



בְּרֵאשִׁית

Bereishit

SEDRA:

בְּרֵאשִׁית Bereishit

1st SEDRA IN:

בְּרֵאשִׁית Bereishit

BY NUMBERS:

146 verses
1,931 words
7235 letters

HEADLINES:

Creation of the
world

Parasha Summary

In the *Torah's* opening *parasha*, God creates the world in six days and ceases creative work on the seventh. God sanctifies and blesses the seventh day, *Shabbat*, as a day of rest. Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and are expelled from the Garden of Eden. Cain kills Abel and is punished accordingly. We read about the ten generations between Adam and Noah and then the degeneration of humanity, so much so that God considers destroying all of Creation.



THE STORY OF JEWISH HISTORY

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvellous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian and the Persian arose, filled the planet with sound and splendour, then faded to dream stuff and passed away; the Greek and Roman followed and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a while, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies,



no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains.

What is the secret of his immortality?

Mark Twain's Essay on the Jews, 1899

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the secret of Jewish continuity?
2. Is Jewish history miraculous?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

[My] faith [in God] has been persistently reinforced by Jewish history... These are His awesome effects, for were it not for awe of God, how could one nation (the Jews) survive among the nations?' (*Talmud* Yoma 69b)... our singular history has provided much reinforcement.

Rabbi Dr Aharon Lichtenstein (1933–2015)

SHABBAT 'SWITCH OFF YOUR SMARTPHONE AND SOAK UP THE SABBATH'

Sometimes the more digitally connected we are, the more disconnected we become from everything that is important. In this context, *Shabbat* is more relevant now than ever before. It is a time to deal with real friends, people and challenges. Real relationships, whether a long overdue catch up with old friends or a joyful family meal, are strengthened by the discipline to rise above the weekly grind and experience something altogether more meaningful.

Jack Lew, an observant Jew who was Chief of Staff to US President Barack Obama, speaks often of how understanding the President was about his leaving the White House for Shabbat. Lew says that the President would frequently point to his watch on a Friday afternoon and prompt him that it was time to get going – “to remind me that it was important to him, not just to me, that I be able to make that balance.”

Striking that balance is a worthy aspiration, not just for Jews, but for all of our society.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

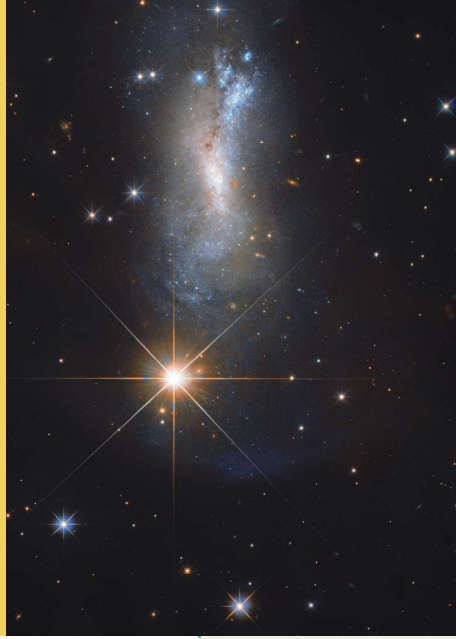
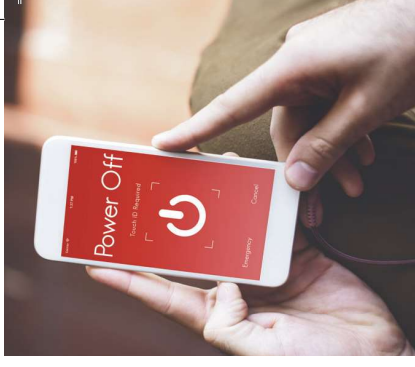


PARASHA QUIZ

1. Day 1: What did God create?
2. Day 2: What did God also call the *rakia*?
3. Day 3: What did God see twice?
4. Day 4: What are the *meorot* (luminaries/lights) and how do they differ from the 'light' on day 1?
5. Day 5: Where did the creatures created on this day live?
6. Day 6: What is the difference between the humans and all the other creations made on this day?
7. Day 7: What did God create?

