

Dear YU Families,

Happy Yom Ha'atzmaut! It is so amazing to be able to celebrate our beautiful little country's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. With much luck we will soon forget what it feels like to fear the loss of the State of Israel, and begin to celebrate the 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar simply as a commemoration of a historic day. Until then, we must take advantage of this day to appreciate this precious gift we have been given.

As we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut, this year more extravagantly than most, it is as crucial as ever that we explain to our children the importance of the State of Israel. While it may seem obvious to many of us that the survival of the Jewish people, and the flourishing of Jewish culture and Torah study, is largely due to the State of Israel, this is becoming less obvious to Jewish youth.

When our children think of Israel, they think of the Inbal Hotel instead of the Knesset. They think about Burger's Bar and Massov Schwarma instead of the sacrifices their ancestors used to bring on the Temple Mount. There is little to no appreciation of Israel's geography outside of Jerusalem, and for that matter out of Ben Yehuda Street. We are losing an appreciation for the Land of Israel, the State of Israel, and the Spirit of Israel.

It takes as little as opening up a Tanach to realize the rich history we have surrounding us when we spend time in Israel. The stories of wars fought, civilizations built, and history made, take place on almost every hilltop in Israel. From the boats that King Solomon sent from the ports in Eilat, to the battles that were waged between the Jews and Philistines in the North, the Bible comes alive in Israel.

The Rabbis throughout the ages also extolled the value and importance of the Land of Israel. Stories abound of people making pilgrimage to Israel despite the economic hardships involved. The Gemara in Gittin goes as far as to say that a spouse's refusal to move to Israel is grounds for divorce! It was taught by the Rambam that even if the majority of the Jewish people lived outside of Israel, those who were in Israel were considered the heart of Israel. The Chofetz Chaim expanded on that point to say that if ever there was a situation that there was not a single Jew living in Israel, even if there was Jewish life thriving throughout the rest of the world, it would be considered as if the Jewish people had been destroyed!

What these Rabbis did not dream of, nor witness, however, was the rebuilding of a modern Jewish State in Israel. Many of them could not conceive of a Jewish government ruling the Land of Israel unless it had shortly followed the arrival of the Messiah. The few who did, Rabbis Alkalai and Kalischer to name a few, were visionaries who shaped the Religious Zionist community we live in today.

These Rabbis wrote extensively about how the immigration of Jews to Israel marked the beginning of the eschatological return to Zion. The working of the land of Israel, and the building up of an infrastructure, was beginning the process of Redemption for the entire Jewish people. They believed in the importance of reviving Hebrew as a spoken language, and the value of the Jewish people taking control of their collective destiny by moving to Israel. Rav Kook crystallized these theories by directly connecting the settlement of the Jewish people in Israel with the arrival of the Messiah.

Thankfully, we live in a time when the claims of those who believe that Zionism is an abomination to God do not even have to be dignified with a response. It is clear to all God-fearing Jews that the State of Israel has contributed more to the Jewish people in the last 60 years than anything else, and that it is a true fulfillment of God's commandments to be a Nation of Priests and a Holy People. Anti-Zionist sentiments are ignored as being ignorant and anti-Torah.

Whether the State of Israel is truly a vehicle of the Messiah is not certain, and the question itself may simply be out of our hands as human beings. Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, recent President of Yeshiva University once wrote,

*My commitment to the State of Israel does not require Messianic presuppositions. That commitment was forged in the fires of the crematoria; in the hatred of and indifference to Jews by the "civilized" countries of the West; in a love of Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael which are the purpose of Medinat Yisrael; in the expectation that Torah has a better chance in Israel today than in the Diaspora. Therefore, especially because I can get along without a Messianic undergirding for my love of Israel, I will not risk premature Messianism which, history has taught us, can lead to psychological and spiritual disasters.*

Our goal as parents and educators must be to instill in the hearts and minds of our children this importance of the State of Israel. Whether we choose to live in Israel or not, and whether we choose to believe in a Messianic connection with Zionism or not, the importance of the State of Israel must be a common denominator.

