

AROUND THE WORLD



Israel

Egypt

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



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PragerU Educational Magazine for Kids

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What is Religious Freedom?

Religious freedom is the fundamental right to choose what religion to follow and to worship or practice one's beliefs without interference.

Why is it important?

Many people throughout history have had to hide their faith for fear of persecution. Some have even fled their home country to find a new place where they could practice their religion freely. This was a major motivation of the Pilgrims who fled Europe for America, thus beginning what would later become one of the freest countries in the world: the United States of America. People who live in countries without religious freedom cannot say, express, or practice their beliefs openly because the government, officials, and even their neighbors could cause them harm. Everyone, no matter their religion, deserves the right to feel safe and free in living their life according to their convictions.

SHIRA PRAYS FOR PEACE

ISRAEL






Jerusalem,
the capital
of Israel

AFRICA

Welcome to Israel

Israel is a very small country in the Middle East that sits on the Mediterranean Sea. One could even drive across the entire country from north to south in about six hours. And yet, this tiny Jewish state is quite religiously and topographically diverse. The territory corresponding to the state of Israel and the capital city of Jerusalem is regarded by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike as the "Holy Land." As such, the holy land of three faiths is talked about around the world and attracts over 4 million visitors each year.



This land became the home of the Jewish people 4,000 years ago but most of them were expelled from their homeland after many wars and could not return until decades later. In 1948, following World War II and the murder of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, the Jewish people's prayers were finally answered and Israel was granted the legal right to exist by the United Nations.

Sadly, it continues to fight for its survival to this day. For decades, the United States has been a strong ally of Israel. In fact, the US was the first country to recognize Israel as a legitimate state in 1948, and the first to recognize Jerusalem as its capital in 2017. Both nations are united in their commitment to economic prosperity, democracy and regional security. These shared objectives keep the bond strong, as demonstrated by the exchange of military, technological, and medical advancements.



Fun Facts

- Size of population: 9 million
- Size of country: 8,550 square miles
- Languages: Hebrew and Arabic (English is the most widely-used foreign language)
- Neighboring countries: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria
- Only country in the world which had more trees at the end of the twentieth century than it did at the start of that century



Jerusalem

Israel's capital city of Jerusalem is considered by many to be the holiest city in the world. Located in the Judean Mountains, this 4,000-year-old city is a spiritual center for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Three main areas make up Jerusalem: the Old City, East Jerusalem, and West Jerusalem. The Old City is divided into quarters where each religious group (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity) is uniquely represented by its own distinctive characteristics. The Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are just a few of the holy sites that attract people to Jerusalem. Although some people are just visitors, many people consider Jerusalem their home. As a result, Jerusalem has become Israel's most populous city. This ancient city is also the heart of Israel's modern day government which is led by its prime minister and Parliament, known as the Knesset.



Tel Aviv

Israel's second most populous city, and most affluent city, Tel Aviv, is an economic engine. Centrally located on the Mediterranean coastal plain, like a little New York City, Tel Aviv is a center of big business, high-fashion, entertainment, and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange. It also has some of the most beautiful beaches in Israel, and is a major attraction for locals and tourists.



Meet Shira

This is Shira. She lives with her Jewish family in an apartment in Tel Aviv. Two blocks from her house is a mixed Arab-Jewish city called Jaffa. Like many other thirteen-year-old girls, Shira enjoys hanging out with her friends after school. But her best friend is Yasmin, a Muslim girl from Jaffa. Shira and Yasmin have been friends since they were eight years old, when they first began playing soccer together on the same team. While the girls have many differences in cultures and religious beliefs, they also have a lot in common, and enjoy learning from each other's differences. Thanks to Yasmin, Shira is almost fluent in Arabic, but most of the time they speak Hebrew with each other.



American Friend

Just like the United States of America, Israel is a nation of **immigrants** which prides itself on its freedom of religion and the freedom of all of its citizens, no matter their ethnicity or race. Over seventy different nationalities live in this tiny country. Uniquely, Israel is the only country in the Middle East which does not oppress its minority populations. Israel's laws and Supreme Court rulings protect these freedoms from being jeopardized.

Shira also has a pen-pal in the United States of America named Avery. Like Shira, Avery is in middle school. At first, Shira didn't think they would have much in common, but they do! Like Shira in Israel, Avery lives in one of the most populous and diverse cities in the USA – Houston, Texas. Avery's parents are even from different ethnic backgrounds. Both girls enjoy living in a **"melting pot"** and learning about others' cultures, but love celebrating their own nations most of all. Like the United States, Israel believes in free enterprise, strong national defense, individual freedoms, and a political system based on free elections. Both countries had to fight in wars for these freedoms and independence, which are still celebrated today. Shira and Avery enjoy sharing their experiences celebrating Yom Ha'Atzma'ut (Israel's Independence Day) and the Fourth of July (America's Independence Day) with one another each year. Just like on the Fourth of July, Shira celebrates Yom Ha'Atzma'ut with delicious foods and fireworks. Both girls recognize that uniting people in celebration of their nation is something to be proud of.



Immigrant:

A person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence.

Melting pot:

A country in which cultural assimilation results in blending the heritage and traditions of previously distinct ethnic groups.

Being one of the most educated countries in the world, Israel highly values quality education for all of its people. Shira's parents instilled the importance of education in their children at a young age, and they make many sacrifices to provide the best opportunities for their children. Since the expectations are high, middle school can be tough in Israel. Shira diligently studies every day, knowing that in a few years, like her sister Rotem, she will be tested to determine her placement in the Israeli military, known as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Unlike the voluntary military in the US, all Jewish Israeli citizens, both male and female, are required to join the IDF at the age of eighteen after graduating from high school. While it is not mandated, many Arab-Israeli men and women also join the military because they love Israel. Enlisting a diverse group of men and women, the Israeli military serves an important social role in uniting the country. Shira isn't sure if

she wants to be a combat soldier, but she does know the coolest jobs require a lot of hard work.

After school, Shira walks to her grandparents' house where her retired grandfather helps her with her schoolwork until her parents get home from work. He is a real history buff. Like most families in Israel, both Shira's mom and dad are professionals who contribute to Israel's workforce. Shira is grateful her grandparents moved to Tel Aviv, and she always looks forward to Friday afternoons at their house, where she helps prepare for the **Sabbath**. Smelling the **challah** (braided bread) baking as she walks in the door is one her favorite traditions. Gleeful because she doesn't have any homework on Fridays, Shira relishes getting to help her grandmother cook for the Sabbath and getting to listen to her grandfather tell stories about Israel's past.

Sabbath: The seventh day of the week, begins on Friday night and ends when the stars come out on Saturday night (approximately twenty-five hours). It is the day of rest for religious Jews and some Christians.

