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Courtesy of the
Israel Museum,
Jerusalem

THE PEOPLE

Israel is home to a widely diverse population from many ethnic, religious, cultural, and social backgrounds. A new society with ancient roots, it is still coalescing and evolving today. Of its 7.6 million people, 75.5 percent are Jews, 20.2 percent are Arabs (mostly Muslim) and the remaining 4.3 percent comprise Druze, Circassians, and others not classified by religion. The society is relatively young and is characterized by social and religious commitment, political ideology, economic resourcefulness, and cultural creativity, all of which contribute momentum to its continuing development.

הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד. (תהלים קל"ג: א)
... Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers
to dwell in unity. (Psalms 133:1)

JEWISH SOCIETY

The Long Road Home

Following the expulsion of most of the Jews from the Land of Israel some 2,000 years ago, they were dispersed to other countries; mainly in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Over the centuries, they established many large Jewish communities in lands near and far, where they experienced long periods of growth and prosperity, but were also subjected at times to harsh discrimination, brutal pogroms, and total or partial expulsions. Each wave of persecution and violence strengthened their belief in the concept of the "ingathering of the exiles" and inspired individuals and groups to return to their ancestral homeland. The Zionist movement, founded at the end of the 19th century, transformed the concept into a way of life, and the State of Israel translated it into law, granting citizenship to every Jew wishing to settle in the country.



Formation of a New Society

The political, economic, and cultural basis of Israel's contemporary Jewish society was largely formed during the period of British rule (1917-48). Ideologically motivated by Zionism, the Jewish community in the Land of Israel developed social and political institutions which exercised authority without sovereignty, with every echelon mobilized toward consolidation and growth. Volunteerism was its political spine, egalitarianism its social glue.

The attainment of political independence and the mass immigration which followed, doubling Israel's Jewish population from 650,000 to some 1.3 million in the first four years of statehood (1948-52), changed the structure and fabric of Israeli society. The resultant social grouping was composed of two main elements: a majority comprised of the established Sephardi community, veteran Ashkenazi settlers, and Holocaust survivors; and a large minority of recent Jewish immigrants from the Islamic countries of North Africa and the Middle East. While most of the pre-state population was committed to strong ideological convictions, a pioneering spirit, and a democratic way of life, many of the Jews who had lived for centuries in Arab lands adhered to a patriarchal social organization, and found it difficult to integrate into Israel's society and rapidly developing economy.



Tel Aviv:
An event on the
beach
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Tourism

In the late 1950s, the two groups coexisted virtually without social and cultural interaction, with the Jews of North African and Middle Eastern backgrounds expressing their frustration and alienation in anti-government protests, which, in the 1960s and 1970s, became demands for greater political participation, compensatory allocations of resources and affirmative action to help close the gaps between them and mainstream Israelis. In addition to the tensions generated by the diversity of its population during these years, Israeli society was also called upon to struggle for economic independence and to defend itself against belligerent actions by Arabs across the border. Still, the common denominators of religion, historical memory, and national cohesion within the Jewish society proved strong enough to meet the challenges facing it.

Ethiopian immigrants arriving on "Operation Solomon" from Addis Ababa

G.P.O. / Ts. Israeli



Continued Ingathering

Over the years, Israel has continued to receive new immigrants in larger and smaller numbers, coming from

the free countries of the Western world as well as from areas of distress. The most recent wave of mass immigration was comprised of members of the large Jewish community of the former Soviet Union which struggled for years for the right to emigrate to Israel. While some 100,000 managed to come in the 1970s, since 1989 over one million have settled

in the country. Among them were many highly educated professionals, well-known scientists, and acclaimed artists and musicians, whose expertise and talents are contributing significantly to Israel's economic, scientific, academic, and cultural life.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the arrival of two massive airlifts of the ancient Jewish community of Ethiopia, popularly believed to have been there since the time of King Solomon. While the transition of these 50,000 immigrants from an agrarian African environment to an industrialized Western society will take time, the eagerness of their youth to adapt will hasten the absorption of this long-isolated Jewish community.

Religious Diversity

Since biblical times, the Jews have been a people with a monotheistic faith, Judaism, embodying both a religious and a national component. By the 18th century most of the world's Jews lived in eastern Europe, where they were confined to ghettos and had little interaction with the societies around them. Within their communities, they managed their own affairs, adhering to the body of Jewish law (Halakha) which had been developed and codified by religious scholars over many centuries.