Take the time this Yom Ha'atzmaut, even if it is only 15 minutes, to sit with you children and talk about the importance of the State of Israel. To help you with this, we have provided three different activities you can conduct with your family to engage them with Israel. They are as follows:

- Aliyah Profiles – This includes three different stories of young people who are going through the process of moving to Israel, and asks questions to help understand what they are feeling throughout the process.
- Understanding HaTikvah – This explores the meaning of Israel's National Anthem, and gives you and your family an opportunity to write your own poem or song for Israel.
- Planning Your Next Trip to Israel – This activity helps you plan an imaginary (or actual) trip to Israel with your family. Use the internet to find pictures and descriptions of activities you would like to try in Israel.

Whether you use the tools in this packet or not, make sure that this important day does not slip by without recognition at home that it is Israel's birthday, and there is reason for celebration.

Chag Sameach!

*Aaron Steinberg*

Director, Eimatai

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

[ajsteinb@yu.edu](mailto:ajsteinb@yu.edu)

500 West 185th Street, Suite 440 New York, NY 10033

# Yom Ha'atzmaut

## Aliyah Profiles

Below you will find three stories of young people who were faced with a major life-changing event – moving to Israel. As you read through these stories with your family, think about what the characters of the stories are going through. Try to put yourself in their shoes, and get a sense of what they must be feeling.

After the stories are some questions that you can fill out as a family to really analyze and understand the stories.

Enjoy!

### Max and Shira

Max and Shira Cohn were 23 when they got married. They had met in their senior year of college, after they both attended a lecture hosted by the Israel Club that was very active at their school.

They both loved Israel very much as they were growing up, and their parents had always stressed the importance of Israel. Both of them had gone on a number of vacations to Israel, and felt like it was their second home (even though they always stayed in hotels).

Before they knew each other, Max and Shira had spent the same year studying Torah in Israel after they graduated high school. They both felt very connected to the neighborhoods that their schools were in, and they always dreamed of moving back there when they were married.

After their one-year anniversary, Max and Shira announced to their parents that they would be moving to Israel the following year. They had thought about it long and hard, and they were ready to make the move. They had decided on the community they wanted to live in, and they were working with an organization called Nefesh B'Nefesh that could help them find jobs once they got there.

Even though it sounded like everything was taken care of, Max's parents were less than enthusiastic about the move. They were used to having Max near the family, and they didn't want to have to fly in order to see their eldest son.

Shira's parents weren't taking it much easier, and they were especially upset that their future grandchildren would be raised speaking a language that neither of them knew very well.

Max and Shira spent a lot of time explaining to their parents that it wouldn't be as bad as they thought. They would stay in touch by phone and video-chat on the computer, and family vacations could now be held in Israel (without having to stay in a hotel). They explained that their children would hopefully speak both English and Hebrew, and that the future grandparents shouldn't worry about being out of touch with the grandkids.

The problem was, however, that Max and Shira started having their own doubts because of these discussions. Would they be able to live so far away from the people and places they had grown up their whole lives around? Would they be able to handle the Hebrew as well as they had hoped? What were they going to do living in a land without any family and only a few friends?

It was a rough period for them. They had a lot of late night discussions, and there were days when it seemed that they would never move to Israel.

After speaking to some of their friends, Max and Shira decided to take a pilot trip to Israel – this was a short trip people take to find out if and how they want to make Aliyah.

After landing in Israel, they very quickly began to remember the things about Israel that had made them fall in love with it in the first place. They were enthralled with the idea of having a Jewish State. They visited the hallowed grounds that are the backdrop for much of Tanach, and they spent time in the community they thought might be their home. They felt comfortable, happy, and at home in Israel. Their minds were made up.

After a few months of difficult deliberation, Max and Shira informed their parents they had made up their minds, and had booked one-way tickets to Israel. It wasn't easy, but they were reassured that their families were always there for them, and both sets of parents made plans to visit Israel within the first year that Max and Shira would be there.

★ Where did Max and Shira get their love of Israel?

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★ Why did Max and Shira suddenly get concerned about moving to Israel? What scared them?

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★ How did Max and Shira's pilot trip suddenly make them feel more confident about moving to Israel? Why do you think that happened?

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# Anna Loeb

Anna Loeb grew up in Donyetsk, Ukraine. Her mother is an insurance saleswomen and her father is in real estate. Although she wasn't really raised in a "Jewish" home, Anna's grandmother told her she was Jewish when Anna was a young child.

