

# AROUND THE WORLD



**SHIRA PRAYS FOR PEACE**



# Welcome to Israel

Israel is a very small country in the Middle East that sits on the Mediterranean Sea. One could even drive across the entire country from north to south in about six hours. And yet, this tiny Jewish state is quite religiously and topographically diverse. The territory corresponding to the state of Israel and the capital city of Jerusalem is regarded by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike as the "Holy Land." As such, the holy land of three faiths is talked about around the world and attracts over 4 million visitors each year.

This land became the home of the Jewish people 4,000 years ago but most of them were expelled from their homeland after many wars and could not return until decades later. In 1948, following world war two and the murder of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, the Jewish people's prayers were finally answered and Israel was granted the legal right to exist by the United Nations.

Sadly, it continues to fight for its survival to this day. For decades, the United States has been a strong ally of Israel. In fact, the US was the first country to recognize Israel as a legitimate state in 1948, and the first to recognize Jerusalem as its capital in 2017. Both nations are united in their commitment to economic prosperity, democracy and regional security. These shared objectives keep the bond strong, as demonstrated by the exchange of military, technological, and medical advancements.

## Fun Facts

- Size of population: 9 million
- Size of country: 8,550 square miles
- Languages: Hebrew and Arabic (English is the most widely-used foreign language)
- Neighboring countries: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria
- Only country in the world which had more trees at the end of the twentieth century than it did at the start of that century







# Jerusalem

Israel's capital city of Jerusalem is considered by many to be the holiest city in the world. Located in the Judean Mountains, this 4,000-year-old city is a spiritual center for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Three main areas make up Jerusalem: the Old City, East Jerusalem, and West Jerusalem. The Old City is divided into quarters where each religious group (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity) is uniquely represented by its own distinctive characteristics. The Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are just a few of the holy sites that attract people to Jerusalem. Although some people are just visitors, many people consider Jerusalem their home. As a result, Jerusalem has become Israel's most populous city. This ancient city is also the heart of Israel's modern day government which is led by its prime minister and Parliament, known as the Knesset.

## Tel Aviv

Israel's second most populous city, and most affluent city, Tel Aviv, is an economic engine. Centrally located on the Mediterranean coastal plain, like a little New York City, Tel Aviv is a center of big business, high-fashion, entertainment, and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange. It also has some of the most beautiful beaches in Israel, and is a major attraction for locals and tourists.



# Meet Shira

This is Shira. She lives with her Jewish family in an apartment in Tel Aviv. Two blocks from her house is a mixed Arab-Jewish city called Jaffa. Like many other thirteen-year-old girls, Shira enjoys hanging out with her friends after school. But her best friend is Yasmin, a Muslim girl from Jaffa. Shira and Yasmin have been friends since they were eight years old, when they first began playing soccer together on the same team. While the girls have many differences in cultures and religious beliefs, they also have a lot in common, and enjoy learning from each other's differences. Thanks to Yasmin, Shira is almost fluent in Arabic, but most of the time they speak Hebrew with each other.





# American Friend

Just like the United States of America, Israel is a nation of immigrants which prides itself on its freedom of religion and the freedom of all of its citizens, no matter their ethnicity or race. Over seventy different nationalities live in this tiny country. Uniquely, Israel is the only country in the Middle East which does not oppress its minority populations. Israel's laws and Supreme Court rulings protect these freedoms from being jeopardized.

Shira also has a pen-pal in the United States of America named Avery. Like Shira, Avery is in middle school. At first, Shira didn't think they would have much in common, but they do! Like Shira in Israel, Avery lives in one of the most populous and diverse cities in the USA – Houston, Texas. Avery's parents are even from different ethnic backgrounds. Both girls enjoy living in a "melting pot" and learning about others' cultures, but love celebrating their own nations most of all. Like the United States, Israel believes in free enterprise, strong national defense, individual freedoms, and a political system based on free elections. Both countries had to fight in wars for these freedoms and independence, which are still celebrated today. Shira and Avery enjoy sharing their experiences celebrating Yom Ha'Atzma'ut (Israel's Independence Day) and the Fourth of July (America's Independence Day) with one another each year. Just like on the Fourth of July, Shira celebrates Yom Ha'Atzma'ut with delicious foods and fireworks. Both girls recognize that uniting people in celebration of their nation is something to be proud of.



