

Chapter 5

It Was Built With Hope

Rehovot, Israel, 2012

Today, Israel is a vibrant and modern country that's home to the largest Jewish community in the world. But it wasn't always like that. For many years, Israel was full of swamps and rocky, sandy areas. And while there have always been Jews living in Israel, in 1920 just 5 percent of the population was Jewish.



What Do You See?

With a partner, look at the two pictures of Rehovot and discuss:

1. How would you describe each one?
2. What do you think it would have been like to live in Rehovot in 1893? How about today?



Rehovot, Israel, 1893

The Hope for a Home

Have you ever felt different from the rest of the crowd? Before 1948, many Jews around the world felt that way. Wherever they lived, they were a minority. And although they flourished in many places, in others they often suffered from anti-Semitism and discrimination. Many Jews dreamed of having a land of their own.

First Aliyah

Some Jews decided to make their dream a reality, and between 1882 and 1903, many Jews moved to Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. Most came from eastern Europe, to escape violent anti-Semitism there. Others came from Yemen. This period of immigration was called the First Aliyah.

0720

By the Numbers:

In 1918, the total population of what is now Israel was 660,000 people. Today, 8.5 million people live there.

Kibbutz Givat Brenner, 1936

1517-1917

Ottoman Empire rules Palestine

1882

First Aliyah begins

1895

The Dreyfus Affair

1897

First Zionist Conference

1904

Second Aliyah begins

1914-1918

World War I

1917

Balfour Declaration

1918-1948

Britain rules Palestine

1939

The White Paper

1939-1945

World War II

1948

Establishment of modern State of Israel



BEHRMAN HOUSE



Delegates from seventeen countries at the First Zionist Congress



Alfred Dreyfus being stripped of his rank in a painting by Henri Meyer, 1895

Zionism

At the same time that the First Aliyah was taking place, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish French soldier, was arrested in France for spying. Known as the Dreyfus Affair, his trial was widely criticized for its anti-Semitic bias. Although Captain Dreyfus was innocent, he was found guilty. Covering the trial, a young Jewish journalist named Theodor

Herzl witnessed mobs outside the courthouse shouting, “Death to the Jews.” Herzl came away from the experience profoundly affected.

Building a Movement

The trial led Herzl to believe that Jews would only be safe if they had their own land, and he began to work hard to make that happen. In 1897, he organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, to discuss strategies. A new movement was born—Zionism. Its goal was to create a homeland for the Jewish people.

“If you will it, it is no dream.”—Theodor Herzl



Theodor Herzl at the conference



“...The tallit [prayer shawl]...is our symbol.... So I ordered a blue and white flag....That is how the national flag, which flew over [the Zionist] Congress Hall, came into being.”

—David Wolffsohn, designer of the Israeli flag

Illustrate the Dream

Imagine that you are one of the original pioneers who came to the Land of Israel.

In the space above, draw a simple outline of a house. Inside the house, draw words, symbols, and colors that represent your new home in Israel. What will your new home provide for you that you didn't have in your old country?

Taking Action

With Herzl as their leader, Zionists around the world worked to achieve their dream. They raised money for new communities in Palestine. They met with leaders around the world, asking them for their support. They even designed Israel's flag and wrote its national anthem, “Hatikvah” (The Hope). They had hope that their dream would become a reality.

To raise money for a new Jewish homeland, tzedakah boxes, like this one from 1934, were distributed to Jewish homes around the world. By World War II, there were over one million boxes in circulation.





The first kibbutz, Degania, 1910

0778

By the Numbers:

By 1940, there were 82 kibbutzim in Palestine.

Second Aliyah

Between 1904 and 1914, anti-Semitism in Russia and eastern Europe grew, leading to another, even larger, wave of Jews moving to Israel. This was called the Second Aliyah. Unlike the pioneers of the First Aliyah, who often employed local Arabs to work their farms, the immigrants of the Second Aliyah believed that to create a successful Jewish state, they needed to prove that they could make a home for themselves and not depend on others.

