



Aliyah Bet: Illegal Immigration (1933–1948)

Early statehood (1948–1950)

The British government limited Jewish immigration to Palestine with quotas, and following the rise of Nazism to power in Germany, illegal immigration to Palestine commenced. The illegal immigration was known as Aliyah Bet ("secondary immigration"). Immigration was done mainly by sea, and to a lesser extent overland through Iraq and Syria. During World War II and the years that followed until independence, Aliyah Bet became the main form of Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Following the war, Berihah ("flight"), an organization of former partisans and ghetto fighters was primarily responsible for smuggling Jews from Poland and Eastern Europe to the Italian ports from which they traveled to Palestine. Despite British efforts to curb the illegal immigration, during the 14 years of its operation, 110,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine. In 1945 reports of the Holocaust with its 6 million Jewish dead, caused many Jews in Palestine to turn openly against the British Mandate, and illegal immigration escalated rapidly as many Holocaust survivors joined the Aliyah.

After Aliyah Bet, the process of numbering or naming individual aliyot ceased, but immigration did not. A major wave of immigration of over half a million Jews went to Israel between 1948 and 1950, many fleeing renewed persecution in Eastern Europe, and increasingly hostile Arab countries.

As for the youngest Jewish immigrant to arrive in Israel, that title probably goes to eight children – five boys and three girls – who were born on planes during Operation Solomon, the dramatic airlift in 1991, which brought thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel.



Yemenite Jews en route from Aden to Israel, during the Magic Carpet operation (1949–1950).



Moroccan Jews arrive in 1956.

Operation Magic Carpet: Aliyah from Arab countries

From 1948 until the early 1970s, around 900,000 Jews from Arab lands left, fled, or were expelled from various Arab nations. In the course of Operation Magic Carpet (1949–1950), nearly the entire community of Yemenite Jews (about 49,000) immigrated to Israel. Most of them had never seen an airplane before, but they believed in the Biblical prophecy that according to the Book of Isaiah (40:31), God promised to return the children of Israel to Zion on "wings".

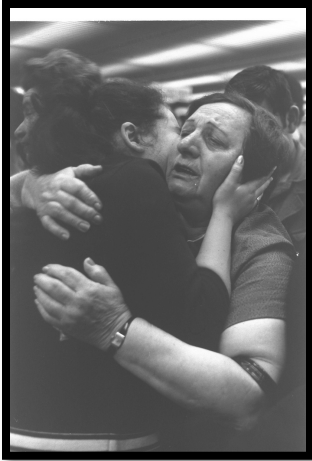
In three and a half years, the Jewish population of Israel had doubled, inflated by nearly 700,000 immigrants, which was one of the causes of the austerity. Huge numbers of Jewish refugees were temporarily settled in "cities of tents" called Ma'abarot. As the residents were gradually absorbed into Israeli society, the Ma'abarot were phased out.

Many Israeli immigrants were Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews who left Arab countries to move to Israel. In many of these cases they had been persecuted and sometimes forced to leave their homes. 114,000 Jews came from Iraq in 1951 in Operation Ezra and Nehemiah.



Operation Moses: Ethiopian Aliyah

The massive airlift known as Operation Moses began to bring Ethiopian Jews to Israel on November 18, 1985 and ended on January 5, 1986. During those six weeks, some 6,500–8,000 Ethiopian Jews were flown from Sudan to Israel. An estimated 2,000–4,000 Jews died en route to Sudan or in Sudanese refugee camps. In 1991, Operation Solomon was launched to bring the Beta Israel Jews of Ethiopia. In one day, May 24, 34 aircraft landed at Addis Ababa and brought 14,325 Jews from Ethiopia to Israel. Since that time, Ethiopian Jews have continued to immigrate to Israel bringing the number of Ethiopian-Israelis today to over 100,000.



Operation Exodus: Aliyah From the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet States

The Soviet authorities barred many Jews from immigrating to Israel. These individuals became known as refuseniks. The refuseniks took open action to protest the ban under the battle cry, “Let My People Go!”, despite the severe consequences of arrest and imprisonment.

Other Jewish activists worked clandestinely to organize ulpanim for learning Hebrew; underground seminars on Jewish topics; kindergartens; activities by teenagers; events and festivals; underground religious activity celebrating the Jewish festivals (e.g., Purimshpils); publications, including samizdat (clandestine) publications; underground Jewish art. These secret meetings took place in people’s homes, putting individuals and their families at risk of arrest and harassment, were their hideouts to be uncovered by Soviet authorities and informants.

Having learned the lessons of the Holocaust, Jewish communities from around the world were determined to assert themselves in defense of their brothers and sisters locked inside the USSR. Arming their protests with slogans such as “Never Again!”, Jews of all ages and backgrounds – from community leaders, artists and intellectuals, to students and housewives – protested outside Soviet embassies and consulates year in and year out until the power of their demonstrations were backed up by their governments’ exertion of diplomatic pressure on the Soviet Union.

In the end, the struggle succeeded, the floodgates opened, and Jews gained the right to immigrate – one million to Israel and around half a million to other countries. The Soviet Jewry movement had wider implications as well. The endurance and efficacy of Russian Jewish activism fueled the broader anti-communist movements found in all the Soviet republics and satellite countries, thereby significantly contributing to the fall of the Iron Curtain, begun in 1989 in the Eastern Bloc and climaxing with the 1991 collapse of the USSR.



Aliyah From India

The Bnei Menashe community consists of close to 9,000 members of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribe, which lives in the northeast Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram, near the border of Myanmar (formally Burma). For generations they kept Jewish traditions, claiming to be descended from the Tribe of Manasseh, one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel that were exiled by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C.E. and have since disappeared.

In March 2005, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, one of Israel's two chief rabbis, decided to recognize the members of India's Bnei Menashe community as descendants of the ancient Israelites due to their exceptional devotion to Judaism. In the past two decades, some 1,700 Bnei Menashe have emigrated to Israel.



Phillip and Dorothy Grossman, ages 95 and 93, respectively, are probably the oldest married couple ever to immigrate to Israel. The couple from Baltimore, Maryland, who have been together for 71 years, arrived in Feb. 2012.

North American Aliyah

Approximately 110,000 North American immigrants live in Israel. There has been a steady flow of olim from North America since Israel's inception in 1948. Record numbers arrived in the late 1960s after the Six-Day War, and in the 1970s. Like Western European olim, North Americans tend to immigrate to Israel more for religious, ideological and political purposes, and not financial ones.

Following the Global Financial Crisis in the late 2000s, American Jewish immigration to Israel rose. This wave of immigration was triggered by Israel's lower unemployment rate, combined with financial incentives offered to new Jewish immigrants. In 2009, 4,000 American Jews made aliyah - the largest number in a single year since 1983.