## **Immigrant:**

a person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence.

## **Melting pot:**

a country in which cultural assimilation results in blending the heritage and traditions of previously distinct ethnic groups.

Being one of the most educated countries in the world, Israel highly values quality education for all of its people. Shira's parents instill the importance of education in their children at a young age, and make many sacrifices to provide the best opportunities for their children. Since the expectations are high, middle school can be tough in Israel. Shira diligently studies every day, knowing that in a few years, like her sister Rotem, she will be tested to determine her placement in the Israeli military, known as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Unlike the voluntary military in the US, all Jewish Israeli citizens, both male and female, are required to join the IDF at the age of eighteen after graduating from high school. While it is not mandated, many Arab-Israeli men and women also join the military because they love Israel. Enlisting a diverse group of men and women, the Israeli military serves an important social role in uniting the country. Shira isn't sure if

she wants to be a combat soldier, but she does know the coolest jobs require a lot of hard work.

After school, Shira walks to her grandparents' house where her retired grandfather helps her with her schoolwork until her parents get home from work. He is a real history buff. Like most families in Israel, both Shira's mom and dad are professionals who contribute to Israel's workforce. Shira is grateful her grandparents moved to Tel Aviv, and she always looks forward to Friday afternoons at their house, where she helps prepare for the Sabbath. Smelling the challah (braided bread) baking as she walks in the door is one her favorite traditions. Gleeful because she doesn't have any homework on Fridays, Shira relishes getting to help her grandmother cook for the Sabbath and getting to listen to her grandfather tell stories about Israel's past.

**Sabbath:** the seventh day of the week, begins on Friday night and ends when the stars come out on Saturday night (approximately twenty-five hours). It is the day of rest for religious Jews and some Christians.



# Israel's Past

Shira's grandfather, Aryeh, recently retired from the tourism industry in Jerusalem. For many years, he enthusiastically shared the complex history of Israel with people from all over the world. Although Shira thinks her grandfather is as old as Israel, she forgets that the year of his birth, 1948, was Israel's rebirth. Israel has a rich past dating back to ancient times. The Bible relates that Jews have lived in the land of Israel for thousands of years. The Old Testament chronicles that Jacob, who was re-named "Israel" by God, had twelve sons, whose families became the twelve tribes of Israel. After some time, the twelve tribes were united, Jerusalem became their capital city, and the first Jewish temple was built around 960 BC. Eventually, the Jewish people were exiled by the Babylonians in 586 BC, although some Jews stayed behind. In the course of time, the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, who allowed the Jewish people to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Even after the Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great and the Greeks, some Jews still remained on their land.

Around 60 BC, the Romans occupied Israel. This occupation of Israel caused the First Jewish Revolt between 66-73 AD, which resulted in the deaths of many Jews. Many survivors fled the land. At this time, to decrease the Jewish connection to the land, the Romans renamed Judea "Palestine," after the ancient Biblical enemies of the Jews, the Philistines. For hundreds of years, the land of Israel changed powers. During these times many Jews suffered and were killed, but some of them always remained in their homeland of Israel.



960 BC

First  
Jewish  
temple  
built

586 BC

Jewish  
people  
exiled by  
Babylonians

60 BC

Romans  
occupied  
Israel

66-73 AD

First  
Jewish  
Revolt

1948 AD

Israel's  
rebirth





# Israel's Rebirth

After World War I and World War II, the need for a Jewish homeland became very clear, because many Jews were murdered and persecuted with nowhere to escape to. At this time, Shira's great-grandparents immigrated to the land of Israel where they supported the Zionist movement (Zionists believe in the right of a Jewish homeland and a safe haven for Jewish refugees). Incredibly, in 1948, Israel was legally declared an independent state by the United Nations, and soon after, Shira's grandfather, Aryeh, was born. Immediately after declaring independence, Israel was attacked by surrounding Arab states, beginning the first Arab-Israeli war. During this time, many Arabs fled the new state of Israel, and many more Jews fled Arab countries to try and get to Israel. During this transfer of populations, Shira's grandmother, Hannah, and her family came from Morocco and settled in Israel.