It wasn't easy. Many of the new immigrants had never been farmers before. The land was not ideal for farming. Illnesses such as cholera and malaria were common.

The Kibbutz

Despite the challenges, these early pioneers had many successes. They built the city of Tel Aviv, printed newspapers, and opened schools. They also founded the first kibbutz, a cooperative community in which members worked and ate together, and even shared childcare, as if they were part of one large family.

“We lead a curious life here. I do the same work every day. It is very boring. In the morning, as soon as I get up, I must stoke the stove, then boil the milk, peel the potatoes for the stew and cook some soup....Then I must do the dishes and sweep the room...I am often ill with malaria...”

—**Anya**, an immigrant to Palestine, writing in her diary, December 1912

Hebrew

The immigrants of the Second Aliyah made Hebrew the language of the land. Previously, Hebrew had mostly been the language of prayer and study. With immigrants coming from many different countries and speaking many different languages, Hebrew was a language they could all share.



Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922) led the movement to revive Hebrew as a language for everyday speech and even invented new, modern Hebrew words such as glidah for ice cream.

Moving Forward

Stand in a line with your friends. The object of the game is to get to the other side of the room. Imagine that you are all new immigrants to Israel in the early 1900s. On each turn, a player can ask a question such as, “How do I learn Hebrew?” or, “How will I make new friends?” Or, a player can choose to name one of the obstacles that the early pioneers faced, such as “hard labor” or “sickness.” For every question a player asks, he or she takes three steps forward; for every obstacle named, all the other players must move back a step.

Once everyone has crossed the room, discuss:

1. How easy or hard was it to come up with questions? With obstacles?
2. How do you think the pioneers felt when faced with obstacles?
3. How do you think those early pioneers would feel if they could see the country of Israel today?

The Arab Resistance

The Jewish community continued to purchase land and settle it, and its population steadily grew. In response, many Arabs became fearful that their country would be taken over by Jews and began refusing to do business with Jewish pioneers. Some Arabs even attacked Jewish communities, burning crops and killing people. To defend themselves, the Jewish community formed the Haganah, the first nationwide Jewish defense organization. It ultimately became the Israel Defense Forces, or IDF—Israel’s army.



Haganah fighters, 1948



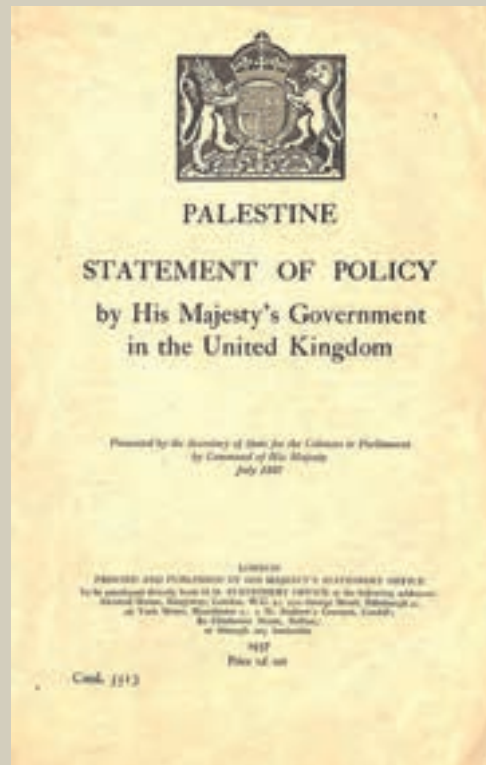
Mixed Messages

After World War I, Palestine came under British rule, and the British were faced with the challenge of governing a population of both Arabs and Jews. The British sent inconsistent messages to both sides. Sometimes the British would tell one group one thing and the other group another. This led to much confusion.