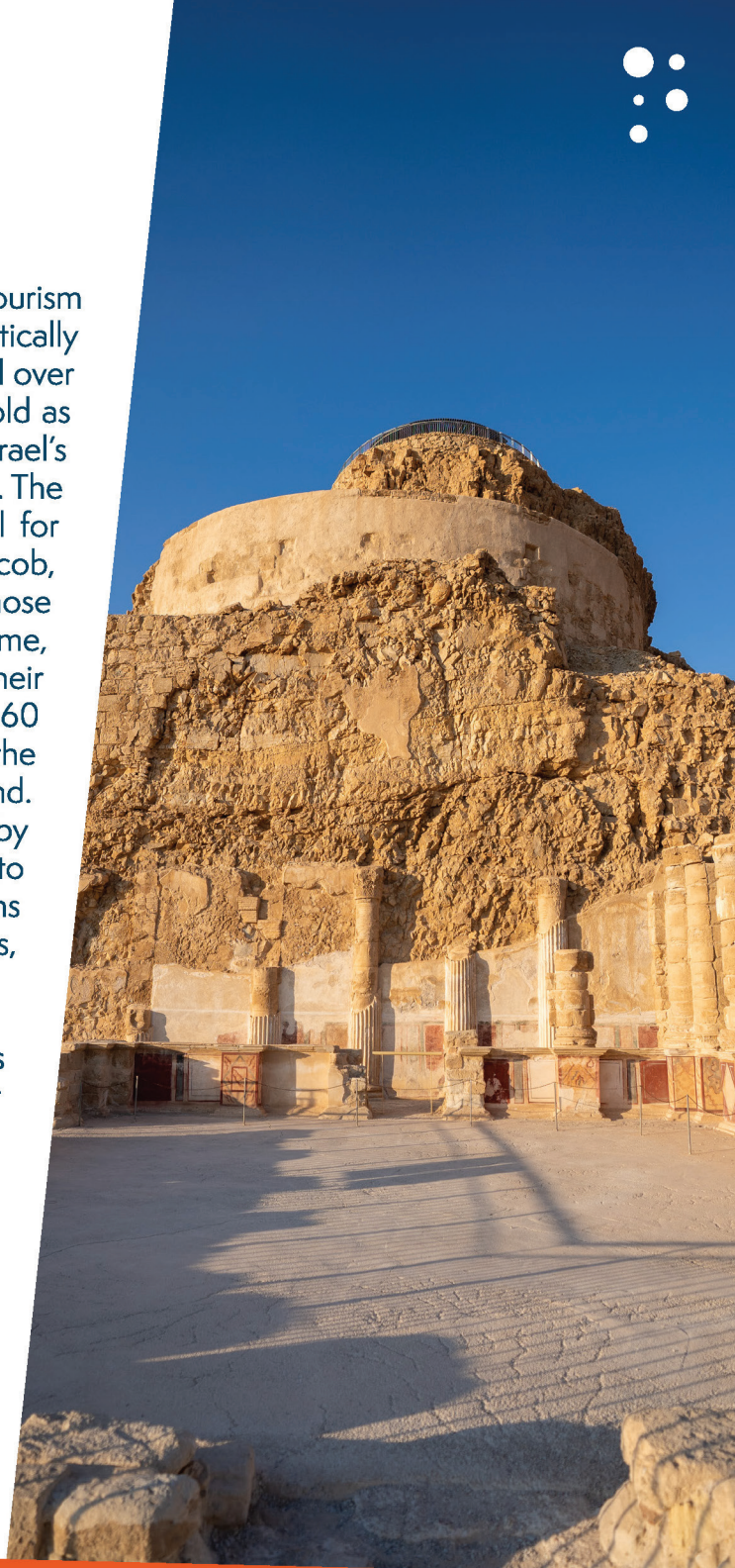
Challah: Braided bread, often eaten by Jews on the Sabbath.



Israel's Past

Shira's grandfather, Aryeh, recently retired from the tourism industry in Jerusalem. For many years, he enthusiastically shared the complex history of Israel with people from all over the world. Although Shira thinks her grandfather is as old as Israel, she forgets that the year of his birth, 1948, was Israel's rebirth. Israel has a rich past dating back to ancient times. The Bible relates that Jews have lived in the land of Israel for thousands of years. The Old Testament chronicles that Jacob, who was re-named "Israel" by God, had twelve sons, whose families became the twelve tribes of Israel. After some time, the twelve tribes were united, Jerusalem became their capital city, and the first Jewish temple was built around 960 BC. Eventually, the Jewish people were exiled by the Babylonians in 586 BC, although some Jews stayed behind. In the course of time, the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, who allowed the Jewish people to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Even after the Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great and the Greeks, some Jews still remained on their land.

Around 60 BC, the Romans occupied Israel. This occupation of Israel caused the First Jewish Revolt between 66-73 AD, which resulted in the deaths of many Jews. Many survivors fled the land. At this time, to decrease the Jewish connection to the land, the Romans renamed Judea "Palestine," after the ancient Biblical enemies of the Jews, the Philistines. For hundreds of years, the land of Israel changed powers. During these times many Jews suffered and were killed, but some of them always remained in their homeland of Israel.



960 BC

First Jewish temple built

586 BC

Jewish people exiled by Babylonians

60 BC

Romans occupied Israel

66-73 AD

First Jewish Revolt

1948 AD

Israel's rebirth



Israel's Rebirth

After World War I and World War II, the need for a Jewish homeland became very clear, because many Jews were murdered and persecuted with nowhere to escape to. At this time, Shira's great-grandparents immigrated to the land of Israel where they supported the Zionist movement (Zionists believe in the right of a Jewish homeland and a safe haven for Jewish refugees). Incredibly, in 1948, Israel was legally declared an independent state by the United Nations, and soon after, Shira's grandfather, Aryeh, was born. Immediately after declaring independence, Israel was attacked by surrounding Arab states, beginning the first Arab-Israeli war. During this time, many Arabs fled the new state of Israel, and many more Jews fled Arab countries to try and get to Israel. During this transfer of populations, Shira's grandmother, Hannah, and her family came from Morocco and settled in Israel.

On many occasions, Israel sought peace with the surrounding countries and the local Palestinians. After several devastating wars, they were able to sign two peace treaties, one with Egypt in 1979, and one with Jordan in 1994. Sadly, despite many attempts, Israel has not been able to achieve a much-desired peace agreement with the local Palestinians. Every night, before Shira goes to bed, she prays that God will bring peace to the entire region, and that there will be no more wars against Israel.



1948 AD

Israel's
rebirth

1979 AD

Signed
peace
treaty
with
Egypt

1994 AD

Signed
peace
treaty
with
Jordan

Today





Start-up Nation

Israel, like the United States, allows its citizens the freedom to develop their individual talents through **entrepreneurship**. Taking advantage of this opportunity, with self-discipline and hard-work, Aryeh and Hannah grew a successful tourism business that supported the influx of visitors in Jerusalem.

Nicknamed the “Start-Up Nation,” Israel has the largest number of start-ups per-capita in the world. Incredible technologies such as ICQ, first instant messenger, Waze, a navigation device, and many biotech innovations came from this little country. As a result, Israel has been able to share these remarkable technologies with many around the world. Shira is enormously grateful that she lives in an innovative country that provides her with the support and the opportunities to be her personal best. She hopes to follow in her parents’ footsteps one day by inventing a life-saving product.