- Answers:**
1. Light and darkness
 2. The Heavens (*Shtamayim*)
 3. "That it was good"
 4. The sun and the moon – they are the source of light. The light on day 1 was the actual light.
 5. In the sea and the sky
 6. Humans are created "in the image of God".
 7. Shabbat (rest)

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SEDRA:

נֹחַ

Noach

2nd SEDRA IN:

בְּרֵאשִׁית

Bereishit

BY NUMBERS:

153 verses
1,861 words
6,907 letters

HEADLINES:

The flood and
Tower of
Babel

Parasha Summary

God sends a flood to destroy the world. Only Noah, "a righteous man in his generation", his family and at least two of each living creature survive the flood by taking refuge in an ark that God commanded Noah to build. God promises never to make such a flood again. The rainbow recalls this promise. The people that then populate the world build the Tower of Babel, but it angers God and leads to the dispersal of Noah's descendants. Abram and Sarai are born, and further genealogy is listed.

THE FLOOD STORY IN MIDRASH (RABBINIC TEACHINGS)

When *Noach* (Noah) was told by God of the impending flood and the end of the world, he begged his neighbours to repent, saying that a terrible flood was due to destroy humanity and animals because of their wickedness. *Noach* purposely worked slowly, hoping that the people would heed his warnings and repent. According to one teaching, *Noach* planted cedar trees and chopped them down over 120 years, to give the people time to change their ways. But they still did not believe him. Instead, they mocked and persecuted him.

Then *Noach* brought the animals into the ark, seven of each 'clean' animal but only two of the 'unclean' ones.

According to some rabbinic commentaries, *Noach's* faith was shaky and he did not board the ark until he stood ankle deep in water. Others assert that *Noach* awaited God's directions to enter, just as he awaited God's permission to leave.

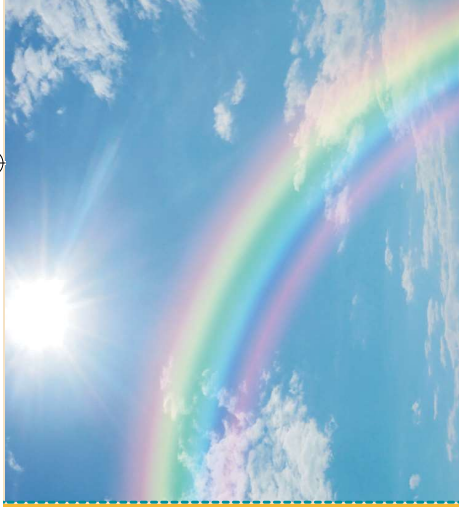
Once inside, *Noach* was constantly

occupied attending to all the animals, which fed at different times. One of the lions, angry from hunger,

attacked and injured him, so he remained lame for the rest of his life.

When *Noach* eventually left the ark, he saw the destruction and began to weep, saying: "Lord of the world, You are merciful; why didn't You pity Your children?" God answered: "Foolish shepherd! Now you pray

for the world? If you had done so when I announced to you my plans for the Flood, it would have been avoided. You knew you would be rescued, and therefore did not care for others. Now you pray?" *Noach* acknowledged his fault, and brought offerings for forgiveness.



JEWISH HISTORY THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

The Balfour Declaration was a statement of support made by the British Government for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael*. It was written on 2 November 1917 by Lord Arthur James Balfour, former Prime Minister (1902–1905) and then Foreign Minister (1916–1919). He sent it to Lord Lionel Rothschild, a senior member of the Jewish community in Britain.

It stated: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".

This was the first time in modern history that a great power had recognised Jewish national aspirations in *Eretz Yisrael*, and lent its support to them. It was a partial realisation of the dream of Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, some 13 years after his death.

At the 'Balfour 100' centenary celebrations in 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May proudly restated the UK's commitment to the aims of the Declaration and to furthering the UK's relationship with Israel.



DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why was it so important to the Zionist establishment in 1917 to get official support from a great power for the Zionist cause?

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BRITISH MANDATE QUIZ

1. What year did Britain conquer Palestine and from whom?
2. Who was the British General that conquered Palestine, paving the way for the establishing of the British Mandate?
3. What year did the British Mandate of Palestine begin?
4. Who was the first High Commissioner for Palestine?
5. What were the official languages of Mandatory Palestine?
6. What was the capital of Mandatory Palestine?