Anna has two older siblings, a brother named Julian and a sister named Paulina. They are a both a couple of years older than her, and Anna was always much closer to her cousin Eve who is a year younger than her.

When she was 12 years old, Anna's grandmother told her about a Jewish Agency Youth Club that had started in their neighborhood. There were weekly meetings that they could attend, and they learned all about Israel.

Anna spent a lot of her time at the Youth Club with Eve, and they began to care a lot about what they were learning. They began to have a lot more Jewish friends, and were learning so many things about Israel and Judaism.

After a few years, Anna became a counselor at the Jewish Agency Summer Camp that was affiliated with their youth club. She just couldn't get enough of everything they were doing and learning. She felt so connected to the club that she began to feel more Israeli than Ukrainian.

When she was 17, Anna decided that she wanted to move to Israel. She didn't know how her parents would react to this, so she was a little concerned to approach them about her idea. She knew she was too young to just get on a plane and move to Israel, so she asked her parents if she could join a high school in Israel designed for teens that make Aliyah before their parents.

It wasn't an easy decision, but Anna's parents agreed to let her join the program. When she got there, Anna was one of 50 students at the school who came from the Former Soviet Union, so she had a good group of friends who understood her culture and background. It made it a little easier, but it was still so hard for her to be away from her family.

By the time she graduated from high school, Anna was fluent in Hebrew with just a slight Russian accent. She enrolled at the University of Tel Aviv, graduated with a degree in Political Science.

Anna, now 26, lives in Tel Aviv. She works at the Jewish Agency to help show Jewish youth living throughout the world how amazing Israel is. Last month, Anna's parents told her that they plan on moving to Israel over the summer.

★ Why did Anna want to move to Israel?

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★ Why was it so hard for her to leave Ukraine?

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★ Do you think Anna’s parents should have let her go to Israel on her own? Why or why not?

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## Joey Silver

Joey Silver was born and raised in Sunny California – Los Angeles to be specific. His Mom is a writer, and his Dad is a computer programmer. He is the older kid in his family; he has two younger brothers and a baby sister.

When Joey was 12 years old, his parents told him that they would be moving to Israel. It was Chanukah then, and they told him that over the summer they would be moving to their new house in Modi’in.

Joey was confused and outraged. He knew they had gone on a trip to Israel that previous summer, but he thought it was just a vacation. They had gone to the beach and had ice cream and they went to the Kotel. It was a fun trip, but how could he leave LA?

Joey was very upset. What about all of his friends? He didn’t want to leave them. His best friend Alex lived down the block. Since he was 8 years old he was allowed to run over there on Shabbat afternoon and play basketball in Alex’s backyard. Did they even have backyards in Israel?

Joey’s parents tried to make him feel better, but he was really mad. Everyone in school heard that he was moving, and it seemed like only the teachers and rabbis were excited. All of Joey’s classmates were confused and scared for him.

Miriam Pransky told him “the whole country was one big desert.” David Walter was convinced that “the only sports that kids in Israel played was soccer.” Rachel Kranz said that when she was there they ate cucumbers for breakfast instead of cereal.” Moshe Stein said “they had school on Sunday!”

This was too much for Joey to handle. He begged and pleaded with his parents not to make them move, but they wouldn’t budge. He tried to rally his brothers to help in his protest, but they were still too young to understand. Didn’t they realize their lives would be ruined if the family moved?

Finally the day came that the family was going to move. He slumped along on the way to the plane, and made sure his face was in frown-mode the whole day.

As it turned out, their house wasn’t so bad. It was a little smaller than their house in California, but it was nice. That summer his parents made Joey go to a day camp in the neighborhood, and at first he was really mad. When he showed up on the first day and saw the other boys playing basketball, things changed. When he started playing with them, it turned out that all of them understood English, and some of them were born in America like him!

It took time for Joey to really feel comfortable in Israel, but at the end of 7<sup>th</sup> grade, he was speaking Hebrew so well that even his parents had trouble understanding him sometimes.

Joey made a lot of new friends very quickly, but he did still miss his friends in America. His parents understood that, and helped Joey stay in touch by sending emails to his friends every once in a while. His parents also sent Joey to LA the following summer to spend a few weeks with his grandparents and hang out with his American friends.