Jerusalem:
Hassidic Jews in
an ultra-Orthodox
neighborhood

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The spirit of emancipation and nationalism which swept 19th century Europe generated the development of a more liberal approach to education, culture, philosophy, and theology. It also gave rise to several Jewish movements, some of which developed along liberal religious lines, while others espoused national and political ideologies. As a result, many Jews, and ultimately the majority, broke from Orthodoxy and its attendant way of life, with some striving to integrate completely into the society at large.

Jewish society in Israel today is made up of observant and non-observant Jews, comprising a spectrum from the ultra-Orthodox to those who regard themselves as secular. However, the differences between them are not clear-cut. If Orthodoxy is determined by the degree of adherence to Jewish religious laws and practices, then 20 percent of Israeli Jews strive to fulfill all religious precepts, 60 percent follow some combination of the laws according to personal choices and ethnic traditions, and 20 percent are essentially non-observant. But as Israel was conceived as a Jewish state, Shabbat (the Sabbath, Saturday) and all Jewish festivals and holy days have been instituted as national holidays and are celebrated by the entire Jewish population and observed by all, to a greater or lesser extent.

Other indicators of the degree of religious adherence might be the percentage of parents choosing to give their children a religiously oriented education or the percentage

of voters casting their ballot for religious parties in national elections. The significance of such statistics, however, is uncertain, as non-observant parents may enroll their children in religious schools and many Orthodox citizens vote for non-religious political parties.

Basically, the majority may be characterized as secular Jews who manifest modern lifestyles, with varied degrees of respect for and practice of religious precepts. Within this majority are many who follow a modified traditional way of life, with some choosing to affiliate with one of the liberal religious streams.

Within the observant minority, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi, are many who adhere to a religious way of life, regulated by Jewish religious law, while participating in the country's national life. They regard the modern Jewish state as the first step toward the coming of the Messiah and redemption of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.

In contrast, some of the ultra-Orthodox Jews believe that Jewish sovereignty in the Land can be reestablished only after the coming of the Messiah. Maintaining strict adherence to Jewish religious law, they reside in separate neighborhoods, run their own schools, dress in traditional clothing, maintain distinct roles for men and women, and are bound by a closely circumscribed lifestyle.

Inter-Jewish Dynamics

As there is no clear separation of religion and state, a central inter-community issue has been the extent to which Israel should manifest its Jewish religious identity. While the Orthodox establishment seeks to augment religious legislation beyond the scope of personal status, over which it has exclusive jurisdiction, the non-observant sector regards this as religious coercion and an infringement on the democratic nature of the state. One of the ongoing issues focuses on the elements required to define a person as a Jew. The Orthodox sector advocates determining a Jew as one born of a Jewish mother or who converts in strict accordance with Jewish law, while secular Jews generally support a definition based on the civil criterion of an individual's identification with Judaism. These conflicts of interest have given rise to a search for legal means to define the demarcation between religion and state. Until an overall solution is found, authority lies in an unwritten agreement, reached on the eve of Israel's independence and known as the status quo, which stipulates that no fundamental changes would be made in the status of religion.

Kibbutz Society

A unique social and economic framework based on egalitarian and communal principles, the kibbutz grew out of the country's pioneering society of the early 20th century and developed into a permanent rural way of life.



Kibbutz:
young workers in
the date groves

•
Kibbutz:
cowshed and
young milkers

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Over the years, it established a prosperous economy, at first primarily agricultural, later augmented with industrial and service enterprises, and distinguished itself with its members' contributions to the establishment and building of the state.

In Israel's pre-state period and during the early years of statehood, the kibbutz assumed central functions in settlement, immigration and defense, but when these were transferred to the government, interaction between the kibbutz and Israel's mainstream decreased. Its centrality as a vanguard for social and institutional development diminished, and since the

1970s its political strength, which in the early days had resulted in overrepresentation, has declined. However, the kibbutzim's share in the national product has continued to be significantly greater than their proportion of the population.

In recent decades the kibbutz has become more introspective, emphasizing individual achievement and economic growth. In many kibbutzim, the 'do-it-ourselves' work ethic has become less rigid as the taboo on hired labor in the kibbutz has weakened, and greater numbers

of non-member paid workers are being employed. At the same time, increasing numbers of kibbutz members are working outside the kibbutz, with their salary accruing to the kibbutz.

