishness.

When you're done, complete the chart below to record the key points of the conversation.

The questions were:	The family's answers:
Were any of your great-grandparents Jewish? If so, what evidence do you have?	
Do you have a document, like a bar or bat mitzvah certificate, that shows your ongoing Jewish practice?	
What objects do you have in your home that can prove your commitment to Jewish practice?	
Do you have a relationship with your community rabbi? Would your rabbi be willing to testify that your family is Jewish?	
The official also asked:  _____	



A passport stamp that issues its holder Israeli citizenship based on the Law of Return

## Talk about It!



1. Compare the different types of immigrant experiences that you learned about. In what ways were they similar? Different?
2. Which of the stories on pages 14 through 17 did you connect with the most? Why?
3. Why do you think people from around the world choose to immigrate to Israel?

