

Ministry of Education: *Lihiyot Ezrahim bi-Israel/ Medina Yehudit ve-Demokratit (Being Citizens in Israel– A Jewish and Democratic State)*. Sefer Ezrahut la-Talmidim ba-Hativa ha-Elyona be-Veit ha-Sefer ha-Klali ve-ha-Dati (Civics Book for Students in the Senior High School in General and Religious Schools) Renewed edition, Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 2001. 604 pages.

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## Content

The book begins with a preface, written by the authors' panel. There is also an introduction, referring to the Proclamation of Independence. The book is divided into three sections, and each section contains a number of chapters. This review deals with sections 1 and 3, as they deal with the identity of Israeli society and of the Arab minority within it.

- ★ **Section 1:** *What is a Jewish State? (Mahi Medina Yehudit?)* This section explains the different concepts of nationality, a state for the Jewish people, the characteristics of a Jewish state, and the issue of the identity of Israeli citizens.

The third chapter in this section (pp. 41–43) deals with 'The Question of the Identity of the Israeli Citizens' (*Sugiyat ha-Zehut shel Ezrahei Israel*), and the fourth chapter (pp. 44–61) deals with 'The State of Israel – The State of the Jewish People' (*Medinat Israel – Medinat ha-Am ha-Yehudi*).

- ★ **Section 3:** *The Regime and Politics in Israel (ha-Mishtar ve-ha-Politika bi-Israel)*. This section deals with Israeli society, the elections in Israel, the rights of the citizens and the minorities, and political culture in Israel.

The second chapter in this section (pp. 276–354) deals with 'Israeli Society – A Society with lots of rifts' (*ha-Hevra ha-Israelit/ Hevra Rabat Shsa'im*). The eighth chapter (pp 497–514) deals with 'Human and Citizen's Rights, and the Rights of the Minorities in Israel' (*Zkhuyot Adam ve-Ezrah ve-Zkhuyot ha-Mi'utim bi-Israe'*). The twelfth chapter (pp. 562–593) serves as a summary: 'The State of Israel: A Jewish and Democratic State' (*Medinat Israel- Medina Yehudit ve-Demokratit*).

## General Structure

Each section begins with an introduction explaining the aim of the section.

At the end of each chapter, there is an exercise (*Tirgul*) and a quote with questions. The questions assist the reader to come up with an opinion and perspective on the issue discussed. Some of the questions are followed by quotations from newspapers, famous speeches, law books, and so on.

The book contains 55 pictures, 33 figures (sketches – mostly caricatures), 22 tables and 5 maps.

There is a six-page glossary in which are explained 62 terms that appear in the book. The book ends with a bibliography, which lists 100 books. These include both sources from which the authors took their information and also books to which readers might turn in order to deepen their knowledge. Eighty-nine of the books listed are by Jewish authors, four are by Arab authors, and seven are journals.

## “The Other”

The book introduces issues giving historical events and dates. The Jewish–Arab problem is explained by cultural differences: after Israel was declared a state, the Arabs who lived here were neglected and treated as a minority, and this treatment assisted in increasing the gap between the two sides. Arab society was seen as rooted in a traditional culture, and their level of education was low. After the Arabs were integrated with the Jewish people who came from Western countries, the influence of modern Western culture became stronger. The Arabs nowadays go to universities (and some tables illustrate that the percentage of students failing is getting smaller by the year – p. 292), and they have their own political parties in the Knesset.

“The Israeli Jewish attitude towards the Israeli Arabs was not like that towards the Jews, since the Arab minority had a connection of family, culture, language, history, religion and nationality with the Arab world, while between it and Israel was a connection built on confrontation.” (p.279 The minorities were looked at as a problem by the political and military institutions. Therefore, it was impossible not to be able to feel the inequality towards the Arabs; they did not get their full rights as citizens of Israel

The Israeli-Arab citizens define themselves as Arabs and Palestinians. The Arabs are divided into groups: there are Moslems (75%), Christians (14%) and Druze (11%) and they are a



Illustration 1: „Beit Jan“ (p.286)

minority in Israel (18% of the population). However, there is a question as to whether the Druze are considered to be Arabs or not.

The history of each group is explained briefly. Druze is considered to be a religion by itself. The book gives an idea about the ‘other side’ (the Arabs in this case, since the book is written to Jewish students) in a relatively positive way.

It seems that the authors of the book want to say that there is a solution to the

problems between the Jews and the Arabs if there is enough integration and understanding between the two nations.

When mentioning terrorism, a clear distinction is drawn between the Arab minority population and members of terrorist groups. The Arab minority in Israel is considered to be a part of the population that follows the country’s laws and participates in its activities. However, the terrorist groups mentioned are separate from the population that integrates with Israeli society. The terrorist groups are described as those who disagree with the peace process and try to act against it by initiating terror attacks.

## Values and Intentions

The chapter entitled 'The State of Israel – The State of the Jewish people' refers to the Law of Return (*Hok ha-Shvut*, 1950), which allows every Jewish person to immigrate into Israel (to make *Aliya*) and enjoy full rights as a citizen.

In 1948, when the war of independence broke out, 2 million people lived in Israel. Of these, two-thirds were Arab Palestinians and one-third was Jews. After the war there was an expulsion (*Girush*) of Arabs, and in this way the Jews became the majority. In addition to the expulsion, it is also mentioned that some Arabs fled.

