

POSTWAR JEWISH LIFE IN ISRAEL



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

There has been a continuous Jewish presence in the Land of Israel for thousands of years; however, Jews were exiled a number of times by various empires. The yearning by those exiled Jews to return to their indigenous homeland has been a cornerstone of Jewish life. This deep connection of the Jews to the Land of Israel sparked a movement for self-determination called Zionism, since Zion is the biblical term for both the Land of Israel and Jerusalem.

The Zionist movement began in the mid to late 1800s, as part of widespread national liberation movements across Europe. There were many Jews who wanted to revive Jewish life in the Land of Israel, where it had begun, and they worked towards founding agricultural settlements and developing the land in order to be a healthy and productive nation like other nations. These settlements built infrastructure, including universities and other institutions, and grew substantially in population throughout the early 20th century while under British control.

Zionism was also a response to a long history of intense antisemitism, persecution, and discrimination in places across the world. European Jews endured persistent antisemitism, manifesting through restrictive

laws, forced social segregation, and episodic yet brutal violence, such as pogroms. All of these circumstances shaped the Jewish experience profoundly, fostering a sentiment that made the concept of a sovereign Jewish homeland not only appealing but also a necessity for survival. Zionists believed that Jews had the same right to nationhood and self-determination as any other people. Most advocated for the establishment of a safe and autonomous Jewish state in the historic Land of Israel, where Jewish cultural and religious life could be renewed based around a return to working the land, and could flourish away from persecution.



David Ben-Gurion, who was to become Israel's first prime minister, reads the new nation's Declaration of Independence in Tel Aviv, May 14, 1948, under a photo of the father of modern political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, Central Zionist Archives.

The dire necessity for such a homeland became heartbreakingly evident during the Holocaust, an unprecedented genocide during which six million Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. This cataclysm not only decimated 2/3 of the Jewish population of Europe but also obliterated Jewish community life that had evolved over centuries. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, there was a significant swell in support for Zionism among survivors, many of whom could not return to their former homes due to enduring antisemitism and the deep trauma of their experiences.

The establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, following the United Nations' partition plan, marked a significant turning point. Israel was envisioned as a place of refuge and renewal, where Jewish life could be reconstituted based on the principles of self-determination and security.

For Holocaust survivors and Jews worldwide, the creation of Israel was a beacon of hope and a testament to the resilience of the Jewish spirit. The new state became a center for Jewish immigration, absorbing not only Holocaust survivors but also Jews who were expelled from many North African and Muslim countries including Egypt, Iraq and Yemen. Though the Jews had resided in these regions for over 2,000 years, nearly one million Jews were forced to emigrate following the establishment of Israel and subsequent Arab-Israeli conflicts. Today, only a small number, perhaps around 15,000, remain.

While Israel's establishment was a moment of triumph and relief for many, it also marked the onset of new challenges and conflicts in the region. Israel was supposed to be a place where Jews would be safe and able to defend themselves. Throughout its history, however, it has endured aggressive wars against its right to exist, terrorism, and global antisemitism.

Anti-Defamation League. (2016, September 1). Zionism. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/zionism>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Aftermath of the Holocaust: Effects on Survivors. Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-aftermath-of-the-holocaust>

RUTH PEARL

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



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Ruth Pearl was born in Baghdad, Iraq, on November 10, 1935. In June 1941, she witnessed the Farhud — an attack on Jewish homes and businesses in Iraq in which hundreds were killed or wounded. In the aftermath of the Farhud, Ruth’s family fled to British Mandatory Palestine, later Israel, where they stayed in a refugee camp. She would later join the Israeli Navy, and study at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology. In 2002, Ruth’s son, Daniel — then the Wall Street Journal’s South Asia Bureau Chief — was kidnapped and murdered by terrorists in Pakistan. She and her family established the Daniel Pearl Foundation in his memory. Ruth was interviewed in Encino, California on February 2, 2014.

MOSHE ZWI SHAMIR

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



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Moshe Zwi Shamir was born on April 17, 1922, in Cernăuți, Romania (now Chernivtsi, Ukraine) to Orthodox Jewish Parents Rifka and Avraham Schmucker. Moshe attended a four-grade Yiddish school, was a member of the Gordonia Zionist youth movement, and sang in the Jewish Choral Temple choir. He started apprenticeship in a haberdashery, a store that sells small clothing accessories and sewing goods, at the age of twelve. During World War II, Cernăuți was under Soviet and German occupation. During German occupation, he was in six ghettos and two concentration camps. After the war, he joined a Zionist resettlement training program and prepared to immigrate to British Mandatory Palestine. In December 1947, the ship he was taking to British Mandatory Palestine was seized

by the British border patrol; all of the passengers were interned in Cyprus. After he was released from the internment camp, Moshe made his way to the newly established State of Israel. He worked for the Mossad (the national intelligence agency) and in 1954, he married Judith Klein. The couple had two sons, Avichai and David, and two grandchildren. The interview was conducted on November 2, 1998, in Netanya, Israel.

A SURVIVOR OF THE HOLOCAUST AND OCTOBER 7, 2023

My name is Haim Raanan, and I am a survivor of both the Holocaust and the October 7 massacre. I was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1935. During the Nazi occupation, my family and I faced severe antisemitism. We were forced to wear yellow badges and our home was marked with the Star of David, a tactic used to isolate and dehumanize us. Despite the pervasive fear and persecution, our survival was miraculously aided by the intervention of Swedish diplomats who provided us with diplomatic papers. This allowed us to move to what was known as the ‘international ghetto’ in Budapest, a relatively safer area reserved for Jews holding protection certificates from neutral countries.

Decades later, I found myself facing terror again, this time much closer to my current home in Kibbutz Be’eri. On October 7, as sirens wailed, I initially thought it was just another barrage of rockets from Gaza, which we had grown accustomed to. However, the reality was far more devastating.

We began receiving text messages that Hamas terrorists were infiltrating the kibbutz, attempting to break into safe rooms and setting fire to homes to force people out. By sheer luck, the terrorists did not reach my house, and all my family members who live around the kibbutz survived. The massacre claimed the lives of about 10% of our kibbutz’s residents, either through murder or abduction. For me, it felt like a second Holocaust. During the Holocaust, I didn’t personally know the 6,000,000 who perished, but in the Kibbutz Be’eri massacre, I knew almost every single person who was affected.



Haim, with a photo of himself with his mother, Erin.

Now, at 88, I reside in a retirement home in Tel Aviv, having been evacuated from towns along the Gaza border. The trauma from my youth and the events of October 7 remain a subtle, ever-present shadow in my life.

Source

Adapted from: Haim Raanan. Humans of Tel Aviv. (2024, January 8). <https://www.humansoftelaviv.co.il/4930-2/>