Today's kibbutz is the achievement of three generations. The founders, motivated by strong convictions and a definitive ideology, formed a society with a unique way of life. Their children, born into an existing social structure, worked hard to consolidate the economic, social, and administrative basis of their community. The present generation, which grew up in a well-established society, is grappling with the challenges of contemporary life. Today, much discussion focuses on the future nature of the relationship and mutual responsibility between the individual and the kibbutz community, as well as on ramifications for the society of recent developments in technology and communications.

Some fear that in adjusting to changing circumstances the kibbutz is moving dangerously far from its original principles and values; others believe that this ability to compromise and adapt is the key to its survival.

Old City of Jerusalem: Via Dolorosa (Way of the Cross) and the souq (market) in the Muslim Quarter

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Bedouins in the Arava Wilderness

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MINORITY COMMUNITIES

Some 1.8 million people, comprising some 24 percent of Israel's population, are non-Jews. Although defined collectively as Arab citizens of Israel, they include a number of different, primarily Arabic-speaking groups, each with distinct characteristics.

Muslim Arabs, over 1.2 million people, most of whom are *Sunni*, reside mainly in small towns and villages, over half of them in the north of the country.

Bedouin Arabs, also Muslim (estimated at approximately 250,000), belong to some 30 tribes, a majority scattered over a wide area in the south and others in the north. Formerly nomadic shepherds, the Bedouin are currently in transition from a tribal social framework to a permanently settled society and are gradually entering Israel's labor force.

Christian Arabs, some 123,000, live mainly in urban areas, including Nazareth, Shfar'am, and Haifa. Although many denominations are nominally represented, the majority are affiliated with the Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

Druze elders in the village of Beit Jann
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The **Druze**, some 122,000 Arabic-speakers living in 22 villages in northern Israel, constitute a separate cultural, social, and religious community. While the Druze religion is not accessible to outsiders, one known aspect of its philosophy is the concept of *taqiyya*, which calls for complete loyalty by its adherents to the government of the country in which they reside.



The **Circassians**, comprising approximately 4,000 people concentrated in two northern villages, are Sunni Muslims, although they share neither the Arab origin nor the cultural background of the larger Islamic community. While maintaining a distinct ethnic identity, they participate in Israel's economic and national affairs without assimilating either into Jewish society or into the Muslim community.



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Arab community center
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Courtesy of the Jerusalem Foundation / M. Lauber

Arab Community Life

Arab migrations in and out of the country fluctuated in response to prevailing economic conditions. Late in the 19th century, when Jewish immigration stimulated economic growth, many Arabs were attracted to the area by its



Pluralism and Segregation:

As a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society, Israel has a high level of informal segregation patterns. While groups are not separated by official policy, a number of different sectors within the society are somewhat segregated and maintain their strong cultural, religious, ideological, and/or ethnic identity.

However, despite a fairly high degree of social cleavage, some economic disparities and an often overheated political life, the society is relatively balanced and stable. The low level of social conflict

employment opportunities, higher wages, and better living conditions.

The majority of Israel's Arab population lives in self-contained towns and villages in Galilee, including the city of Nazareth, the central area between Hadera and Petah Tikva, the Negev, and in mixed urban centers such as Jerusalem, Akko (Acre), Haifa, Lod, Ramle, and Yafo (Jaffa).

Israel's Arab community constitutes mainly a working-class sector in a middle-class society, a politically peripheral group in a highly centralized state and an Arabic-speaking minority in a Hebrew-speaking majority. Essentially non-assimilating, the community's distinct identity is facilitated through the use of Arabic, Israel's second official language; a separate Arab/Druze school system; Arabic mass media, literature, and theater; and maintenance of independent Muslim, Druze, and Christian

denominational courts which adjudicate matters of personal status.

While customs of the past are still part of daily life, a gradual weakening of tribal and patriarchal authority,

the effects of compulsory education and participation in Israel's democratic process are rapidly affecting traditional outlooks and lifestyles. Concurrently the status of Israeli Arab women has been significantly liberalized by legislation stipulating equal rights for women and prohibition of polygamy and child marriage.

The political involvement of the Arab sector is manifested in national and municipal elections. Arab citizens run the political and administrative affairs of their own municipalities and represent Arab interests through their elected representatives in the Knesset (Israel's parliament), who can operate in the political arena to promote the status of minority groups and their share of national benefits.

Since Israel's establishment (1948), Arab citizens have been exempted from compulsory service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) out of consideration for their family, religious, and cultural affiliations with the Arab world (which has subjected Israel to frequent attacks), as well as concern over possible dual loyalties. At the same time, volunteer military service is encouraged,

between the different groups, notwithstanding an inherent potential for social unrest, can be attributed to the country's judicial and political systems, which represent strict legal and civic equality.