- Answers:
- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. 1917 from the Turkish Ottoman Empire | 4. Sir Herbert Samuel |
| 2. General Edmund Allenby | 5. English, Arabic, Hebrew |
| 3. 1920 | 6. Jerusalem |

SEDRA:

לֵךְ-לְעָמָר

Lech Lecha

3rd SEDRA IN:

בְּרֵאשִׁית

Bereishit

BY NUMBERS:

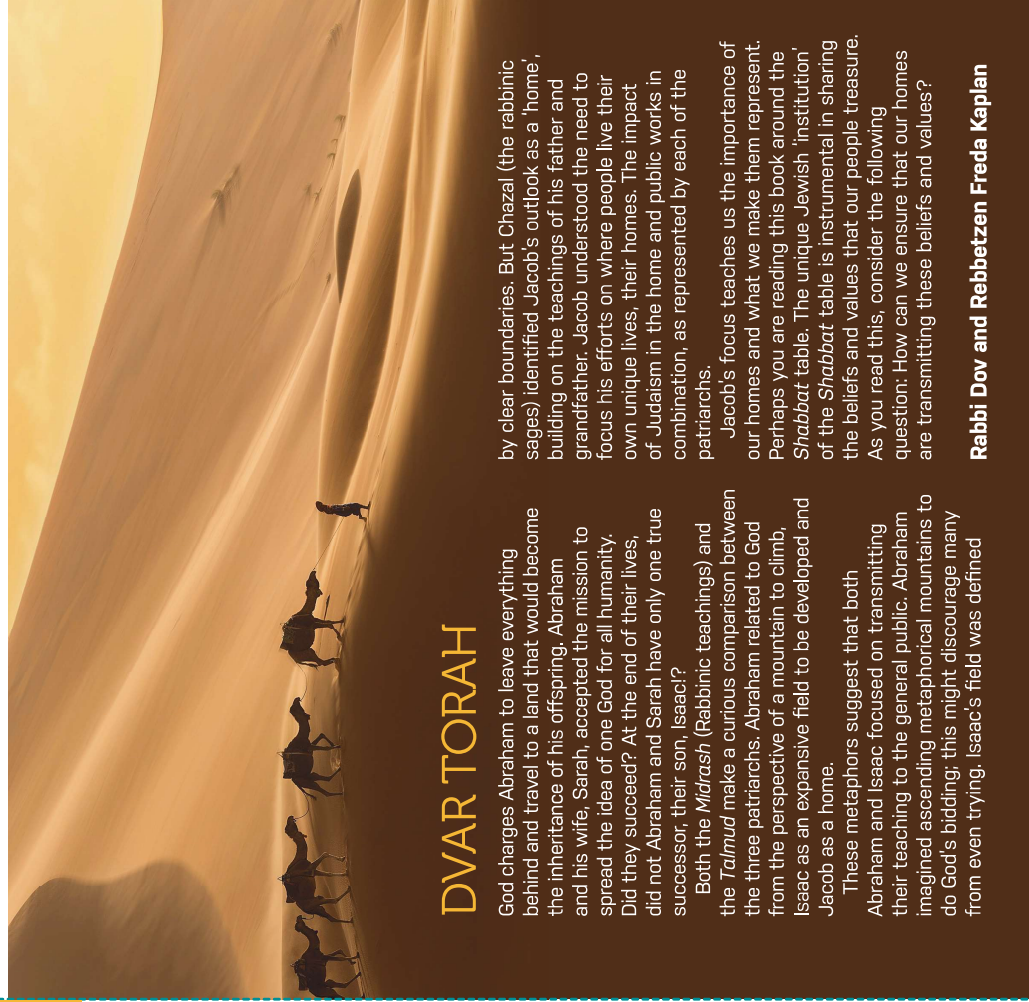
126 verses
1,686 words
6,336 letters

HEADLINES:

Abraham in
the Land

Parasha Summary

God tells Abram to leave his home and go "to a land that I will show you." He and his wife Sarai travel to Canaan (later to be the Land of Israel), but famine forces them to move to Egypt. Later they return to Canaan with great wealth, and Abram reluctantly parts ways with his nephew Lot. Abram defeats the armies of the four kings and rescues Lot whom they had taken captive. God makes a Covenant with Abram, bequeathing Canaan to his descendants. Abram marries Hagar, who gives birth to Ishmael. God changes Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's to Sarah. Abraham and all the men in his household are circumcised.



DVAR TORAH

God charges Abraham to leave everything behind and travel to a land that would become the inheritance of his offspring. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, accepted the mission to spread the idea of one God for all humanity. Did they succeed? At the end of their lives, did not Abraham and Sarah have only one true successor, their son, Isaac?

