

SOLZHENITSYN'S TWO CENTURIES TOGETHER contd - The first 'aliyah'. Essay by Peter Brooke, first published in *Church and State*, No 141, July-September 2020  
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A distinct Jewish politics emerged in the Russian empire at the turn of the twentieth century - the Bund, formed in 1897; the Marxist Zionist Poale Zion in New York in 1903 and in the Russian empire in March 1906 (the term 'Poale Zion' may have been first used by a group formed in Minsk in 1897<sup>1</sup>) and the Union for Equal Rights, which included the liberal Simon Dubnow and the Zionist Vladimir Zabolinsky, in March 1905. This development presupposed a profound transformation of the idea of what it was to be a Jew, a transition from an essentially religious conception to a secular - and therefore racial - conception. If a similar development had been occurring in Western Europe since the emergence of the 'Haskalah' ('enlightenment') in the eighteenth century, it had been moderated by the emergence of Reform Judaism. The Haskalah itself had not been defined as anti-religious, and in Reform Judaism it assumed a religious form. Although this is a sweeping generalisation my impression is that in the Pale of Settlement in the Russian empire, the transition was much more abrupt. Here the tendency of the Haskalah was not so much to reconcile Judaism with European 'modernity' as to reject Judaism in favour of an alliance with the similar tendency ('Nihilism') in Russian society. When a rebound occurred back towards a distinctly Jewish identity in the wake of the 1881-2 pogroms, it very distinctly did not take a religious form.

Some idea of the conflict between traditional Judaism and the new idea is given in two books by Yakov Rabkin - *A Threat from within*, and *What is modern Israel?*<sup>2</sup> Rabkin is writing as an anti-Zionist and his principle concern is with the opposition to Zionism by various 'ultra-Orthodox' groupings - the *haredim* (those who tremble). Although militant anti-Zionism among the ultra-Orthodox is now reduced to two allied tendencies - the 'Satmar' *haredim* and *Neturei Karta* (guardians of the city) - Rabkin argues that they represent positions that had been more or less universally accepted as defining characteristics of Judaism for the whole period following the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD. He also says that those *haredim* tendencies that do not militantly oppose the existence of Israel nonetheless do not recognise it as a legitimate Jewish state and certainly not as fulfilment of the return to the kingdom promised by the prophets.

## WHAT DISTINGUISHES JEWS FROM GENTILES?

In the traditional concept, Jews are the people who follow, or aspire to follow, the law of God as revealed in the 'Torah' (the Pentateuch, or first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament). They are the 'chosen people' because they, and only they, are required to observe the Torah in its fulness. The rest of us are only required to observe seven laws which were given to Noah, ancestor, following the Flood, of the whole of humanity. According to the account on the Chabad (Lubavitcher) website, these are:

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Frankel: *Prophecy and Politics - Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917*, Cambridge University Press, 1984 (first published 1981). p.310.

<sup>2</sup> Yakov M. Rabkin: *A Threat from within - a century of Jewish opposition to Zionism*, Zed books, London and New York, 2006 (first published in French as *Au Nom du Torah*, 2004) and idem: *What is modern Israel?*, Pluto Books, London, 2016 (first published in French as *Comprendre l'état d'Israël*, 2014).

*'1. Do not profane G-d's Oneness in any way.*

*Acknowledge that there is a single G-d who cares about what we are doing and desires that we take care of His world.*

*'2. Do not curse your Creator.*

*No matter how angry you may be, do not take it out verbally against your Creator.*

*'3. Do not murder.*

*The value of human life cannot be measured. To destroy a single human life is to destroy the entire world - because, for that person, the world has ceased to exist. It follows that by sustaining a single human life, you are sustaining an entire universe.*

*'4. Do not eat a limb of a living animal.*

*Respect the life of all G-d's creatures. As intelligent beings, we have a duty not to cause undue pain to other creatures.*

*'5. Do not steal.*

*Whatever benefits you receive in this world, make sure that none of them are at the unfair expense of someone else.*

*'6. Harness and channel the human libido.*

*Incest, adultery, rape and homosexual relations are forbidden.*

*The family unit is the foundation of human society. Sexuality is the fountain of life and so nothing is more holy than the sexual act. So, too, when abused, nothing can be more debasing and destructive to the human being.*

*'7. Establish courts of law and ensure justice in our world.*

*With every small act of justice, we are restoring harmony to our world, synchronizing it with a supernal order. That is why we must keep the laws established by our government for the country's stability and harmony.'*

Six of these laws were given to Adam. The law against eating the limb of a living of a living animal was added when permission was given to Noah to eat meat.