THE MCMAHON-HUSSEIN CORRESPONDENCE

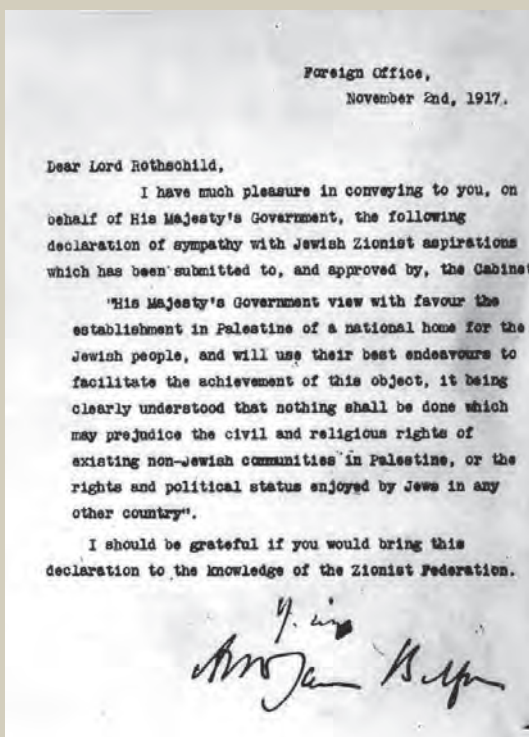


In 1915, before Britain was even in control of the land, Sir Henry McMahon pledged to Hussein ibn Ali, the sharif of Mecca, that Britain would support Arab independence in “the land.” While it was unclear which land his letters referred to, the Arabs believed it meant Israel.



THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

In 1917, the British government committed to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Known as the Balfour Declaration, it gave hope to Zionists that their dream for a homeland would come to be.



THE WHITE PAPER

In 1939, Britain issued a declaration called the White Paper, which said that Palestine would be a single state with an Arab majority. To make sure that Arabs would remain the majority, the White Paper severely restricted Jewish immigration and the sale of land to Jews. It seemed to suggest that Arabs would always rule the land and led many Zionists to feel betrayed by the British.



Jews arriving at the Auschwitz death camp in Poland, 1944

After World War II

The White Paper could not have come at a worse time for the Jewish community. In 1939, as World War II was about to begin, and with Palestine's doors closed, the Jews of Europe had nowhere to escape. Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and hundreds of thousands of survivors became refugees with nowhere to go.



Full of Holocaust survivors headed to Palestine, the ship Exodus 1947 was stopped by the British. The sight of Holocaust survivors being forced to return to Germany helped turn world support in favor of a Jewish state.

Refugees

After the Holocaust, many survivors tried to return to their homes in Europe, but they weren't welcome. At the same time, the British continued to enforce their White Paper and stopped ships of Jewish refugees trying to get into Palestine.



The Partition Plan

Britain chose to turn its Palestine problem over to the United Nations, which recommended dividing Palestine into two separate states: one Arab, one Jewish. Jerusalem would not be a part of either state. Most Jewish leaders accepted the plan, happy at the prospect of having a Jewish state. But most Arab leaders rejected it and threatened to go to war if it was accepted. Since there were twice as many Arabs as Jews living in the land at the time, they felt that they should be given more land than they were offered. Despite the threats of war, the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the Partition Plan in 1947.



Israel Becomes a State



David Ben-Gurion reads the Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

Not long after the United Nations voted “yes” for the Partition Plan, on the morning of May 14, 1948, Jews around the world gathered around radios to hear David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, read the Israeli Declaration of Independence before a crowd in Tel Aviv. With tears in their eyes, the crowd sang the new nation’s national anthem: “Hatikvah.”

The Jewish state was no longer just a hope and a dream. It was the State of Israel.

Hatikvah: The Hope

*As long as in the heart
within,*

A Jewish soul still yearns

*And onward, toward the
ends of the east*

*An eye still yearns
toward Zion*

Our hope is not yet lost

*The hope of two
thousand years*

*To be a free people in
our land*

*The land of Zion and
Jerusalem*

Watch a video of Hatikvah at
bhlink.me/israel5

Today's Hatikvah

The words of “Hatikvah” express the hopes of the early pioneers for a new Jewish state.