Both the *Midrash* (Rabbinic teachings) and the *Talmud* make a curious comparison between the three patriarchs. Abraham related to God from the perspective of a mountain to climb, Isaac as an expansive field to be developed and Jacob as a home.

These metaphors suggest that both Abraham and Isaac focused on transmitting their teaching to the general public. Abraham imagined ascending metaphorical mountains to do God's bidding; this might discourage many from even trying. Isaac's field was defined

by clear boundaries. But Chazal (the rabbinic sages) identified Jacob's outlook as a 'home,' building on the teachings of his father and grandfather. Jacob understood the need to focus his efforts on where people live their own unique lives, their homes. The impact of Judaism in the home and public works in combination, as represented by each of the patriarchs.

Jacob's focus teaches us the importance of our homes and what we make them represent. Perhaps you are reading this book around the *Shabbat* table. The unique Jewish 'institution' of the *Shabbat* table is instrumental in sharing the beliefs and values that our people treasure. As you read this, consider the following question: How can we ensure that our homes are transmitting these beliefs and values?

Rabbi Dov and Rebbetzen Freda Kaplan



PERSONALITY OF THE WEEK YITZCHAK RABIN

On 12th Cheshvan in the Jewish calendar, the anniversary of the death of Yitzchak Rabin is commemorated across Israel with ceremonies and memorials. Rabin was assassinated on this date in 1995 by a political opponent who believed the peace process was endangering the security of the State of Israel.

Rabin was an elder statesman. Born in Jerusalem in 1922 to parents who had made *aliya* as early Zionist pioneers, he became an active Labour Zionist. He learnt agriculture and joined the Palmach fighting force as a teenager. He concentrated on his military career, ultimately becoming Chief of Staff in 1964, the position in which he served during the Six Day War in 1967.



After the army Rabin entered politics. He served twice as Prime Minister (1974–1977 and then from 1992 until his death in 1995). He has been described as a warrior in both war and peace, and signed the Oslo Peace Accords, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994.

The anniversary of his death will forever be remembered as a tragic day in Israel's history, when a Jewish Prime Minister was assassinated by another Jew.

PARASHA QUIZ

1. Abram and Sarai each get a new name. What Hebrew letter is added to form their new names?
2. Where exactly did Abraham go with Lot and Sarah after he left Egypt?
3. In God's promise to Abraham, to what is the future people of Israel compared?



Answers:

1. ך
2. The Negev (southern) region of Israel
3. The stars of heaven

JEWISH HISTORY THE KINDERTRANSPORT

Nine months before World War Two started, an effort was made to rescue more than 10,000 Jewish children from an almost certain death by the Nazis. Despite attempts at the 1938 International Evian Conference to find countries willing to accept Jews desperate to leave continental Europe, other countries including Britain continued to maintain strict immigration limits. However the shocking events of Kristallnacht in 1938 led to a change in public opinion. After a parliamentary debate on 21 November 1938, Britain agreed to take in Jewish refugee children, provided they would not be a burden on the state. Thus started the Kindertransport.

Children were then taken from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland and housed with families throughout the British Isles. The first group arrived at Harwich in December 1938, bringing 196 children from a destroyed Berlin Jewish orphanage. The transports ended with the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Most of the children ended up living in the UK. They were largely cared for by non-Jewish families, with the understanding that the children would be reunited with their families after the war. Tragically though, most of the children were orphaned during the War.



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SEDRA:

ויקרא

Vayera

4th SEDRA IN:
בְּרֵאשִׁית
Bereishit

BY NUMBERS:

147 verses
2,085 words
7,862 letters

HEADLINES:

Abraham's
dilemmas

Parasha Summary

Angels visit Abraham and Sarah, who say that Sarah will soon have a baby despite her advanced age. Abraham argues with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gommorah. Lot and his daughters escape as the cities are destroyed, and Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt. Avimelech, king of the Philistines, tries to take Sarah as a wife, but God ensures she is released unharmed. Isaac is born, and Hagar and Ishmael are sent away. Abraham makes peace with Avimelech. Finally God tests Abraham, instructing him to sacrifice his beloved Isaac. This near-sacrifice of Isaac is called *Akeidat Yitzchak* (the binding of Isaac). Having seen Abraham's willingness to obey, God tells him to stop and sacrifice a ram instead.

