

Multimedia – The Bricha | Educational Activity Facilitator

The Bricha—literally, “Escape”—was an underground movement that acted between 1944 and 1948 to enable some 250,000 Jews who survived the Holocaust to cross from Eastern Europe to Western Europe in order to leave the continent and start life over. Most of the escapees wished to reach the Land of Israel. The Bricha began to organize in the winter of 1944 at the initiative of several dozen members of resistance and partisan groups who were affiliated with Zionist youth movements. Within a year or so, these few became the leaders of masses of survivors who entrusted their fate and lives to them. As time passed, the Bricha evolved into the largest organized illegal movement in the twentieth century.

The leaders of the Bricha guided the escapees along its routes, equipped them with false documents, set up transit stations, recruited and trained guides, supplied basic nutrition, and adapted their operating methods to the changing realities of the postwar months.

The first three emissaries from the Land of Israel arrived in late 1945. About a year after the Bricha was up and running, it was joined by soldiers from the Jewish Brigade. The Bricha played a meaningful role in the struggle for the establishment of the Jewish state in 1945–1948 and dramatically emphasized the demand to open the gates of the Land of Israel to the survivors of the Holocaust.

The Bricha – educational activity

At this online exhibition, you will find testimonies about the main events and the challenges that the leaders of the Bricha faced based in three periods that represent the main turning points in the flow of events from the first days of liberation up to the Kielce pogrom. The fourth segment is devoted to the Nakam (revenge) movement that arose at this time, in part by leaders of the Bricha. We recommend that you lead a class discussion or self-learning activity by using the videotaped testimonies, the texts, and the guiding questions.

Below is a suggested activity, consisting three study levels :

Investigation

Develop new knowledge or enhance existing knowledge on the basis of the source material

Contemplation

Develop insights by contemplating the past

Discussion

Use knowledge and insights about the past to assess challenges in the present

The Bricha – First Steps

“I’ll rest up a little”—they said to each other [...]. “I’ll search for more family members; maybe they’re still alive. And when they were spoken to about escaping, they’d answer: “Di briche vet nit antlofyen (the Bricha won’t escape).” (Ephraim Dekel: BeNetive haBricha)

In the summer of 1944, as the German forces in the east began to retreat, thousands of Jews found themselves liberated from the terrors of Nazi rule. For them, the Holocaust was over. With the liberation of Poland in January 1945, those who had survived the ghettos and camps were freed after six years of war and Holocaust. Among the three and a half million Jews who had lived in Poland before the war, several thousand were free.

Watch the testimonies and look at the pictures in the first section of the Multimedia – the inception of the Bricha – as a basis for activity

Investigation

What were the goals of the Bricha movement?
What personal challenges did the survivors have to cope with?

Contemplation

What will the liberated Jews do? Where will they go? What is upsetting them?
Why were many attracted to the Bricha movement despite the dangers and hardships of the road?

Discussion

How does a mass movement come into being after a crisis?
What values inspire people to act jointly?