Entrepreneurship:
The act of taking on financial risks and building a company in the hopes of creating economic value.



Parents of Innovation



This is Bella, Shira's mom. She is a part of an Israeli "think-tank." Serving in the Israel Defense Forces for two years, Bella received special training which laid the foundation for her future career as an engineer. After serving in the military, Bella continued her education at Tel Aviv University. With a passion for people and robotics, Bella began to work in one of Israel's largest and most innovative systems – medical technology. In partnership with the inspiring and gifted team of scientists at Rewalk, Bella developed assistive technology to help disabled people be mobile again. This wearable robotic exoskeleton assists people in everyday movements such as standing, walking, turning, and climbing. This is amazing! Bella couldn't be happier she is improving the lives of people around the world. More fascinating medical technology devices created by Israelis include: a device that can smell disease, a swallowable pill-camera, and a flexible stent, used in life-saving heart surgeries.



This is Dov, Shira's dad. He is an engineer, too. Growing up in Israel, a country with limited water sources, Dov feared running out of fresh water to drink! Throughout his life, Dov and his community had to practice extreme water conservation measures. He never ran the water while brushing his teeth, and his mother would time his showers to avoid overuse. Knowing fresh water shortages plagued his country, Dov worked diligently on finding a solution. Dov and his colleagues developed one of the most cutting-edge inventions in the world – **desalination**. Desalination is the process of taking salt water and turning it into usable, drinkable, fresh water. As of 2016, over 50% of Israel's fresh water comes from desalination. As a world leader in desalination, Israel, which was once one of the driest places in the world, now has an abundance of fresh water. As a result, people no longer stress over the need for water. With this knowledge in hand, Israel is helping the world, including California, solve their problems from drought.

Desalination:
The process of taking salt water and turning it into usable, drinkable, fresh water.

Under Attack

This is Rotem, Shira's older sister. Sadly, Rotem and Shira have grown up during a time of ongoing attacks from terrorist organizations, including Hamas, whose primary goal is to destroy Israel. Both girls have been trained on how to respond to surprise attacks at school and at home. Unfortunately, bomb drills at school are as common in Israel as fire drills are in the United States. Rotem and Shira's family are prepared at home with a surplus of supplies piled high in their bomb shelter located in their apartment, which also acts as Rotem's room. Rotem complains about the heavy window and the coldness of the cinder-block walls, but having nighttime access to the extra snacks and drinks does have its advantages.

Rotem is in her last year of high school and she can't wait to become a combat soldier in the Israel Defense Forces. Understanding she will have to train hard and commit to more years of service because she wants to be a combat soldier, Rotem is ready for the challenge and the risk. Since the competition is fierce, she has spent years taking advanced classes, and even more time studying. Rotem loves her country and wants to devote her life to protect her community from the dangers of those who don't want Israel to exist. She is already looking forward to celebrating her enrollment in the army at her enlistment party with her friends and family.



Above all else, like Rotem, Israel yearns to protect the lives of innocent people. Israel has been a victim of terrorist attacks for many years. Since 2008, Israel has had to protect itself in four wars and from numerous other terrorists attacks. Most recently, in 2021, the Palestinian terror group Hamas launched over 4,000 rockets directly at the populous cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in an attempt to obtain mass casualties and chaos. Sadly, during this eleven-day conflict, many people, including children, lost their lives. Hamas, which is the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and supported by Iran, frequently launches rockets at Israeli civilians in an attempt to crush the Jewish state. Unfortunately, in the process of trying to achieve this goal, Hamas purposefully risks the lives of, and even kills, many Palestinians by launching their rockets from residential areas, including from schools and hospitals, and using civilians as "human shields."

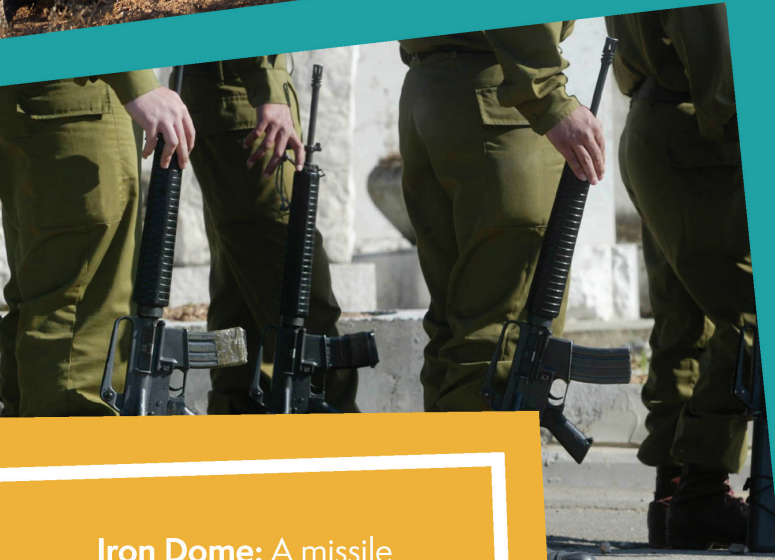



Military Strength

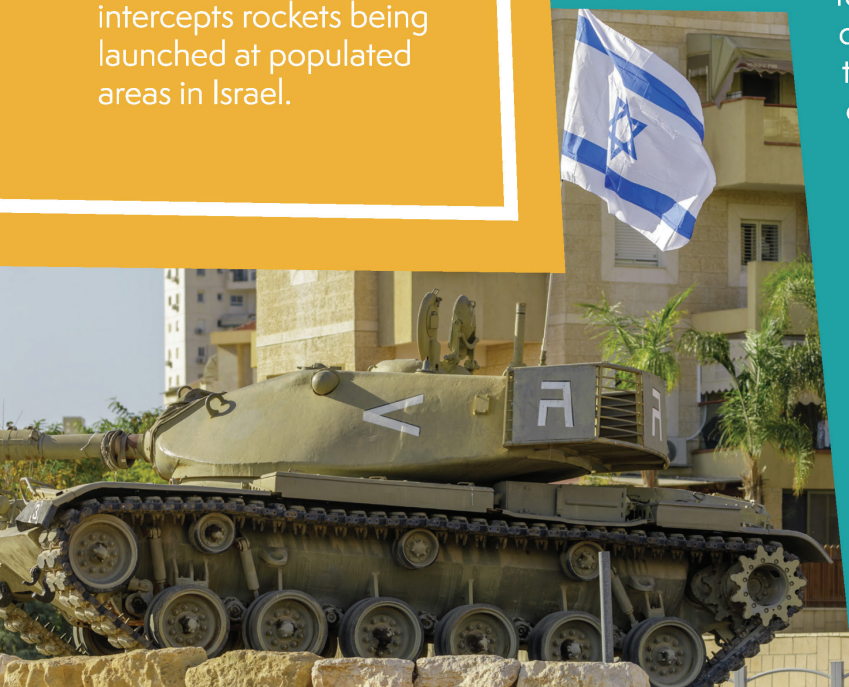
Knowing the Jews have no other guaranteed safe haven, Israel established the Israel Defense Forces on May 31, 1948, and has made it its mission to never lose a war. Like the United States military, the IDF consists of an army, a navy, and an air force. Within each of these units lies specialized forces who receive specific training in different forms of combat and counterterrorism. Needing to constantly defend itself, Israel depends on its active military and its enormous reserve forces. All reserve military personnel receive annual training to maintain their skills in order to be ready to fight at a moment's notice. Shira's father Dov, eagerly participates in training and service every year, understanding he is protecting his country.