Thus, Israel is not a melting-pot society, but rather more of a mosaic made up of different population groups coexisting in the framework of a democratic state.



At the
**Arab-Jewish
kindergarten,**
The Jerusalem
YMCA

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Courtesy of
the Jerusalem
Foundation / S.
Sabella

with some choosing this option every year. Since 1957, at the request of their community leaders, IDF service has been mandatory for Druze and Circassian men, while the number of Bedouin joining the career army voluntarily increases steadily.

Arab-Jewish Dynamics

Arab citizens, who constitute more than one-sixth of Israel's population, exist on the margins of the conflicting worlds of Jews and Palestinians. However, while remaining a segment of the Arab people in culture and identity and disputing Israel's identification as a Jewish state, they see their future tied to Israel. In the process, they have adopted Hebrew as a second language and Israeli culture as an extra layer in their lives. At the same time, they strive to attain a higher degree of participation in national life, greater integration into the economy and more benefits for their own towns and villages.

Development of inter-group relations between Israel's Arabs and Jews has been hindered by deeply-rooted differences in religion, values, and political beliefs. However, though coexisting as two self-segregated communities, over the years they have come to accept each other, acknowledging the uniqueness and aspirations of each community.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (1948) guarantees freedom of religion for all. Each religious community is free, by law and in practice, to exercise its faith, to observe its holidays and weekly day of rest, and to administer its internal affairs. Each has its own religious council and courts, recognized by law and with jurisdiction over all religious affairs and matters of personal status such as marriage and divorce. Each has its own unique places of worship, with traditional rituals and special architectural features developed over the centuries.



Courtesy of The Israel Philatelic Service

Synagogue: Traditional Jewish Orthodox worship requires a minyan (quorum of 10 adult males). Prayers take place three times daily. Men and women are usually seated separately, and heads are covered. Services may be led by a rabbi, cantor, or congregant. The rabbi is not a priest or an intermediary with God, but a teacher. The focal point in the synagogue is the Holy Ark, which faces the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and contains the Torah scrolls. A prescribed weekly portion is read cyclically throughout the year. Services are particularly festive on the Sabbath (Saturday, the Jewish day of rest) and holidays.

Mosque: Muslim prayers take place five times daily. Men and women pray separately. Shoes are removed and a ritual ablution may be performed. Muslims pray facing Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the direction of which is indicated by a mihrab (niche) in the mosque wall. Services are performed by an imam, a Muslim prayer leader. On Friday, the traditional Muslim day of rest, a public sermon is usually preached.

Church: The form and frequency of Christian services vary according to denomination, but all observe Sunday as the day of rest, with special rituals. Services are conducted by a priest or minister. Men and women pray together. Services are often accompanied by music and choral singing. Traditionally, churches are cruciform in shape.

Holy Places

Each site and shrine is administered by its own religious authority, and freedom of access and worship is ensured by law.

Major holy places are:

Jewish: Jerusalem's Kotel (the Western Wall), last remnant of the retaining wall of the Temple Mount from the Second Temple period; Rachel's Tomb, near Bethlehem; Tomb of the Patriarchs in the Cave of Machpela, in Hebron; the tombs



of Maimonides (Rambam) in Tiberias and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai in Meron.

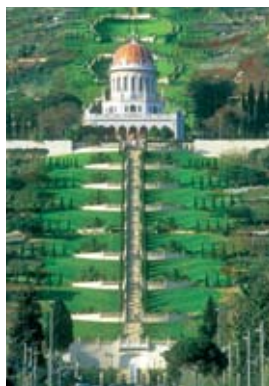
Islamic: The Haram a-Sharif building complex on the Temple Mount, including the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem; Tomb of the Patriarchs, in Hebron; El-Jazzar Mosque, in Akko.

Christian: Via Dolorosa, Room of the Last Supper, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and other sites of Jesus's passion and crucifixion in Jerusalem; Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem; Church of the Annunciation, in Nazareth; Mount of Beatitudes, Tabgha, and Capernaum, near the Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret).

Druze: Nebi Shueib (tomb of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses), near the Horns of Hittin in Galilee.

Baha'i: (independent world religion founded in Persia, mid-19th century): Baha'i world center, Shrine of the Bab, in Haifa; Shrine of Baha'ullah, prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith, near Akko.

Jerusalem: The Dome of the Rock
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Haifa: The Bahai Shrine of the Bab and gardens
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Mount of Beatitudes: church exterior,
traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount
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