"On Eagles' Wings: Operation Solomon"

PAGES 16–19

This article describes the miraculous and dramatic rescue of the Beta Israel Ethiopian Jewish community by Israel in 1991. Students will learn about that rescue mission, as well as other operations that Israel has initiated to save Jews from persecution in the lands of their dispersion. Students will create three-dimensional symbols that represent the various operations to use in celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about various operations carried out by Israel to save Jews from persecution in foreign lands.
- Students will design symbols to represent the various rescue operations.
- Students will analyze Jewish texts to understand why carrying out rescue operations is a core value of the State of Israel.

VOCABULARY

מִבְצָע שְׁלֹמֹה	Operation Solomon
מוֹלֶדֶת	homeland
הַצָּלָה	rescue

QUOTES & QUESTIONS

"Hours earlier, in the night's still darkness, covert operatives...had nudged Wenda awake in her hut in Addis Ababa."

Why did Wenda and the others of her village trust the operatives who had come in the middle of the night?

How did keeping the hope of a life in Israel and holding on to Jewish practices through centuries of persecution pay off for the Jews rescued by Operation Solomon?

"Her first thought was of a story her parents had told her when she was a little girl: 'One day, we will all be free,' they said, 'lifted up on the wings of an eagle to a place called Zion.' "

Consider that the Ethiopian Jews had access only to the Torah and to some of the Prophetic Writings. Brainstorm what other stories Wenda's parents may have told her.

How do you think Wenda's parents would have described what *eretz Yisrael* would be like?

Why did they envision going to Zion on the wings of an eagle? [See the text from *Shemot* 19 below.]

What did this story do for Wenda and the other Jews of Ethiopian villages?

ACTIVITY: OPERATION HOMECOMING

1. Begin class by telling students that they will be reading a story of drama and intrigue. Read the story on pages 16–19 of BabagaNewz together about the miraculous airlift of 14,000 Ethiopian Jews during the 36-hour Operation Solomon in 1991. Ask:

What was the most exciting or touching aspect of this article?

Look at the layout of the article. What do you notice about the design? What feel do you get from the pages?

Why do you think that the pages were designed in such a fashion? [The first pages are atop a night scene, while the later pages are in a bright, day-lit sky. The Ethiopian Jews were rescued from the darkness of their exile and brought to the light of a new life in Israel.]

Discuss the Quotes & Questions above.

What pushed the Jews of Ethiopia to want to leave?

What made it difficult for them to leave?

Why did these Jews want to go to Israel? What stories, holidays, or *mitzvot* from Tanakh would have nurtured their love for *eretz Yisrael* and their desire to go there?

How was the Beta Israel community different from other Ethiopian communities facing the challenges of famine, poverty, and war? [Dreams of *eretz Yisrael* gave them hope for a future.]

Discuss why the operation was called Operation Solomon. [According to Ethiopian folklore, the Ethiopian Jewish community descended from the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.]

2. Explain that Operation Solomon was not the only operation to save Jews and bring them to Israel. In fact, since the establishment of the state, more than 1.5 million Jews have been rescued by Israel. Hold up cards with the names of various rescue operations carried out by the Israelis. Ask students:

What do you know about these operations?

Many of the operations have Biblical names. Do you recognize any of the names or know any of the Biblical stories associated with the names? What can you guess about the operations based on their Biblical names?

- Operation Ezra and Neḥemiah—123,000 Iraqi Jews brought to Israel in 1950–1952

  After the destruction of the first *Beit Hamikdash*, the Jews were exiled to Babylonia, which is modern-day Iraq. Ezra and Neḥemiah were leaders who brought some of the first exiles back to *eretz Yisrael* from Babylonia.

- Operation Magic Carpet—45,000 Yemenite Jews brought to Israel in 1949–1950

  This operation (not given a Biblical name) airlifted Jews from Yemen who had never seen planes before. It was as if they were flying home on magic carpets.

- Operation Goshen—10,000 Egyptian Jews brought to Israel in 1948–1953

  This operation was named after the Jewish area in which *B'nai Yisrael* lived when they were slaves in Egypt.

- Operation Moses—7,400 Ethiopian Jews brought to Israel in 1984

  Just as Moshe led the Jews from persecution into the wilderness, the Ethiopian Jews involved in this operation walked through the desert into Sudan where they eventually boarded planes to Israel.

- Operation Exodus—over 750,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union brought to Israel from 1989–present

  The huge size of this *aliyah* is comparable to the masses that were freed from Egyptian tyranny in Biblical times.

3. Pose the following questions to your students:

Why do you think Israel has dedicated so many of its resources and energies to rescuing these Jews and absorbing them into Israeli society?

What Jewish values do you think play a role in Israel's commitment to bringing these Jews home to Israel?

Now study the Jewish texts below.

4. To culminate the lesson, divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Explain that each group will be responsible for designing a symbol to represent one of the different *aliyah* operations. Provide each group with information about a particular operation. Information sheets are available at www.babaganewz.com/teachers. Once group members review the information about the operation, they must brainstorm a symbol that they think best represents it. For example, an eagle may best represent Operation Solomon, because Ethiopian Jews felt as if they flew on wings of eagles to Israel. Using whatever art supplies you have available in class, groups should create a three-dimensional symbol of the *aliyah*.

In addition, groups must write a one-paragraph explanation of how the symbol serves as an appropriate representation of the operation. Allow students time to share their projects with the class. Display the finished products in the hall or classroom in honor of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

JEWISH TEXTS

SHEMOT 19:4

You saw what I did to Egypt, and I bore you on eagles' wings, and I brought you to Me.

Why do you think that this text uses the image of an eagle to represent God's rescuing of the Jewish People?

WEEKDAY *AMIDAH*

Sound the great shofar *for our freedom, raise the banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth.*

The Hebrew word for banner is "*nes*." What else does that mean? How are these rescue operations both banners and *nisim*?

How is Israel helping to raise God's banner to gather the exiles?

PRAYER FOR THE WELFARE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

*Remember our brothers and sisters of the entire House of Israel in all the lands of their dispersions and may You quickly lead them to Zion, Your city, and to Jerusalem, the dwelling place of Your Name, as it is written in the Torah of Your servant Moshe (*Devarim *30): If any of you that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there will God gather you, and from there take you. And God will bring you home to the land which your ancestors*

ISRAELI TSVIKA/ISRAEL GPO

took into possession and you will possess it, and God will make you happy and multiply you more than your ancestors.

What would you expect to be the content of a prayer for the State of Israel?

Why do some versions of the Prayer for Israel include a request that Jews scattered around the world should come to live in Israel?

What is the benefit for the Jewish communities and what is the benefit for Israel when this occurs?

How is Israel's response to troubled Jewish communities different from the United States' approach to suffering communities? [The United States will send relief aid and try to alleviate the problems through political and diplomatic pressures, but does not bring entire communities to live in the United States.]

What is the difference between Israel's relationship with Jewish communities around the world as compared to the United States' relationship with communities in other countries?