The issue of the local government is discussed in the book: after 1948, the local governments that had previously been in existence were paralysed, and a few were even destroyed completely. The problem of the destroyed Arab villages is a big issue in Israel nowadays. The two most famous are Iqrith and Bir'im. The citizens of these two villages were evacuated, and now the majority of them live in Haifa, Acre, Gush Halav, and some other villages. The remainder emigrated to Canada, the USA and Australia.

The idea of Greater Israel (*Israel ha-Shlema*) is also discussed in the context of contrasting views within the Israeli Jewish public (p. 332-350). There are two groups of people: the *Nitzim* (the hawks – the right-wing parties/people), and the *Yonim* (the doves – the left-wing parties/people). The *Nitzim* believe that the Land of Israel (*Eretz Israel, which includes the Westbank and the Gaza Strip*) belongs only to the Jewish people and are opposed to giving away land to the Arab population. However, the *Yonim* believe that peace should be achieved even if it involves giving away land. According to them it is crucial that Jews form the majority in a democratic state, which can only be achieved by territorial concessions. The section is introduced by a short historical flashback in which it is stated that Israeli society was always unanimous about the Jews' right to a sovereign Jewish state in the land of Israel. Ever since its foundation Israel sought peace with its neighbours. Alas they rejected and went out to war against Israel in 1967.

Further divisions within Israeli society described here are the one between Jews and Arabs, the secular and the religious fractions, the different ethnic backgrounds of the Jewish immigrants, and between the sexes.



Illustration 2: rally of Israeli secularists (p.310)



Illustration 3: rally of Orthodox Jews (p.311)

## **Describing history**

The book deals with two periods that relate to the status of the Arabs as citizens of Israel:

1. 1948–1966: under a military regime.
2. 1966–present: the cancellation of the military regime.

The book explains that the Jewish–Arab conflict and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict began at the end of the nineteenth century.

After the United Nations' (UN) decision in November 1947 and the Proclamation of Independence, it was decided that the State of Israel was to be a Jewish State. Therefore, the Arabs were automatically considered to be a minority, and they were treated as such.

The war with the Arab countries that followed the establishment of the Jewish State is discussed. The armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon invaded Israel. During the war 700,000 Arabs who had lived in Israel during the British mandate were expelled or escaped to Arab countries, Samaria, Judea and Gaza – this was actually the beginning of the refugee problem.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964 and declared the Palestinians' single political representative. Therefore, the PLO is the only organization that can represent the Palestinian side in peace talks (p. 336).

The Arab-Israeli war known as the Six Day War (1967) was won by Israel. The new borders that were created following that war are still viewed as a problem by the Palestinian side (p. 332).

In 1979 the Camp David Agreement, a peace treaty with Egypt, was signed after long negotiations. It followed the Yom Kippur War (1973), and a lot of effort and many 'ups' and 'downs' (*Aliyot vi-Yridot*).

The first *Intifadah* began in 1987 as a result of the frustration and rage of the Arab residents in the territories over the Israeli control there, and as a result of the lack of progress in the peace talks (negotiations) regarding the Palestinian problem. (p. 338).

In 1992 talks with the PLO were conducted. The Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993 and dealt, among other issues, with the territorial compromise. This agreement was made during Rabin's government. However, Rabin was killed by an extreme right-wing activist who disagreed with the peace process with the Palestinians. Under the terms of the Oslo Agreement, a territorial compromise and an end to Israeli control over the Palestinians was envisioned. This led to disagreements within the population in Israel and it deepened the Ideological–Political gap between the people (p. 338).

There is a mention of important figures such as Ben Gurion, Herzl, Rabin and Barak, and also of Anwar as-Sadat and the famous sentence from one of his speeches regarding the peace agreement with Israel: "No more war, no more bloodshed" (p. 335).



## Maps

There are two maps on page 13: one deals with the period 1949–1967, and one only with 1999. The maps identify territories (areas) as A, B and C, explaining that A means under complete Palestinian control, B means under Civil Palestinian control, and C means under Israeli control.

A map on page 468 shows how many rural settlements, municipal settlements, and cities inhabited by Jewish/Arab/Druze people existed in 1999 inside Israel.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the book presents to the readers a historical explanation of the events before and after Israel was declared a state: the conflicts, wars, peace treaties, and so on. The students who read this book, as the Jewish population of Israel, learn about their history and their present. The book represents the conflicts within the society and the different ethnic groups living in Israel. The conflict between the Jewish people and the Arabs is presented in the book as well, and it presents all groups as citizens of Israel who should be treated equally.

In 2002 the Ministry of Education unified the civics curriculum for the secondary level for all schools in Israel, be they religiously or rather secularly oriented, Jewish or Arab. In this wake the reviewed book was prescribed as the

unified tool for civics instruction in the higher secondary stage throughout the state. Thus, it will be highly influential on the collective self perception of an Israeli generation of university aspirants. The consequent use of a terminology in which the whole country is named Israel including the occupied Palestinian territories, which occur as Judea, Samaria and Gaza, is significant and reflects the attitude of the current government, tending to the more nationalist, ideological version of Zionism. Moreover Israeli Arabs waving the Israeli flag on the first picture of Israeli Arabs in the book is an odd representation (p.40). On the other hand the quite concise coverage of the minority issue and presentation even of views that, in opposition to the official position, speak out in favour of



Illustration 4: Israeli Arabs celebrating the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan (p.40)

a state of its citizens rather than a Jewish state (p.35), and the detailed map of the current state of affairs between Israel and the PNA are a desirable example for high school civics instruction.