

Kiryat Malachi was hastily established at the end of 1950 as part of a programme to disperse the population of new immigrants who had settled in two immigrant camps in the north. From the outset, the intention was to establish a transit camp for the waves of immigrants arriving in the 1950s. In October 1950, ten families of immigrants from Iraqi Kurdistan and Romania arrived at the Kastina transit camp. They were housed in tents and the abandoned buildings of the military camp. A few months later, a further 19 families arrived, and in this way, in small waves, the tent transit camp grew to 300 families by the end of 1951.

These immigrants arrived in the country with nothing, cut off from their roots, unable to speak the local language and with children and elderly people in their care. Faced with this bleak reality, they had to build a new life from scratch in a foreign land, relying solely on their own resources. This wave of immigration was characterised by a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and a limited range of professional skills. Most of the heads of households had been traders in their countries of origin, and here they lacked the professional skills or specialisations that might have helped them and contributed to the development of the area. Hundreds of tents and tin shacks were erected around the military camp, which was already full, and the site became a large, densely populated transit camp. The initial plan regarding the transit camp's future was to dismantle the tents once a permanent settlement had been found for the immigrants; however, as the waves of immigration intensified, it was decided in 1952 to turn the place into a permanent settlement, at which point it was given the name Kiryat Malachi. It was named after the biblical prophet, and is in fact a Hebrew translation of 'Los Angeles', whose Jewish community had adopted the immigrant town.

According to the initial plan, the settlement was to be established as a workers' neighbourhood that would provide labour and services to the agricultural moshavim in the area during the summer season; whilst in the winter, when there was no work in the moshavim, the residents were to develop the smallholdings allocated to each family.

Owing to planning shortcomings, the residents' inability to develop their own subsistence farms, and the failure of the authorities to provide adequate assistance, the residents were forced to make do with seasonal odd jobs, which were themselves in very short supply. Those were days of austerity in the country, and 'work days' were doled out sparingly amongst the families most in need. The neighbouring moshavim could not absorb more than a few dozen labourers, and hundreds of heads of families were left destitute, bewildered and confused, without any means of livelihood.

Other sources of livelihood were found for the residents in army camps, in the Corps of Engineers, and on road-building projects. In 1951, work began on building prefabricated blocks and Swedish-style huts on 'HaCarmel' and 'HaShomron' Streets, and each family was allocated a plot of land to develop a smallholding. It was not until 1952 that the residents of the tents began to be moved into new homes. Traces of those early days are still evident in Kiryat Malachi today. The clusters of houses, scattered in a haphazard manner, without any planning or central core, bear witness to the many twists and turns the area's development plan has undergone.

Between 1953 and 1955, a turning point was reached and the first factories began to take shape, such as the flax factory and the Jewish Agency's tractor factory (a workshop serving the surrounding settlements); the first commercial centre (in the form of a market) was built, providing a livelihood for several dozen families and also serving the residents of the surrounding area.

Between 1957 and 1961, a significant proportion of Kiryat Malachi's residents suffered severe economic hardship, and during that period there were numerous demonstrations and road blockades by the unemployed.

In 1954, the Workers' Council and the Local Committee exerted pressure on the Jewish Agency and the Immigration Department to direct new immigrants to the transit camp, with a view to transforming it into a larger, self-sustaining settlement.

In 1956, new immigrants from Morocco and Egypt were settled in Kastina, and this wave continued until 1961. Between 1961 and 1963, there was a surge in immigration from Romania and North Africa, bringing some 700 immigrant families to the town. This wave of immigration brought prosperity and growth to the town, as it was characterised by immigrants with professional skills that had been sorely lacking until then. Shoemakers, mechanics, metalworkers, doctors, nurses and pharmacists established businesses and provided services to the local residents, contributing to the town's self-sufficiency and reducing its dependence on external sources in essential sectors.

From 1962 onwards, the economic and employment situation improved, and there were even occasional labour shortages. Investors were attracted to the area, and around 20 factories and some 130 small workshops (metalworks, joinery, etc.) and small businesses were established. The fourth wave of immigration took place in 1969–1970 and consisted almost entirely of immigrants from the Soviet Union (Russia, Bukhara and Georgia). This wave comprised some 500 families, of whom approximately 250 remained in the area. It accelerated the construction boom in Kiryat Malachi and led to the building of a new neighbourhood to accommodate the new immigrants. This wave of immigration came to Kiryat Malachi on the instructions of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, who instructed his emissaries to find a suitable location for the establishment of a neighbourhood for his followers, where they could lead an undisturbed religious community life – something they had been denied in their countries of origin. Chabad Hasidim oversaw the integration of these immigrants from a social, cultural and religious perspective, and thus the Chabad neighbourhood was established.

(Published in 2009 | Translated with DeepL.com)