On many occasions, Israel sought peace with the surrounding countries and the local Palestinians. After several devastating wars, they were able to sign two peace treaties, one with Egypt in 1979, and one with Jordan in 1994. Sadly, despite many attempts, Israel has not been able to achieve a much-desired peace agreement with the local Palestinians. Every night, before Shira goes to bed, she prays that God will bring peace to the entire region, and that there will be no more wars against Israel.



1948 AD

Israel's  
rebirth

1979 AD

Signed  
peace  
treaty  
with  
Egypt

1994 AD

Signed  
peace  
treaty  
with  
Jordan

Today







# Start-up Nation

Israel, like the United States, allows its citizens the freedom to develop their individual talents through entrepreneurship. Taking advantage of this opportunity, with self-discipline and hard-work, Aryeh and Hannah grew a successful tourism business that supported the influx of visitors in Jerusalem.

Nicknamed the “Start-Up Nation,” Israel has the largest number of start-ups per-capita in the world. Incredible technologies such as ICQ, first instant messenger, Waze, a navigation device and many biotech innovations came from this little country. As a result, Israel has been able to share these remarkable technologies with many around the world. Shira is enormously grateful that she lives in an innovative country that provides her with the support and the opportunities to be her personal best. She hopes to follow in her parents’ footsteps one day by inventing a life-saving product.

**Entrepreneurship:**  
the act of taking on  
financial risks and  
building a company in  
the hopes of creating  
economic value.

# Parents of Innovation



This is Bella, Shira's mom. She is a part of an Israeli "think-tank." Serving in the Israel Defense Forces for two years, Bella received special training which laid the foundation for her future career as an engineer. After serving in the military, Bella continued her education at Tel Aviv University. With a passion for people and robotics, Bella began to work in one of Israel's largest and most innovative systems – medical technology. In partnership with the inspiring and gifted team of scientists at Rewalk, Bella developed assistive technology to help disabled people be mobile again. This wearable robotic exoskeleton assists people in everyday movements such as standing, walking, turning, and climbing. This is amazing! Bella couldn't be happier she is improving the lives of people around the world. More fascinating medical technology devices created by Israelis include: a device that can smell disease, a swallowable pill-camera, and a flexible stent, used in life-saving heart surgeries.



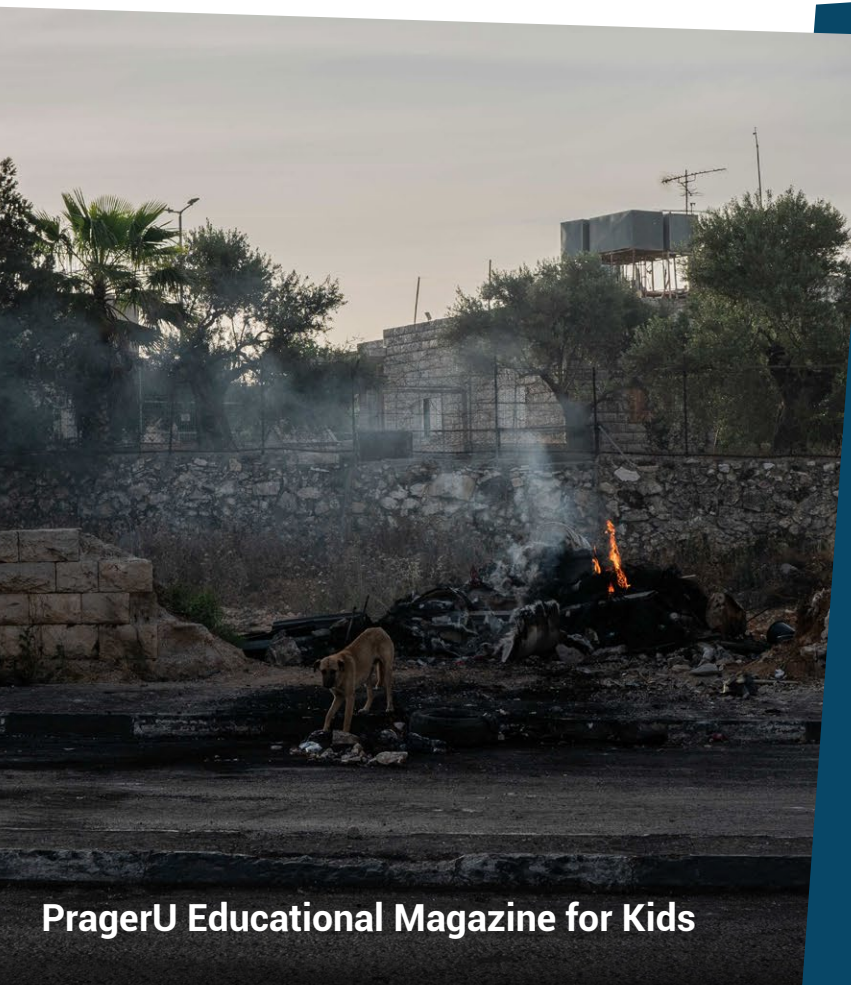
This is Dov, Shira's dad. He is an engineer, too. Growing up in Israel, a country with limited water sources, Dov feared running out of fresh water to drink! Throughout his life, Dov and his community had to practice extreme water conservation measures. He never ran the water while brushing his teeth, and his mother would time his showers to avoid overuse. Knowing fresh water shortages plagued his country, Dov worked diligently on finding a solution. Dov and his colleagues developed one of the most cutting-edge inventions in the world – desalination. Desalination is the process of taking salt water and turning it into usable, drinkable, fresh water. As of 2016, over 50% of Israel's fresh water comes from desalination. As a world leader in desalination, Israel, which was once one of the driest places in the world, now has an abundance of fresh water. As a result, people no longer stress over the need for water. With this knowledge in hand, Israel is helping the world, including California, solve their problems from drought.