★ Why was Joey so against moving to Israel? Did his fears make sense for a 12-year-old boy?

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★ Why did Joey's parents make them all move even though Joey was upset? Was it the right decision?

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★ What happened once Joey started at the summer camp? What do you think his feelings were about moving to Israel after that?

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# Understanding HaTikvah

Composed in 1878 by Naftali Herz Imber in Ukraine, *HaTikvah* has served as the unofficial National Anthem for the State of Israel since its founding. In 2004, the Knesset declared *HaTikvah* to be the official National Anthem of Israel. It had previously been the anthem for the World Zionist Congress before that, and the Hovevei Zion movement before that. Samuel Cohen who immigrated to Israel from Moldavia arranged the melody.

Below is the text of *HaTikvah* in both Hebrew and English. Read through one of them, or both, and think about what the song/poem is all about:

## HaTikvah

**As long as within our Hearts  
The Jewish soul sings,  
As long as forward to the East  
To Zion, looks the eye -  
Our hope is not yet lost,  
It is two thousand years old,  
To be a free people in our land  
The land of Zion and  
Jerusalem.**



## הַתִּקְוָה

כָּל עוֹד בְּלִבְּב פְּנִימָה,  
נֶפֶשׁ יִהוּדֵי הוֹמָה.  
וּלְפָאֲתֵי מְזֻרַח קְדִימָה  
עֵין לְצִיּוֹן צוֹפֶה.  
עוֹד לֹא אָבְדָה תְּקוּתָנוּ,  
הַתִּקְוָה בֵּת שְׁנוֹת אֲלֵפִים,  
לְהִיּוֹת עִם חֶפְשֵׁי בְּאַרְצָנוּ,  
אֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם.

Of course you will only get the full-effect of the anthem if you sing it, or hear it sung. So, if you know the tune and feel confident with the words, belt it out as a family! If you need a little help, check out this website which has a great rendition of the song:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjfFpFW9Oda>

# Family Worksheet Page 1

Take the time to sit down with your family and think about some of the questions below. Fill out your answers in order to make it clear how you want to respond. You can have one sheet for the whole family, or give each person their own sheet to fill out.

**What does *HaTikvah* mean to you?**

★ How does singing *HaTikvah* make you feel?

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★ What do you think about when reading the words of *HaTikvah*?

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★ Does *HaTikvah* make you feel a closer connection to Israel and/or the Jewish people?

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## Family Worksheet Page 2

Take the time to sit down with your family and think about some of the questions below. Fill out your answers in order to make it clear how you want to respond. You can have one sheet for the whole family, or give each person their own sheet to fill out.

**What do the words of *HaTikvah* mean?**

★What is the “**hope**” we sing about in *HaTikvah*?

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★Why is it important for us to “**be a free people in our land**”?

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★The song/poem refers to the “**heart**” and the “**eye**,” why do you think that is?

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# Write Your Own Israeli Anthem

In both 1898 and 1900, competitions were held to come up with a good Zionist anthem. Although both competitions failed to find the right song, HaTikvah was settled upon when it was instinctively sung by all of the participants at the 7<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress in 1905.

To continue in that tradition, try to see what sort of song or poem you would write to be the anthem for the State of Israel. Below are some tips for how to brainstorm and get started with your anthem. You can choose to have your anthem rhyme or not rhyme. You can put it to music, or just write the words. It's your anthem to compose! Send in your completed anthem to [office@yutorah.org](mailto:office@yutorah.org)

★ Why do you think Israel is important?

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★ What are the things you like most about Israel?

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★ Use this space to get started with your anthem. Use extra paper if you need it!

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# Plan Your Dream Vacation in Israel



This 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the State of Israel is the perfect time to start planning your family's next trip to Israel. The only real problem is that since there are so many places you will want to visit, you could end up staying a month and not see everything you want to see! Below is a list of activities to help you plan a ten-day trip in Israel, maximizing your experience as much as possible.

Do some extra research to learn about places you would like to visit, and feel free to add them to the list below in the blank spaces by each category.