Imagine that it was your job to create a new anthem. Write it in the space above, as a poem or song. Then, using the “Hatikvah” melody, chant or sing your new anthem to your friends.

War of Independence

There was little time to celebrate. The new nation of Israel was attacked by five Arab countries—Egypt, Syria, Transjordan (now called Jordan), Lebanon, and Iraq.

Israel's soldiers successfully beat back the attack, and when the fighting ended, the Jewish homeland was here to stay.



The red arrows show where the surrounding countries attacked Israel.



Approximately 750,000 Palestinian Arabs left their homes and became refugees. Some left out of fear; others because they were forced to. Still others because they thought they would have better lives in a different country.

0710

By the Numbers:

During Israel's first three years of existence, almost 700,000 Jewish immigrants moved there. Half were Holocaust survivors from Europe. The other half were Jews from Arab countries, who often chose to come in response to the violence that was rising against Jews in the Muslim world.



Independence Day: Celebrations?

May 14, 1948, was one of most joyous days in Jewish history. After two thousand years without a homeland, and after the horrors of the Holocaust, the Jewish people had their own country.

Today, Israelis and Jews worldwide celebrate Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Israeli Independence Day, with fireworks, street parties, and picnics.



A child commemorating Nakba Day in Hebron

In contrast, Palestinians call May 15, the day after Yom Ha'atzma'ut, the Nakba, which means "catastrophe." During the War of Independence, 750,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes, and a Palestinian state was not created as the United Nations had intended.

Palestinians consider the Nakba a day of sorrow. Many commemorate it with rallies and speeches. Protesters carry cutouts of keys, symbolizing the keys to the homes Palestinians abandoned in 1948. Sometimes the rallies turn violent, with protestors burning tires, throwing rocks, and clashing with Israeli police.

In Israel, these two complicated realities—Yom Ha'atzma'ut and Nakba Day—exist side by side. Some celebrate Yom Ha'atzma'ut, and others commemorate the Nakba. "The celebration of the Jewish people's ability to govern itself without having to play the loyal minority is a legitimate celebration. At the same time, it is worth recognizing the political challenges and the human cost that statehood created," says writer and activist Ariel Beery.

"These days are filled with symbols that have very different meanings for the two groups: victor and the vanquished, the Jews who won the war and the Arabs who lost the war."

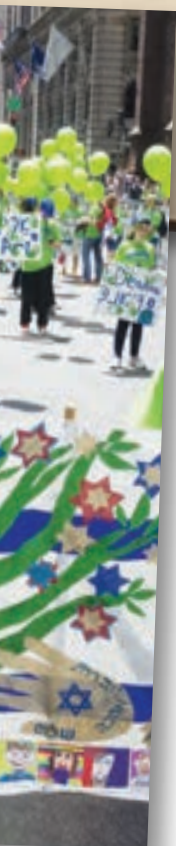
—**Nadia Kinani**, an Arab Israeli educator



Americans celebrating Yom Ha'atzma'ut

May 14, 1948

May 15, 1948



Dear Diary

With a partner, imagine that one of you is an Israeli Jew and the other a Palestinian Arab. Above are two days of your diary, May 14 (the date of the Israeli Declaration of Independence) and May 15 (when war broke out). On each page, answer the following questions:

- How are you feeling on this day?
- What events have you witnessed?
- What are your friends or family members saying?
- What are you hearing and reading in the news?

Then, trade diary entries with your partner and discuss:

- What was similar about your entries?
- What was different?



Talk about It!

1. What do you think the pioneers from over one hundred years ago would think if they saw Israel today? How might they feel?
2. Why do you think many Jewish people who live outside of Israel celebrate Yom Ha'atzma'ut?
3. What ritual would you create that Jews could do on Yom Ha'atzma'ut to recognize the Nakba while still celebrating Israel's independence?

