

Going Up/Aliyah to Israel (On the Structure and Origin of the Expression)

Lali Guledani* and Tamari Lomtadze**

*Iliia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

**Akaki Tsereteli State University, Kutaisi, Georgia

(Presented by Academy Member Avtandil Arabuli)

ABSTRACT. In the 20th century, after the establishment of the state of Israel, the Jews started hoping that they would go back to their historical homeland. In their speech the expression “Aliyah to Jerusalem” appeared. If in Georgia the word “Aliyah” was used to denote moving to Israel, in Israel the parallel expression “going up to Israel” appeared. It is noteworthy that the Jews use the word “going up” to denote returning/moving/arrival in Israel or Jerusalem when they speak Georgian but in any other cases when they speak about arriving in another country, they use relevant words. In the Hebrew language another verb is used to express this idea (the verb הגיע - higia’ – “He has arrived”). The Hebrew word “Aliyah” is a highly significant lexical unit in the new history of the people having a distinct fate. That is why, it was spread in Georgia as well. However, in order to express the distinctive historical, religious and geographical meaning that is related to the return of the Jews according to their beliefs the Georgian Jews living in Israel used a Georgian verb form *asvla* “to go up” (which should be a Hebrew loan translation) in parallel with the term “Aliyah”. However, it is supposed that the basis of the Georgian *asvla* “to go up” is religious beliefs as in the world and especially in the Jewish consciousness Jerusalem (and even the whole Israel) is considered to be a holy land. © 2019 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: going up to Israel, Aliyah, Georgian Jews

Twenty-six centuries old coexistence of the Jews in Georgia was friendly and harmonious but they had never forgotten their historical homeland returning to which was the centuries-old dream. Therefore, every New Year began with the expression **הבאה בשנה בירושלים** (be Shana haba’a biruShalaim) “Next year in Jerusalem” and every Jew often repeated the phrase:

...אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני...
ierushalaim tishqax iamini) that says "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten".

In the 20th century, after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, despite the Soviet Communist regime the Jews started hoping that their centuries-old dream would become true. In their speech the expression “Aliyah to Jerusalem” appeared and they hoped that God would give them power to join this “Aliyah”. At that time for many of the Jews who did not know the language (those were the majority) and moreover, for Georgians, it was unclear what the word “Aliyah”, attested in the speech of the Jews, meant. It is not surprising

because it is known that the majority of the Georgian Jews who constantly read sacred books and prayers in the synagogues did not understand the meanings of the words they read.

In 1967, 18 families managed to return to their homeland that was followed by mass Aliyah in the 70s and then in the 90s.

As stated above, the Jews living in Georgia did not speak Hebrew. A relatively small number, especially rabbis and their family members spoke Ivrit. They were the ones who spread the word “Aliyah” in Georgia.

After returning to Israel, the Jews learned Hebrew but the competence of knowing the language was quite different between the generations. The social-cultural level and the possibilities of accessing information was different as well. If in Georgia the word “Aliyah” was used to denote moving to Israel, in Israel the parallel expression “going up to Israel” appeared: *israelSi rom amovedit sacxovreblad, maSin Kvelaperi sxvagvarad iKo; 70-ian wlebSi vinc amovida ak, bevrad rtuli pirobebi daxvdat, magrama maSin daxmarebac meti iKo...* “When we came up to Israel to settle here, then everything was different; those who came up here in the 70s were in a more difficult situation but then, they got more help...”

The Jews who moved to Israel from Georgia explain the expression “going up to Jerusalem/Israel” in different ways, e.g. 1) “Jerusalem is at higher altitude and you go up there”; 2) “Israel is a holy land where you are nearer to God and we use the term “going up”; 3) “We use this term to refer those who come here for the permanent residence but as for the tourists (even the Jews), we just say that they come there”.

In Hebrew the verb **עלה**-, 'ala(h)“ conveys two main meanings: 1. to go up (at height); 2. to cost. The word “aliyah” denotes repatriation and was derived from the root 'ala(h) as well as the word “repatriate” **עולה** ('olé) that, together with the word **חדש** (khadásh) in Ivrit, is used to denote a new immigrant. The above-mentioned definitions are

closely related to the first meaning of the verb, since this word expresses spiritual (in the holy country) as well as physical (Jerusalem is located on the seven hills) elevation.

It is noteworthy that the Jews use the word Aliyah/going up to denote returning/moving/arrival in Israel or Jerusalem when they speak Georgian but in any other cases when they speak about arriving in another country, they use relevant words. In the Hebrew language another verb is used to express this idea (the verb **הגיע** -higia' – “He has arrived”).

It is also interesting that in the Gospel arriving in Israel for great festivals of the Jews (Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot were compulsory) is translated as going up: *ar aval, vinaidan Jer ar gasrulebula Cemi dro* “I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come” [1: John 7:8]; *xolo, roca avidnen misi Zmebi tvitonac avida dGesaswaulze* “but when his brothers went up for the feast, he did the same” [1: John 7:10], but in some other articles of this edition the verb to go is used instead of to go up: *da misi mSoblebi Kovel weliwads pasekis dGesaswaulze midodnen ierusalimSi* “Every year Jesus’ parents’ went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover” [1: Luke 2:41], *da roca tormeti wlisa gaxda, Cveulebisamebr, ierusalimSi dGesaswaulze wavidnen isini* “When he was twelve years old, they went to the festival in Jerusalem, according to the custom” [1: Luke 2:42], etc. Even from these small episodes it is clear that the attitudes towards the issue vary and in the Gospel as well as in its translations both words “to go” and “to go up” are used. The Georgian Jews would use just “going up to Israel” in the similar cases.

The Hebrew word "Aliyah" is also attested with the Jews living in other countries who usually use the mentioned word without translation when they speak in Russian, English, German or other languages. This term is attested in the lexicon of researchers of the Hebrew studies. Thus, it has an international importance.

After the establishment of the state of Israel and before that (the late 19th – the early 20th centuries) in the homeland of the Jews the term “Aliyah” acquired special significance. This process was divided into the following periods: the First “Aliyah”, the Second “Aliyah”, etc. The history of different “Aliyahs” was created... Every generation had its own function and importance [2: 72].

A large part of the Jewish Diaspora had always dreamed of returning of the Jews to Palestine since the period of the Old Testament. Their hopes and aspirations were reflected in the Bible: “Many people will come and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” [1: Isaiah 2:3]. Returning to the historical homeland is one of the central themes of the Jewish prayers. From XII century, persecution of Judaism by the religions of Christianity and Islam led to the rise of the number of the Jews in the Holy Land. In 1492 this flow was filled by the Jews expelled from Spain who later founded the Jewish community in the city of Safed in Galilee. In the 16th century the Jews formed a large community in four “holy cities” of Israel (Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and Tveria). In the late 18th century all the Hasidic religious representatives from Eastern Europe settled in the Holy Land.

In 1882 the Jewish population of Palestine was about 30-35 thousand deeply religious people. The Jews lived in the ancient holy cities – Jerusalem, Tver, Safed and Hebron. A relatively small community lived in Jaffo, Gaza, Khaippa and some other cities. In the middle of the 19th century, the Jews were the majority of the population of Jerusalem.

The First Aliyah (1882-1903). The first big wave of the modern repatriation of the Jews i.e. the First Aliyah is related to the persecutions by the Russian Empire in 1882. In 1882-1903 the estimated 53

thousand Jews moved to Palestine which was a subject of the Ottoman Empire. Most of them, who were the members of the Palestinian movements “Hovevei Zion” (Lovers of Zion) and “Bilu” (Palestine Pioneers), came from Eastern Europe (mainly from the Russian Empire) and a small amount from Yemen. Almost all of them were the religious Jews.

Those who moved to the territory of Israel during this period established agricultural settlements which turned into the cities of Petah Tikva, Rishon Lezion, Rehovot, Rosh Pinna and Zikhron Ya’akov. The new settlers faced many difficulties: severe environmental conditions, the lack of experience and resources in agriculture, diseases, etc. Baron Edmond de Rothschild, who played a significant role in overcoming the difficulties, took several settlements under his care and helped the colonists with preferential loans and specialists [3: 39].

The Second Aliyah (1904-1914). The new wave of Aliyah is associated with the new pogroms in the Russian Empire. The most violent pogroms took place in Kishinev in 1903. During this period the estimated 40 thousand Jews moved from Eastern Europe and settled on the territory of Israel.

Just like the immigrants of the First Aliyah, the colonists of the Second Aliyah were mostly the religious Jews and rarely the activists of Zionist organizations. At that time, many colonists were attracted by the socialist ideas – creating political parties and organizations of workers in Palestine. In 1909 they founded the first kibbutz (an agricultural collective community) Degania that laid the foundation for the Kibbutz Movement. The first Jewish defense organization “Ha-Shomer” was established to protect the Jewish settlements from the attacks of Arabs and Bedouins. In 1909 in the suburbs of Jaffa a new settlement Akhuzat Bait was founded that later became the city of Tel Aviv. At that time, the Hebrew language began resurrecting as they used it to publish newspapers and create literature.

In the World War the Ottoman-German alliance led to expelling the Jewish population from Turkey that prevented and stopped the Second Aliyah. As a result, in 1917 an approximate number of the Jews in the territory of Israel was 85 thousand.

The Third Aliyah (1919 – 1923). During the Second World War Vladimir Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor initiated to form a military unit “the Jewish Legion” in the British army. Consequently, on November 2, 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued by the British government announcing support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. The Jewish Legion actively participated in the British efforts to “liberate” Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. In 1922 the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate to ensure the political, administrative and economic conditions in Palestine for the safe establishment of the Jewish National Home.

In 1919-1923, during the First World War as a result of the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration, 40 thousand Jews went to the country mainly from Eastern Europe. The Zionist Organization organized trainings of this wave in the field of Agriculture even before the repatriation. Although the British government restricted the Jewish Aliyah, the number of the Jewish population who left Britain grew to 90 thousand people in that period. In new places they had to work hard physically to dry up the wetlands in the deserts of Israel and Hephher and turn the soil into the fertile ground for the agricultural activities. In this period, the national trade union “Histadrut” and the defense organization “Haganah” were founded. The First and the Second Aliyahs are important as by these waves the young idealists, who were the main intellectual potential of the country and did great things for establishing the state of Israel, moved to the country. It is enough to name David Ben Gurion (Israel’s first prime minister), Nayim Nahman Bialik (a national poet) and others [4: 189].

The Fourth Aliyah (1924-1929). In these years 82 thousand Jews emigrated from Eastern and Central Europe to the land of Israel mainly because of the growing anti-Semitism in Poland and Hungary. A part of the immigrants moved from the countries of the Soviet Union to Israel. The economic crisis of Poland which led to the harassment of the Jews in the fields of trade and craftwork as well as the restrictions introduced in the USA in 1924 regarding emigration had a significant impact on the Fourth Aliyah. Many European Jews who were planning to live over the ocean were forced to move to Israel. This group mainly consisted of the representatives of the middle class whose families moved to growing cities, established small enterprises, trade and catering facilities. As a result, approximately 23 thousand Jews joined the country through this wave [3: 55].

The Fifth Aliyah (1929-1939). In this period, in 1933, the Nazis came to power in Germany pushing the Jews to immigrate to Israel from Central Europe. From 1933 to 1939, approximately 250 thousand Jews moved legally and illegally from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Lithuania to Palestine being under the British Mandate [5: 71]. In 1936 Britain tightened restrictions on immigrating to Palestine and the Jews were constrained to enter Palestine illegally. That is why this Aliyah is called illegal and is known as “Aliyah Bet” in Hebrew. The main purpose of this Aliyah was to save the Jews from the persecution by European countries in 1933-1942 and to save them from the destruction in 1938-1941. In 1945-1948 all the efforts were directed to taking the displaced Jews and the Holocaust survivors to Israel. In general, the Aliyahs of the period of the War were distinguished by severe distress and were aimed at the salvation of the Jewish nation.

After announcing Israel as an independent state on May 14, 1948, all the doors were opened for the repatriates that was officially stated in the

declaration. Of course, after that the wave of repatriates to this country became further strengthened. Every wave of repatriation had its own name, purpose and significance as well as the previous Aliyahs.

The Fifth Aliyah is distinguished by the relation to the change of the Hebrew language. It was the first wave which mostly consisted of non-religious and assimilated Jews (mainly German-speaking). Many immigrants of this wave were not ideological Zionists but they got such ideas after repatriation. In 1929 the number of the Jewish immigrants became equal to the number of the people of the whole Jewish community in Palestine. Yiddish was no longer a spoken language for the main Jewish population in the country of Israel (90% in the 1920s) that contributed to strengthening the positions of Ivrit as the common spoken Hebrew language.

The language that was considered as the language of the books became the official language of the state of Israel in the 20th century and turned into means of everyday communication for the Jews. It was made possible by the enthusiastic young people, amongst whom Eliezer Ben-Yehuda was the driving spirit behind the revival of the language.

The idea of the revival of the Hebrew language was an integral part of the ideology of Zionism which required breaking up any connections with the languages of the countries of Diaspora that had been spoken by the Jews before the arrival in Israel. The motto of the first president of Israel Chaim Weizmann was as follows “All the values that the Jews have gained under the influence of foreign cultures must be changed” [6]. Indeed, in this regard a number of measures were undertaken in the country. The establishment of Ivrit faced great difficulties. In the so-called “war of languages” it was often needed to take extreme measures as well. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the approach to languages was mitigated. As stated

above, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda was the driving spirit of the unprecedented process of the resurrection of the language. He worked hard to modernize the Hebrew language [3: 24]. Apart from the enthusiasts, the revival of Hebrew in the beginning of the 20th century is related to the efforts of the people of the Second and the Third Aliyahs and the collective agricultural settlements (kibbutzs). The choice of each family was voluntary. Despite the difficulties, hundreds of Israeli households used only Hebrew in everyday communication, thus helping to establish and develop this language in the country.

As it seems, a small Hebrew word “aliyah”, which has become an international term, is a highly significant lexical unit in the new history of the people having a distinct fate. That is why, it was spread in Georgia as well. However, in order to express the distinctive historical, religious and geographical meaning, that is related to the return of the Jews according to their beliefs, the Georgian Jews living in Israel used a Georgian verb form *asvla* “to go up” (which should be a Hebrew loan translation) in parallel with the term “Aliyah”. It unites the first meaning of the Hebrew word “aliyah” that is related to climbing up to the height (as Jerusalem is located on seven hills), the semantics of ascending the holy land and elevating spiritually (as Israel is considered to be a holy land) and the meaning of repatriation (as they use it when they refer only to those who moved there permanently). However, it is supposed that the basis of the Georgian *asvla* “to go up” is religious beliefs as in the world and especially in the Jewish consciousness Jerusalem (and even the whole Israel) is considered as a holy land.

The work is supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSF) [grant number: DI- 2016-32 “The Speech of Georgian Jews in Israel”].

ენათმეცნიერება

ისრაელში ასვლა/ალია (გამონათქვამის სტრუქტურისა და წარმომავლობისათვის)

გულედანი¹ და თ. ლომთაძე²

¹ილიას სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი საქართველო

²აკაკი წერეთლის სახელობის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ქუთაისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ა. არაბულის მიერ)

მე-20 საუკუნეში, ისრაელის სახელმწიფოს დაარსების შემდეგ, ებრაელებს გაუჩნდათ დიდი იმედი ისტორიულ სამშობლოში დაბრუნებისა. მათ მეტყველებაში გაჩნდა გამოთქმა „იერუსალიმის ალია“. თუ საქართველოში, ისრაელში საცხოვრებლად გადასვლის მნიშვნელობით ებრაელებთან გამოიყენებოდა სიტყვა „ალია“, ისრაელში რეპატრაციის შემდეგ პარალელურად გაჩნდა გამოთქმა „ისრაელში ასვლა“. საყურადღებოა ის ფაქტი, რომ ებრაელი ქართულად მეტყველებისას მხოლოდ ისრაელში დაბრუნების/გადასვლის/ჩასვლის აღსანიშნავად იყენებს ასვლას, ანუ ისრაელში/იერუსალიმში ადიან, მაგრამ ნებისმიერ სხვა შემთხვევაში, სხვა ქვეყანაზე იტყვიან ჩასვლას, ანუ სხვა ქვეყნებში ჩადიან. ამ აზრის გამოსახატავად ებრაულში უკვე სხვა ზმნა გამოიყენება (ებრაული ზმნა: חיגיא -higia' -ნიშნავს „ჩავიდა, ჩაალწია“). ებრაული სიტყვა -”ალია“, რომელიც დროთა განმავლობაში საერთაშორისო ტერმინად იქცა, მსოფლიოში გამორჩეული ბედისწერის მქონე ხალხის – ებრაელების ახალ ისტორიაში დიდი დატვირთვისა და მნიშვნელობის მქონე ლექსიკური ერთეულია. სწორედ ამიტომ გავრცელდა იგი საქართველოშიც. მაგრამ იმ გამორჩეული ისტორიული, რელიგიური თუ გეოგრაფიული მნიშვნელობის გამოსახატავად, რომელიც ებრაელთა რწმენა-წარმოდგენით ისრაელს და იქ მათ საცხოვრებლად დაბრუნებას უკავშირდება, ისრაელში მცხოვრებმა ქართველმა ებრაელებმა „ილიას“ პარალელურად გამოიყენეს და ფართოდ განავრცეს ქართულ მეტყველებაში „ასვლა“ ფორმა (რომელიც ებრაულის კალკი უნდა იყოს). სავარაუდოდ, ქართულ „ასვლას“ თავდაპირველად საფუძვლად მაინც სიწმინდის წარმოდგენა უნდა დასდებოდა, მსოფლიოში და განსაკუთრებით, ებრაელთა ცნობიერებაში იერუსალიმის, როგორც წმიდათაწმიდა ქალაქად აღქმის გამო, რომელიც შემდგომ მთელს ისრაელზე გავრცელდა.

REFERENCES

1. The Bible (1989) Publishing Centre of Patriarchate of Georgia, Tbilisi (in Georgian).
2. Oren I. (Ed.) (1990) Gosudarstvo Izrail', 2. Jerusalem: Biblioteka-Aliyah (in Russian).
3. Heled R., Meir R. (1992) be Sha'arei ha'ivrit, hasoxnuT ha ichudiT (in Hebrew).
4. Weinbach L., Lauden E. (1991) She'aT ha'ivrit, Xelek Alef (in Hebrew).
5. Elazari E., Afik I. (1996) Istoriia evreiskogo natsional'nogo dvizheniia 1914-1949. Jerusalem: Biblioteka-Aliyah (in Russian).
6. Guledani G. (1998) A guide of Israel, 27: 11. The Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, Tbilisi (in Georgian).

Received February, 2019