

# Diversity Among the Jewish People



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Common within the Jewish community is the thread of diversity in culture. This is due to the movement of the Jewish people throughout history which stretches back 4,000 years to Abraham.

A man named Abraham responded to the call of an unseen G-d with an inaudible Voice, calling to his heart. He left his home in Ur of Chaldees (Mesopotamia) and moved across the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. He was called the "Ivri" meaning "to cross over" for he had crossed over the two great rivers. The word "ivri" became "Hebrew" in English. He eventually settled in "The Promised Land", Canaan.

During times of famine, Abraham (a merchant prince) and his descendents traveled to Egypt where they found solitude to slavery, but always returned to the Promised Land, carrying Egyptian influence with them.

Babylon was the next exile, where the language and culture touched the Hebrews. The name "Jews" was first used in Babylon, after the tribe of "Judah". The Jews blended their language, Hebrew, with the Babylonian language to create Aramaic. Aramaic was spoken in everyday language, and Hebrew became the "Holy Language" used in prayer and the Torah (Five books of Moses, first 5 books of the Bible). But, the Jews were destined to return!

Once back in Canaan, the next influence was the Greeks who came conquering the known world at the time. Greek philosophy was enticing to the mind and the new cuisine had its influence.

The Romans followed; they destroyed the Temple, and exiled Jews from the Holy Land, which they called Judea. The period of exile is called the Diaspora; the Jews were dispersed among the nations.

Some Jews moved to the Far East, as the sea routes to China had been opened by Jewish merchants for centuries. There were Jews in China, India, and all along the coasts. Jews went to Turkey, Greece, the Mediterranean Islands and the northern coast of Africa, circling the Mediterranean basin, extending to the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain). The Jews were referred to as Sephardim. Again, languages and culture mingled. The Jews mixed Hebrew with Castilian Spanish, and created Ladino, a language for everyday life. Instead of saying Mazel Tov (Good Fortune) in Ladino one would say Mazel Bueno! Christians, Jews and Muslim lived together. Still Hebrew remained the Holy Language of prayer and preserved the religion through the Torah.



As history and politics would have it Jews were forced out of northern and western Europe including Spain. The Jews left the harbor at the same time as Christopher Columbus sailed. Since Jews were shipping merchants, the first “wave of immigration” to America took place during the ensuing Colonial Era, by the Sephardic Jews.

Many Jews relocated to Eastern Europe to build communities in countries such as Germany, Poland, Austria, Ukraine and Russia. There Hebrew was mixed with High German and some Slavic words to create Yiddish, the everyday language, while Hebrew remained the language for prayer. These European Jews are called Ashkenazi.

In the early 1800’s central European Jews settled largely near other Germans in the mid-western states. This was the “second wave of immigration”.

The “third wave of immigration” came between the late 1800’s and 1925 when the US all but closed the doors of immigration. Jews fled persecution in Eastern Europe, (“Fiddler on the Roof”) and were among millions such as the Irish, Italian and Polish immigrants. They settled largely in the northeast such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

After 1925 Jews immigrated to Cuba, Argentina, and other South American countries still open to immigrants. In an interesting twist of fate, many cookbooks filled with eastern European dishes (Ashkenazi) were written in Spanish (Sephardi).

In 1948 Israel declared independence (from England) and became a nation – return to the Promised Land after nearly 2000 years. Modern Hebrew became the everyday language and the Holy Language. Israel is to some “home”, to others “joy” and to some, a “safety net”. To all it is “HaTikveh”, the “Hope”.

Diversity is consistent among the Jewish people. From Abraham to today, that which is without change is the unseen G-d with the inaudible Voice, which calls to the heart. Victoria Ben-Toviya, MA, BCC