Prioritizing the safety of its people, Israel has developed a unique partnership with the United States government to help protect its borders. The US has committed to assist Israel in maintaining its military edge in the Middle East in exchange for intelligence concerning security and innovative strategies. This relationship also provides economic opportunities for the US, where technology components are manufactured. One of Israel and the United States' greatest technological successes was the co-development of the **Iron Dome** in 2011. The Iron Dome is an incredible missile defense system that intercepts rockets being launched at populated areas in Israel. Protecting Israel from attacks, this machine has successfully stopped thousands of missiles from destroying Israeli cities, and prevented the deaths of many of its citizens. Ultimately, the Iron Dome reduces death and destruction without harming anyone.

Shira, like all Israeli citizens, knows that when she turns eighteen she will also enlist in the IDF. She eagerly looks forward to serving her country in the best way she can.



Iron Dome: A missile defense system that intercepts rockets being launched at populated areas in Israel.



Challenge Yourself

In Israel, almost everybody serves their country by enlisting in the military. If you were to serve your country, how would you do it?



Scripture



Christian scripture is called the Bible



Jewish scripture is called the Torah



Muslim scripture is called the Quran

Matching

Draw a line to match each vocabulary word to its definition.

Melting Pot

The seventh day of the week, begins on Friday night and ends when the stars come out on Saturday night.

Immigrant

Braided bread, often eaten by Jews on the Sabbath.

Sabbath

A person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence.

Entrepreneurship

A missile defense system that intercepts rockets being launched at populated areas in Israel.

Challah

A country in which cultural assimilation results in blending the heritage and traditions of previously distinct ethnic groups.

Desalination

The process of taking salt water and turning it into usable, drinkable, fresh water.

Iron Dome

The act of taking on financial risks and building a company in the hopes of creating economic value.



Traditional Recipe for Challah



Cook Time: 25-30 minutes

Yield: 4 loaves

Ingredients:

- Poppy or sesame seeds (optional)
- 9 1/4 cups flour
- 4 eggs, beaten, plus 2 yolks or 1 whole egg for glazing
- 1 Tablespoon salt
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 1/4 cups lukewarm water
- 2 Tablespoons dry yeast
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil

Instructions:

1. Dissolve the yeast and 1 tsp of sugar in the water. Beat well. Leave for about 10 minutes or until it froths.
2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs. Add the salt, sugar, and oil. Beat again. Add the frothy yeast mixture. Beat well.
3. Add the flour gradually, only add enough for the dough to come together in a soft ball.
4. Knead for 15 minutes. The dough should be very smooth and elastic. Add flour if the dough is too sticky.
5. Spray a bowl with cooking oil. Place dough in greased bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let dough rise in a warm place for 2-3 hours.
6. Divide the dough in 4 pieces. Set 3 aside. Divide 1 piece of the dough into 3. Roll each piece out in a long rope about an inch thick. Pinch one end of all 3 ropes together and plait them: bring the rope on the right over the middle one, then bring the one on the left over it, and continue to the end. Pinch the ends together and tuck them under the loaf. Do this with the remaining 3 pieces of dough.
7. Place the 4 loaves on greased baking sheets. Leave room for them to get bigger. Let rise for 1 hour.
8. Preheat oven to 350 F. Now brush gently with the beaten egg yolks. Sprinkle with poppy or sesame seeds (optional).
9. Bake for 30-40 minutes or until the loaves are golden-brown. You will know that they are done if they sound hollow when you tap the bottoms.



Israeli Salad

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Yield: 8 servings

Ingredients:

- 5 medium cucumbers
- 3 fresh, ripe tomatoes
- 1 medium onion
- 1/2 cup minced fresh parsley
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- Salt to taste

Instructions:

1. Dice the cucumbers and tomatoes.
2. Mince the onion and fresh parsley.
3. Place all of the ingredients into a large mixing bowl.
4. Mix until vegetables are well coated with parsley, oil, lemon juice, and salt.
5. Best served fresh at room temperature. You can also serve chilled for a more refreshing salad.



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Images: Getty Images, 123rf, Unsplash

Answer key:

Sabbath

The seventh day of the week, begins on Friday night and ends when the stars come out on Saturday night.

Challah

Braided bread, often eaten by Jews on the Sabbath.

Immigrant

A person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence.

Iron Dome

A missile defense system that intercepts rockets being launched at populated areas in Israel.

Melting Pot

A country in which cultural assimilation results in blending the heritage and traditions of previously distinct ethnic groups.

Desalination

The process of taking salt water and turning it into usable, drinkable, fresh water.

Entrepreneurship

The act of taking on financial risks and building a company in the hopes of creating economic value.

BISHOY CHOOSES BRAVERY

EGYPT





Welcome to Egypt

The Nile is the world's longest river, and one of the most famous bodies of water on Earth. It flows from the highlands of Northeastern Africa, through the mighty Sahara Desert, and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. Groups of people have lived together along the banks of the Nile for as long as humans have kept records, and for thousands of years, those occupying the northern half of the river's shores have been known as Egyptians. In ancient times, the Egyptians were ruled by kings they called pharaohs, who built magnificent monuments and pyramids up and down the Nile River Valley.



Today, there is an independent country named Egypt, but from 332 BC until 1952 AD, outsiders ruled the land where Egyptians lived and worked. From 30 BC until around 640 AD, the land of the Egyptians was controlled by the Romans, and during this time a new religion spread throughout their empire.

According to church tradition, Christianity arrived in Egypt around 42 AD through the Apostle Mark. He started a church in the port city of Alexandria, and the religion began to spread. The Romans eventually lost control of Egypt to invaders from Arabia, and the new ruler's name for the Egyptian people was **Copt**. Local Egyptian customs and traditions were called Coptic, and the kind of Christianity that had developed in Egypt became known as the Coptic Orthodox Church.



Copt:

A native Egyptian in ancient times, but in more recent times, a member of the Christian Coptic Orthodox Church.





Meet Bishoy

This is Bishoy. He lives with his family in Egypt's capital city, Cairo. Like many Egyptian boys his age, Bishoy is obsessed with soccer. When he's not playing, he's either watching matches on TV or trying to steal his older sister's phone to watch soccer highlights on YouTube. The top Egyptian professionals play for clubs in Europe, and Bishoy collects their jerseys, but most days he can be found wearing the jersey of the Egyptian national team – nicknamed the Pharaohs. Until recently, Bishoy mostly played soccer with his friends and neighbors in unorganized games on the street, but last year he tried out for a prestigious youth club team and made the squad. It took him a while to adjust to having coaches and playing with referees, but he's now the starting striker and his team's top goal scorer.