Set the following goals for your trip itinerary:

- ✓ Try to do something from each of the categories below
- ✓ Try to travel to different parts of the country
- ✓ Let everyone in the family pick at least one activity
- ✓ Make sure to do something you have never done before

You should pick nine major activities, and up to five minor activities for your family to do. It might help to pull out a map for this. Try [www.eyeonisrael.com](http://www.eyeonisrael.com). For more information, check out the Israeli Ministry of Tourism website at [www.goisrael.com](http://www.goisrael.com)

## Religious sites (major activities)

- Ma'arat Hamachpela:** The final resting place for most of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, located in the city of Hevron.
- Sfat:** This Holy City located in Northern Israel is home to a number of famous sites including the Ari's Mikveh, the Ari's Synagogue, and is considered by many to be the Kabbalah capitol of the world.
- Jewish Quarter of the Old City:** This Jewish section of the Old City in Jerusalem has a number of sites including the Ramban's Synagogue, the Hurva Synagogue, the Temple Institute, and the Cardo.
- Katzrin:** This reconstructed Talmudic village will give you a taste of what life was like back in the age of the Talmud.
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## Shopping Attractions (minor activities)

- Machane Yehuda Shuk:** This outdoor shopping bazaar, also known as a Shuk, is best known for its fresh produce and baked products, low prices, and variety of stalls. Make sure you haggle for a lower price!
  - Azrieli Center Mall:** This modern shopping mall is one of the largest in Israel, and is also located in one of the tallest buildings in the Middle East. Take a few minutes to travel to the 49<sup>th</sup> floor of the Circular Tower for a view that can go as far as Hadera to the north, and Ashkelon to the South.
  - Antique Shopping at the Jerusalem Old City Cardo:** This ancient street mall is now an underground hub for judaica and antique shopping.
  - Art Shopping in Zichron Ya'akov:** This early settler town founded by the Baron de Rothschild is now home to a number of boutique galleries and art studios. While there, check out the Carmel winery.
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## Food/Dining (minor activities)

- Falafel and Schwarma:** This local cuisine is easily found in every Israeli city and town. Stuff your pita full of vegetables and sauces before you devour this amazing sandwich.
  - Kosher American Fast Food:** While in Israel, why not try the Kosher versions of McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Pizza Hut? Make sure to check the hechsher and make sure it is one of the kosher franchises!
  - Ethiopian Cuisine:** Find one of Israel's many Ethiopian cuisine restaurants to try dishes such as Lamb Soup with Injera bread and Waat sauce. Bring extra napkins, because traditional Ethiopian meals don't come with silverware.
  - Turkish Coffee:** This traditional Middle Eastern drink is made by boiling finely powdered roast coffee beans in a pot with sugar, and serving it into a cup, where the dregs settle. Needless to say, leave some left at the bottom of your cup.
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## Hiking (major activities)

- Arbel Reserve:** Mount Arbel is near the Galilee, and was once the stomping ground of the Hasmonians. This trail follows the Arbel stream, and offers a great opportunity to spot rare birds.
- Hula Valley:** Until the 1950s, large swaths of the Hula Valley were covered with swamps. Today it is a settled area with a large Nature Reserve in the center. It is home to a wide array of flora, fauna and animal life.

- Ein Gedi:** Ein Gedi has been described as “an oasis in the desert and a green Garden of Eden in the wilderness.” Enjoy this hike into some of the most beautiful parts of Israel.
- Mount Meron – Pisgat Trail:** Mount Meron is the final resting place of the Kabbalistic sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Explore this beautiful forested region as you hike a 3000 foot high mountain.
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## Water Recreation (major activities)

- Floating in the Dead Sea:** Popularly known as the lowest point on Earth, this is the only place in the world where you can simply float on the water. Enjoy a mud bath with the sea salt minerals while you’re at it!
- Surfing in the Mediterranean:** Enough said. Catch some waves body-surfing on one of the nicest beaches of the Mediterranean.
- Kayaking in the Jordan:** Drive up to the North and spend a few hours navigating the tributaries of the Jordan river in inflatable kayaks. Break for lunch on the side of the river, or keep going to the mini-falls at the end of the route.
- Scuba diving in the Eilat:** The clear blue water to the Red Sea is perfect for snorkeling and Scuba diving. You will love the beautiful coral reefs that can be found under the water.
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## Adventure Activities (major activities)

