

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda

אליעזר בן-יהודה

This January, Israel will be celebrating the 11th annual Hebrew Language Day. The day was created in memory of the founder of Modern Ivrit - Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.

Born 7 of January 1858 (ל'א בְּטַבְּת), Ben-Yehuda was the lexicographer of the first Hebrew dictionary, and the editor of הַצֶּבֶי (Gazelle newspaper), one of the first newspapers in pre-state Israel. He is known as the driving force and reviver of the Hebrew language.

Before Ben-Yehuda started inventing modern Hebrew words, the language was considered to be very dated, and no one used it for speaking. Only for Torah study and prayers.

When trying to revive and invent the Hebrew language, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda faced some difficulty, how can you revive an ancient language and make it fit for a modern world? To do this, he looked at the existing rules of Hebrew in the Bible based around every word having Roots – שׁוֹרְשֵׁים... The roots are the basic 3 letters appearing in words that have a similar meaning. He then used the root principle to come up with new words.

Example of שׁוֹרְשֵׁים:

Root – ד.ל.ד

דָּלַד – He Danced

דָּלְדוּ – They Danced

דוֹלְדִים – They are dancing

דוֹלְדוּ – Dance



In addition, he used some basic words and added new endings to them to make new words that are fit for modern times. For example, he took the word "רֶכֶב" which originally appears in the Tanakh (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel amongst others) as a chariot, and used it to create the new word "רֶכֶבֶת" which means train.



Eliezer Ben-Yehuda was so committed to the revival of Hebrew that he raised his son as the first native speaker of Ivrit in 2000 years, by only speaking to him in Ivrit, even though no one else could therefore talk with him outside the family. Itamar Ben-Yehuda, Eliezer's eldest son is the first Modern-Hebrew native speaking person in the world. After turning 18, Itamar legally changed his name to Itamar Ben א.ו.י - אִיטָמָר בֶּן אֵלִיעֶזֶר, meaning Itamar the son of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in commemoration of his father.

Discussion and Activity Tasks:



Imagine you wanted to invent a new word. What would it be and how would you go about creating this new word? Would there be some part of the word, that would link it to something else so that everyone could understand it better?

Can you create a dictionary of your favourite words in Ivrit. Try to create your own list of your favourite 10 words and share your list with friends. Maybe they have different words to you or the same ones. Can you have a conversation using your favourite words?