When Bishoy decided to try out for his club team, many of his friends and neighbors were surprised, and some were even concerned. They thought he had no chance of making the team, not because he isn't talented – Bishoy is tall for his age, has blazing speed, and has a powerful shot with either foot. Their doubt had nothing to do with Bishoy's ability – it was because he and his family are Coptic Christians.



Invasion of a New Religion

In the year 639 AD, another new religion arrived in the Nile River Valley, but this time it was brought by an army. Guided by their faith, soldiers from neighboring Arabia invaded Egypt with goals to rule over the Egyptians and spread the teachings of a man named Muhammad and his religion, **Islam**. By 646 AD, the Muslim Arabs won and ended Roman rule. Egypt was now ruled by **Muslims**, the name of the followers of Islam.

At the beginning of Muslim rule, most Egyptians were Christians, but over the centuries, that changed. Today, the population of Egypt is roughly 100 million, and most Egyptians are Muslims, but there remains a significant minority group of Christians who have kept the Coptic Orthodox Church beliefs and traditions. At the beginning of Muslim rule, all Egyptians were known as Copts, but as the number of Muslims grew, the name Copt began to fade. Today, the only Egyptians called Copts are the Coptic Christians, and while they are the largest non-Muslim religious group in any Islamic country, no one knows for sure how many there are. There could be as many as 20 million Copts in Egypt. There could be as few as 8.5 million. It is difficult to keep track, because after centuries of **discrimination** and oppression, many Copts feel the need to hide their religion.

Islam:

A religion founded by a man named Muhammad in the 7th century in what is now Saudi Arabia. With about 2 billion followers worldwide, it is the world's second largest religion.

Muslim:

A person who believes in and practices Islam.

Discrimination:

The unjust treatment of a category of people.



History of Oppression

Bishoy's dad is named Ash. He loves soccer, too, and once dreamed of being a member of the national team and playing for the Pharaohs. The older men in Bishoy's neighborhood like to remind him that when Ash was his age, his father was the better player. But Ash never played for a prestigious youth club team – very few Copts ever do. Even though Egypt is a nation where citizens are free to choose their religion, there are very different customs, expectations, and even laws for non-Muslims. If an Egyptian chooses not to be Muslim, they are often treated differently, and sometimes treated very badly. A result has been that in certain areas, Copts don't participate except in rare situations. It is very uncommon for Copts to participate in government or the military, and it is extremely rare for Copts to work as police or play high-level soccer.

After the Muslim takeover of Egypt was complete, Copts were allowed to choose between converting to Islam or continuing as Christians. Egyptians who chose to become Muslims changed their religion, but were allowed to continue living similarly to the way they did before the Arab takeover. Copts who chose Christianity were forced to pay higher taxes and follow new laws. Coptic Christians were not allowed to build new churches, and damaged churches were not allowed to be repaired. Christians were not permitted to speak about their faith in public, but they needed to be easily identified as different, so they were not allowed to dress like Muslims. Their homes were not to be larger than those owned by Muslims, and if a Muslim wanted to sit in a seat occupied by a Christian, the Christian had to give the seat up. Christians were forbidden from owning weapons, and they were not allowed to lead, govern, or employ a Muslim.



In return for following the rules, Christians received protection from violence. They were not included in the military, and Muslims were not supposed to physically attack them. Muslims and Christians were permitted to live together in Egypt, but the law treated them very differently.

Over the centuries, some of the differences have relaxed, and some no longer exist, but what hasn't changed is that if Egyptian Christians (the modern-day Copts) follow their special set of rules, then their government rulers are required to protect them from violence. Since the Muslim takeover, Egypt has been led by a long list of different governments – sometimes these governments have protected the Copts and sometimes they haven't.



Rami Malek

Academy Award-winning actor born in California to Egyptian parents. Because he speaks Arabic, Malek is often inaccurately referred to as Arab, but he is not. He and his family are among the hundreds of thousands of Coptic-Americans who live in the USA.

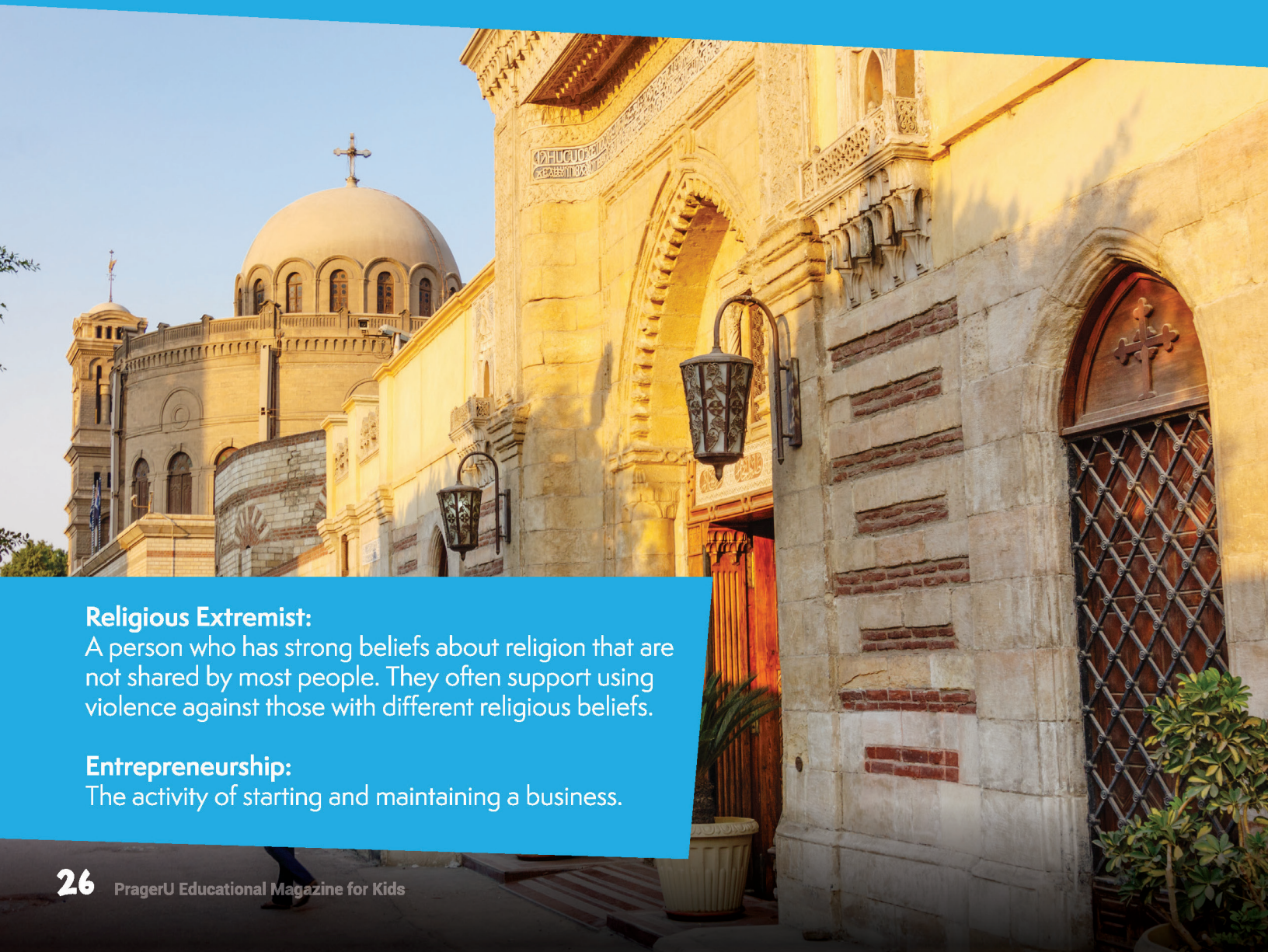




Modern Violence

Ash quit playing soccer when he was not much older than Bishoy is today. Like many Copts, he decided to focus on academics, business, and his Christian faith. In part because they were kept from the military, Copts have a long tradition of valuing education and **entrepreneurship**. Today's Copts usually have higher levels of education and often make more money than their Muslim neighbors, and this has been typical in Egypt for generations.

Over the years, most of Egypt's Muslims have been friendly with Copts and friendships between Muslims and Christians is normal and common. Many Copts are doctors and lawyers, and many of Egypt's most successful businesses are Copt-owned. Ash has a lumber company that supplies wood for making furniture. Laws forbidding Muslims to work for Christians no longer exist in Egypt, and Ash has many Muslim employees. Some have worked for him for over ten years and feel like family. However, not all Muslims are nice to their Coptic Christian neighbors, and some believe Egypt should only be a place for Muslims to live. These Egyptians who want Christianity removed from Egypt are considered **religious extremists**, and there is a long history of these types of Muslims hurting Copts through intimidation and violence.



Religious Extremist:

A person who has strong beliefs about religion that are not shared by most people. They often support using violence against those with different religious beliefs.

Entrepreneurship:

The activity of starting and maintaining a business.



In late 2010 when Bishoy was a toddler, a series of anti-government protests and uprisings began spreading through the Islamic countries of North Africa. People wanted changes in society and the protests sparked a movement called the Arab Spring, which quickly made its way to Egypt. Ever since the 1970s, Muslim extremists have committed more and more intimidation and violence against Christians. The outbreak of the protests led many in Copt communities, like Bishoy's neighborhood in Cairo, to hope for more peace between Muslims and non-Muslims in Egypt.

The **Arab Spring** indeed brought changes to the country, but hopes for a safer Egypt soon disappeared. While the Egyptian military and political groups argued over how to run the country, Muslim extremists intensified their attacks on the Copts. In January of 2011, an extremist group called the Army of Islam bombed the Coptic Orthodox Church of Saint Mark and Pope Peter in Alexandria. The bomb was set off during a Christian religious celebration, killed 23, and left 97 injured.

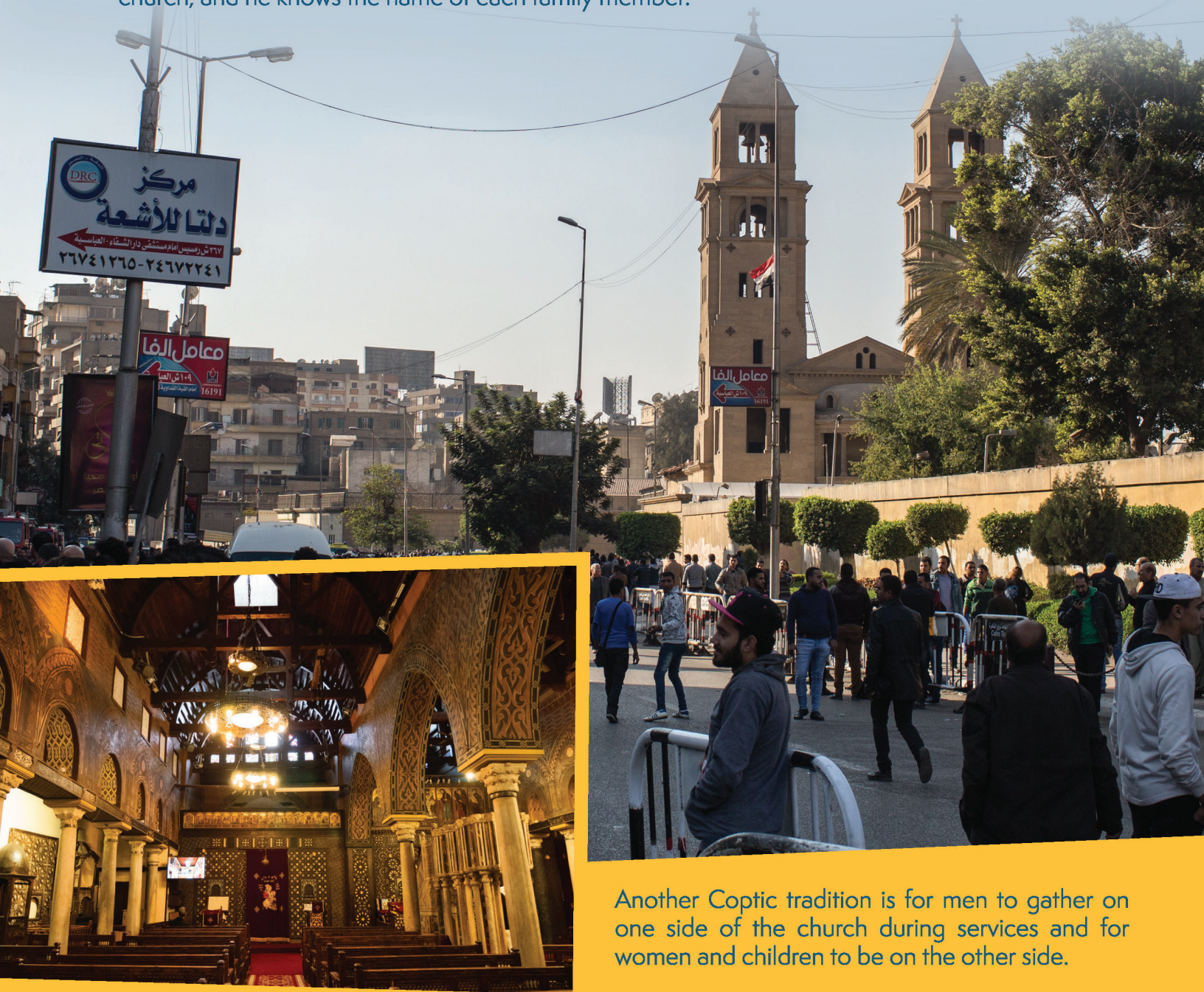
Extremists who do not think Copts have the right to exist in Egypt began burning churches across the country (63 Egyptian Coptic Orthodox churches were set on fire in 2013 alone), and rarely did six months go by without news coming to Bishoy's neighborhood of something terrible happening to his fellow Copts. Eventually, the anti-Christian violence came to Cairo, and even to Bishoy's church, but miraculously, nothing happened to him or his family.



Arab Spring:
A series of uprisings against government corruption and economic problems that spread across several Arab countries in the early 2010s.

Terror Strikes

The leader of the Roman Catholic Christian church is given the title of Pope. Their current Pope is named Francis, he lives in the Vatican City in Europe, and he is famous around the world. One of the many unique traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Church is that they too have a Pope. He's named Tawadros II (Theodore the 2nd, in English), but outside of Egypt, he isn't widely known. Although Coptic Christianity began in Alexandria, the headquarters of the Church moved to Cairo after the Arab invasion. It is common for Pope Tawadros II to travel to many different Coptic churches, but his home congregation worships at St. Mark's Cathedral in Bishoy's neighborhood – Old Cairo. In fact, Bishoy's family regularly attends Pope Tawadros's home church, and he knows the name of each family member.



Another Coptic tradition is for men to gather on one side of the church during services and for women and children to be on the other side.

On December 11, 2016, at about 10:00 AM, a bomb exploded during Sunday morning worship service inside of a chapel at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. Ash was in attendance, but was unharmed because the bomb detonated on the side of the building near the place where his wife and children usually sit. The massive explosion killed 29 people, and injured another 47, but fortunately Bishoy and his mother and sister were unharmed. His sister had been feeling sick, and Bishoy and his mom stayed home with her that day.

Pope Tawadros II was also away that morning. He was visiting another church, but after hearing the news of the blast, he rushed back to Cairo and began publicly pleading with the Egyptian government to protect Copts from Muslim extremists. Government leaders made statements criticizing the extremists, called for a united Egypt, and promised higher security, but a wave of anti-Copt violence swept over the country. 2017 saw 81 Copts murdered by Muslim extremists and forced the Egyptian military to tighten security around Christians.



Coptic Pope Selection

When it comes time to select a new Coptic Pope, a ceremony is held and names of three respected religious leaders are each written on separate pieces of paper and placed in a container. A 12-year-old Copt boy is blind-folded and he selects one piece of paper. The religious leader whose name is on the selected paper becomes the next Pope.



Bishoy's New Job

Thankfully, the killings have drastically reduced over the last few years, but extremists still attempt to make life uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous for Copts. Armed guards protect Coptic churches now, but it is common for groups of Muslim extremists to gather near church entrances to yell insults. Copts like Bishoy and his family are regularly verbally abused on their way in and out of worship services. The extremists curse the Copts, insult their faith, and shout lies about how and when Christianity came to Egypt.

The lies and insults don't feel good, but Bishoy and his family live with them, and Ash has taught his children to walk proudly and ignore what extremists say. This is important, because now that Bishoy is bigger than his mom and almost as tall as his dad, he serves as his sister's primary escort. Each year, an unknown number of Copt teenaged girls are kidnapped by extremists and forced to convert to Islam. Copt girls walking alone are easy targets, so anytime his sister goes shopping or visits friends, Bishoy has to tag along. Having another pair of eyes to watch for trouble is necessary.

Most boys are nervous when they begin escorting their sisters around town, but it was easy for Bishoy. After trying out for and making his soccer club, he walks with confidence.

Courage and Bravery

Each season, over 500 Egyptian men play for one of the 18 teams in the Egyptian professional soccer league. However, despite having between 10 and 20 percent of the population, over the past 30 years only 12 players in the league have been Christians (that's less than 0.01%). It isn't because soccer isn't popular among Copts – most boys are like Bishoy and love the game. Even Pope Tawadros II has commented about the lack of Copts who play at high levels. There are no rules against Copts playing professionally, but there have long been fears that Copts will not be safe in soccer stadiums, and that clubs will not treat Copt players fairly. It is nearly impossible to advance to high levels of soccer without playing for prestigious youth teams, and since all of those teams are led by Muslim coaches and are full of Muslim players, very rarely do Copt boys even try out.

When Bishoy asked his dad if he could try out for the team he's on now, Ash beamed with pride and excitedly gave his permission. Ash has long regretted that he never attempted to play with and against Muslims, and he was excited for his son to try.

Word of Bishoy's tryout spread through the neighborhood, and responses were mixed. Some people were worried that Bishoy would not be given a fair chance by the Muslim coaches, and there were fears that Muslim players may try to harm him. Interestingly, Bishoy received the most passionate encouragement from his father's Muslim employees, who, like most Egyptian Muslims, love and respect their Copt countrymen. Before the tryout, these men filled Bishoy with confidence by telling him that what matters on the soccer pitch is a player's skills, effort, and attitude – not whether he or she is Christian or Muslim.

Tattoos on Copt Kids


In a tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages, many Copts get a small tattoo of a Christian cross during their childhood.





Before the first day of tryouts, Bishoy asked Ash if he should cover his tattoo with a wristband. Like many Copt boys and girls, Bishoy was given a tattoo of a Christian cross when he was young. For centuries, so that they could easily be identified as non-Muslims, Copts were forced to look different from Muslims. As a result, for centuries now, Copts have tattooed Christian symbols on themselves. Bishoy has a cross on his wrist. Ash told him it was his choice, but that whether or not he covered up his cross, the only pathway to success was to play with courage and bravery.

Bishoy decided not to cover his tattoo, and even though he was nervous and scared on the inside, he refused to show it outwardly during the tryout. The first time a defender gave him a hard foul and knocked him to the ground, every coach and player watched to see how the Copt boy would respond. Would Bishoy stay down on the ground? Would he get up and foul the defender in response? Instead, Bishoy did neither; he quickly jumped to his feet, made a run for the goal, called for the ball, received a good pass, and buried the ball in the back of the net! The coaches running the tryout couldn't hide their excitement and cheered. Bishoy celebrated his goal by kissing his cross tattoo, and his nervousness and fear vanished.



When it was announced that Bishoy had made the team, not everyone was happy. Two players quit the team because their families did not want their sons to play with a Christian, and some Copts in the neighborhood believed the new attention Bishoy would receive could bring harm. However, Ash and his new coaches told him not to worry about negativity from others. Bishoy is very popular with all of the boys who remained on the team, and his father could not be prouder. There are even a few Copt boys who are thinking about trying out at the next opportunity.

Life in Egypt is not easy for Copts. For over a thousand years, they have lived in fear that violence could be right around the corner, and it often has been. Bishoy has decided he is not going to live life guided by what could or might happen. Whether going to church with his family, walking around the city with his sister, or playing soccer on the pitch, Bishoy is choosing to be brave.



The Nile River is 4,132 miles.

Fun Facts



95% of the population in Egypt lives along the Nile River.



