

THE INGATHERING OF THE EXILES

Following their expulsion and after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 CE, the majority of Jews were dispersed throughout the world. Ever since then, Jews never lost hope of returning to the land of Israel. Returning to Israel is called, '*aliyah*,' which means 'to go up.'

Between 1948, when Israel gained its independence, and 1952, Israel doubled its population from 600,000 to more than 1.2 million. The immigrants included survivors of the Holocaust from displaced persons camps in Germany, Austria and Italy; a majority of the Jewish communities of Bulgaria and Poland and one third of the Jews of Romania; and nearly all of the Jewish communities of Libya, Yemen and Iraq. The immigrants encountered many adjustment difficulties.

The fledgling state had just emerged from the bruising war of independence, was in grievous economic condition, and found it difficult to provide hundreds of thousands of immigrants with housing and jobs. Much effort was devoted towards absorbing the immigrants: camps of tin shacks and tents and later permanent dwellings were erected; employment opportunities were created; the Hebrew language was taught; and the educational system was expanded and adjusted to meet the needs of children from many different backgrounds.

Israel exists today, in part, to provide a safe haven for Jews from around the world. For example:

- From 1881-1882, Eastern European Jews fled pogroms in Russia. A small number also arrived from Yemen. Though the immigrants were inexperienced idealists, most chose agricultural settlement as their way of life and founded *moshavot* - farmholders' villages based on the principle of private property. Three early villages of this type were Rishon Lezion, Rosh Pina, and Zikhron Ya'akov. These settlers encountered many difficulties, including an inclement climate, disease, crippling Turkish taxation and Arab opposition. The Yemenite immigrants, most of who settled in Jerusalem, were first employed as construction workers and later in the citrus plantations of the *moshavot*.

Almost half of the 35,000 immigrants that arrived at the end of the 19th century left the country within several years of their arrival, some 15,000 established new rural settlements, and the rest moved to the towns.

- In the wake of pogroms in Czarist Russia and the ensuing eruption of anti-Semitism, young Jews inspired by socialist ideals immigrated to Israel. The first kibbutz (collective settlement), Degania (1909) and the first Jewish self-defense organization were established. The Ahuzat Bayit neighborhood, established as a suburb of Jaffa, developed into Tel Aviv, the first modern all-Jewish city. The Hebrew language was revived as a spoken tongue, and Hebrew literature and Hebrew newspapers were published. Political parties were founded and workers' agricultural organizations began to form. In all, 40,000 Jews immigrated between 1904 and 1914, but absorption difficulties and the absence of a stable economic base caused nearly half of them to leave.
- In May 1949, when Yemen agreed to let 45,000 Jews leave, Israeli transport planes flew them "home" in Operation Magic Carpet. The government of Israel needed \$700,000 to absorb the immigrants; an amount that was more than the entire state budget.
- From 1950-1952, 130,000 Jews arrived in Israel from Iraq. The last Hebrew speaker - from a Jewish population that dates back to the days when King Nebuchadnezzar brought the Israelites to Babylon in chains nearly 2,600 years ago - left for Israel in 2003.

- In 1984, 7,000 Ethiopian Jews walked hundreds of miles to Sudan, where a secret effort known as Operation Moses brought them to Israel. Another 15,000 arrived in a dramatic airlift, Operation Solomon, in May 1991. New immigrants continue to arrive in Israel from Ethiopia today.
- Soviet Jews left the Soviet Union in unprecedented numbers in the late 1980s, with President Gorbachev's bid to liberalize the country. 190,000 immigrants reached Israel in 1990 and 150,000 in 1991.

***Aliyah* for idealistic reasons**

While mass immigrations to Israel have mostly been from countries that persecuted Jews, immigration of individuals from the free world has also continued throughout the years. This *aliyah* gained strength with the reawakening of feelings of Jewish identity among Jews around the world, including the United States.

Adjusting to life in Israel

Today, when immigrants arrive in Israel the Israeli government helps them with housing, education and finding jobs. Absorption centers are dormitories run by the Jewish Agency to house immigrants. The immigrants live in the center at a very low cost while they learn Hebrew and prepare for life in their new home. All immigrants receive financial assistance for their first year in Israel.

New Israeli families are paired with former immigrants who have experienced the *aliyah* process and who can help them form a bridge to Israeli society. They are invited to jointly participate in a variety of recreational, cultural, social activities.

Assistance for children

The *Youth Aliyah* initiative was originally founded in 1933 to rescue Jewish youth from Nazi Germany. Some 5,000 teenagers were brought to Israel before World War II and educated at *Youth Aliyah* boarding schools; followed, after the war, by an additional 15,000, most of them Holocaust survivors. Today *Youth Aliyah* villages continue to play a vital role in the absorption of young newcomers, as well as offering thousands of disadvantaged Israeli youth a second chance.

An example of a Youth Aliyah village is the Yemin Orde Youth Village, founded in 1953 by the British Friends of Youth Aliyah, in order to accommodate Holocaust orphans and immigrant children during the great immigration waves of the fifties. Today, most of the children at Yemin Orde come from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and Brazil. About half of the population comes from dysfunctional homes. About 20% of the children at Yemin Orde are orphans. In addition to their work in Israel, Yemin Orde staff expanded their work to an international project in Rwanda, home to many orphans of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Yemin Orde staff, including recent Ethiopian Israeli graduates of the Yemin Orde program, work in an advisory capacity to train staff at the Agahozo Shalom Village in Rwanda.

11/08



Guided by Jewish values, the JCRC informs, collaborates, advocates and takes action on issues in the public arena that are of central concern to the Jewish community.

#12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146-5776 E-mail jrcrstl@jrcrstl.org 314-442-3871 www.jrcrstl.org
The JCRC is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation.