When was the city founded?
The day on which the ‘land lottery’ took place – 20 Nisan 5669 (11 April 1909) – is recognised as the founding date of Tel Aviv. In fact, however, Tel Aviv was founded three years earlier, at a meeting of the Jews of Jaffa, which took place in the month of Tammuz 5666 (July 1906) at the ‘Yishuron’ club, which was then situated at the end of Bostros Street in Jaffa. At that social gathering, those present raised concerns about the harsh living conditions of the Jews in Jaffa: the appalling overcrowding, the filth, the inadequate lighting and, above all, the ‘muharram’ decree, which forced the Jews to move house every year.

On that same day, a new immigrant, Aryeh Akiva Weiss, arrived in the country and inspired those present with a proposal to build, far from Jaffa, a clean residential neighbourhood where Jews could rest after a hard day’s labour.

That very evening, the ‘Home Builders’ Association’ was established, which later changed its name to ‘Ahuzat Bayit’ (homestead). This marked the beginning of the establishment of Tel Aviv.

The city born of a shell lottery
The intention of Tel Aviv’s founders was to build a neighbourhood far removed and separate from Jaffa, modelled on the standard of living that prevailed in Western Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.

The new neighbourhood was to be called ‘City of Gardens’. This method of living was conceived by an urban philosopher named Ebenezer Howard, and it was he who introduced the neighbourhood’s founders to this new planning approach. They were enthusiastic about creating vegetable gardens, flower beds and playgrounds – a stark contrast to the poor quality of life that characterised life in Jaffa at the time.

Once enough members had signed up for the new neighbourhood, they used their funds to purchase a plot of land known as Kerem Jabali, an area of sandy hills to the east of Neve Tzedek, not far from the seafront. It was decided to divide the neighbourhood into 60 plots for the first 60 families who were members of ‘Ahuzat Bayit’ (there were 66 founding families).

The members of the new neighbourhood considered how it would be right and fair to divide the land amongst them, so that each could build their own home there. Various proposals were put forward, and in the end it was decided to hold a lottery.

It was on the second evening of Passover, when all the dignitaries gathered on one of the hills in the centre of the deserted area. The chairman of the committee, Aryeh Akiva Weiss, went down to the nearby seashore and collected sixty white shells and sixty grey ones. He inscribed the names of the participants on the white shells and wrote the plot numbers on the grey ones. He chose to conduct the draw in this way because he believed that, as a town situated on the seashore, it was fitting that shells should be used in the ceremony marking its founding.

(Translated with DeepL.com)