In 1978, the United States Congress asked President Carter to designate the birthday of the Lubavitch Rebbe, Rabbi Menechem Mende Schneerson, as Education and Training Day, to celebrate the Rebbe's achievements in that field. Since the Rebbe's birthday is four days before the Passover and calculated following the lunar calendar it is a moveable feast in the Western solar (Gregorian) calendar. The day has been proclaimed annually by the President ever since. In 1987, Ronald Reagans' proclamation spoke of 'the historical tradition of ethical values and principles which have been the bedrock of society from the dawn of civilisation when they were known as the seven noahide laws transmitted through God [should that be G-d? - PB] to Moses on Mount Sinai' and in 1991, Congress, in the preamble to the 1991 bill establishing Education Day, referred again to 'these ethical values and principles' which 'have been the bedrock of society from the dawn of civilisation when they were known as the seven noahide principles.'

In a book designed to introduce Judaism to non-Jews, Isidore Epstein claims that in the time of paganism Judaism was a missionary religion but primarily concerned with promoting the Noahide laws ('the religion of humanity') rather than the full range of obligations imposed on the Jews. 'But when paganism gave place to Christianity and later also to Islam, Judaism withdrew

from the missionary field and was satisfied to leave the task of spreading the religion of humanity to her daughter faiths.<sup>3</sup>

## THE MEANING OF THE JEWISH EXILE

Traditional Judaism teaches that the exile (*galut*) of the Jewish people - which is something other than simply not living in Palestine - has two aspects. On the one hand it is a punishment for the sins of the Jewish people; on the other hand it is a means by which the blessing that accompanies Jewish integral observance of the Torah can be scattered like sparks of light throughout the world. The Chabad website concentrates on the sparks of light. Rabkin concentrates on the punishment.

What is the sin that was being punished?

In the broadest terms Rabkin represents it as engaging in political or, more seriously, military activism independently of divine guidance, specifically the Jewish revolt against the Romans which resulted in the destruction of the second temple and subsequently the revolt led by Simon bar Kokhba, 132-6 AD, which resulted in a huge destruction of the Jewish population of Palestine and exile from Jerusalem, though not from the country as a whole. In this reading, Judaism - in the absence of the legitimate ruler, the Messiah - is a religion of almost total passivity, apart from the obligation to observe the precepts of the Torah (Jews can legitimately risk their lives in resisting efforts to force them into breaking the precepts of the Torah, for example by worshipping idols). Thus when Jews encounter persecution they don't have a right to fight back. One could say (Rabkin doesn't) they have to turn the other cheek. In Rabkin's version they are strangers in any land in which they find themselves and therefore have no 'rights'. If they are well treated, well and good; if they are badly treated, their only options are to put up with it or move somewhere else. Thus he says of the Nazi attempt at genocide:

*'From a traditionally religious point of view based on the premise of the existence of divine justice, the tragedy of the Shoah calls out for the closest scrutiny of personal behaviour, and for individual and collective atonement. It is not an occasion for accusing executioners, and even less an attempt to explain their behaviour by political, ideological, or social factors. The executioner - whether Pharaoh, Amalek, or Hitler - in this perspective is an agent of divine punishment, an admittedly cruel means of bringing the Jews to repentance. Following this same logic, only divine providence - and not historical accident - can explain the catastrophes that have afflicted the Jews, affirmed Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman (1875-1941), disciple of Hafetz Haim and an eminent authority on Lithuanian Judaism. Born in Lithuania, then a part of the Russian empire, he trained under renowned rabbinical masters, culminating in the Talmudic Academy of Brisk (Brest-Litovsk). He served as director of several yeshivas, the best known of which was the Novardok yeshiva in Baranovichi, currently in Belarus. While on a fund-raising mission to the United States on behalf of his yeshiva, he learned of the Nazi attack on Poland. Well aware of the Nazi threat to the Jews, he refused to abandon his students and returned to Europe. He was arrested in 1941 and put to death by Lithuanian collaborators. His last words have been preserved: In Heaven it appears that they deem us to be righteous because our bodies have been chosen to atone for the Jewish people. Therefore, we must repent now, immediately. There is not much time. We must keep in mind that we will be better offerings if we repent. In this way we will save the lives of our brethren so that Jewish life may continue.'* (Modern Israel, p.98)

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<sup>3</sup> Isidore Epstein: *Judaism - a historical presentation*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973 (first published in 1959), p.144.

Incidentally it's rather regrettable that the word 'holocaust' is so widely used in preference to the Hebrew word 'Shoah'. A 'holocaust' is a burnt sacrifice and as such in Biblical (Torah-Old Testament) terms it's a Good Thing. The word 'Shoah' means 'catastrophe', and as such it is parallel to the Arabic term 'Nakba', describing the destruction that befell the Palestinian people in 1948.

It's obvious that this traditional Jewish culture would be deeply alarmed by the ferocious voluntarism that characterised the development both of Jewish Socialism and Zionism in the wake of the 1881-2 pogroms. It is also obvious that this traditional Judaism would not have regarded the non-Torah following Jews as Jews in any meaningful sense of the term. Indeed, one could suggest that in the Russian empire, Jews who, inspired by the *haskalah*, became interested in European culture or got involved in the revolutionary movement, ceased to regard themselves as Jews. It was the pogroms, and the relatively indulgent response of Russian and Ukrainian political circles (including the radical circles) that forced them to self identify as Jews and to think about the needs that were specific to the Jewish community. Hitler of course had a similar effect on many German Jews - Rabkin (*Modern Israel*, p.99) cites Orthodox Jews complaining that although Hitler was a scourge sent by God to bring the Jews back to the Torah they were instead turning to all sorts of non-religious cultural and sporting activities: *'Rabbi Schwab lamented in Germany in 1934: They have set up athletic associations and even an honest-to-goodness "cultural league," so that, God forbid, we should not "get back into the ghetto again." ... True, we are depressed, but we are not contrite. We are downcast but not humbled, least of all in our relationship with God. ... If this is so, is it still the people of God?'*

## WHO ARE THE HAREDIM?

It isn't clear to me, however, that the *haredim*, at the centre of Rabkin's thinking, do represent traditional Judaism. They are divided into two great families - the *hasidim* and the *mitnagdim*. The *hasidim* were, as I remarked in an earlier article in this series, an innovation in Judaism, coinciding with the incorporation of the whole area that became the pale of Settlement into the Russian empire with the Polish partitions at the end of the eighteenth century. Hasidism could be described as a charismatic movement, both in terms of a much more intense emotional life on the part of the believer and a gathering round the individual leadership provided by the 'rebbe', himself a product of a charismatic family - Schneerson in the case of the Lubavitchers, Teitelbaum in the case of the militantly anti-Zionist Satmar *hasidim*. The term 'mitnagdim' however, means 'rejecters' or 'opponents' and what they were rejecting was the *hasidic* innovation so, as a response to an innovation, they too could be characterised as something new. They were characterised by a much more intellectual, analytical approach to the study of the Torah and the authoritative interpretations of the Torah in the Talmud. In the extract I have quoted from Rabkin's book he refers to 'Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman (1875–1941), disciple of Hafetz Haim and an eminent authority on Lithuanian Judaism.' 'Lithuanian Judaism' is one of the major branches of the *mitnagdim*.

I would suggest that both *hasidim* and *mitnagdim* could be seen as products of the disruption of the older 'kahal' system which was essentially a system of law, of the policing of a whole society. Like an established church which all members of the society would be required to attend, the *kahal* made it easy to be a Jew in the religious sense of the term, in fact difficult not to. Maybe not

a good Jew but a Jew nonetheless. It enabled, or rather obliged, Jews to organise their lives on a basis quite different from that of the society surrounding them. In Poland it was, as we have seen, disrupted by the deterioration in the position and wealth of the Jews following the seventeenth century Khelmnitsky rising. In more general terms, in Europe in the nineteenth century, it was disrupted by emancipation, opening up greater possibilities for Jews to integrate with the surrounding society and therefore greater temptation to abandon the disciplines specific to Judaism. We have just seen Rabbi Schwab complaining against secularised Jews after the arrival in power of the Nazis not wanting to 'get back into the ghetto again.'. He obviously saw it as an opportunity to do just that. According to Shlomo Avineri, in his book *The Making of modern Zionism*:

*'The problems of Jewish identity had not been solved by liberalism and tolerance but, in a way, had been exacerbated. Being Jewish no longer meant a single, sometimes heroic, decision to stand by one's conviction and not succumb through conversion to majority pressure. Rather, it now became a series of innumerable daily decisions, bringing out the difference and distinction within equality in hundreds of individual decisions ... With the young person's entry into professional life, now open to the Jews, the problems continued to accumulate. If he opened a doctor's practice, he had to decide whether to have his clinic open on Saturday and the Jewish holidays, and if he shared a clinic with gentile associates the dilemma became even more acute. If he became a clerk in a bank or a state employee or a teacher in the public school system, he had to solve the same problem. The necessity - and desire - to socialise with gentile colleagues again brought up the question of kosher food.'* <sup>4</sup>

'Reform Judaism' could be seen as an adaptation to these new circumstances as religion increasingly became a matter of private opinion rather than of social organisation. Although the word 'emancipation' may not sound quite right in relation to the Pale of Settlement, the conscription of Jews into the Russian army, the legal suppression of the kahal and the more liberal policies of Alexander II after 1860 all tended in the same direction. Under those circumstances the haredim, wanting to maintain and indeed intensify the coherence of the traditional disciplines could be seen as themselves a symptom of the breakup of the traditional disciplines.

## EMIGRATION

The period following the pogroms was marked by increasingly massive emigration. Hans Rogger says that prior to the pogroms, in the period 1871-80, it had reached a yearly average of 4,100 persons but *'The yearly average of those going to the US alone was 12,856 for 1881-6; it reached 28,509 in the next five year period, rose to 44,829 during 1891-5; 82,223 for 1906-10 and 75,144 for 1911-14. Altogether nearly 2 million Jews left Russia [sic - PB] between 1880 and 1914, more than two thirds of them for the United States.'*<sup>5</sup> This was despite the fact that the government tried to discourage it: *'most border crossings were accomplished illegally, under the cover of darkness and with the connivance of frontier guards, but occasionally accompanied by their bullets.'* (ibid. p.183). Rogger expresses puzzlement as to why the government, obsessed with its 'Jewish problem' didn't encourage emigration. A body

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<sup>4</sup> Shlomo Avineri: *The Making of modern Zionism - the intellectual origins of the Jewish state*, Basic Books, New York, 2017 (first published in 1981). I have it in a Kindle version that doesn't give page references.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Rogger: *Jewish policies and right-wing politics in imperial Russia*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986, p.178.

called the Jewish Colonisation Agency was formed in London in 1891 by the Baron Maurice de Hirsch and it obtained some concessions for legal emigration but the agreed process was cumbersome and expensive and only had marginal effect.

Even those who left illegally still needed passports and the process for obtaining them was expensive and time consuming: *'More than half the Jewish immigrants arrived without any means and no more than 4-7 percent had more than \$50 in their possession. With a Jewish family's budget in a small town estimated as being about 300 rubles a year, the expense of obtaining a passport was obviously a major item - not to mention steamship tickets if these were not sent by relatives - and explains the resort to agents and their bribes and the pleas of the JCA for free exit permits.'* (still p.183).

In contrast to emigration to the United States, the alternative, emigration to Palestine prior to 1914 - the first and second *aliyot* (plural of *aliyah*, meaning 'ascent', the term used by Zionists to characterise emigration to 'Israel') - was marginal, no matter how big it was with consequences for the future. A Jewish agricultural school - Mikve Yisrael - had been established in Palestine in 1870 under the auspices of the Alliance Universelle. In the middle of the enthusiasm over Oliphant's Palestine proposal, its founder, Charles Netter, also one of the founders of the Alliance, wrote to the papers to say that Palestine 'was totally unsuited - climatically, economically, socially - for mass colonisation by the Jews.' (Frankel, p.82). Mikve Yisrael had already met opposition from the existing Jewish population, the 'Old Yishuv', for whom the most integral observance possible of the Jewish law was a precondition for the privilege of living in Palestine, and this was incompatible with the principles of modern agriculture. This is one of Rabkin's themes: 'Tradition also underlines the grave danger of living in the Holy Land by comparing the land of Israel to a royal palace in which any transgression immediately assumes enormous proportions' (Modern Israel, p.12). In this understanding the whole land would be to Jews what a church would be to Christians.

It was a problem encountered by the pioneers of the first aliyah in Rishon Le-Zion, an agricultural colony founded in 1882 by 'hovevei Zion' (lovers of Zion), the movement for migration to Palestine formed in the wake of the pogroms under the influence of the pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation*, by Leo Pinsker, the parallel call by Peretz Smolenskin, editor in Vienna of the Hebrew language journal, *Ha-shahar* (The Dawn - we encountered it in the last article in this series), and the hopes raised by Oliphant. Smolenskin in particular believed that, given the support of the House of Rothschild, 'with a mere fifth of their wealth they could buy the country and resettle in it all the hungry and those searching for salvation'. The money already collected by the Alliance 'could have bought more than half the country and settled there those who were persecuted.' (Frankel, still p.82). According to Frankel he blamed the failure to seize the opportunity on Netter (who died in 1882). Iakov Lvovich Rozenfeld, proprietor of the influential journal *Raszvet* (which also translates as The Dawn and which we also encountered in the last article) joined Oliphant in Constantinople in the effort to win a concession from the Turkish government. These respectable, establishment initiatives failed, largely, as we saw in the last article, because of the new tensions that had risen between the Sublime Porte and the British government over Egypt. The emigration which, unpromising as it may have seemed to begin with, started the process that eventually produced the state of Israel had quite different beginnings.

At the beginning of 1882 the Jewish establishment responded to the pogroms in the traditional manner by proclaiming days of fasting and prayer (Frankel, p.90). The occasion was marked by a demonstration of Jewish students attending Russian language universities. This was a major phenomenon of the time. According to Frankel (p.120) there were 247 Jewish students in the Russian language universities in 1876, 1,856 in 1886. It paralleled in an interesting way the figures he gives for the involvement of Jews in the revolutionary movements, at least as recorded by the *Okhrana*, the Russian secret police - 63 Jews out of 1,054 identified in the period 1873-7; 579 out of 4,307 in the period from 1884 to 1890.

There had been an assumption that the involvement with the Russian universities would necessarily alienate them from the Jewish world: 'The spectacle of the returning sons therefore aroused widespread wonderment.' On the days of fasting and prayer 'the students appeared in the synagogues not in pairs but *en masse* to express symbolically their solidarity with the Jewish people in a time of trial ... In their military type uniforms the mass of students and *gimnazitsky* stood out clearly in the synagogues which were crowded beyond capacity for the occasion.' (p.90)

But this was not just an expression of solidarity. It was also an expression of defiance against the traditional Jewish passivity in the face of persecution, the tradition represented by the day of prayer and fasting, an expression of repentance for the sins which God had punished by unleashing the pogroms. In Kiev 'the presence of the students in the synagogue, their sincere, warm and yet fiery speeches, the poems - brought tens of thousands of Jews to the synagogues and for lack of space people had to stand in the street ... The police could not help noticing of course ... and the governor general called in the rabbi and rebuked the censor for permitting the poems to be printed.' (Frankel p.91, quoting a letter addressed to the pioneer Social Democrat Pavel Akelrod).

Among the students involved were the founders of 'Bilu' - fourteen students at Kharkov University who met on the day after the demonstration and were thoroughly devoted to the idea of emigration to Palestine - 'Bilu' was an acronym based on the Hebrew of Isaiah 2:5, 'Let the House of Jacob go' (not quite how it is understood by the King James Bible: 'O House of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the lord.') Two of them, Moshe Yitshak Mints and Yaakov Berliavsky, went to Constantinople in May to meet Oliphant. But that was the month in which the Turkish government refused to open Palestine to Jewish emigration. Nonetheless other members of the group led by Yisrael Belkind went to Palestine in June and began a process of adaptation to the land in the agricultural school at Mikve Yisrael:

*"The director, Mr Hirsch," Belkind wrote in November, "who at first regarded Russian Jews in an unfriendly way and as incapable of working under the sun ... is [now] convinced that we do not lag behind the Arabs and to some extent even surpass them." (They were paid one franc a day for their labour.) "Our ultimate goal ...," Vladimir Dubnow wrote to his brother Shimén [the Simon Dubnow we encountered in the last two articles - PB] on 20 October, "is, with time, to gain Palestine and return to the Jews that political independence which they lost two thousand years ago. Do not laugh [Simon Dubnow was indeed sceptical about the Zionist project - PB]. It is not a chimera."* (Frankel, p. 97, lacunae as in the original)

This was the group that formed the first agricultural colony of the aliyah, Rishon Le-Zion. Although Rishon Le-Zion now claims to be the fourth largest city in 'Israel' (Wikipedia) its

beginnings weren't very auspicious. It was dependent on outside help. The story is given by Frankel:

*'The first important breakthrough came when an emissary from Rishon Le-Zion succeeded in October 1882 in gaining access to, and winning the sympathy of, Baron Edmund de Rothschild in Paris. Rothschild's decision to make an initial grant of 25,000 francs to that colony - in particular to six of the founding families that were left without any means - proved to be the beginning of a lifetime involvement in the cause of Palestinian settlement. He not only invested increasingly large sums in buying land, developing vineyards, building houses, and supplying livestock and equipment but also sent out overseers and agronomists to ensure that modern methods of farming be introduced. By the late 1880s, all the settlements (except Gadera) were receiving capital investments from him: Rishon Le-Zion, Zikhron Yaakov, Rosh Pina, Petah Tikva, Ekron, Yesud Ha-Maala and Wadi Hanin (Nes Ziona).'* (p.115)

Rothschild's support, however, was, as the mentioned exception of Gadera indicates, problematic:

*'Baron Edmund de Rothschild had very definite ideas about what could and could not be permitted in the new colonies. He had a romantic image of small scale farmers, simple people devoted to orthodox religious practice, dressed in Arabic or Turkish style. The supervisors whom he put in charge of the colonies were expected to keep tight control over all aspects of life there.*

*'Rothschild's conception could not be reconciled with that of the Biluim, who (although for the most part not socialists) were convinced that their duty was to act as the core of a modern, secular, and political movement ... In 1883, Yisrael Belkind, who had settled with other Biluim in Rishon Le-Zion and had clashed with the overseers there, left it rather than have Rothschild cut off funds from the entire colony. In 1887 this pattern repeated itself. In this case, the decision by the overseer (Ossovetsky, a young Russian Jew recruited by Netter at Brody in 1882) to expel the leader of the day labourers in Rishon Le-Zion (Mikhael Helperin) led to a bitter clash with the entire colony ... Rothschild and his staff in Paris were convinced that they were faced by a form of Russian nihilism ... If it had not been for the combined efforts of Pinsker, Pines and Lilienblum [leaders of the Palestinophile movement in Russia - PB] the Biluim could not have remained as a group in Palestine ... For his part, Pinsker was able to channel funds periodically to Gadera, the settlement of the Bilu that was boycotted by Rothschild. But even in Gadera the few remaining Biluim were not free to live as they chose. Religious zealots in Jerusalem reported back to Russia that they were free-thinkers and so turned the leading rabbis in the Palestinophile movement ... against them.'* As a result Pinsker *'wrote to the group in Gadera appealing to them to maintain voluntarily the traditional religious observances for the sake of the general cause ... Pinsker's letter had its effect. Most of the small group in Gadera, ranging between one and two dozen, agreed, as Pines reported, to take on "the yoke of the Torah"'* (pp.126-7).

The list of colonies given above includes Zikhron Yaakov and Rosh Pina, both of which were Romanian, products of Oliphant persuading the Ottoman court that they had responsibilities to the Romanian Jews, denied citizenship in the now independent Romania. But it also mentions Petah Tikra. What Frankel doesn't mention is that Petah Tikra was older than Rishon Le-Zion and had been formed in 1878, prior to the Russian empire pogroms, by Jews who were native to Palestine (so in fact was Rosh Pina, ceded to the Romanians in 1882). And here I'd like to intrude a piece of my own personal history.

Back in about 2004-5, as a result of my commitment to the idea of a single Israel-Palestine state for all its citizens (still amazed how long its taking for this simple and obvious proposal to gain



traction) I was briefly in email communication with a very interesting man called Uzzi Ornan. In his youth in the 1930s, Ornan had been a bomb-maker for the Irgun and I believe was involved with the Stern Gang, which split off from the Irgun in 1940 with a view to continuing the fight against the British through the war. He was arrested in 1944 and kept in camps in Africa until returning to Palestine in 1948 when he was horrified by the way the Palestinian Arabs had been treated. He believed that he had been engaged in an anti-imperialist struggle against the British on behalf of both the Jews and the Arabs. He was one of a small group called (derisively at the time) the 'Canaanites'. Although numerically insignificant, they included a number of well-known artists in different fields including Ornan's brother, Jonathan Ratosh, recognised as a leading Hebrew language poet. Ornan's own major commitment was to the revival of Hebrew as a language of everyday use, regarding himself as a Hebrew speaking Palestinian rather than as a Jew (among other things he argued for a transition to the Roman alphabet, parallel to the alphabet introduced for the Turkish language by Ataturk).

I was at the time running the Brecon Political and Theological Discussion Group and when the Cornish language poet Tim Saunders gave us a talk on the revival of Hebrew I took the opportunity to post on the Discussion Group website an article by Ornan in which he showed that the 'Old Yishuv' was itself undergoing changes prior to the arrival of the first aliyah.<sup>6</sup>

The conventional history of the revival of Hebrew in Palestine (we are talking about revival as a language of everyday use, not a language of literature) presents it as almost entirely the work of Eliezer ben-Yehuda who arrived in Palestine from an area that is now part of Byelorussia in 1881 and so was part of the first aliyah. Ornan is not at all denying his importance but he says:

*'The will to revive Hebrew had manifested itself quite a few years before Ben-Yehuda's arrival in Jerusalem. A spirit of awakening and a yearning for a change of values spread among the members of the Old Yishuv during the 1860s. About twenty years before Ben-Yehuda's arrival, Hebrew newspapers began to be published in Jerusalem.*

*'According to Galia Yardeni, the publication of these newspapers happened as a result of a "circle of young people who ... aspired for changes in the structure of the Yishuv". It is clear that there existed in Palestine young people who "thirsted for cultural enlightenment and also sought a window opening out on to the big world beyond a Jerusalem imprisoned within her walls". These young people sought ways of supporting themselves, not through the Haluqa (charitable funds received from abroad by Jews in Palestine for distribution among the needy), but through the labour of their own hands.*

*'During this period, the first genuine attempts were made to venture out beyond the walls of the cities in order to acquire land for agriculture and to settle on it, to establish businesses for crafts and commerce and so on. The activities of [the English Jewish leader, Moses] Montefiore were oriented to the general mood and fervent desire prevailing at that time to break away from the life of Haluqa and from financial dependence on benefactors from outside Palestine. This time they achieved more success than the earlier attempts in this direction had yielded.*

*'This trend waxed strong during the 1870s. More groups with an aim to settle on the land came into being, and towards the end of the decade they succeeded in purchasing areas of land and settling its members there, something it had not previously managed to achieve. Petah Tiqwa was thus founded by those who ventured*

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<sup>6</sup> Uzzi Ornan: 'Hebrew in Palestine before and after 1882', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Vol 29, no 1, 1984 and on my Discussion Group website at <http://www.peterbrooke.org.uk/bptdg/programmes/janmay05/saunders/ornan>

*beyond the walls of Jerusalem, and Rosh Pinna by those from Old Safed* [particularly noteworthy as a major centre for study of the Kabbalah - PB]. *For they also, as they put it, "despised the bread of humiliation", that is, the charity of benefactors from abroad'* [which was the necessary condition of a life devoted to integral observance and study of the eminently impractical laws of the Torah - PB].

Thus the picture Rabkin draws of a native Jewish population wholly committed to a strict religious conception of Jewish life in Palestine needs to be modified. Rabkin gives as one of the Old Yishuv objections to the arrival of the newcomers that they were tempting Palestinian Jewish youth away from strict adherence to a life bound by the Torah. But it appears that the temptation was already present.

This series, supposedly a commentary on Solzhenitsyn's book, is proceeding very slowly, largely owing to my own weakness for digressions. The 'first aliyah' in the wake of the 1881-2 pogroms was only important as the first step in the process of developing a much more substantial Zionist body of thought, issuing in the 'second aliyah' which followed the more bloody pogroms of Kishinev in 1903 and, in 1905-6, in various parts of the Pale after the 1905 revolution. Among other important figures in the later history of 'Israel' David Ben Gurion was part of this second aliyah. There was also the development of a distinct Jewish national consciousness not tied to emigration but to a demand for Jewish autonomy within the area of the Russian empire. Its most important Socialist manifestation was the Bund, formed in Vilna (modern Vilnius, capital of Lithuania) in 1897. All this will have to go into the next article, if I have the energy to write it - it will be largely taken from Frankel's very impressive book. The present article has concentrated on the emergence out of a people bound by religious obligations of a people defined by race - one might almost say defined by the perceptions of their enemies. That has its own importance, particularly since, no matter how important the development of Zionism might have been in Germany and France, 'Israel' would not have emerged in anything like the shape we know today were it not for the experience of the Jews in the Russian empire prior to 1914.