



SAMPLE

Sabra

## 4. Sabra

The challenge of building a modern state surrounded by hostile neighbors in a desert wilderness has forced Israelis to develop a steely determination. To casual onlookers, this emotional intensity appears abrasive or even rude. But to those who look more deeply, Israelis are like the sabra cactus (*tzavar*) that grows in Israel; namely, tough and prickly on the outside but sweet and tender inside. Native-born Israelis are proud to be called sabras.

Trees are another meaningful symbol for Israelis and for Jews worldwide. Proverbs 3:18 compares the Torah to a tree of life, saying, “Whoever holds on to it is happy.” For a thousand years, our ancestors were dispersed around the world. Regardless of the distances that separated them, each community held fast to the teachings of the Torah. Its sustenance kept them spiritually alive, even in the face of anti-Semitism.

When Zionist pioneers returned to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) in the mid-1800s to rebuild the Jewish homeland, they found a barren landscape. American traveler Mark Twain described the countryside as “a silent mournful expanse. . . [with] hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere.” Planting trees, therefore, became an important part of the Zionist enterprise. To accomplish this task, Zionist leaders created the Jewish National Fund (JNF). Jews everywhere were encouraged to donate money to JNF in honor of loved ones or to mark special events. JNF has used the money to plant more than 240 million trees in Israel.

### Say It in Hebrew

sabra

צָבָר

עֵץ

1. How might a person who is prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside behave?
2. What plant are you like? What characteristics do you share with this plant?
3. What person or event could you memorialize by planting a tree in Israel?