

The Pioneers - A Historical Perspective

The Early Pioneering (*Halutziiyyut*) Ideas of the Second (1903-1914) and Third (1919-1923) Zionist Immigration Waves (*Aliyot*)

Even though most immigrants of the Second Aliyah resembled those who had arrived before them (during the First Aliyah), they are still seen as constituting a separate immigration wave. This is mainly due to the significant impact a small group of these immigrants had on the development of the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. Arriving mainly from the Russian Empire, they were mostly young people who brought with them unique social and national views. Inspired by the revolutionary socialist movements active in the Russian Empire at the time, they promoted a Zionist ethos that called for physical labor, mainly agricultural. It was through this labor, so they believed, that those working the land would gain a form of moral right over it. They believed that the Zionist goal was to create an industrious Jewish nation.

In 1907, a branch of the Zionist Organization was established in Jaffa. It was known as the **"Palestine Office"** and was headed by **Arthur Ruppin**. Ruppin was one of the founders of the "Palestine Land Development Company," which purchased land in what was then Ottoman Palestine. He also initiated the establishment of training facilities, known as "National Farms," where new immigrants came to work the land and study agriculture. These were younger immigrants, mostly men, though some women participated as well. They lived in communes, which made life in the new land easier for them and also suited their socialist ideals.

In 1909, a major dispute broke out at the Kinneret training farm between the young workers and their foreman. Arriving on scene, Arthur Ruppin proposed the following resolution: As the farm had two sections to it, the Jordan River serving as a divide between them, the foreman would remain in his position on the western side of the farm, taking on new workers, and the disgruntled original workers would manage the eastern part of the farm, which was located on the lands of the Um Juni village, purchased by the Jewish National Fund in 1907. There, they would work the land and run the farm based on their views for one year.

Continuing to live as a commune, the group worked the Um Juni lands and, to everyone's surprise, reached the end of the year without incurring any losses. Subsequently, Ruppin decided to adopt this form of work, and a permanent communal settlement, or *Kevutza* (pl. *Kevutzot*), was soon established on the Um Juni lands. It was named "Degania." The *Kevutza's* two leading precepts were an aspiration for communal life and self-management.

Following in Degania's footsteps, additional *Kevutzot* were founded on similar premises between 1912 and 1914. Not all were destined to last. One of the more interesting examples, which existed for only a year, was the Migdal farm, founded by Joseph Trumpeldor.

There were several reasons why many Kevutzot met with relatively quick failure:

1. Economic difficulties: The settlers had minimal know-how when it came to both agriculture and management. Their outputs were low, and so was the assistance given to them by the Palestine Office.
2. Social issues: Each settlement was based on a small core of settlers, a closed-off unit that was difficult to become part of. There were those who believed that the settlement should remain small and serve as a substitute for family.
3. The wanderlust of the workers: many of the workers did not believe in settling in one place, viewing it as a bourgeois act. They preferred to wander from place to place, working in different agricultural jobs.

During the Third Aliyah (1919–1923), former settlers from the smaller *Kevutzot* began establishing larger ones, allowing for growth and development. The first large settlement was established in the Jezreel Valley and was called "**Ein Harod.**" It was from these different settlements that the later **Kibbutzim** developed. Though most immigrants arriving in the Land of Israel did not live in *Kevutzot* or Kibbutzim, this way of life became particularly revered and the one most associated with the Zionist *Yishuv* (body of Jewish residents) in the Land of Israel.

The immigrants of the Second Aliyah are known for their tendency to first act and then establish the appropriate frameworks and institutions for their actions. They took actions that no one had taken before them in the Land of Israel and were therefore called *Halutzim* (pioneers).

It is recommended to emphasize to the students that in most cases, these were very young people, often not a lot older than the students themselves.

The pioneering ideas and actions of the immigrants of the Second Aliyah affected many of those arriving during the Third Aliyah. Second Aliyah immigrants stood out as local leaders, imbuing the pioneering ideals with a sense of loftiness. It was also during this time that the myth of **Trumpeldor** developed, emphasizing manual labor of any kind as a means of building the land. Joseph Trumpeldor was killed in 1920 during a firefight in Tel Hai, which he had volunteered to defend. The doctor attending to his wounds claimed that on the way to the hospital Trumpeldor's last words were, "Never mind, it is good to die for our country." Following his death, the "Joseph Trumpeldor Work and Defense Battalion" (*Gdud HaAvoda*) was founded, raising the banner of readiness to work in any position necessary

for the building of the land. Jewish labor (*Avoda Ivrit*), particularly agricultural labor, Jewish defense, and austerity, became the essence of the pioneering movement (*Halutziyyut*). Later on, when the immigrants of the Fourth and Fifth Aliyot arrived, most of them from an urban background and holding different ideals, the question of who was a pioneer began to be debated. Were pioneers only those following the example of Trumpeldor and his friends, or could they maybe have other characteristics? Could the pioneering ideal be widened to include other expressions? (These are issues that will be addressed in the upcoming lessons).