PERSONALITY OF THE WEEK CHIEF RABBI LORD IMMANUEL JAKOBOVITS

Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits was Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1966 to 1991. He was born in Konigsberg, Germany, in 1921 into a rabbinic family. He came to England as a teenage refugee, where he studied in Yeshivat Etz Chaim, receiving rabbinic ordination, and at London University. After serving congregations in London, he was appointed as Chief Rabbi of Ireland and later became the founding rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, New York. He wrote his doctorate on Jewish medical ethics, now an established academic field of which he was largely the founder.

Rabbi Jakobovits began his Chief Rabbinate by placing Jewish education firmly at the top of the communal agenda. His tenure saw an enormous expansion of day schools and a resurgence of adult learning.

Described by a non-Jewish admirer as having the presence of Moses, he confidently and eloquently stated the Jewish view on issues facing British society. A friend and confidant of prime ministers, he was knighted in 1981 and raised to the peerage as Lord Jakobovits in 1987. He retired in 1991 and died unexpectedly in 1999.

Adapted from www.chiefrabbi.org



RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON (RAMBAM)

The Spanish city of Córdoba sits on the highest navigable point along the Guadalquivir River near to Seville. Its Jewish community in the Middle Ages produced many fine scholars. Perhaps the most famous and impactful of these was Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, better known by the Hebrew acronym 'Rambam' or as 'Maimonides', whose writings are still widely studied.

Born in 1135, he became a foremost scholar of Jewish law, philosopher and doctor. His education started with his father. Before he was 13, the family had to flee Spain due to persecution by the fanatical Almohad sect, settling first in Fez, Morocco and then to Eretz Yisrael. The desperate economic situation in Eretz Yisrael led the family to move to Fostat, near Cairo. There, the Rambam provided rabbinic leadership far and wide whilst also serving as the physician to the Sultan Saladin. In particular, his helped the Jewish community in Yemen avoid apostasy; to this day, the Rambam remains the primary rabbinic source for Yemenite Jewry. He advised many Jewish communities as well as teaching and publishing about medicine.

His most prominent works are his monumental *Mishneh Torah* (an early code of Jewish law) which is indispensable for understanding Jewish law, his commentary on the *Mishna* and his philosophical work, *Moreh Nevuchim* (Guide to the Perplexed). He passed away in 1204 and is buried in Tiberias, northern Israel.



A STORY FOR SHABBAT

Every Friday before dawn, the Rebbe of Nemirov would disappear. He was neither at home nor in any of the town's synagogues or houses of study. Once another scholar came to Nemirov. Puzzled by the Rebbe's disappearance, he asked his followers where the Rebbe was. "Where else but in heaven?" they replied. "The people of the town need peace, sustenance, health. The Rebbe is a holy man and he is surely in heaven, pleading our cause."

The scholar scoffed and was determined to find the Rebbe. One Thursday evening he hid in the Rebbe's house. Early the next morning he heard the Rebbe weep and sigh, then dress in peasant clothes. The Rebbe picked up an axe and went out. Stealthily, the scholar followed the Rebbe as he walked through the town and into the forest. He chopped down a tree, split

it into firewood, bundled it up and walked back to town.

He stopped at a run-down cottage in a back street and knocked on the door. An ill, elderly peasant woman opened the door. 'I am Vassily,' the Rebbe said. 'I have firewood to sell, very cheap, next to nothing.' 'But I have no money,' replied the woman. 'I will give it to you on credit,' he said. 'How will I be able to pay you?' she said. 'I trust you – and do you not trust God? He will find a way of seeing that I am repaid.' The Rebbe helped her to light a fire, as he did so. Then he returned home.

The scholar stayed in the town and became one of the Rebbe's disciples. Whenever he heard people say that the Rebbe ascended to heaven, he no longer laughed, but added, "And maybe even higher".

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SEDRA:

חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

Chayei Sarah

5th SEDRA IN:

בְּרֵאשִׁית
Bereishit

BY NUMBERS:

105 verses
1,402 words
5,314 letters

HEADLINES:

Isaac and Rebecca

Parasha Summary

Although this *parasha's* name means 'the life of Sarah', our Biblical matriarch dies at its start, aged 127. Abraham buys the Cave of Machpela in Hebron for her burial. It is still there today. Abraham sends his servant back to Abraham's original family to find a bride for Isaac. At a well, Rebecca impresses the servant with her kindness by offering to draw water for his camels. He meets Rebecca's family, then takes her to Isaac. They fall in love and marry. Abraham takes another wife and later dies at the age of 175. His sons Isaac and Ishmael bury him in Machpela, alongside Sarah.