- Paragliding in the Galil:** It’s as simple as it sounds. Climb up somewhere high with a kite attached to your back. Take a jump, and fly like a bird as you slowly descend to the ground!
- Skiing on Mount Hermon:** At 2,814 meters, Mount Hermon is the highest point in Israel. While it serves as a great hiking destination in the summer, it is one of the few places in the Middle East with wintertime skiing.
- Biking through the Ramon Crater:** The Ramon Crater is a natural phenomenon that was created over a very long time. Biking trails lead through this desert region, so make sure to bring lots of water!
- Camel Rides in the Negev:** Travel like they used to back in biblical times. Get a boost and jump aboard a real camel for the slowest ride of your life. Be careful – these huge animals really do spit a lot!
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## Ancient Historical Sites (major activities)

- Masada:** Masada is a lofty plateau in a spectacular desert setting overlooking the Dead Sea. This historical site marks a standoff between Jewish rebels and the Roman army.
  - Caesarea National Park:** Caesarea was once a bustling city built by Herod to include ports, entertainment amphitheatres, and bathhouses. Today it has a beautiful beach loaded with archeological masterpieces, and is in the shadow of the old roman aqueduct.
  - David Citadel:** The David Citadel is the hallmark of the wall surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem. Explore this famous tower that guards the entrance to the city, and appreciate some of the rich history Jerusalem has to share.
  - Bet She'an National Park:** Visit Beit She'an, the biblical mound where the Philistines hung Saul's body. Explore the ruins of Talmudic and Byzantine cities from centuries ago.
  - The Burnt House:** This Jerusalem house used to be home to the Katros family, a Priestly family that is mentioned in the Talmud. Rooms from the basement were found, and artifacts from their lives are on display.
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## Recent Historical Sites (major activities)

- Knesset/Supreme Court:** These government landmarks are amazing structures that symbolize the democracy upon which Israel was founded. The recent renovations to the Supreme Court building are not to be missed.
  - Latrun:** Home to the Israel Tank Museum, this is a landmark of some of the most amazing battles to take place in the efforts to reach Jerusalem in the War of Independence.
  - Sde Boker:** This Kibbutz in the Negev is best know for being the home, and ultimate resting place, of Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion.
  - Har Herzl:** Har Herzl is a national cemetery that is the final resting place for many of Israel's fallen soldiers. It is also the final resting place of Theodore Herzl, Golde Meir, Yitzchak Rabin, and a number of other Israeli leaders.
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## Museums (major activities)

- Israel Museum:** Israel's National Museum is home to a number of treasures including the Dead Sea Scrolls, rare manuscripts, ancient Judaica, and treasures from around the world.
- Ulam Ha'atzmaut:** Originally known as the Dizengoff House, Independence Hall is the location where David Ben Gurion declared the State of Israel's Independence at 4pm on May 14, 1948.

- Mini Israel:** This miniature park contains miniature replicas of hundreds of sites across Israel. If you don't have time to do much touring, cross a lot off of your list by seeing the mini versions in this museum near Latrun.
  - Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum:** Israel's Holocaust Museum is unparalleled in its exhibits on the darkest point in Jewish History. Established in 1953, it is a must-see for every Jew.
  - Western Wall Tunnels:** These tunnels discovered after the six day war run the entire length of the Western Wall. Explore underground gates that once led to the Temple Mount, and gain a greater appreciation of the scale of the Western Wall.
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## Shabbat

For Shabbat, sit down as a family, and decide what sort of Shabbat you would like to spend in Israel. If you're lucky, you may get two Shabbatot over your trip!

Think about what you would want to get out of your Shabbat, and where you would want to spend it. Are you looking for a particularly spiritual Shabbat? Something very different than what you're used to? Do you want to see family? Are you interested in more sightseeing? Do you want to check out a community you could see yourself moving to?

## Book the flight!

After all of that hard work, you're ready to book your flight.

It's never a bad time to visit Israel, and a family vacation to Israel will stick with your children for a long time to come. Check out deals for flights to Israel at any of the following airlines: El Al, Israir, Arkia, Air Canada, Alitalia, Air France, Austrian Airlines, British Airways, Continental, Delta, Iberia, KLM, Lufthansa, Lot, Malev, Swiss Air, Tarom, and Turkish Airlines.

Enjoy your trip, and send pictures to [office@yutorah.org](mailto:office@yutorah.org)!