



EVERYBODY SAYS SHALOM

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The first thing to know about Israel? Everybody says shalom – a little word that means so many things – and there are so many places to see and visit.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Shalom – a deceptively simple word that can mean so much. As this book explains, the three basic definitions of the word – hello, goodbye, and peace – make it possibly the most-uttered word in all of Israel. Every time someone enters a room or leaves it, or wishes someone well, “shalom” conveys the appropriate message.

The underlying meaning of shalom goes far beyond greetings, farewells, and good wishes. As with most Hebrew words, shalom comes from a 3-letter root, ש-ל-ם, shin – lamed – mem, meaning “to restore” or “to make whole.” When one thinks about peace (shalom) in terms of wholeness or completeness (shalem), the link between this basic greeting and a central Jewish tenet becomes clear: It is incumbent upon all Jews to help make the world a better place, and this teaching is embedded in the national language of the Jewish people.

Languages shift over time. For centuries Hebrew was used only for prayer and text learning. The rebirth of Hebrew as a living, spoken language, thanks to the 19th century Zionist Eliezer Ben Yehuda, is widely regarded as one of the most successful language revitalization projects of all time, accompanying a culture that is as vibrant and varied as the language itself.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Just as Hebrew is a mixture of ancient and modern words, the land of Israel is also a meld of the very old and the very new. The city of Tel Aviv, for example, is made up almost entirely of buildings from the 20th century, while 42 miles away in Jerusalem, some buildings have been around for millennia. One recently unearthed structure is estimated to be 10,000 years old! Israel is a place where history is very much alive, from its language to its architecture.

As you read this book, ask your child to look for clues that show if the buildings in the background are old or new. How can one tell? An “old” building where you live might be several hundred years old, while in Israel, it’s more like several thousand! Talk with your child about why an “old” structure in your town might be considered “new” in Israel. Ask him or her to consider what might be the oldest building in your town.

The Internet is a great resource for finding out about modern Hebrew as well as the background scenes in this book. Whether it’s the amphitheater in Caesarea, the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem, or the Shalom Tower in Tel Aviv, your family can discover a trove of information about many structures in Israel.