# Under Attack

This is Rotem, Shira's older sister. Sadly, Rotem and Shira have grown up during a time of ongoing attacks from terrorist organizations, including Hamas, whose primary goal is to destroy Israel. Both girls have been trained on how to respond to surprise attacks at school and at home. Unfortunately, bomb drills at school are as common in Israel as fire drills are in the United States. Rotem and Shira's family are prepared at home with a surplus of supplies piled high in their bomb shelter located in their apartment, which also acts as Rotem's room. Rotem complains about the heavy window and the coldness of the cinder-block walls, but having nighttime access to the extra snacks and drinks does have its advantages.

Rotem is in her last year of high school and she can't wait to become a combat soldier in the Israel Defense Forces. Understanding she will have to train hard and commit to more years of service because she wants to be a combat soldier, Rotem is ready for the challenge and the risk. Since the competition is fierce, she has spent years taking advanced classes, and even more time studying. Rotem loves her country and wants to devote her life to protect her community from the dangers of those who don't want Israel to exist. She is already looking forward to celebrating her enrollment in the army at her enlistment party with her friends and family.



Above all else, like Rotem, Israel yearns to protect the lives of innocent people. Israel has been a victim of terrorist attacks for many years. Since 2008, Israel has had to protect itself in four wars and from numerous other terrorists attacks. Most recently, in 2021, the Palestinian terror group Hamas launched over 4,000 rockets directly at the populous cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in an attempt to obtain mass casualties and chaos. Sadly, during this eleven-day conflict many people, including children, lost their lives. Hamas, which is the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and supported by Iran, frequently launches rockets at Israeli civilians in an attempt to crush the Jewish state. Unfortunately, in the process of trying to achieve this goal, Hamas purposefully risks the lives of, and even kills, many Palestinians, by launching their rockets from residential areas, including from schools and hospitals, and using civilians as "human shields."

# Military Strength



Knowing the Jews have no other guaranteed safe haven, Israel established the Israel Defense Forces on May 31, 1948, and has made it its mission to never lose a war. Like the United States military, the IDF consists of an army, a navy, and an air force. Within each of these units lies specialized forces who receive specific training in different forms of combat and counterterrorism. Needing to constantly defend itself, Israel depends on its active military and its enormous reserve forces. All reserve military personnel receive annual training to maintain their skills in order to be ready to fight at a moment's notice. Shira's father Dov, eagerly participates in training and service every year, understanding he is protecting his country.