Egypt lies in the north of the African continent.



Ancient Egyptians invented the first known 365-day calendar.



The official language spoken in Egypt is Arabic.



The capital of Egypt is Cairo.



102 million people currently live in Egypt.



Egypt is believed to be about 90% Muslim.



Egypt is home to about 118 pyramids.

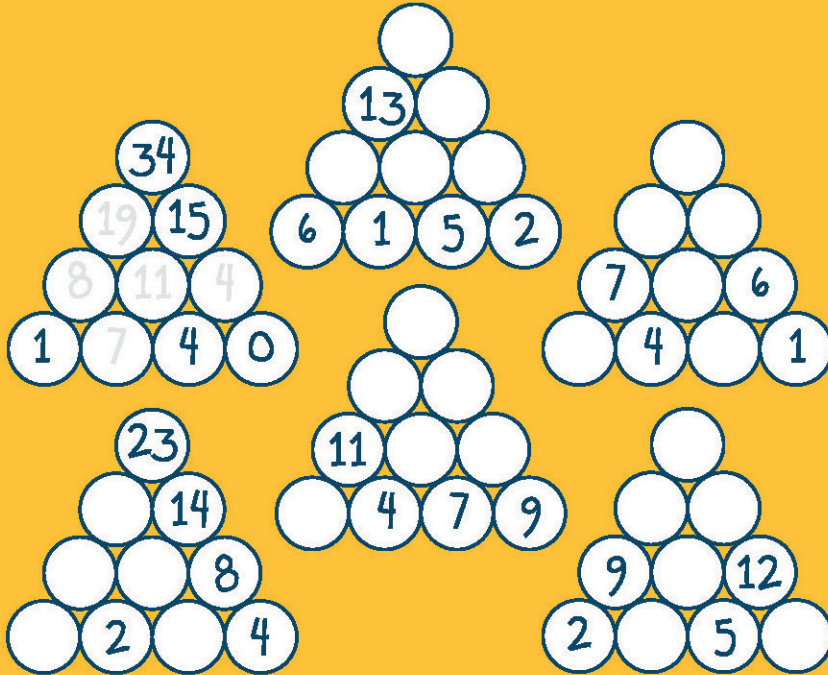


Egypt gets between 0.5 and 8 inches of rain during the entire year.



Math Pyramids

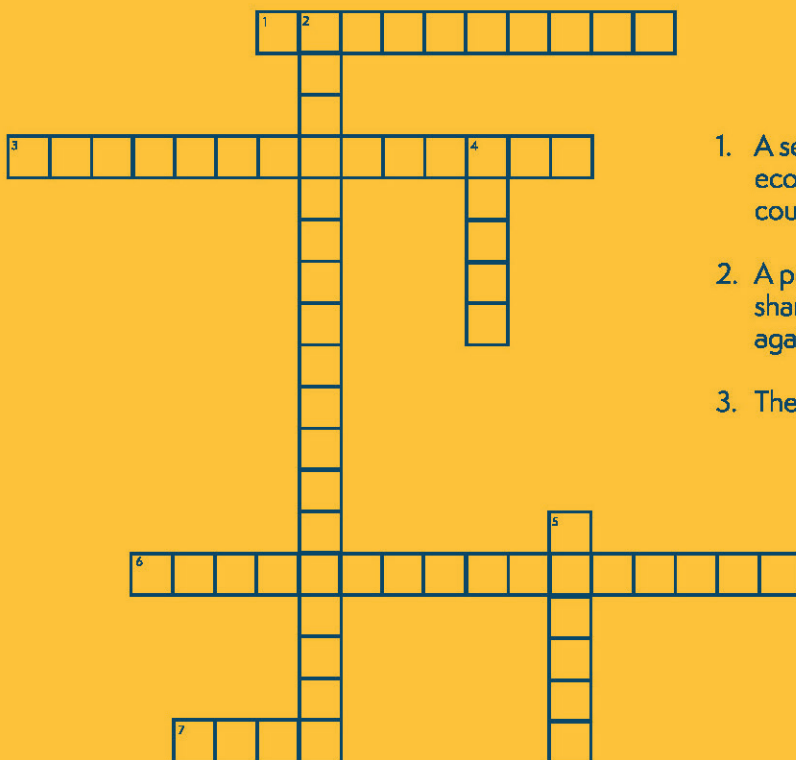
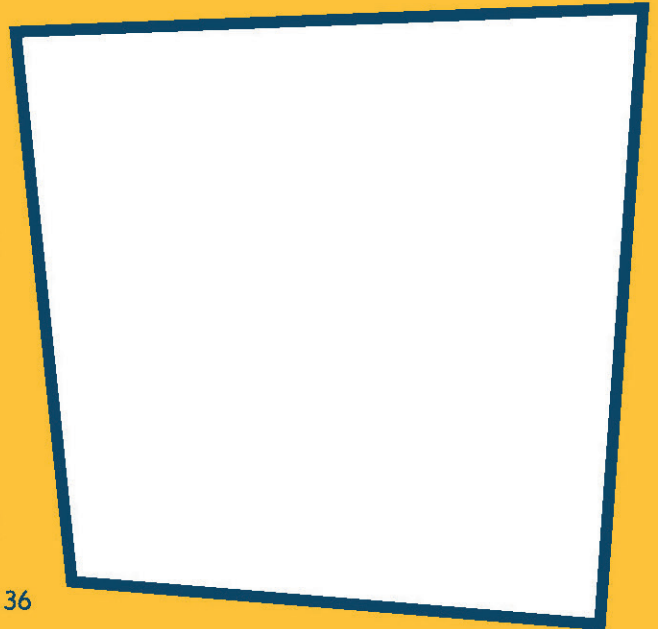
Add the numbers next to each other in each row.
Write the answer in the circle above the two numbers.
Add up and subtract down.



ANSWERS ON PG 36

Hieroglyphs

Ancient Egyptians didn't have the alphabet that we use today. Instead, they wrote using hieroglyphics, which often used symbols. Hieroglyphs were like ancient emojis. Create a message using just emojis. Then ask a friend to decipher your message.



Crossword

1. A series of uprisings against government corruption and economic problems that spread across several Arab countries in the early 2010s.
2. A person who has strong beliefs about religion that are not shared by most people. They often support using violence against those with different religious beliefs.
3. The unjust treatment of a category of people.
4. A religion founded by a man named Muhammad in the 7th century in what is now Saudi Arabia.
5. A person who believes in and practices Islam.
6. The activity of starting and maintaining a business.
7. A native Egyptian in ancient times, but in more recent times, a member of the Christian Coptic Orthodox Church.

ANSWERS ON PG 36

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Images: Getty Images

Answers:



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An illustration of five diverse cartoon characters standing in front of a world map. From left to right: a man in a military uniform, a boy in a blue and white soccer jersey with the number 30, a girl with long brown hair in a blue top and yellow skirt, a girl with dark skin in a yellow top and patterned skirt, and a boy in an orange shirt and dark shorts.

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