THE BETA ISRAEL (ETHIOPIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ISRAEL)

On 29 Cheshvan every year, Jews in Israel of Ethiopian descent celebrate the festival of *Sigd*. Its name comes from *sigda* (prostration), and it is a renewal of the covenant between the Jewish people, God and the *Torah*. It was made an official national holiday in 2008. Today, since most of Ethiopian Jewry has made *aliya*, members of the community make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during *Sigd*. It serves as an annual gathering of the entire Ethiopian community, who view it as an opportunity to strengthen the connection with their roots and culture. The *Kessim* (religious leaders), dressed in their traditional robes, carry the *Torah* scrolls under

multi-coloured umbrellas, reading from the Bible and reciting prayers.

The *Beta Israel* (House of Israel) community lived in northern and northwestern Ethiopia, in more than 500 small villages, surrounded by a hostile Muslim and Christian population. The *Beta Israel* renewed contacts with other Jewish communities in the late 20th century, and the Israeli and American governments mounted *aliya* operations to transport them to Israel. These included Operations Moses and Joshua in the 1980s and Operation Solomon in the 1990s. About 120,000 *Beta Israel* live in Israel today.



QUIZ

How did the following countries vote in the UN Partition Plan for Palestine?

1. United Kingdom
2. United States
3. Soviet Union
4. Iran
5. Argentina
6. Cuba
7. France
8. Australia
9. Venezuela
10. Poland



- Answers:**
1. Abstention
 2. In favour
 3. In favour
 4. Against
 5. Abstention
 6. Against
 7. In favour
 8. In favour
 9. In favour
 10. In favour

PERSONALITY OF THE WEEK GENA TURGEL MBE



Gena Turgel was born in Cracow, Poland, in 1923. She survived the horrific conditions of the Plaszow labour camp, Auschwitz and a death march with her mother in 1945 from Auschwitz to Buchenwald and then Bergen-Belsen. On 15 April 1945, the British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen. One of the British troops was Norman Turgel. On 7 October 1945, Gena and Norman were married by Rev Leslie Hardman at a synagogue in Lubeck, Germany, which the Nazis had used as a stable. After the war, Gena and Norman set up home in North West London. A member of Stanmore & Canons Park Synagogue, where her grandson Jonny is the Chazan, Gena was one of a group of dedicated Holocaust survivors who speak at schools and other venues as Holocaust educators. Her autobiography, *I Light A Candle*, was first published in 1987. She passed away in 2018.

JEWISH HISTORY THE UN PARTITION PLAN FOR PALESTINE

Following Britain's announcement in February 1947 of its intention to terminate its Mandate government, the UN General Assembly appointed a special committee, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. UNSCOP recommended the establishment of two separate states, Jewish and Arab, to be joined by economic union, with the Jerusalem-Bethlehem region as an enclave under international administration.

On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly voted on the partition plan,

adopted by 33 votes to 13 with 10 abstentions. The Jewish leadership accepted the UN plan for the establishment of two states. The Arabs rejected it and initiated military preparations to counter the declaration of a Jewish state. While strictly speaking the plan was never implemented because of this, the vote gave David Ben-Gurion and his government the legal justification for declaring independence, which he did on the last day of the British Mandate, 14 May 1948.



ILAN RAMON

Colonel Ilan Ramon, of blessed memory, was one of the Israeli Air Force pilots who bombed the nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981, removing that threat to Israel's existence. In 2003, he joined the American crew of the space shuttle Columbia to serve as the first Israeli astronaut. Tragically, the entire crew perished when the shuttle exploded whilst returning to earth.

As the first Israeli astronaut, Ramon understood how he could represent the Jewish people to a global audience, even though he was not conventionally observant. Amongst the few possessions he took with him was a miniature *Sefer Torah*. It had miraculously been used at a clandestine bar mitzvah service at the Bergen Belsen concentration camp in 1944 and eventually made its way to Israel after the war along with the bar mitzvah boy, Joachim Joseph.

Ramon reached out to Rabbi Zvi Konikov, of Chabad of the Space & Treasure Coasts in Florida, who helped him plan how to keep Shabbat and kashrut in space. "Ilan was a very special Jew," recalls Rabbi Konikov. "He wanted to do everything in the very best way possible Jewishly... who left a strong impact on Jews all over the world."

Ilan Ramon remains an Israeli hero and an inspiration to generations of Jews.

Rabbi Konikov wrote a moving article about Ilan Ramon www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/632169/jewish/ShabbatInSpace.htm

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