Prioritizing the safety of its people, Israel has developed a unique partnership with the United States government to help protect its borders. The US has committed to assist Israel in maintaining its military edge in the Middle East in exchange for intelligence concerning security and innovative strategies. This relationship also provides economic opportunities for the US, where technology components are manufactured. One of Israel and the United States' greatest technological successes was the co-development of the Iron Dome in 2011. Iron Dome is an incredible missile defense system that intercepts rockets being launched at populated areas in Israel. Protecting Israel from attacks, this machine has successfully stopped thousands of missiles from destroying Israeli cities, and prevented the deaths of many of its citizens. Ultimately, the Iron Dome reduces death and destruction without harming anyone.

Shira, like all Israeli citizens, knows that when she turns eighteen she will also enlist in the IDF. She eagerly looks forward to serving her country in the best way she can.



# Challenge Yourself

In Israel, almost everybody serves their country by enlisting in the military. If you were to serve your country, how would you do it?"



# Scripture



Christian scripture is called the Bible



Jewish scripture is called the Torah



Muslim scripture is called the Quran

# Matching

Draw a line to match each vocabulary word to its definition.

Melting Pot

The seventh day of the week, begins on Friday night and ends when the stars come out on Saturday night.

Immigrant

Braided bread, often eaten by Jews on the Sabbath.

Sabbath

A person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence.

Entrepreneurship

A missile defense system that intercepts rockets being launched at populated areas in Israel.

Challah

A country in which cultural assimilation results in blending the heritage and traditions of previously distinct ethnic groups.

Desalination

The process of taking salt water and turning it into usable, drinkable fresh water.

Iron Dome

The act of setting up a business and taking on financial risks in the hopes of building a company.

# Traditional Recipe for Challah



**Cook Time:** 25-30 minutes

**Yield:** 4 loaves

## Ingredients

- Poppy or sesame seeds (optional)
- 9 1/4 cups flour
- 4 eggs, beaten, plus 2 yolks or 1 whole egg for glazing
- 1 Tablespoon salt
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 1/4 cups lukewarm water
- 2 Tablespoons dry yeast
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil

## Instructions

1. Dissolve the yeast and 1 tsp of sugar in the water. Beat well. Leave for about 10 minutes or until it froths.
2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs. Add the salt, sugar, and oil. Beat again. Add the frothy yeast mixture. Beat well.
3. Add the flour gradually, only add enough for the dough to come together in a soft ball.
4. Knead for 15 minutes. The dough should be very smooth and elastic. Add flour if the dough is too sticky.
5. Spray a bowl with cooking oil. Place dough in greased bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let dough rise in a warm place for 2-3 hours.
6. Divide the dough in 4 pieces. Set 3 aside. Divide 1 piece of the dough into 3. Roll each piece out in a long rope about an inch thick. Pinch one end of all 3 ropes together and plait them: bring the rope on the right over the middle one, then bring the one on the left over it, and continue to the end. Pinch the ends together and tuck them under the loaf. Do this with the remaining 3 pieces of dough.
7. Place the 4 loaves on greased baking sheets. Leave room for them to get bigger. Let rise for 1 hour.
8. Preheat oven to 350 F. Now brush gently with the beaten egg yolks. Sprinkle with poppy or sesame seeds (optional).
9. Bake for 30-40 minutes or until the loaves are golden-brown. You will know that they are done if they sound hollow when you tap the bottoms.





# Israeli Salad

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Yield:** 8 servings

## Ingredients

- 5 medium cucumbers
- 3 fresh ripe tomatoes
- 1 medium onion
- 1/2 cup minced fresh parsley
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- Salt to taste

## Instructions

1. Dice the cucumbers and tomatoes.
2. Mince the onion and fresh parsley.
3. Place all of the ingredients into a large mixing bowl.
4. Mix until vegetables are well coated with parsley, oil, lemon juice, and salt.
5. Best served fresh at room temperature. You can also serve chilled for a more refreshing salad.

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Images: Getty Images, 123rf, Unsplash

# Answer key:

## Sabbath

The seventh day of the week, begins on Friday night and ends when the stars come out on Saturday night.

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Braided bread, often eaten by Jews on the Sabbath.

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